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Gastronomic wanderlust: Millennials preference for local cuisine on their travels

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Abstract

Millennials are known for their unique consumption patterns which generally shaped by globalisation, digital influence, and health consciousness. Therefore, this study aims to examine factors influencing Malaysian millennials' local food consumption intentions during domestic travel, focusing on motivational factors, food neophobia, food involvement, and attitude. Data were collected using non-probability judgment sampling via social media platforms, with 154 respondents completing the survey. Results indicate that food involvement and attitude positively impact local food consumption intentions, while motivational factors and food neophobia do not. These findings suggest that millennials who are more engaged with food and have a positive attitude towards local cuisine are more likely to consume local foods. By understanding what influences Malaysian millennials' preference during travel, policymakers and businesses can develop strategies to promote local cuisine and boost economic growth. The insights provided also can guide tourism boards, marketers, local restaurants, and authorities in developing effective strategies to promote local Malaysian food.

Keywords: Attitude, Food involvement, Food neophobia, Local food consumption intention, Millennials, Motivational factors.

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1. Introduction

During a trip, food is recognized as a crucial element for tourists. This food can be either local or familiar to foreigners. These elements are highly subjective among travellers due to various reasons affecting their choices [1]. A new term, "foodcation," has become a popular trend among tourists worldwide as people increasingly explore destinations

primarily for their culinary offerings [2]. Recent trends indicate that travellers are more likely to seek out local food to experience new cultures [3]. Local food and beverages are becoming essential factors in tourists' choices of travel destinations, enhancing their overall experience [4].

Malaysians love to travel, with access to visa-free travel to around 160 countries. Malaysians can be found almost everywhere around the world [5]. In Malaysia, food is also a significant attraction for tourists. The country's multicultural cuisine offers many choices, making it a point of interest for tourists seeking to experience Malaysia's diverse culture. Some destinations in Malaysia are internationally recognized for their local food offerings [6]. Additionally, Expedia reports that 65% of Malaysian tourists are willing to spend on food during their trips [7].

Unlike Generation X, millennials prefer exploring and experiencing new things [8, 9]. Food has been acknowledged as a significant factor influencing millennials' travel plans. Travel and millennials are closely related, as this generation values travel highly. A 2016 Airbnb survey reported that millennials are more willing to spend on travel than on purchasing cars or houses [10]. Additionally, a 2018 Travelport survey revealed that millennials are expected to spend more on upcoming trips than other age groups [11]. Millennials' travel behaviour differs from other age groups as they tend to spend more and seek new experiences Sofronov [10]. Sofronov [10] study found that food travel is the most popular choice among millennials (16%), followed by business travel (14%). Additionally, 30% of millennials want to experience different foods during vacations, compared to 24% of Generation X and 21% of Boomers [12].

Despite the growing trend of travel among millennials, there is limited research on millennials in the travel sector. While several studies explore local food consumption intentions and motivations, they do not specifically focus on millennials [13-17]. Although Sofronov [10] study is related to millennials, it does not examine local food consumption intentions. Therefore, there is a need for more research to investigate the relationship between millennials and local food consumption intentions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Local Food Consumption Intention

Local food is the food that is grown in a specific area, can be brought from local markets, have distance between their production-consumption locations and mirror the local culture [18]. Local cuisine is also food that is offered to tourists by a local restaurant, organizations that are related to festivals or tours, or sales of packaged local food Ardabili, et al. [19]. Kivela and Crofts [20] and Stewart, et al. [21] illustrated that tourist may be attracted by local food when they travel. For Cohen and Avieli [14] it shows that Asians are more likely to eat at the restaurant that provides Asian foods while Japanese travellers are more resistance to consume at a restaurant that provides Japanese foods at the travel destination. According to Caber, et al. [22] hygiene and health, local eating habits, table manners, and communication difficulties show a negative effect on experience. Hygiene and health [15] and safety issues [16] were the aspects that tourists hesitate to consume local food [22].

