

The role of xiaohongshu in dietary acculturation and its influence on Chinese international students' purchase intention for Malaysian traditional food

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of Xiaohongshu in shaping Chinese international students' purchase intentions (PI) toward Malaysian traditional food. Drawing on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the research examines the direct effects of information quality, electronic word of mouth (eWOM), perceived usefulness (PU), and perceived enjoyment (PE) on PI, as well as the mediating roles of attitude and trust and the moderating role of food neophobia. A quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed among Chinese international students studying in Malaysia. A total of 380 valid responses were obtained, with established scales adapted from prior research to measure the constructs. The data were analyzed using SPSS, including reliability testing, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and mediation and moderation tests. The results revealed that all four independent variables significantly influenced PI, with both attitude and trust mediating these relationships. Furthermore, food neophobia was found to moderate the effects of attitude and trust on PI, weakening these positive associations among students with higher levels of neophobia. These findings confirm the importance of cognitive and affective factors in food-related consumer behavior within a cross-cultural context. This study extends TAM and TPB by applying them to the context of social media-driven cross-cultural food consumption. It provides theoretical insights into the role of trust, attitude, and individual differences in shaping consumer behavior, while also offering practical recommendations for marketers and cultural promoters seeking to enhance the acceptance of Malaysian traditional food among international students.

1. Introduction

The explosive development of social media and digital environments has essentially altered the consumer behavior of all markets worldwide where social commerce has become a significant power player of consumer choices (Wang & Scrimgeour, 2023). Specifically, the platforms with a combination of user-generated content and e-commerce functionality have emerged as potent platforms where consumers share information, experience, and shape attitudes towards products and services (Pedersen et al., 2023). Xiaohongshu or Little Red Book is one example of a hybrid platform that merges lifestyle sharing with product recommendation, which offers both informational and social content, which influences consumption patterns (Lam et al., 2020). Digital platforms like Xiaohongshu are vital to Chinese international students who usually experience cultural adaptation and confusion in the host countries and use them to make decisions related to food, particularly when they are facing new gastronomic cultures (Zhang et al., 2023). It is on this background that the traditional food in Malaysia has become one of the most special subjects of interest, since it is not only a rich source of cultural heritage but also a subject that attracts the rising call of cross-cultural cuisine (Poon & Tung, 2023).

The facts of usage have shown how social media and online communities can be effective in influencing consumer behaviors and perception. Research on the influence of information quality on consumer trust and PI displays its beneficial effect on the

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uncertainty reduction and enhanced trust to decision-making based on the reliable and relevant information (Clotney et al., 2025; H. Sun et al., 2023). On the same note, eWOM has proved to be more compelling than traditional marketing because peer-created information offers authenticity and credibility that may be taken into consideration when considering new products (Yones & Muthaiyah, 2023). The studies based on the Technology Acceptance Model also underline the fact that PU and PE can moderate attitudes and behavioral intentions to prove the dual role of functional and hedonic drivers in the digital environment (Davis, 1989). Besides, it is proposed in the consumer psychology studies that attitude and trust mediate the impact of these antecedents on PI and food neophobia moderates their effects by diluting the willingness to have unfamiliar foods despite positive perceptions (Zheng et al., 2023).

Although the literature on digital influence and consumer behavior has been on the upward trend, there exist a number of gaps that can be filled by other studies. First, the majority of literature has been focused on the overall consumers or domestic markets, and little has been done concerning international students as a distinct consumer group with its cultural adaptation problems and a tendency to use digital platforms as a reference (Lam et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2023). Although earlier researchers have explored the role of social media in forming food-related attitudes, only a few studies have specifically investigated Xiaohongshu despite most of them being gaining popularity among Chinese consumers and foreign students in general (Sun et al., 2023). Second, empirical data related to Xiaohongshu incorporation related to the intake of traditional food in host nations has been sparse with studies usually looking at the globalization of Western fast food as opposed to traditional cultural foods in Southeast Asia (Boccia & Tohidi, 2024). Third, although the information quality, eWOM, PU, and PE were researched as direct predictors of PI, there are few studies that empirically test the mediating role of attitude and trust in this particular cultural and digital context (Ngo et al., 2024). Moreover, food neophobia has been recognized as a hindrance to the implementation of new food items, yet the moderating capacity of food neophobia to the extent to which the impact of attitude and trust relate to PI in an environment driven by social media has not been thoroughly investigated (Estay et al., 2023). It is imperative to fill these gaps so as to develop theoretical knowledge besides providing practical inferences in promoting traditional food in multicultural markets.

This research will test the hypothesis that Xiaohongshu influences the Chinese PI of international students in Malaysia in terms of attitude and trust as mediators and food neophobia as moderators. Towards this end, the research establishes the following objectives: (1) the proposed research seeks to determine how information quality, eWOM, PU, and PE affect the PI of Chinese international students who consume Xiaohongshu; (2) the proposed research aims to determine the role of attitude in the relationships between these variables and PI; (3) the proposed research will aim at establishing the role of trust in the relationships between these variables and PI; (4) the proposed research will aim at adding qualitative data to the existing statistical data that illustrate the lived experiences.

