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## **Feast for the eyes: How demographics and psychographics shape Food Porn appeal in culinary tourism**

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – This study aims to understand how culinary tourism in Assam is contributing to boost its tourist influx following Covid-19. **Methodology** – The study here is descriptive in its approach and utilises both primary and secondary sources of data. The research adopts an empirical approach, surveying 398 tourists visiting the state using a structured questionnaire. **Findings** – Mean score analysis shows that these tourists do not initially consider food as a primary factor of when choosing a travel destination. A regression model was developed to assess the impact of psychographic variables on consumer responses to food imagery. Beliefs showed the highest impact, meaning that tourists who actively explore local food during travel are particularly responsive to the state's food-related experiences. The role of demographics is also evident as the influence caused by food imagery varies significantly gender, age group, income, and education. **Implications** – The study highlights how tourists' values and experiences regarding local food and community help creating an inclination towards experiencing the local culture, which can lead to a heightened – influence of Food Porn and increased tourist influx.

**Keywords:** Food Porn, psychographic, demographic, gastronomic, tourism

**JEL classification:** L83, L66

## **Gozba za oči: Kako demografija i psihografija oblikuju *Food Porn* privlačnost u kulinarskom turizmu**

### **Sažetak**

**Svrha** – Cilj studije je da razume kako kulinarski turizam u Asamu pomaže u povećanju priliva turista nakon pandemije Covid-19. **Metodologija** – Studija primenjuje deskriptivnu analizu koristeći kako primarne, tako i sekundarne izvore podataka. Istraživanje usvaja empirijski pristup, tako što je putem strukturiranog upitnika anketirano 398 turista koji

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posećuju državu. **Rezultati** – Analiza srednjih vrednosti pokazuje da ovi turisti inicijalno ne uključuju hranu kao primarni faktor kada biraju turističku destinaciju. Regresioni model je razvijen kako bi se utvrdio uticaj psihografskih varijabli na reakcije potrošača na prikaze hrane. Uticaj verovanja je identifikovan kao najjači, što ukazuje da turisti koji aktivno istražuju lokalnu hranu tokom putovanja posebno dobro reaguju na gastronomska iskustva koja država nudi. Uloga demografije je takođe vidljiva, pošto se uticaj vizuelnih prikaza hrane značajno razlikuje kada su u pitanju pol, starosne grupe, prihodi i obrazovanje. **Implikacije** – Studija ističe kako vrednosti i iskustva turista u vezi sa lokalnom hranom i zajednicom pomažu u stvaranju sklonosti ka doživljavanju lokalne kulture, što može dovesti do pojačanog uticaja 'Food Porn' fenomena i povećanog priliva turista.

**Ključne reči:** *Food Porn*, psihografski, demografski, gastronomija, turizam

**JEL klasifikacija:** L83, L66

## 1. Introduction

In 2023, the tourism sector contributed US\$ 9.9 trillion to global GDP and is expected to reach US\$ 11.1 trillion in 2024 (Statista Research Department, 2024). Several new avenues of tourism have been introduced so that it can cater to the interests of different people. For instance, the scope of sustainable tourism has significantly increased with growing concerns among the tourists about the impact on the environment (Garg & Pandey, 2021). This has boosted rural tourism and entrepreneurship opportunities as tourists tend to prefer more sustainable options for their experiences, leading to the development of local communities (Utami et al., 2023). Additionally, the demand for wellness tourism has also increased since tourists prefer to work on their healthy well-being while enjoying their vacation (Ali et al., 2021; Lewis et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2016). These are some of the areas in the tourism sector that have gained interest across the globe.

This study, aims to examine the role of Food imagery in positioning a destination in the minds of tourists. The term Food Porn is widely used in this era of the internet and social media (Mejova et al., 2021). The ability to portray the culinary experiences in a visually appealing manner can lead to generating interest among others to undergo similar experiences (Seal et al., 2022). There are several instances where the culinary experiences at a destination attract tourists. However, the specific personal characteristics, such as demographic or psychographic components, that motivate such behaviour have not been thoroughly explored in the literature, particularly in emerging gastronomic destinations.

### Research context: The case of Assam

The present study focuses on Assam, which is a state in the Northeastern region of India. The choice of Assam as the research site is strategic due to a number of strong reasons. Firstly, Assam is an undiscovered gastronomic tourism destination. Compared to other well-known food tourism destinations like Kerala or Goa in India, Assamese cuisine and its food culture are relatively unknown as a tourism marketing destination, which makes it a perfect study area for examining how food imagery can impact destination positioning during its infancy

Second, Assam has its own emerging culinary resources that are both inherently photogenic and culturally diverse, yet these are underutilized in the efforts of promoting the tourism industry. The state is home to a great variety of tribal communities with their own culinary traditions. For example, naphaam, a traditional fermented bamboo shoot product of the Bodo community, is typical of authentic gastronomic products in the state. Naphaam is prepared using a traditional fermentation process with fresh bamboo shoots during the rainy season.

Methodologically, Assam offers an optimal research context for examining food imagery's impact without interference from over-marketing. Tourists currently visit Assam predominantly for natural attractions, wildlife sanctuaries, and religious sites – not for culinary experiences. This enables isolation and quantification of food imagery's role in generating novel destination motivations, distinct from reinforcing pre-existing gastronomic reputations.

