TRENDING TASTES: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL-MEDIA IN DRIVING FOOD INNOVATION AMONG CULINARY STUDENTS

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Abstract. Culinary students occupy an increasingly influential position in shaping food innovation within the Food and Beverage (F&B) industry, yet the way they engage with digital trends remains underexplored. This study, "Trending Tastes: Exploring the Role of Social Media in Driving Food Innovation Among Culinary Students," examines how social media trends drive the tendency to innovate food among culinary students at UiTM Permatang Pauh. Although food-related trends proliferate across social media platforms, there remains a limited understanding of how culinary students draw on this digital content as a guide for their own food innovation. This study addresses that gap by applying the Theory of Planned Behavior to analyze the factors, namely attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control that shape students' tendency to innovate food. A quantitative survey design was adopted, with data collected through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms and completed by a total of 147 respondents selected through stratified random sampling. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics, applying descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation, and regression to test the proposed relationships. The findings indicate that attitude and perceived behavioral control significantly predict culinary students' tendency to innovate food in response to social media trends, whereas subjective norms do not exert a significant influence. These results underscore the value of social media as a pedagogical and professional resource, offering practical insights for culinary educators and the wider F&B industry seeking to cultivate an innovative and adaptive future workforce.
Keywords: *food innovation, social media trends, culinary students, Theory of Planned Behaviour, F&B Industry*

Introduction

In recent years, social media has emerged as one of the most powerful forces shaping consumer perception, preference, and decision-making, including within the hospitality and food and beverage (F&B) industry (Sarkis et al., 2025). Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube play a vital role in shaping consumer interest, particularly around food trends, through the visually appealing content produced by food creators, chefs, and influencers. This growth has pushed F&B businesses to continuously adapt their marketing strategies to stay aligned with emerging trends, often prioritising aesthetics, novelty, and visual suitability in order to remain competitive and sustainable. In this way, social media has effectively become a primary driver of food innovation. Despite this influence, many culinary professionals and food entrepreneurs adopt social media trends in recipe development and food presentation without fully understanding the underlying mechanisms through which these trends emerge and shape consumer decision-making (Silaban et al., 2024). This gap in understanding begins

early, at the point where future culinary professionals are trained. Existing research has emphasised the need to understand how social media specifically influences younger generations in the context of food innovation (Pellegrino et al., 2022), yet comparatively little attention has been paid to how culinary students as both digital natives and emerging practitioners, have to engage with, interpret, and translate social media trends into their own culinary practice. Culinary students are a particularly important group to study in this regard: they are both heavy consumers of food-related social media content and the next generation of professionals who will shape F&B innovation, yet their behaviour in navigating trend-driven content remains underexplored compared with consumer-facing or industry-level perspectives.

This study adopts the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as its theoretical foundation. TPB holds that behavioural intention is the most reliable predictor of behaviour, shaped in turn by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Here, attitude concerns how far culinary students view the adoption of social media food trends as beneficial to their creativity and employability. Subjective norms capture the expectations perceived from peers, lecturers, and industry practitioners active on Instagram and TikTok. Perceived behavioural control reflects students' judgement of their capacity to apply such trends within the constraints of their training, including skill level, resources, and curriculum structure. While TPB has been widely applied to consumer food choice, it has seldom been extended to how culinary students form intentions toward social media-driven trends in professional training. Prior research has examined social media's influence on consumers generally and on commercial practice, leaving the psychological and social mechanisms behind students' trend adoption unmodelled. The omission matters: without it, culinary education risks producing graduates who follow trends reflexively rather than critically, yielding dishes that are visually striking yet culturally shallow, and weakening the long-term sustainability of the F&B industry. This study addresses that gap using TPB.

The concept of social media trends on food innovation

This research investigates the influence of social media trends among culinary students at UiTM Permatang Pauh, focusing specifically on how these students draw on social media as a guide for innovating food. The engagement of students through social media has become a central feature of contemporary marketing practice serving as the primary sites of this activity. Brands operate on these platforms through content production, direct consumer interaction, and social listening (Lim et al., 2025). Despite the widespread prevalence of food trends on social media, limited understanding exists regarding how culinary students actually translate this exposure into innovative culinary practice. The process through which culinary students critically accept, refine, and implement novel concepts and techniques into practical kitchen routines forms the theoretical core of this study. One of the most directly relevant empirical accounts for the present study, demonstrating how this innovative process manifests specifically within culinary training contexts, making their work a key reference point for operationalising student-level creative behaviour rather than industry-level practice more broadly.