This study is important in that it contributes to theory and practice. In theory, it offers the extension of the usage of the TAM and the TPB onto the sphere of cultural food consumption, emphasizing on the mediating and moderating processes that form PI in an online environment (Davis, 1989). It also enhances the knowledge of the role of the use of social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu as cultural brokers that enable the international students to interact with the traditional foods of the host countries. In practice, the results of this study may inform Malaysian food marketers, tourism stakeholders, and policymakers to create superior digital marketing approaches that make use of social media to advertise the traditional food goods to international student markets. The study offers practical implications in designing culturally sensitive campaigns to overcome the limitations on purchase behavior by determining how the quality of information, eWOM, usefulness, enjoyment, trust, and attitudes play off to influence purchase behavior e.g., food neophobia.

2. Literature Review

The quality of information has been determined in previous research as a decisive factor of online consumer behavior and this is so especially in the context of social commerce where the digital content is highly relied on when making a decision (Hu et al., 2023). The availability of high-quality information that is accurate, clear, timely, and relevant leads to less uncertainty and more consumer confidence and trust in both the platform and the product (Chen et al., 2025). Empirical data indicate that once consumers see information presented on the social platforms as credible and exhaustive, they are more apt to shape positive attitudes towards the product and eventually, they develop more PI (Harsono, 2024; L. Sun et al., 2023; Yuan et al., 2024). Therefore, quality of information is important in motivating the consumers such as international students to see and purchase goods within unfamiliar cultural environments.

H_{1a}: *Information quality has a positive effect on PI.*

EWOM has been researched widely as a factor that determines consumer attitudes and behavior with studies that have indicated that it has more credibility and impact than conventional marketing communications (Ngo et al., 2024). The generation of social proof through the reviews, testimonials and recommendations of peers in the social sites minimizes the risk perceptions and maximizes the desire to purchase among the consumers (Román-Augusto et al., 2023). Research has established that eWOM has a strong influence on consumer trust particularly among the younger generation who are more dependent on online groups to give them a clue on what to purchase (Rosyid et al., 2023; Widiarta et al., 2024). In line with

this, eWOM is an influential tool that enhances the intention to buy as it offers genuine and experience-based judgements to the products by consumers.

H_{1b}: *EWOM has a positive effect on PI.*

PU is a construct based on the Technology acceptance model and has always been related to behavioural intentions of consumers in the online scenario (Raza et al., 2023). It has been established that the more useful the information or functions of a platform are to consumers in accomplishing their objectives, including judging or buying products, the more they are willing to follow the advice they get on the platform (Sun et al., 2023). In the social commerce context, PU is translated to consumers who feel the content, tools, or interactions provided by the platform, which directly relates to their buying decision (Teo et al., 2024). Empirical evidence supports the fact that PU influences the PI positively because consumers tend to invest in new services and products when they are convinced that the platform offers some value to them (Munikrishnan et al., 2023).

H_{1c}: *PU has a positive effect on PI.*

It has also been noted that PE is another major driver of online consumer behavior in the contexts where hedonic experience supplements utilitarian functions (Hu et al., 2023). Enjoyment can be perceived as the level of pleasure and satisfaction of the users with using a platform and studies indicate that interactive elements, visual appeal and dynamic stories contribute to consumer desire to buy (Raghunathan et al., 2006; Román-Augusto et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Empirical research has shown that emotions towards the platform and product become stronger when customers are offered fun and entertainment during their browsing of digital content, which increases the chances of purchase (Poon & Tung, 2023). Therefore, perceived pleasure boosts PI through the positive affective feelings that stimulate consumer involvement and propagation.

H₂: *PE has a positive effect on PI.*

Attitude has always been treated as one of the most important psychological mechanisms applied in the research of consumer behavior to translate external stimuli into behavioral intentions. Research has also evidenced that consumers consider the quality of information presented on social sites to form cognitive assessments that within the framework of digital consumption determine how the consumer feels about the service or product at large (Jiang et al., 2023). Perceived high-quality information, perceived as reliable, comprehensive and relevant, in addition to boosting trust, also elicits positive evaluations, which reinforce the attitude of consumers and increase their buying intentions (Raza et al., 2023). Equally, eWOM does contribute to attitude formation, since a positive peer-review and recommendations serve as effective social messages that affect cognitive and affective behaviour of consumers towards products (Widiarta et al., 2024). Empirical research proves that eWOM indirectly influences PI through the attitudes of the consumers, and with the increased strength of these attitudes, consumers act as a channel through which social influence can be converted to actual purchase behavior (Boccia & Tohidi, 2024). In this way, information quality and eWOM are not independent of each other but can influence purchase decisions by affecting consumer attitudes in both ways, i.e. creating and strengthening them, which shows the mediating role of attitude between these relationships (Rosyid et al., 2023).

In addition to informational and social motivations to online engagement, functional and hedonic motivation of online engagement also impose their effects on behavior of buying products based on the development of attitude (Denniss et al., 2023). PU, which has been described in the Technology Acceptance Model, describes how consumers are convinced that their interaction with a platform will improve their efficiency in decision making or deliver any benefit that is meaningful (Davis, 1989). Other previous researchers indicated that usefulness is a strong predictor of technology adoption attitudes, which then translate into behavioral outcomes (i.e., PI) (Sun et al., 2023). Similarly, PE, which is the hedonic contentment upon using digital platforms, has been discovered to instill positive affective reactions leading to attitudes to the platform and the products being exhibited on it (Tao & Chao, 2024). It has been proposed that enjoyment improves consumer engagement and emotional association, which empowers attitudes and likelihood to make a purchase (Yuan et al., 2024).

