

## PERSONAL DIETARY CHARACTERISTICS, DESTINATION IMAGE AND BEHAVIOURAL INTENTIONS: FOOD TOURISM IN CHENGDU

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Received: 2 January 2022

Accepted: 30 April 2022

Revised: 13 June 2022

Published: December 2022

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51200/mjbe.vi.2916>

**Keywords:** food tourism, personal dietary characteristics, destination image, behaviour intentions, Chengdu

### ABSTRACT

*Food has become an indispensable part of the tourism industry, and there are inextricable links between food and tourism. Tourist food destination is widely promoted on various websites and has become the destination's most crucial cultural expression. Personality dietary characteristics, destination image, and behavioural attention can influence food tourism's positive development at a destination. Chengdu, China, was chosen as a case setting to explore the effect of food tourism in China. A quantitative research approach and a self-administered questionnaire were adopted in this study. One hundred and sixty-nine respondents participated in this study, and the data were analyzed using Smart-PLS. Personal dietary characteristics were found to have an indirect effect on tourist behaviour intentions and destination image. This study will help the industry formulate corresponding management strategies for multiple influencing factors of food tourist behaviour and enhance the competitiveness of destinations.*

### INTRODUCTION

Food tourism has become a new trend in tourism development in the experience economy era (Bessiere, 2010). Travel and Tourism Global Economic Impact (2018) has reported that travel and tourism directly contributed USD 8.3 trillion to the global economy and supported 313 million

jobs. Therefore, it is necessary to develop food tourism in this era of the experience economy. With the advent of the age of the experience economy, experience-centred tourism activities have become a new tourism development trend. The personalized experience demand of tourists has led to food tourism (Bessiere, 2010; Jonac, 2013). Research on food tourism has developed all around the world. The study of gastronomic tourism began in the early 21st century, followed by a series of articles on food and tourism and gastronomic tourism (Fox, 2007). Food gradually takes up an essential part of people's tourism and drives economic development in tourist destinations (Correia & Moital, 2010).

Food consumption is an important way for tourists to feel the destination culture (Jimenezbeltran et al., 2016). People are eager to obtain an authentic experience through local food consumption (Sim, 2009). When food is part of an extension of daily life, it gives visitors a supportive experience. When there is a vast difference between the food experience and everyday life, tourists bring a peak experience (Quan & Wang, 2004). Factors identified affecting tourist food consumption include motivation and psychological characteristics (Mak et al., 2012a, 2012b) and demographics (Kim et al., 2010). Moreover, food is the inheritance and symbol of the local culture. Local food is an essential factor in marketing tourist destinations and a part of the destination image, brand and logo (Lin et al., 2011).

The lack of research on food tourism consumer behaviour has led to a lack of comprehensive understanding by tourism players, which is not conducive to obtaining higher tourist satisfaction and predicting tourists' future behaviour (Chang, 2007). A less study examined tourist behaviour intention through tourist satisfaction as the mediator between dietary personality characteristics and destination image. Therefore, this study filled the literature gap in this area and

provided valuable empirical evidence on tourist behaviour intention through dietary personality characteristics in Chengdu, China.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Personal Dietary Characteristics

Personal dietary characteristics, including food neophobia and food neophilia, are important factors that affect tourist food choice preferences in destinations (Chang et al., 2011). Food neophobia refers to people who tend to show dislike or suspicion when faced with new and unfamiliar food, while food neophilia tends to pursue strange and novel foods (Fischler, 1988). In a study conducted by Cohen and Avieli (2004), tourists unfamiliar with local food's cooking methods and ingredients will feel reluctant to consume the dishes. Thus, tourists with food neophobia would be unwilling to try strange foods and usually dominated by internal traits, which affect their behavioural intentions. Surprisingly, food neophilia tourist is eager to try novel foods. When the experience is consistent with external information, they will show positive behaviour intentions, that is, to revisit the destination to taste the food or recommend local cuisine to others.

### Destination Image

A positive destination image helps improve the competitiveness of the tourist destination and has an important impact on tourists' decision-making behaviour before and during the tour (Rand & Heath, 2006). For those reasons, the destination image is the overall tourist impression after a tourist activity (Embacher & Buttle, 1989). On that note, food plays an increasingly important role in destination marketing and tourist experience (Kivela & Crofts, 2005). The amazing food at the destination has become a critical element to travel decisions (Jimenezbeltran et al., 2016). Hence, tourist destinations and tourism organizations recognize that food has

particular potential as an important tool to promote sustainable destination development (Sanchezcanizares & Castillocanalejo, 2015). Besides, regional cuisine has a significant thrust on tourism and destination marketing to encourage sustainable competitiveness (Rand & Heath, 2006).

