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***Received on :*** *31st January 2025*
***Revised on :*** *30th March 2025*
*https://doi.org/10.48165/pjhas.2025.11.1.3*

***Accepted on :*** *31st March 2025*
***Published on :*** *07th April 2025*

# From Intention to Action: Factors Shaping Tourist Decisions to Experience Local Food

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## Abstract

**Background:** *Culinary tourism enhances travel experiences by allowing tourists to engage with local cultures through food. Understanding the factors influencing tourists' decisions to sample and purchase local food is crucial for destination marketers.* **Objective:** *This study examines the relationships between Tourist Attitude Towards Local Food (TALF), Tourist Subjective Norms (TSN), Tourist Perceived Behavioural Control (TPBC), Tourist Intention to Sample Local Food (TISLF) and Tourist Decision to Purchase Local Food (TDPLF) in Nainital, India.* **Methodology:** *The study adopted a quantitative research design and was conducted in Nainital, a popular tourist destination in Uttarakhand, India. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 450 domestic tourists using convenience sampling. Data were analysed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and path analysis through PLS-SEM to assess relationships among key variables and test the proposed hypotheses.* **Results:** *TALF, TSN and TPBC significantly influence TISLF, which, in turn, positively affects TDPLF. Social influence, perceived control and positive attitudes shape tourists' food choices, with food sampling playing a key role in purchasing decisions.* **Conclusion:** *The study highlights the importance of social influence, accessibility and cultural authenticity in enhancing culinary tourism. Strengthening these aspects can boost Nainital's appeal as a gastronomic destination.*

*Keywords: Tourist behaviour, local food, theory of planned behaviour, culinary tourism, food sampling*

## Introduction

"Food is the ingredient that binds us together," as the old adage goes, aptly describing the universal and unifying nature of gastronomic experiences (Fanzo et al., 2021). Food, a fundamental necessity for human survival, extends beyond mere sustenance to become a cultural marker, an economic driver and a medium of social interaction (Mann et al., 2023). In the realm of tourism, the prominence of local food has grown significant factor influencing travel decisions, providing tourists exciting avenues to actively participate in cultural experiences and heritage of a destination (Fusté-Forné, 2022). This research focuses on understanding the factors that drive tourists' intentions and decisions to sample and purchase local food, a subject that has grown in significance over the past few years but remains underexplored in specific contexts like Nainital, a popular tourist destination in India (Bhakuni, 2017). The role of food in tourism is well-documented, with numerous studies underscoring its importance in enhancing the overall travel experience. Local food is not just a meal; it is a representation of a destination's identity, culture and history. Studies have shown that engaging with local cuisine enhances tourists' satisfaction, creates lasting memories and fosters a deeper connection to the destination. According to Pamukçu et al. (2021), local and ethnic culinary traditions are essential contributors in developing favourable perceptions of

a location, influencing tourists' revisit intentions. Similarly, Baysse-Lainé and Perrin (2018) emphasized the role of cuisine in destination branding, noting that food-related strategies can significantly boost tourism numbers. Recent trends indicate a growing interest in food tourism, with travellers seeking authentic and immersive experiences. This has led to a surge in studies examining the motivations and behaviours of tourists concerning local food consumption. Researchers like Stalmirska (2024) highlighted that local food contributes to economic sustainability by promoting local businesses and preserving culinary heritage. However, while the economic and cultural benefits of local food are well-recognized, there is a paucity of research on the psychological and social factors influencing tourists' decisions to sample and purchase local cuisine, particularly in destinations like Nainital, which is not only a scenic hill station in Uttarakhand but also rich in culinary diversity (Barbhuiya, 2021). The hill station is known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse culinary offerings which provides an ideal context to investigate the dynamics as if how local food influences tourists' experiences and decisions in this region. Addressing this gap is crucial, as it not only sheds light on the psychological and social determinants of food-related behaviour but also presents useful suggestions for the destination marketing and sustainable tourism strategies.

