

Ethnic Food Consumption: Mediating Role of Food Involvement and Food Neophilia

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Abstract

Ethnic food encompasses foods and beverages specific to a particular culture. Ethnic dishes reflect the customs and traditions of the culture to which they belong, their religion, heritage, and national origins. Consumption of ethnic foods has increased in recent years and has come to the fore. This study aimed to test a research model that explains how openness to different cultures affects ethnic food consumption intention. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to examine the connection among variables. Data was collected between April 29 and July 19, 2023. Convenience sampling method was used in the study. Research data were collected from 321 participants dining in the ethnic restaurants in Istanbul. The findings revealed that openness to different cultures positively and significantly affected food neophilia ($\beta = 0.94$; $P < 0.01$) and food involvement ($\beta = 0.38$; $P < 0.01$). It was also found that the mediating role of food neophilia and food involvement in the positive relationship between openness to new cultures and ethnic food consumption intention. The findings are expected to help create marketing strategies to improve ethnic food consumption in Türkiye and contribute to enriching the existing knowledge in the literature, especially ethnic food consumption.

Keywords: *Ethnic food consumption intention, food-related personality traits, openness to different cultures, gastronomy*

Etnik Gıda Tüketimi: Gıda Katılımı ve Gıda Neofilisinin Aracı Rolü

Öz

Etnik yiyecekler belirli bir kültüre özgü yiyecek ve içecekleri kapsayan ve ait oldukları kültürün gelenek ve göreneklerini, dinlerini, miraslarını ve ulusal kökenlerini yansıtan yiyeceklerdir. Etnik yiyeceklerin tüketimi son yıllarda giderek artmaktadır. Bu çalışma, farklı kültürlerle açıklığın etnik yiyecek tüketme niyetini nasıl etkilediğini açıklayan bir araştırma modelini test etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Değişkenler arasındaki ilişkiler yapısal eşitlik modellemesi (SEM) kullanılarak değerlendirilmiştir. Veriler 29 Nisan- 19 Temmuz 2023 tarihleri arasında toplanmıştır. Çalışmada kolayda örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Araştırma verileri İstanbul'da etnik restoranları ziyaret eden 321 katılımcıdan toplanmıştır. Bulgular, farklı kültürlerle açıklığın gıda yeniliği ($\beta = 0,94$; $P < 0,01$) ve gıda katılımını ($\beta = 0,38$; $P < 0,01$) pozitif ve anlamlı olarak etkilediğini göstermektedir. Ayrıca farklı kültürlerle açıklık ile etnik yiyecek tüketim niyeti arasındaki pozitif ilişkide gıda neofilisi ve gıdaya katılımın aracı rolünün olduğu da tespit edilmiştir. Bulguların, Türkiye'de etnik yiyecek tüketimini geliştirmeye yönelik pazarlama stratejilerinin oluşturulmasına yardımcı olması ve başta etnik yiyecek tüketimi olmak üzere literatürdeki mevcut bilgilerin zenginleştirilmesine katkıda bulunacağı düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Etnik yemek tüketim niyeti, gıdaya ilişkin kişilik özellikleri, farklı kültürlerle açıklık, gastronomi*

Introduction

Ethnic foods have become widespread worldwide thanks to the movement of different ethnic groups, the travel opportunities of tourists, and the impact of globalization (Verbeke & Poquiqui Lopez 2005). With the changes in consumers' lifestyles and dietary habits, the interest in ethnic foods is increasing gradually at the international level (Mascarello et al., 2020). Ethnic food is a distinct culinary resource that differs from the individual's familiar national cuisine. It pertains to "foods originating from the heritage and culture of an ethnic group, using their knowledge of the local content of plant and/or animal resources such as traditional spices, herbs, or specific types of meat (Kwon, 2015). Ethnic cuisines are becoming more widely available in the Turkish food industry as the number of foreign businesses operating in the food sector grows.

Although there has been a growing interest in ethnic foods, people vary significantly

in their willingness to try ethnic foods in particular. Some people tend to enjoy trying novel foods, while others strongly dislike those foods (Ritchey et al., 2003). Such states can be associated with food-related consumer behaviors. Various factors categorized as food-internal factors [e.g., food involvement (FI) and food neophilia (FN) and food-external factors (e.g., information and social factors] influence consumers' food preferences (Pliner & Hobden, 1992).