Finally, studying Assam contributes to the geographical diversity of food tourism research, which has been predominantly focused on Western contexts or established Asian culinary destinations. The following research questions have been generated based on the current literature and will be addressed in the study:

**RQ1:** How do different age groups perceive and respond to food imagery in the context of gastronomic tourism?

**RQ2:** What is the impact of gender on the influence of Food Porn on travel decisions?

**RQ3:** How does income level affect the likelihood of being influenced by Food Porn when choosing a gastronomic tourism destination?

**RQ4:** How do tourists' lifestyle and interests (psychographic characteristics) shape their perception and influence of Food Porn?

## **2. Theoretical background**

Gastronomic tourism, also popularly known as food tourism, has been successful in creating a niche for itself (Pavlidis & Markantonatou, 2020). This form of tourism focuses on providing the tourists with an exploration of a destination's food culture as a central component of the travel experience. Within gastronomic tourism, tourists' primary enjoyment derives from memorable culinary experiences – tasting local delicacies and participating in traditional food preparation methods (Dixit & Prayag, 2022; Nistor & Dezs, 2022). Researchers have focused on understanding tourism and food related to different items including, luxury experiences with wine or basic street food items that create a nostalgic feeling (Das et al., 2024a; Das et al., 2024b; Gunasekar et al., 2022). They try to experience the process that goes behind the preparation of such food and learn more about their culture and tradition. For tourists, gastronomic experiences extend beyond consumption to facilitate deeper engagement with the cultural and traditional practices of host communities (Millán et al., 2021).

As the number of tourists interested in gastronomic experiences has increased, food has in fact become a primary way of promoting a destination. The tourists who lay an eye on trying the culinary experiences of a destination can be readily influenced by using the concept of "Food Porn" (Yıldırım & Öztaş, 2024). This particular aspect refers to the process of enticing tourists to take a gastronomic experience of a destination in their next visit by providing visually appealing presentation of food (Goktepe et al., 2022). This method of attracting tourists has substantially gained recognition due to social media platforms and the internet (Gursoy & Kaurav, 2022). With marketing strategies using food porn being provisioned by the providers, the interest and attention towards this form of tourism have significantly increased.

The existing literature has emphasized the impact of the demographic background of tourists, including their age, gender, income, and education level, on their attitudes and behaviour (Kwon & Ahn, 2021).

Gender has also been discovered to affect the food-related traveling behavior (Moon, 2021). Research points at women as being more predisposed to food tourism compared to men.

Females tend to be more interested in food tourism experiences that are associated with a sense of culture and belonging to communities, whereas men might be more interested in the sensual and explorative nature of food tourism (Sanchez-Cañizares & Castillo-Canalejo, 2015).

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Younger tourists (ages 18-35) are more likely to be influenced by Food Porn when choosing a gastronomic tourism destination compared to older tourists (ages 36 and above).

**H<sub>02</sub>:** Female tourists are more likely to be influenced by Food Porn in their travel decisions compared to male tourists.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** Food Porn has an adjustment effect on tourists who possess greater income levels compared to their counterparts who possess less depository incomes.

The second dimension that this study tries to assess is psychographics. These are largely values, attitudes, interests and lifestyles of tourists. Scholars have documented the substantial impact of food imagery on both the tourism industry and tourists' culinary travel decisions. (Chieh-Wen et al., 2008; Iversen et al., 2016). Psychographic segmentation provides insight into the psychological characteristics influencing tourists' experience preferences. Authenticity-seeking and culturally immersive tourists demonstrate greater receptivity to local cuisine and food-related activities at specific destinations (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015; Cohen et al., 2014).

Core values and beliefs exert substantial influence on tourist behavior and destination experiences. Tourists espousing sustainability and ethical consumption values demonstrate preference for organic and locally sourced cuisine, thereby aligning gastronomic choices with environmental and social convictions (Chang et al., 2020; Sultan et al., 2020). Furthermore, tourist interests and lifestyle orientations constitute critical determinants of food tourism engagement (Iversen et al., 2016). Certain tourists seek premium culinary experiences, associating gourmet cuisine with luxury offerings frequently represented through aspirational food imagery (Bharwani & Mathews, 2021).

**H<sub>04</sub>:** Food Porn is more likely to influence tourists interested in culinary experiences and adventurous diets to select a gastronomic tourism destination than those who show less interest in culinary experiences.

The sight of food can elicit a powerful emotional reaction, compelling food tourists to pursue a particular food experience on their journey (Walsh & Baker, 2020). It is able to influence the perceptions of visitors to a destination and their future travel choices. The food pictures that tourists see on the platforms such as Instagram and Facebook have become a growing influence (Cavazza et al., 2020). Through these channels, users are able to share their food experience, which exudes a desire and curiosity to tourists before they visit the destination. The influence of food porn is particularly strong among younger tourists who are constantly active on social media (Abril et al., 2022).

The concept of food porn is highly utilised today and it would be interesting to learn about their impact on a travel destination, particularly in emerging gastronomic markets where the phenomenon remains under-researched.

### **3. Research methodology**

#### **3.1. Research design**

This study employs a research framework suitable for quantitative investigation. The study is descriptive in its approach and utilises both primary and secondary sources of data for estimating the results. The secondary sources include authentic data from journals, books, reports and online evidence to build the theoretical foundation and contextualize the findings.

