ATTITUDES, NORMS, AND ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS IN YOUNG ADULTS' LOCAL FOOD TOURISM INTENTIONS

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examines the influence of local cuisine on destination choices among young Greek adults, aiming to understand how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control impact travel intentions.
Methodology/Design/Approach – A 15-item questionnaire based on the Theory of Planned Behavior and Utility Theory was distributed to 411 Greek participants aged 20-29. Data were collected through online surveys and analyzed using hierarchical multiple regression to assess the interaction between psychological factors and economic constraints on travel decisions.
Findings – The results reveal that local food significantly influences young adults' intentions to visit destinations, with attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control each playing a role. Economic constraints and personal preferences moderate these effects, highlighting the complex relationship between local food preferences and travel behavior.
Originality of the research – This study addresses a gap in culinary tourism research by focusing on young adults, a demographic whose travel behavior is shaped by unique preferences and financial considerations. The findings contribute to tourism marketing by offering insights into how local gastronomy affects destination appeal among young Greek travelers.
Keywords local food, potential influence of local cuisine, attitudes, decisions, criteria for visiting a destination, young Greek adults

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INTRODUCTION

Culture and tourism are closely interlinked, as travelers increasingly seek experiences that embody the local identity of the destinations they visit. Local cuisine, as an expression of culture, has become a central element of this engagement—transcending mere sustenance to represent social meaning, authenticity, and belonging (Poeggel, 2022; Rodyna, 2023; Liberman et al., 2016). Beyond being a sensory experience, food serves as a communicative medium through which tourists construct symbolic connections to place, culture, and community.

The growing scholarly interest in culinary tourism reflects this dual nature of food as both a cultural artifact and a marketing resource for destinations (Recuero-Virto & Arróspide, 2024). Empirical evidence confirms that local gastronomy can strongly influence destination image and tourist satisfaction (Pektas et al., 2019; Hashemi et al., 2021). Yet, despite extensive research, three main inconsistencies remain unresolved in the literature (Liu-Lastres et al., 2025).

First, studies have yielded contradictory findings on how psychological factors drive food-related travel behavior. While several authors show that attitudes and social influence predict gastronomic choices (Choe & Kim, 2018; Cozzio et al., 2020), others highlight that these effects diminish under financial or contextual constraints (Angelakis et al., 2023). The limited integration of economic realities into psychological models leaves open the question of how affordability and accessibility moderate these well-established predictors.

Second, research on the emotional and affective aspects of food tourism has expanded, yet remains fragmented. Some scholars emphasize the emotional atmosphere and attachment that food experiences create (Björk et al., 2023; Wei et al., 2024), while others question whether these emotions translate into concrete behavioral intentions (Gupta et al., 2023; Dao, 2019; Bui et al., 2022). These mixed results point to a gap in understanding the mechanisms through which affective responses influence travel behavior.

Third, despite frequent reference to authenticity, few studies critically assess the diversity of meanings attributed to "local food." Authenticity may relate to tradition, production methods, or even social media representation (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2019;

Turker & Suzer, 2022), leading to measurement inconsistency across studies (Zhang et al., 2018). Moreover, empirical work focusing on young adults—a demographic characterized by limited budgets but strong social-media engagement—remains scarce, particularly in Mediterranean contexts such as Greece.

Overall, the literature lacks a unified framework that links psychological drivers (attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control) with economic and emotional mechanisms that jointly shape culinary travel behavior. Some progress has been made toward integrating behavioral and economic theories. For example, Yang (2016) and Mariel et al. (2024) demonstrate that attitudes and perceptions can be incorporated into utility-based decision models, yet tourism studies rarely operationalize this integration empirically.

Despite the growing recognition of local food as a strategic tourism asset, a fundamental problem remains insufficiently addressed in the literature: destinations increasingly invest in culinary branding without a clear understanding of when and under what conditions food-related motivations translate into actual travel intentions. Existing studies often identify positive relationships between psychological factors—such as attitudes, social influence, and perceived behavioral control—and food-related travel behavior, yet they rarely explain why these relationships weaken or fail under real-world economic constraints (Mariel et al., 2024). As a result, destination managers face a theory–practice gap, where strong symbolic and experiential narratives around local cuisine do not necessarily lead to measurable demand, particularly among economically constrained visitor segments. This lack of an integrated explanatory framework limits both the predictive power of existing models and their practical applicability in contemporary tourism contexts (Liu-Lastres et al., 2025).

Clarifying this problem is of direct practical relevance for destinations seeking to design effective and financially realistic culinary tourism strategies. Without understanding how psychological drivers interact with economic limitations, investments in local food festivals, gastronomic routes, or digital food branding risk being inefficient or poorly targeted. Destinations increasingly compete for visitors who are motivated by authenticity and experiential value, yet simultaneously constrained by budget considerations and rising travel costs. Identifying the conditions under which favorable attitudes and social influence are strengthened—or undermined—by perceived affordability and personal preferences enables destination managers and policymakers to align product development, pricing strategies, and communication efforts with actual consumer decision-making processes. In this sense, the present research responds to an applied need to move beyond descriptive accounts of food tourism and toward actionable insights that can inform destination-level planning and marketing (Recuero-Virto & Arróspide, 2024).

The focus on Greece and young adults is theoretically and empirically justified. Greece represents a tourism-dependent destination with a strong and internationally recognizable culinary identity, while simultaneously operating within a post-crisis and post-pandemic economic environment characterized by financial pressure on domestic and regional travelers. This context offers a critical setting for examining how psychological motivations toward local food interact with economic constraints. Young adults, in particular, constitute a strategically important yet understudied segment: they exhibit high engagement with food-related experiences and social media, strong interest in authenticity and cultural expression, and comparatively limited financial resources. These characteristics make young adults an analytically informative group for testing the boundaries of established behavioral models. Examining their food-related travel intentions in the Greek context therefore provides a rigorous empirical test of how psychological and utility-based mechanisms jointly shape tourism decision-making (Angelakis et al., 2023).

By combining the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) with Utility Theory, the present study aims to address these theoretical and empirical gaps. It examines how young Greek adults' attitudes, norms, and perceived behavioral control influence their intentions toward local food tourism, while explicitly testing how economic constraints (EC) weaken, and personal preferences (PP) strengthen, these relationships. This dual-theory approach contributes to bridging the psychological–economic divide and to clarifying how emotions, authenticity, and social influence interact under real-world limitations.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

Local food has increasingly been recognized as a pivotal element in tourism, serving not only as a gastronomic experience but also as an integral part of cultural identity (Chua et al., 2024). Its significance extends far beyond dining, emerging as a key driver of destination appeal by offering authentic, sensory, and culturally rich experiences that resonate with travelers (Sailesh, 2024). While there is broad agreement that local cuisine enhances tourists' satisfaction and loyalty (Gupta et al., 2021; Choe & Kim, 2018; Rousta & Jamshidi, 2019; Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2016; Baby & Joseph, 2023), findings diverge regarding the magnitude and consistency of these effects. Some studies show that favorable attitudes toward local food directly predict behavioral intentions (Choe & Kim, 2018), whereas others argue that such relationships are moderated by contextual and economic variables, such as affordability, accessibility, and perceived authenticity (Recuero-Virto & Arróspide, 2024). These inconsistencies suggest that while attitudes are essential drivers of local food tourism, their influence depends on structural and economic conditions.

> **H1:** Favorable attitudes toward local food are expected to positively predict behavioral intentions, although the strength of this relationship may vary depending on contextual or economic conditions.