H_{2a}: *Attitude mediates the relationship between information quality and PI.*

H_{2b}: *Attitude mediates the relationship between eWOM and PI.*

H_{2c}: *Attitude mediates the relationship between PU and PI.*

H_{2d}: *Attitude mediates the relationship between PE and PI.*

Trust has been noted as a mediating factor in internet consumer behavior especially in situations where the consumer uses online platforms to make purchasing decisions without laying his eyes on the products physically (Pedersen et al., 2023). The quality of information is crucial in consumer trust because with the correct, pertinent and consistent information the

uncertainty is lessened and this increases the credibility which further generates more trust in the platform and the product being advertised (Gong et al., 2023). Consumers in an environment that they can trust the information on tend to build trust, which in turn enhances their PI (Wang et al., 2024). Likewise, eWOM plays a huge role in fostering trust in the context of peer reviews and sharing experience as this presents genuine indicators which minimise perceived risks of online buying (Bai et al., 2023). Earlier studies have established that eWOM has an indirect relationship with PI only that it increases consumer trust before intermediating social influence into behavioral consequences (Teo et al., 2024; Zheng et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2023). Therefore, the quality of information and eWOM both operate by trust as a mediator, so that the extent of trust, based on trustworthy information and peer experiences increases trust, which in turn results in the purchase decision.

Besides informational and social motivation, there are functional and hedonic motivating factors that influence PI with the mediation of trust. PU that is based on the Technology Acceptance Model indicates what the consumers believe that using a platform will yield benefits or enhance their decision making efficiency and in most cases, the belief manifests in increased levels of trust in the platform as a source of reliable support (Davis, 1989). Research has established that the perception of usefulness does not directly have an effect on PI but operates by raising trust which is a psychological guarantee that consumers require to make a commitment to online transactions (Munikrishnan et al., 2023). Similarly, the perception of enjoying, an aspect focusing on the subjective happiness and contentment consumers get through use of online platforms has been established to elicit positive emotional conditions that give rise to trust among the online platform and the products advertised by it (Gong et al., 2023). The empiric data show that pleasant and interesting experiences make consumers more willing to trust digital platforms, and this trust, in turn, enhances their intention to buy (Wang et al., 2024).

H_{3a}: *Trust mediates the relationship between information quality and PI.*

H_{3b}: *Trust mediates the relationship between eWOM and PI.*

H_{3c}: *Trust mediates the relationship between PU and PI.*

H_{3d}: *Trust mediates the relationship between PE and PI.*

The literature has established food neophobia as one of the major moderating elements in determining consumer buying patterns especially in the cross-cultural setting (Chen et al., 2025). A positive influence on the PI has always been proven by the attitude, as positive judgments cause the intention to purchase more, but this positive relationship may be weakened when the consumers are characterized by a high degree of food neophobia (Zamparo, 2023). Empirical research has shown that highly food neophobic consumers tend to be less receptive to trying new or foreign food even when they have a relatively positive attitude, undermining the adoption of attitude into behavioral response (Clotey et al., 2025). Conversely, low food neophobic respondents have a higher likelihood of letting a positive attitude toward new foods directly influence a purchase decision reflecting greater attitude intention correspondence (Fan & DARA, 2024). Thus, food neophobia is proposed to work as a conditioning factor that reduces predictive ability of attitude on PI indicating that efficacy of favorable attitude to drive food-related consumption is heavily conditional on the receptiveness of the consumer to new food experiences (Estay et al., 2023).

On the same note, food neophobia also mediates the association between trust and PI, since even a high level of trust in a platform or the product might be insufficient to overcome the unwillingness of high neophobic consumers to taste the new cuisines (Wang et al., 2023). The studies have indicated that trust is a very important element in mitigating the perceived risk and uncertainty in the consumption of food products especially when the products are of new cultural backgrounds (Poon & Tung, 2023; Wang et al., 2025; Yong et al., 2023). Nevertheless, highly food neophobic people tend to be psychologically resistant to new foods, i.e. in these instances trust does not necessarily translate into purchasing behavior (Clotey et al., 2025). In comparison, low food neophobic consumers tend to transform trust into action more easily since their openness to experiment with unknown food partners and their use of trust cues in making their choices (Wang et al., 2023).