The food-internal factors particularly associated with food preferences are FN and FI. FN and FI are recognized as important food-related personality traits that influence consumers' food preferences (Pliner & Salvy, 2006). These variables play a significant role in consumers' food preferences. Previous studies reveal that ethnic food consumption is influenced by personality factors (Shi et al., 2022) and that food-related personality features might boost involvement with a destination's local cuisine

(Olsen et al., 2021). Most studies include food-related personality traits (e.g., FN and FI), willingness to experiment (e.g., Çınar et al., 2021), openness to different cultures (ODC) (Mascarello et al., 2020), and sensation seeking (Sivrikaya & Pekerşen 2020), which have been associated with general personality traits. Food-related personality traits are widely used by researchers to understand consumer behaviors (Chen, 2007; Hsu & Scott, 2020; Mak et al., 2017).

It is known that individuals who are open to different cultures attach importance to experiences from various cultural backgrounds (Topçu & Ozer Altundag, 2023). Individuals with this personality trait also have a desire and curiosity to learn about diverse cultures. Foods from different nations frequently vary in flavor, ingredients, and preparation techniques (Geertsen et al., 2016), capturing the interest of consumers (Bernard & Schulze, 2005; Stone et al., 2021). Therefore, it is believed that individuals who are open to different cultures will likely have a positive intention to consume ethnic foods.

In this context, consumers' food-related personality traits are considered to influence their Ethnic Food Consumption Intention (EFCI). This study specifically focuses on Openness to Different Cultures (ODC) as a food-external factor that may impact EFCI. Previous studies have indicated that consumers with an openness to new cultures are more willing to consume ethnic food (Mascarello et al., 2020). Openness to new cultures is believed to influence the acceptance of and willingness to try novel foods. Therefore, ODC, along with FN, and FI might affect EFCI. There are a relatively limited number of studies on this topic. To date, only one study has examined the relationship between ODC and EFCI (Mascarello et al., 2020). Nevertheless, this remains an under-researched area in the literature.

Given these considerations, the present study aimed to examine the effects of ODC, FN, and FI on EFCI. Specifically, the objectives of this study were: (1) to develop and experimentally test an integrated model linking ODC, FN, FI, and EFCI; (2) to examine whether the integrated model, accounting for both the direct and indirect effects of ODC, significantly enhances the predictive power provided by food-related personality traits when modeling EFCI; and (3) to explore the comparative impact of the three factors (i.e., ODC, FN, and FI) on EFCI. This study thus fills a research gap by examining the relationship between consumers and ethnic food in terms of food-related personality traits and ODC. The findings are expected to assist in creating marketing strategies to enhance ethnic food consumption in Türkiye and contribute to enriching the existing knowledge in the literature, particularly in the field of ethnic food consumption.

Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

Culturally open consumers are known to value cultural experiences in various contexts. These consumers are also receptive to multicultural cues in the market and appreciate the opportunity to learn about diverse cultures (Seo & Gao, 2015). Individuals who are open to different cultures are, therefore, likely to show more interest in diverse and novel culinary cultures. According to Kim and Jang (2019), consuming ethnic cuisine can spark curiosity about the country of origin and its cultural practices. Ethnic restaurants not only serve traditional dishes but also use their social ambiance and ethnic decor to showcase the cultural values of their nation. Furthermore, literature observes that ODC influences the acceptance of and willingness to try novel foods (Mascarello et al., 2020). Additionally, extroversion and openness to experience were found to have positive effects on FN (Tuncdogan & Akdeniz Ar, 2018). In this context, cultural openness might impact food-related personality

traits and EFCI. The proposed hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: ODC has an impact on EFCI.

Hypothesis 2: ODC has an impact on FN.

Hypothesis 3: ODC has an impact on FI.

There is substantial evidence that neophilic tendencies influence sensitivity to novel foods from various cultures (Sassatelli & Scott, 2001). For instance, Tourists with neophilic tendencies, have a desire to experience novel foods from different cultures during their holiday experiences (Ritchey et al., 2003). Neophilics who are open to trying novel foods have a positive attitude towards ethnic foods (Raudenbush & Frank, 1999). Verbeke and López (2005) asserted that consumers who desire food variety have increased due to the impact of ethnic diversity and globally sourced foods. Mak et al. (2013) asserted that one-third of the respondents wanted to try ethnic foods that are not easily available in their own country. For this reason, researchers have suggested the evaluating the effect of neophilic tendencies on food behaviors (Choe & Cho, 2011; Cohen & Avieli, 2004). As seen in various studies, Food Neophilia (FN) has a strong influence on the consumption of novel and diverse foods. The following hypothesis was thus proposed:

Hypothesis 4: FN has an impact on EFCI.