Beyond individual attitudes, subjective norms (SN) play a crucial role in shaping travel decisions by transmitting both social and cultural expectations. Previous research highlights that social influence operates through multiple channels: online networks, such as social media influencers and digital communities, and offline networks, such as friends and family (Su et al., 2018; Pop et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2023; Asri et al., 2024). However, findings are inconsistent as to which source exerts greater influence. Some studies argue that social media increasingly dominates by shaping perceived authenticity and trust, while others show that traditional interpersonal recommendations remain highly influential, especially in collectivist contexts like Greece (Rao Hill & Qesja, 2022; Zhang & Yao, 2022). This divergence underscores the need to reassess the relative weight of digital and interpersonal influences within a unified framework.

> **H2:** Subjective norms—arising from both online and offline interactions—are expected to positively predict behavioral intentions, with the influence of digital networks potentially exceeding that of traditional interpersonal sources.

Perceived behavioral control (PBC) represents another central construct within the Theory of Planned Behavior, reflecting the perceived ease or difficulty of engaging in a particular activity. In tourism, PBC often captures tourists' sense of access, affordability, and ability to enjoy local culinary experiences. Empirical studies report mixed findings: some confirm that high PBC strengthens travel intentions and satisfaction (Birch & Memery, 2020; Lacap, 2019; Piramanayagam et al., 2020), while others, such as Angelakis et al. (2023) in the Greek context, find non-significant effects. These contradictions indicate that PBC may be contextually dependent, especially among young adults who face financial constraints. When travel is perceived as feasible and affordable, intentions are more likely to translate into behavior; when barriers exist, intentions weaken.

> **H3:** Greater perceived behavioral control is expected to enhance behavioral intentions toward local food tourism, although its predictive power may diminish among individuals experiencing higher economic or structural constraints.

Despite these theoretical advances, the literature has rarely examined how psychological drivers interact with real-world financial conditions. Economic constraints are often mentioned as background variables (Robinson & Getz, 2016; Choe & Kim, 2018; Luong & Duong, 2025) but seldom tested as moderators that condition the strength of psychological predictors. Utility Theory offers an appropriate lens for addressing this gap by interpreting travel behavior as a function of perceived benefits versus costs. When economic pressure is high, even favorable attitudes and strong social influence may fail to generate behavioral intentions because the perceived utility of travel declines (Mariel et al., 2024).

> **H4:** Economic constraints are expected to negatively moderate the relationships between attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on behavioral intentions, such that these relationships become weaker under high economic pressure.

In contrast, personal preferences operate as intrinsic motivators that can strengthen the translation of perceived behavioral control into behavioral intentions. Tourists who have strong preferences for authentic and sensory-rich culinary experiences tend to experience greater emotional engagement and satisfaction (Dao, 2019; Gupta et al., 2023; Sukthankar et al., 2025). These preferences serve as motivational amplifiers, intensifying the effect of perceived feasibility on actual decision-making. When individuals truly value local cuisine, perceived opportunities and access are more likely to lead to concrete behavioral outcomes.

> **H5:** Personal preferences are expected to positively moderate the relationship between perceived behavioral control and behavioral intentions, strengthening this relationship among individuals with strong affective and sensory engagement with local food.

Furthermore, demographic variables, including gender and age, are significant determinants of culinary tourism behavior. Studies reveal systematic differences in motivations and engagement: women are generally more driven by cultural and relational motives, whereas men prioritize novelty and adventure (Matalas et al., 2023; Kaufman & Severt, 2023). Within Generation Z, motivational structures vary by age, reflecting differences in financial independence, lifestyle, and exposure to global food trends (Marques et al., 2025). These findings indicate that demographic segmentation offers additional explanatory power in understanding culinary travel intentions.

> **H6:** Behavioral intentions regarding local food tourism are expected to vary significantly according to gender and age, reflecting differentiated motivational and experiential structures among young adults.

Classical decision theory establishes that individuals allocate resources to maximize utility by weighing expected benefits against perceived costs — a principle rooted in early economic theory (Bernoulli, 1738/1954; Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). Becker (1976) later extended this logic to consumer choice, proposing that all consumption behavior reflects rational utility maximization under resource constraints. However, the assumption of perfect rationality was challenged by Simon (1955, 1957), who introduced bounded rationality, emphasizing that human decision-making also involves cognitive limitations, heuristics, and affective influences.

This evolution in economic thought parallels developments in behavioral science. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) emphasizes that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape behavioral intentions. When integrated with principles from Utility Theory, TPB accommodates both rational evaluation (e.g., affordability, feasibility) and emotional and identity-driven motives. Accordingly, decisions about engaging with local cuisine are influenced not only by positive beliefs and social encouragement but also by perceived affordability and resource availability.

Thus, incorporating economic considerations into the TPB framework addresses a key theoretical gap by explaining why strong attitudes and social motivation may not always translate into behavioral intentions. This integrated perspective enhances explanatory power by accounting for constraints and opportunity structures that shape consumer choices — particularly relevant in culinary tourism, where financial trade-offs and affective motives converge.

In sum, although previous studies have demonstrated that attitudes, norms, and perceived control are central predictors of travel intentions, the evidence remains fragmented and often inconsistent. Few studies have explicitly combined psychological and economic frameworks to explain how internal motivations interact with external constraints and affective drivers. By integrating the Theory of Planned Behavior and Utility Theory, the present research addresses this gap, proposing a comprehensive model that explains how psychological constructs, economic limitations, and personal preferences jointly determine young adults' intentions toward local food tourism in the Greek context.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design and Theoretical Framework

The present study employed a quantitative research design to investigate how attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, economic constraints, and personal preferences influence young Greek adults' intentions to participate in local food tourism. The research framework integrates the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) with Utility Theory, enabling the study to capture both psychological and economic factors involved in travel decision-making (Dedeoglu et al., 2022). The target population consisted of young Greek adults aged 20–29, as this group is both highly engaged in travel and actively involved with digital media related to food and tourism. Participants were recruited using purposive criterion sampling, focusing on individuals who demonstrated an active interest in food and frequent travel behavior. A final sample of 411 respondents was obtained, based on established formulas for sample size calculation for the relevant population and confidence level.

Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire developed specifically for this research. The questionnaire was designed to capture all core constructs of the TPB - attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intentions - while also including dedicated items to measure economic constraints and personal food preferences, as identified as moderating variables in the literature. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." To ensure content validity and clarity, questionnaire items were adapted from established scales in the literature and revised for contextual relevance to Greek youth and culinary tourism.

Prior to administering the survey to the main sample, a pilot study was conducted with ten students from the target demographic. The purpose of this pilot phase was to assess the clarity and relevance of the items, as well as to identify any potential issues with item wording or redundancy. Feedback from pilot participants indicated that two items required rewording for improved comprehension, and one redundant question was eliminated to streamline the instrument. These revisions enhanced the questionnaire's clarity and ensured that the survey effectively captured the intended constructs related to attitudes, behavioral intentions, and the moderating effects of economic constraints and personal preferences.

Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous, and all respondents provided informed consent. Data collection was conducted online to maximize accessibility and ensure a broad geographic reach within the target age group. The final dataset was screened for completeness and quality before analysis.

Data analysis was performed using SPSS 21. Internal consistency of the measurement scales was assessed with Cronbach's alpha, and all constructs demonstrated satisfactory reliability ($\alpha > 0.7$). Exploratory factor analysis was used to confirm the underlying structure of the questionnaire and to verify construct validity. Relationships among the main variables were examined using Pearson correlation analysis, while hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to test the hypothesized relationships and the moderating effects of economic constraints and personal preferences. Group differences based on gender and age were explored using independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA, followed by appropriate post hoc analyses to clarify significant findings.