Within this research framework, students' capacity to translate exposure into practical culinary innovation serves as the primary dependent variable, measuring behavioural execution of creative culinary processes under the dual influence of digital media exposure and internal psychological drivers. This process has been grounded in the

TPB, whose foundational framework continues to underpin the majority of behavioural intention research across disciplines, including food-related decision-making. Extending this framework to the digital context, Riswanto et al. (2025) offer a particularly important contribution by demonstrating how social media engagement enables individuals to actively adapt digital concepts into tangible, domain-specific outcomes, a finding directly applicable to how UiTM Permatang Pauh culinary students translate online trends into gastronomically relevant practice. Treating this creative execution as the definitive behavioural endpoint allows the present study to operationalise how external social media influence merges with TPB variables to drive students' psychological intention into complex culinary behaviours that benefit the wider industry. Moreover, culinary-specific empirical grounding, Ajzen (1991) behavioural framework, and Riswanto et al. (2025) digital-adaptation lens collectively justify examining this construct as both a theoretically robust and empirically supported dependent variable and collectively underscore why the behaviour of UiTM Permatang Pauh culinary students, specifically, remains important for understanding how social media trends shape real-world food innovation.

Relationship between attitude and food innovation adoption

In the modern gastronomical landscape, culinary students' attitude is defined as their behavioural mindsets, evaluations, and perceptions toward contemporary food innovation (Tóth et al., 2020). This attitude serves as the vital cognitive bridge connecting abstract creative ideas to practical, hands-on industry performance. Most significantly, Selvakumar et al. (2025) establish that this attitude framework creates an essential psychological space for learning the modern culinary arts, enabling students to transform passive digital consumption on platforms like Instagram and TikTok into active professional development. Rather than merely viewing emerging global trends and advanced presentation techniques, students with a highly developed innovative attitude actively filter and translate this digital content into tangible, innovative outcomes that ultimately benefit the wider culinary industry. Because these students represent the future key influencers of the food sector, understanding how their daily digital habits can be systematically channelled into professional innovation is central to this study. This dynamic is empirically validated by Suryani et al. (2025), whose findings demonstrate that immersion in a trend-rich digital environment decisively shapes an individual's overall tendency to innovate food, thereby shaping their practical innovative behaviour. Based on the findings of previous studies, the following hypothesis was proposed: (H1): There is a positive relationship between attitude and food innovation adoption among culinary students.

Relationship between subjective norm and food innovation adoption

The relationship between subjective norms and food innovation adoption is increasingly mediated by the digital environment, functioning as an indirect yet powerful form of social influence when culinary students observe, internalise, and mirror the behaviours of prominent chefs and popular food bloggers on social media. Social media generates considerable pressure for culinary students to conform, as they constantly encounter popular chefs online and feel compelled to replicate those exact trends in order to appear professional. However, exploring social media food trends is a self-directed and highly independent process. Most significantly, when a person relies

heavily on their own internal cognitive preferences, the pressure of social norms is weakened, meaning a student's true intention to innovate must be driven by their own internal mindset rather than external expectations from others. Because innovation requires this personal freedom, the heavy pressure exerted by online trends may, in fact, inhibit creativity, which leads to the hypothesis that there is a negative relationship between subjective norm and food innovation adoption among culinary students. Based on the findings of previous studies, the following hypothesis was proposed: (H2): There is a negative relationship between subjective norm and food innovation adoption among culinary students.

Relationship between perceived behavioural control and food innovation adoption

The relationship between perceived behavioural control and the adoption of food innovation is fundamentally driven by internal motivational perceptions, a mechanism robustly explained by the theoretical framework of Hagger et al. (2022). When culinary students hold the firm conviction that social media platforms equip them with highly functional, accessible resources, they cultivate a strong sense of operational control over the creation of novel food products. This perceived mastery acts as a direct psychological catalyst, transforming digital media from a passive viewing tool into an active engine that encourages and motivates them to deepen their learning within the food and beverage industry. Most significantly, Hagger et al. (2022) also establish that this heightened sense of control directly empowers students to set increasingly challenging creative goals for themselves and to proactively search for advanced culinary content to replicate. Consequently, this behavioral loop leads to an empirical improvement in their technical skills, which further reinforces their internal perceived control. Understanding this self-sustaining relationship between digital resource access and heightened motivation provides crucial insights for the broader culinary industry, offering a clear pathway to cultivating a highly creative, resilient, and adaptive future culinary workforce, which leads to the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between perceived behavioural control and food innovation adoption among culinary students. Based on the findings of previous studies, the following hypothesis was proposed: (H3): There is a positive relationship between perceived behavioural control and food innovation adoption among culinary students.