In addition, when it comes to literature most studies have focused on broad demographic or cultural factors influencing food choices, often overlooking the practical interplay of psychological and social determinants. For example, studies by Ajzen (1991) and others applying the TPB have shown that attitude (ATT), subjective norms (SN) and perceived behavioural control (PBC) are critical predictors of intention and behaviour. However, these studies primarily focus on urban or global settings, leaving smaller, emerging destinations like Nainital relatively unexplored. Moreover, while existing research acknowledges the impact of local culinary experiences on tourist contentment, few studies have systematically examined the sequential relationship between tourists' attitudes, social influences, perceived control and their ultimate purchasing decisions. Thus, the present study employs TPB (Ajzen, 1991) and conceptualizes five key variables: Tourist Attitude towards Local Food (TALF), which examines how tourists perceive local food in terms of taste, authenticity and cultural value; Tourist Subjective Norms (TSN), which explore the influence of relatives, friends and online platforms on food choices; Tourist Perceived Behavioural Control (TPBC), which assesses tourists' perceptions of their ability to access, afford, or understand local food; Tourist Intention to Sample Local Food (TISLF), which evaluates their likelihood of trying local cuisine during their visit; and Tourist Decision to Purchase Local Food (TDPLF), representing the act of buying local food products.

**Tourist Attitude and the Quest for Local Food:** Tourist attitude represents a critical determinant in understanding behaviour within the TPB. In the current study TALF includes perceptions of its taste, authenticity, cultural significance and nutritional value, play a crucial role in guiding tourists' intentions to sample it. Prior research by Qi and Ploeger (2021) demonstrated that positive attitudes towards local food significantly enhance tourists' willingness to engage with culinary offerings at destinations. Similarly, Lim and An (2021) highlighted that tourists who associate local food with a region's cultural heritage are more likely to seek authentic food experiences. Additionally, Fleșeriu et al. (2020) indicated that a favorable perception of local dishes quality directly influences tourists' inclination to engage in food tourism activities. Attitude often acts as a precursor to behaviour al intention, aligning with the findings of Ajzen (1991), which emphasize that favourable attitudes positively influence intentions to perform specific behaviours.

Building on these insights, this research proposes that TALF in Nainital strongly impacts Tourist Intention to Sample Local Food (TISLF). Considering the region's rich culinary variety and cultural importance, tourists with favourable attitudes are inclined to see local food as a path to genuine experiences, which leads to the development of the subsequent hypothesis:

**H1:** TALF positively influences TISLF.

**Impact of Subjective Norms Towards Local Food:** Subjective norms (TSN), as defined by TPB, refer to the perceived societal expectations to engage in or avoid a behaviour. In the context of local food tourism, the influence of peers, family and social networks often dictates tourists' willingness to engage with local cuisine. Studies such as those by Stalmirska, (2024) and Sultan et al. (2020) indicate that social approval from close associates significantly impacts individual choices, especially in group travel scenarios. The growing influence of social media further amplifies these

norms, with peer recommendations and reviews increasingly shaping tourists' food-related decisions (Singh et al., 2020). Findings from Sogari et al. (2023) also revealed that tourists show a greater tendency to sample local food when they perceive strong encouragement from their social circles.

For Nainital, where local food serves as a cultural hallmark, TSN could act as a powerful motivator for tourists to sample local cuisine. Tourists who perceive social approval or encouragement from their peers are more likely to engage with local food offerings. Aligning with these insights, which leads to the development of the hypothesis:

**H2:** TSN positively influences TISLF.

**Tourist Perceived Behaviour al Control and Local Food:** Perceived Behaviour al Control (TPBC) reflects a person's perceived difficulty or ease in engaging in a particular behaviour influenced by both individual and situational elements (Hagger et al., 2022). In relation to local food Intake, TPBC encompasses tourists' perceptions of accessibility, affordability and availability of information about local cuisine. Ajzen (1991) noted that higher levels of perceived control enhance the likelihood of behavioural intention. Wang and Scrimgeour (2021) emphasized that tourists are more inclined to sample local food when they feel confident about navigating potential barriers, such as affordability or language differences. Additionally, Qi and Ploeger (2021) found that perceived convenience in accessing local food strongly influences tourists' intentions to engage in food tourism.

