**Chaordic Destination Image Formulation through Gastronomy Perspectives: Evidence from Greece**

**Abstract**

**Purpose:** The study evaluates the complex behaviour of tourists in terms of the formulation of destination image related to its gastronomy. Through the examination of gastronomic image, memorability of experiences and food personality traits such as neophobia and neophilia, the research investigates the chaordic (chaos versus order) systems and provides specific pathways that formulate the gastronomic destination image.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Using fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA), the study examines the chaordic relations amongst memorable tourism experiences, gastronomic neophobia and neophilia, and gastronomic image upon the formulation of destination image. It also includes two grouping variables (nationality [stratified]; age).

**Findings:** Three sufficient configurations were revealed that can lead to the formulation of destination image, explaining the attributional gastronomic decision-making of holidaymakers. These solutions concern: (i) food personality traits (ii) generated experience, and (iii) gastronomic image.

**Research limitations/implications:** Despite the need for examining the complexity and the chaordic systems in the gastronomic domain, the lack of a sufficient number of studies employing fsQCA hinders its full potential. The complete lack of gastronomic studies employing this method highlights the necessity of its use for research in the respective field.

**Originality/value:** This study explores the complexity of how food-related personality traits influence the attainment of memorable tourism experiences and the formulation of gastronomic image, and how the chaordic systems influence the overall image of a destination.

**Keywords: Gastronomy, Food, Tourism Experiences, Destination Image, Personality Traits**

**1. Introduction**

The competition between destinations has intensified even since Urry (1995) suggested that destinations must exhibit “tourism reflexivity”, meaning to develop a range of products and services that will distinguish their product offering. In this respect, destinations are continuously trying to differentiate among others by creating new products and activities to attract more visitors. Within this context, the promotion of the local culture of a destination has become pivotal, as this is a key characteristic that can act as a prevalent identification attribute for destinations. Specifically, food has been recognised as an important component of a destination’s culture (Kivela and Crotts, 2006; Mariani and Okumus, 2022) and a key feature of cultural tourism (Sanchez-Canizares et al., 2012) that can be promoted to enhance a destination’s “tourism reflexivity”.

Gastronomy, the study of the relationship between food and culture, has thus emerged as a significant attraction at a destination (Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Hjalager and Richards, 2002; Lai et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2011) and a popular tourism development alternative as it can drive tourist demand and contribute to destination competitiveness (de Albuquerque Meneguel et al., 2019; Seyitoğlu and Ivanov, 2020; Knollenberg, Duffy, Kline, & Kim, 2021). Through gastronomy tourism, tourists become acquainted with local food and traditions and, thus, gain a more authentic tourist experience which translates into higher satisfaction and enhanced destination image (Hsu et al., 2016; Hsu and Scott, 2020). Generally, food is considered part of a destinations’ identity (Fox, 2007; Lin et al., 2011; Sims, 2009) and a central ingredient in the overall tourism experience (Hjalager and Richards, 2002).

Thus, many destinations are trying to promote their local cuisine and food as a form of experience and, in so doing, capitalize on the growth of the experience economy whose value is projected to reach $12 billion by 2023 (Jain, 2019). The tourism and hospitality sectors are primed to offer experiences by staging memorable and personal experiences to tourists (Pine and Gilmore, 2011). Gastronomy, in particular, plays a significant role in the way tourists experience a destination (Kivela and Crotts, 2006; Sivrikaya and Pekersen, 2020). Many destinations (i.e., Italy, France, Thailand) have already established themselves as culinary destinations (Ab Karim and Chi, 2010). There are also destinations (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece) who are now beginning to promote their gastronomic offerings (Fox, 2007; Meller and Cerovic, 2003; Peštek and Činjarević, 2014; Vourdoubas, 2020). This is particularly important for tourists who view a destinations’ gastronomy as an opportunity to experience something new, novel, and adventurous ((Lee and Crompton, 1992; Ji et al., 2016).

In pertinent literature, it is largely accepted that travellers often seek to taste and experience a destination’s cuisine, which positively affects their tourism experience (Ab Karim and Chi., 2010; Peštek and Činjarević, 2014; Smith and Costello, 2009), as well as their perception of the destination (Lertputtarak, 2012; Lin et al., 2011). However, the fact that food can act as an obstacle in tourism experiences has barely been examined (Cohen and Avieli, 2004). Recent studies have revealed that individuals’ food-related personality traits are a key factor affecting tourists’ preference or aversion for local cuisine (Kim et al., 2010; Lai et al., 2020; Mak et al., 2013, Hsu and Scott, 2020; Hsu et al., 2016).

While existing literature provides an understanding on how food-related personality traits affect various aspects on the behavior of travellers, there is an evident gap of knowledge in the ways food-related personality traits affect perceptions of a gastronomic destination image (Chang & Mak, 2018; Hsu and Scott, 2020; Hussain et al, 2022). In addition, the current tourism research predominantly uses linear examination for the themes under evaluation (Pappas and Glyptou, 2021). This reductionist approach cannot holistically encapsulate the comprehension of tourism complexity (McDonald, 2009; Ordanini et al., 2014), highlighting the need for asymmetric analysis. This study responds to calls for further research on this research gap and explores the complexity on how food-related personality traits affect the attainment of memorable tourism experiences and the formation of a destination’s gastronomic image, and how the chaordic systems influence the overall image of a destination. In so doing, the study employs fsQCA in its investigation of complexity and chaordic systems by providing specific pathways that formulate the gastronomic destination image.

**2. Literature Review**

***2.1 Duality of food and (memorable) tourism experiences***

The feeling of hunger and the need for food is a fundamental human requirement that exists regardless of location. The need to eat is (mostly) non-negotiable as our bodies require fuel to function and therefore is considered a mandatory tourist activity (Hjalager and Richards, 2002). However, food consumption is far more meaningful than simple sustenance and relieving hunger. It represents multiple ways in which we connect to the world and to others in different social, cultural and political contexts (Mak et al., 2012).