Local eating habits, table manners, menus in the local language, server staff's lack of foreign language skills, insufficient knowledge about local food, communication failures, and fear of gullibility are factors that impede local food consumption intentions Batra [23]. Chang, et al. [16] identified six categories to examine tourists' local food consumption: tourists' food culture, contextual factors, perception of the destination, service performance, tour guide's performance, and variety of food. Their study focused on Chinese tourists from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

Cultural and religious factors, socio-demographic and individual factors about food, motivational factors, psychological factors, and exposure and experience also influence travellers' food consumption Caber, et al. [22]. Chang, et al. [16] further illustrated that tourists' behaviours can be determined by destination culture, tourists' own food culture, cultural distance, and religious beliefs. For instance, Cohen and Avieli [14] showed that Israeli tourists refuse to consume foods that are not prepared according to kosher rules (food preparation according to Jewish law) and meals that do not align with their cultural practices during travel to Asia. Similarly, Muslim tourists prefer Halal food, and Korean tourists are more likely to consume their local cuisine Caber, et al. [22].

2.2. Hypothesis Development

2.2.1. Relationship Between Motivational Factors and Consumption Intention

Motivation is perceived as the most significant factor leading to tourist food consumption [16, 17, 24]. Motivational factors for tourists can be classified into four dimensions. These four dimensions are physical, cultural, interpersonal, and status and prestige. The conceptual framework requires further empirical evidence for validation, but it serves as a useful theoretical linkage between tourist motivation and their local food consumption [15, 24] identified nine general motivational factors in their qualitative study examining the intention to consume local food and beverages during a trip. Ignatov and Smith [25] adopted motivational factors in their study, which included an exciting experience, escape from routine, health concerns, learning, authentic experience, togetherness, and prestige.

In the context of food consumption, past studies illustrate that these factors significantly influence individual food choices. For instance, Chang, et al. [16] examined the food preferences of Chinese tourists traveling to Australia, finding that different motivational factors lead to varying dining behaviours. Mak, et al. [17] further streamlined these motivational factors from nine to five key elements, reinforcing the importance of these factors in supporting tourist food preferences. They also demonstrated that tourist motivation significantly affects food consumption.

H₁: Motivational factor has a positive relationship with local food consumption intention.

2.2.2. Relationship Between Food Neophobia and Consumption Intention

Food neophobia is widely recognized in tourism literature as a factor influencing local food consumption. It is frequently examined in previous studies [1, 17, 22, 26]. According to Hwang and Lin [27] food neophobia is essentially a human propensity to dislike unfamiliar tastes or an unwillingness to try novel foods. Research conducted by Pliner and Hobden [28] examined individuals' food neophobia using the Food Neophobia Scale (FNS), a ten-item scale. Their findings indicate that neophobic individuals tend to dislike novel foods and are reluctant to try them.

Food neophobia has also been found to positively correlate with age [29] while income and education are inversely related to food neophobia [30]. According to Pliner and Hobden [28] fear and anxiety are positively associated with food neophobia, whereas food familiarity and sensation-seeking are negatively associated with it. Several studies have reported similar findings, showing that local food consumption intention is influenced by psychological factors, including food neophobia and food neophilia [1, 15, 17].

Research has consistently shown a negative correlation between food neophobia and local food consumption [22, 31, 32]. Factors such as safety anxieties, communication difficulties, table manners, emotional attraction, and food neophobia negatively impact local food consumption. Arvola, et al. [33] used the FNS to investigate the relationship between food neophobia and the purchase intention of cheese, illustrating that neophobic individuals tend to have lower expectations and attitudes toward the taste of cheese. However, their study also indicated that food neophobia cannot fully predict behaviour due to sample constraints.

H₂: Food neophobia has a negative relationship toward local food consumption intention.

2.2.3. Relationship Between Food Involvement and Consumption Intention

Food involvement is well-defined as the degree of an individual's focus on food in their life [34]. The Food Involvement Scale (FIS), derived from Goody [35] theory of the food life cycle, encompasses acquisition, preparation, cooking, eating, and procurement, and is used to study food involvement and food choices [34]. The FIS was created to identify individuals' food involvement [15]. Food involvement varies among individuals based on their preferences and attitudes [34]. Research indicates that eating experiences and levels of food involvement are correlated and influenced by individuals' responsibilities.

