

Research Paper

## Tastes to Trends: A Brief Study of Attitudes and Preferences of Young Adults Towards Different Culinary Choices

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### ABSTRACT

This research study explores young adults' attitudes, openness, and acceptance towards food preferences and choices, focusing on vegetarian vs. meatarian diets, Pan-Indian vs. local cuisines, and Indian vs. multinational foods. It also investigates how cultural identity, exposure, and nutritional awareness influence openness to diverse cuisines, while assessing trust in Indian vs. multinational foods, the impact of marketing, and ethical considerations, revealing broader trends in young adults' acceptance of various food choices. Food choice is a complex behavior influenced by various factors. Sensory consumer research, historically developed independent of psychology, often overlooks unconscious processes, focusing instead on rational decision-making models. This has led to several research flaws, such as assuming uniformity in behavior, consistency in choices, and conscious decision-making. Despite advancements in psychology recognizing the significant role of unconscious influences, these insights have yet to significantly impact sensory research. The field still relies on theories like reasoned action and planned behavior, which prioritize rationality but fail to accurately predict food choices, as habits, past behavior, and enjoyment often play stronger roles. (*Diversity in the determinants of food choice: A psychological perspective.*) An attitude is a learned tendency to respond positively or negatively towards an object, influencing behavior, as outlined by Dr. Madan Lal's study based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour. His research examines the relationship between attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in predicting food consumption in India. The study uses questionnaires to measure these factors, focusing on beliefs, evaluations, and intentions. Results show that subjective norms significantly influence food consumption intentions, surpassing the effects of perceived control and attitudes. Overall, intentions are good predictors of behavior, with subjective norms being the strongest determinant of behavioral intentions. (*An Empirical Study of Attitudes towards food in India*) Semi-structured interviews were used to examine how cultural, familial, and individual dynamics shape decisions. The flexible format allowed participants to share personal experiences, revealing insights into food exposure, family acceptance, and individual choices. Key informant interviews with a food anthropologist and a food enthusiast provided expert perspectives, enriching the analysis with a broader socio-cultural context. Conducted with 10 Pune

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residents, the research highlights the interplay between personal preferences and external factors like cultural traditions, social norms, and family influences in shaping food choices. It was found that food choices act as extensions of an individual's self-concept, rooted in cultural identity. Psychologically, the enthusiast's reflections align with self-identity theory, showing that one's food preferences reflect a desire for belonging and personal expression. For younger participants, urbanization and exposure to diverse cuisines reshape self-perception, contributing to evolving food identities. Early socialization and cultural conditioning shapes psychological attitudes toward purity and pollution in food. The participant's interviews, supported by the insights provided by experts reveals how caste-based beliefs about food purity are internalized and influence food preferences. Over time, as people are exposed to different social contexts, these rigid attitudes tend to evolve, reflecting cognitive flexibility and adaptability. It was found that a notable psychological tension between individuals' ethical beliefs and their privileged social positions, especially concerning movements like veganism exists. individuals advocating for this ethical food choice may face dissonance due to their recognition that such lifestyles are largely accessible to those with economic and social privileges. The study reveals that food preferences among urban youth in India are evolving due to globalization and increased exposure to international cuisines. This shift signifies broader social and cultural changes, where traditional food habits are being reimagined. As younger generations navigate both regional and global food influences, their choices reflect an openness to new experiences and a break from rigid, caste-based traditions. This suggests a redefinition of cultural identity in food, particularly in urban contexts, driven by global interconnectedness and individual autonomy. The research suggests that ethical food movements, like veganism, while well-intentioned, can perpetuate social inequalities. This finding emphasizes the need for more inclusive practices and policies that recognize the economic realities of diverse communities. Advocates can use these insights to create frameworks that promote equitable access to ethical food choices. The persistence of social conditioning regarding food purity reflects broader societal norms that continue to shape individual behaviors. The findings advocate for ongoing dialogue around food practices, fostering inclusivity and challenging outdated beliefs. This can lead to greater awareness and acceptance of diverse food choices, ultimately enriching cultural understanding in a rapidly changing world.

