

Tourists' need for uniqueness and ethnic food purchase intention: A moderated serial mediation model

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ABSTRACT

Although the need for uniqueness has been extensively investigated by consumer researchers, food and tourism researchers have been silent on this promising research topic. This study examined food neophilia and ethnic food involvement as potential mediators of the association between tourists' need for uniqueness (TNFU) and ethnic food purchase intention. Additionally, it was tested whether independent self-construal moderates this serial mediation effect. Results showed that the relationship between tourists' need for uniqueness and ethnic food purchase intention was serially and positively mediated by food neophilia and ethnic food involvement. Furthermore, the moderated serial mediation effect was stronger at higher values of independent self-construal.

1. Introduction

Tourists' exploration of alternative food choices has been increased by their growing interest in and acceptance of culturally diverse cuisine (Barrena & Sánchez, 2013). 67% of respondents indicated that they sought local or traditional food experiences, often including ethnic cuisine, based on a survey conducted by the World Food Travel Association (2019). Ethnic food can provide tourists with a deeper understanding of a place and create lasting impressions, and a destination's cuisine is a significant motivator for tourists (Ting et al., 2019). Ethnic cuisine offers tourists a purpose for visiting, enhances the destination's brand value, and strengthens the destination's food image (Lee & Arcodia, 2011).

Previous research suggests that personality traits influence ethnic food consumption (Jang & Kim, 2015), and food-related personality traits may drive engagement with a destination's local cuisine (Olsen et al., 2021). Most research has linked food-related personality traits (e.g., food neophobia/neophilia, food involvement) with general personality traits such as openness to experience (e.g., Çınar et al., 2021) and novelty seeking (Ji et al., 2016). Many of these concepts have been introduced to the tourism literature from other disciplines. However,

current research continues to contribute to the tourism literature through the incorporation of personality-trait constructs borrowed from other disciplines. For instance, in a recent study, researchers applied the theory of consumers' need for uniqueness (CNFU) to tourists' need for uniqueness (TNFU), which emphasizes that tourists differentiate their identities through specific behaviors to satisfy this need (Karagöz & Uysal, 2022). Few studies have investigated it in the context of food and tourism, despite consumers' need for uniqueness being widely researched in the marketing literature. For example, Hyun and Park (2016) found that CNFU positively affects dining experiences and tourists' behavioral intentions. Similarly, Hwang and Hyun (2017) found that travelers' need for uniqueness influences their ticket-purchasing goals and their attitude toward first-class flights. More specifically, Cardello et al. (2019) developed a domain-specific instrument for measuring consumers' need for uniqueness related to food. Although these studies highlighted the potential impact of CNFU on tourist behavior and food consumption, no study has yet investigated TNFU's relationship with ethnic food purchase intention and food-related personality traits as possible mediators in this relationship. Accordingly, the main aim of this study is to fill this gap in the existing literature. In addition, this study clarifies the importance of independent

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self-construal in a hypothesized serial mediation model.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

2.1. Tourists' need for uniqueness and ethnic food purchase intention

The need for uniqueness theory delineates the psychology behind why people want to be perceived as unique (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977), and the consumers' need for uniqueness applies need for uniqueness to consumer behavior (Ruvio, 2008). Consumers' need for uniqueness is defined as the pursuit of uniqueness relative to others as a dominant consumer characteristic (Tian et al., 2001). It has been associated with fashion preferences, customer–employee interactions, and product preferences (e.g., Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2018; Knight & Young Kim, 2007; Lindsey-Hall et al., 2021). Additionally, various personality traits, such as variety-seeking, self-expression, and nonconformity, have been linked to the need for uniqueness (e.g., Kim & Drolet, 2003; McAlister & Pessemier, 1982).