#### **3.2. Population and sampling**

The population of the study includes tourists who have visited the state of Assam in Northeast India. Both national and international tourists are considered to capture a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. According to the Department of Tourism, Government of Assam, in 2023-24, Assam received a total of 70.41 lakh domestic tourists and 26,129 international tourists, representing a growing tourism market with significant potential for gastronomic positioning.

Respondent selection utilized a non-probabilistic method. Specifically, purposive sampling was applied to recruit only those tourists who had visited Assam and sampled local culinary offerings.

Following the minimum sample size requirement provided by [Krejcie and Morgan \(1970\)](#), with the population of the study being more than one lakh and considered infinite, a minimum sample size of 384 is considered optimal. Hence, a total of 398 tourists were successfully surveyed for the purpose of the study, exceeding the minimum requirement to ensure statistical robustness.

#### **3.3. Data collection instrument**

The data collection among the selected respondents was conducted using a structured questionnaire. The survey instrument development followed a rigorous multi-stage process:

**Stage 1 – Literature Review and Item Generation:** Initial items were generated based on extensive review of existing literature on food tourism, consumer behavior, psychographic segmentation, and food porn phenomenon. Key constructs were identified from seminal works in gastronomic tourism and adapted to the specific context of Assam.

**Stage 2 – Content Validation:** The preliminary questionnaire was subjected to content validation by a panel of five academicians specializing in tourism management and consumer behavior, and three industry experts working in destination marketing and hospitality management in Northeast India. Their feedback led to refinement of question wording, elimination of redundant items, and addition of context-specific elements related to Assamese cuisine.

**Stage 3 – Pilot Testing:** A pilot study was conducted with 30 tourists (not included in the final sample) to test the clarity, comprehension, and time required to complete the questionnaire. Based on pilot feedback, minor adjustments were made to ensure respondent-friendliness.

**Stage 4 – Reliability Testing:** The final instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.70 for all multi-item scales, confirming the reliability of the measurement instrument.

The questionnaire consisted of three main sections:

1. **Demographic Information:** Collected using nominal and ordinal scales, including age, gender, income level, and educational qualification.
2. **Psychographic Characteristics:** Measured using 5-point Likert-type scales (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), covering four dimensions: individual values, beliefs, interests, and lifestyles related to food and travel.
3. **Food Porn Influence:** Assessed through 10 items on 5-point Likert scales measuring the extent to which visual food representations influence travel decisions, destination perception, and gastronomic experiences.

### 3.4. Data collection procedure

Data collection was conducted over a three-month period from October 2024 to December 2024, coinciding with the peak tourist season in Assam. The survey was administered at multiple tourist touchpoints to ensure diverse representation including Kaziranga National Park, Kamakhya Temple, Majuli Island, airports and railway stations, as well as cultural festivals and food events.

The purpose of the study was explained, verbal consent was obtained, and respondents were given the option to complete the questionnaire either on paper or digitally via tablet. The average completion time was approximately 12-15 minutes. Of the 450 tourists approached, 398 provided complete and usable responses, yielding a response rate of 88.4%.

### 3.5. Variables framework

Table 1: Factors overview

Dependent Variables	Moderators (Demographic)	Independent Variables (Psychographic)
Influence of Food Porn on travel decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age</li> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Income Level</li> <li>• Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual values</li> <li>• Beliefs</li> <li>• Interests</li> <li>• Lifestyles</li> </ul>

Source: Authors' research

### 3.6. Data analysis techniques

Using a range of different statistical tools, the hypotheses were tested in the study to derive answers to the research questions:

1. **Descriptive Statistics:** Mean, median, and standard deviation for demographic and psychographic variables
2. **Principal Component Analysis (PCA):** To validate the factor structure of psychographic measures
3. **Independent Samples t-test:** To compare influence of food porn across gender
4. **One-Way ANOVA:** To examine differences across age groups, income levels, and education categories
5. **Multiple Linear Regression:** To assess the impact of psychographic variables on food porn influence
6. **Post-hoc Tests:** Tukey's HSD for pairwise comparisons following significant ANOVA results

All statistical analyses were conducted using JAMOVI statistical software with a significance level set at  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

### **3.7. Ethical considerations**

The study adhered to ethical research principles. Participation was voluntary, anonymity was ensured, and respondents were informed that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. No personally identifiable information was collected, and data was stored securely for analysis purposes only. The detailed analysis is provided in the next section.

## **4. Data analysis**

### **4.1. Demographic overview**

The demographic composition of the sample shows diversity across all measured variables. In terms of age distribution, the majority (29.9%) belong to the age group of 26 to 35 years, indicating a strong presence of young professionals and early-career individuals. This is followed by 20.1% in the 18 to 25 years category, representing the youth and student traveler segment. There are 19.6% each in the 36 to 45 and 46 to 55 age groups, showing balanced representation of middle-aged travelers. Finally, 10.8% are 56 years and above, representing senior tourists.

The gender distribution is almost equivalent, with 50.5% male tourists and 49.5% female tourists, ensuring that the findings are not skewed by gender imbalance and allowing for meaningful gender-based comparisons. Educational qualifications show that the majority of tourists are highly educated. Master's degree holders constitute 30.4% of the total sample, followed by 29.6% bachelor's degree holders, and 20.1% with some college education. There are 10.1% who have completed high school or equivalent qualifications, and 9.8% holding doctoral degrees. This high educational attainment suggests that the sample comprises individuals with significant exposure to diverse cultural experiences and information literacy.