Aghdaie, et al. [36] found that food involvement has a positive relationship with purchase behaviour. Their study showed that high motivation to purchase is influenced by a high degree of involvement. Similarly, Chen [37] research on purchasing organic food indicated a significant relationship between food involvement and consumers' intentions to purchase organic food. Rahman and Reynolds [38] also observed a positive relationship between involvement and consumer behaviour in wine consumption, noting that high wine involvement leads to more frequent wine drinking.

Bell and Marshall [34] emphasized that food involvement is an important measure in food research, especially regarding food choice and preference. They developed the Food Involvement Scale (FIS), which contains 12 items. Various studies have identified a positive correlation between food involvement and tourist loyalty [15] and tourists' intentions to consume local food. Greater food involvement indicates a stronger intention to consume local food [18, 22, 39]. High food involvement suggests that tourists are more likely to consider food and beverages as a reason to travel to particular destinations [40].

H₃: Food involvement has a positive relationship toward local food consumption intention.

2.2.4. Relationship Between Attitude and Consumption Intention

Some scholars focus on attitude within the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to identify its relationship with tourists' local food consumption intentions. Similarly, attitude has been used in studies evaluating the intention to purchase local food in the U.S. context Shin and Hancer [41]. Choe and Kim [42] also adopted attitude as an element to examine its relationship with tourists' local food consumption intention. Attitude significantly affects individual behavioural intentions [43].

TPB has been widely adopted in past studies to describe food choice behaviour. For example, Nguyen [44] described the intention to follow a low-fat diet using TPB, which accounted for 51% of the variance. In the context of Korean food, Phillips, et al. [45] showed that attitude is positively correlated with the intention to dine on Korean food. Choe and Kim [42] indicated that attitude toward local food in Hong Kong has a positive relationship with the intention to recommend local food and visit for food tourism. Levitt, et al. [43] also found that attitude and behavioural intention have a positive relationship. Shin and Hancer [41] applied attitude in their model to identify the antecedents of the intention to buy local food, showing that attitude and perceived behavioural control are positively correlated.

H₄: Attitude has a positive relationship toward local food consumption intention.

Figure 1 illustrated the proposed research framework.

3. Methodology

This study adopted the survey instruments for Local Food Consumption Intention (3 items), Food Neophobia (10 items), and Food Involvement (6 items) from Caber, et al. [22]. Motivational Factors (6 items) and Attitude (6 items) were adopted from Levitt, et al. [43]. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Judgment sampling method was employed for this study. Judgment sampling is a non-probability sampling technique wherein an experienced individual selects the sample based on personal judgment regarding the appropriateness of certain characteristics of the sample members. In this study, only Malaysian millennials who have travelled in the past, are currently traveling, or intend to travel in the future were approached to complete the survey

questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed via popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, ensuring a broad reach within the target demographic. This approach was chosen to maximize the response rate and ensure that the sample accurately represented the millennial population in Malaysia.

4. Results

A total of 154 participant fully completed the survey questionnaire. Data collected from respondents' self-administered questionnaires were analysed with SPSS version 29 software. The detailed demographic profile of the respondents was projected in Table 1.

Table 1.
Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=154).

