

1 Exploring the emotions and well-being of food neophobic travelers in the consumption 2 of comfort food

3 Abstract

4 Some travelers feel reluctant to try novel food in foreign countries. However, limited
5 empirical research has been done on tourists with food neophobic tendencies and their well-
6 being associated with comfort food consumption. The purposes of this research were to explore
7 the relationship between food neophobic tendencies and perceived well-being derived from
8 eating comfort food and the effects of emotions on food neophobic tendencies and perceived
9 well-being. The influence of demographic characteristics on the perceived well-being of
10 comfort food consumers was also investigated. Purposive sampling was conducted at two major
11 international airports in Taiwan, and a total of 381 responses were collected. The results showed
12 that: (1) food neophobic tendencies had a positive influence on perceived well-being when
13 consuming comfort food on international trips; (2) emotions played a moderating effect
14 between food neophobic tendencies and perceived well-being; and (3) demographics and
15 consumption characteristics did not affect neophobic tourists' perceived well-being. Based on
16 the results, suggestions for academic researchers and industry were proposed.

17 **Keywords:** Comfort food; food neophobic tendencies; perceived well-being; emotions;
18 international travel; Taiwan

19 1. Introduction

20 Living a quality life is essential for all humans. Most people's activities are driven by this
21 very basic motivation, and tourism is no exception (Yu, Smale, & Xiao, 2021). As a result of
22 increasing stress unavoidable in today's fast-paced societies (Soyka et al., 2016), comfort and
23 relaxation are liberally quoted as motives for traveling by tourism marketing agencies and travel
24 guidebooks. Food, as the primary source of energy (Troisi & Wright, 2017), is an essential
25 component of the travel experience (Adongo, Anuga, & Dayour, 2015; Hsu, Robinson, & Scott,

1 2018). In addition, food is often associated with pleasure and enjoyment (King, 2016; Mak,
2 Lumbers, Eves, & Chang, 2012; Therkelsen, 2015). Like daily routines and habits, food
3 consumption at destinations can be seen as the “ontological comfort of home” (Giddens, 1984;
4 Quan & Wang, 2004), supplying tourists with a sense of comfort, relaxation, ease, and security
5 relieving their anxieties caused by unfamiliar environments (Quan & Wang, 2004). However,
6 there tend to be differences across individuals in terms of the foods that people think of as
7 psychologically and emotionally comforting (Spence, 2017). For example, foods with high fat
8 or sugar provide consolation or a feeling of well-being in certain populations (Dubé, LeBel, &
9 Lu, 2005; O’Conner, Jones, Conner, McMillan, & Ferguson, 2008; Spence, 2017). This implies
10 that important psychological variables, such as food-related personality traits can affect
11 people’s food consumption and choices at tourism destinations (Mak et al., 2012; Siegrist,
12 Hartmann, & Keller, 2013), thereby influencing their emotions and well-being (Evers,
13 Adriaanse, de Ridder, & de Witt Huberts, 2013; Jiang, King, & Prinyawiwatkul, 2014; Soffin
14 & Batsell Jr., 2019).

15 Two main types of personality traits, namely neophobic and neophylic tendencies
16 (Fischler, 1988) have been applied to identify attitudes toward food (Cohen & Avieli, 2004).
17 People who demonstrate neophylic tendencies tend to search for novel and strange food and
18 those who demonstrate neophobic tendencies, by contrast, dislike or suspect new and unfamiliar
19 food (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). Generally, tourists are eager for new experiences different from
20 those in daily life (Cohen & Avieli, 2004) including exotic and strange dishes (Ji, Wong, Eves,
21 & Scarles, 2016). However, as Cohen (1972) proposed, tourists require a degree of familiarity
22 to enjoy their experience, indicating that not all tourists tend to try exotic cuisines (Baah,
23 Bondzi-Simpson, & Aye, 2020). Since eating at unfamiliar destinations appears to be risky or
24 threatening (Cohen & Avieli, 2004), some who travel abroad may avoid local food (Çanakçı &
25 Birdir, 2020; Tse & Crotts, 2005). The reluctance of unfamiliar food serves as a protective
26 function in a potentially hostile food environment (Ji et al., 2016).

1 Understanding the psychological states of people who are experiencing services to
2 promote customer satisfaction and happiness has become a priority for tourism operators (Carù
3 & Cova, 2007). Customer emotions are integral to service experiences (Mcintosh & Siggs,
4 2005). Recently, there is greater research interest in traveler food neophilia (e.g., Baah et al.,
5 2020; Dimitrovski & Crespi-Vallbona, 2017), whereas food neophobia and its effects on
6 perceived well-being have received less attention concerning comfort food consumption in
7 tourism. Therefore, to fill the gap in the literature, the purpose of this research was to investigate
8 the relationships among food neophobia, emotions, and the perceived well-being of travelers
9 who consumed comfort food. Additionally, based on previous works (e.g., Çanakçı & Birdir,
10 2020; Pourfakhimi, Nadim, Prayag, & Mulcah, 2020), this investigation further explored the
11 moderating effect on food neophobia and well-being after people consumed comfort food to
12 understand the benefits of comfort food more comprehensively to neophobic tourists at foreign
13 destinations.

