

Food Experience and Intention to Visit a Cuisine's Country of Origin: Evidence from Korean Cuisine Consumers in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines whether four dimensions of food experience are associated with Malaysian consumers' intention to visit the country of origin of a foreign cuisine. Building on the food-experience framework used by Pu et al. (2024), the study focuses on sensory, affective, behavioural, and intellectual experiences of Korean cuisine and models their direct relationships with intention to visit Korea. A cross-sectional survey produced 391 valid responses. The data were analysed using reliability analysis, Pearson correlations, and multiple linear regression. All four food-experience dimensions were positively correlated with visit intention. When entered simultaneously in the regression model, behavioural food experience ($\beta = .181$, $p = .023$) and intellectual food experience ($\beta = .162$, $p = .030$) were significant positive predictors, whereas sensory ($\beta = .104$, $p = .237$) and affective experience ($\beta = .112$, $p = .225$) were not. The model explained 25.8% of the variance in visit intention. These findings indicate that the four dimensions do not contribute equally to unique explained variance in this Malaysian sample. They also support further testing of evaluative mechanisms such as food attitude, cuisine image, and perceived authenticity rather than assuming that sensory and emotional responses translate directly into origin-country travel intention. For practice, Korean destination marketing can combine strong sensory presentation with participatory and culturally informative food experiences that encourage active engagement and learning.

Keywords: Korean cuisine, food experience, travel intention, culinary tourism, country of origin

INTRODUCTION

Food increasingly functions as a destination attribute and, for some travellers, as a primary travel motivation. Gastronomic experiences contribute to destination image, cultural learning, and behavioural intention, which makes cuisine relevant to both tourism research and destination marketing (Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019; Horng & Tsai, 2012; Tsai & Wang, 2017). Exposure to a foreign cuisine before travel can also shape expectations about its place of origin. Ethnic restaurant experience, for example, has been linked to prospective tourist intentions partly through destination food image (Aybek & Özdemir, 2022).

Korean cuisine provides a useful setting for examining this process in Malaysia. Korean cultural products have become highly visible among Malaysian consumers, and Malaysian studies report substantial awareness, preference, and consumption interest in Korean food (Jeong & Choi, 2018; Raman & Bok, 2024; Zaini et al., 2024). This exposure creates a non-origin consumption context in which consumers can develop food-related impressions before visiting Korea.

Pu et al. (2024) conceptualised food experience through four dimensions: sensory, affective, behavioural, and intellectual. Their cross-national study also showed that food attitude mediated relationships between these experience dimensions and travel intention, while subjective knowledge moderated selected relationships. The distinction matters for the present study. A direct-effects model that excludes food attitude and subjective

knowledge does not reproduce the full explanatory structure of Pu et al. (2024). Instead, it asks a narrower question about which dimensions account for unique variance in travel intention when the four are entered together.

Accordingly, this study examines the direct relationships between Malaysian consumers' experiences of Korean cuisine and their intention to visit Korea. The study contributes context-specific evidence from Malaysia, where Korean cuisine is consumed outside its country of origin, and it clarifies whether each food-experience dimension remains statistically informative when modelled simultaneously. Because the design is cross-sectional, the study evaluates associations and predictive relationships rather than causal effects.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Food experience and culinary tourism

The four-dimensional experience structure has its roots in the brand-experience literature, where experience is represented through sensory, affective, behavioural, and intellectual responses (Brakus et al., 2009). Tourism research later adapted these dimensions to destination experience and found that the dimensions can relate differently to behavioural outcomes (Barnes et al., 2014). Pu et al. (2019, 2024) applied the same logic to food experience, treating cuisine as an experiential stimulus that can evoke sensory impressions, emotions, active engagement, and cognitive reflection.

Food also carries cultural meaning. Traditional food is commonly tied to place, know-how, historical continuity, and cultural significance (Rocillo-Aquino et al., 2021). In culinary tourism, perceived authenticity and cultural embeddedness can therefore shape how visitors interpret food encounters (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Long, 2018). These ideas do not imply that every foreign-cuisine encounter is authentic. They do, however, explain why food consumption can become a route to curiosity about an origin culture and destination.