Individuals typically exhibit a socially acceptable form of the desire to differentiate themselves from others (Fromkin, 1976). Previous research found that local food is perceived as a means of differentiation (Renko & Bucar, 2014). Consumers acquire, use, and dispose of products that align with their desired personal and social identities to fulfill their need for uniqueness. This often entails sourcing unique items to highlight their individuality (Tian et al., 2001). The aspiration for uniqueness can influence what tourists do and choose while traveling; for example, they may be more receptive to the idea of trying local ethnic cuisine than others.

Consumers frequently seek out uncommon products and difficult to obtain (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Those with a high need for uniqueness are more likely to purchase unique products (Ruvio, 2008). The pursuit of novelty would encourage tourists to try novel food (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). Since novel foods are generally perceived as unique (Olsen et al., 2021), ethnic foods may help satisfy tourists' need for uniqueness. This is because tourists search for unique and memorable gastronomic experiences. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H1. Tourists' need for uniqueness positively influences ethnic food purchase intention

2.2. Mediators: food neophilia and ethnic food involvement

Food neophilia refers to a person's propensity to seek out and sample novel foods and is exemplified by a willingness to explore unfamiliar cuisines (Pliner & Hobden, 1992). Food neophiles are more receptive to new and unique food experiences. Tourists may believe they are distinguishing themselves when they acquire even minor incompatible experiences with their home cultures. The act of trying new foods, which is central to neophilia, can therefore serve as a means of differentiation for tourists. This could be due to the fact that individuals who place a higher value on uniqueness tend to seek out greater variety (Kim & Drolet, 2003; Lähteenmäki & Arvola, 2001).

Although local food is regarded as an attraction, it may not hold the same appeal to all tourists. Tourists with neophobic attitudes toward unfamiliar foods tend to avoid trying them, with high levels of neophobia corresponding to high levels of avoidance, regardless of the importance of dining to the travel experience (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Xu & Zeng, 2022). Previous research has shown that individuals who fear or are averse to trying new foods tend to be less interested in consuming unfamiliar ethnic foods (Tuorila et al., 2001), and food neophilia drives tourists' acceptance of local cuisine (Baah et al., 2020). Similar to previous research, Hussain et al. (2022) discovered that food neophilia strengthens tourists' positive reception toward local food and their intention to try it, whereas food neophobia weakens this relationship (Caber et al., 2018).

Food involvement is a crucial food-related personality trait that influences food selection (Bell & Marshall, 2003; Eertmans et al., 2005). Food involvement refers to a strong motivation for and interest in food preparation and related activities (Goody, 1982). Previous research demonstrated that the perception of a product's uniqueness/novelty influences future consumption intentions and is motivated by exposure to traditional food products (Olsen et al., 2021). This phenomenon may be attributed to how consumers seek out a taste that is distinct from so-called common or typical foods relative to traditional or novel foods, taking into consideration that uniqueness refers to having possessions rare or unavailable to others (McAlister & Pessemier, 1982).

Previous studies' results also confirm the positive relationship between food involvement and food purchase intention (Chen, 2007; Teng & Lu, 2016). Accordingly, since tourists' need for uniqueness is defined as a tourist-specific personality trait rather than a food-specific trait, we predict that ethnic food involvement and food neophilia serially will mediate the relationship between tourists' need for uniqueness and ethnic food purchase intention. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H2. The relationship between tourists' need for uniqueness and ethnic food purchase intention will be positively and serially mediated by food neophilia and ethnic food involvement

2.3. Independent self-construal as a moderator

Independent self-construal is a psychological concept reflecting an individual's tendency to define themselves in terms of their unique characteristics, attributes, and accomplishments (Lin et al., 2012). This suggests that an individual with a high level of independent self-construal is more likely to desire uniqueness (Singelis, 1994). Independent or interdependent self-construal may affect consumers' product evaluations and future behavior (Gardner et al., 1999). Banovic and Barone (2021) found that self-construal positively affects consumer attitudes toward products and encourages consumers to purchase. Previous research has also shown that people with an independent self-construal tend to engage in various consumption behaviors to set themselves apart from others (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014). Similarly, Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) found a relationship between an independent self-concept and the need for uniqueness. Those with independent self-construal, which focuses on uniqueness and self-expression (Lee & Workman, 2015), have a significantly higher need for uniqueness than those with interdependent self-construal (Li & Zhao, 2021). Individuals who define themselves in terms of their internal traits and attributes may perceive their travel experiences as self-expressive. This may involve greater engagement with ethnic food and the exploration of new foods as a form of self-expression.