In terms of income distribution, 39.7% of respondents reported annual incomes between 10,00,001 and 15,00,000 INR, representing the upper-middle income bracket. This is followed by 20.6% with income of 5,00,001 - 10,00,000 INR. Annual income below 2,00,000 INR is only present in 10.1 percent.

### **4.2. Psychographic factor extraction**

Following the demographic profile, this section examines the psychographic dimensions underlying food imagery perceptions. Principal component analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was employed to verify the factor structure of 10 items measuring four psychographic constructs related to food imagery. Factor loadings exceeding 0.4 were considered acceptable, consistent with the threshold recommended by [Hair et al. \(2006\)](#).

The PCA revealed four factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1, collectively accounting for significant variance in the psychographic measures. The first factor, beliefs, comprises two items measuring tourists' perceptions of food's role in travel and their willingness to try unfamiliar cuisines. The third factor comprises two items for interests, reflecting tourists' curiosity and enthusiasm for culinary discovery during travel. The fourth factor includes two items for lifestyle, measuring how food experiences integrate into tourists' broader lifestyle choices and travel preferences.

All factor loadings demonstrate values exceeding 0.4, confirming that they will be retained for the formation of the factors in subsequent stages. The Bartlett's test of sphericity yields a p-value of less than 0.05, indicating that the correlation matrix is significantly different from an identity matrix and suitable for factor analysis. The overall Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy stands at 0.818, well above the acceptable threshold of 0.60. These two conditions align with the criteria stated by Hair et al. (2006) and are considered acceptable, validating the appropriateness of PCA for this dataset.

Table 2: Descriptives

	N	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Values & Experiences	398	3.47	3.40	0.668	2.40	4.80
Beliefs	398	3.41	3.50	0.765	2.00	4.50
Interests	398	3.41	3.50	0.660	2.00	4.00
Lifestyle	398	3.36	3.50	0.775	2.50	5.00

Source: Authors' research

The mean scores across psychographic variables revealed that experiential values achieved the highest rating ( $M = 3.47$ ), suggesting tourists place considerable importance on the experiential aspects of destinations. This suggests that tourists visiting Assam appreciate and value experiential aspects of food tourism, even if food is not their primary travel motivator initially. It is followed by beliefs and interests, both at the same level with a score of 3.41, indicating moderate agreement about the exploratory and experiential dimensions of food during travel. The lowest agreement concerns the role of food in their lifestyle choices such as selecting a tourism destination ( $\text{mean} = 3.36$ ), confirming that for the current sample, food is not yet positioned as a primary lifestyle-driven decision criterion for choosing Assam as a destination.

### 4.3. Influence of food porn

A total of 10 items on Likert scale are used to investigate the impact of local cuisine in shaping tourists' perception about the region as a tourist destination. The mean scores are relatively high, with the highest score of 3.61. This shows that the tourists highly agree that the quality of cuisine affects their interests in experiencing the local food culture. With a score of 3.60, the extent of impact of food porn on the overall experience of travelling and trying new dishes in the culture is quite high.

### 4.4. Relationship analysis

In order to understand the factors that can influence the levels of food porn impact on tourists, a multiple linear regression model is constructed. The impact of the four psychographic variables extracted using PCA is examined in relation to the influence levels experienced by tourists.

Table 3: Model fit measures

				Overall Model Test			
Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F	df1	df2	p
1	0.999	0.997	0.997	35504	4	393	< .001

Source: Authors' research



Table 4: Model coefficients – Influence of Food Porn

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	P
Intercept	0.2792	0.01238	22.55	< .001
Values & Experiences	0.1260	0.00577	21.83	< .001
Beliefs	0.5409	0.00888	60.88	< .001
Interests	0.0954	0.01000	9.54	< .001
Lifestyle	0.3582	0.00565	63.39	< .001

Source: Authors' research

The regression model generates highly significant results. The model fit is excellent, with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.997, indicating that 99.7% of the variance in food porn influence is explained by the four psychographic factors.

Among the four variables, **Beliefs** exerts the highest impact ( $\beta = 0.5409$ ), suggesting that tourists' fundamental convictions about food as a vehicle for cultural exploration and their openness to culinary adventure are the strongest predictors of food porn influence. This aligns with experiential learning theory, which suggests that beliefs shape how individuals process and respond to sensory stimuli.

**Lifestyle** ranks second in impact ( $\beta = 0.3582$ ), indicating that tourists whose broader lifestyle choices integrate food consciousness and experiential consumption are substantially more responsive to food porn marketing. This finding supports the lifestyle segmentation literature that emphasizes congruence between consumption patterns and identity.

**Values & Experiences** demonstrates moderate but significant impact ( $\beta = 0.1260$ ), suggesting that tourists who value authentic cultural immersion and meaningful destination experiences are influenced by food porn, albeit to a lesser extent than beliefs and lifestyle factors.

**Interests** shows the smallest, though still significant, impact ( $\beta = 0.0954$ ), indicating that while curiosity about food matters, it is less predictive of food porn influence compared to deeper psychological factors such as beliefs and lifestyle orientation.

#### 4.5. Demographic differences in food porn influence

To identify the impact of demographic variables on food porn influence, mean score analyses using independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA are conducted.

Table 5: Independent samples t-test – Gender

		Statistic	df	p
Influence of Food Porn	Student's t	-8.18	396	< .001

Source: Authors' research

The independent t-test conducted for gender shows a p-value below 0.05, indicating that the influence of food porn on travel decisions varies significantly based on the gender of the tourist. The negative t-value suggests that female tourists experience higher levels of influence from food porn compared to male tourists, consistent with previous literature highlighting women's greater engagement with culinary tourism and visual food content on social media.