Korean cuisine in Malaysia and origin-country interest

Korean cuisine has become increasingly familiar to Malaysian consumers through restaurants, packaged foods, and Korean popular culture. Jeong and Choi (2018) documented awareness and preference for Korean food products among Malaysian consumers. Raman and Bok (2024) found that media exposure and accessibility were important in Malaysian university students' engagement with Korean food. Zaini et al. (2024) similarly reported that attitudes toward Korean culture and imitation of Korean entertainment were associated with intention to consume Korean food. Together, these studies establish a plausible pathway from cultural exposure to food consumption, although they do not by themselves establish that food consumption causes travel to Korea.

Research outside the Malaysian context also suggests that evaluative mechanisms may connect food experience with travel intention. Aybek and Özdemir (2022) found that destination food image mediated the relationship between ethnic restaurant experience and prospective tourist intentions. Aydın et al. (2022) reported a mediating role for overall cuisine image in the relationship between novelty seeking and intention to visit Turkey. Pu et al. (2024) likewise identified food attitude as a mediator between food-experience dimensions and travel intention. These findings support testing direct relationships while recognising that indirect pathways may be theoretically important.

Food-experience dimensions and intention to visit

Sensory food experience concerns impressions created by a food's appearance, taste, and smell. Sensory cues can shape food evaluation and destination-related imagery, which supports the expectation of a positive association with intention to visit the cuisine's origin (Pu et al., 2019; Tsai & Wang, 2017).

H1a. Sensory food experience is positively associated with intention to visit Korea.

Affective food experience captures feelings and emotions evoked by cuisine. Emotional responses can become part of destination image and may increase interest in the cultural setting from which the cuisine originates (Barnes et al., 2014; Pu et al., 2024).

H1b. Affective food experience is positively associated with intention to visit Korea.

Behavioural food experience reflects active engagement, such as seeking new restaurants and trying unfamiliar dishes. This type of engagement requires consumers to act on their interest and may therefore be more proximal to future travel-related behaviour than passive exposure alone (Pu et al., 2019).

H1c. Behavioural food experience is positively associated with intention to visit Korea.

Intellectual food experience captures cognitive engagement with a cuisine's origins, meanings, and culture. Previous research on Sichuan cuisine found intellectual food experience to be particularly relevant to intention to visit the cuisine's place of origin (Pu et al., 2019).

H1d. Intellectual food experience is positively associated with intention to visit Korea.

Table 1. Food-experience dimensions used in the study

Dimension	Construct	Working description
SFE	Sensory food experience	Sensory impressions created by Korean food, including appearance, taste, and smell.
AFE	Affective food experience	Feelings and emotions evoked by Korean food.
BFE	Behavioural food experience	Active engagement with Korean cuisine, including seeking restaurants and trying dishes.
IFE	Intellectual food experience	Thinking and learning about Korean food, its origins, and its cultural meaning.

Note. Terminology follows Brakus et al. (2009) and the food-experience applications of Pu et al. (2019, 2024).