No	Variable	Classification	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	46.8
		Female	53.2
2	Race	Malay	0.6
		Chinese	94.8
		Indian	3.2
		Others	1.3
3	Current Employment Status	Full-time employment	18.8
		Part-time employment	1.3
		Business owner	1.3
		Student	73.4
		Unemployed	5.2
4	Monthly Income	Less than RM1000	72.1
		RM1,000 – RM 1,999	7.1
		RM 2,000- RM 2,999	13.6
		RM 3,000- RM 3,999	2.6
		RM 4,000 – RM 4,999	1.3
		RM 5,000 and above	3.2
5	Places Normally Travel	Domestic	68.8
		International	31.2
6	Days Normally Spend on Travel	One (1) day trip	7.1
		2 Days 1 Night	17.5
		3 Days 2 Nights	49.4
		One (1) week	20.8
		More than One (1) week	5.2
7	Person that Likely Travel Together	Travel alone	6.5
		Family member	42.9
		Friends	50.6
8	Trip Purpose	Rest & relaxation	75.3
		Adventure & exploring	22.1
		Learn about history & culture	1.9
		Business travel	0.6
9	Most Important Aspect for Travel	Top rate hotel	7.8
		Nightlife and entertainment	20.1
		Food	57.1
		Shopping places	5.8
		Historical places	9.1

The study's respondents exhibit a diverse demographic profile, providing insight into the varying backgrounds and preferences influencing their travel behaviours. Gender distribution among the respondents reveals a slight predominance of female participants, accounting for 53.2% of the sample, compared to 46.8% male respondents. This 6.4% difference highlights a balanced yet slightly skewed gender representation within the survey. Ethnically, the majority of respondents are Chinese, constituting 94.8% (146 individuals) of the total sample. This is followed by Indian respondents at 3.2% (5 individuals), and those from other races at 1.3% (2 individuals). The smallest ethnic group represented in the survey is Malay, with only 0.6% (1 individual).

In terms of travel preferences, respondents show a significant inclination towards domestic travel, with 68.8% (106 individuals) primarily engaging in domestic trips. In contrast, 31.2% (48 individuals) of respondents favour international travel. This preference for domestic travel underscores a possible comfort and familiarity with local destinations or a practical consideration influenced by factors such as cost, convenience, and current global travel conditions. The duration of trips varies among respondents, with the most common trip length being 3 days and 2 nights, chosen by 49.4% (76 individuals). A week-long trip is preferred by 20.8% (32 individuals), while 17.5% (27 individuals) opt for shorter trips of

2 days and 1 night. One-day trips are less common, selected by 7.1% (11 individuals), and trips lasting more than a week are the least favoured, accounting for only 5.2% (8 individuals). These preferences indicate a tendency towards shorter, manageable getaways that fit within typical work or academic schedules.

When considering travel companions, the majority of respondents, 56.6% (78 individuals), prefer to travel with friends, highlighting the social aspect of their travel experiences. Travel with family members is also popular, chosen by 42.9% (66 individuals). Solo travel is less common, with only 6.5% (10 individuals) indicating a preference for traveling alone. These preferences suggest that social interactions and shared experiences play a significant role in travel choices for the majority of respondents. The primary purpose of travel among respondents is rest and relaxation, with 75.3% (116 individuals) identifying this as their main reason for traveling. Adventure and exploration attract 22.1% (34 individuals), while learning about history and culture is a less common motivation, chosen by 1.9% (3 individuals). Business travel is the least common reason, accounting for only 0.6% (1 individual). These findings underscore a strong preference for leisure and rejuvenation as the primary travel motivations among respondents.

Food emerges as the most important aspect of travel for respondents, with 57.1% (88 individuals) identifying it as a key factor in their travel experiences. Nightlife and entertainment follow, valued by 20.1% (31 individuals). Historical places are important for 9.1% (14 individuals), while top-rated hotels and shopping places are considered significant by 7.8% (12 individuals) and 5.8% (9 individuals) of respondents, respectively. This emphasis on food highlights the cultural and experiential significance of culinary experiences in travel preferences.

Reliability analysis was also conducted. Cronbach alpha for all the five variables were greater than 0.7 which means that the scale scores for each of the dimensions were of good reliability [46]. The following were the details of Cronbach alpha for the five variables: Motivational Factors (alpha=0.835, 6 items), Food Neophobia (alpha=0.848, 10 items), Food Involvement (alpha=0.741, 6 items), Attitude (alpha=0.937, 6 items) and Consumption Intention (alpha=0.907, 3 items).

Table 2.
Results of Regression Analysis.