It is widely acknowledged that FI positively affects the adaptation to novel foods and the intention to consume them (Burusnukul et al., 2015). FI increases a person's willingness to consume novel foods and the likelihood of being motivated to try new food experiences

(Kim et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2013; Mak et al., 2012). Previous research has shown that high FI positively affects the consumption of more diverse range of unknown foods (Kim et al., 2013; Mak et al., 2012). FI, therefore, enables the consumption of a wider variety of foods, leading to more positive experiences with novel foods, and the emergence of more positive emotional responses (Mitchell & Hall, 2003). FI is considered to influence individuals' intentions to consume ethnic foods. The following hypothesis was proposed accordingly:

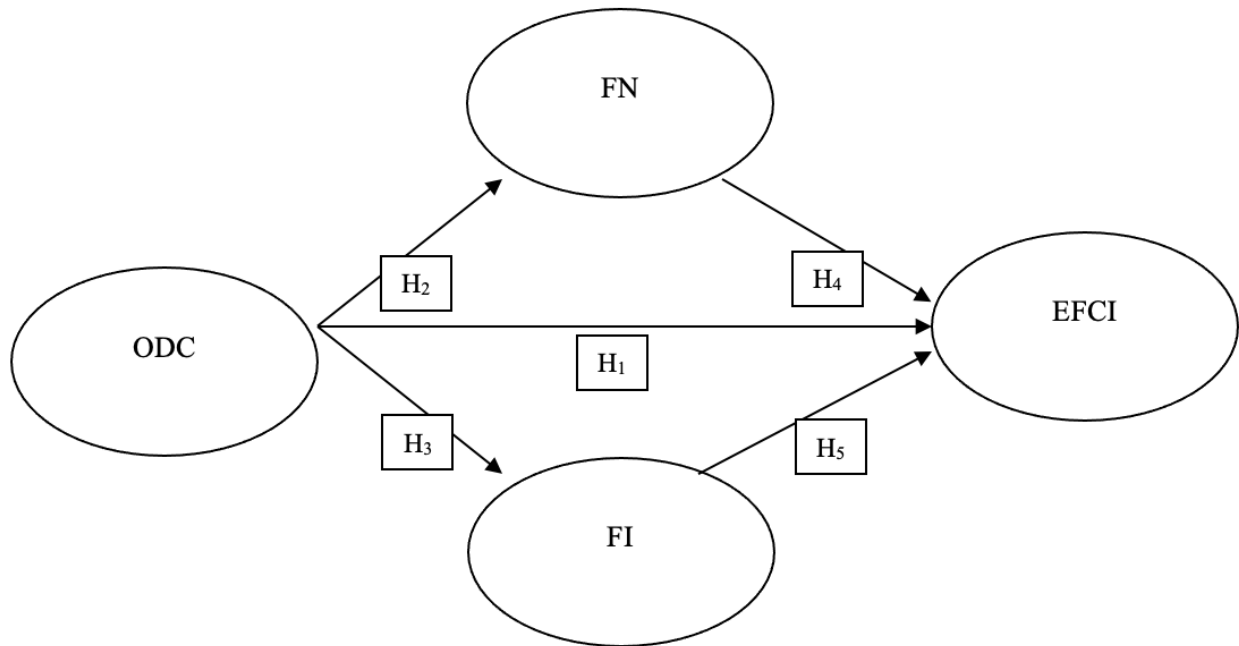
Hypothesis 5: FI has an impact on EFCI.

Based on the proposed hypotheses, the characteristics of individuals who are more open to different cultures may directly impact their consumption of ethnic foods. However, it is also possible that individuals open to different cultures have a positive influence on food-related personality traits, specifically FN and FI, and these personality traits may have an indirect effect, encouraging the intention to consume ethnic foods (Mascarello et al., 2020). More specifically, ODC may indirectly influence EFCI because FI and FN may mediate these relationships. As a result, it makes sense to examine the potential mediating effects of FI and FN in relation to ODC and EFCI, as outlined in the final two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 6: The ODC indirectly affects EFCI through FN.