H_{4a}: *Food neophobia moderates the relationship between attitude and PI, such that the positive effect is weaker when food neophobia is high.*

H_{4b}: *Food neophobia moderates the relationship between trust and PI, such that the positive effect is weaker when food neophobia is high.*

2.1 Theoretical Framework Supporting the Research

This theoretical background is based on TAM and TPB, which, in combination with each other, offer a clear explanation of the relationships developed in the research framework. TAM assumes that the PU and PE are the key factors of user acceptance of digital platforms because these two constructs affect the formation of attitudes that eventually determine behavioral intentions (Davis, 1989). This conforms to the role of Xiaohongshu, in which consideration of the functionality and hedonic

value of the platform by the consumers leads to positive attitudes, which are converted into PI. To this, TPB also points out that attitudes, along with trust as a proxy of perceived behavioral control intermediates the relationship between external factors and behavioral outcomes. The information quality and eWOM are considered important external indicators in this context since they affect attitudes and trust by alleviating uncertainty and increasing credibility which subsequently influence buying intentions (Lee & Youn, 2009). Additionally, incorporating the concept of consumer psychology, the moderating intervention of food neophobia can be elaborated by the idea that the neophobia influences the strength of the relationship between mediators and the outcome so as higher the neophobia the less the impact of the positive attitudes and trust on PI (Damsbo-Svendsen et al., 2017). Taken together, the theories form the rationale of the suggested conceptual model where information quality, eWOM, PU, and PE become antecedents of PI mediated by attitude and trust and food neophobia is a boundary condition. The conceptual framework of the given research is shown in Fig. 1.

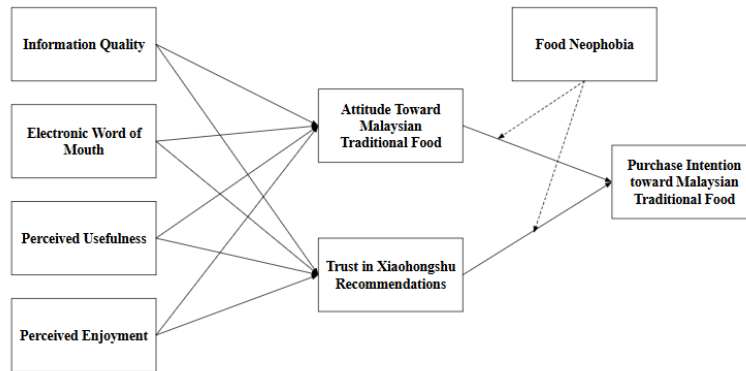


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

The cross-sectional survey design used in this study was quantitative, as it aimed at establishing how Xiaohongshu affects the PI of Chinese international students towards Malaysian traditional food. The survey technique was considered suitable because it would allow the quantitative gathering of numerical data of a substantial sample of respondents thus providing an opportunity to test hypothesized relationships statistically. The cross-sectional design offered a view of the impact of information quality, eWOM, PU and PE on PI and also taking into account the moderating influence of attitude and trust and moderating influence of food neophobia. The design was reliable and generalized the results meaning that the conceptual framework could be tested in a systematic and rigorous way.

The population of the study was the Chinese international students enrolled in higher education institutions in Malaysia, since they are both the active consumers of Xiaohongshu and the consumers who have been introduced to the Malaysian traditional food. Out of this number, 380 valid responses were obtained, and this was more than the suggested sample size required in regression, mediation, and moderation analyses. This was found to be an appropriate sample size as it has enough statistical power and minimizes the risk of Type II errors when testing the hypothesis. The purposive sampling method was utilized to make sure that the respondents who were included in the study were those that are pertinent to the aims of the study. This approach was selected because it focused on Chinese students who actively used Xiaohongshu and had an experience with Malaysian traditional food, as they would be able to contribute to the impactful information regarding the study issue.

The data was gathered in the form of a structured questionnaire designed by following the current measurement scales based on previous research which yield reliability and validity. The items included in the measurement of constructs like information quality, eWOM, PU, PE, attitude, trust, food neophobia, and PI were based on the well-known consumer behavior and information systems literature. As an example, the PU was assessed using items according to (Davis, 1989), eWOM according to (Lee & Youn, 2009), and food neophobia according to (Pliner & Hobden, 1992). All answers were noted on a five-point likert scale starting with strongly disagree (1) up to strongly agree (5). In order to make the items clear and appropriate, the questionnaire was firstly pilot-tested among a small sample population of the students to ensure that it was clear and appropriate before it was extensively distributed electronically so that the respondents could be respondents in different Malaysian universities and conveniently respond to the questionnaires.

Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) was used in analyzing the collected data. Primary data screening was performed to verify the presence of missing values, outliers and lack of normality in order to ascertain that the data was clean and would be analyzed as such. Mean, standard deviations, and the frequency distributions were used as descriptive statistics to summarize the demographics data and can give a summary of the sample. Cronbach alpha was used to test the reliability of the constructs in order to determine internal consistency and exploratory factor analysis was used to determine construct validity of the measures. The strength and direction of the relationship between the variables of the study were then analyzed

using Pearson correlation analysis. In order to test the hypotheses, multiple regression analysis was done to determine the direct impacts of the information quality, eWOM, PU and PE on the PI. The mediation analysis was conducted through the PROCESS macro in SPSS to investigate the indirect effects of attitude and trust whereas moderation analysis was also conducted to determine the moderating effect of food neophobia on the mediated effects. It was an integrative method of analysis, which made it possible to test the conceptual framework with high levels of rigor and guarantee that the results were both statistically and practically significant.