Individuals with a high level of independent self-construal tend to be more self-reliant (Lalwani & Shavitt, 2009), individualistic (Utz, 2004), and more focused on differentiation from others (Lei et al., 2021). Therefore, they may be more inclined to seek out novel and unique experiences, including culinary variety (Vargas-Sanchez & López-Guzmán, 2022). Ethnic cuisine creates a unique experience for visitors and distinguishes a tourist destination (Haven-Tang & Jones, 2005). Accordingly, individuals with a high need for uniqueness and a high level of independent self-construal may be more likely to engage in and enjoy novel and unique ethnic food experiences. Meanwhile, those with a low level of independent self-construal may be more likely to prefer familiar foods, even if they have a strong NFU. Accordingly, we predict that the serial mediation effect will be higher for individuals with a higher level of independent self-construal. We, therefore, hypothesize that.

H3. Independent self-construal positively moderates the serial mediation effects of ethnic food involvement and food neophilia in the tourists' need for uniqueness and ethnic food purchase intention relationship, such that the higher the independent self-construal level, the

stronger the serial mediation effects will be.

2.4. The present study

Fig. 1 depicts the variables and hypothesized relationships in the research model. Accordingly, the main aim of the present study was to investigate the relationship between tourists' need for uniqueness and ethnic food purchase intention. We also expected that there would be a serial mediation effect of tourists' need for uniqueness on ethnic food purchase intention via food neophilia (first mediator) and ethnic food involvement (second mediator). Further, we hypothesized that independent self-construal would moderate the association between tourists' need for uniqueness and ethnic food purchase intention, such that the hypothesized serial mediation effect would be conditional upon participants' levels of independent self-construal.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Instrument

A survey questionnaire was used to collect data. The first part of the questionnaire explains the purpose of the survey. The second part collects respondents' demographic information, including gender, age, education level, and ethnicity. The third part includes the measures for the first-order and second-order theoretical constructs. This study measured tourists' need for uniqueness at the higher-order level, consisting of *creative choice* and *avoid similarity*. This approach was chosen because higher-order constructs allow researchers to create more concise models involving easily understood connections (Hair et al., 2018).

The questionnaire's items were adapted from prior research (See Appendix A). Tourists' need for uniqueness was measured using a ten-item scale developed by Karagöz and Uysal (2022). Ethnic food involvement was measured with three items adapted from Olsen et al. (2021). Three items were used to measure independent self-construal (Singelis, 1994; Bauman & Skitka, 2010). Food neophilia was measured using five items adapted from Pliner and Hobden (1992). Ethnic food purchase intention was measured using three items adapted from Klein (1998). We invited 30 tourists who had previously visited Turkey, along with three tourism experts, to participate in a pretest. According to their suggestions, we optimized the questionnaire in terms

of the items' wording, length, format, and sequence. Participants responded on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). We used all the scales in their original forms to measure the general attitudes of individual tourists.

3.2. Data collection and sample procedure

We collected data from international tourists visiting Alanya, Turkey. To ensure participants' familiarity with the concept of ethnic food and their international tourist status, we chose a hotel that caters exclusively to international tourists and allows them to experience local cuisine. With the cooperation of a four-star hotel in Alanya, we shared a questionnaire with its customers. Before the guests checked into their rooms, a self-administered questionnaire was provided along with an introductory letter that outlined (1) the research's objectives, (2) the voluntary nature of the guests' participation, and the guarantee of anonymity. Participants gave informed consent before taking part in this study. Guests were instructed to leave the completed questionnaire in their hotel rooms for the housekeeping staff to collect. The institutional review board at the participating university approved all procedures performed in this study.