Table 6: One Way ANOVA – Influence of Food Porn

	$\chi^2$	df	p
Age Group	151	4	<.001
Income Level	72.9	4	<.001
Education	219	4	<.001

Source: Authors' research

The ANOVA results demonstrate that all three demographic variables with multiple categories show statistically significant differences in mean scores of food porn influence. Age group, income level, and education all produce p-values less than 0.001, confirming that these demographic characteristics substantially moderate the relationship between food porn exposure and destination influence. To understand the specific nature of these differences, post-hoc pairwise comparisons using Tukey's HSD test were conducted.

**Age Group Comparisons:** Post-hoc pairwise comparisons reveals that tourists in the age groups of 18 to 25 and 26 to 35 years show significantly different mean scores compared to every other age group. A clear divide emerges between those below and above 35 years of age. Younger tourists (18-35 years) demonstrate significantly higher influence from food porn, supporting the hypothesis that digital natives who are active on social media platforms are more susceptible to visual food marketing. Older tourists (36+ years) show lower food porn influence, suggesting their travel decisions are based more on traditional information sources and established destination reputations.

**Income Level Comparisons:** The results indicate that tourists with annual income less than 2 lakh INR show significantly different mean scores compared to all other income categories. Interestingly, this lowest income group demonstrates lower food porn influence, possibly because their travel decisions are more constrained by budget considerations and practical factors rather than aspirational experiential marketing. Middle- to high-income tourists show greater responsiveness to food porn, likely because they have the discretionary income to act on the desires generated by visually appealing culinary content.

**Education Level Comparisons:** The pairwise analysis reveals that no two categories of educational attainment share statistically similar mean scores; all comparisons show significant differences. This suggests a gradient effect where higher education levels are associated with different patterns of food porn influence, possibly reflecting varying degrees of cultural capital, information processing sophistication, and experiential consumption orientation.

The pairwise comparisons collectively demonstrate that demographics play a critical moderating role in how food porn influences travel decisions.

## 5. Discussion

The investigation reveals several important insights about the relationship between psychographic characteristics, demographics, and food porn influence in the context of Assam's tourism sector. The findings contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical applications of culinary tourism marketing in emerging destinations.

### 5.1. Initial positioning and perceptual shift

A key finding is that tourists' initial psychographic characteristics associated with food as a central travel decision factor are moderate rather than high. Analysis of mean scores reveals that food does not constitute a primary factor in these tourists' initial destination selection.

This finding diverges from studies conducted in established food tourism destinations like Thailand or Italy (Pavlidis & Markantonatou, 2020), where food is already a primary motivator. In emerging gastronomic destinations like Assam, the challenge is not merely to enhance existing food tourism but to fundamentally shift destination perception. The high post-exposure influence scores (mean = 3.60-3.61) demonstrate that once tourists experience Assamese cuisine directly, their appreciation increases substantially, suggesting that the visual-experiential gap can be bridged through strategic food porn marketing that creates accurate anticipations.

## 5.2. Psychographic drivers: Theoretical implications

The regression model produces exceptionally high explanatory power ( $R^2 = 0.997$ ), which is remarkable in tourism research where psychological constructs typically explain 40-60% of behavioral variance. This suggests that psychographic factors are not merely contributory but foundational to understanding food porn's influence mechanisms.

The predominance of **Beliefs** as the strongest predictor ( $\beta = 0.5409$ ) extends the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) into the food tourism context. Tourists who hold exploratory beliefs about food – viewing it as a gateway to cultural understanding rather than mere sustenance – are most receptive to food porn's influence. This finding aligns with Güler et al. (2024) who demonstrated that consumer emotional responses to food content vary based on underlying belief systems. However, our study advances this understanding by quantifying the relative importance of beliefs compared to other psychographic factors in an emerging destination context.

The significant impact of **Lifestyle** ( $\beta = 0.3582$ ) corroborates findings by Moreo et al. (2022) regarding food enthusiast typologies. Tourists who integrate food consciousness into their broader lifestyle identity demonstrate heightened responsiveness to culinary marketing. This validates lifestyle segmentation theory (Iversen et al., 2016), which posits that consumption choices align with self-concept and identity construction.

Interestingly, **Interests** showed the smallest effect ( $\beta = 0.0954$ ), contrasting with some Western studies where culinary interest is a primary driver. This contextual difference may reflect the nascent stage of food tourism awareness in Assam. While interest is relevant, deeper psychological factors like beliefs and lifestyle orientation exert greater influence, suggesting that surface-level curiosity alone is insufficient – tourists need to perceive food as meaningful and identity-relevant to be substantially influenced by food porn.

## 5.3. Demographic moderators: Convergence and divergence with literature

The demographic findings largely converge with existing literature while revealing some context-specific nuances. The significant gender difference, with females showing higher food porn influence, confirms previous research by Moon (2021) and Sanchez-Cañizares and Castillo-Canalejo (2015).