2.2 Sample and Procedure

The population of interest is 411 Greek young adults. This choice was made because of its originality. Also, it satisfied specific criteria that each respondent should meet to be eligible for inclusion in the study and to be able to answer the questionnaire. In other words, the purposive criterion sampling technique was used in the research (Patton, 2001).
Participants were required to be interested in food, to travel frequently (domestically or internationally), and to be adults above 20 years old with minimal dietary restrictions, following approaches used in similar studies (Boesen et al., 2017; Mak et al., 2016).
Yamane (1967) provides a simplified formula for calculating sample sizes for a 95% confidence level which was:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n is the sample size, N is the population size, and e is the precision level. Assuming that the population size is N=1,053,304 (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2024) and the precision level is e=5%=0.05 the result is

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N \cdot e^2} = \frac{1{,}053{,}304}{1 + 1{,}053{,}304 \cdot 0.05^2} = 399{,}585 \cong 400$$

The final sample was n=411 respondents.

Representativeness (sample–population relationship). Although purposive criterion sampling does not yield a probability sample, the study sought to enhance external validity by targeting young adults across multiple Greek regions via national online channels, and by including both genders and the full 20–29 age span used by the Hellenic Statistical Authority (2024). This alignment of core demographics (age bands 20–22, 23–25, 26–29 and gender composition) with national youth statistics supports the claim that the composition of the achieved sample approximates the broader youth population structure relevant for local-food–related travel behavior. Importantly, the achieved size (n=411) exceeds the Yamane-based minimum (≈400), further supporting adequacy for the intended multivariate analyses.

Generalizability (findings–context relationship). While purposive sampling limits probabilistic generalization, three elements increase the transferability of findings to comparable youth populations: (i) heterogeneity within the 20–29 cohort (age subgroups and gender), (ii) consistency of effects across subgroups observed in the analyses (t-tests/ANOVA/regressions reported in Section 3), and (iii) the use of validated scales and a clearly specified TPB–Utility framework. Accordingly, results are reasonably generalizable to young Greek adults sharing similar socio-demographic characteristics and travel engagement patterns, while broader generalizations beyond this frame should be made with caution due to the non-probability design.

2.3 Scale Development and Validation

Given the absence of a fully standardized instrument for examining the psychological and economic determinants of local food tourism among young Greek adults, a new measurement scale was carefully developed through a rigorous multi-stage process. Initial item generation was based on an extensive review of the literature, drawing from established and validated scales in previous studies (Choe & Kim, 2018; Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2016). The resulting items were designed to comprehensively capture the four key constructs of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)—attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intentions—as well as additional dimensions related to economic constraints and personal food preferences, reflecting their theorized role as moderating variables.
To ensure content validity and cultural relevance, a panel of five experts in tourism marketing, behavioral psychology, and consumer research reviewed the initial pool of items. The experts evaluated each item for clarity, relevance, and appropriateness within the Greek youth and tourism context. Based on their feedback, redundant or ambiguous items were removed, and several items were reworded for improved clarity and precision. This process ensured that the final set of items was both comprehensive and directly aligned with the research objectives.

A pilot study was then conducted with a small sample from the target demographic to further assess the scale's clarity and reliability. The feedback obtained led to additional refinements, including the rewording of two items and the removal of one redundant question. The final questionnaire consisted of 15 items, each measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."
To examine the underlying factor structure of the measurement instrument and ensure construct validity, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was first performed using Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation. Items with factor loadings of 0.75 or higher on their respective dimensions were retained, confirming the theoretical structure of the TPB constructs and the additional moderating factors.

The suitability of the data for factor analysis was first assessed through the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The KMO value was 0.89 and Bartlett's test was significant (χ^2 = 2,136.42, df = 105, $p < .001$), confirming the adequacy of the sample. The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal component extraction and varimax rotation revealed six components with eigenvalues greater than 1, corresponding to the theoretical constructs of the study (Attitudes, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioral Control, Behavioral Intentions, Economic Constraints, and Personal Preferences). The eigenvalues ranged from 1.12 to 4.86, explaining 78.4% of the total variance. These findings verified that the empirical structure of the data aligns with the hypothesized six-factor model, supporting the construct validity of the instrument.

The structure identified in the EFA was further validated using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) with AMOS 26.0 on the main dataset. The CFA results indicated a satisfactory model fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.84 < 5$; CFI = 0.943 ≥ 0.90; TLI = 0.928 ≥ 0.90; RMSEA = 0.061 [90% CI: 0.052–0.070] ≤ 0.08; SRMR = 0.047 ≤ 0.08. Convergent validity was established, as all factor loadings exceeded 0.70, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50, and composite reliability (CR) values exceeded 0.70. Internal consistency was further confirmed, with Cronbach's α coefficients for all constructs surpassing the 0.70 threshold. Discriminant validity was supported following the Fornell–Larcker criterion, as the square root of each construct's AVE was greater than its correlations with other constructs (Hair et al., 2019).

The computed values of composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct are summarized in Table 1, confirming the internal consistency and convergent validity of the measurement model.

Table 1: **Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted**

Construct	**No. of Items**	**Composite Reliability (CR)**	**Average Variance Extracted (AVE)**
Attitudes (ATT)	3	0.87	0.69
Subjective Norms (SN)	3	0.83	0.62
Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)	3	0.85	0.66
Behavioral Intentions (BI)	3	0.89	0.73
Economic Constraints (EC)	2	0.81	0.68
Personal Preferences (PP)	1	—	—

Note: All CR values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, and all AVE values are above 0.50, supporting convergent validity and reliability of the measurement model

The internal consistency of each construct was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with all scales demonstrating high reliability (Attitudes, α = 0.89; Subjective Norms, α = 0.91; Perceived Behavioral Control, α = 0.85; Behavioral Intentions, α = 0.78), all above the recommended 0.70 threshold. This comprehensive scale development and validation process ensured that the measurement instrument was robust, reliable, and well-suited to the research objectives.

The finalized research instrument consisted of 15 items, each mapped to the relevant TPB construct and economic/personal preference dimensions, as summarized in Table 2.

Although certain indicators may appear conceptually related across dimensions, this reflects the inherent interconnection among TPB constructs (attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control) and the utility-related facets of economic constraints and personal preferences. To address potential conceptual overlap, we assessed discriminant validity empirically. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses showed that items loaded predominantly on their intended factors with minimal cross-loadings. Convergent validity and internal consistency were satisfactory (all factor loadings ≥ .70; CR > .70; AVE > .50), while discriminant validity was supported both by the Fornell–Larcker criterion (square roots of AVE exceeding inter-construct correlations) and by HTMT ratios below .85 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler et al., 2015). Taken together, these results indicate that the latent dimensions are empirically distinct despite minor semantic proximity among certain indicators.

Table 2: **Statements, TPB Dimensions, and Utility Theory Focus Areas**

Statement	TPB Dimension	Utility Theory
1. The cost of local food affects the intention to visit a destination.	Behavioral Intentions	Economic Constraints
2. Local food, including specialties and authentic flavors, ranks among the top criteria for tourists when choosing a destination.	Attitudes	Personal Preferences
3. Gastrotourism has a positive impact on tourist destinations.	Behavioral Intentions	Personal Preferences
4. The process of preparing local food is an attractive factor for visiting a destination.	Behavioral Intentions	Personal Preferences
5. Economic constraints affect confidence in finding and enjoying local food while traveling.	Perceived Behavioral Control	Economic Constraints
6. The presence of local food serves as an indicator of the traveler's intention to visit a destination.	Behavioral Intentions	Personal Preferences
7. Local food serves as a criterion for choosing a destination because it reflects the culture of the destination and economic value.	Attitudes	Economic Constraints, Personal Preferences
8. Local food is a criterion for choosing a destination because of the experiences it offers.	Behavioral Intentions	Personal Preferences
9. Local food is a criterion for choosing a destination because of the satisfaction it provides.	Behavioral Intentions	Personal Preferences
10. Changes in the visitor's eating habits make local food a criterion for choosing a destination within economic constraints.	Behavioral Intentions	Economic Constraints
11. Economic constraints affect confidence in finding and enjoying local food when traveling.	Perceived Behavioral Control	Economic Constraints
12. Friends and family influence the decision to visit destinations known for their local food.	Subjective Norms	Personal Preferences
13. Positive reviews and recommendations about local food on social media affect travel decisions, considering economic constraints.	Subjective Norms,	Economic Constraints, Personal Preferences
14. Local food festivals and events increase interest in visiting a destination.	Behavioral Intentions	Personal Preferences
15. The availability of local food enhances the overall travel experience.	Attitudes	Personal Preferences

Source: Authors' research

2.4 Data Processing and Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 21 and AMOS 26.0, following a comprehensive and systematic approach. Initially, descriptive statistics—including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions—were calculated to provide an overview of the dataset and summarize participant responses across all measured variables. To evaluate the internal consistency of the measurement scales, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed for each construct, confirming satisfactory reliability.