Food is often seen as a ‘cultural reference point’ (Montanari, 2009), because it conveys details about the production, culture and geography of the destination it originates from. In the tourism gaze, food obtains symbolic meaning as an artifact that is embedded in local stories and traditions (Elis et al., 2018; Sims, 2007). In itself, food is a means of cultural expression, providing a clearer insight into the culture of local communities and their way of life in a given destinations’ landscape (Hjalager and Corigliano, 2000; Robinson and Getz, 2012). Sims (2009) and Hjalager and Richards (2002) outline the importance of local food products for the local community, particularly in terms of developing destinations and economies sustainably. Additionally, gastronomic service provision can be of great significance for destinations that cannot benefit from sun, sea and sand or experience a lack of natural or historical resources, or even when destinations seek a revival of their touristic product (Kivela and Crotts, 2006). The importance of food in destinations is further delineated by Hsu et al. (2016), who recognize that it can create benefits both for destinations and tourists.

Taking into account that food consumption can entail a special meaning and pleasure (Quan and Wang, 2004), expenditure on food and drink often corresponds to a sizeable portion of the overall travel budget (up to 40%) (Boyne et al, 2002; Hall and Sharples 2003; Meller and Cerovic, 2003). Hence, it encompasses a substantial part of tourism revenue (Mak et al., 2012). Arguably, as food and beverage services become an increasingly competitive sector within the tourism and hospitality, they undoubtedly constitute a pivotal component of a destination’s tourism product (Okumus, 2021). Hence, the connection and symbiotic relationship between tourism and gastronomic services provided in any destination cannot be disregarded.

Food within tourism is no longer regarded as only a complementary service provided to fulfil its ‘obligatory’ nature. Gastronomy is considered to be one of the main motives in destination selection, as local food and drink as well as its imagery are critical differentiators for a destination (Ab Karim and Chi, 2010; Boyne et al., 2002). For instance, Italy is promoting its cuisine and wines imbued with cultural heritage characteristics to boost tourism consumption, whilst France is capitalizing on its reputation for oenogastronomic products (Frochot, 2003). As destinations increasignly compete to appeal to different markets, gastronomy is becoming an “attractionised” experience (Ab Karim and Chi, 2010; Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Kivela and Crotts, 2006; Mak et al., 2013).

Although food and drink consumption can generate high revenues for the destination, it is important that it is not viewed only as a solution for short-term profit by local stakeholders, but also as an important part of the provided touristic experience (Quan and Wang, 2004), as experiences of this type are considered “rare” and hard to be acquired (Trihas et al., 2016). Gastronomy can add value to the tourist experience as it is associated with quality tourism for those travelers who seek new encounters and to try new products to enhance their cultural experiences (Kivela and Crotts, 2006).

These tourists are often characterized as “foodies”, meaning that they have a particular interest in food and view local cuisines a conduit to experiencing local culture (Getz and Robinson, 2014). The production and promotion of gastronomy from destinations’ stakeholders and the increasing consumption of gastronomy from visitors has intensified the food tourism niche (Smith and Costello, 2009). Even if food tourism is not the main travel motive, local food and drink consumption have the propensity to offer more memorable and enjoyable experiences than expected (Ab Karim and Chi, 2010; Quan and Wang, 2004; Pestek and Cinjarevic, 2014; Sanchez-Canizares and Lopez-Guzman, 2012; Smith and Costello, 2009) and eventually turn into this “rare” (Trihas et al., 2016) and “peak” touristic experience (Quan and Wang, 2010). As a result, experiences gained while engaging in food and beverage activities impact tourist satisfaction (Kim, 2018), influence perceptions of gastronomic image (Chang and Mak, 2018; Quan and Wang, 2004) and of the destination (Kivela and Crotts, 2006; Lertputtarak, 2012; Lin et al., 2011). Despite the fact that culinary experiences appear to be increasingly important to both tourists and destinations, this study will not focus on food tourists or ‘foodies’. Rather it addresses all tourists regardless of their main motivation to travel, considering the “obligatory” aspect of food (Quan and Wang, 2004; Hjalager and Richards, 2002).

Williams, Yuan & Williams (2019) and Chen, Wang & Morrison (2021) considered memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) in terms of gastronomy by making a distinction between deliberate and incidental gastro-tourists. A key consideration for the creation of memorable food and drink experiences is that they must happen away from home, either on vacation or a trip (Stone et al., 2018). Stone et al., (2018) suggest that the following elements lead to the creation of memorable food and drink experiences when travelling: a particular food or drink, the location or setting, companion, the occasion, touristic elements such as novelty, authenticity, nostalgia, variety, surprise, the desire to return, hedonism, emotions and sensuality, negative elements, and experiences encompassing multiple themes. This concept is further supported by Sthapit, Coudounaris & Björk (2019) who claim that memorable local food and drink experiences do not occur only through a single element, but experience co-creation, the servicescape and experience intensification need to coexist. Engaging in food activities, enhances multiple senses, such as taste, or smell (López-Guzmán, Vieira-Rodríguez & Rodríguez-García, 2014). Thus, constituting a medium for the creation of strong memories, which usually are positive (Vignolles & Pichon, 2014).

Although the relationship between gastronomy and memorable tourism experiences has only recently started being investigated (Stone et al., 2018; Sthapit, Coudounaris & Björk, 2019; Williams, Yuan & Williams, 2019) - indicating that local food consumption contributes to the creation of MTEs (Sthapit, 2017) - the empirical evidence currently in existence is admittedly limited. More importantly, our understanding of the interplay between those elements and perceptions of destination image remains restricted as also highlighted by Quan & Wang (2004), Chang & Mak, (2018) and Hsu & Scott (2020).

 ***2.2 Destination image and gastronomic image***

The importance of destination image has been widely discussed as it affects travelers’ perceptions, behaviors and decision making in destination selection (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Gallarza et al., 2002). Destination image, has great impact on tourists’ satisfaction and intention to revisit the destination (Stylos et al., 2016). Having knowledge of the attributes that influence destination’s image development is important especially after the Covid-19 pandemic (Dedeoğlu et al, 2022) as it can affect both the intention of tourists to visit the destination but also the destination’s organizational structure (Ahmat et al., 2020); which will result in the adoption of suitable practices and strategies in order to manage to return to the pre-Covid-19 normality.