### Tourist Behaviour Intention

Tourist behavioural intention is the possible state of behaviour: the individual behavioural tendency or response attitudes to a specific thing or object (Smith, 2004). Behaviour intentions are the intensity of spontaneously engaging in a particular behaviour, and believed that when there are no specific factors that interfere with an individual action plan, the stronger the behaviour intention, the greater the possibility that the behaviour will occur (Kim & Richardson, 2003). On that note, tourist behaviour intentions are known by the tendency and likelihood of tourists visiting a tourist destination in a specific environment and time node. Actual choice behaviour can predict by tourist behaviour intention and environmental variables (Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). Tourist behaviour intentions are linked to relative dimensions of recommendation to others and the possibility of revisiting to predict actual choice behaviour (Chen & Tsai, 2007).

### Tourist Satisfaction

The more consistent the experience image is with the pre-tourism image, the easier it is to obtain good tourist satisfaction; otherwise, it will be disappointing (Chen & Funk, 2010). The overall destination image is positively correlated with tourist satisfaction and will indirectly impact tourist behaviour intentions (revisit and recommendation) through satisfaction (Beerli & Martin, 2004). The destination image, including infrastructure quality, humanities, and natural attractions, significantly affects overall tourist satisfaction (Tavitiyaman & Qu, 2013). The food image will build individual travel expectations and food

satisfaction by comparing expectations and experience. Satisfied tourists are more eager to spread positive word of mouth and revisit the destination (Kim, 2008). Moreover, tourist satisfaction has a significant positive effect on long-term behavioural intentions (Huang, 2011). Therefore, visitors who are satisfied with the destination will revisit the destination and recommend it to others.

Therefore, this study attempts to investigate personal dietary characteristics, destination image, behavioural intentions and tourist satisfaction. With that, the hypotheses of the study were developed and presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1** Hypotheses of the study

H1	H1-a:	Food satisfaction level has a significant mediator effect between food neophilia the tourist behaviours intention.
	H1-b:	Food satisfaction level has a significant mediator effect between food neophobia and tourist behaviour intention.
H2	H2-a:	There is a significant effect between neophilia and tourist behaviour intention.
	H2-b:	There is a significant effect between neophobia and tourist behaviour intention.

## METHODOLOGY

### Questionnaire and Data Analyses

A quantitative approach with an online questionnaire was adopted in this study. The questionnaire was transformed into Google form and distributed purposively to tourists who had visited Chengdu, China. The questionnaire was structured in three parts: respondents' profiles, motivation for travelling, and behavioural intentions. The basic respondent information consists of gender, age, marital status, educational background,

occupation, monthly household income, and province. Furthermore, the variables used to measure travelling motivations were personal dietary characteristics (Pliner & Hobden, 1992) and destination image (Hunt, 2016). Meanwhile, behavioural intentions were measured through food satisfaction (Mingjie et al., 2016) and tourist behaviour intentions (Chen & Tsai, 2007). These items were measured using 5 points Likert scale of attitude assessment (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree). The data were keyed and analyzed using IBM Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) and PLS Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The study findings were generated with descriptive statistics, and the hypotheses were tested using SmartPLS three software.

### Respondents' Characteristics

There were 169 respondents, with 74 male and 95 female respondents participating in this online survey. The majority of the respondents who answered the questionnaire were from the age group range of 26 – 45 years old, about 58 per cent of the total respondents. About 60.4 per cent of the respondents were married, and 51.5 per cent was undergraduate. The majority of the 49 per cent of respondents worked in the private sector, and their monthly household income ranged between RMB12,001 to RMB24,000. Moreover, the majority of the respondents involved in this study were from Si Chuan Province 18 per cent, Guang Dong Province about 10 per cent and other provinces about 72 per cent. The summary of descriptive analyses of the respondent demographic profiles is highlighted in Table 2.

**Table 2** Demographic profiles (N = 169)

Demographic profiles		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	74	43.8
	Female	95	56.2
Age	18 – 25 years old	24	14.2
	26 – 35 years old	56	33.1
	36 – 45 years old	42	24.9
	46 – 55 years old	34	20.1
	>56 years old	13	7.7
Marital status	Single	40	23.7
	Married	102	60.4
	Others	27	16.0
Education	< Middle school	5	3.0
	Junior college	66	39.1
	Undergraduate	87	51.5
	>Postgraduate	11	6.5
Occupation	Student	20	11.8
	Private sector	83	49.1
	Government sector	10	5.9
	Businessman	32	18.9
	Unemployed	7	4.1
	Others	17	10.1

Household income	< RMB6,000	16	9.5
	RMB6,001 – RMB12,000	38	22.5
	RMB12,001 – RMB18,000	50	29.6
	RMB18,001 – RMB24,000	41	24.3
	RMB24,001 – RMB30,000	13	7.7
	>RMB30,000	11	6.5
Provinces	Si Chuan	30	18
	Guang Dong	17	10
	Others	122	72

## FINDINGS

### Convergent Validity

Table 3 shows the convergent validity result of the measurement model. The Composite Reliability (CR) were found to be > 0.70 (Hair et al., 2006), which establishes internal consistency. Meanwhile, the AVE values were more than the prescribed value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2006) and demonstrated convergent validity. Higher outer loading on a variable indicates that the associated measure has much in common measured by the variable (Hair et al., 2014). Hair et al. (2014) suggested that items having a loading > 0.70 should be retained.