For Nainital, TPBC is particularly relevant given its diverse culinary landscape and varying levels of accessibility to authentic local food. Tourists who perceive minimal barriers—be it cost, language, or availability—are more inclined to engage with local culinary offerings leading to the formulation of the hypothesis:

**H3:** TPBC positively influences TISLF.

**The Role of Food Sampling in Shaping Consumer Purchase Choices:** Food sampling serves as a pivotal stage in the individual decision formulation system, particularly pertaining to local food tourism (Park & Widyanta, 2022). Sampling allows tourists to directly experience the taste, quality and authenticity of local cuisine, which can significantly influence their purchasing decisions. According to Rendall et al. (2022) food sampling not only enhances sensory appeal but also builds trust and reduces uncertainty, thereby motivating consumers to make a purchase. Similarly, Cifci et al. (2024) demonstrated that buyers are more willing to acquire a commodity after sampling, as it bridges the gap between expectation and actual experience.

In the domain of local food tourism, sampling acts as a critical touchpoint that connects tourists with the traditional and sensory elements of a destination's culinary offerings. Tourists who intend to sample local food (TISLF) often do so to evaluate its authenticity, quality and cultural significance, which subsequently shapes their decision to purchase (TDPLF). Lee et al. (2021) emphasized that sensory satisfaction derived from sampling directly correlates with higher purchase intentions, while Choe and Kim (2024) highlighted he impact of food sampling in building emotional and ethnic bonds.

For Nainital, a destination known for its unique culinary offerings, food sampling provides an opportunity for tourists to explore the region's diverse gastronomy. The act of sampling can transform a visitor's curiosity into a tangible purchasing decision, thus contributing to both the economic well-being of the area and the conservation of food traditions. Building on these insights, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

**H4:** TISLF positively impacts TDPLF.

**Development of the Research Model:** The theoretical model underpinning this study is derived from TPB, examines how ATT, SN and PBC influence tourists' intentions and decisions regarding local food in Nainital. The dependent variable is TDPLF, which reflects the actual purchase of local food. The independent variables include TALF, which influences willingness to engage with local cuisine (Peral-Peral et al., 2022); TSN, which are social pressures from peers and family (Van Tonder et al., 2023); and TPBC, which refers to tourists' perceptions of accessibility and ease in consuming local food (Aitken et al., 2020). TISLF is shaped by these factors, as suggested by Ajzen (1991). The model posits that TALF, TSN and TPBC positively influence TISLF, which then impacts TDPLF. This study aims to explore these relationships and understand how psychological and social factors drive food-related behaviour in Nainital (Fig 1).


*PUSA Journal of Hospitality and Applied Sciences, 2025; 11(1) : 20-31*
*ISSN 2395-020X (P); e-ISSN 2583-2700 (O)*
*NAAS Score: 3.49*

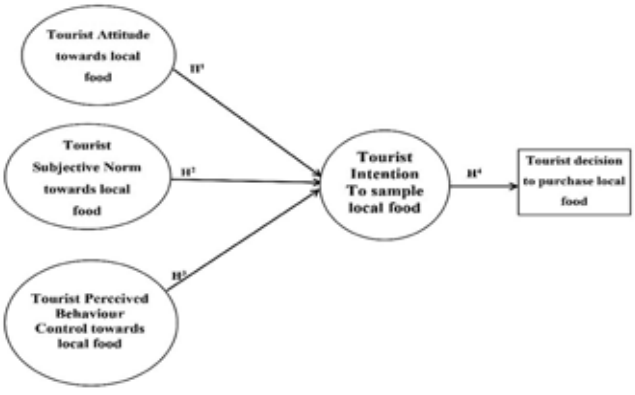


***Figure 1:*** *Conceptual Model*

To add on, the core central problem investigated in this research is the lack of comprehensive understanding of the factors driving tourists' intentions and their choices to try and buy local cuisine, specifically in the context of Nainital. While TPB provides a robust framework for analysing behaviour, its application to local food tourism in smaller destinations has been limited. This gap is significant because such destinations often rely heavily on tourism for economic development and cultural preservation. Addressing this gap is not only academically relevant but also practically important for policymakers, marketers and local communities. To achieve this gap, the study sets forth the following objectives. The study aims to examine the influence of tourists' attitudes, social norms and perceived behavioural control on their intention to sample local food in Nainital. It further seeks to assess the relationship between tourists' intention to sample local food and their actual decision to purchase it. Additionally, the study aims to provide insights for policymakers and tourism stakeholders on how to leverage local culinary experiences to enhance visitor satisfaction and economic sustainability. Altogether, the significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding how psychological and social factors shape tourists' food-related behaviours, particularly in smaller tourism destinations like Nainital, where local food plays a dual role in enhancing visitor experiences and supporting the local economy.