14 **1.1 Food neophobic tourists and well-being**

15 The willingness of tourists to taste novel foods is often associated with individuality (Ji et
16 al., 2016; Pliner & Salvy, 2006) such as neophilia and neophobia (Fischler, 1988). Research has
17 shown that food neophobic tendencies are common in tourism (Wolff & Larsen, 2019).
18 Neophobic tourists tend to suspect or dislike unfamiliarity (Pourfakhimi et al., 2020; Veeck,
19 2010) and are more likely to consume familiar foods in foreign places to achieve psychological
20 comfort. As food consumption in tourism often occurs in unfamiliar environments (Mak et al.,
21 2012), such eating may provoke consumer worries about food safety and discourage them to
22 experience new cultures and foods at destinations (Veeck, 2010). Therefore, people are likely
23 to choose familiar food to reduce fear in travel (Fennell, 2017). From the perspective of a quest
24 for authenticity in gastronomical experiences, Özdemir and Seyitoğlu (2017) argued that
25 comfort seekers who expect secure and comfortable travel tend to choose familiar food so as
26 not to face unknown risks while authenticity seekers expect genuine local food experiences

1 despite higher risks and uncertainty (Sthapit, 2017). Similarly, Hjalager (2004) divided culinary
2 tourists into four typologies based on sociology and lifestyles. Tourists with recreational
3 lifestyles prefer familiar food to maintain their daily regimens, sense of security and comfort at
4 destinations. In addition to personal and intrapersonal factors, differences between cultures
5 have also been found to exert a significant influence on neophobic tendencies (e.g., Chang,
6 Kivela, & Mak, 2010; Chitra, Adhikari, Radhika & Balakrishna, 2016). For example, most
7 Asians are apt to shun novel foods, while Westerners are more encouraged to engage in quests
8 for novel foods (Cohen & Avieli, 2004).

9 Along with food consumption behavior, tourists' well-being has also been an important
10 issue in tourism and gastronomy research (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2017; Chang, 2013;
11 Chen, 2012; Kuo, Chen, & Chen, 2017). However, the definition of well-being in the literature
12 is still vague (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012). Generally, well-being refers to
13 satisfaction or happiness derived from optimal functioning (McDowell, 2010). Perceived well-
14 being has been measured in relation to the frequency and intensity of experiencing positive
15 emotions, living without suffering from negative emotions such as melancholy and anxiety, and
16 overall life satisfaction (Liang, 2014). Lu (1998) suggested that people assess their well-being
17 in two dimensions, inclusive of positive feelings, such as happiness, pleasure, and ecstasy, and
18 life satisfaction relating to status, work, or family. Based on the above discussion, well-being
19 can be defined as the holistic evaluation of and feelings about people's life (Diener & Seligman,
20 2004; Meiselman, 2016). Chen (2012) pointed out that feelings about certain things are likely
21 to affect well-being. As such, food consumption, especially comfort food may contribute to
22 well-being for people (Lu, 2009; Oliveira et al., 2013; Troisi, Gabriel, Derrick, & Geisler,
23 2015). In tourism, food consumption is not only a fundamental activity but also generates
24 awareness of self (Boniface, 2003). In other words, food choices on a trip may reflect people's
25 self-identity and thereby determine psychological comfort (Mak et al., 2012; Ujang, 2012), and
26 such food-related self-identity and corresponding food choices are closely related to perceived

1 well-being (Debuquet, Lombart, & Labbé-Pinlon, 2021). Tourists with food neophobic
2 tendencies may perceive lower well-being associated with authentic food experiences
3 (Pourfakhimi et al., 2020; Schnettler et al, 2013; Schnettler et al., 2017). Therefore, it can be
4 expected that neophobic tourists are more likely to improve their well-being by choosing
5 comfort food that is more in line with their personalities. Thus, the following hypothesis was
6 proposed:

7 H1. Food neophobic tendencies of outbound tourists who consume comfort food at
8 destinations will positively influence perceived well-being.

9 Research has shown that demographics can affect perceived well-being. For instance, Li
10 and Chen (2010) noted that demographic profiles are important predictors of consumption
11 preferences and perceived well-being for female spa experiences. Likewise, Chang (2012)
12 found significant differences in perceived well-being among different age and education levels.
13 The study of female self-guided travelers' well-being overseas revealed significant differences
14 in subjective well-being in terms of basic demographics and consumption behavior (Chu &
15 Yang, 2012). Thus, it is inferred that tourists perceive dissimilar levels of well-being due to
16 consumption behaviours and demographics. The second hypothesis was stated as follows:

17 H2. Outbound tourists' perceived well-being is determined by consumption
18 characteristics and demographics.

19 **1.2 Comfort food consumption and emotions**

20 Tourists are curious and excited about unfamiliar places but at the same time concerned
21 about different climates, living conditions, health standards, and safety (Cohen & Avieli, 2004).
22 Accordingly, local food could be an attraction or an aversion for visitors. While people try novel
23 food at foreign destinations, they do not completely abandon their core foods and favorites. To
24 reduce the strain and anxiety resulting from contact with a new culture (Winkelman, 1994),
25 familiar food in a comfortable environment during travel is essential, especially for comfort
26 seekers (Özdemir & Seyitoğlu, 2017). Comfort food, as a result, refers to food with which

1 individuals are familiar (The Oxford English Dictionary, 2009), providing psychological and
2 physical comfort (Wansink, Cheney, & Chan, 2003). For example, international chained-brand
3 products familiar to tourists are often adopted by destinations to reduce perceived risk (Fennell,
4 2017). From this point of view, comfort food is emotionally linked and inseparable from
5 memories such as home cooking (Spence, 2017) prepared in a traditional style, usually coming
6 from simple, ordinary recipes (Locher, Yoels, Maurer, & van Ells, 2005; Richman, 2013). For
7 example, the existing literature indicated that traditional food can make people relaxed, reduce
8 anxieties, and evoke memories, including memories of being fed by parents or grandparents,
9 sharing with family during childhood, or eating with someone important (Hong, 2014; Locher
10 et al., 2005; Ortolani, Garcia, Melo-Thomas, & Spadari-Bratfisch, 2014). To summarize,
11 comfort food brings to mind familiar food that represents security, home, or a link with a
12 specific person, place, or time with which the food has a positive association, providing
13 familiarity and psychological satisfaction for tourists (Spence, 2017). Comfort food
14 consumption is critical to tourist experience and influenced by factors such as stress, dietary
15 habits, and above all, personal traits.