Subsequently, the measurement model was validated through both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to examine the underlying factor structure, while Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in AMOS further tested the fit of the proposed measurement model, with detailed reporting of key parameters such as eigenvalues, percentage of variance explained, cumulative variance, and factor loadings.

To assess the relationships among the core constructs of the Theory of Planned Behavior and additional variables, Pearson correlation analyses were performed. Inferential statistical techniques were then employed to examine potential differences in behavioral intentions across gender and age groups; specifically, independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA were conducted, with Tukey's HSD post hoc tests applied where necessary to clarify significant findings.

Finally, hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed to evaluate the predictive effects of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on behavioral intentions, as well as to test the hypothesized moderating roles of

economic constraints and personal preferences within the integrated theoretical framework. This rigorous analytical strategy ensured a robust examination of the study's hypotheses and the complex relationships among the investigated variables.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Descriptive Statistics, Factor Loadings, and Scale Reliability

Tables 3a and 3b present the descriptive statistics [Mean (M), Standard Deviation (SD)], factor loadings from the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and Cronbach's α coefficients for each item and construct. This unified table provides a clear overview of item performance relative to the theoretical dimensions, as well as the internal consistency of each scale. For clarity of presentation, descriptive statistics and psychometric indicators are reported separately in Tables 3a and 3b.

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions) were computed using SPSS 21 to provide an initial overview of the dataset. These statistics illustrate the central tendency and variability of responses, serving as a baseline for subsequent analyses.

Internal consistency was further confirmed, as Cronbach's α values for all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory reliability. Factor loadings from the EFA were all above 0.75, supporting the dimensional structure of the instrument.

Finally, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) results provided additional evidence of construct validity, producing satisfactory fit indices consistent with recommended thresholds ($\chi^2/df = 2.84 < 5$; CFI = 0.943 ≥ 0.90; TLI = 0.928 ≥ 0.90; RMSEA = 0.061 [90% CI: 0.052–0.070] ≤ 0.08; SRMR = 0.047 ≤ 0.08).

Table 3a: **Descriptive Statistics for Questionnaire Items**

Item	Mean (M)	SD
1. The food is an important criterion for the intention to visit a tourist destination.	4.0	0.65
2. Local food, including specialties and authentic flavors, ranks among the top criteria for tourists.	4.2	0.60
3. Gastrotourism has a positive impact on tourist destinations.	4.1	0.62
4. The process of preparing local food is an attractive factor for visiting a destination.	4.0	0.63
5. Searching for information about local food on social media.	3.9	0.70
6. The presence of local food serves as an indicator of the traveler's intention to visit a destination.	4.0	0.65
7. Local food serves as a criterion and reflects the culture of the destination.	4.1	0.61
8. Local food is a criterion for choosing a destination because of the experiences it offers.	4.2	0.60
9. Local food is a criterion for choosing a destination because of the satisfaction it provides.	4.2	0.60
10. Changes in the visitor's eating habits.	3.8	0.70
11. I am confident in my ability to find and enjoy local food when traveling.	3.8	0.70
12. My friends and family influence my decision.	3.9	0.70
13. Positive reviews/recommendations about local food on social media.	3.9	0.70
14. Local food festivals and events increase my interest.	4.1	0.61
15. The availability of local food enhances the overall travel experience for me.	4.2	0.60

Note: N = 411. Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree.

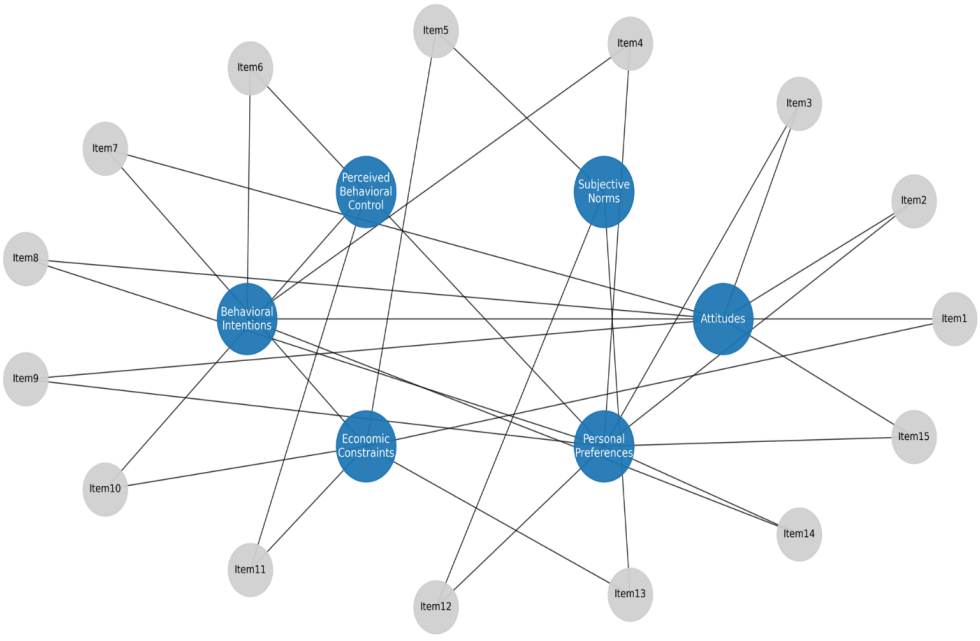
Table 3b: **Factor Loadings and Reliability Coefficients**

Item	Attitudes	Subjective Norms	Perceived Behavioral Control	Behavioral Intentions
1. The food is an important criterion for the intention to visit a tourist destination.	0.18	0.13	0.12	0.82
2. Local food, including specialties and authentic flavors, ranks among the top criteria for tourists.	0.85	0.16	0.15	0.20
3. Gastrotourism has a positive impact on tourist destinations.	0.87	0.21	0.18	0.22
4. The process of preparing local food is an attractive factor for visiting a destination.	0.84	0.18	0.20	0.21
5. Searching for information about local food on social media.	0.12	0.88	0.15	0.19
6. The presence of local food serves as an indicator of the traveler's intention to visit a destination.	0.20	0.13	0.12	0.85
7. Local food serves as a criterion and reflects the culture of the destination.	0.82	0.21	0.18	0.22
8. Local food is a criterion for choosing a destination because of the experiences it offers.	0.83	0.18	0.17	0.23
9. Local food is a criterion for choosing a destination because of the satisfaction it provides.	0.81	0.19	0.20	0.25
10. Changes in the visitor's eating habits.	0.12	0.13	0.85	0.15
11. I am confident in my ability to find and enjoy local food when traveling.	0.12	0.16	0.83	0.18
12. My friends and family influence my decision.	0.12	0.85	0.16	0.17
13. Positive reviews/recommendations about local food on social media.	0.12	0.89	0.14	0.15
14. Local food festivals and events increase my interest.	0.18	0.13	0.22	0.78
15. The availability of local food enhances the overall travel experience for me.	0.22	0.21	0.20	0.76
Cronbach's α	.89	.91	.85	.78

Note: Factor loadings of 0.75 and above are considered strong for the corresponding factors, while loadings below 0.24 are considered low for non-corresponding factors. Source: Authors' research.