**Table 3** Measurement model

Construct	Items	Loading	AVE	Composite reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Food neophilia	NPL1	0.846	0.699	0.874	0.785
	NPL2	0.837			
	NPL3	0.825			
Food neophobia	NPB1	0.92	0.818	0.900	0.779
	NPB2	0.889			
Food satisfaction	FS1	0.847	0.687	0.898	0.847
	FS2	0.801			
	FS3	0.863			
	FS4	0.802			
Behaviour intention	BI1	0.856	0.752	0.901	0.835
	BI2	0.866			
	BI3	0.864			
	BI4	0.870			

### Discriminant Validity

The criterion and cross-loading scores of Fornell and Larcker (1981) were used to establish discriminant validity. Table 4 demonstrates that the square root of AVE for all latent variables was higher than the inter-construct correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), and therefore, confirmed discriminant validity. Further, all individual loadings indicators were higher than their respective cross-loadings (Hair et al., 2013).

**Table 4** Discriminant validity

Construct	Food neophilic	Food neophobia	Destination image	Food satisfaction	Behaviour intention
Food neophilic	<b>0.904</b>				
Food neophobia	-0.462	<b>0.836</b>			
Destination image	-0.516	0.826	0.832		
Food satisfaction	-0.494	0.807	0.809	<b>0.829</b>	
Behaviour intention	-0.461	0.798	0.824	0.796	<b>0.867</b>

### Structural Model Assessment

The  $R^2$  (Coefficient of determination) value was used to evaluate the structural model. This coefficient measured the model's predictive accuracy and was calculated as the squared correlation between actual and predictive values of a specified endogenous construct. The  $R^2$  values represent the exogenous variables' combined effects on the endogenous latent variables. It also represents the variance in the endogenous constructs explained by all of the exogenous constructs linked to it (Hair et al., 2013). In Table 5, the endogenous variables, namely food satisfaction and behaviour intention have an  $R^2$  value of 0.715, 0.631. It reflects the fact that the structural model developed in this study has predictive relevance.

**Table 5** Prediction of the model

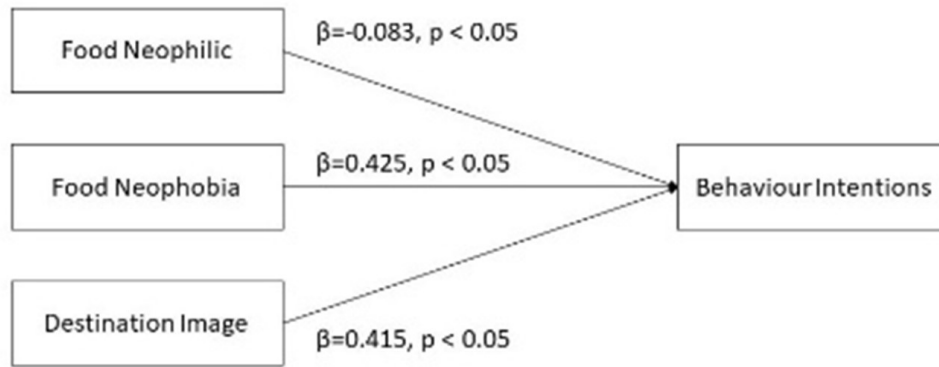
Endogenous	R Square
Food Satisfaction	0.715
Behaviour Intention	0.631

### Mediator Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

The bootstrapping procedure was conducted to identify the mediating effects of food satisfaction towards personal dietary characteristics; destination image towards tourist behaviour intentions. Figure 1 indicates that personal dietary characteristics and destination image positively influence tourist behaviour intentions. Moreover, figure 4.3 specifies one of the main variables in personal dietary characteristics: food neophilia does not significantly affect tourist behaviour intentions, while food neophobia and destination image positively influence tourist behaviour intentions.