16 In the context of food, emotions are indispensable to well-being (e.g., Ares, de Saldamando,
17 Giménez, & Deliza, 2014), and thus have drawn much attention from tourism studies (Ouyang,
18 Gursoy, & Sharma, 2017). Emotions are defined as a state of consciousness such as joy, sorrow,
19 fear, hate, or the like aroused by internal and external stimuli (Damasio, 2003) or formed from
20 personal experiences (Berridge & Winkielman, 2003). Emotions are direct and immediate
21 reactions to specific events, usually for a short period, which help people set priorities in their
22 lives or make decisions based on their feelings (Abro, Klein, Manzoor, Tabatabaei, & Treur,
23 2015). In psychology, emotions are considered an important influencing factor of human
24 behavior (Gross, 2015). For example, research showed that people select activities that bring
25 greater happiness to regulate their emotions (Cuijpers, van Straten, & Warmerdam, 2007). The
26 interaction between food and emotions has been noted in previous research as well (Köster &

1 Mojet, 2015). Emotions influence food choices and food consumption can affect people's
2 emotions in turn. In addition, researchers also indicated that pleasurable emotions lead to
3 positive attitudes and memories in relation to tourist destinations and accommodations (Eroglu,
4 Machleit, & Davis, 2003; Loureiro, 2014). Overall, emotions triggered by food are influential
5 in shaping food preferences and food consumption behavior (Gutjar et al., 2015). This aligns
6 with the research by Macht (2008), which suggested that eating and emotions are highly
7 correlated. Robust evidence shows that positive emotions and emotional contagion increase
8 well-being (Chang, Huang, Han, & Chang, 2017; Chung, Chung, & Tsai, 2012). Therefore,
9 outbound tourists with food neophobia may try to use comfort food to regulate emotions (Dubé,
10 LeBel, & Lu, 2005; Evers, Marijn Stok, & de Ridder, 2010), which will affect the relationship
11 between their food neophobic tendencies and perceived well-being. Therefore, the following
12 hypothesis was proposed:

13 H3. Emotions of outbound tourists who consume comfort food at destinations will further
14 moderate food neophobic tendencies and perceived well-being.

15 The overall model of outbound tourists' food neophobia, emotions, and behavioral
16 intentions is presented in Figure 1.

17 **[Figure 1 insert about here]**

18 **2. Methodology**

19 **2.1 Sampling design**

20 As outbound tourists were the main target in this study, data were collected in the two
21 biggest international airports in Taiwan (Taoyuan and Kaohsiung). By purposive sampling
22 design, only tourists who had had the experience of consuming comfort food within the past
23 year and those aged over 18 years old were invited to participate in the survey (Chang,
24 2017). During four weeks in March 2018, the questionnaire was distributed in the departure
25 and arrival halls by researchers. The main ideas of the instrument were also explained to the
26 participants to avoid missing responses and errors. Given a value for a confidence level of 0.95

1 and a 5% margin of error in this study, the required sample size would be 384 (Hazra, 2017).
2 Prior to the formal survey, a pretest (n = 58) was carried out to ensure reliability in the research.
3 A total of 400 respondents finished the formal survey where 381 were valid, resulting in a valid
4 response rate of 95.2%.

5 **2.2 Survey instrument**

6 To measure the three main constructs, scales were adapted from previous studies. Food
7 neophobic tendencies are reactions in tourists who want to consume familiar comfort foods due
8 to familiarity-seeking or facing other obstacles, such as getting tired of trying unfamiliar local
9 food. The food neophobic tendencies were measured by a 5-item scale, originally developed by
10 Mak et al. (2017) and Chitra et al. (2016). Perceived well-being was defined as individual
11 positive and subjective feelings. Six items were used for perceived well-being as identified by
12 Gao, Kerstetter, Mowen, and Hickerson (2017) including eudaemonic/psychological and
13 hedonic/subjective well-being. During travel, emotions can influence the decision-making
14 process of consumers. Therefore, based on the previous research by Locher et al. (2005),
15 emotions in the present study were conceptualized as tourists' positive or negative emotional
16 status after comfort food consumption. Five items were adapted from the emotions scale
17 recommended by Su and Hsu (2013), which contained six items about positive and negative
18 emotions; one item about negative emotions being removed due to its weak consistency in the
19 pretest (the Cronbach's α was lower than scholars' suggestions of 0.6) (Cronbach,1951). The
20 last part of the questionnaire gathered socio-demographic data (Chang, 2017; Chung, 2015;
21 Tsai, Huang, & Jan, 2017) including gender, age, education level, marital status as well as the
22 characteristics of travel consumption based on the studies by Ritchie, Chien, and Sharifpour
23 (2017), Jeng (2015), Ho, Ou-Yang, and Li (2011), Wang and Tseng (2009), and the Tourism
24 Bureau of Taiwan (2017). The characteristics of travel consumption provide more complete
25 profiles of respondents such as their travel purposes, average expenditures on comfort food,
26 frequencies of consuming comfort food, and information sources. All scales were five-point

1 Likert scales (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

2

3 **2.3 Data Analysis**

4 Data analysis was undertaken using SPSS 21.0. First, to assess the reliability of each
5 construct (variable), 60 respondents were invited to participate in a pilot study according to
6 suggestions in prior research (Wu, 2011). The results of Cronbach's α (> 0.60) indicated
7 acceptable internal consistency for all constructs (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Furthermore, to avoid
8 the potential problem of common method variance (CMV), Harman's single factor test was
9 used to determine whether CMV influenced the results. In the appendix, Table A1 shows that
10 no significant CMV was detected (Chen & Wang, 2017) as variance in the data was not largely
11 attributed to a single factor (36.67%). As the first step in analyzing the data, descriptive statistics
12 were assessed. Next, analysis of variance (ANOVA), as well as *post hoc* tests were used to
13 compare differences among the variable mean scores of respondents with varied demographics
14 and characteristics of travel consumption. If the results in one-way ANOVA F-tests reached
15 significant levels, *post hoc* analysis such as Tukey's HSD method is required to uncover specific
16 differences between three or more group means.

