

ASSESSING TOURIST PREFERENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL WINES IN TRAVEL DESTINATIONS

Abstract:

Research on the intention and consumption of local products among tourists has recently gained prominence. Despite advances, gaps remain in understanding how these relationships are formed. This study proposes a conceptual model based on the Theory of Interpersonal Behaviour to examine attitudes towards local products through ethnocentrism and subjective knowledge and assesses how social factors such as locavorism and identity with place, together with affective factors such as food neophobia and perceived authenticity, influence consumption intention. In addition, it will be analyzed whether habitus, based on past consumption frequency, moderates the relationship between intention and consumption of local products. The study will be conducted across four countries—Spain, Germany, the United Kingdom, and France—focusing on tourists who have visited the Canary Islands, a major Spanish tourist destination. This study will contribute to the development of sustainable tourism strategies and the support of the regional economy and culture.

Keywords:

Locavorism, ethnocentrism, food neophobia, perceived authenticity, place identity, subjective knowledge, consumption habits

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1. Introduction

In the realm of tourism, local products not only enrich the gastronomic offerings but also play a crucial role in enhancing and promoting local cultures internationally (Uçkan et al., 2022). The term ‘local foods’ refers to those food systems close to the consumer (Birch and Memery, 2020). In this study, it focuses specifically on the indigenous gastronomic products of tourist destinations. Previous research has shown that local cuisine is a decisive factor in the choice of tourist destinations, significantly enriching the traveller’s experience and increasing loyalty to the destination (Di-Clemente et al., 2020). Gastronomic tourism, which uncovers the essence of a destination through its characteristic flavours, has gained popularity, highlighting the importance of local products and food systems as fundamental elements (Jibin Baby and Joseph, 2023). These products not only promote a more sustainable tourism model but also respond to the growing demand for practices that respect the environment and local culture (Gallardo Vázquez, 2023). Several recent studies have explored variables that drive the consumption of local products by tourists visiting a region (e.g., Sthapit et al., 2023; Wachyuni et al., 2024). However, gaps remain in understanding how the underlying dynamics shape tourists’ attitudes and behaviours towards these products.

Firstly, there is ample evidence of a positive relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and their attitude towards local products (Maksan et al., 2019; Petek et al., 2021). Nevertheless, tourists with ethnocentric tendencies might exhibit resistance to consuming local products outside their region or country, thus perpetuating their ethnocentric ideology even when abroad. Furthermore, knowledge of local foods significantly influences how tourists perceive and consume these products, moderating the relationship between perceived risks and benefits and local food consumption, affecting attitudes and consumption decisions in tourist destinations (Zhang et al., 2018). Secondly, locavorism emerges as another essential construct in studying local product consumption behaviour (Kim and Huang, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2023). Locavorism promotes a preference for locally sourced products not based on patriotic ties or biases regarding the country of origin but as a commitment to the local economy, community, and environmental sustainability (Fitzgerald, 2015). Place identity has also proven to be a crucial factor in the preference for local products, establishing a cultural link that allows visitors to connect emotionally with the destination and contributing to their integration into the local community (Burhanudin et al., 2021). Thirdly, the growing interest in understanding how tourists perceive new or unfamiliar foods when visiting a region has fostered research on food neophobia and its impact on the motivation to consume local products (Çakıcı et al., 2020; Gurbaskan Akyuz, 2019). This phobia can limit tourists’ ability to enjoy local gastronomic experiences, restricting their willingness to explore and appreciate local cuisine (Choe and Kim, 2024). Likewise, in the tourism context, perceived authenticity, defined as tourists’ subjective impression of the genuineness of the experiences offered, plays a crucial role in their consumption behaviours regarding local products (Aybek and Alphan, 2021). Although the relationship between authenticity and tourism is paradoxical, with both negative and positive observations (Zhang et al., 2019), understanding how perceived authenticity influences the intention to consume tourist products is vital for designing strategies that preserve the cultural integrity of local products and encourage their acceptance among visitors. Finally, the importance of analysing habit as a crucial psychological aspect that determines behaviour has been recognised. Not only do consumers’ explicit intentions shape their future actions, but so do their pre-existing habits, demonstrating that past behaviours can be reliable predictors of future ones (Triandis, 1979). Although specific literature in this field remains limited, previous studies on tourists’ consumption of local cuisine indicate that habit does not significantly influence this behaviour (Mahachi-Chatibura, 2015). However, the relevance of habit in food consumption has been confirmed by other recent research, highlighting its significant impact