3.3. Data analysis

In this research, we applied the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method to analyze the proposed model. PLS is a powerful and suitable method for testing complex relationships, such as mediation and moderation, in a research model (Hair et al., 2018). In addition, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) supports testing the second-order reflective and formative constructs. Relying on SmartPLS 4 software, we assessed factor loadings and path coefficients via bootstrapping method with 5000 resamples. Initially, the validity and reliability of each measurement were examined in the measurement model testing stage, followed by testing the structural model. We also used the new PROCESS module of Smart PLS 4 to assess the moderated mediation analysis and conditional indirect effect.

3.4. Common method bias

Precautions were taken to minimize and detect common method variance (CMV) issues in this study. We employed both preventative

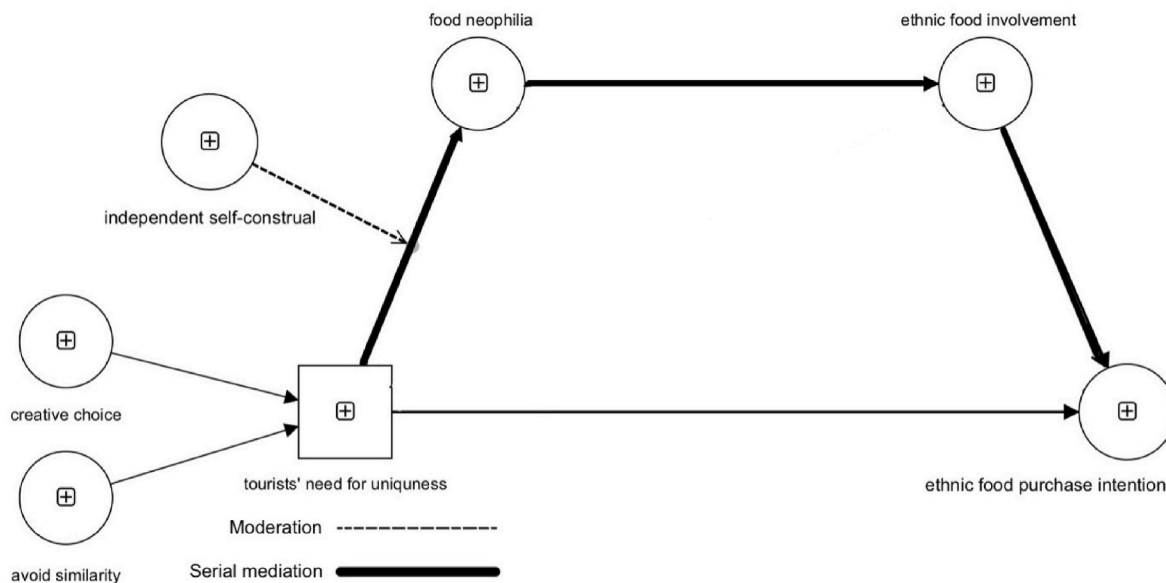


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

measures and ex-post statistical techniques, following research recommendations in the CMV area (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). First, participants were informed their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. Second, we used clear and concise language, avoided double-barreled questions, checked the scale items before data collection, and revised accordingly. Third, we included in the survey the level of satisfaction with the survey method as a single marker variable, which was not expected to relate to the other constructs. The analysis revealed that the mean correlation coefficient value for the marker variable was 0.033, less than 0.05 (Rönkkö & Ylitalo, 2011), indicating an insignificant influence of common method bias. Finally, we used Harman’s single-factor technique. The results demonstrated that a one-factor solution accounted for 36.44% of explained variance, falling below the 40% cutoff value (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986).