**Figure 1** Structural Model 1



**Figure 2** Structural Model 2

As indicated in Table 6, four hypotheses were accepted. One hypothesis, H1-a: Food satisfaction level has a significant mediator effect between food neophilia and tourist behaviour intentions, was rejected. The hypotheses accepted in this study were H1-b, H2, H3-a, H3-b, and H4. It shows that food neophobia and destination images directly affect tourists' behaviour intentions and indirectly impact food satisfaction. It concludes that there is no significant relationship between food neophilia with tourist behaviour intention through food satisfaction.

**Table 6** Mediator analysis

Hypotheses	Relationship	Std. Beta	SE	T-Value	Result
H1-a	NPL-FS-BI	-0.066	0.037	1.785	Not Supported
H1-b	NPB-FS-BI	0.338	0.069	4.921	Supported
H2	DI-FS-BI	0.33	0.074	4.433	Supported
H3-a	NPL-BI	-0.083	0.046	1.805	Supported
H3-b	NPB-BI	0.425	0.081	4.787	Supported

## DISCUSSION

### Mediator Effect of Food Satisfaction on Personal Dietary Characteristics and Tourist Behaviour Intentions

The hypotheses revealed that food neophilia does not significantly influence tourist behaviour through food satisfaction. It is due to the personal characteristics of neophilic individuals who are daringly trying varieties of foods (Fischler, 1988). This type of individual would try to consume all kinds of food whenever travelling to a destination. Neophilic individuals will not revisit the places once they do not favour the local foods they have tasted. Thus, it is the opposite scenario with Neophobia tourists who only eat foods they are familiar with. When they are happy and satisfied with the food they have eaten, they will revisit Chengdu. Hence, they will also

recommend it to their families and friends and share their Chengdu gastronomy journey on social media. These study findings found similar outcomes from Kim and In (2014), where satisfied tourists revisit the destination and recommend others.

### Mediator Effect of Food Satisfaction on Destination Image and Tourist Behaviour Intentions

Destination image was identified to significantly impact tourists' behavioural intentions through food satisfaction (Kivela & Crotts, 2005; Jimenezbeltran et al., 2016). The findings of this study show that before visiting Chengdu, the tourist has gone through all the information about Chengdu. Furthermore, the tourist will seek information about attractions in Chengdu and the array of local delicacies offered at the destination (Ottenbacher &



Harrington, 2013). Hence, when tourists arrive at the destination, they will experience the destination and the local foods. Hereafter, when the tourist feels satisfied during their visit to Chengdu, this will lead to their intentions to visit next time (e.g., Liu, 2013; Endah et al., 2017).

### **Personal Dietary Characteristics and Tourist Behaviour Intentions**

Personal dietary characteristics were identified to have a significant impact on tourist behavioural intentions. The food-neophilic type of tourist is revealed not to come to Chengdu to watch pandas and avoid trying any Chengdu cuisines they are unaware of. In contrast, food neophobia tourists will eagerly seek information about any food that is new to them. The tourist will get information about the raw materials and food production process. The advancement of technology nowadays has made everything much more manageable. Food neophobia tourists can easily access the internet and look for specific information about a destination's cuisine. It will also encourage positive behaviour to taste the local foods when they visit a destination.

### **Destination Image and Tourist Behavior Intentions**

The findings of this study also stated that the destination image significantly influences tourist behaviour. A positive destination image helps improve the competitiveness of the tourist destination and has an important impact on tourist decision-making behaviour before and during the tour (Rand & Heath, 2006). Chengdu is well known for its local foods, and it has become one of the motivations to visit (Kivela & Crotts, 2005; Jimenezbeltran et al., 2016). Tourists who visit a destination will taste local cuisines and form an active food destination image. Furthermore, this will positively influence the revisit intentions toward a destination and promote others (Kim & In, 2014).

## **DISCUSSION**

This study revealed that food satisfaction at a destination could mediate personal dietary characteristics, destination image, and tourist behaviour intentions. This study indicates that food neophobia indirectly affects tourist behaviour intentions through food satisfaction and positively influences tourist behaviour intentions. Furthermore, food neophilic has a positive effect on tourist behaviour intentions but does not significantly influence tourist behaviour intention through food satisfaction. Food neophobia was identified to determine tourist food satisfaction and influence tourist behaviour intentions. Moreover, destination image also significantly affects tourist behavioural intentions. When they are satisfied with the local foods, they will revisit Chengdu and encourage others to visit the destination. Food tourism in Chengdu can be developed and promoted by improving tourist satisfaction by establishing an excellent motivational image, and enhancing tourist willingness to recommend and encourage the development of Chengdu cuisine. Thus, a food destination image directly affects tourist behaviour intention and indirectly affects tourist behaviour intention through food satisfaction. Hence, it indicates that tourists can obtain a better impression of food destinations by comparing the experience and expectations of Chengdu cuisine. This study provides a new perspective for the destination management organization to understand tourist needs and behaviour.

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