Gallarza et al. (2002) eloquently argue that image can be hard to define due to the plethora of definitions already in existence. One of the earlier definitions was introduced by Crompton (1979), who defined destination image as a collection of opinions, feelings and perceptions that a person has of a destination. Later, Pike (2008) added to the definition by acknowledging the transformative power of the information acquired after having visited the destination. Echtner and Ritchie (2003) then proposed that destination image entails two distinct elements: individual attributes and holistic (imagery) impressions. One of the most prominent frameworks for the formation a destination image was proposed by Baloglu and McCleary (1999) who claimed that destination image consists of *perceptual/cognitive* and *affective* evaluations. The perceptual/cognitive evaluations focus on information and understanding of destination’s attributes, while affective evaluation is concerned with the emotional attachment to it (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). Hence, to understand destination image it is critical to consider multiple elements including attractions, weather, landscape, infrastructure, heritage as well as local cuisine (Chang and Mak, 2018). Destination image is fluid, as it can change with every tourism encounter at location (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). Tourists who engage with local communities have more memorable and pleasurable experiences and develop a more sophisticated and comprehensive destination image (Kim, 2018).

Considering the importance of food and drink consumption in the tourism experience (be it for the utilitarian or symbolic value), it is important to acknowledge that this consumption can only central to the “peak touristic” experience in a given destination (Quan and Wang, 2004). Hence, the consumption of food and drink can distinctively influence the creation or alteration of a destination’s image (Chang and Mak, 2018). A study by Hsu and Scott (2020) suggests that food experiences strongly influence the creation of a positive destination image. Gastronomic image therefore represents a crucial element in the overall destination image.

Yet, destination image is a fluid concept and dependent on an individual’s perceptual/cognitive and affective evaluations. It therefore becomes pertinent to also consider individual personality traits in terms in food and drink consumption, as they can be integral to the formulation of MTEs as well as to perceptions of gastronomic and destination image. Whilst there is sufficient research on food related personality traits (Byrnes & Hayes, 2013; Mak et al, 2012; Kim et al., 2010), evidence connecting these to concepts of MTEs, gastronomic and destination image remains scarce, as also highlighted by Lai et al (2020) and Sivrikaya & Petersen (2020).

***2.3 Food-related personality traits***

Thus far, literature suggests that tourists are actively looking for to consume local food and drink to enhance their tourism experiences, and destinations are capitalizing on this by presenting local food and drink as an attraction (Ab Karim and Chi, 2010). Yet, not all tourists are willing to taste products that are new and unfamiliar (Jauniskis and Michopoulou, 2021). Peoples’ diverse attitudes toward food are known as food related personality traits (Hsu and Scott, 2020) and they are considered to be the most critical elements in determining food choice behavior (Hsu et al., 2016). Mak et al. (2012) suggest that these are particularly pertinent when considering travelers’ food related decisions at the destination. Travelers’ food related personality traits influence not only their food choices but also their perceptions of a destination’s gastronomic image (Baah, Bondzi-Simpson, & Ayeh, 2020; Hsu et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2020; Marshal and Bell, 2004; Peštek and Činjarević, 2014), satisfaction and intention to visit again (Ji et al., 2016), loyalty (Kim et al., 2010), place attachment (Hsu and Scott, 2020), purchase intention of traditional food (Sivrikaya and Petersen, 2020) and explaining and predicting behaviour and influencing food-buying behavior (Byrnes and Hayes, 2013).

Food neophobia and food neophilia are the two more distinct food personality traits (Fischler, 1988). Food neophobia refers to an individuals’ sense of caution and the worry about anything appearing strange or foreign to them. Pilner and Hobden (1992) define food neophobia as the aversion to consuming unfamiliar food. Conversely, food neophilia signifies an individual’s sense of adventure, need for change and the desire to explore new and novel cuisines (Chang et al., 2011; Jang and Kim, 2015; Ji et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2009). Similar terms have been used to describe this concept including food involvement (Chen, 2007; Eertmans et al., 2005; Hsu and Scott, 2020; Kim et al., 2010; Levitt, Zhang, DiPietro, & Meng, 2019; Robinson & Getz, 2013), novelty or variety seeking (Kim et al., 2013; Lai et al., 2020; Mak et al., 2017) and sensation-seeking (Hsu et al., 2016; Sivrikaya and Petersen, 2020). Food involvement in particular is perhaps conceptually closer to food neophilia, as they both focus on sociocultural aspects of food in tourists’ perceptions (Choo, Park, & Petrick, 2022; Derinalp Çanakçı & Birdir, 2020; Di-Clemente, Hernández-Mogollón, & Campón-Cerro, 2020).

Fischler as early as (1988) discusses the ‘omnivore’s dilemma’; whereby humans as omnivorous foragers have both the drive to explore of new types of food (neophilia) to ensure survival, and the distrust in foods that could be potentially dangerous and harmful (neophobia) (Mak et al., 2017). Food neophobia and neophilia can be incited by biological as well as cultural stimuli (Cohen and Avieli, 2004). Different cultures encourage neophilic behaviours in a various extents (Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Mak et al., 2017; Sivrikaya and Pekersen, 2020). Supportive of the previous proposition are Ji et al. (2016), who suggest that culture is the core factor influencing the approval of tastes and cooking practices.

Neophobic tendencies are found to be influenced by age, gender and education (Kim et al., 2013; Okumus, Dedeoğlu, & Shi, 2021) personal interests and traits (Chen, 2007), personality and past experiences (Hsu et al., 2016) and even religion (Sivrikaya and Pekersen, 2020). Neophobic or neophilic behaviors become particularly evident in unfamiliar environments, where food and drink is different and novel (Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Sivrikaya and Pekersen, 2016). A more neophobic traveler, would be reluctant to try local delicacies, thinking that they taste worse than the known foods (Mak et al., 2017), resulting in reduced food experiences. As there are numerous factors influencing food neophobia, it cannot be described as a stable concept among individuals. Food neophobia has been empirically examined to assess the inclination of an individual to sample novel food (Kim et al., 2010; Ritchey et al., 2003) including tasting insects (entomophagy) (Sogari et al., 2018). Although nephobic tendencies protect individuals form physical damage, they are restrictive on the development of food and new flavors appreciation (Hsu et al., 2016).