By examining the underlying drivers of tourists' food choices, this research provides actionable insights for policymakers, tourism marketers and local businesses, enabling them to design more effective promotional strategies that align with tourist expectations and preferences. Furthermore, fostering a stronger connection between local cuisine and tourism can enhance cultural appreciation while ensuring economic sustainability for local communities. The findings contribute to the theoretical advancement of TPB by applying it to an underexplored setting, while also providing actionable recommendations for policymakers, marketers and local businesses to better promote local food as a key tourism asset.

**Objectives**

- To examine the relationship between Tourist Attitude Towards Local Food (TALF), Tourist Subjective Norms (TSN), Tourist Perceived Behavioural Control (TPBC), Tourist Intention to Sample Local Food (TISLF) and Tourist Decision to Purchase Local Food (TDPLF) in Nainital, India.

## Methodology

**Research Design:** This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the psychological and social factors influencing tourists' intentions to sample and purchase local food in Nainital. A survey-based approach was employed to collect data from domestic tourists, allowing for the quantification of relationships among TALF, TSN, TPBC, TISLF and TDPLF. The study utilizes SEM to analyse the interrelationships among these variables, providing a robust framework for understanding tourists' food-related behaviours in the context of culinary tourism.

**Locale:** The study was conducted in Nainital, Uttarakhand, a popular hill station known for its scenic beauty, cultural heritage and diverse culinary offerings. As a prominent tourist destination, Nainital attracts a significant number of domestic visitors, making it an ideal setting to examine TALF, TSN, TPBC, TISLF and TDPLF in the context of culinary tourism.

**Sampling Design:** Data was collected from both domestic and international tourists visiting Nainital between January and August 2024. A two-tiered sampling strategy was adopted for this study. The first stage involved purposive sampling, which was used to selectively recruit tourists visiting Nainital, ensuring alignment with the study's objectives. This method was chosen to secure an accurate depiction of the population through the targeted sample. Second, snowball sampling was used to reach a wider pool of respondents. Snowball sampling was effective in this case as it allowed the study to tap into networks of tourists, facilitating the collection of data from a diverse range of respondents who may not have been easily accessible through other sampling methods. In total, 500 questionnaires were distributed, with

472 completed responses received. After data filtration for incomplete responses, 450 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis. A small-scale test with 100 participants was done to check the reliability and validity of the survey tool.

**Tools and Technique:** This study utilized established and widely recognized scales to measure the key constructs. A semantic differential scale was employed to assess three statements for TALF, as indicated by the scales of Hussain et al. (2023) and Soltani et al. (2021). For TISLF, three statements were derived on a seven-item Likert scale adopted from Stalmirska (2021). TPBC was again measured using three items from Hanafiah and Hamdan (2021), while TSN were captured using four items from BalıkçıoğluDedeoğlu et al. (2022). Finally, TDPLF was measured using four items adapted from Hussain et al. (2023) and Rehman et al. (2022).

**Data Analysis and Statistical Analysis:** For data analysis, the study initially employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the correlations between variables. The technique ensured a robust analysis of both direct and indirect effects according to the theoretical structure of the TPB. Key steps in the SEM analysis included model specification, assessment of fit indices (e.g., CFI, RMSEA and TLI,) and hypothesis testing. By leveraging SEM, the study could establish not only the statistical significance of the relationships but also the overall validity and dependability of the theoretical model, providing a thorough understanding of the elements influencing tourists' choices related to local food.

## Results and Discussion

**Demographic Profile:** The table provides an overview of the demographics of travellers visiting Nainital, revealing that 70% of visitors are from India, while 30% are international travellers. The gender distribution shows a higher proportion of male travellers (62%) compared to females (38%). This trend may be attributed to a greater representation of men in adventure-based activities, such as water sports, which are prominent in Nainital. Regarding the regional distribution of Indian tourists, the sample is primarily composed of travellers from North India (40%), likely due to Nainital's proximity to northern states. Western India follows with 35%, while Central India accounts for 20% and Southern India represents around 15% of the sample. These groups may be drawn to Nainital's offerings in breath-taking sightseeing and fabulous food eateries, offering a chance to sample various local food delicacies as well. The age distribution indicates that the largest group of travellers are aged 35 years and above, making up 36% of the sample. This aligns with Nainital's appeal to those seeking leisure tourism, including lake visits and wellness retreats, which tend to attract older, financially stable tourists. Younger travellers, aged 18–25 years, represent 24% of the sample, reflecting their interest in adventure tourism, such as trekking, rafting and exploring the region's natural beauty.