Figure 1 illustrates the results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), showing the standardized loadings for each latent construct.

Figure 1: **Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Model showing standardized factor loadings for each construct.**



3.1.1 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed following the Fornell-Larcker criterion to ensure that each construct in the model represents a distinct theoretical dimension. As shown in Table 4, the square roots of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are presented on the diagonal, while the off-diagonal elements show the inter-construct correlations. In all cases, the square root of AVE for each construct exceeds its correlations with any other construct, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 4**: Fornell-Larcker Discriminant Validity Matrix**

Construct	1	2	3	4
1. Attitudes	**0.85**			
2. Subjective Norms	0.55	**0.88**		
3. Perceived Behavioral Control	0.60	0.50	**0.83**	
4. Behavioral Intentions	0.75	0.68	0.72	**0.82**

Note: Diagonal values (bold) are the square roots of AVE; off-diagonal values are inter-construct correlations.
Source: Authors' research

In addition to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, discriminant validity was further assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Henseler et al., 2015). The HTMT ratio provides a more stringent evaluation of discriminant validity, especially in complex models. Values below 0.85 are considered indicative of adequate discriminant validity. Table 5 displays the HTMT ratios for all construct pairs in the model.

Table 5**: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratios**

Construct Pair	HTMT Ratio
Attitudes – Subjective Norms	0.62
Attitudes – Perceived Behavioral Control	0.68
Attitudes – Behavioral Intentions	0.79
Subjective Norms – Perceived Behavioral Control	0.57
Subjective Norms – Behavioral Intentions	0.76
Perceived Behavioral Control – Behavioral Intentions	0.73

Note: All HTMT values are below the recommended threshold of 0.85.
Source: Authors' research

The results of the Fornell-Larcker matrix clearly demonstrate that each construct's square root of AVE is greater than any inter-construct correlation, confirming that the constructs are empirically distinct. Moreover, the HTMT ratios provide robust additional evidence of discriminant validity, as all values are well below the critical value of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). Taken together, these findings validate that the measurement model captures unique and theoretically meaningful dimensions of attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intentions in the context of culinary tourism among young Greek adults.

3.2 Pearson Correlation

Pearson correlations were calculated to assess the relationships between the TPB dimensions. Strong positive correlations were found among Attitudes, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioral Control, and Behavioral Intentions, indicating that as one construct increases, so do the others. (Table 6).

Table 6: **Pearson Correlations**

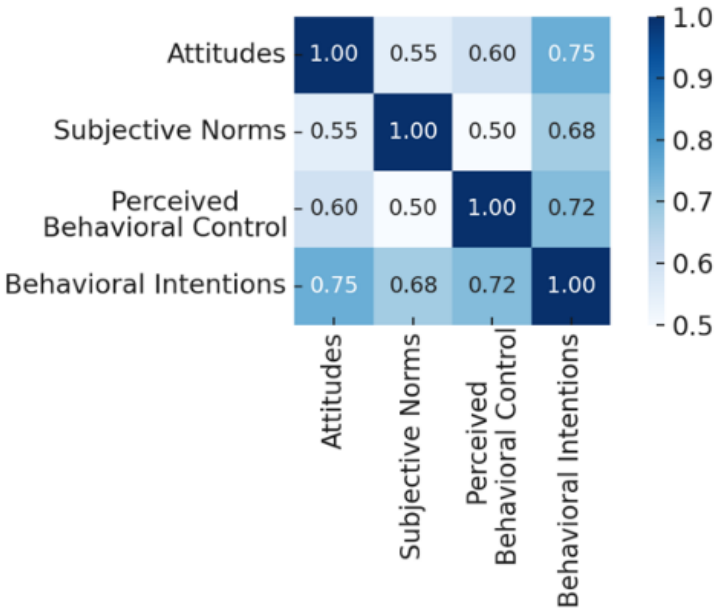
Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Attitudes	1			
2. Subjective Norms	.55**	1		
3. Perceived Behavioral Control	.60**	.50**	1	
4. Behavioral Intentions	.75**	.68**	.72**	1

**p < .01
Source: Authors' research

The results show strong positive correlations among all variables, with particularly high correlations between behavioral intentions and attitudes, as well as between behavioral intentions and perceived behavioral control.

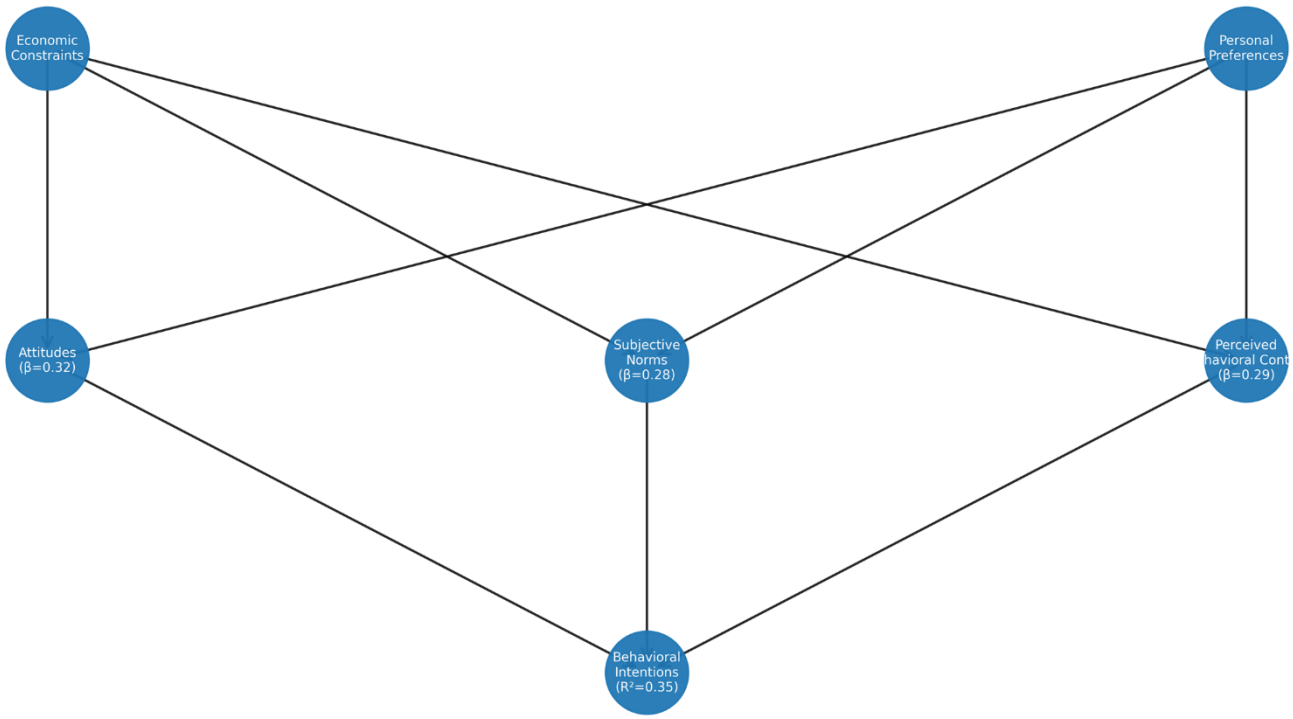
Figure 2 visually summarizes the strength of relationships between Attitudes, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioral Control, and Behavioral Intentions. The darker blue shades indicate higher correlations, supporting the narrative that these variables are strongly interrelated.