Hypothesis 7: The ODC indirectly affects EFCI through FI.

Figure 1
Research model



Methodology

Sampling and data collection

The data for this study were collected through a questionnaire distributed at ethnic restaurants in Istanbul, Türkiye. Istanbul was chosen as the study area for two main reasons. Firstly, Istanbul boasts a more developed food and beverage sector with a high number of businesses (Çetin et al., 2020). Secondly, Istanbul has a cosmopolitan city structure, hosting more than one ethnic group. In the current study, it was not possible to accurately assess the population size due to the lack of a clear count of the number of ethnic restaurants in Istanbul and the reluctance of ethnic restaurants to share their customer numbers. Ethnic restaurants that voluntarily agreed to take part were included in the study. These are restaurants that offer and allow consumption of foods that are not known in a particular region, that is, that do not belong to that region. These restaurants are classified as ethnic restaurants that offer their customers culinary

products that have a different culture from where they are located. The questionnaire was distributed among customers in collaboration with the ethnic restaurants that took part in the research conducted in Istanbul. Convenience sampling method was used in the study. Following their meal, diners were presented with a self-administered questionnaire and a letter introducing the study's objectives, highlighting the voluntary nature of their involvement, and guaranteeing anonymity. Data was collected between April 29 and July 19, 2023.

A total of 321 usable responses were received and deemed appropriate according to the preferred algorithm used in this study. There are differing opinions in the literature regarding the minimum sample size required for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). For example, while Cattell (1978) suggests that the minimum sample size should be around 3-6 times the total number of items in the measurement tool, Hair et al. (2006) argue that it should be at least 5

times. Participants in this study consisted of 330 people, and a total of 321 data points were analyzed after removing missing data. Six ethnic restaurants willingly participated in the study, and data were collected from individuals dining in these ethnic restaurants. In the first week of April 2023, the researcher personally delivered questionnaires to the restaurants by the researcher. The participants were informed about the study's purpose at the beginning of the questionnaire.

Of the 321 respondents who completed the questionnaire, 52.3% were males and 47.7% were females. In terms of age distribution, 36.8% were in the 18-24 age range, and 37.1% were aged 25-34. Additionally, 10.9% were high school graduates, while 64.5% had undergraduate degrees. It is not surprising that more than half of the respondents were aged 18-34, aligning with previous studies indicating a preference for ethnic foods among young people (Mascarello et al., 2017; Tomić et al., 2018). Türkiye's young population, estimated at 13 million, constitutes half of the research sample, as reported by the Turkish Statistical Institute in 2019. Regarding the participants' frequency of dining in ethnic restaurants, 31.5% stated rarely, 41.5% sometimes, 23.4% often, and 3.4% always.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into two parts: the first part contains related to the study model, while the second part includes questions regarding participant demographics. Previous research was utilized to assess the constructs within the study model. Masceroles et al. (2020) investigations were employed to develop the ODC construct, measured with seven items. EFCI was evaluated using three questions and was informed by research by Seo et al. (2013) and Levitt et al. (2019). FN was composed of five items based on the work of Cohen and Avieli (2004) and Kim et al. (2010). FI was

assessed using six statements derived from Kim et al. (2010).

The items response categories using a five-point Likert rating scale, ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree) to express agreement or disagreement. Initially, the scales were written in English. Subsequently, a linguistic validity test was conducted. Four experts, fluent in both languages, employed the back-translation procedure to translate the scales into Turkish (Brislin, 1970). The translated scales were then tested in person with 30 participants. Two items were made for clarity based on the feedback received, and the final data gathering instrument was procured. The Ethics Committee Approval necessary for the data collecting phase is arranged with the Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University (01.03.2022-2023/03).

Data analysis

Following the guidelines of Anderson and Gerbing (1988), a two-step approach was utilized to examine the research model. The Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) tool was used in the first step to perform confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the fit of the measurement model. Analyzes were carried out using AMOS 24.0 software packages. The structural model was then evaluated, and the links between the four components in the research were investigated.