4. Results

4.1. Outer model evaluation

The outer model assesses the contribution of each indicator in reflecting its related construct and determines the effectiveness of the set of indicators in representing the construct. In contrast, the inner model outlines the connections between the constructs. The initial step in assessing a model is to display the results of the outer model as a means of assessing the reliability and validity of the measures used to reflect each construct. Accordingly, we evaluated the outer model by examining convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency. We assessed the constructs’ validity and reliability via item loadings, Cronbach’s alpha, composite reliabilities (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) values (Hair et al., 2018). Cronbach’s alpha and CR values exceeded the minimum threshold value of 0.70, indicating that the constructs were reliable. The AVE values and outer loadings were checked to assess convergent validity, and all AVE values ranged from 0.532 to 0.866, with outer loadings above 0.70 (Hair et al., 2018). Table 2 shows all values exceeded threshold values.

As shown in Fig. 1, tourists’ need for uniqueness is modeled as a second-order construct with the reflective-formative approach. As Henseler et al. (2009) recommended, we assessed the second-order construct’s validity at two stages: the construct and the indicator levels. First, we tested the validity of the second-order formative constructs, assessing collinearity through the variance inflation factor (VIF) values. The VIF values fell between 1.832 and 3.072, landing below the threshold of 5.0 as well as Diamantopoulos and Siguaw’s (2006) more conservative cut-off of 3.3; this indicates no multicollinearity error exists. Second, we checked the weights of the first-order constructs on the second-order construct. Table 3 shows that the weights are significant at

Table 1 Profile of survey participants.

Demographic Characteristics	N	%
Gender		
Male	117	48.3%
Female	125	51.7%
Age		
18–34	90	37.2%
35–54	116	47.9%
55 and above	36	14.9%
Education		
High school and below	47	19.4%
Graduate	135	55.8%
Post-graduate and higher	60	24.8%
Ethnicity		
European	155	64.0%
Middle east	35	14.5%
Asian	33	13.6%
American	4	1.7%
Others	15	6.2%

Table 2 Factor loadings and reliability.

Construct	Items	Loadings	Mean	Cronbach’s α	CR	AVE
Tourists’ need for uniqueness (TNFU)				0.902	0.919	0.532
Creative choice (CC)	CC1	0.794	4.28	0.910	0.933	0.736
	CC2	0.873	4.70			
	CC3	0.788	4.80			
	CC4	0.856	4.78			
	CC5	0.877	4.85			
Avoid similarity (AS)	AS1	0.825	4.32	0.894	0.922	0.703
	AS2	0.865	4.05			
	AS3	0.884	4.16			
	AS4	0.854	4.20			
	AS5	0.861	4.10			
Ethnic food involvement (EFI)	EFI 1	0.886	4.99	0.872	0.922	0.797
	EFI 2	0.887	5.25			
	EFI 5	0.904	5.09			
Food neophilia (FN)	FN1	0.887	4.22	0.908	0.931	0.730
	FN2	0.841	4.08			
	FN3	0.859	4.17			
	FN4	0.856	4.17			
	FN5	0.828	4.44			
Ethnic food purchase intention (EFPI)	EFPI1	0.868	5.01	0.860	0.861	0.781
	EFPI2	0.905	5.06			
	EFPI3	0.877	5.07			
Independent self-constructual (ISC)	ISC1	0.945	3.74	0.922	0.951	0.866
	ISC2	0.942	3.80			
	ISC3	0.904	3.86			

Abbreviations: CR, Composite reliability; AVE, Average Variance Extracted.

Table 3 Weights of the first-order constructs on the second-order construct.

Second-order construct	First-order constructs	Weights	t-value
CNFU	CC	0.561***	24.968
	AS	0.601***	25.774

Abbreviations: CNFU, Consumers’ need for uniqueness; AS, Avoid similarity; CC, Creative choice.

***p < 0.001.

000.1 level based on 5000 Bootstraps.

We assessed discriminant validity using the Fornell and Larcker, as well as the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) approaches. Discriminant validity can be established if the AVE values of each latent construct exceed its squared correlation with any other latent construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Accordingly, the square roots of the AVE values were compared to correlations between each pair of constructs. The HTMT ratio was then examined, and all HTMT indexes fell below the threshold value of 0.90 (Henseler et al., 2015). Table 4 shows that all constructs achieved discriminant validity.