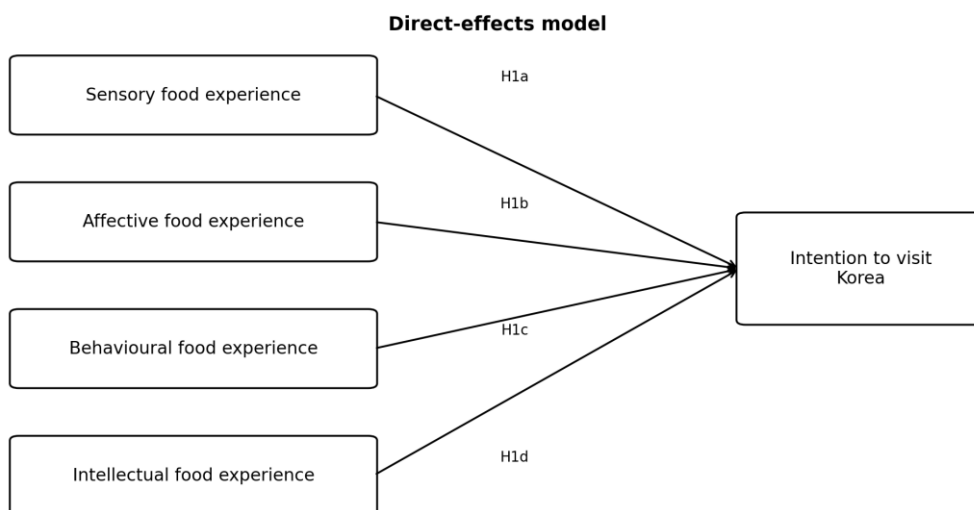


Figure 1. Direct-effects research model adapted from the food-experience framework of Pu et al. (2024).

METHODOLOGY

Research design and sample

The study used a cross-sectional explanatory survey to examine relationships between Korean food experiences and intention to visit Korea. The analytical sample comprised 391 Malaysian adults aged 18 years or older. The respondent profile indicates that every valid case reported having tried Korean food at least once. Convenience sampling was used at selected Korean restaurants and through online recruitment channels. The original sampling plan used the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table as an operational benchmark and targeted at least 384 responses. Because the final sample was obtained through non-probability convenience sampling, the sample size should not be interpreted as providing a design-based 5% margin of sampling error.

Measures

Measurement items were adapted from the food-experience framework used by Pu et al. (2024) and contextualised for Korean cuisine. The five focal constructs were represented by 30 items: sensory food experience (6 items), affective food experience (7 items), behavioural food experience (7 items), intellectual food experience (6 items), and intention to visit Korea (4 items). Responses used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The present analysis focused on these five constructs and tested the four food-experience dimensions as simultaneous predictors of visit intention.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected over four weeks using physical and online questionnaires. Physical surveys were administered at selected Korean restaurants in Melaka, Kuala Lumpur, and Selangor. Online questionnaires were distributed through WhatsApp and Instagram. Participants received information about the study purpose and the intended use of the data, and participation was voluntary. The same measurement items and response scale were used across both modes.

The 391 valid responses were analysed in SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics summarised the respondent profile and construct distributions. Cronbach's alpha assessed internal consistency. Pearson correlations examined bivariate relationships among the four food-experience dimensions and visit intention. Multiple linear regression then estimated the unique association of each food-experience dimension with visit intention while controlling for the other three dimensions. The overall model was evaluated with the F statistic and R^2 , and individual predictors were evaluated using unstandardised coefficients, standardised coefficients, t statistics, and p values. Statistical significance was assessed at $p < .05$.

RESULTS

Respondents' profile

The sample included 217 women (55.5%), 172 men (44.0%), and 2 respondents (0.5%) who preferred not to state their gender. Respondents aged 26-35 years formed the largest age group (37.6%), followed by those aged 18-25 years (32.5%). Most respondents held a bachelor's degree (51.4%). The sample was predominantly Malay (81.6%). Private-sector employees were the largest occupational group (46.8%). Table 2 reports the full profile.

Table 2. Respondents' profile (N = 391)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	172	44.0
	Female	217	55.5
	Prefer not to say	2	0.5

Age	18-25	127	32.5
	26-35	147	37.6
	36-45	44	11.3
	45 and above	73	18.7
Education	Secondary	42	10.7
	Diploma	98	25.1
	Bachelor	201	51.4
	Master	47	12.0
	Other	3	0.8
Occupation	Private sector	183	46.8
	Government	42	10.7
	Own business	57	14.6
	Unemployed	14	3.6
	Student	82	21.0
	Other	13	3.3
Ethnicity	Malay	319	81.6
	Indian	25	6.4
	Chinese	36	9.2
	Other	11	2.8
Marital status	Single	196	50.1
	In a relationship	68	17.4
	Married	95	24.3
	Prefer not to say	32	8.2
Monthly income (RM)	Less than 1,500	90	23.0
	1,600-2,500	158	40.4
	2,600-3,500	57	14.6
	3,600-4,500	39	10.0
	More than 5,000	47	12.0
Times trying Korean food	First time	167	42.7

	Twice	46	11.8
	3-5 times	1	0.3
	6-10 times	89	22.8
	More than 10 times	88	22.5

Note. Percentages are reproduced from the reported respondent profile.