Measurement and testing of the structural model were conducted using the maximum likelihood method. The normal distribution assumption must be met to use this method. For this, the skewness (0.132- 1.220) and kurtosis (0.263- 1.196) values were examined, and the premise of normal distribution was met (Kline, 2011). The bootstrapping method was employed for the significance of the mediating effect (Stine, 1989). Full and partial mediation models were compared in line with James et al.'s (2006)

recommendations to determine the type of mediation. In the full mediation model, FN and FI are considered as mediators in the relationship between cultural openness and EFCI. Partial mediation model, on the other hand, involves the direct effects of cultural openness on EFCI in addition to the indirect effects of cultural openness on EFCI through FN and FI.

Findings and Discussion

Measurement model

The measurement model comprised four latent variables: ODC, FI, FN, and EFCI. CFA was performed before testing the SEM model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The Maximum likelihood estimation technique was used in all model tests. The AMOS application provides several compliance data sets depending on various parameters. Various fit indices were utilized within the scope of the study to evaluate the model's fit with the data. In this context, the discrepancy value Chi-square (χ^2) was initially investigated. The model's χ^2 value is 325.5. The degrees of freedom area critical criterion in the χ^2 test. When the degrees of freedom are great, the χ^2 value produces substantial consequences. Therefore, the ratio of the χ^2 value to degrees of freedom is considered a significant requirement. Hair et al. (2006) claimed that the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio is a criteria for adequacy and that a ratio of 3 or less shows satisfactory fit. The Goodness of Fit metric (GFI), the most often used fit metric in model evaluation, was discovered to be 92%. According to the structural equation model analysis, if the GFI value is 1, the model's degree of fit is perfect.

The GFI value was determined to be 0.93 as a result of the research. The model can be said to fit the data, but the fit is not perfect. Another criterion for assessment is Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.061. If the RMSEA value is less than 0.05, the model fit is said to be flawless. The analysis result (0.061) indicates that the model has a decent match with the data but that this fit is not perfect.

For the measurement model, the goodness-of-fit indices of a first-order measurement model with four constructs were found to be acceptable with the following fit indices: ($\chi^2 = 167.118$, $df = 97$, $\chi^2 / df = 1.723$, $RMSEA = 0.048$, $GFI = 0.942$, $CFI = 0.980$, $NFI = 0.955$, $PCFI = 0.793$, $PNFI = 0.772$, $SRMR = 0.0416$) (Byrne, 2010). Two items from the FI scale (FI5, FI6) and three items from the ODC scale (ODC5, ODC6, ODC7) were excluded because the factor loads were below 0.50. The remaining 16 items' factor loads all had statistically significant values ($P < 0.01$). The factor loads of the constructs varied between 0.56 and 0.96. The alpha coefficients indicating the internal consistency of each construct related to the scale ranged from 0.824 to 0.961 (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics, CR, AVE, MSV, ASV and correlations. The mean score of the independent variable (i.e. ODC) was 3.81. The mean scores of the other variables were as in the table: FN 3.57, FI 3.88, and EFCI 3.86. ODC correlated positively with FN ($r = 0.43$, $P < 0.01$), FI ($r = 0.24$, $P < 0.01$), and EFCI ($r = 0.38$, $P < 0.01$).

Table 1
Measurement model

Variables	λ	Error variance	t-values	α
ODC				
I am very comfortable dealing with non-Turkish	0.76	^a Fixed	^a Fixed	0.824
I like to go to places where I can be among non-Turkish	0.82	0.077	13.909	
I like to participate in activities of non-Turkish	0.79	0.071	13.564	
Some of my friends are non-Turkish	0.56	0.079	9.647	
FN				
I am constantly sampling new and different foods.	0.76	^a Fixed	^a Fixed	0.896
I like foods from different countries.	0.84	0.069	15.768	
At dinner parties, I will try a new food.	0.73	0.075	14985	
I will eat almost anything.	0.81	0.077	17509	
I like to try new ethnic restaurants	0.82	0.075	17.720	
FI				
I think a lot about food in my daily life	0.69	^a Fixed	^a Fixed	0.856
I don't think much about ethnic food*	0.82	0.078	13.595	
I don't think much about how the ethnic food tastes*	0.92	0.081	14.587	
Talking about my ethnic food experiences is something I like to do.	0.66	0.073	11.130	
EFCI				
I would like to consume ethnic food in the near future	0.93	^a Fixed	^a Fixed	0.961
I intend to consume ethnic food in the near future	0.94	0.030	33.340	
I am willing to consume ethnic food in the near future	0.95	0.029	34,953	