**Keywords:** *Food Preferences, Attitudes towards Food Choices, Behavioral Components, Cultural Influences, Familial Impact, Social Influences*

**A**ttitudes are evaluations or feelings toward objects, concepts, or situations that shape opinions, choices, and actions. They consist of three components: cognitive (beliefs and opinions), affective (emotions), and behavioral (intentions). Attitudes form through personal experiences, social influences like family and peers, cultural background, and individual traits such as openness or conscientiousness. They can be favorable or unfavorable and are inferred from consistent behavior.

Food choices reflect our psychology, cultural background, and values. Preferences often mirror upbringing and cultural identity, while trying new cuisines shows openness and curiosity. Psychologically, healthy food choices indicate conscientiousness and focus on well-being, whereas indulgent or convenience foods suggest prioritizing pleasure or efficiency. Social influences, such as peer trends and group norms, shape choices for acceptance or individuality. Ethical concerns, like sustainability and local sourcing, also play a growing role. Ultimately, food preferences weave together cultural, psychological, and

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social factors, offering insight into personality and openness to diverse experiences and values.

### ***Rationale***

Food choices often reflect personality, values, and social influences. Conscientious individuals may prefer nutritious diets, prioritizing long-term health, while those choosing convenience foods might value efficiency or immediate pleasure. Social factors also shape preferences, as people align with their peer groups or follow trends to feel a sense of belonging. Conversely, unconventional diets can signal individuality. Additionally, ethical and environmental values drive choices like organic, local, or plant-based foods. Overall, food choices are shaped by personal experiences, cultural background, and social connections, providing insight into one's attitudes, values, and openness to the world.

### ***Significance***

Understanding young adults' attitudes towards food choices offers insights into their cognitive and emotional processes, including how beliefs, emotions, and values shape preferences. It highlights the psychological mechanisms, such as cognitive biases and emotional responses, that influence food choices. Social and environmental factors, like peer pressure, social norms, and media, play a key role in shaping dietary behaviors, offering valuable insights into social psychology. Additionally, studying attitudes and behaviors through models like the Theory of Planned Behavior helps explore how attitudes translate into actual eating habits, revealing patterns and discrepancies between attitudes and behaviors.

### ***Objectives***

1. Understanding attitudes of young adults towards choices related to Vegetarian and Non-Vegetarian dietary choices.
2. Understanding attitudes of young adults towards consuming local and Pan-Indian cuisines.
3. Understanding attitudes of young adults towards consuming International cuisines.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Diversity in the determinants of food choice: A psychological perspective-**

Food choice is a complex behavior influenced by diverse factors, yet sensory consumer research has developed largely independent of psychology, which focuses on behavior. This gap stems from sensory science's emphasis on "hard science" methods and neglect of psychological insights, leading to flawed assumptions about uniformity, consistency, conscious choice, and rational decision-making. While psychology now recognizes the unconscious nature of many behaviors, these insights remain underutilized in sensory research. The reliance on outdated theories like planned behavior overlooks the role of habits, past behavior, and enjoyment in food decisions. Advancing sensory research requires integrating psychological findings and updating methodologies.

### **An Empirical Study of Attitudes towards food in India-**

Attitudes are learned tendencies to respond positively or negatively toward an object, influencing behavior but inferred from consistent patterns. Dr. Madan Lal's study, based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour, examines how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape consumers' intentions toward food. Using a structured questionnaire, it measures direct and indirect components of these factors, including

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behavioral beliefs, control strength, and outcome evaluations. Findings confirm the theory's effectiveness in predicting food consumption in India, highlighting that subjective norms significantly influence intentions, surpassing attitudes and perceived control. Intentions strongly correlate with future behavior, emphasizing their predictive reliability.