4.2. Inner model evaluation

R², also known as the coefficient of determination, is commonly employed to measure the goodness of fit of a predictive model. In partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), R² is used to assess the proportion of the variance in the dependent variable explained by the model’s independent variables. Chin (1998) classified endogenous latent variables as substantial (R² = 0.67), moderate (R² = 0.33), or weak (R² = 0.19). The coefficient determinant test revealed that the dependent variables’ explained variances of food neophilia, ethnic food involvement, and ethnic food purchase intention were 0.464, 0.176, and 0.601, respectively. Then, predictive relevance was assessed by calculating Q² values (Stone, 1974; Geisser, 1975). Results showed that the Q² values for the endogenous constructs were above zero, demonstrating the predictive relevance of the model (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 4
Discriminant validity.

	Heterotrait-monotrait ratio						Fornell-Larcker Criterion					
	AS	CC	EFI	EFPI	FN	ISC	AS	CC	EFI	EFPI	FN	ISC
AS							<i>0.839</i>					
CC	0.531						0.481	<i>0.858</i>				
EFI	0.425	0.226					0.376	0.205	<i>0.893</i>			
EFPI	0.209	0.143	0.869				0.418	0.306	0.753	<i>0.884</i>		
FN	0.322	0.619	0.427	0.447			0.304	0.574	0.388	0.404	<i>0.855</i>	
ISC	0.295	0.624	0.071	0.049	0.620		0.268	0.573	0.043	0.013	0.571	<i>0.930</i>

Notes: Italic values on the diagonal are the square roots of the AVE; AVE values are along the main diagonal.

Abbreviations: AS, Avoid similarity; CC, Creative choice; EFI, Ethnic food involvement; EFPI, Ethnic food purchase intention; FN, Food neophobia; ISC, Independent self-construal.

As shown in Table 5, tourists' need for uniqueness significantly and positively influenced ethnic food purchase intention ($\beta = 0.163, t = 2.469, p = 0.014$), supporting H1. Serial mediation results revealed that the positive indirect effect of tourists' need for uniqueness on ethnic food purchase intention via food neophilia and ethnic food involvement was also significant ($\beta = 0.117, p = 0.000, 95\%, BCCI [0.071; 0.175]$), supporting H2. However, since H1 was supported, we can conclude that food neophilia and ethnic food involvement were partial serial mediators in this relationship. In addition, confirming H3, independent self-construal was found to positively moderate the indirect effect of tourists' need for uniqueness on ethnic food purchase intention via food neophilia and ethnic food involvement ($\beta = 0.102, p = 0.000, 95\% [BCCI 0.055; 0.169]$).

The SmartPLS 4 calculates a moderated mediation index, offering statistical evidence of the significance of the conditional indirect effect. It also provides results for simple slopes for each conditional indirect effect. Table 5 demonstrates that independent self-construal moderates the serial mediation positively. However, the results regarding how this moderation effect is realized at low (-1 SD), medium (the mean), and high (+1 SD) levels of the moderator are presented in Table 6. The conditional indirect effect results show that as the moderator increases, the conditional indirect effect increases. More specifically, when independent self-construal is low (1 SD below the mean or -1 SD), the influence of serial mediation is -0.007 ($p = 0.772$). When the value reached the mean, the influence increased to 0.125 ($p = 0.000$). When the value of moderator further increased to high (1 SD above mean or +1 SD), the influence of serial mediation increased to 0.343 ($p = 0.000$). Thus, as hypothesized for H3, the indirect effect is higher at higher values of the moderator. In other words, this indirect effect was attenuated most for participants with high independent self-construal, compared to medium and low.

5. Discussion

This study focused on how the tourists' need for uniqueness—a relatively new and neglected construct in the literature on tourism and food consumption—impacts ethnic food purchase intention and whether food-related personality traits mediate this relationship. The results showed that TNFU positively and significantly influences ethnic food purchase intention, and food-related personality traits positively and

Table 5
Results of the hypotheses testing.