Figure 2: **Pearson Correlation Matrix of TPB Dimensions**



To further examine the hypothesized causal relationships among the constructs, the structural equation model (SEM) was estimated using AMOS 26.0. Beyond the bivariate correlations, the hypothesized relationships among the TPB constructs were further examined using a Structural Equation Model (SEM). The model showed a good fit to the data ($\chi^2/df = 2.35$, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.058, SRMR = 0.041). The standardized path coefficients and explained variance (R^2) are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: **Structural Equation Model (SEM) illustrating standardized path coefficients and explained variance (R^2)**



3.3 Difference between genders

To examine potential differences in interest in local food between genders, we employed an independent samples t-test. This method was chosen because it enables a comparison of the means between two independent groups, such as gender groups, while accounting for sample variability.

The t-test revealed a significant difference between genders, with females (M = 3.9, SD= 0.7)) showing a higher interest in local food compared to males (M = 3.7, SD=0.6), $t(409) = 3.5$, p = .001 (Table 7). This indicates that gender plays a significant role in the level of interest in local food, with females generally expressing a stronger interest.

Table 7: **Independent Samples T-test for Interest in Local Food by Gender**

Gender	*M*	*SD*	*t*	df	*p*
Male	3.7	0.6	3.5	409	.001
Female	3.9	0.7			

Source: Authors' research

3.4 One-Way ANOVA

The one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess whether interest in local food differs across age groups. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference, $F(2, 408) = 8.7$, $p < .001$, indicating that age has a significant influence on interest in local food. These findings suggest that as age increases, interest in local cuisine may also change, potentially due to variations in travel experience, financial stability, or evolving lifestyle priorities. Table 8 below summarizes the results, with between-groups variance demonstrating that differences among age groups are statistically meaningful.

Table 8: **One-Way ANOVA for Interest in Local Food Across Age Groups**

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	8.2	2	4.10	8.7	.000
Within Groups	185.2	408	0.45		
Total	193.4	410			

Source: Authors' research

These results support the notion that demographic factors such as age play a crucial role in shaping culinary tourism preferences, warranting further exploration into how these differences impact travel decisions.

3.5 Post Hoc Comparisons

To further investigate the differences in interest in local food across age groups, we conducted post hoc comparisons following a significant one-way ANOVA. This step was essential because, while the ANOVA indicated that age has a statistically significant impact on local food interest, it does not specify which particular age groups differ from each other. We chose Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) test for these comparisons because it is well-suited for controlling the family-wise error rate when multiple pairwise comparisons are made, ensuring that the overall Type I error remains low.

Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test showed that the 26-29 years group (M = 4.2) had a significantly higher interest in local food compared to both the 20-22 years group (M = 3.5, p < .001) and the 23-25 years group (M = 3.7, p = .002). No significant difference was found between the 23-25 years and 20-22 years groups (p = .197) (Table 9).

Table 9: **Post Hoc Comparisons for Interest in Local Food by Age Group**

Comparison	Mean Difference	p
26-29 vs. 20-22 years	0.7	.000
26-29 vs. 23-25 years	0.5	.002
23-25 vs. 20-22 years	0.2	.197

Source: Authors' research

These results suggest that interest in local culinary experiences increases with age among young adults, possibly reflecting factors such as increased travel experience, greater financial stability, or evolving culinary preferences. This analysis not only refines our understanding of demographic influences on culinary tourism but also supports targeted marketing strategies that account for these age-related variations.

3.6 Hierarchical Multiple Regression

To examine the impact of the TPB dimensions on Behavioral Intentions and the moderating effects of Economic Constraints and Personal Preferences, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted in two blocks. In this analysis, the dependent variable is Behavioral Intentions, operationalized in the survey as the decision to visit a destination for culinary experiences.

3.6.1 Block 1 Results

In the first block (see details in Table 9), we examined the effects of Attitudes, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control on Behavioral Intentions, operationalized as the decision to visit a destination. This model was statistically significant, F (4, 406) = 25.43, p < .001, with an R^2 of .20. This indicates that these three TPB dimensions together explained 20% of the variance in Behavioral Intentions (decision to visit a destination).

3.6.2 Block 2 Results

In the second block, interaction terms were introduced: Attitudes * Economic Constraints, Behavioral Intentions * Personal Preferences, Subjective Norms * Economic Constraints, and Perceived Behavioral Control * Personal Preferences. This model was statistically significant, F(12, 398) = 18.43, p < .001, with an R^2 of .35. This indicates an additional 15% in explained variance over Block 1, suggesting that the interactions between the dimensions of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and elements of Utility Theory (Economic Constraints and Personal Preferences) significantly enhance our understanding of travel decisions. Detailed results are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: **Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Results**

Variable	***B***	**95% CI for B**		**SE B**	**β**	***R²***	**Δ*R²***
		LL	*UL*				
Step 1							
Attitudes	0.30***	0.22	0.38	0.04	0.32***	.20	.20***
Subjective Norms	0.25***	0.15	0.35	0.05	0.28***		
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.27***	0.17	0.37	0.05	0.29***		
Behavioral Intentions	0.22***	0.12	0.32	0.05	0.24***		
Step 2							
Attitudes * Economic Constraints	-0.18**	-0.28	-0.08	0.05	-0.16**	.35	.15***
Attitudes * Personal Preferences	0.21***	0.11	0.31	0.05	0.19***		
Subjective Norms * Economic Constraints	-0.15**	-0.25	-0.05	0.05	-0.14**		
Subjective Norms * Personal Preferences	0.20***	0.10	0.30	0.05	0.18***		
Perceived Behavioral Control * Economic Constraints	-0.22***	-0.32	-0.12	0.05	-0.20***		
Perceived Behavioral Control * Personal Preferences	0.23***	0.13	0.33	0.05	0.21***		
Behavioral Intentions * Economic Constraints	-0.19***	-0.29	-0.09	0.05	-0.17***		
Behavioral Intentions * Personal Preferences	0.25***	0.15	0.35	0.05	0.22***		

Note. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; TPB = Theory of Planned Behavior; Economic Constraints = financial limitations impacting travel decisions; Personal Preferences = individual tastes related to local food offerings.

**p < .01. ***p < .001.

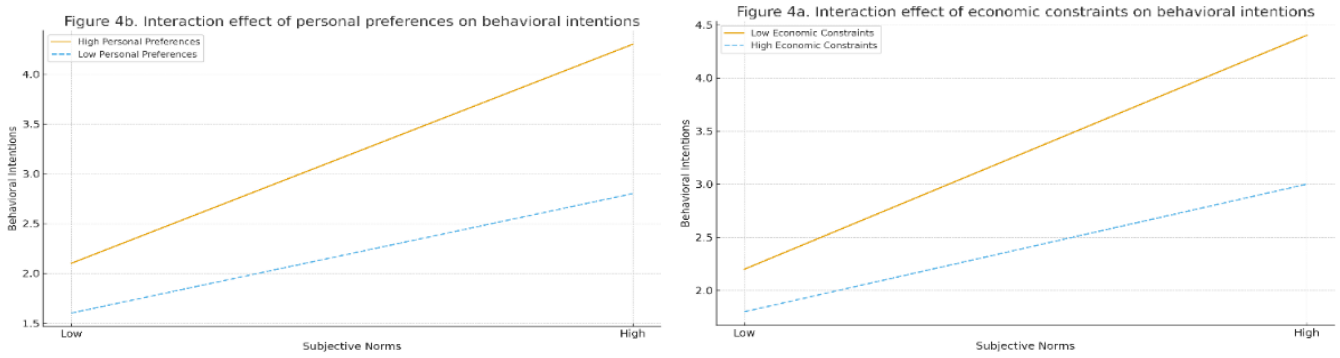
Source: Authors' research

The hierarchical multiple regression analysis indicated that TPB dimensions significantly predict Behavioral Intentions, with interactions involving Economic Constraints and Personal Preferences providing additional insights. Specifically, our findings reveal that economic constraints generally weaken the impact of TPB dimensions, diminishing the positive influence of favorable attitudes and perceived behavioral control on travel decisions, while personal preferences tend to enhance the effects

of subjective norms and behavioral intentions. This nuanced interplay suggests that, in contexts where financial limitations are more pronounced, the motivating power of positive attitudes may be curtailed, whereas strong individual culinary preferences can amplify social influences and decisiveness regarding travel. This comprehensive understanding offers valuable guidance for developing more targeted marketing strategies that address both economic and personal factors, thereby improving predictions of travel behavior in relation to local food.