### **Prevalence and acceptability of Modernization of Indian Food in Hotels and Restaurants of Delhi and NCR-**

Indian cuisine, deeply rooted in regional traditions, has evolved significantly, blending traditional flavors with modern techniques like sous vide and spherification. Chefs like Gaggan Anand and Manish Mehrotra have pioneered this global trend, transforming perceptions of Indian food through molecular gastronomy and fusion techniques. This modernization, embraced by iconic restaurants, balances tradition and innovation, appealing to international palates while preserving culinary heritage. A study in Delhi-NCR found that 61.5% of respondents were aware of modernized Indian cuisine, and 73.1% could distinguish it from fusion concepts. This trend highlights Indian cuisine's dynamic evolution within the global hospitality industry.

### **Food Neophobia as a Determinant of Consumer Behaviour in Ethnic Food Consumption-**

This study explores the influence of food neophobia on consumer behavior in ethnic food consumption, focusing on motivations for visiting ethnic restaurants and attitudes toward ethnic cuisines. The expanding ethnic food market, driven by tourism and global migration, offers unique dining experiences shaped by factors like taste, authenticity, and service quality. However, food neophobia, the fear of unfamiliar foods, affects consumption. A survey of 230 Croatian consumers identified two segments: food neophilic (adventurous) and food neophobic. Nearly equal in size, these groups highlight the need for strategies to reduce neophobia, such as positive exposure, education, and media promotion, fostering greater acceptance of ethnic foods.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to investigate the attitudes of young adults in Pune, India, toward food preferences and choices, focusing on cultural, familial, and individual dynamics. Using semi-structured interviews with 10 participants, the research captures the depth and complexity of subjective experiences. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling, ensuring diverse perspectives and openness to discussing their food habits. Flexibility in interview formats—online and in-person—fostered a comfortable environment, allowing participants to share rich insights.

The study focuses on three core themes: food exposure, familial acceptance, and individual choices. Participants reflected on their experiences with diverse cuisines, their autonomy in food decisions, and the role of family traditions and expectations. Discussions also explored the cultural context, including social norms and environmental factors influencing food availability. This approach highlighted the interplay of personal preferences and external influences, providing a nuanced understanding of food-related attitudes.

To complement participants' narratives, insights from two key informants added depth. Food anthropologist Bhushan Korgaonkar contextualized participants' experiences within broader socio-cultural frameworks, emphasizing the impact of historical, regional, and social dynamics on food habits. Food science enthusiast Tanmay Sadhana-Satish contributed

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practical insights on evolving food trends, cultural fusion, and individual experimentation in food choices. These expert perspectives validated and enriched the study's findings.

Secondary data, particularly from Locavore, provided additional context by exploring the intersection of food, culture, and sustainability. Locavore's emphasis on local and seasonal foods, traditional culinary practices, and indigenous foodways illuminated how cultural identity and sustainability shape food preferences.

The study's findings underscore the complex, multifaceted nature of food preferences, shaped by personal motivations, familial expectations, and cultural influences. The semi-structured interviews revealed nuanced insights into how young adults navigate these dynamics, emphasizing the significance of exposure to diverse cuisines and the autonomy to make food choices. Familial traditions and acceptance were pivotal in shaping habits, reflecting the interconnectedness of individual and cultural factors.

Incorporating both primary and secondary data, the research offers a comprehensive view of food preferences as a dynamic interplay of subjective and socio-cultural factors. By bridging personal narratives with expert insights and cultural context, this study provides a detailed understanding of the attitudes and motivations underlying young adults' food choices, contributing to broader discussions on food behavior and identity.

### ***Data Analysis***

#### **Key Informant Interview: Mr. Bhushan Korgaonkar**

Mr. Bhushan emphasized that food preferences and choices are shaped by multiple factors from childhood through adulthood. Early exposure to local cuisine, street food, and regional availability plays a significant role. Media, including television and digital platforms, further influences choices by creating aspirations for different foods. For example, people from Kolkata may develop a taste for Jhalmuri due to its local prevalence, whereas those from Pune may not.

Family traditions and upbringing strongly shape attitudes toward food. The anthropologist's personal experience highlights how their family's Konkani and Goan heritage influenced their diet with coconut-based dishes, rice, and seafood. However, social interactions with neighbors from diverse cultural backgrounds, such as Punjabi and South Indian communities, broadened their palate and preferences, demonstrating the impact of external cultural exposure beyond familial habits.