***Table 1:*** *Demographic Distribution of Respondent's Profile*

| Items | Characteristics | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 279 | 62.00 |
| N=450 | | | |
| | Female | 171 | 38.00 |
| Nationality | Indian (North India) | 180 | 40.00 |
| | Indian (Western India) | 158 | 35.11 |
| | Indian (Central India) | 90 | 20.00 |
| | Indian (Southern India) | 67 | 14.89 |
| | International | 134 | 30.00 |
| Age (years) | Below 18 | 58 | 12.89 |
| | 18–25 | 108 | 24.00 |
| | 25–35 | 116 | 25.78 |
| | 35 and above | 162 | 36.00 |

**Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA):** Before conducting CFA, it is important to ensure that all necessary assumptions of EFA are met. The following table summarizes the verification of key preconditions, the criteria used for assessment and the status of compliance.

***Table 2:*** *Compliance with EFA assumptions*

| EFA Assumption | Criteria | Reference | Compliance Status |
|---|---|---|---|
| Adequate Sample Size | Sufficient sample size (n = 450) | (Glenn d Israel, 2003) | Satisfied |
| Bartlett's Test for Sphericity | Significant result ($p < 0.001$) | (Odoi et al., 2022) | Satisfied |
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure | KMO value: 0.920 (high sampling adequacy) | (Shrestha, 2021) | Satisfied |
| Communality Levels | All communality values > 0.50 | (Ximénez et al., 2022) | Satisfied |
| Total Variance Explained | Explained variance = 68.73% | (dos Santos & Cirillo, 2023) | Satisfied |


*PUSA Journal of Hospitality and Applied Sciences, 2025; 11(1) : 20-31*
*ISSN 2395-020X (P); e-ISSN 2583-2700 (O)*
*NAAS Score: 3.49*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| First Factor Variance Contribution | 37.26% (within acceptable range) | (dos Santos & Cirillo, 2023) | Satisfied |

The EFA was conducted using through varimax rotation, which facilitated dimensionality reduction. The Rotated Component Matrix (RCM) revealed that all factor loadings were above the 0.6 threshold, indicating robust relationships between the items and their corresponding factors (Hardle et al., 2024). Consequently, the analysis identified six distinct components: FVROF, SVROF, EVROF, EPVROF, TROF and ROFPI (Table 3).

***Table 3:*** *Factor Loadings Matrix*

| Variables | Indicator 1 | Indicator 2 | Indicator 3 | Indicator 4 | Indicator 5 | Indicator 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TALF1 | 0.835 | | | | | |
| TALF2 | 0.812 | | | | | |
| TALF3 | 0.850 | | | | | |
| TALF4 | 0.821 | | | | | |
| TSN1 | | 0.811 | | | | |
| TSN2 | | 0.845 | | | | |
| TSN3 | | 0.834 | | | | |
| TPBC1 | | | 0.821 | | | |
| TPBC2 | | | 0.798 | | | |
| TPBC3 | | | 0.835 | | | |
| TISLF1 | | | | 0.869 | | |
| TISLF2 | | | | 0.853 | | |
| TISLF3 | | | | 0.884 | | |
| TDPLF1 | | | | | 0.841 | |
| TDPLF2 | | | | | 0.858 | |
| TDPLF3 | | | | | 0.810 | |
| TDPLF4 | | | | | 0.819 | |
| TDPLF5 | | | | | 0.803 | |
| TDPLF6 | | | | | 0.793 | |

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis:** Confirmatory Factor Analysis is a method based on statistical approach to test the structure of measurement models by analysing the links between the indicators and the underlying constructs. According to Brown (2015) in SEM, CFA performs an important function of confirming the factor structure and establishing construct validity.