Neophilic tendencies are enhanced while on holiday, because travelers are often eager to acquire new experiences and their normal tolerance for risk is increased (Cohen and Avieli, 2004). Food neophilia does not just affects tourists food consumption at the destination; it rather influences the very choice of the destination prior to travel, as food neophiliacs would opt for destinations with sophisticated food offering (Hsu and Scott, 2020). They will, intentionally, seek for new complex experiences in order to maintain their level of excitement in a high level and are willing to take the risk of suffering from physical damage or undertake danger (Sivrikaya and Pekersen, 2020). Food neophiliacs view food consumption as a sensational, pleasurable and hedonic activity (Bell and Marshal, 2003; Kim et al., 2009; Ritchey et al., 2003) that enables an optimum level of excitement (Sivrikaya and Pekersen, 2020). Kivela and Crotts (2006) suggest that to gain an interesting and pleasurable gastronomic experience facing “strange” foods, travelers need to feel confident, a characteristic that is enabled when someone is experiencing a higher degree of food neophilia. Similar to food neophobia, food neophilia is not a static concept as it can be influenced by many different factors, thereupon its extent can, likewise, vary among individuals.

Hence, food related personality traits highly influence tourists’ food choices and consumption. This bares implications for MTEs as well as gastronomic and destination image. Although some direct and linear links between some these concepts have been established (see for example Chen, & Rahman, 2018; Rasoolimanesh, et al, 2021; Wolff, & Larsen, 2019; Zhang, Wu, & Buhalis, 2018), the complex interplay between them has not been captured and is yet to be understood. These concepts are subjective, fluid, and co-exist simultaneously, so it is important that we understand what happens when we concurrently account for all of them and which configurations are sufficient.

***2.4 Chaos and complexity***

As the preceding sections highlight, the relationship between tourist attitudes to food and destination image is complex, relying on a multiplicity of factors whilst, at the same time, may yield either positive or negative effects depending of course on tourist characteristics (i.e., cultural background) and the experience derived at the destination. Thus, for the purposes of this study we utilise chaos and complexity theory as a lens through which the complex interaction between the studied simple conditions can be examined.

Chaos theory has become popular as it is widely employed in order to evaluate complex systems, also involving the behavioural patterns of people. It was first used in 1963 (Lawrence et al., 2003) and assumed that the systemic complexity consists of a substantial number of components that have non-linear relationships, and develop throughout time (Olmedo and Mateos, 2015). In particular, the term chaos concerns “a class of dynamic behaviour of deterministic systems characterized by sensitive dependence on initial conditions, diverging but constrained trajectories that imply unpredictability, and complex organisation or structure” (Schuldberg, 1999 p. 183). As such, chaos theory underlines that human behaviour is likely not to be predicted in a long-term basis due to small differences in behavioural patterns being present which are likely to produce numerous different outcomes (Kellert, 1994). The complexity theory has actually derived from the evolution of chaos theory (Pappas, 2019) following the acknowledgement of the existence of global complexity and we are not able to effectively explain phenomena through the use of relationships that are based on cause-and-effect assumptions. Following Zahra and Ryan (2007, p. 855) the theory of complexity “deals with systems that have many interacting agents and, although hard to predict, these systems have structure and permit improvement”. As such, this theory describes the interactions of elements that are asymmetric and dynamic, aiming to explain the way that a combination of antecedents is likely to generate solutions characterised by causality for phaenomena dominated by complexity (Woodside, 2017). Hence, several causal solutions are able to be employed in order to anticipate an outcome that may emerge from randomly generated interactions that have no deterministic cause (Kretzschmar, 2015).

The term and rationale of a ‘chaordic-system’ derived from chaos, complexity and the relationship between them (Fitzgerald and Van-Eijnatten, 2002). The combination of the words ‘chaos’ and ‘order’ leads to the formulation of the term ‘chaordic’ which refers to entities and systems of complexity that are chaotically-ordered. The systems dominated by complexity are defined as chaordic, since the behavioural aspects emerge from elemental dynamic and complex interactions and formulate new structures (Schneider and Somers, 2006). The patterns of those behaviours are unpredictable, hence the merging between the terms of ‘chaos’ and ‘order’ (Olmedo, 2011). Those systems are in a constant change, as they are influenced by dynamic and unpredictable changes and alterations, and formulate new configurations (Olmedo and Mateos, 2015). Therefore, there cannot be a long-term prediction of the chaordic systems, as they create new structural complexities in an endogenous and spontaneous format, as well as they affect the examined phenomena due to changes that are unexpected (Pappas, 2021). Although chaos and complexity have been used in many different business sectors and disciplines aiming to understand the human motivations and behaviours, they are very useful for the evaluation of the decision-making of tourists (Farmaki et al., 2021; Pappas and Glyptou, 2021). Specifically, tourism decision-making is characterized by complexity as numerous decisions need to be undertaken. These decisions are dependent of several criteria, whilst various combinations of predictors may derive from their interaction giving us the ability to understand the tourism phenomena in reference. Thus, there is a need for an alternative approach in analysing tourism decision-making related to gastronomy that takes under consideration the asymmetric complexity of tourism systems.

***2.5 Study tenets***

In service research, when we use the term ‘tenet’ we actually refer to testable principles concerned with the identification of conditions characterised by complexity (Papatheodorou and Pappas, 2017). The evaluation of complexity implies that statistical hypotheses and consistency metrics do not have an important role, since scores of outcome are employed in order to establish the adequacy of those configurations (Wu et al., 2014). Hence, the tenets (non-linear research) actually replace the hypotheses (linear research) during the literature presentation (Pappas et al., 2021). Following the theory of configuration, even is the set of causal factors is the same different outcomes can be produced (Ordanini et al., 2014). Thus, this study examines the effects of tourist food-related personality on gastronomic destination image. The configurational presence or absence of binary state combinations are evaluated by the examination of British and German tourists travelling to Greece. This research has taken under consideration the studies mentioned above and it has formulated the following tenets:

T1: The same attribute is able to determine a different mode of decision-making for travellers depending on the way it interacts with the other examined attributes.