Note(s): **“Items are reverse coded” origin image*; ^a *Parameter fixed at 1.0 during ML estimation*

Table 2
Means, standard deviations, AVE, MSV, ASV and correlations

Variables	\bar{x}	SS	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	ODC	FN	FI	EFCI
ODC	3.81	0.71	0.831	0.556	0.185	0.267	1			
FN	3.57	0.86	0.897	0.635	0.381	0.627	0.43*	1		
FI	3.88	0.77	0.863	0.616	0.189	0.249	0.24*	0.42*	1	
EFCI	3.86	0.94	0.961	0.892	0.349	0.627	0.38*	0.74*	0.41*	1

Note(s): CR: composite reliability; AVE: average variance extracted; MSV: maximum shared variance; ASV: average shared variance

In order to assess convergent validity, we calculated the average variance extracted (AVE) values for each dimension. All AVE values exceeded 0.50, indicating that the variables provide sufficient evidence for convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

To evaluate discriminant validity, we compared the maximum shared variance (MSV), average shared variance (ASV), and AVE values by calculating the arithmetic means and bivariate correlations of all dimensions using SPSS. According to the expected order of $ASV <$

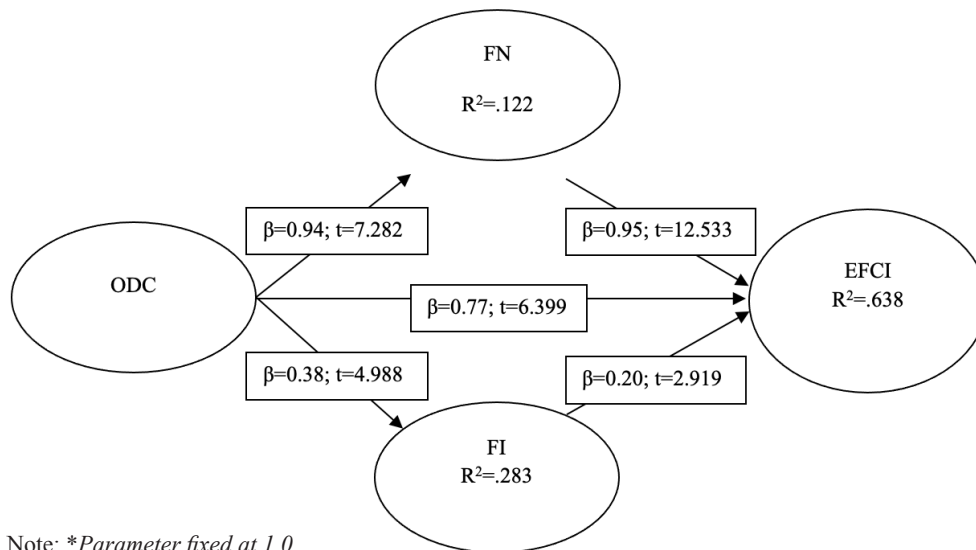
MSV < AVE < CR (Hair et al., 2006), the results showed that ASV values were lower than MSV values in all dimensions, while MSV values were also lower than AVE values, and AVE values were lower than CR values. Additionally, the square roots of the AVE values in all dimensions were greater than the shared correlation coefficients, providing further evidence for the discriminant validity of the factors (Hair et al., 2006). To assess reliability, we calculated the composite reliabilities (CRs) (Table 2). Most CRs exceeded 0.70 (Hair et al., 2006). Furthermore, all AVE values were greater than the shared correlation coefficients of the factors, indicating that reliability was achieved in all dimensions (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