4. Results

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 provide an overview of the variability and the central tendency of the constructs used in the study. The results show that the mean scores of all the constructs vary between 3.12 and 3.97, indicating that respondents showed moderate to high agreement levels on the measures. Attitude ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 0.70$) and PU ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.74$) recorded the highest mean score that showed respondents scored these constructs as having the greatest influence on their perception and behavior. Contrastingly, food neophobia recorded the lowest mean value ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.80$), reflecting a more cautious approach by the respondents in consuming new foods. Standard deviations ranged from 0.68 to 0.80, with good variation and no extreme dispersion. Minimum and maximum (1.00 and 5.00) values confirm that the full range of the scale was employed, suggesting respondent variation.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

Construct	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Information Quality	3.82	0.71	1.00	5.00
eWOM	3.76	0.68	1.00	5.00
Perceived Usefulness	3.95	0.74	1.00	5.00
Perceived Enjoyment	3.88	0.69	1.00	5.00
Purchase Intention	3.91	0.72	1.00	5.00
Attitude	3.97	0.70	1.00	5.00
Trust	3.84	0.73	1.00	5.00
Food Neophobia	3.12	0.80	1.00	5.00

Normality test in Table 2 checks for skewness and kurtosis of the measures. All the measures of skewness ranged between -0.29 and 0.15, while the measures of kurtosis ranged between -0.46 and -0.28, which is within the acceptable range of ± 1 . It indicates that the data for all the constructs is almost normal distribution. Minorly negative skewness measures for constructs such as PE (-0.29) and trust (-0.25) reflect a weak tendency to larger response categories, whereas food neophobia exhibited small positive skewness (0.15), reflecting a weak tendency toward smaller responses. The largely flat kurtosis measures across constructs further suggest no extreme departure from normality, thus ensuring that the data set is appropriate for ensuring multivariate statistics.

Table 2
Normality Assessment

Construct	Skewness	Kurtosis
Information Quality	-0.21	-0.37
eWOM	-0.18	-0.42
Perceived Usefulness	-0.24	-0.35
Perceived Enjoyment	-0.29	-0.46
Purchase Intention	-0.20	-0.39
Attitude	-0.23	-0.33
Trust	-0.25	-0.31
Food Neophobia	0.15	-0.28

Table 3
Reliability Analysis

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Information Quality	0.81
eWOM	0.78
Perceived Usefulness	0.83
Perceived Enjoyment	0.80
Purchase Intention	0.85
Attitude	0.82
Trust	0.84
Food Neophobia	0.76

Table 3 indicates Cronbach's alpha coefficients utilized to assess internal consistency and reliability of constructs. All constructs yielded more than the recommended threshold of 0.70, thus confirming strong reliability on the measures. PI registered the highest alpha coefficient of 0.85, followed closely by trust (0.84) and PU (0.83), meaning that these constructs

are predominantly consistent in capturing respondents' views. Attitude (0.82), information quality (0.81), and PE (0.80) also contributed to great reliability, while eWOM (0.78) and food neophobia (0.76) remained in acceptable categories. The results confirm that the measurement items of the study are reliable and depict a consistent representation of the underlying constructs. The outer loadings in Table 4 provide indicators of indicator reliability for each construct. The overwhelming majority of item loadings were higher than the suggested threshold value of 0.70, revealing strong correlations between observed variables and corresponding latent constructs. Information quality loadings were 0.78 to 0.84, and eWOM items loaded between 0.76 and 0.82. PU ranged from 0.81 to 0.85, and PE ranged from 0.77 to 0.82. PI items loaded between 0.81 and 0.85, revealing high reliability in terms of intent prediction. Similarly, attitude items ranged 0.79 to 0.82, and trust items ranged some of the highest, from 0.82 to 0.86. Food neophobia items ranged somewhat lower but still good, ranging from 0.72 to 0.78. Overall, these results confirm that all measuring items are making a significant contribution to their corresponding factors, thereby rendering good convergent validity of the measurement model.

Table 4
Outer Loadings

Construct	Item	Outer Loading
Information Quality	IQ1	0.78
	IQ2	0.81
	IQ3	0.84
	IQ4	0.79
eWOM	EW1	0.76
	EW2	0.82
	EW3	0.80
Perceived Usefulness	PU1	0.83
	PU2	0.85
	PU3	0.81
	PU4	0.84
Perceived Enjoyment	PE1	0.77
	PE2	0.80
	PE3	0.82
Purchase Intention	PI1	0.82
	PI2	0.85
	PI3	0.83
	PI4	0.81
Attitude	AT1	0.79
	AT2	0.82
	AT3	0.81
Trust	TR1	0.83
	TR2	0.86
	TR3	0.82
	TR4	0.85
Food Neophobia	FN1	0.74
	FN2	0.78
	FN3	0.76
	FN4	0.72
	FN5	0.77