Religious and spiritual beliefs are also critical influencers, particularly regarding dietary restrictions. For instance, Hindu and Jain practices emphasize vegetarianism and exclude ingredients like garlic and onions on certain days. Such beliefs, ingrained from childhood, often shape food habits. However, exposure to diverse social circles and nutritional awareness, such as the importance of protein from eggs or fish, can lead individuals to reconsider traditional dietary practices.

Caste and sub-caste further contribute to culinary distinctions, affecting not only broad dietary patterns but also cooking styles and ingredient choices. Communities may use similar ingredients differently, varying proportions of spices or prefer distinct cooking oils based on their culinary heritage. For instance, some communities favor mustard oil, while others use coconut or peanut oil, reflecting caste-based culinary nuances.

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Social and economic factors also shape food habits. Practices tied to religious customs, such as fasting, intersect with modern nutritional insights that advocate for dietary diversity to enhance nutrient absorption. Economic conditions influence access to diverse foods, with wealthier communities enjoying greater variety, while economically disadvantaged groups often rely on seasonal or locally available staples.

Geography and climate have traditionally influenced food habits, though their impact has diminished due to the homogenization of cuisine across India. Despite the widespread availability of foods like Indian-Chinese dishes and packaged snacks, traditional diets still align with local climates. For example, people in hot regions consume spicier foods to induce perspiration for cooling, while those in humid areas use spices more moderately.

Lastly, generational shifts in food habits often stem from economic changes, migration, and cultural exchange. The anthropologist notes that their family adopted wheat-based foods like chapati after moving to Mumbai, despite wheat not being a staple in their native region. Such adaptations reflect how migration and urbanization foster culinary blending and evolution across generations.

### **Key Informant Interview: Mr. Tanmay Sadhana Satish**

Mr. Tanmay Sadhana-Satish shared insightful perspectives on Indian cuisine, its cultural significance, and evolving food trends. He highlighted how geography and climate shape regional cuisines, citing Maharashtra's diverse food traditions, such as Malvani cuisine from the coastal regions and Vidarbha cuisine from the dry interiors. He noted that other countries also exhibit rich culinary diversity, influenced by their history and cultural evolution. Exposure to different cuisines, he believes, can broaden food preferences if approached with openness, though passive exposure can sometimes lead to cultural alienation.

Tanmay views food choices as deeply personal and reflective of cultural identity and social status. He illustrated the impact of historical events on cuisine, referencing *'doubles'* in Trinidad and Tobago, a dish with Indian roots from indentured laborers. Discussing purity and pollution rituals, he criticized how such beliefs perpetuate social exclusion, reflecting on his own upper-caste upbringing, where these norms felt natural. However, he observed that urbanization and independence from family settings are driving change among younger generations. He also pointed out that these rituals reinforce social hierarchies by imposing privileged norms on marginalized communities.

On veganism, Tanmay distinguished between global veganism, driven by climate and ethical concerns, and Indian vegetarianism, shaped by climate, scarcity, and caste-based purity norms. He argued that veganism can sometimes mask caste biases under a moral pretext. Regarding marginalized communities' cuisines, he noted how Dalits and tribal groups created resourceful, protein-rich dishes due to limited access to ingredients, influenced by historical deprivation.

Lastly, he observed that while international interest in Indian cuisine has sparked a revival of regional foods among urban youth, their curiosity for novelty also drives a preference for global cuisines. Tanmay's reflections provide valuable insights into the intersections of food, culture, and identity.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Veg/Non-Veg Food**

The interviews revealed that food preferences among participants were shaped by family traditions, religious beliefs, and personal experiences. Most followed vegetarian or restricted non-vegetarian diets, with chicken and eggs preferred over seafood or other meats. Cultural restrictions, such as abstinence on specific days, were common, though openness to trying new foods varied. Participants were curious about new experiences but often stayed within comfort zones. Hesitations toward certain foods were linked to past experiences or cultural and personal reservations. International cuisine exposure was limited.