Hypotheses tests

Following the validation of the measurement model, the study hypotheses were examined using an implicit variable structural model. Fit

indices for the structural model were acceptable ($\chi^2 = 228.100$, $df = 99$, $P < 0.01$ $\chi^2 / sd = 2.304$, $RMSEA = 0.064$, $CFI = 0.964$, $NFI = 0.939$, $AIC = 302.100$, $CAIC = 478.643$, $SRMR = 0.0949$). The findings of the structural model were shown in Figure 3. First, H_1 (ODC ? EFCI) was tested, and ODC was found to have a significant effect on EFCI ($\beta = 0.77$; $t = 6.399$; $P < 0.01$). H_2 (ODC ? FN) was then tested. Accordingly, ODC was found to have a positive influence on FN ($\beta = 0.94$; $t = 7.282$; $P < 0.01$). H_3 (ODC ? FI) was tested later, and ODC was found to positively affect FI ($\beta = 0.38$; $t = 4.988$; $P < 0.01$). H_4 (FN ? EFCI) was tested next, and FN was found to positively influence EFCI ($\beta = 0.95$; $t = 12.533$; $P < 0.01$). H_5 (FI ? EFCI) was tested last, and FI was found to have a positive effect on EFCI ($\beta = 0.20$; $t = 2.919$; $P < 0.01$). Consequently, H_1 , H_2 , H_3 , H_4 and H_5 were confirmed.

Figure 2
Results of SEM



According to χ^2 difference test results, it was observed that partial mediation model ($\chi^2 = 228.512$, $df = 100$, $P < 0.01$ $\chi^2 / sd = 2.285$, $RMSEA = 0.063$, $CFI = 0.964$, $NFI = 0.938$, $AIC = 300.512$, $CAIC = 472.283$) had better goodness-of-fit indices ($\chi^2 = 0.412$;

$df = 1$; $P < 0.01$) than full mediation model ($\chi^2 = 228.100$, $df = 99$, $P < 0.01$ $\chi^2 / df = 2.304$, $RMSEA = 0.064$, $CFI = 0.964$, $NFI = 0.939$, $AIC = 302.100$, $CAIC = 478.643$). The data indicated the partial mediating role of FN and FI.

The significance of the mediating effect was tested with the bootstrapping method using 5,000 samples at the 95% confidence interval (Zhao et al., 2010). The results revealed that the indirect effect of ODC on EFCI was 0.585 through the two mediating variables. The lower and upper bounds of the indirect effect were 0.455 and 0.751 at the 95% confidence interval, demonstrating statistical significance ($P < 0.01$). When the indirect effect of ODC was computed according to the mediating variables, the indirect effect of cultural openness was observed to be 0.525 through FN and 0.059 through FI. The lower and upper bounds of the indirect effects, respectively, at the 95% confidence interval were 0.403 and 0.685, 0.022 and 0.109. These results indicate that the effect of ODC, as mediated by the mediating variables, was significant ($P < 0.01$). The sum of all indirect effects represents the total indirect effect. The indirect effect on each mediating variable was evaluated through the AMOS user-defined estimation, which also provided the level and confidence interval. The findings indicate the partial mediation role of FN and FI. For this reason, the mediation hypotheses are supported (H_6, H_7). The present study results reveal that ODC is a critical component in terms of EFCI (H_1). Given the unique characteristics of ethnic cuisine (Haven-Tang & Jones, 2005), consumers may become more involved in ethnic food consumption. This finding is consistent with the findings of previous studies (Mascarello et al., 2020). The results of the current study show that ODC is a critical component for FN(H_2) and FI(H_3). Consumers' ODC may be related to the search for new foods (Mascarello et al., 2020). For example, consumers who are ODC, their interest in food and their search for innovation and difference are expected to increase their consumption of ethnic foods (Verbeke & Poquiviqui Lopez, 2005). Openness to different cultures leads to FN and FI attitudes.

Additionally, the intention to consume ethnic food, FN(H_4) and FI(H_5) are positively affected. FI and FN are a phenomenon expected to affect consumers' intention to consume ethnic food. The more consumers are interested in the product and the more they seek innovation, the more likely they are to consume the product in question. But, as the findings show, this also depends on consumers' tendencies to search for and try out new foods. Accordingly, this study supports that consumers with high FN levels may see ethnic dishes as a way of differentiation. The effect of FN and FI on ethnic food consumption in this study supports this argument. This finding is supported by the results of similar studies in the literature (Jin & Hwang 2022; Shi et al., 2022; Verbeke & Poquiviqui Lopez, 2005). Finally, the findings of this study show that FN and FI play a partial mediating role in the relationship between ODC and EFCI. Therefore, ODC alone is not enough to improve ethnic food consumption intentions. The positive impact of ODC will undoubtedly also have a positive impact on consumers' intentions to consume ethnic food. However, if high levels of FN and FI are provided with ODC; it has been determined that consumers' intentions to consume ethnic food may increase further.