Table 5 indicates the results of correlation analysis where significant positive correlations are observed between the key constructs and persistent negative correlations for food neophobia. Information quality was strongly correlated with eWOM ($r = .546, p < 0.01$), PU ($r = .584, p < 0.01$), PE ($r = .563, p < 0.01$), PI ($r = .612, p < 0.01$), attitude ($r = .597, p < 0.01$), and trust ($r = .603, p < 0.01$), highlighting its central role in consumer perception. Similarly, eWOM has a very high correlation to PU ($r = .512, p < 0.01$), PE ($r = .498, p < 0.01$), PI ($r = .575, p < 0.01$), attitude ($r = .559, p < 0.01$), and trust ($r = .581, p < 0.01$). PU was also positively correlated with PE ($r = .601, p < 0.01$), PI ($r = .643, p < 0.01$), attitude ($r = .628, p < 0.01$), and trust ($r = .636, p < 0.01$), while PE was positively correlated with PI ($r = .621, p < 0.01$), attitude ($r = .589, p < 0.01$), and trust ($r = .592, p < 0.01$). PI was itself strongly related to both attitude ($r = .671, p < 0.01$) and trust ($r = .689, p < 0.01$), emphasizing the mediating effects of these factors. On the other hand, food neophobia possessed negative correlations with all variables, including PI ($r = -.291, p < 0.01$), meaning that higher levels of caution towards new foods reduce the positive effects of information quality, eWOM, PU, and PE on consumer behavior.

Table 5
Correlation Analysis

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Information Quality	1							
2. eWOM	.546	1						
3. Perceived Usefulness	.584	.512	1					
4. Perceived Enjoyment	.563	.498	.601	1				
5. Purchase Intention	.612	.575	.643	.621	1			
6. Attitude	.597	.559	.628	.589	.671	1		
7. Trust	.603	.581	.636	.592	.689	.664	1	
8. Food Neophobia	-.244	-.213	-.228	-.207	-.291	-.276	-.263	1

Table 6 depicts the direct path outcomes between the independent constructs and PI. The outcomes verify that all four hypotheses were strongly supported. Information quality was positively and significantly related to PI ($\beta = 0.22$, $t = 4.87$, $p = 0.000$) in that greater perceptions of reliable and accurate information contribute to stronger purchase decisions. Similarly, eWOM was also very significant in affecting PI ($\beta = 0.18$, $t = 4.12$, $p = 0.000$), and it demonstrates that peer opinions and online reviews have a very significant impact on consumers' purchasing behaviors. PU was the strongest predictor of the direct influence ($\beta = 0.26$, $t = 5.32$, $p = 0.000$), emphasizing the extent to which consumers perceive online sites to be useful in their tasks is highly influential on consumers' purchase behavior. PE also presented a positive significant relationship with PI ($\beta = 0.19$, $t = 4.05$, $p = 0.000$), emphasizing hedonic value's influence on consumer behavior. Combined, these results assert that both utilitarian and experiential considerations heavily impact consumer PI.

Table 6
Direct Path Analysis Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1a	Information Quality \rightarrow PI	0.22	4.87	0.000	Supported
H1b	eWOM \rightarrow PI	0.18	4.12	0.000	Supported
H1c	PU \rightarrow PI	0.26	5.32	0.000	Supported
H1d	PE \rightarrow PI	0.19	4.05	0.000	Supported

Table 7 indicates the mediation analysis results wherein attitude and trust were tested as mediators for the predictive construct-PI relations. The findings indicate that both mediators play key roles in transferring the influences of information quality, eWOM, PU, and PE to PI. Attitude bridged the influences of all four predictors to PI with indirect effects between 0.12 and 0.18, all significant at $p < 0.001$. The largest mediation effect was for PU ($\beta = 0.18$, $t = 4.95$, $p = 0.000$), highlighting the importance of positive consumer attitudes in translating functional benefits to behavioral outcomes. Trust was also demonstrated to significantly mediate all predictor–outcome relationships, with indirect effects from 0.13 to 0.17, all significant at $p < 0.001$. The strongest mediation by trust was also associated with PU ($\beta = 0.17$, $t = 4.82$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that as consumers perceive platforms as useful, their trust increases, leading to further PI. Overall, the findings of mediation confirm that cognitive and relational processes enhance the relationships between predictors and consumer behavioral outcomes.

Table 7
Mediation Analysis Results

Hypothesis	Mediation Path	Indirect Effect (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
H2a	IQ \rightarrow AT \rightarrow PI	0.15	4.21	0.000	Supported
H2b	EWOM \rightarrow AT \rightarrow PI	0.12	3.89	0.000	Supported
H2c	PU \rightarrow AT \rightarrow PI	0.18	4.95	0.000	Supported
H2d	PE \rightarrow AT \rightarrow PI	0.14	4.07	0.000	Supported
H3a	IQ \rightarrow TR \rightarrow PI	0.16	4.36	0.000	Supported
H3b	EWOM \rightarrow TR \rightarrow PI	0.13	3.97	0.000	Supported
H3c	PU \rightarrow TR \rightarrow PI	0.17	4.82	0.000	Supported
H3d	PE \rightarrow TR \rightarrow PI	0.15	4.19	0.000	Supported

Table 8 presents the outcome of the moderation analysis where food neophobia was applied to moderate between attitude, trust, and PI. From the result, it is clear that food neophobia had a significant moderation effect on both the relationships in the model. The neophobia-food attitude interaction negatively impacted PI ($\beta = -0.14$, $t = 3.28$, $p = 0.001$), implying that the positive function of positive attitudes towards PI is reduced in situations where consumers experience high levels of food neophobia. Similarly, food neophobia in response to trust had a strong and significant negative impact on PI ($\beta = -0.12$, $t = 2.97$, $p = 0.003$), meaning that even if consumers trust online sources, their reluctance towards trying new food discourages them from making a purchase. These results highlight the importance of considering the differences between individuals as consumer traits because food neophobia reduces the strength of both attitudinal and trust-based PI drivers.