17 In addition, Pearson's correlation analysis was performed to measure the strength and
18 direction of the relationships between food neophobic tendencies, emotions, and perceived
19 well-being. Finally, hierarchical multiple regression was employed and the enter method in
20 which all variables in a block are entered in a single step was selected to test the model's
21 hypotheses. More specifically, in Model 1, food neophobic tendencies were first set as the
22 independent variable, while perceived well-being was regarded as the dependent variable. Next,
23 emotions were added and together with food neophobic tendencies were run in a regression to
24 assess their explanatory power on perceived well-being in Model 2. Finally, the interaction
25 between food neophobic tendencies and emotions was added creating Model 3. After
26 conducting hierarchical regression analysis, the model was:

1 $Y = 0.394X_4 + 0.346Z + 0.135XZ + 0.889$

2 where Y was perceived well-being, X₄ was food neophobic tendencies, Z was emotions
3 and XZ was the interaction between food neophobic tendencies and emotions.

4 **3. Results**

5 **3.1 Demographic characteristics and differences among respondent food neophobic** 6 **tendencies, emotions, and perceived well-being**

7 As shown in Table 1, the sample was comprised of slightly more females (n = 200, 52.5%).
8 Nearly half (n = 168, 44.1%) of the study's participants were aged 21-30 years, while 35.4%
9 were those aged between 31 and 40 years. Overall, respondents were generally well-educated
10 with at least a bachelor's degree (n = 353, 92.7%). An overwhelming proportion of respondents
11 were married with or without children (n = 336, 88.2%). In addition, for these participants, the
12 main purpose to travel abroad was sightseeing (n = 348, 91.3%). During travel, the majority of
13 the respondents spent NT\$1,001-3,000 on comfort food (n = 298, 78.2%), and self-guided tours
14 (n = 289, 75.9%) were more favored than guided tours (24.1%). The length of trips for most
15 respondents was 6 to 8 days (n = 289, 75.9%), and 64.3% traveled with friends, followed by
16 family or relatives (23.6%). More than 80% of participants had purchased comfort food once
17 or twice in foreign countries. Furthermore, the information on comfort food was accessed from
18 print media such as newspapers, magazines, and tourist guidebooks (38.8%) as well as through
19 the Internet (32.8%). In addition, the data were analyzed with one-way ANOVA and *post hoc*
20 test (Tukey's HSD). Demographics and consumption characteristics did not exert significant
21 influences on food neophobic tendencies, perceived well-being, and emotions. The results are
22 summarized in Table 1.

23 **[Table 1 insert about here]**

24 **3.2 Profiles of the items**

25 The results of descriptive analysis for all variables were demonstrated in Table 2.
26 Respondents in this study generally showed their resistance and conservative attitude toward

1 unfamiliar and strange food in foreign countries including distrust ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.76$) and
2 fear of new food ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.69$). As a result, new food may become a barrier to food
3 consumption for these travelers, who claimed themselves to be picky eaters ($M = 4.07$, $SD =$
4 0.70). In terms of individual's hedonic/subjective well-being, respondents believed that their
5 life was close to ideal ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.94$), leading to satisfaction with the status quo of their
6 life such as "I have got what I want in my life so far" ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.71$). Additionally, items
7 within eudaemonic/psychological well-being including helping others, leading a meaningful
8 life, and fearlessness in the face of challenges in life were highly rated as well. Lastly, the
9 experience of eating comfort food also triggered respondent emotions, mostly positive ones.
10 For example, overall, they felt comfortable ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.70$) as well as happy ($M = 4.03$,
11 $SD = 0.72$) rather than negative emotions such as anger ($M = 1.89$, $SD = 0.67$) or distress ($M =$
12 1.85 , $SD = 0.61$).

13 **[Table 2 insert about here]**

14 **3.3 Correlations among food neophobic tendencies, emotions, and perceived well-being**

15 Pearson correlation coefficients and the absolute values of correlation coefficients were
16 calculated as proposed by Wu (2011). Significant positive correlations existed between the three
17 variables of food neophobic tendencies, perceived well-being, and emotions. Food neophobic
18 tendencies were correlated with perceived well-being ($r = .524$, $p < 0.01$). Also, food neophobic
19 tendencies and emotions were correlated ($r = .300$, $p < 0.01$). Additionally, the correlation
20 between perceived well-being and emotions was moderate ($r = .454$, $p < 0.01$) (see Table 3).
21 This inferred that when travelers have higher food neophobic tendencies, their perceived well-
22 being and emotions became more positive (e.g., happy and relaxing) after consuming comfort
23 food. In addition, emotions became more positive with improved perceived well-being.