T2: Recipe principle: When we have a creation of a complex condition (at least two of the examined simple conditions are included), an outcome condition is likely to produce a consistently high score.

T3: Complex configurations are likely to affect the gastronomic image of a destination.

T4: When the examined simple conditions are differently combined, they are likely to positively or negatively affect the formulation of gastronomic image of the destination.

T5: Equifinality principle: A sufficient effect of food-related personality traits on destination image is not necessary to occur by having a high outcome score.

T6: When the Y scores are high, a given recipe for gastronomic destination image formulation is not relevant for all cases.

**3. Methods**

***3.1 Participants***

The research was held during summertime 2021 at the International Airport of Athens, Eleytherios Venizelos. Self-administered questionnaires written in English were distributed at the exit gates of the airport to adult holidaymakers leaving Greece. The duration to fill in each questionnaire was approximately 10 minutes. List-wise deletion (exclusion from further analysis) for each partially completed questionnaire was selected, since this is considered as the most versatile method for handling missing data (Allison, 2001).

***3.2 Sampling***

The study considered that the perceptions of the examined population were unknown, hence it has adopted the most conservative hypothesis (50/50) that half of the expressed perspectives will be positive and the other half will be negative. Following Akis et al. (1996), the sample size validity was based on a minimum 95% level of confidence with a subsequent maximum five% statistical error. Therefore, the sample size is calculated as follows:

$N=\frac{Z^{2}(hypothesis)}{S^{2}}⇒N=\frac{1.96^{2}(0.5)(0.5)}{0.05^{2}}⇒N=384.16$

Rounded to 400

According to INSETE (2021), the two main inbound tourist flows of Greece are originated from Germany (2019: 4.0 million; 2020: 1.5 million) and the United Kingdom (2019: 3.5 million; 2020: 1.1 million). The research was stratified between German and British (200 respondents each) holidaymakers. In order to achieve the set stratification, 582 holidaymakers were asked to participate in the study, setting the response rate at 68.72%.

***3.3 Measures***

The self-administered questionnaire includes one categorical question (Nationality), and 36 Likert scale (1: Strongly disagree; 5: Strongly agree) statements. All statements were adopted from previous research. More specifically, the statements concerning food neophobia and neohilia were taken from Kim et al. (2010). The statements focusing on the gastronomic image were derived from Lertputtarak (2012), and Peštek and Činjarević (2014). Finally, the statements dealing with memorable tourism experiences and destination image were adopted from Kim (2018).

The study uses fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA), since it is considered as the most versatile method for the examination of complexity aspects and chaordic systems (Olya and Al-ansi, 2018; Pappas, 2021). More specifically, fsQCA evaluates the combination of the simple conditions that are likely to formulate the desired outcome and any possible combination of binary sets created from the set predictors (Longest and Vaisey, 2008). It is a mixed method, since it combines empirical testing for quantitative data (Longest and Vaisey, 2008) and qualitative inductive reasoning for the examination of the cases under evaluation (Ragin, 2000).

The logical complexity is handled by fsQCA through the acknowledgement that different combinations can generate different findings when they are combined with other events (Kent and Argouslidis, 2005). Furthermore, the correlation metric of symmetry is analogous with the metric of asymmetric consistency, and in parallel the symmetric determination coefficient is analogous with the metric of asymmetric coverage (Woodside, 2014). A complex configuration is sufficient when its coverage ranges from .25 to .75 and its consistency is higher than .74 (Skarmeas et al., 2014). In addition, the causal recipe (this is the score of membership of a complex configuration) is the minimum of the scores of membership of the causal conditions that intersect and include this specific recipe (Woodside and Zhang, 2013). The study also employs contrarian case analysis and examines negated sets (inclusion/exclusion) for the simple conditions) and highlights their absence by using the symbol “∼”. According to Skarmeas et al. (2014), before using fsQCA, a study should examine the existence of general asymmetry, which is indicated when all the coefficients generate correlations lower than .6. Those correlations are presented in Table 1, showcasing the general asymmetry of the examined coefficients.

Please insert **Table 1**

***3.4 Algorithms***

The research examined the high membership scores of the causal recipes, and was calibrated through the use of 35 random cases. The effects upon the destination image ‘f\_di’, were examined by using the fuzzy-sets of food neophobia ‘f\_fnb’, food neophilia ‘f\_fnp’, gastronomic image ‘f\_gi’, memorable tourism experiences ‘f\_mte’, and nationality ‘f\_n’.

**4. Results**

Table 2 illustrates the study’s descriptive results per examined simple condition and nationality, also including the items used.

Please insert **Table 2**

Since all items derived from previous studies, the research employed Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). According to Norman and Streiner (2008) a sufficient loading should be .4 or higher. Thus FNP1, FNP2, and DI6 items have been excluded from further analysis due to low commonality (Table 3). Cronbach’s A reliability analysis showcased that in all cases it was higher than .7, which is considered as the minimum acceptable level (Nunnally, 1978). Average Variance Explained (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) also employed for measuring research validity. In all cases AVE was higher .5 (minimum acceptable level – Kim [2014]), whilst CR was always higher than AVE (precondition of acceptable CR – Pappas and Glyptou [2021]). Therefore, the research can be considered both, reliable and valid.

Please insert **Table 3**

***4.1 Sufficient pathways***

As it was presented in section 3.3, the study has employed fsQCA for the examination of complexity, also using negated sets (the symbol “~” is used for the simple conditions that are not included in a generated solution). Each sufficient configuration is characterised by both, the presence and absence of simple conditions), and whilst their combination is different, all pathways lead to the same outcome (in our case destination image).

The research has generated three sufficient pathways (Table 4). The first solution (f\_n,f\_fnb,f\_fnp, ~f\_gi, ~f\_mte) includes the categorical condition of nationality and generates high membership scores in food neophobia and neothilia. This configuration appears to have the highest consistency (.86078) and unique coverage (.13947) amongst the three generated solutions. The second pathway (~f\_n, ~f\_fnb,f\_fnp, ~f\_gi,f\_mte) includes food neophilia and memorable tourism experiences. This solution has the highest row (.42037) and lowest unique coverage (.10385). The third sufficient configuration (f\_n, ~f\_fnb, ~f\_fnp,f\_gi,f\_mte) generates high scores of memberhip in nationality, gastronomic image. and memorable tourism experiences. This pathway has the lowest consistency (.81983) of all three solutions.