Reliability and correlations

Internal consistency was high for the four food-experience dimensions, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .814 to .880. The visit-intention scale produced $\alpha = .655$, which is materially lower than the reliabilities of the predictor scales. The visit-intention findings should therefore be interpreted with additional caution because measurement error may attenuate relationships and reduce precision.

Table 3. Internal consistency of study constructs

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α
SFE	6	.873
AFE	7	.870
BFE	7	.814
IFE	6	.880
TI	4	.655

All five constructs were positively correlated. The four food-experience dimensions showed similar bivariate associations with visit intention, ranging from $r = .455$ to $r = .470$. Correlations among the four predictors were substantially higher, ranging from $r = .741$ to $r = .846$. This pattern indicates considerable shared variance among the experience dimensions and is important when interpreting the simultaneous regression coefficients.

Table 4. Correlations, means, and standard deviations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. SFE	1				
2. AFE	.846**	1			
3. BFE	.752**	.787**	1		
4. IFE	.742**	.741**	.758**	1	
5. TI	.455**	.462**	.470**	.459**	1
Mean	4.029	3.932	3.447	3.773	3.214
SD	0.94	0.98	1.00	1.04	1.06

Note. $N = 391$. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

Multiple regression

The multiple regression model was statistically significant, $F(4, 386) = 33.586$, $p < .001$, and explained 25.8% of the variance in intention to visit Korea ($R^2 = .258$, adjusted $R^2 = .250$). Behavioural food experience was a significant positive predictor ($\beta = .181$, $t = 2.286$, $p = .023$), as was intellectual food experience ($\beta = .162$, $t = 2.177$, $p = .030$). Sensory food experience ($\beta = .104$, $p = .237$) and affective food experience ($\beta = .112$, $p = .225$) were not statistically significant unique predictors after the four dimensions were entered simultaneously. H1c and H1d were supported. H1a and H1b were not supported.

Table 5. Multiple regression predicting intention to visit Korea

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	0.969	0.210	-	4.617	< .001
Sensory food experience	0.118	0.100	.104	1.185	.237
Affective food experience	0.122	0.100	.112	1.215	.225
Behavioural food experience	0.193	0.084	.181	2.286	.023
Intellectual food experience	0.165	0.076	.162	2.177	.030

Note. Dependent variable = intention to visit Korea. $R^2 = .258$. Adjusted $R^2 = .250$. $F(4, 386) = 33.586$, $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

The central result is more specific than a simple distinction between significant and non-significant food experiences. At the bivariate level, sensory, affective, behavioural, and intellectual food experience were all moderately and positively related to intention to visit Korea. In the simultaneous regression, however, only behavioural and intellectual experience retained statistically significant unique coefficients. The evidence therefore indicates differences in unique explained variance after overlap among the four dimensions is controlled. It does not show that sensory and affective experiences are unrelated to travel intention.

The high correlations among the predictors help explain this distinction. Sensory and affective experience correlated at $r = .846$, and all predictor intercorrelations exceeded .74. When predictors share this much variance, individual regression coefficients can become less precise even when each predictor is meaningfully related to the outcome. Formal multicollinearity diagnostics are therefore important for the final statistical report. The present coefficient pattern should not be attributed solely to a missing mediator or to perceived authenticity. Neither mechanism was tested in this study.

The findings are nevertheless compatible with prior food-tourism research that emphasises evaluative and cognitive pathways. Pu et al. (2024) found that food attitude mediated relationships between all four food-experience dimensions and travel intention. That result does not imply that all four direct paths must remain significant when the mediator is omitted. Earlier work by Pu et al. (2019) also identified intellectual food experience as a particularly important direct predictor of intention to visit the city of origin. Similarly, Aybek and Özdemir (2022) showed that destination food image can transmit the effect of ethnic restaurant experience to prospective tourist intentions, while Aydın et al. (2022) found a mediating role for overall cuisine image. The present results are therefore consistent with the proposition that sensory and emotional experiences may matter partly through evaluative constructs, although this explanation requires direct mediation testing.