24 **[Table 3 insert about here]**

25 **3.4 Hypothesis testing**

26 The results were shown in Table 4 and Figure 2. The total variance of perceived well-being

1 explained by food neophobic tendencies and emotions was 37.2% (R^2), $F(2, 378) = 111.857, p$
2 < 0.001 . Furthermore, in Model 3, the interaction effect of two independent variables increased
3 the explanatory power of the model to 37.9% and explained 0.7% of the change in explanatory
4 power (ΔR^2) significantly, $F(1, 377) = 4.181, p < 0.05$. In regards to main effects, food
5 neophobic tendencies exerted a positive influence on perceived well-being ($\beta = .422, p < 0.001$).
6 That is travelers with higher food neophobic tendencies perceived higher well-being in their
7 life, supporting hypothesis (H1). However, there were no significant differences among variable
8 mean scores of respondents' perceived well-being according to the *post-hoc* test. Consequently,
9 the second hypothesis (H2) was not supported. Perceived well-being was also influenced by
10 emotions positively ($\beta = .339, p < 0.001$), and the path coefficient value from the interaction
11 between food neophobic tendencies and emotions to perceived well-being was .084, reaching
12 a significant level ($p < 0.05$). This implies that emotions triggered from comfort food experience
13 will further enhance the relation between food neophobic tendencies and perceived well-being.
14 As a result, the third hypothesis (H3) was supported. Simple slope tests indicated that food
15 neophobic tendencies had a stronger effect in higher emotions group ($B = 0.457, p < 0.001$)
16 than lower emotions group ($B = 0.331, p < 0.001$) (see Figure 3).

17 In summary, based on the results of the regression, two hypotheses were supported.
18 outbound tourists with food neophobic tendencies had greater perceived well-being when
19 eating comfort food. Emotions had a moderation effect after consuming comfort food,
20 indicating that positive emotions after consumption of comfort food had a positive impact on
21 food neophobic tendencies and perceived well-being.

22 [Table 4 insert about here]

23 [Figure 2 insert about here]

24 [Figure 3 insert about here]

25 4. Discussion

26 The research examined the relationship between food neophobic tendencies and the

1 perceived well-being of tourists who consumed comfort food and explored the effect of
2 emotions on neophobic tendencies and perceived well-being. When traveling abroad,
3 neophobic tourists prefer their familiar home comforts over the unfamiliar tourist services of
4 locally owned businesses (Juan-Vigaray & Sarabia-Sánchez, 2013; Ng, Lee, & Soutar, 2007).
5 In other words, they are more likely to remain within the tourist bubble (Cohen, 1972). In this
6 regard, comfort food might be consumed once they experience negative emotions or pressures
7 at strange destinations (Blasche, Weissensteiner, & Marktl, 2012; Fennell, 2017; Van Strien,
8 Gibson, Bañosa, Cebolla, & Winkens, 2019). Besides, tourists have their food preferences and
9 choices, which were proven to influence satisfaction with life (Schnettler, Miranda, Sepúlveda,
10 & Denegri, 2011; Schnettler et al., 2012) and well-being (Gong, Li, Xie, & Tan, 2020). Tasty
11 food choices, particularly high-fat and high-sugar foods make people happy. For example, ice
12 cream on a hot summer day is a better mood booster than other foods (Bublitz, Peracchio, &
13 Block, 2010; Mujcic & Oswald, 2016). However, to date, the relationship between food
14 neophobic tendencies and perceived well-being has remained unclear in the field of tourism.

15 As well-being has attracted significant attention in both academia and everyday life (Lim
16 & An, 2021), studies have shown that there is a relationship between well-being and food, and
17 that food is an important contributing factor in perceived well-being (Ares et al., 2015; Ares,
18 de Saldamando, Giménez, & Deliza, 2014). This study found that food neophobic tendencies
19 had a significant and positive impact on perceived well-being (H1). That is, tourists with food
20 neophobia perceived a higher level of well-being as such neophobic traits may contribute to
21 involvement in a specific food, namely comfort food, and avoidance of untried food at foreign
22 destinations, which may keep their well-being subsequently. The results of this study
23 correspond to the research of Chen (2012) and Chen and Su (2011), which empirically
24 investigated the role of dining in tourists' well-being. This research further highlighted the
25 significance and benefits of comfort food for neophobic tourists, which has been overlooked in
26 previous studies.

1 Second, an unexpected finding was that no significant differences were found in perceived
2 well-being by demographics (H2). These results contradict the work by McCabe and Johnson
3 (2013) and Nawijn and Mitas (2012), who suggested that consumption characteristics affect
4 perceived well-being associated with consuming comfort food. This study mainly focused on
5 neophobic travelers as well as their comfort food experiences in foreign countries, and most
6 respondents were married young adults with high educational levels, traveling abroad
7 independently with friends for sightseeing. In other words, the distribution of respondents in
8 this research was rather uniform, consequently leading to similar perceptions.

9 Finally, emotions influenced the relationship between food neophobic tendencies and
10 perceived well-being associated with consuming comfort food. Emotions had a moderation
11 effect on food neophobic tendencies and perceived well-being, which means that emotions
12 positively affected the food neophobic tendencies and perceived well-being of tourists
13 consuming comfort food (H3). Previous studies have shown that positive consumption
14 emotions improve perceived well-being as well as affecting purchase intentions (Gilovich,
15 Kumar, & Jampol, 2015; Kang & Jin, 2015; Mishra & Bakshi, 2016). This analysis was
16 conducted to examine the effect of comfort food consumption on the well-being of tourists,
17 demonstrating that emotions moderated the relationship between food neophobia and well-
18 being. The results revealed that tourists with food neophobia demanded comfort food to
19 stimulate positive emotions and thereby improve perceived well-being.