**Convergent Validity and Reliability:** As outlined in Table 4, all factor loadings are above the 0.50 threshold, which means that the items effectively capture the constructs they are supposed to measure. Composite reliability values are greater than 0.70, indicating that there is a high internal consistency within each construct (Hardle et al., 2024). Also, the AVE values are greater than 0.50 and thus the constructs explain more variance than measurement error (Campbell & Fiske, 1959).

***Table 4:*** *Convergent Validity and Reliability Parameters*

| Variables (Cronbach's alpha) | Items | Item Loadings | CR | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tourist Attitude towards Local Food (TALF) (α=0.905) | Measure 1 | 0.835 | 0.904 | 0.702 |
| | Measure 2 | 0.812 | | |
| | Measure 3 | 0.850 | | |
| Tourist Subjective Norms (TSN) (α=0.910) | Measure 1 | 0.811 | 0.907 | 0.709 |
| | Measure 2 | 0.845 | | |
| | Measure 3 | 0.834 | | |
| Tourist Perceived Behavioural Control (TPBC) (α=0.884) | Measure 1 | 0.821 | 0.863 | 0.680 |
| | Measure 2 | 0.798 | | |
| | Measure 3 | 0.835 | | |
| Tourist Intention to Sample Local Food (TISLF) (α=0.979) | Measure 1 | 0.869 | 0.966 | 0.905 |
| | Measure 2 | 0.853 | | |
| | Measure 3 | 0.884 | | |
| | Measure 4 | 0.866 | | |
| Tourist Decision to Purchase Local Food (TDPLF) (α=0.960) | Measure 1 | 0.841 | 0.948 | 0.859 |
| | Measure 2 | 0.858 | | |
| | Measure 3 | 0.810 | | |
| | Measure 4 | 0.819 | | |

**Discriminant Validity Analysis:** The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), formulated by Henseler et al. (2015) is a valid method for testing discriminant validity. It compares the correlation between items measuring different constructs (heterotrait) and those measuring the same construct (monotrait) to check if the constructs are different enough. An HTMT value below 0.85 is said to have good discriminant validity, whereas values above 0.90 may suggest that the constructs are not distinct from each other (Yusoff et al., 2020).

***Table 5:*** *Discriminant Validity*

| Items | TALF | TSN | TPBC | TISLF | TDPLF | HTMT < 0.85 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TALF | 1 | | | | | Pass |
| TSN | 0.421 | 1 | | | | Pass |
| TPBC | 0.462 | 0.498 | 1 | | | Pass |
| TISLF | 0.476 | 0.512 | 0.542 | 1 | | Pass |
| TDPLF | 0.436 | 0.497 | 0.432 | 0.421 | 1 | Pass |

**Analysis of Model Fit Indices:** The model fit indices, presented in Table 6, demonstrate that the model meets the necessary criteria for an acceptable fit. The absolute fit indices, including $\chi^2$/df, RMR, GFI and AGFI, confirm a good fit. Additionally, the relative fit indices (NFI, CFI, TLI) and non-centrality-based indices (CFI, RMSEA) all overcome the suggested threshold limits, further validating the robustness of the model. While the chi-square p-value is below the acceptable threshold, it is considered acceptable due to the sample size exceeding 200 participants, as discussed by (Bentler & Bonett, 1980).

***Table 6:*** *Model Fit Indices and Evaluation*

| Fit Measure | Recommended Threshold | Observed Value | Reference | Acceptable (Yes/No) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chi-square ($\chi^2$) | p > 0.05 | 118.202 | (Shen et al., 2022) | No |
| Degrees of freedom (df) | - | 72 | (Okoye & Hosseini, 2024) | - |
| Chi-square/df ($\chi^2$/df) | 1.00 – 5.00 | 1.643 | (Okoye & Hosseini, 2024) | Yes |
| Root mean square residual (RMR) | < 0.08 | 0.038 | (Hidayat & Wulandari, 2022) | Yes |
| Goodness of fit index (GFI) | > 0.90 | 0.938 | (Shi & Maydeu-Olivares, 2020) | Yes |
| Adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) | > 0.80 | 0.912 | (Shi & Maydeu-Olivares, 2020) | Yes |
| Normed fit index (NFI) | > 0.80 | 0.943 | (West et al., 2023) | Yes |
| Parsimony normed fit index (PNFI) | > 0.50 | 0.718 | (Shi et al., 2022) | Yes |
| Incremental fit index (IFI) | > 0.90 | 0.976 | (Cai et al., 2023) | Yes |
| Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) | > 0.90 | 0.971 | (Tucker & Lewis, 1973) | Yes |
| Comparative fit index (CFI) | > 0.90 | 0.978 | (Ximénez et al., 2022) | Yes |
| Parsimony goodness of fit index (PGFI) | > 0.50 | 0.642 | (Marsh & Hau, 1996) | Yes |
| Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) | < 0.08 | 0.045 | (Purwanto, 2021) | Yes |