Materials and Methods

The study targeted culinary arts degree students at UiTM Penang Campus, Permatang Pauh branch. A stratified random sampling technique was employed, dividing students by academic year and selecting respondents proportionally from each stratum to ensure balanced representation across all levels, where only students enrolled in food innovation subjects were included. This stratified approach was chosen because it minimises sampling bias and ensures that each academic cohort is represented in proportion to its size, thereby strengthening the generalizability of the findings across the target population. Data were collected through a structured, self-administered questionnaire distributed via Google Forms through WhatsApp and Telegram. A pilot test with 30 students confirmed the clarity and reliability of the instrument. The final sample comprised 147 responses, exceeding the minimum requirement of 128 determined using Raosoft (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970). All responses were screened for completeness, and the cleaned data were analysed using SPSS. Data were collected

using an online questionnaire developed via Google Forms, an approach that offers efficient distribution and consistent data capture (Faleiros et al., 2016). The questionnaire comprised six sections: A, B, C, D, E, and F. Section A contained the screening question, and Section B gathered respondents' demographic profiles. Sections C, D, E, and F measured the study constructs, namely attitude, social influence, perceived behavioural control, and food innovation orientation, with each section containing five to seven items. A five-point Likert scale was applied throughout, where 1 indicated "strongly disagree", and 5 indicated "strongly agree." The measures were derived from previously validated items.

Prior to the main data collection, a pilot test was conducted by distributing the questionnaire to 30 respondents to assess the reliability of the instrument. Reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded values for Section C (0.766), Section D (0.761), Section E (0.819), and Section F (0.912). Following Botes (2023), a coefficient of 0.70 or higher confirms acceptable reliability, and all sections met this threshold, validating the instrument before its use with the full sample. The reliability analysis indicated an acceptable to good level of internal consistency across all constructs. Attitude recorded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.766 and subjective norms 0.761, while perceived behavioural control obtained 0.819 and tendency of food innovation among culinary students recorded the highest value at 0.912. According to Hair et al. (2010), Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.60 are acceptable for exploratory research, whereas values above 0.70 indicate good reliability. All constructs therefore satisfied these benchmarks, confirming that the items consistently measured their respective constructs and were suitable for further analysis.

Data analysis techniques

The collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis proceeded in several stages, moving from data preparation through to hypothesis testing. First, the raw data were screened for completeness and cleaned, and negatively worded items were reverse-coded where necessary to ensure consistent scale direction before analysis. Second, descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarise respondents' demographic profiles and their responses to each construct, following the interpretive framework established for the study. Third, a reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha (Hair et al., 2010) was conducted to confirm the internal consistency of the four constructs prior to inferential testing. To test the study's hypotheses, Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine the strength and direction of the relationships between the independent variables (attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control) and the dependent variable (tendency of food innovation among culinary students), consistent with the associational aims of the Theory of Planned Behaviour framework (Lederman et al., 2015). Multiple regression analysis was then conducted to determine the combined and relative predictive influence of the three independent variables on the tendency to innovate food, thereby establishing which constructs contributed most significantly to the model. Together, these techniques allowed the study to assess both the individual associations and the overall explanatory power of the proposed model.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive analysis