20 **4.1 Theoretical and practical implications**

21 Previous studies on food neophobia have mostly focused on tourist food consumption,
22 preferences, and cultural differences in destinations (Chitra et al., 2016). However, comfort
23 food can have an empathic effect on emotional attachment (Liu, 2014) and it is possible to
24 associate well-being through comfort food (Spence, 2017). Past research has confirmed that
25 travelers moderate their emotions in many ways, including seeking social support or sharing
26 with family, friends, and spouses/partners (Gao & Kerstetter, 2018). Positive emotions are more

1 likely to lead to positive behaviors during vacations (Servidio & Ruffolo, 2016). This study
2 addresses the gap in previous studies on the relationship between food neophobia, comfort food,
3 and well-being by indicating that tourists with food neophobia experience positive effects on
4 well-being after comfort food access.

5 Restaurants and other tourism operators are concerned with tourist intentions to purchase.
6 This research showed that food neophobic tendencies create a barrier to food consumption for
7 some outbound tourists. Being comfort seekers, tourists with neophobic tendencies are likely
8 to avoid strange and unfamiliar local food. Comfort food plays an important role for the
9 neophobes at foreign destinations as well as affecting emotions which can significantly
10 influence well-being. To increase the willingness to purchase, restaurant operators need to
11 provide familiar and well-known foods based on the market and different types of travelers,
12 e.g., Japanese-and Korean-style breakfasts are now quite common in hotel restaurants in Asia.

13 **4.2 Limitations and future research needs**

14 This research targeted only Taiwanese who have traveled abroad and consumed comfort
15 food. Hence, the representativeness of and inferences from these data are somewhat limited.
16 Secondly, in terms of emotions, only five emotions were contained in this study based on Su
17 and Hsu (2013). Future research should consider other emotions that are influential in shaping
18 tourist neophobic attitudes toward local food as well as perceived well-being at foreign
19 destinations. Future studies are needed to explore food preferences and perceived well-being
20 among other national and ethnic groups due to cultural differences and eating habits. Moreover,
21 given that the significance of domestic tourists has been re-emphasized since COVID-19
22 (Volgger, Taplin, & Aebli, 2021), it is now more urgent to explore their reuse intentions due to
23 lower spending capacity of domestic compared to international tourists (Archer, 1978; Jafari,
24 1986; Sheldon & Dwyer, 2010). In this vein, potential mediators such as food involvement and
25 satisfaction and variables such as tourist repurchase intentions and loyalty to local food should
26 be considered. Qualitative methods (e.g., in-depth interviews, focus groups, and Delphi expert

1 opinions) should be used for a more in-depth analysis of comfort food consumption when
2 traveling internationally as well as domestically.

3 **5. Conclusion**

4 From the perspective of food neophobia, this study explored the relationships between
5 tourists' food neophobia, emotions affected by comfort food experience, and perceived well-
6 being. Based on the results, the findings are summarized as follows: (1) in the relationship
7 between tourist food neophobic tendencies and perceived well-being, food neophobic
8 tendencies positively affected perceived well-being; (2) in the relationship between tourist
9 emotions and well-being, when neophobic tourists derived positive emotions from consuming
10 comfort food, their perceived well-being increased significantly; (3) emotions moderated and
11 strengthened the relationship between food neophobic tendencies and perceived well-being,
12 and finally (4) no significant differences existed in perceived well-being among respondents.
13 Overall, this research addressed the gap in previous studies on the relationships among food
14 neophobia, comfort food, and well-being by indicating that tourists with food neophobia
15 experienced positive effects on well-being after comfort food consumption. The findings offer
16 insights for guiding future research on food neophobia and comfort food in tourism.