Only one study has examined the role of ODC in ethnic food studies (Mascarello et al., 2020). In order to contribute to the literature, the current study first looked at how cultural openness affects the consumption of ethnic foods. Secondly, this study confirmed the effect of ODC on EFCI. Third, the present research indicated the partial mediating role of FN and FI in explaining the impact of cultural openness on EFCI. Most existing studies about ethnic food consumption have focused on food neophobia (Mascarello et al., 2017; Ting et al., 2016; Tomić et al., 2019). However, the roles of other food-related personality traits have

remained inadequately explained and clarified. In this sense, this study aimed to address a gap in literature by demonstrating the impact of ODC on EFCI through FN and FI.

Conclusion

In parallel with the growing interest in ethnic foods, it has become essential for ethnic food businesses to examine consumers' ODC and food-related personality traits and clarify their role in affecting their behaviors. This experimental study examined the effect of consumers' ODC and food-related personality traits on EFCI. The findings indicated a significant relationship between consumers' ODC and their EFCI. Research findings clearly supported all hypotheses. In light of the findings, initially, ODC affected EFCI (H_1). It was observed that consumers with high levels of ODC had higher EFCIs. Also, ODC positively influenced food-related personality traits (H_2 , H_3). In other words, ODC increased consumers' tendencies for FN and FI. Additionally, FN and FI positively impacted EFCI (H_4 , H_5). The findings revealed that ODC increased EFCI through FN and FI.

Practical Implications

This study not only made theoretical contributions, but also presented practical recommendations for practitioners. These research findings have several practical implications for the gastronomy and tourism industry. The findings of this study revealed that ODC positively affected FN, FI, and EFCI. Therefore, communication messages used in the marketing of ethnic foods should be designed to emphasize the cultural discovery, innovation, and educational aspects of ethnic foods.

First, ethnic restaurants should recognize that people who are open to different cultures may also have a higher interest in ethnic foods. Consequently, the inclusion of diverse and culturally unique products in your selection

could appeal to this segment of consumers. Second, customers with high food neophilia may prefer new and novel foods more strongly. This highlights the astuteness in firms providing an assortment of individualistic and pioneering dishes, encompassing cultural cuisines.

Another significant finding of this study is that customers with a high level of openness to different cultures are motivated themselves to get to know different cultures, which then drives them to try and purchase ethnic food. By understanding and meeting the needs of this specific group, ethnic restaurants can distinguish themselves from their competitors and become more appealing to customers who value their own uniqueness and self-expression. In light of this, it is important for ethnic restaurants to be aware of their customers' food preferences, including their level of food neophilia or neophobia, and make necessary adjustments to their menu. First, marketers should consider the ODC, FN and FI level of their target consumers when promoting ethnic foods. Hence, marketers need to introduce exclusive features for those with a strong knowledge of ethnic foods and cultures, and fuse elements that are reminiscent of the local culture for consumers who may not be as familiar.

Secondly, messaging strategies for localized ethnic food should be tailored to consumers' ODC levels, as this significantly affects their information processing process. According to the literature, detailed and concrete messages increase appreciation for consumers with high cultural familiarity. These consumers tend to seek and appreciate deeper cultural knowledge and experiences. In these markets, marketers should use more detailed and culturally rich message frames that highlight cultural differences to encourage more positive perceptions and evaluations. For example, material specific to ethnic cultures, explaining different cooking methods specific to cultures

and integrating elements of cultural storytelling, and stimulating a sense of recognition of different cultures can stimulate the intention to consume ethnic food. In summary, these results highlight the significance of comprehending the connections between customers' individual traits and food preferences when devising successful marketing and management tactics in the gastronomy and tourism sector.

Limitations and future research

This study handled EFCI through the lens of cultural openness and confirmed the mediating role of FN and FI. However, there are several limitations to consider. First, the study was conducted with people dining in ethnic restaurants in Istanbul, Türkiye, suggesting that future research could involve different samples and locations. Second, it is recommended that the postulated links be tested on larger, culturally varied groups. The third limitation pertains to food-related personality traits. Within the scope of this study, FI and FN were considered as mediator variables. In future research, other factors pertaining to personality and food, such as aversion to unfamiliar foods, willingness to take risks, ethnocentric tendencies, and fear of being left out, may also be explored.

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