Dependent Variable: Local Food Consumption Intention

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.833	0.546		1.525	0.129
	Motivational Factors	0.143	0.102	0.110	1.392	0.166
	Food Neophobia	0.008	0.082	0.007	0.103	0.918
	Food Involvement	0.197	0.075	0.184	2.629	0.009
	Attitude	0.458	0.086	0.441	5.339	0.000
R Square= 0.342 F-value= 19.352						
Adjusted R Square= 0.324 Significance= 0.000						

Multiple linear regression was performed to test the hypotheses. The result of this regression is shown in Table 2. As highlighted, the overall result for the regression model was significant (Significance = 0.000). From the adjusted R square value (Adjusted R² = 0.324), the four independent variables contributed 32.4% towards local food consumption intention. From the analysis, two of the independent variables Attitude and Food Involvement contributed significantly towards consumption intention. Motivational Factors and Food Neophobia did not significantly affect consumption intention. The results of standardized coefficient (beta) revealed that Attitude (beta= 0.441) was the most important variable that contributed to the dependent variable followed by Food Involvement (beta= 0.184).

4.1. Discussion

It can be seen that the motivational factors of each respondent are not homogeneous, and other conditions such as attitude and interest may influence tourist motivation [47, 48]. Therefore, different individuals will have different perceptions, and their local food consumption intentions are not significantly influenced solely by motivation, as other factors also play a role.

Food neophobia, for instance, does not support the hypothesis regarding millennials' local food consumption intentions. Comparing this to past research, the results do not align with previous findings that identified food neophobia as a factor influencing tourist food consumption [15]. This discrepancy may be attributed to age, as this study focuses on millennials, who tend to have lower levels of neophobia compared to older individuals [24, 29, 30]. Additionally, in the culturally diverse context of Malaysia, respondents exhibit neophilia, showing a greater willingness to try new foods.

Food involvement demonstrates a significant and positive relationship with local food consumption intentions. Studies on the purchase intentions of organic food among Taiwanese consumers highlight food involvement as a key factor influencing consumption intentions [37]. Other research also supports a positive relationship between high food involvement and purchase choices as well as food consumption intentions [36, 40]. Respondents exhibit high food involvement, with food being the most important aspect of travel for the majority.

Attitude also has a positive and significant relationship with millennials' local food consumption intentions during their trips. Moreover, attitude emerges as the most significant predictor of local food consumption intentions. This outcome aligns with previous research, which underscores the importance of attitude in examining the relationship between tourist local food consumption intentions [42] and individual behavioural intentions [43].

Both food involvement and attitude influence millennials' local food consumption intentions while traveling. These insights are valuable for the Malaysian Tourism Board, which should focus on incorporating food and positive attitudes (fun, excitement, enjoyment) in their tourism promotions. To attract Malaysian millennials, the Tourism Board should prioritize food as a key attraction. Creating tourism campaigns that highlight food involvement and positive attitude elements could effectively engage this demographic.

These findings also present opportunities for tourism marketers, who can better understand millennials' expectations. Marketing promotions should emphasize local foods that appeal to millennials. Marketers can develop new and interesting tourism plans that incorporate food involvement and positive attitude elements to achieve their objectives. Utilizing social media and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) can further attract millennials by featuring food and attitude-focused promotions [43].

Local restaurants can also benefit from these findings. Since Malaysian millennials are more neophilic and willing to try local food, restaurants should focus on other aspects such as taste, presentation, and ambiance to enhance their business. Incorporating elements of fun, excitement, and enjoyment can attract potential customers. Local authorities can also gain insights from these results. Since attitude and food involvement significantly influence millennials' local food consumption intentions, authorities can organize events or festivals to draw visitors. By gathering local vendors and creating markets or festivals that include positive attitude elements, authorities can attract millennials to visit local destinations, thereby boosting tourism.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the factors influencing the local food consumption intention of Malaysian millennials during domestic travel. The significant impact of food involvement and attitude underscores the importance of these factors in shaping food-related behaviours. Conversely, the lack of significant influence from motivational factors and food neophobia highlights the complex interplay of various elements in determining food choices. These insights provide valuable guidance for stakeholders and pave the way for future research to further explore this dynamic and evolving field.