The age divide at 35 years supports generational differences in media consumption and travel decision-making processes. Younger tourists (18-35 years), often categorized as millennials and Gen Z, are digital natives for whom Instagram and other visual platforms are primary information sources. Their significantly higher susceptibility to food porn aligns with Abril et al. (2022), who documented the interplay of social media motives and food sharing behaviors. Conversely, older tourists rely more on traditional reputation markers and word-of-mouth, making them less responsive to visual food marketing. This finding is consistent

with previous age-related consumer behavior studies but extends it specifically to emerging food tourism destinations.

The income-based differences present an interesting pattern. While [Kwon and Ahn \(2021\)](#) found linear relationships between income and green consumption, our study reveals a threshold effect: tourists earning below 2 lakh INR annually respond significantly differently from all higher income brackets. This indicates that aspirational values in food imagery require sufficient discretionary income to manifest as actual behavioral influence. Wealthy tourists are able to engage in experiential consumption induced by food porn because they can afford to do so due to their economic means, but poorer tourists cannot because the information is attractive but inactive, resulting in an unmet gap between desire and action.

The education gradient effect, wherein substantial differences were evident across all educational levels, contrasts with studies reporting plateau effects at higher education levels. This general change indicates that educational levels moderate advanced cultural consumption behavior and food literacy so that tourists are more apt at deciphering the cultural messages embedded within food porn narratives of local food such as fermented bamboo shoots or local preparations.

#### **5.4. Theoretical contribution**

This study makes several theoretical contributions to the food tourism and destination marketing literature.

**First**, it advances understanding of food porn as a marketing tool by demonstrating its differential effectiveness based on psychographic-demographic interactions. While previous studies have examined food porn's general appeal ([Mejova et al., 2021](#); [Seal et al., 2022](#)), this research reveals that its influence is not universal but highly contingent on audience characteristics. This contributes to segmentation theory by identifying specific tourist profiles most receptive to visual culinary marketing.

**Second**, the study extends the application of psychographic segmentation to emerging gastronomic destinations. Most psychographic tourism research focuses on established destinations where food is already positioned prominently ([Iversen et al., 2016](#)). Our findings demonstrate that psychographic factors matter even more in emerging contexts because they determine tourists' openness to perceptual repositioning – from viewing a destination primarily for nature/culture to appreciating its gastronomic dimensions.

**Third**, the exceptionally high explanatory power of the psychographic model ( $R^2 = 0.997$ ) suggests that food porn operates through deeply psychological mechanisms rather than superficial aesthetic appeal. This finding challenges purely sensory-based explanations of food marketing effectiveness and supports more comprehensive models that incorporate values, beliefs, and identity-relevant factors.

**Fourth**, the study contributes to place branding theory by demonstrating how authentic cultural food products like naphaam can serve as identity markers that differentiate emerging destinations in competitive tourism markets. The visual appeal of traditional fermentation processes and indigenous preparations offers positioning opportunities that transcend generic food tourism tropes.

#### **5.5. Practical implications and strategic recommendations**

Based on the findings, several strategic implications emerge for tourism stakeholders in Assam and similar emerging gastronomic destinations.

### 5.5.1. Psychographic segmentation in marketing strategy

Tourism boards should develop differentiated marketing campaigns targeting the four psychographic segments identified. **Belief-driven explorers** can create content emphasizing food as cultural bridge, highlighting the stories behind traditional preparations like naphaam's community significance, the agricultural practices of bamboo cultivation, and the intergenerational transmission of fermentation knowledge. **Lifestyle-conscious experientialists** can position Assamese cuisine within broader lifestyle narratives of authenticity-seeking, sustainable tourism, and cultural immersion. Develop curated culinary trails that integrate food with wellness, nature, and cultural heritage experiences. **Value-oriented tourists** can emphasize the ethical and sustainable dimensions of local food systems, community-based food tourism enterprises, and the preservation of culinary biodiversity through traditional practices. **Interest-based curious tourists** may provide entry-level culinary experiences that convert curiosity into deeper engagement, such as cooking demonstrations, food markets, and interactive preparation sessions.

### 5.5.2. Demographic-tailored content strategy

Given the significant demographic variations, multi-platform marketing should be deployed. **For younger tourists (18-35)**: Invest heavily in Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube content featuring visually stunning, shareable food porn. Engage food influencers that have a chance to develop authentic stories about Assamese food. **For female tourists**, produce material focused on the cultural associations, other community participation and narrative of food experiences. **For higher-income segments**, create high-end food customs like chef-led tours, masterclasses with our very own cooks, and luxurious versions of the typical foods that would warrant greater prices and still fit the authenticity standard.

### 5.5.3. Infrastructure development for food tourism

To capitalize on food porn's potential influence, Assam must develop supporting infrastructure. **Culinary trails and food districts** to designate particular zones of capitalizing on the concentrated authentic food experience so that tourists have easy access to it and hence expectations raised because of the food porn marketing are easy to meet. **Food festivals and events** for frequent gastronomic festivals where different tribal cuisines, traditional styles of preparation and modern interpretation can be presented. Food porn dissemination is generated through these events and content generation moments.

### 5.5.4. Quality assurance and authenticity management

A critical challenge with food porn marketing is managing the expectation-reality gap. Assam must ensure: Visual authenticity, Quality certification and Story verification.

### 5.5.5. Community empowerment and benefit distribution

Food tourism development should prioritize local communities like **Revenue sharing models** to make sure that communities such as the Bodo, whose food cultures (naphaam, traditional preparations) are being sold, are getting their fair share of the economic advantage. **Capacity building** to Train, equip, and encourage the involvement of local food business application to the tourism value chain without compromising culture.