Please insert **Table 4**

***4.2 Confirmation of tenets***

The findings have generated three sufficient configurations that meet the set aim of the study. As it is highlighted in Table 4, all three pathways appear to have a high overall coverage (>.4). In addition, each of the five simple conditions is included in at least one pathway. As a result, each antecedent contributes with a different way to the holidaymakers’ destination image with the rest of the simple conditions, and subsequently confirms the first tenet (T1). All three sufficient configurations consist of at least two simple conditions, whilst the first and third solution also includes the categorical fuzzy-set of nationality. According to Woodside (2014), when a minimum of two simple conditions are included in a pathway, the solution in reference is considered as a complex configuration. As a result, the second set tenet (T2) in confirmed. The selected method (fsQCA) does not examine variables but provides an investigation of cases. Therefore, each pathway if formulated through an interaction of simple conditions characterized by complexity, leading to the desired outcome (in our case, destination image) (Olya and Altinay, 2016). This aspect leads to the confirmation of the third tenet (T3). As illustrated in ‘Measures’ section, the research employs contrarian case analysis, investigating the inclusion or exclusion of a simple condition influencing destination image. The use of such analysis confirms the fourth tenet (T4). Following Woodside (2014, p.2499) “the occurrences of different paths usually do not occur with the same frequency among the set of paths”. In terms of the principle of equifinality all three generated solutions lead to destination image and confirm the fifth tenet (T5). As it is presented in Table 4, the pathways’ coverage varies from .40582 to .42037, meaning that each solution applies to less than half of the respondents (existence of partial application – Pappas et al. [2021]). On the other hand, the three sufficient configurations cover the examined population, and ultimately lead to the confirmation of the sixth tenet (T6).

**5. Discussion and Conclusions**

***5.1 Conclusions***

The aim of this study was to consider the link between food-related personality traits with regards to creating memorable tourism experiences and affecting perceptions of a destination’s gastronomic and overall image. By employing fsQCA, the study identifies three solutions leading to destination image. The first concerns the food personality traits of the respondents, since it includes the food neophilia and neophobia simple conditions. The second configuration focuses on the generated experience of tourists and the third concerns the destination’s gastronomic image. As such, the study findings can be helpful to destination marketers and industry practitioners who can use the generated solutions or a combination of both as a guide for improving their management and marketing strategies.

***5.2 Theoretical Implications***

The findings have generated three pathways leading to destination image. The first solution concerns the food personality traits of the respondents, since it includes the food neophilia and neophobia simple conditions. As it is suggested by Hsu and Scott (2020), these are the characteristics of people towards food. The results also confirm the study of Hsu et al. (2016) concerning the criticality of those elements in terms of the determination of decision-making (in our case destination image formulation). These findings further contribute to the understanding of the chaordic aspects of food personality traits upon destination image and their influence in tourists’ decision-making, something that can also be influenced by the cultural origins (nationality) of consumers. Given that gastronomy is an increasingly important aspect of destination image (Mariani and Okumus, 2022), as destinations strive to market themselves as offering authentic and memorable experiences (Kivela and Crotts, 2006; Sivrikaya and Pekersen, 2020), this solution implies that tourist attitudes to food must be taken into consideration by destination marketers. The food personality traits of neophobia and neophilia, of course, entail that tourist attitudes towards food could have either a positive or negative effect on destination image depending also on the cultural background of the tourists. Indeed, the interaction of food personality traits with tourist decision-making is complex, yielding various outcomes that determine destination image formation in favourable or unfavourable terms.

The second sufficient configuration focuses on the generated experience of tourists. This chaordic perspective is not only based on the importance of gastronomy for cultural and social interactions (Mak et al., 2012), but also involves gastronomy as an added value factor for the formulation of tourist cultural experience (Kivela and Crotts, 2006). Hence, the findings showcase that tourists’ perceived destination image is substantially related with the memorable tourist experiences associated with the neophilistic food traits. Tourists’ attitudes towards food forms an important aspect of their experience at the destination (Ab Karim and Chi., 2010; Peštek and Činjarević, 2014; Smith and Costello, 2009) as gastronomy is a significant component of culture and, thus, a signifier of destination image. Therefore, this configuration highlights that gastronomy should be embedded in destination marketing campaigns and, especially, in destination image promotion as an experience-related aspect.

The third generated solution concerns the destination’s gastronomic image. This image related to the destination’s gastronomy per-se is also associated with the formulated tourist experiences of tourists. As the results indicate, the characteristics of tourists related to their nationality also affect their perceptions upon destination image. The image relationship between destination and gastronomy is not new in the literature (Chang and Mak, 2018; Kim, 2018; Lertputtarak, 2012). However, the literature is silent concerning the complexity of this relationship, something that this study sheds light on. Specifically, this study shows that tourist cultural characteristics exert an important influence on destination image perceptions in relation to gastronomy, implying that destination marketing efforts need to be based on a segmentation strategy of the targeted tourist segments.

Overall, the study makes the following contributions to existing knowledge. First, the study offers a theoretical understanding on how tourists’ food choice behavior is affected by the psychological construct of food-related personality traits and how experiences gained during food and beverage consumption can influence the formation of the perceived gastronomic and overall image of the destination. Second, the study offers to the theoretical domain through the holistic examination of complexity and the chaordic systems affecting the gastronomic destination image, by providing insights beyond the reductionist (linear) approach that currently dominates tourism and hospitality research. Knowledge of the effects of tourists’ food-related personality traits on destination image may enable researchers to also focus on non-linear (asymmetric) evaluation, as well as the destination planners to better develop, manage and market gastronomic tourist experiences, particularly in the post COVID-19 era as the pandemic has highlighted health and safety as influencing destination image (Dedeoğlu et al, 2022). Moreover, the study makes a methodological contribution as, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study examining the formulation of gastronomic destination image using a non-linear analytical approach.