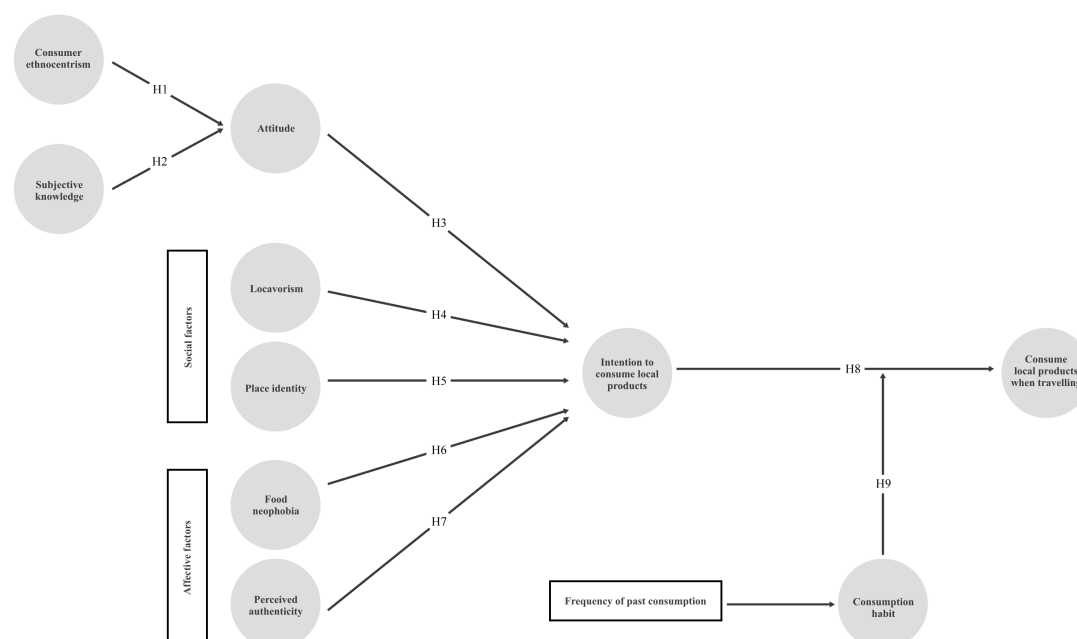
(Amalia et al., 2020). This discrepancy underscores the need for further exploration of how habits influence consumer behaviour in different contexts.

Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps in the literature through a comprehensive analysis of tourists' consumption of local products. The objectives of this research include making a significant contribution to the literature on the Theory of Interpersonal Behaviour (Triandis, 1979), considering ethical, social, and cultural factors, which are not accounted for by other theories such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985). Furthermore, this study will add value by examining consumption habits based on the frequency of past consumption and facilitating conditions as antecedents of behaviour. The research will focus on Canary Islands, two of the most visited tourist destinations in Spain (INE, 2023). A structural equation model using PLS-SEM will be used to analyse a sample of tourists from the United Kingdom, the main source market for tourists to Spain (Statista, 2023). Additionally, this study will focus on local agri-food products, given the impact of numerous recent reports in Europe questioning the quality, safety, and social aspects of imports and exports of these types of products from Spain (El Periódico, 2024).

2. Conceptual model and hypotheses

Due to the complexity of human behaviour, one of the most widely used socio-psychological models in recent years, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985), seems unable to explain the emotional aspect of the consumer. The TPB explains behaviour through intention and is considered a static model, based on self-interest motives, excluding emotional and unconscious influences (Lopes et al., 2019). To address this gap, the Theory of Interpersonal Behaviour (TIB) (Triandis, 1979) was used to support this study (Figure 1). The TIB, by introducing additional factors such as habit, affect, and social interactions, provides a broader and more predictive model for understanding consumer behaviour. Furthermore, in the TIB, habit is considered an automatic and unconscious driver that can influence action, an aspect that the TPB does not adequately address as it focuses primarily on the reflective system (Shah Alam and Mohamed Sayuti, 2011).

FIGURE 1.
Conceptual model and hypotheses



2.1. Antecedents of attitude towards the consumption of local products

Consumer ethnocentrism refers to a "general tendency of buyers to reject all imported products, regardless of price or quality, for nationalistic reasons" (Shankarmahesh, 2006). This implies that high ethnocentric tendencies lead to an unfavourable attitude towards purchasing foreign products (Karoui and Khemakhem, 2019), due to a shared belief in the immorality of such behaviour and its harmful consequences for the local economy (Strizhakova et al., 2008). On the other hand, subjective knowledge refers to what the consumer believes they know about a particular product and is often termed perceived knowledge (Fatha and Ayoubi, 2023). The varying levels of subjective knowledge (high vs low) can influence tourists' attitudes and decision-making processes regarding the intention to consume local products when travelling (Tassiello and Tillotson, 2020). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Consumer ethnocentrism is negatively related to attitudes towards the consumption of local products by tourists.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Subjective knowledge is positively related to attitudes towards the consumption of local products by tourists.