Behavioural and intellectual experience may also be closer to destination-oriented motivation. Seeking Korean restaurants, trying unfamiliar dishes, and learning about food origins involve active pursuit and cognitive investment. These activities can expose consumers to cultural information that is not exhausted by the local

dining encounter itself. By contrast, a pleasant sensory or emotional response may be satisfied within the restaurant context and need not translate into a distinct desire to travel. This interpretation remains theoretical because the cross-sectional design cannot establish temporal or causal order.

Theoretical implications

The study contributes to food-tourism research by separating bivariate association from unique prediction. The results show that the four experience dimensions move together strongly, yet they do not contribute equally when entered in one regression model. This finding supports closer attention to construct distinctiveness and to the mechanisms that connect food experience with destination intention. It also cautions against treating a simplified direct-effects model as equivalent to the mediated and moderated framework evaluated by Pu et al. (2024).

A second implication concerns context. Malaysian consumers encounter Korean cuisine outside Korea and often through a wider Hallyu environment. Research in Malaysia confirms that Korean popular culture, food availability, and cultural attitudes are related to Korean-food consumption (Raman & Bok, 2024; Zaini et al., 2024). Future models should therefore integrate food attitude, cuisine image, subjective knowledge, and perceived authenticity to determine which of these mechanisms explains the step from local consumption to country-of-origin travel intention.

Practical implications

For Korean destination marketers, the regression results support the use of participatory and culturally informative food content. Cooking demonstrations, guided food tours, chef interactions, and short explanations of ingredients, regional origins, and dining customs can strengthen behavioural and intellectual engagement. These activities align with the two dimensions that showed significant unique coefficients in the present model.

The findings do not justify abandoning sensory or affective marketing. Sensory and affective experiences were positively correlated with visit intention and are strongly connected with the other experience dimensions. A more defensible strategy is to use taste, presentation, and atmosphere as the entry point, then add opportunities for participation and cultural learning. Korean restaurants in Malaysia can also function as information gateways by connecting dishes to regions, culinary traditions, and travel experiences in Korea.

Limitations and future research

Several limitations constrain the inference. First, the cross-sectional self-report design establishes association rather than causality. Second, convenience sampling limits population generalisation, and the sample was concentrated among younger respondents and Malays. Third, the visit-intention scale had comparatively weak internal consistency ($\alpha = .655$), which raises a measurement concern for the dependent variable. Fourth, the four food-experience dimensions were highly intercorrelated, so discriminant validity and multicollinearity require explicit evaluation. Fifth, the study omitted food attitude and subjective knowledge from the tested model even though these variables were central to Pu et al. (2024). Finally, perceived authenticity was discussed as a possible mechanism in the original manuscript but was not measured and cannot be inferred from the present data.

Future research should validate the measurement model using confirmatory factor analysis or an equivalent latent-variable approach, report factor loadings and construct-validity evidence, and provide multicollinearity diagnostics for direct-effects regression. Mediation models should then test whether food attitude or cuisine image carries sensory and affective effects to travel intention. Longitudinal designs and behavioural outcomes, such as destination search, booking intention, or actual visitation, would provide stronger evidence about whether food experience precedes travel behaviour.

CONCLUSION

Among Malaysian consumers of Korean cuisine, all four food-experience dimensions were positively related to intention to visit Korea at the bivariate level. When sensory, affective, behavioural, and intellectual experiences

were modelled together, only behavioural and intellectual experience explained statistically significant unique variance in visit intention. The result therefore favours a differentiated view of food experience rather than a claim that every dimension exerts the same direct effect. It also leaves open an important mechanism question. Sensory and affective experiences may operate through food attitude, cuisine image, or other evaluative constructs, but those pathways must be tested rather than inferred.

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