***5.3 Managerial Implications***

This study underlines that it is important for hospitality and destination marketers to understand how a gastronomic destination image is formulated, as this has implications for both existing tourists and potential tourists. The complexity of destination image formulation is showcased by the generation of three different pathways that can lead to the same outcome. This is something new in the literature since the relevant previous studies were following a linear approach, hence they couldn’t demonstrate these insights (reductionist approach of the linear analysis [McDonald, 2009]). As a result the systems generating these pathways are chaordic, since the inclusion or exclusion of the same simple conditions in different combinations actually ends up to the formation of a gastronomic destination image.

Considering that word-of-mouth is the simplest and most effective source of forming destination images prior to a trip and, taking into account social media’s role in facilitating the spreading of word-of-mouth, attention should be paid to reinforce destinations’ online gastronomic identity. However, these aspects entail high complexity levels and their chaordic systems need to be appropriately evaluated and examined. Furthermore, the effective promotion of a destination’s gastronomic image requires comprehensive knowledge of the local food offering from the destination perspective, but also an understanding of travellers’ requirements and food culture (Chang and Mak, 2018; Kim et al., 2010; Mak et al., 2012; Sanchez-Canizares and Lopez- Guzman, 2012). As it is apparent, these complex aspects differ from one destination to another, hence their significance and impact upon the destination image may significantly vary. Thus, through a chaordic (non-linear) analysis and the related complexity examination each destination can select the most appropriate aspects for the formulation of its gastronomic image. It is important to consider that the tourist decision-making and personality traits are characterised by high complexity levels, whilst their way of thinking embeds chaordic characteristics (Olmedo and Mateos, 2015). By acknowledging that not all travellers as keen on novelty-seeking during holidays (Crompton and Lee, 1992), destination marketers need to categorize consumers in groups that share similar interests (Hsu et al., 2016), as the personality trait of food neophilia can be a strong predictor of behaviour and intention to buy local food in destinations (Ji et al., 2016).

Tour operators may also adapt their advertising materials to influence tourists’ perceptions of a destinations gastronomic image. Moreover, restauranteurs and hoteliers may use the findings to facilitate the creation of menus and services, which will enable both food neophobics and food neophiliacs to take advantage of the destination food culture, acquire the optimal experiences and provide assistance in the creation of an overall positive destination image. As food neophobia is mitigated by familiarity (Pilner and Hobden, 1992), the food offering should entail elements that are congruent with the travellers eating habits and customs (Ji et al., 2016). For instance, Lai et al. (2020) suggested that Asian tourists were more accepting of dishes that incorporated Asian influences. Familiarity can be increased through sharing local gastronomy tips online, distributing information at tourist points of interest, as well as offering practical activities such as cook-along sessions and organising food festivals (Hsu and Scott, 2020). However, the complex formulation of tourist experience requires the investigation of all those conditions that may affect their decision-making and ultimately their satisfaction levels, also impacting upon the gastronomic destination image. Therefore, the chaordic associations of the experience formulation need to be taken under consideration as well as to be non-linearly evaluated in a regular basis. Providing verbal and visual clues (i.e pictures on menus) can also address the fear of novel food (Jang and Kim, 2015). Whilst it is important for destination marketers and local businesses to devise strategies to mitigate food neophobia, it is equally important to design products and services that would appeal to neophiliacs and their requirements for novelty, adventure and excitement (Crompton and Lee, 1992; Kim et al., 2010).

***5.4 Limitations and Future Research***

Despite the theoretical and managerial contributions of this paper, it is not without limitations. First, the study draws from a specific context (Greece) and tourist segments (UK, German) which carry specific cultural characteristics. Second, the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic which could have potentially impacted tourist perceptions. Future research is required for the provision of empirical evidence on the relationship between constructs such as culture, income and education and food-related personality traits. Specifically, knowledge on response patterns to various external stimuli from neophobics and neophiliacs is needed to assess the effectiveness of destination promotion strategies. Another significant consideration is the role of food authenticity in yielding neophobic or neophilic attitudes and affecting memorability of experiences as well as destination image. Future research should seek to gain a deeper understanding of how food-related personality traits explain food choice, thus facilitate the adoption and implementation of strategies within the tourism industry to enable tourists to gain more pleasurable experiences and eventually promote the destination effectively.

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**Table 1: Correlation matrix**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
| 1 | Food Neophobia | 1 |  |  |  |  |
| 2 | Food Neophilia | -.020 | 1 |  |  |  |
| 3 | Gastronomic Image | .063 | -.024 | 1 |  |  |
| 4 | Memorable Tourism Experiences | -.025 | .161 | .058 | 1 |  |
| 5 | Destination Image | -.016 | -.018 | -.033 | .010 | 1 |