	Hypotheses	β	STDEV	t-value	Decision
Relationship					
H1 – Direct	TNFU → EFPI	0.163*	0.066	2.469	Supported
H2 – Serial mediation	TNFU → FN→EFI→EFPI	0.117***	0.026	4.436	Supported
H3 – Moderated serial mediation	ISCxTNFU→FN→EFI→EFPI	0.102***	0.029	3.552	Supported

Abbreviations: TNFU = Tourists' need for uniqueness; EFI = Ethnic food involvement; EFPI = Ethnic food purchase intention; FN=Food neophobia; ISC=Independent self-construal.

*** $p < 0.001, *p < 0.050$.

Table 6
Moderated serial mediation results.

Hypothesis	Moderator	Values	Effect	95% bias-corrected confidence interval (BCCI)	
				Lower limit	Upper limit
H3	Independent self-construal	Low (-1 SD)	-0.007	-0.038	0.058
		Medium (the mean)	0.125***	0.109	0.285
		High (+1 SD)	0.343***	0.227	0.489

Note. *** $p < 0.001$. The statistical significance of the index of moderated serial-mediation effects was assessed by interpreting the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval (5000 samples).

partially mediate this relationship. In addition, results revealed that independent self-construal positively moderates this serial mediation relationship. The acceptance of the moderated serial-mediation hypothesis showed that independent self-construal strengthens the indirect positive effect through food neophilia and ethnic food involvement in serial. The results demonstrate that food neophilia and ethnic food involvement together play a critical role in the relationship between TNFU and ethnic food purchase intention.

As noted by previous studies (McAlister & Pessemier, 1982), individuals with a strong desire for uniqueness tend to be less likely to opt for common or mainstream options and, instead, are more inclined to search for alternative products and brands. These individuals specifically look for products that are rare, unique, or not easily accessible (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999)(Ruvio, 2008). Considering the unique characteristics of ethnic cuisine (Haven-Tang and Jones, 2005), tourists may be more involved in ethnic food consumption while on vacation. However, as the study results indicate, this also depends on the tourists' propensity to seek out and sample novel foods. Accordingly, this study supports that neophilic tourists may see ethnic food as a way of differentiation.

5.1. Theoretical implications

The theoretical implications of this study are significant in several ways. To start, this is the first study to associate TNFU with ethnic food purchase intention and food-related personality traits. TNFU is a domain-specific construct derived from NFU and CNFU (Karagöz and Uysal, 2022). This study highlights TNFU's meaningful place within food involvement, in accordance with the importance of converting different disciplines' constructs to domain-specific constructs when identifying and testing a new theoretical relationship (Cengiz & Fidan, 2017).

Secondly, the study contributes to the literature on the serial mediation effect by providing empirical evidence of the sequential relationships between TNFU, food neophilia, ethnic food involvement, and purchase intention. This demonstrates the importance of examining the underlying mechanisms that drive ethnic food consumption and highlights the need for more research to identify the specific factors that influence these mechanisms.

The present study also adds to the existing literature on the role of independent self-construal in the context of ethnic food consumption by demonstrating its positive moderating effect on the serial mediation relationship between TNFU and ethnic food purchase intention. This result suggests that tourists with higher TNFU and ISC may be more likely to seek out and participate in unique, novel food experiences. This suggests that independent self-construal plays an important role in shaping the way consumers perceive and interact with different products and experiences (Ma & Li, 2023) and highlights the need for further research into this concept in other contexts.

5.2. Practical implications

These research findings bear several practical implications for the food and tourism industry. First, businesses should recognize that tourists with a high need for uniqueness may also have a higher interest in ethnic foods. Therefore, offering unique and culturally diverse consumables may attract this segment of tourists. Second, tourists with high independent self-construal may prefer new and novel foods more strongly. This suggests the wisdom in businesses offering a variety of unique and innovative foods, including ethnic cuisine.