17 **Appendix A**

18 See Table A1

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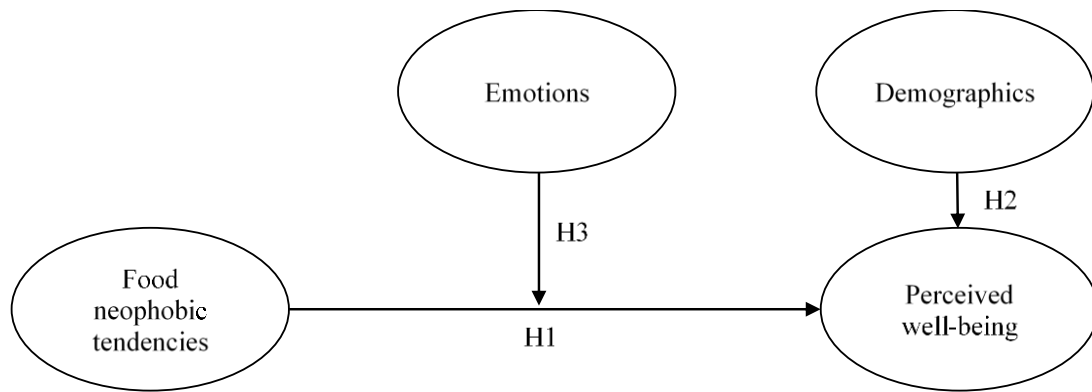
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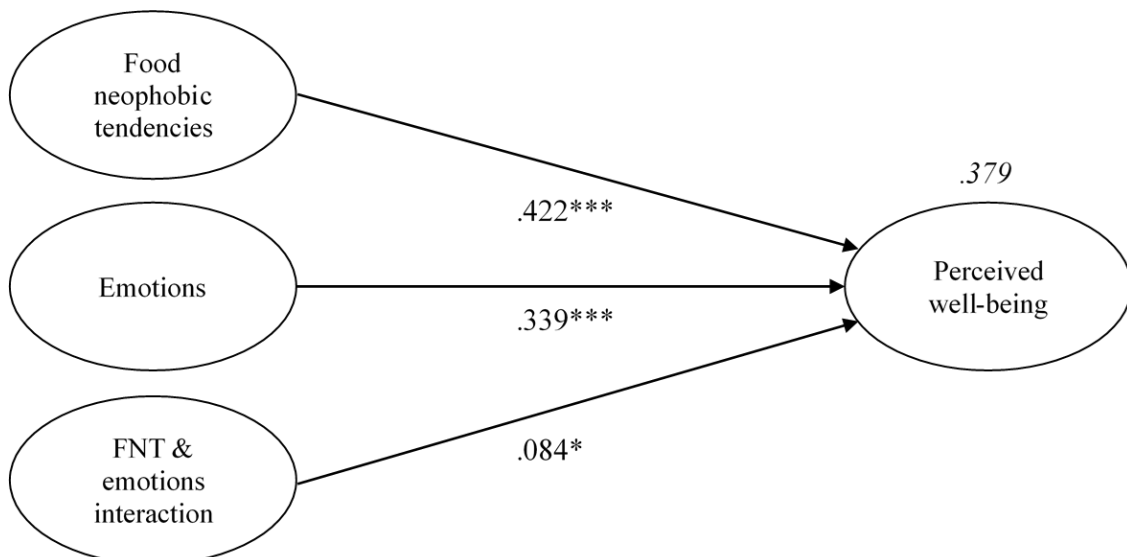
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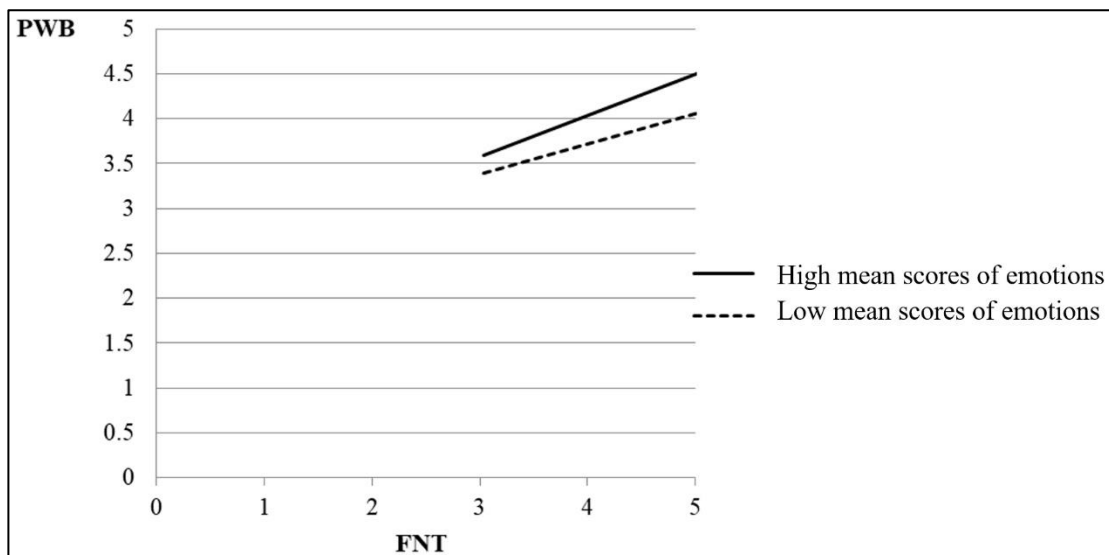
Figure 1. Proposed model.



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Note. $*p < .05$; $***p < .001$; FNT = food neophobic tendencies.

Figure 2. Path coefficients of regression analysis (variance explained in italic).



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Note. FNT = food neophobic tendencies; PWB = perceived well-being.

Figure 3. One-way interaction plot.

1 **Table 1**

2 Respondent characteristics and comparisons of variables among respondents using one-way
 3 ANOVA and Tukey's HSD (n = 381).

Demographics/ variables		N	%	FNT		PWB		Emotions	
				M	F	M	F	M	F
Gender	Male	181	47.5	4.04	0.20	3.91	0.05	4.06	0.68
	Female	200	52.5	4.06		3.90		4.10	
Age	Below 21	5	1.3	3.68	1.01	3.90	1.61	4.20	1.98
	21-30 years	168	44.1	4.04		3.89		4.03	
	31-40 years	135	35.4	4.05		3.92		4.17	
	41-50 years	36	9.4	4.13		3.97		3.98	
	50-60 years	18	4.7	3.93		3.64		3.98	
	Above 60	19	5.0	4.14		4.03		4.15	
Education	Finished junior school	9	2.4	4.02	0.28	3.69	0.79	4.04	0.22
	Finished high school	19	5.0	4.14		3.87		4.13	
	Finished a bachelor's degree	329	86.4	4.04		3.92		4.09	
	Finished a master's degree or higher	24	6.3	4.09		3.87		3.98	
Marital status	Single	45	11.8	3.94	2.51	3.81	1.10	4.05	0.19
	Married without children	131	34.4	4.12		3.91		4.10	
	Married with children	205	53.8	4.03		3.92		4.08	
Travel purpose	Sightseeing	348	91.3	4.04	0.37	3.89	2.25	4.08	0.26
	Business	21	5.5	4.11		4.09		4.02	
	Visiting friends and relatives	12	3.1	4.13		4.04		4.13	
Average expenditure on comfort food (NT\$)	Under 1,000	44	11.5	4.00	0.48	3.81	1.21	3.95	2.14
	1,001-3,000	298	78.2	4.06		3.92		4.09	
	3,001-5,000	14	3.7	3.93		3.80		4.09	
	5,001-7,000	20	5.2	4.07		4.00		4.27	
	7,001 or more	5	1.3	4.24		3.70		3.84	
Means of traveling abroad	Self-guided tour	289	75.9	4.07	0.26	3.91	0.06	4.08	0.05
	Semi-guided tour	92	24.1	3.98		3.89		4.07	
Trip length	3-5 days	64	16.8	4.11	1.11	3.89	0.49	4.03	1.78
	6-8 days	289	75.9	4.04		3.91		4.09	
	9-11 days	17	4.5	4.20		3.84		4.02	
	12 days or longer	11	2.8	3.84		4.00		4.11	
Travel companions	Single	25	6.6	3.97	0.44	3.81	1.81	4.06	0.11
	Friends	245	64.3	4.04		3.88		4.07	
	Family or relatives	90	23.6	4.08		3.95		4.10	
	Colleagues	21	5.5	4.10		4.08		4.10	
Frequency of consuming comfort food when being abroad	1	95	24.9	4.12	0.96	3.89	0.21	4.04	0.43
	2	227	59.6	4.01		3.91		4.10	
	3	44	11.5	4.10		3.94		4.03	
	4	12	3.1	4.00		3.86		4.12	
	5 or more	3	0.8	3.87		3.72		4.00	
Sources of information on comfort food	Internet	125	32.8	4.01	1.95	3.88	0.86	4.00	1.75
	Print media (e.g., newspapers, magazines, and travel guidebooks)	148	38.8	4.01		3.88		4.10	
	TV advertisement	16	4.2	4.25		3.96		4.14	
	Food programme	27	7.1	4.06		3.91		4.14	
	Friends or relatives	65	17.1	4.17		4.00		4.15	