2.2. Antecedents of intention to consume local products

Attitude in consumer behaviour reflects the predisposition and evaluation, whether positive or negative, that an individual holds towards a specific product or behaviour, directly influencing consumption intentions (Caldwell et al., 2006). According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985), this evaluation is the primary determinant of behavioural intention. In the case of local products, attitude plays a crucial role due to its affective and learned component, which can change with new opinions. Research has shown a significant relationship between favourable attitudes towards local products and the intention to consume them (Skallerud and Wien, 2019). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Consumer attitude is positively related to the intention to consume local products when travelling.

Regarding social factors, this study considers locavorism and place identity. According to Reich et al. (2018), locavorism should be understood as a new ideology rather than a simple trend. This is because individuals who adopt an ideology adhere to a belief system and, in turn, take meaningful actions to support social forms (e.g., farmers' markets; Reich et al., 2018). It has been demonstrated that locavores will continue seeking local options wherever they are to support the consumption of local foods (Choi et al., 2021). On the other hand, place identity is described as a dimension of identity that connects an individual's personal identity to their geographical location (Antonsich, 2010). In the context of consumption, individuals with a strong place identity often value and prefer products that originate from that region (Yildiz et al., 2018). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Locavorism is positively related to the intention to consume local products when travelling.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Place identity is positively related to tourists' intention to consume local products.

Affective factors will be analysed through food neophobia and perceived authenticity. Food preferences and choices are strongly influenced by individual personality traits. In particular,

the trait of food neophobia has been widely investigated in recent decades (Hashemi et al., 2023) and is defined as "the reluctance to consume unfamiliar or new foods in a given situation" (Jaeger et al., 2023). In the context of gastronomic tourism, tourists' personality traits (e.g., food neophilia and neophobia) influence their selection and rejection of foods (Hussain et al., 2023). Perceived authenticity has been conceptualised as a socially and individually constructed perception of objects and cultures (Kim and Huang, 2021). Despite the absence of clear distinctions between real and fake (Kim and Jang, 2016), it is evident that consumers' pre-existing images or knowledge affect their sense of authenticity when purchasing products and services (Jang et al., 2012). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 6 (H6): Food neophobia is negatively related to the intention to consume local products when travelling.

Hypothesis 7 (H7): Perceived authenticity is positively related to the intention to consume local products when travelling.

2.3. Intention to consume local products and the moderating role of habit

Intention is a strong predictor of the likelihood that a behaviour will materialise (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). In other words, intention can be seen as the mental predisposition that drives an individual towards effective action (Ajzen, 1985). This variable plays a crucial role in predicting specific behaviours. Studies such as Maksan et al. (2019) highlight the strength of intention as a key predictive variable in the decision to consume local products. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 8 (H8): The intention to consume local products while travelling is positively related to actual consumption.

The TIB suggests that the likelihood of performing a behaviour depends on the individual's habits and the conditions that facilitate it (Amin et al., 2016; Sung et al., 2019). Habit is defined as repeated behaviours associated with the experience of consuming local food products (Mahachi-Chatibura, 2014). The inclusion of habit as an important determinant of behaviour is widely supported in the literature (Ibrahim et al., 2018; Mullan et al., 2016; Russell et al., 2017). However, some recent studies have been unable to replicate this moderating effect, suggesting that purchasing intention may be a determinant of actual behaviour regardless of the level of habit (Amalia et al., 2020; Jabeen et al., 2023). Based on the above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 9 (H9): Consumption habit moderates the relationship between the intention to consume local products while travelling and actual consumption.

3. Methodological proposal and expected contributions

This study will analyse Tenerife (Canary Islands) and Almería (Andalusia) as highly demanded tourist destinations, with 258,670 and 349,556 travellers, respectively, in 2023 (INE, 2023). Spain has faced recent challenges related to food safety, quality, and social and environmental aspects, particularly in agri-food products (El Periódico, 2024), offering a relevant context for the objectives of this research. A stratified random sampling will be applied to the main source market of tourists to Spain, the United Kingdom, which had nearly 17.3 million visitors in 2023 (Statista, 2023). A questionnaire will be developed using an online panel in collaboration with a market research company, employing 7-point Likert scales based on the literature to measure consumer ethnocentrism (Shimp and Sharma, 1987), subjective knowledge (Bruwer et al.,

2017; Guo and Meng, 2008), locavorism (Reich et al., 2018), place identity (Obst et al., 2002), food neophobia (Ritchey et al., 2003), perceived authenticity (Schallehn et al., 2014), and consumption habits (Issock Istock et al., 2020), as well as attitude towards local products and the intention to consume them, adapting items from Zhang et al. (2018) and Maksan et al. (2019). The analysis will be conducted using structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM).

It is expected to gain a better understanding of how attitude, social, and affective factors influence the intention to consume local products in tourism. Greater consumer ethnocentrism and food neophobia could reduce the willingness to consume local products, while a positive evaluation of local products and strong place identity could increase the propensity for consumption. Additionally, tourists with extensive subjective knowledge, perceived authenticity, and a prior habit of consuming local products are expected to show a higher tendency to continue consuming these products.

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