Another significant finding of this study is that tourists with a high level of independent self-construal are motivated to identify themselves through unique traits and behaviors (Singelis, 1994), which then drives them to try and purchase ethnic food. By understanding and catering to this market, businesses can differentiate themselves from competitors and increase their appeal to customers who value individuality and self-expression. Accordingly, businesses should pay attention to customers' food preferences, including their food neophilia/neophobia level, and adapt their offerings to match the demand. Overall, these findings emphasize the importance of understanding the relationships between tourists' personality characteristics and food preferences in developing effective marketing and management strategies in the food and tourism industry.

5.3. Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations, beginning with its concentration on international tourists patronizing a hotel. The sample was more homogenous than those of tourists visiting popular high-traffic destinations. In addition, respondents were mostly European; those from different cultures may demonstrate differing levels of involvement and interest in ethnic food. Therefore, testing the hypothesized relationships on more culturally diverse samples is recommended. In addition, future research could test the proposed research framework in a cross-cultural setting.

We intentionally chose independent self-construal as a moderator for this study in consideration of the theoretical foundations of uniqueness

needs. As outlined in the previous section, future research could test the role of interdependent self-construal in the relationship between TNFU and ethnic food consumption. Future research could also explore the impacts of other personality or food-related traits, such as health consciousness, adventurousness, ethnocentrism, and fear of missing out on this relationship. Additionally, future studies can focus on the relationships between relatively less domain-specific constructs such as CNFU and general food involvement.

The greater connection between agriculture, the food industry, tourism, and gastronomy is undeniable. Hall et al. (2004) have shed light on the interdependencies among these domains, emphasizing their collective impact on economies, societies, and cultural experiences. By recognizing and harnessing these connections, we can foster sustainable development, promote local economies, and enhance the cultural richness of destinations. Future research and collaborations in these fields hold immense potential for shaping the future of agriculture, the food industry, tourism, and gastronomy in a more integrated and sustainable manner.

Finally, we recommend conducting future research to test the research findings using data collected in different settings, such as restaurants in urban neighborhoods known for serving local food.

Ethics approval

All participants gave their informed consent for inclusion before they participated in the study. The Institutional Review Board of the authors' university approved all procedures performed in this study with the approval number E-78977401-050.02.04-89138. All procedures were in accordance with the ethical standards of the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments.

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Declaration of competing interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

APPENDIX A

TNFU

Creative choice

CC1 Since I think I am different from the general average; I travel to extraordinary destinations.

CC2 My goal in selecting a holiday destination is to select a destination that is coherent with my uniqueness.

CC3 Since I like being authentic, I usually follow different routes in ordinary (known) destinations.

CC4 My most favorite holiday destinations are the unique destinations that reflect my uniqueness.

CC5 In general, I travel to new destinations, which I think would contribute to my personal uniqueness.

Avoidance of similarity

AS1 In general, I do not like destinations where everyone travels to.

AS2 I give up traveling to the destination which becomes popular in the community.

AS3 My interest for a destination decreases when the destination becomes ordinary.

AS4 Destinations, which everyone visits, do not have much value for me.

AS5 When the destinations I travel to become ordinary, I give up traveling to these destinations.

Food neophilia. I am constantly sampling new and different foods.

I like foods from different cultures.

At dinner parties, I will try new foods.

I will eat almost anything.

I like to try ethnic restaurants.

Ethnic food involvement. Traditional food products are important to me.

I am very interested in traditional food products.

Traditional food products mean a lot to me.

Independent self-construal. I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects.

I prefer to be direct and forthright when dealing with people I have just met.

My personal identity, independent of others, is important to me.

Ethnic food purchase intention. I would never buy ethnic food products (R)*

Whenever available, I would prefer to buy ethnic foods products.

Whenever possible, I would avoid buying ethnic foods products (R)*

*Note: Reversely coded items were recoded before data analysis.

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Further reading

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