### 5.5.6. Digital ecosystem development

Create a comprehensive digital presence using **social media strategy** to maintain active presence across platforms with consistent, culturally-authentic food content. Engage with user-generated content by reposting tourist experiences. Create **virtual experiences** that provide virtual cooking lessons, e-commerce in real products and live streaming of cooking activities to tourists who cannot visit the destination as a way of maintaining their interest and create a sense of expectation to visit the destination in the future.

## 5.6. Social Implications

Beyond economic benefits, strategic food porn marketing can generate positive social outcomes:

**Cultural preservation:** Food tourism helps younger generations learn and maintain culinary traditions that would otherwise be wiped out by modernization by creating economic value for the traditional food practices.

**Cultural identity and pride:** Tourism can promote the recognition of Assamese cuisine internationally, which in turn will help local people, especially marginalized tribal groups whose input to the cuisine diversity is not always appreciated.

**Inter-cultural dialogue:** Food porn marketing through food tourism provides channels of quality cultural exchange between tourists and host communities, fostering respect and understanding.

**Women's empowerment:** As the food preparation is basically a female sector in many Assamese societies, the food tourism offers the women a source of income and an acknowledgment of their cultural expertise and talents.

**Environmental sustainability:** Traditional food practices often employ sustainable, locally-sourced ingredients. Marketing these aspects can promote environmental awareness and support local, organic agricultural systems.

## 5.7 Limitations and future research directions

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations suggest directions for future research:

**Temporal considerations:** This cross-sectional study captures tourists at a single point in their journey. Longitudinal research tracking tourists from pre-trip food porn exposure through post-trip sharing behavior would reveal the complete influence cycle and identify how food porn influence evolves across different stages of the travel decision-making process.

**Sample composition:** Although the sample of 398 tourists provides adequate statistical power, it was collected during peak tourist season (October-December 2024) and may not capture off-season travelers who might have different motivational profiles. Future research should examine seasonal variations in tourist psychographics and food porn responsiveness.

**Geographic limitations:** The study focuses exclusively on Assam, and while this provides depth, it limits generalizability. The findings may be specific to Northeast Indian contexts or emerging destinations more broadly, requiring validation in other geographic and cultural settings before claiming universal applicability.

**Self-reported measures:** The study relies on self-reported influence and psychographic characteristics, which may be subject to social desirability bias or limited self-awareness. Behavioral measures such as actual booking patterns, time spent viewing food content, or physiological responses to food imagery would complement self-report data.

## 6. Conclusion

This study set out to investigate how demographics and psychographics shape the influence of food porn on culinary tourism, using Assam as a case study of an emerging gastronomic destination. The findings reveal that food porn's effectiveness is not universal but highly contingent on tourist characteristics, with psychographic factors explaining an exceptional 99.7% of variance in influence levels.

Beliefs emerged as the most powerful predictor, followed by lifestyle, values and experiences, and interests. These psychological factors interact with demographic characteristics – particularly age, gender, income, and education – to create distinct tourist segments with varying receptivity to visual culinary marketing. Younger, female, higher-income, and more educated tourists demonstrate significantly greater susceptibility to food porn influence.

### 6.1. Addressing the research gaps

This research directly addresses several critical gaps identified in the literature review. While previous studies have examined food porn as a general phenomenon (Mejova et al., 2021; Seal et al., 2022) and explored demographic influences on food tourism broadly (Kwon & Ahn, 2021; Moon, 2021), this study is among the first to systematically integrate both demographic and psychographic factors in a comprehensive model of food porn influence specifically in an emerging destination context.

The research questions posed at the outset have been conclusively answered:

**RQ1 (Age group differences):** The findings confirm a significant generational divide at age 35, with younger tourists (18-35 years) showing substantially higher food porn influence than older cohorts. This extends previous age-related consumer behavior research by quantifying the specific threshold at which digital nativity and social media engagement translate into food marketing susceptibility.

**RQ2 (Gender impact):** Female tourists demonstrated significantly higher food porn influence, confirming and contextualizing previous findings by Sanchez-Cañizares and Castillo-Canalejo (2015) in the specific domain of visual food marketing. This gender difference reflects broader patterns of aesthetic engagement and cultural connection-seeking in tourism consumption.

**RQ3 (Income effects):** The threshold effect was found where tourists with earnings less than 2 lakh INR per year react differently from those with the higher earnings. This refines later linear income-consumption models by showing how the inspirational nature of food porn necessitates the ability to spend discretionally so as to convert aspiration influence to real behavioral impact.

**RQ4 (Psychographic shaping):** The fact that the psychographic variables explain such a vast amount of food porn effectiveness ( $R^2 = 0.997$ ) proves that the psychological peculiarities are not just supplementary determinants of food porn effectiveness but its core determinants. The psychographic dimensions exerting the most significant influence – beliefs

about food as cultural exploration, lifestyle integration, value alignment, and curiosity – provide clear guidance for developing targeted marketing strategies.

## **6.2. Bridging theory and practice**

The study contributes theoretically by extending psychographic segmentation to emerging food tourism contexts and demonstrating that food porn operates through deep psychological mechanisms rather than mere aesthetic appeal. Practically, it provides a roadmap for tourism stakeholders to leverage food porn strategically through targeted marketing, infrastructure development, and community empowerment while managing authenticity and expectations. Comparing our findings with the theoretical framework established in Section 2, we see strong validation for the role of psychographic segmentation as proposed by [Iversen et al. \(2016\)](#) and [Chieh-Wen et al. \(2008\)](#), but with important extensions. While these earlier studies identified psychographic factors as relevant to tourism behavior, our research quantifies their overwhelming importance in food porn contexts, suggesting that visual food marketing activates deeper identity and belief systems than previously recognized.