### **Openness and Exposure:**

Participants displayed varying levels of openness to trying new foods. While some, like showed curiosity about international cuisines such as Japanese and Italian, others, like preferred familiar options. Exposure played a significant role; participants with diverse culinary experiences, such as were more open to new foods. In contrast, limited exposure, as seen with often led to more restricted food preferences. Travel and work experiences influenced participants' willingness to explore diverse cuisines.

### **Preferences and Biases:**

Biases toward certain foods were influenced by cultural upbringing, personal experiences, and limited exposure. Some participants preferred vegetarian diets due to negative reactions or taste aversions to non-vegetarian food. Another found Japanese food "weird," reflecting a cognitive bias toward unfamiliar flavors. Those raised in strict vegetarian households, showed resistance to non-vegetarian foods, driven by family values or past negative experiences. These biases highlight the deep connection between food preferences, cultural conditioning, religious practices, and individual encounters with new foods.

### **Peculiar Views:**

There were also some peculiar views expressed during the interviews. For example, a participant viewed eggs as acceptable within a vegetarian diet because it does not involve harming the animal, reflecting a unique interpretation of vegetarianism. Similarly, another participant's interest in trying squid, despite her adherence to a mostly vegetarian diet, shows an atypical curiosity. The unusual food experiences of some participants, like trying monitor lizard meat, also reflect niche preferences influenced by regional practices.

### **Sufficient or Insufficient Exposure:**

Food preferences among participants were often shaped by their exposure to new cuisines. Those with limited exposures, showed little interest in trying foods from other states or countries. In contrast, participants who had broader exposure to both local and global cuisines, displayed more adventurous food choices. Limited exposure was often tied to strict family traditions or few opportunities for exploration, whereas greater exposure led to a more flexible attitude toward food preferences.

### ***Suggestions and Recommendations***

#### **1. Encouraging Cross-Cultural Food Exposure and Exploration:**

Organizing food festivals, cooking workshops, and "food tours" can help expand people's acceptance of various cuisines. The research highlighted that participants' openness to trying new foods often stemmed from travel or exposure to regional dishes. Providing opportunities for individuals to experience different culinary traditions in familiar settings

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can reduce apprehension and make new foods seem less intimidating. Such cross-cultural exposure fosters an appreciation for diverse flavors and traditions, motivating individuals to experiment with and embrace unfamiliar cuisines over time.

### **2. Leveraging Media and Social Platforms to Normalize Diverse Foods:**

Social media and online platforms can play a vital role in normalizing diverse food choices and dismantling stereotypes. Cooking shows, food bloggers, and influencers can showcase lesser-known foods and their benefits, making them appealing to wider audiences. Many participants mentioned that media exposure influenced their food preferences, indicating that highlighting regional and international cuisines through these platforms can reduce biases. Such visibility, combined with cultural and nutritional insights, can make individuals more comfortable trying new dishes and broadening their food horizons.

### **3. Education on Nutritional Benefits of Diverse Foods:**

Educational initiatives focused on the nutritional advantages of various foods can shift ingrained biases and misconceptions. Workshops aimed at young adults or hosted in community centers can provide practical insights into how different food options meet dietary needs. The research noted that some participants moved away from traditional family diets when they understood the health benefits of alternative foods. Providing accurate, non-judgmental information on the nutritional value of diverse cuisines can encourage individuals to explore foods they previously avoided or misunderstood.

### **4. Promoting Open Dialogue on Food Preferences and Cultural Sensitivity:**

Facilitating open discussions on food biases can foster understanding and empathy for different dietary habits. Participants who faced social judgment due to their food choices often felt isolated or misunderstood. Creating opportunities for conversations—through workshops, casual meetups, or community forums—can challenge these biases and give people a platform to share their experiences without fear of discrimination. Encouraging such dialogue can break cultural barriers, promote inclusivity, and cultivate a respectful attitude toward diverse food practices across communities and backgrounds.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

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