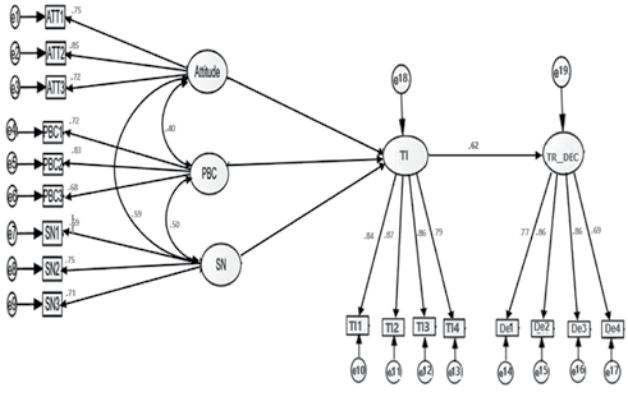


***Figure 2:*** *Path Diagram with Estimated Coefficients*

***Table 7:*** *Structural Model Outcomes*

| Hypothesis | Hypothesized Paths | Estimate (β) | S.E. | C.R. | Sig. | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1 | TALF → TISLF | 0.476 | 0.063 | 7.556 | <0.001 | Supported |
| H2 | TSN → TISLF | 0.512 | 0.058 | 8.828 | <0.001 | Supported |
| H3 | TPBC → TISLF | 0.542 | 0.071 | 7.634 | <0.001 | Supported |
| H4 | TISLF → TDPLF | 0.341 | 0.058 | 5.879 | <0.001 | Supported |

The current study examined the relationships among TALF, TSN, TPBC, TISLF and TDPLF in the context of Nainital. The results, supported by the TPB, offer valuable insights into tourist behaviour regarding local food consumption. Finding supported the initial hypothesis, which suggested a positive correlation between TALF and

TISLF (β = 0.476, CR = 7.556, p < 0.001). It indicates that tourists who have a favourable TALF tend to aspire more to sample it. The positive attitude may stem from a combination of cultural curiosity, the perception of authenticity and the belief that local food offers a unique culinary experience. Tourists are generally attracted to authentic and culturally rich experiences and food plays a central role in this aspect of tourism (Kim et al., 2022). Additionally, the quality and freshness of local food may influence tourists' perceptions, contributing to the development of a strong intention to try local dishes (Kim et al., 2022). The significant positive relationship reflects the general tendency of tourists to view local food as a key part of the destination's cultural identity. If local food is presented as part of the immersive travel experience, it becomes a strong factor in attracting tourists. The outcome agrees with Atsız et al. (2022), who argued that tourists' food choices are heavily influenced by perceptions of authenticity and cultural connection. To capitalize on this relationship, tourism authorities and local restaurants should focus on enhancing the cultural narrative surrounding local cuisine. Promotions through food festivals, storytelling and cultural events can increase the visibility of local food and strengthen the connection tourists feel with the destination's culinary offerings.

The second hypothesis, which explored the influence of TSN on TISLF, was also supported (β = 0.512, CR = 8.828, p < 0.001). This finding suggests that social norms, including the influence of peers, family and online communities, significantly affect a tourist's intention to sample local food. Tourists often rely on social cues to make decisions about unfamiliar destinations and food is no exception (Chen & Huang, 2021). Social influence, especially in group travel settings, can be a powerful motivator for trying local cuisine. The constructive influence of SN may be attributed to the importance of social validation in tourism decisions (Roh et al., 2022). Tourists are prone to influence from recommendations from friends or positive reviews on social networking sites. This exemplifies the broader trend in tourism, where social proof, such as influencer endorsements and consumer-created material has a major influence in shaping behaviour (Lariba, 2023). This could be particularly pronounced in food tourism, where tourists seek validation that they are making the "right" choice by consuming local specialties. Tourism marketers can harness this influence by encouraging user-generated content, reviews and testimonials about local food experiences. Influencer marketing can be particularly effective in this context. Collaborating with local influencers or travel bloggers to highlight the unique culinary offerings of Nainital could stimulate interest and increase the TISLF.