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Statements** | **Means** | **SD** | **Nationality** |
|  |  |  |  | German | British |
|  | *Food Neophobia* |  |  |  |  |
| FNB1 | I don’t trust new foods | 2.97 | .698 | 2.93 | 3.01 |
| FNB2 | If I don’t know what is in a food, I won’t try it | 2.94 | .655 | 2.98 | 2.90 |
| FNB3 | I don’t like foods from different countries | 3.02 | .637 | 2.89 | 3.14 |
| FNB4 | At dinner parties, I will never try a new food | 2.99 | .641 | 2.98 | 3.00 |
| FNB5 | I am afraid to eat things I have never had before | 2.92 | .657 | 2.98 | 2.86 |
| FNB6 | I am very particular about the foods I will eat | 2.97 | .699 | 2.99 | 2.96 |
|  | *Food Neophilia* |  |  |  |  |
| FNP1 | I am constantly sampling new and different foods | 3.73 | 1.028 | 3.67 | 3.78 |
| FNP2 | I like foods from different cultures | 3.81 | .932 | 3.76 | 3.87 |
| FNP3 | I like to try new ethnic restaurants | 3.81 | .897 | 4.17 | 3.45 |
| FNP4 | Talking about what I ate or am going to eat is something I like to do | 3.78 | .904 | 4.04 | 3.53 |
| FNP5 | Compared with other daily decisions, my food choices are very important | 3.80 | .873 | 3.92 | 3.68 |
| FNP6 | When I travel, one of the things I anticipate most is eating the food there | 3.84 | .874 | 3.89 | 3.77 |
| FNP7 | When I eat out, I think or talk a lot about how the food tastes | 3.81 | .872 | 3.85 | 3.76 |
|  | *Gastronomic Image* |  |  |  |  |
| GI1 | Destination cuisine is part of the cultural heritage | 3.67 | .977 | 3.55 | 3.78 |
| GI2 | Destination cuisine is authentic | 3.69 | .977 | 3.59 | 3.81 |
| GI3 | Destination cuisine is recognisable | 3.65 | 1.037 | 3.63 | 3.68 |
| GI4 | Destination cuisine is unique/original | 3.69 | .937 | 3.60 | 3.77 |
| GI5 | Destination cuisine is tasty | 3.59 | .935 | 3.55 | 3.63 |
| GI6 | Destination cuisine is overall high quality | 3.65 | .959 | 3.64 | 3.65 |
| GI7 | Destination cuisine is overall good value for money | 3.57 | 1.014 | 3.48 | 3.67 |
| GI8 | Destination cuisine is colourful | 3.73 | .888 | 3.67 | 3.79 |
| GI9 | Destination cuisine is organic/natural | 3.61 | 1.016 | 3.58 | 3.63 |
| GI10 | Destination cuisine is easily digestible | 3.60 | 1.011 | 3.51 | 3.68 |
| GI11 | Destination cuisine is healthy | 3.62 | .940 | 3.55 | 3.68 |
| GI12 | Destination cuisine is exciting | 3.71 | .948 | 3.66 | 3.76 |
|  | *Memorable Tourism Experiences* |  |  |  |  |
| MTE1 | I really enjoyed this tourism experience | 3.87 | .849 | 3.88 | 3.88 |
| MTE2 | I revitalized through this tourism experience | 3.92 | .813 | 3.91 | 3.94 |
| MTE3 | I learned something about myself from this tourism experience | 3.80 | .941 | 3.96 | 3.65 |
| MTE4 | I had a chance to closely experience the local culture of a destination area | 3.76 | .909 | 3.75 | 3.77 |
| MTE5 | I experienced something new (e.g., food, activity, etc) during this tourism experience | 3.80 | .889 | 3.87 | 3.74 |
|  | *Destination Image* |  |  |  |  |
| DI1 | I consider the quality of service an important factor for destination image | 3.86 | .852 | 3.86 | 3.85 |
| DI2 | I consider entertainment as an important factor for destination image | 3.76 | .868 | 3.69 | 3.83 |
| DI3 | I consider the quality and variety of accommodations an important factor for destination image | 3.81 | .814 | 3.80 | 3.82 |
| DI4 | I consider the local transportation an important factor for destination image | 3.91 | .770 | 3.91 | 3.91 |
| DI5 | I consider the degree of exotic image in a destination as an important factor for its image | 3.76 | .891 | 3.78 | 3.74 |
| DI6 | I consider the image of architectures/buildings an important factor for destination image | 3.72 | .833 | 3.69 | 3.75 |

**Table 3: Factor analysis**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Statements** | **Loadings** | **A** | **AVE** | **CR** |
| *Food Neophobia* |  | .881 | .626 | .909 |
| FNB1 | .769 |  |  |  |
| FNB2 | .809 |  |  |  |
| FNB3 | .782 |  |  |  |
| FNB4 | .825 |  |  |  |
| FNB5 | .783 |  |  |  |
| FNB6 | .779 |  |  |  |
| *Food Neophilia* |  | .799 | .550 | .859 |
| FNP1 | .006\* |  |  |  |
| FNP2 | .196\* |  |  |  |
| FNP3 | .675 |  |  |  |
| FNP4 | .736 |  |  |  |
| FNP5 | .766 |  |  |  |
| FNP6 | .768 |  |  |  |
| FNP7 | .760 |  |  |  |
| *Gastronomic Image* |  | .933 | .578 | .942 |
| GI1 | .732 |  |  |  |
| GI2 | .730 |  |  |  |
| GI3 | .718 |  |  |  |
| GI4 | .777 |  |  |  |
| GI5 | .773 |  |  |  |
| GI6 | .767 |  |  |  |
| GI7 | .729 |  |  |  |
| GI8 | .813 |  |  |  |
| GI9 | .800 |  |  |  |
| GI10 | .750 |  |  |  |
| GI11 | .755 |  |  |  |
| GI12 | .771 |  |  |  |
| *Memorable Tourism Experiences* |  | .793 | .538 | .853 |
| MTE1 | .678 |  |  |  |
| MTE2 | .808 |  |  |  |
| MTE3 | .771 |  |  |  |
| MTE4 | .734 |  |  |  |
| MTE5 | .667 |  |  |  |
| *Destination Image* |  | .846 | .618 | .889 |
| DI1 | .806 |  |  |  |
| DI2 | .822 |  |  |  |
| DI3 | .825 |  |  |  |
| DI4 | .800 |  |  |  |
| DI5 | .665 |  |  |  |
| DI6 | .231\* |  |  |  |

\* Items have been excluded from further analysis due to low commonality (<.4)

**Table 4: Complex configurations**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Complex Solution** | **Raw Coverage** | **Unique Coverage** | **Consistency** |
| Model: f\_di=f(f\_n,f\_fnb,f\_fnp,f\_gi,f\_mte) |  |  |
| f\_n,f\_fnb,f\_fnp, ~f\_gi, ~f\_mte | .40582 | .13947 | .86078 |
| ~f\_n, ~f\_fnb,f\_fnp, ~f\_gi,f\_mte | .42037 | .10385 | .84727 |
| f\_n, ~f\_fnb, ~f\_fnp,f\_gi,f\_mte | .41926 | .11934 | .81983 |
| *Solution Coverage*: .41932 | *Solution Consistency*: .83920 |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| f\_n: Nationality | f\_fnb: Food Neophobia | f\_fnp: Food Neophilia |
| f\_gi: Gastronomic Image | f\_mte: Memorable Tourism Experiences | f\_di: Destination Image |