- 1 Note. N = frequencies; FNT = food neophobic tendencies; PWB = perceived well-being; M = mean
- 2 scores of variables; F = F value; n = number of study participants.

1 **Table 2**
 2 Descriptive and reliability statistics for food neophobic tendencies, perceived well-being
 3 and emotions scales (n = 381).

Food neophobic tendencies (Cronbach's $\alpha = .696$)	M	SD
I do not trust new food	4.16	0.76
Food looks too strange to try	3.90	0.84
I am afraid to try new food	4.18	0.69
I am a picky eater	4.07	0.70
I can eat almost any kind of foods	2.06	0.79
Perceived well-being (Cronbach's $\alpha = .542$)	M	SD
<i>Hedonic/subjective well-being</i>		
Most of my life is close to ideal	4.14	0.74
I have got what I want in my life so far	4.08	0.71
If I had to live my life again, I would not want to change anything	4.06	0.73
<i>Eudaemonic/psychological well-being</i>		
It is important for me to challenge myself and experience new life	3.29	1.23
As described by people, I am a helpful person who is willing to share time with others	3.91	0.82
I am not one of those people who lead an aimless sort of life	3.94	0.84
Emotions (Cronbach's $\alpha = .688$)	M	SD
<i>Positive emotions</i>		
The experience of this consumption of comfort food made me excited	3.94	0.78
The experience of this consumption of comfort food made me happy	4.03	0.72
The experience of this consumption comfort food made me comfortable	4.17	0.70
<i>Negative emotions</i>		
The experience of this comfort food consumption made me angry	1.89	0.67
The experience of this comfort food consumption made me distressed	1.85	0.61

4 Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; n = number of study participants.

5 **Table 3**
 6 Correlations among food neophobic tendencies, perceived well-being and emotions.

Variables	A	B	C
A. Food neophobic tendencies	1		
B. Perceived well-being	0.524**	1	
C. Emotions	0.300**	0.454**	1

7 Note. ** $p < 0.01$; n = number of study participants.

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1 **Table 4**

2 Hierarchical regression results for the influence of food neophobic tendencies and emotions
 3 on perceived well-being (n = 381).

Regression model	B	S.E.	β	<i>t</i>	VIF
DV = Perceived well-being					
Model 1 ($\Delta R^2 = 0.275^{***}$)					
(Constant)	1.925	0.167		11.554	
Food neophobic tendencies	0.489	0.041	0.524 ^{***}	11.980	1.000
Model 2 ($R^2 = 0.372$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.097^{***}$)					
(Constant)	0.936	0.202		4.634	
Food neophobic tendencies	0.398	0.040	0.426 ^{***}	9.973	1.099
Emotions	0.333	0.044	0.327 ^{***}	7.645	1.099
Model 3 ($R^2 = 0.379$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.007^*$)					
(Constant)	0.889	0.203		4.392	
Food neophobic tendencies	0.394	0.040	0.422 ^{***}	9.915	1.101
Emotions	0.346	0.044	0.339 ^{***}	7.889	1.121
Interaction	0.135	0.066	0.084 [*]	2.045	1.020
Total $R^2 = 0.379$, Total <i>Adj. R</i> ² = 0.374, $F = 76.593$, $p < 0.001$					
Durbin-Watson = 1.848 > $d_u = 1.841$ (k=1, n = 400, $\alpha = 0.05$)					

4 Note. * $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$; n = number of study participants; DV = dependent variable; B =
 5 unstandardized regression coefficient; S.E.= standard error; β = standardized
 6 regression coefficient, t = t value; VIF= variance inflation faction.

7 **Table A1**

8 Common method variance (CMV) test.

Factor	Initial eigenvalues			Average of variance extracted		
	Eigenvalue	Variance %	Cumulative variance %	Eigenvalue	Variance %	Cumulative variance %
1	4.77	36.67	36.67	4.77	36.67	36.67
2	1.61	12.41	49.07	1.61	12.41	49.07
3	1.20	9.21	58.28	1.20	9.21	58.28
4	1.05	8.06	66.34	1.05	8.06	66.34

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