Table 8
Moderation Analysis Results

Hypothesis	Moderation Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H4a	Attitude \times Food Neophobia \rightarrow PI	-0.14	3.28	0.001	Supported
H4b	Trust \times Food Neophobia \rightarrow PI	-0.12	2.97	0.003	Supported

5. Discussion

The analysis of the findings of this research gives a comprehensive synthesis of the effect of Xiaohongshu, being a digital social media application, in shaping the PI of the Chinese international students with respect to Malaysian traditional food. Not only does the research confirm the relevance of information quality, eWOM, PU and PE but also demonstrates the mediation effect of attitude and trust and the moderating effect of food neophobia. A comprehensive analysis of how the process of cognitive judgment, affective reaction, and individual variance interacts to promote or restrain consumer choices can be explained through the interpretation of these results with the help of TAM and TPB. This model highlights that consumer behavior in cross-cultural environments is dynamic and as such, technological and psychological orientations interact to determine how consumers will buy a product.

The findings of this research give a solid empirical support that indicates that information quality, eWOM, PU, and PEs have significant and positive impacts on PI in Chinese international students in the context of Malaysian traditional food. The embrace of H1a to H1d shows that as a digital platform, Xiaohongshu is a core facilitator of consumer decision-making as it provides credible, relevant, and enjoyable content that may influence consumer preferences. The beneficial influence of information quality is in line with the information adoption model, which postulates that quality information promotes the confidence of consumers in making decisions (L. Sun et al., 2023). Equally, the high effect of eWOM can be related to the social influence theory, which reveals the persuasive nature of online messages through peer-generated messages and shared consumption experiences (Ngo et al., 2024). The findings also support the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as PU increases the consumer confidence that the information obtained in Xiaohongshu will add value to the decision-making process, and PE proves that affective gratification and hedonic value are also essential factors in online purchasing. These results highlight that the Malaysian traditional food brands that intend to enter into the Chinese international student market ought to consider using Xiaohongshu as a viable marketing medium that combines both utilitarian and hedonic attributes to facilitate consumer intentions in the market.

Besides these direct effects, the findings also support that attitude is also an important mediator between the antecedent variables and the PI in support of H2a through H2d. The intervening variable of attitude reaffirms the significance of TPB asserting the fact that consumer attitudes are central appraisal judgment mediating between external stimuli and behavioral intentions (Davis, 1989). Similar to this research, the positive attitudes developed toward Malaysian traditional food due to high-quality information, positive eWOM, PU, and PE increased the chances of PI among the researchers. The results indicate that Xiaohongshu is not just an avenue in the flow of the information but also creates positive consumer judgments, which are a psychological process linking external stimuli and behavioral responses. This finding indicates the need to build positive consumer attitudes as they play a critical role in the conversion of information credibility, social influence, and perceived value into real PI (Yones & Muthaiyah, 2023). Together, these findings widen the theoretical and empirical implications of how social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu can influence food-related choices of international students by ensuring the activation of both cognitive (usefulness, quality) and affective (enjoyment, eWOM-driven perceptions) processes through the mediating effect of attitudes.

The hypothesis of this paper is supported by the findings that H3a through H3d are valid since the information quality, eWOM, the perception of usefulness, PE, and PI vary significantly due to the presence of trust as the mediating variable. This observation highlights the fact that trust is a key process in which the favorable impressions of Xiaohongshu material are converted into consumer PI. In the case of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), PU and PE positively influence not just direct behavioral intentions but also influence how consumers trust the platform as well as the information sharing on the site, which further reinforces a purchase decision (Raza et al., 2023). In the same way, quality information and reliable eWOM can foster a trustful atmosphere where consumers feel safe depending on peer-based recommendations and content on the platform, and increase their determined intentions to sample Malaysian traditional food. This can be correlated to TPB according to which favorable evaluations are determined by the consumer beliefs concerning the dependability of the information and through which intentions can be formed by trust (Wang et al., 2024). The mediating value of trust therefore shows that the combination of utilitarian (usefulness, quality) and hedonic (enjoyment, peer influence) factors intersect to produce confidence in the purchase decisions to support the theoretical assertion that trust is a key mediator between platform-based perceptions and behavioral outcomes.

The explanatory power of the TPB is further indicated by the moderating effect of the food neophobia on the relationships between both the attitude and PI (H4a) and trust and PI (H4b). As the positive attitudes and high trust in Xiaohongshu content tend to increase the purchasing intentions, this connection is considerably undermined when epidemiological indicators such as the food neophobia level are shown by individuals. TPB has it that individual differences and perceived barriers affect conversion of attitudes into intentions and in this study, food neophobia played the role of a psychological barrier that limited the positive impact of trust and attitude (Estay et al., 2023). Practically, this implies that in case of positive attitudes or trust towards the platform, the hesitation to new foods reduces the probability of them responding to such assessments. This moderation effect also can be explained with the help of the TAM perspective because PU and enjoyment of Xiaohongshu content may not be enough to adopt Xiaohongshu in case a significant psychological barrier like food neophobia spoils consumer acceptance. Therefore, the results reveal that although the TAM variables and TPB constructs interact to promote PI, food neophobia is a conditioning factor that diminishes the impacts, hence marketing interventions that will aid the reduction of perceived risk and familiarity with Malaysian traditional food are necessary (Clotney et al., 2025). On the whole, the findings of this paper present strong arguments that Xiaohongshu is an effective platform that integrates the credibility of provided information, peer influence, notions of value, and fun to embrace positive attitudes, establish trust, and eventually increase PI. The mediating functions of attitude and trust, as the latter prove the significance of the psychological intermediary between platform experiences and behavioral consequences, whereas the moderating role of food neophobia indicates the existence of cultural and personal hindrances to food adoption.