The third hypothesis, which tested the findings highlighted a significant positive connection between TPBC and TISLF (β = 0.542, CR = 7.634, p < 0.001). This suggests that a tourist's perception of control over their ability to access local food positively influences their intention to sample it. Factors such as ease of access, affordability and knowledge about where to find local food are crucial in shaping tourists' perceptions of control. The findings highlight that when tourists perceive local food as easily accessible and affordable, they are more likely to form an intention to try it. The perceived availability of local food at popular tourist spots, affordability and convenience are strong enablers of this intention (Ajzen, 1991). Previous research by Hagger et al. (2022) also supports the idea that reducing perceived barriers encourages positive behavioural intentions. This result aligns with the TPB, where perceived control over behaviour is a key determinant of intention. To reduce barriers, local authorities and businesses should ensure that local food is widely available, particularly in high-traffic tourist areas (Sultan et al., 2020). Providing multilingual menus, affordable price ranges and easy access to information via mobile apps or websites can help tourists feel more empowered to try local food without facing difficulties.

The fourth hypothesis, which examined the relationship between TISLF and TDPLF, was also supported (β = 0.608, CR = 9.236, p < 0.001). This finding confirms that tourists' intention to sample local food is a strong predictor of their actual decision to purchase it. This suggests that the decision to purchase is heavily influenced by prior intentions, with intention being a leading factor in predicting behaviour (Yeo et al., 2022). The significant association between TISLF and TDPLF reflects the role of intentions in translating to actual behaviour, especially within the domain of food tourism. The congruence of intentions with actual purchases can be attributed to the emotional and sensory appeal towards local food, which is often viewed as an essential aspect of traveling (Rendall et al., 2022). When tourists decide they want to sample local cuisine, the decision to purchase becomes a natural extension of their desire to experience the destination fully (BalıkçıoğluDedeoğlu et al., 2022). To convert intentions into actual purchases, local food vendors

and tourism boards should create memorable culinary tours or gastronomic workshops, that make the sampling process seamless and enjoyable. Additionally, emphasizing the health benefits and authenticity of local dishes can further motivate tourists to purchase.

## Conclusion

This research highlights the significant role of ATT, SN and PBC in shaping TISLF and the decision to purchase local food in Nainital. The findings emphasize the importance of fostering positive perceptions, leveraging social influence and minimizing barriers to enhance culinary tourism. By strategically promoting local food experiences through immersive initiatives such as food festivals, culinary workshops and gastronomic tours, stakeholders can strengthen Nainital's appeal as a culturally rich and attractive destination. Tourism authorities and local businesses can collaborate to create marketing campaigns that highlight the authenticity and uniqueness of regional cuisine, enhancing its visibility among potential visitors. The study also underscores the need to reduce accessibility and affordability barriers to encourage greater tourist participation in local food consumption. Ensuring that local food is widely available in key tourist areas, providing multilingual menus and offering budget-friendly options can make local cuisine more approachable for diverse visitor demographics. Additionally, restaurant owners and food vendors can leverage social proof by encouraging tourists to share their food experiences through online reviews, influencer collaborations and social media content, thereby influencing potential visitors' perceptions and choices. From an academic perspective, the research reinforces the validity of TPB in explaining food-related behaviours in tourism contexts, providing a foundation for future studies to explore additional psychological, cultural and experiential factors that influence food choices. However, the study has certain limitations, including its restricted geographical scope, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other tourist destinations. Additionally, the data was collected within a specific time frame, limiting its ability to capture evolving tourist behaviours over multiple visits or seasons. Future research could address these gaps by conducting longitudinal studies to analyse changes in tourists' food-related decisions over time and incorporating additional variables such as cultural distance, health consciousness and past travel experiences to enrich the understanding of food tourism behaviour. Despite these limitations, this study provides actionable insights for tourism marketers, policymakers and local businesses, offering practical strategies to enhance the role of local food in shaping memorable tourism experiences and supporting sustainable economic growth in Nainital.

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