To enhance the interpretation of the moderation effects obtained in the hierarchical multiple regression analysis, Figure 4 illustrates the interaction patterns between subjective norms and the two moderators. As shown, the positive relationship between subjective norms and behavioral intentions weakens under high economic constraints (Figure 4a), whereas it strengthens when personal preferences are high (Figure 4b). The plotted values correspond to standardized mean levels (1–5 Likert scale) derived from the estimated regression slopes.

Figure 4: **Interaction effects of economic constraints and personal preferences on the relationship between subjective norms and behavioral intentions.**



3.7 Hypotheses Testing

In this section, each hypothesis (H1–H6) is explicitly evaluated against the empirical results. This approach ensures transparency and allows the reader to clearly assess the validity of the proposed model.

H1: Attitudes positively predicted Behavioral Intentions (B = 0.30***, β = 0.32, 95% CI [0.22, 0.38]). This result indicates that young adults with favorable attitudes toward local food are significantly more likely to intend to engage in culinary tourism. *Supported.*

H2: Subjective Norms had a positive effect on Behavioral Intentions (B = 0.25***, β = 0.28, 95% CI [0.15, 0.35]). This suggests that social influence from peers and family, as well as social media, plays a crucial role in shaping intentions. *Supported.*

H3: Perceived Behavioral Control significantly predicted Behavioral Intentions (B = 0.27***, β =0 .29, 95% CI [0.17, 0.37]). This shows that when young adults perceive local food tourism as accessible and affordable, their intentions to participate increase. *Supported.*

H4: Economic Constraints weakened the effects of Attitudes (β = −0.16**), Subjective Norms (β = −0.14**), and PBC (β=−0.20***). This confirms that financial limitations reduce the strength of psychological drivers in predicting intentions. *Supported.*

H5: The interaction between PBC and Personal Preferences was positive (B = 0.23***, β = 0.21, 95% CI [0.13, 0.33]). This highlights that personal interest in authentic food amplifies the influence of control perceptions on intentions. *Supported.*

H6: Significant gender and age differences were found: t(409) = 3.50, p =.001; F(2,408) = 8.70, p < .001. This implies that demographic characteristics systematically shape behavioral intentions in culinary tourism. *Supported.*

3.8 Hypotheses Testing Summary

Table 11 provides a summary of the hypothesis testing results, clearly indicating the statistical outcomes and whether each hypothesis was supported. This overview strengthens the interpretability of the study.

Table 11: **Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results**

Hypothesis	Key effects	Test statistics	Status
H1	Attitudes → Intentions	B = 0.30***, β = 0.32, 95% CI [0.22, 0.38]	Supported
H2	Subjective Norms → Intentions	B = 0.25***, β = 0.28, 95% CI [0.15, 0.35]	Supported
H3	PBC → Intentions	B = 0.27***, β = 0.29, 95% CI [0.17, 0.37]	Supported
H4	EC moderates Att, SN, PBC → Intentions	Att×EC β = −0.16**, SN×EC β = −0.14**, PBC×EC β = −0.20***	Supported
H5	PP moderates PBC → Intentions	B = 0.23***, β = 0.21, 95% CI [0.13, 0.33]	Supported
H6	Differences by gender and age	t(409) = 3.5, p = .001; F(2,408) = 8.7, p < .001	Supported

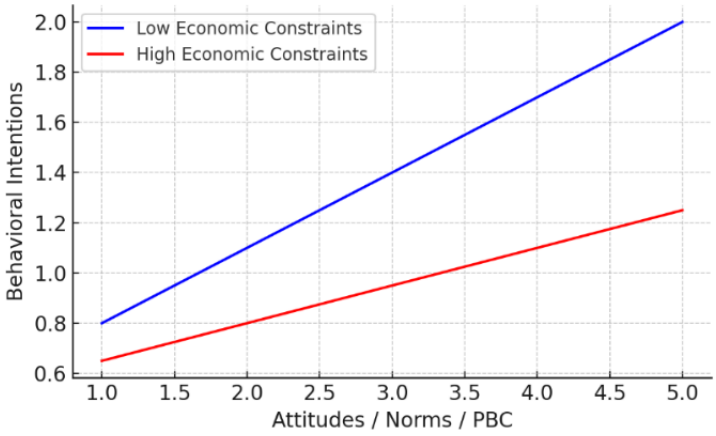
Note. Summary of hypothesis testing results (H1–H6), indicating whether each hypothesis was supported, partially supported, or not supported.
Source: Authors' research

As shown in the table, all six hypotheses were statistically supported, confirming the robustness of the proposed integrated model.

3.9 Interaction Plots for Moderation Effects

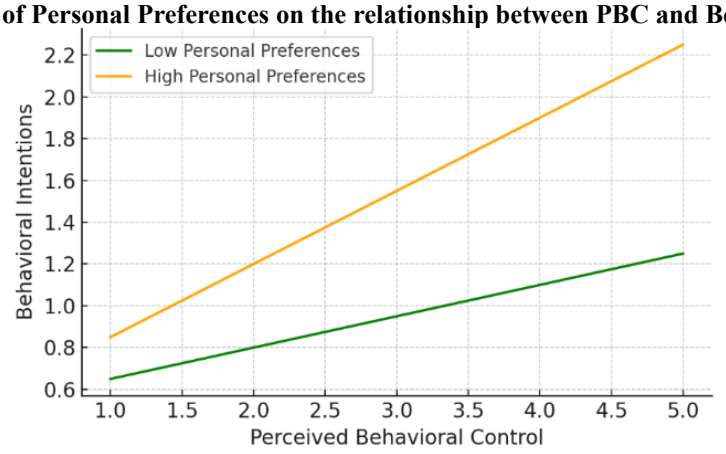
Figures 5 and 6 provide visual confirmation of the moderation effects. Specifically, Figure 5 shows that high economic constraints weaken the positive effects of Attitudes, Subjective Norms, and PBC on intentions.

Figure 5. **Moderation effect of Economic Constraints on TPB constructs.**



Conversely, Figure 6 demonstrates that when personal preferences for local food are strong, the positive effect of PBC on intentions is amplified.

Figure 6. **Moderation effect of Personal Preferences on the relationship between PBC and Behavioral Intentions.**



4. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings offer robust support for an integrated account of local-food tourism intentions among young Greek adults that combines the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) with utility-based reasoning. By explicitly testing six hypotheses, the study demonstrates that core TPB constructs predict behavioral intentions (H1–H3), while economic constraints and personal preferences condition these relationships (H4–H5), and demographic factors further differentiate intention formation (H6). Taken together, the results confirm that food-related travel decisions emerge from the interaction of psychological motivations, economic feasibility, and individual preferences.

Consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior, attitudes toward local food were found to positively and significantly predict behavioral intentions, supporting H1. This result aligns with prior TPB-based research in gastronomy and tourism, which shows that favorable evaluations of local cuisine enhance travel intentions (e.g., Choe & Kim, 2018; Baby & Joseph, 2023; Gupta et al., 2023). Beyond replicating earlier findings, however, the present study extends the literature by situating attitudes within a broader utility-based context. Here, positive attitudes reflect not only affective appreciation but also rational evaluations of experiential value and cost efficiency. This hybrid cognitive–affective appraisal helps explain why attitudes exhibit stronger predictive power than in earlier Greek studies, suggesting that young adults increasingly frame local food experiences as both pleasurable and economically justifiable choices.

In addition to individual evaluations, subjective norms exerted a significant influence on behavioral intentions, supporting H2. This finding is consistent with research highlighting the role of peers, family, and social media in shaping travel decisions (Su et al., 2018; Pop et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2023; Ahmad & Idris, 2024), as well as evidence from more collectivist cultural contexts (Rao Hill & Qesia, 2022; Zhang & Yao, 2022). Importantly, the present findings add nuance by emphasizing the growing importance of digitally mediated socialization. Among young Greek adults, subjective norms are increasingly shaped not only by close social circles but also by online micro-communities where authenticity cues and aesthetic representations of local cuisine circulate. This transformation of normative influence may account for the relatively strong norm–intention relationship observed compared with earlier, pre-digital studies in the same context.

Perceived behavioral control also emerged as a significant predictor of behavioral intentions, supporting H3. This result diverges from Angelakis et al. (2023), who reported non-significant effects of perceived control among food tourists in Crete. The discrepancy can be explained by three interrelated factors. First, the present model integrates Utility Theory, capturing both self-efficacy and financial control—dimensions often treated separately in previous Greek studies. Second, the sample reflects post-pandemic economic conditions, where financial planning and self-regulation are salient aspects of perceived control. Third, by incorporating cost–benefit reasoning into measurement, perceived behavioral control extends beyond affordability perceptions to encompass broader resource management. Together, these factors clarify why perceived control plays a significant role when psychological readiness and financial agency are jointly considered.

A central contribution of the study lies in demonstrating the moderating role of economic constraints, supporting H4. Consistent with cost-sensitivity theories in culinary tourism (e.g., Choe & Kim, 2018; Robinson & Getz, 2016), economic constraints were found to weaken the relationships between attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intentions. These findings extend prior work by modeling cost not as a background condition but as an interactive determinant that shapes intention formation. Even strong psychological motivations translate less effectively into intentions under high perceived financial pressure, highlighting the growing importance of price–value trade-offs in young adults' travel reasoning—particularly in post-crisis and post-COVID economic environments.

At the same time, personal preferences for authentic local food functioned as motivational amplifiers, supporting H5. In line with studies linking emotional and aesthetic engagement to food-related choices (Dao, 2019; Bui et al., 2022; Sukthankar et al., 2025), strong preferences intensified the impact of subjective norms on behavioral intentions. These results refine existing perspectives by showing that personal preferences are not merely stable dispositions but dynamic forces that convert social encouragement into committed intention. By heightening responsiveness to normative cues, authenticity-seeking and self-expression motives energize the intention-formation process beyond rational planning alone.

Demographic differences further enriched the interpretation of the findings, supporting H6. Gender and age-related variations in intention strength indicate that culinary tourism motivations are not homogeneous within the young adult segment. Consistent with prior research, women tended to emphasize cultural and relational aspects of food more strongly (Matalas et al., 2023), while age-related differences suggest increasing engagement with local food as experience and financial autonomy grow (Marques et al., 2023). These patterns underscore that psychological drivers and utility-based appraisals operate jointly with demographic characteristics to shape food-related travel intentions.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce the core propositions of the TPB (H1–H3) while extending the model by demonstrating that utility-related factors condition the strength of its psychological drivers (H4–H5). Rather than acting as distal antecedents, economic constraints and personal preferences operate as interactive mechanisms that influence how beliefs,

norms, and control perceptions translate into intentions. This integrated TPB–Utility framework offers greater explanatory power than TPB alone, particularly in contexts where cost–benefit judgments and identity-laden taste preferences coexist, such as local food tourism.

From a practical standpoint, the study provides clear guidance for destination managers and policymakers aiming to promote local-food experiences among young adults. Emphasizing authenticity alone is insufficient; affordability, accessibility, and transparent pricing are essential to mitigate the dampening effects of economic constraints. Low-cost tasting routes, student-oriented culinary events, and collaborations with local producers may enhance perceived behavioral control and strengthen intentions. Furthermore, leveraging social influence through trusted micro-influencers, community ambassadors, and food-focused digital platforms can be particularly effective when aligned with strong personal food preferences. Finally, segmentation strategies that account for gender and age differences may further enhance the effectiveness of culinary tourism initiatives.

Overall, this study advances the theoretical landscape by positioning economic constraints and personal preferences as interactive moderators within the TPB framework. By bridging psychological and economic reasoning, the proposed model offers a holistic lens for understanding culinary tourism behavior and provides a foundation for future research across tourism contexts where utility trade-offs and hedonic motivations jointly shape decision-making.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the role of psychological and utility-driven factors in shaping young adults' intentions to engage in local food tourism. By integrating the Theory of Planned Behavior with Utility Theory, the findings highlight that travel decisions related to local cuisine are not driven solely by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, but also by cost–benefit evaluations and personal preferences. This integrated perspective advances intention-formation research in tourism by demonstrating that financial reasoning and intrinsic taste motivation meaningfully condition the influence of TPB constructs, especially in post-pandemic economic environments.

Importantly, the results offer new insight into the role of perceived behavioral control within the Greek context. Whereas earlier studies reported mixed or negligible effects, this work identifies PBC as a significant predictor when conceptualized to include financial self-efficacy and resource planning. These findings suggest that contemporary food-related travel behavior among young adults reflects a dual evaluative process in which experiential aspirations coexist with pragmatic resource management.

Despite these contributions, several limitations must be acknowledged. One important methodological limitation concerns the pilot study, which included only ten participants. Although it provided useful insights for improving the clarity and wording of the questionnaire items, this small pre-test sample does not allow for statistical validation and should therefore be interpreted only as a preliminary step assessing face validity. The study's focus on young adults in Greece limits the generalizability of the results to other age groups, cultures, and populations with different travel patterns or culinary interests. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data raises the possibility of social desirability bias, as respondents may offer answers they perceive as favorable. The PP construct was measured with a single item, which may attenuate effects; future work could validate a short multi-item PP scale.

To address these limitations, future research should employ more diverse and representative samples across different cultural and socioeconomic contexts, and consider mixed-method designs, including qualitative interviews, ethnographic immersion, and observational approaches, to deepen understanding of the emotional, identity-based, and financial mechanisms shaping food-related travel intentions. Furthermore, examining the model in cross-cultural settings would clarify the extent to which utility-driven decision dynamics generalize beyond the Greek context. Finally, emerging themes such as sustainability, ethical food consumption, local producer support, and the evolving role of digital influencers present promising directions for advancing theoretical and practical insights into gastronomic tourism behavior.

In conclusion, this study offers a strengthened conceptual lens for understanding local-food travel intentions by combining traditional behavioral theory with utility-based evaluation. The results underscore the importance of viewing culinary travel decisions as both expressive and economically contingent, and provide a foundation for future research and strategic initiatives that seek to promote culturally meaningful and financially accessible food tourism experiences.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCES

In preparing this paper, the author used ChatGPT in order to improve the language and readability of the article. Following the use of this tool/service, the author have reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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