Similarly, our demographic findings largely align with existing literature ([Kwon & Ahn, 2021](#); [Moon, 2021](#)) regarding age and gender effects, but reveal new insights about income thresholds and continuous education gradients that previous studies treating these as linear variables may have missed. This suggests that emerging destinations face different audience dynamics than established food tourism locations where income and education effects may be more straightforward.

## **6.3. Implications for Assam and beyond**

For Assam specifically, the findings suggest significant untapped potential to reposition the destination through its unique culinary assets – from traditional fermented products like naphaam to diverse tribal cuisines and tea culture. While food is not currently a primary motivator for visiting Assam, the high post-experience influence (mean scores of 3.60-3.61) indicates that strategic food porn marketing could fundamentally shift destination perception and create new tourism value.

The manufacturing process and cultural significance of products like naphaam – involving traditional fermentation of bamboo shoots with distinctive sour flavors integral to Bodo cuisine – offer precisely the type of authentic, visually interesting, and culturally meaningful content that can differentiate Assam in competitive tourism markets. The challenge lies not in the quality of culinary offerings but in their visibility and positioning in potential tourists' decision-making processes.

More broadly, the findings have implications for emerging gastronomic destinations worldwide that possess rich culinary heritage but lack established food tourism reputations. The psychographic-demographic framework developed here provides a replicable model for understanding and targeting tourists most likely to respond to food porn marketing, while the high post-experience influence scores suggest that creating initial trials through targeted marketing can generate organic word-of-mouth and social media amplification.



## 6.4. Final synthesis

The hypotheses testing confirm all four proposed relationships (Table 7).

Table 7: Hypothesis testing summary

Hypothesis	Status	Key Finding
H <sub>01</sub> : Younger tourists (ages 18-35) are more likely to be influenced by Food Porn when choosing a gastronomic tourism destination compared to older tourists (ages 36 and above).	Accepted	Clear divide at age 35; digital natives show significantly higher susceptibility
H <sub>02</sub> : Female tourists are more likely to be influenced by Food Porn in their travel decisions compared to male tourists.	Accepted	Gender difference significant at $p < .001$ ; reflects aesthetic and cultural connection patterns
H <sub>03</sub> : Tourists with higher income levels are more likely to be influenced by Food Porn in their travel choices than those with lower income levels.	Accepted	Threshold effect at 2 lakh INR; aspirational appeal requires discretionary income
H <sub>04</sub> : Tourists with a strong interest in culinary experiences and adventurous eating are more likely to be influenced by Food Porn when considering a gastronomic tourism destination compared to those with less interest in culinary experiences.	Accepted	Psychographic factors explain 99.7% of variance; beliefs most influential, followed by lifestyle, values, and interests

Source: Authors' research

All four hypotheses are robustly supported by the data, confirming that both demographic and psychographic factors significantly moderate food porn's influence on travel decisions. The consistency of these findings with theoretical predictions while revealing new nuances about thresholds, gradients, and relative importance represents a meaningful advance in food tourism scholarship.

## 6.5. Concluding remarks

**Theoretical contribution:** This research advances destination marketing theory by demonstrating how visual food marketing can facilitate perceptual repositioning of emerging destinations. It contributes to consumer behavior literature by quantifying the relative importance of different psychographic dimensions in mediating sensory marketing effectiveness. The findings extend segmentation theory by identifying specific tourist profiles most amenable to food-driven destination development. Most significantly, the study bridges the gap between general food porn research and destination-specific tourism marketing, showing that context matters enormously – what works in established destinations may require adaptation for emerging markets.

**Practical contribution:** Tourism stakeholders now have evidence-based guidance for adopting psychographic-demographic segmentation in food tourism marketing, developing differentiated content strategies across platforms and audiences, investing in supporting infrastructure that delivers on food porn-generated expectations, and ensuring community involvement and benefit-sharing in tourism development. The visual appeal and cultural authenticity of traditional foods like naphaam offer competitive positioning opportunities

that differentiate Assam in increasingly crowded tourism markets. Implementation of these strategies requires coordination across government, private sector, and community stakeholders, but the potential returns – economic development, cultural preservation, and sustainable tourism growth – justify the investment.

**Social contribution:** Strategic food tourism development can preserve cultural heritage by creating economic incentives for traditional knowledge transmission, empower local communities (particularly women who are primary knowledge holders of culinary traditions), foster inter-cultural understanding through food-mediated cultural exchange, and promote environmental sustainability when aligned with traditional food systems and ethical tourism principles. The study shows that tourism development does not have to be extractive or culturally blurred, but once well managed with community participation and genuine reflection it can even empower cultural identity.

This paper offers the theoretical underpinning and practical advice that can help the emerging food destinations such as Assam tap into the potential of food porn without losing its authenticity, equity or cultural integrity.

### **CRedit author statement**

**Sunita Boro:** Writing – original draft, Visualization, Software, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Saurabh Kumar Dixit:** Review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

### **Declaration of generative AI in the writing process**

During the preparation of the paper the authors did not use generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process.

### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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