6. Implications

6.1 Practical Implications

The conclusions of this research have significant practical implications to marketers, stakeholders in the food industry, and strategists of the digital platform in promoting the sales of Malaysian traditional food to the Chinese international students. The findings of the study clearly show that Xiaohongshu is a powerful mediator where information quality, eWOM, PU, and PE all play a role to influence the PI. This implies that the emphasis of practitioners should be laid on the development of high quality, appealing, and culturally appealing content which brings into focus the originality and distinctive features of Malaysian traditional food. Also, the positive eWOM can be promoted by collaborative efforts with trusted personalities or satisfied customers to increase the trust and attitude development, which will increase the PI. As trust was discovered to be an imperative mediator, the marketers are advised to make their campaigns focus on safety, transparency and reliability whereby uncertainties to the consumers who might not be conversant with such products are minimized. In addition, the mediating effect of food neophobia emphasizes the importance of specific interventions, including providing samples, informative materials, or intercultural events, in order to minimize the psychological reservations and enhance familiarity. Through synchronization of marketing activities with psychological processes that have been uncovered in this study, the food businesses will be in a better position to make Malaysian traditional food desirable and reachable to the Chinese international students.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

In theoretical terms, this research will support the development of the consumer behavior and information system literature by combining TAM and TPB into one conceptual framework explaining the role of digital platforms on the food-related purchase intent in a cross-cultural context. The validation of direct relationships between information quality, eWOM, PU, PE, and PI: These results prove that constructs with technology acceptance can be applied to non-technological adoption situations and that the same social media-mediated food consumption decision-making constructs apply in technological usage decisions. The discovery of attitude and trust as intervening variables goes further to assume TPB in that positive beliefs and assessments have to appear first in the psychological processes before it is converted into behavioral intentions. The buffering the influence of food neophobia provides a boundary condition on both TAM and TPB and implies that the personal dispositions may reduce the strength of the theoretically established relationships, therefore, enhancing the elucidatory capacity of the two models. The study, as a whole, adds value by setting the context of TAM and TPB in cross-cultural, food-purchasing behavior propelled by social media and broadening the scope of the applications of these theories, as well as presenting a more refined picture of how digital platforms intersect with consumer psychology.

7. Limitations and Future Directions

Although this research yields useful insights on how Xiaohongshu influences Chinese international students' purchase behavior towards traditional food from Malaysia, there are a few limitations which need to be noted, and they also create opportunities for future studies. First, the research utilized a cross-sectional survey design that captures consumers' attitudes and behavior at one point in time, precluding observing changes in attitude and intention over time; future research could use longitudinal designs to investigate how these relationships change with extended exposure to Malaysian traditional food or changing trends on Xiaohongshu. Second, the study was based on self-reported information from 380 participants, which might be vulnerable to common method bias and social desirability effects; future studies could supplement surveys with experimental or behavioral data to make findings more robust. Third, the research only considered Chinese international students in Malaysia, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other cultural groups or geographical locations; comparative studies across various international student populations or local Malaysian consumers need to be done in the future to examine the variance in cultures. In addition, the model focused on information quality, eWOM, PU, PE, attitude, trust, and food neophobia but did not test other possible determinants like cultural identity, nostalgia, or social belonging; integration of such variables would offer a more holistic perspective on cross-cultural food buying behavior. Lastly, the research focused on Xiaohongshu as the main platform, and although it is extremely relevant to the target audience, expanding future research to other platforms like TikTok, WeChat, or Instagram may provide insight into differences in how different social media spaces impact consumer trust, attitude, and intention towards traditional foods.

8. Conclusion

Finally, this paper has established that Xiaohongshu is a key in influencing the PI of Chinese international students towards Malaysian traditional food by supplying them with quality information, easing eWOM and improving the perception of usefulness and pleasure. The results indicate that cognitive and affective variables have an effect on consumer behavior and that attitude and trust are significant mediating variables that convert these perceptions into consumer behavior intentions. Meanwhile, food neophobia was observed to mediate between the influence of attitude and trust, with the effect of psychological and cultural barriers playing a significant part in cross-cultural food adoption. This study has added to the theoretical progress of the studies in consumer behavior in the digital and cross cultural environment, and provided the practical implications to marketers, food industry stakeholders, and cross cultural promoters working with the introduction of

Malaysian traditional food to the foreign markets, by means of the combination of TAM and TPB. The article finally highlights the strength of online platforms in closing cultural divides and influencing food-related behaviors, and it also indicates the need to consider the unique aspects of the individuals to ensure that they can get as many acceptances and adoptions.

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