Nevertheless, the first limitation of this research is that the targeted respondents are Malaysian millennials. Therefore, the outcomes presented in this study are only applicable to those interested in focusing on Malaysian millennials as their target population. The second limitation is the inadequacy of respondents' demographic profiles. The demographic profile in this research is not well-diversified, as the questionnaire was not equally distributed. For example, the majority of respondents are Chinese, and most of the respondents are female. Furthermore, students comprise the majority of millennial respondents. Acquiring a sample that accurately represents the standard population was challenging. Lastly, the presence of too many negatively worded questions in the questionnaire posed a limitation. Respondents might have introduced bias when completing the questionnaire, leading to contradictory answers if they did not take the survey seriously. Additionally, the abundance of negatively worded questions could have caused confusion among respondents, further impacting the reliability of their answers.

5.1. Suggestions for Future Research

Future researchers should consider conducting related studies involving millennials from other regions, such as ASEAN or Asia. Exploring millennials' local food consumption intentions across a larger region rather than just Malaysia would yield more comprehensive results. This broader scope would provide more reliable data for stakeholders to implement their strategies, as it would be easier to identify target populations based on regions.

To diversify the demographic profile of respondents, future researchers are recommended to use quota sampling as their sampling technique. Researchers should ensure that the sample proportions are representative of the targeted population. Consequently, the sample should reflect this proportion to ensure that the results are more accurate and reliable. Quotas should be set for each group, including gender, race, and other relevant demographics.

Future researchers are also encouraged to use a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Distributing questionnaires to respondents at local food restaurants or stores—points of interaction with local food—can provide more relevant data. Additionally, interviewing respondents who are consuming or planning to consume local food at these locations can yield better insights into their local food consumption intentions. Combining interviews with surveys will provide more precise and detailed understanding of respondents' views.

Lastly, it is recommended that future researchers reduce the number of negatively worded questions or use only positively worded questions in their survey questionnaires. Positive questions can minimize confusion and reduce respondent bias, which can occur when negative questions lead to contradictory responses. This approach will improve the clarity and reliability of the survey results.

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Appendix

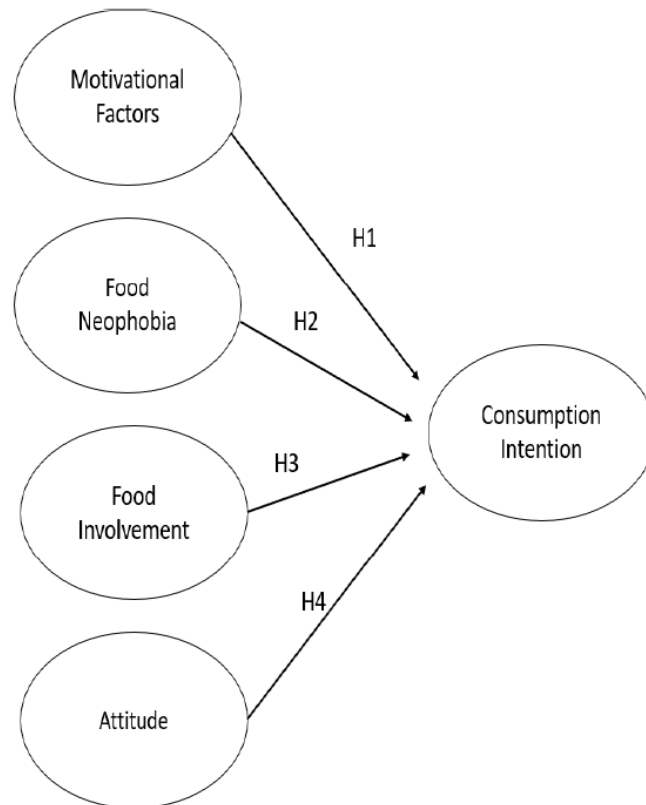


Figure 1.
Research Framework.