The final sample consisted of 147 respondents who verified their enrolment as active students in the Bachelor's degree programme in Culinary Arts at UiTM. All respondents (100%, n = 147) reported prior exposure to food influencer or food vlogger content across various social media platforms, principally TikTok and Instagram. The gender composition was predominantly female, with female students representing 72.1% (n = 106) of the sample and male students the remaining 27.9% (n = 41). With respect to age, the largest group comprised respondents aged 22 years (n = 63, 42.9%), followed by those aged 23 years and above (n = 51, 34.7%), 21 years (n = 19, 12.9%), and 20 years (n = 14, 9.5%). Academically, respondents were distributed across Semesters 3 to 6, with 10.9% (n = 16) in Semester 3, 23.8% (n = 35) in Semester 4, 36.7% (n = 54) in Semester 5, and 28.6% (n = 42) in Semester 6. The most widely adopted platform configuration was the combination of TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, reported by 32.7% (n = 48) of respondents, followed by the dual use of TikTok and Instagram at 14.3% (n = 21). This concentration of usage on these particular platforms may be attributable to generational factors, as platforms such as Facebook are more commonly associated with older age cohorts. Content consumption frequency was correspondingly high, with 44.9% (n = 66) viewing food influencer videos three to four times per week and a further 37.4% (n = 55) doing so on a daily basis. This pattern of engagement is reinforced by the amount of time devoted to social media each day: the majority, 67.3% (n = 99), reported more than three hours of daily use, 25.9% (n = 38) reported between one and three hours, and only 6.8% (n = 10) limited their usage to less than one hour per day. One note on the figures: the daily-use percentages (67.3 + 25.9 + 6.8) total 100%, and the frequencies (99 + 38 + 10) sum to 147, so that distribution is consistent.

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics of the mean, where the dependent variable, Tendency to Innovate Food Among Culinary Students (TOTALDV), recorded a mean score of 3.9580 (SD = 0.7461). Among the independent variables, Subjective Norms (TOTALSN) registered the highest level of agreement, with a mean of 4.1202 (SD = 0.6954), followed by Attitude (TOTALATT) at 4.0102 (SD = 0.6411) and Perceived Behavioural Control (TOTALPBC) at 3.9932 (SD = 0.6408). The reliability analysis indicates that all constructs achieved acceptable to good levels of internal consistency. Attitude recorded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.766 and Subjective Norms a value of 0.761, both indicating good reliability. Perceived Behavioural Control obtained a coefficient of 0.819, while Tendency of Food Innovation Among Culinary Students returned the highest value at 0.912. Hair et al. (2010) establish that Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.60 are acceptable in exploratory research, whereas values above 0.70 denote good reliability. All constructs employed in this study therefore satisfy the required threshold, confirming that the items consistently measure their respective constructs and are suitable for subsequent analysis.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistical analysis.*

Category	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
TOTALDV	3.9580	.74608	147
TOTALATT	4.0102	.64113	147
TOTALSN	4.1202	.69538	147
TOTALPBC	3.9932	.64081	147

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Moreover, to assess the relationships among the study variables, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. All three independent variables demonstrated a statistically significant association with the dependent variable at the $p < .001$ level using a one-tailed test. Attitude exhibited the strongest baseline association with TOTALDV ($r = .794$), followed closely by Perceived Behavioural Control ($r = .769$) and, to a lesser extent, Subjective Norms ($r = .591$). Strong positive relationships were likewise evident among the predictors themselves, notably between Attitude and Perceived Behavioural Control ($r = .774$), Attitude and Subjective Norms ($r = .641$), and Subjective Norms and Perceived Behavioural Control ($r = .724$), indicating a cohesive alignment across the independent constructs. Multiple linear regression analysis was adopted in this study to determine the extent to which Attitude, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioural Control jointly predict the dependent variable. The model summary in *Table 2* indicated a strong overall linear relationship, yielding a multiple correlation coefficient of $R = .830$. The coefficient of determination reached $R^2 = .690$, establishing that the three predictors collectively account for 69.0% of the variance in the dependent variable, with an adjusted value of $R^2 = .683$ and a standard error of the estimate of 0.42006. The model demonstrated sound predictive capacity and statistical adequacy, as confirmed by an analysis of variance yielding a significant overall model fit, $F(3, 143) = 105.860$, $p < .001$, as shown in *Table 3*.

***Table 2**. Model summary[b].*

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.830a	.690	.683	.42006

Note: a. Predictors: (constant), TOTALPBC, TOTALSN, TOTALATT; b. Dependent Variable: TOTALDV.

***Table 3**. ANOVA[a].*

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	56.037	3	18.679	105.860	<.001b
Residual	25.232	143	.176		
Total	81.269	146			

Note: a. Dependent Variable: TOTALDV; b. Predictors: (Constant), TOTALPBC, TOTALSN, TOTALATT.

Examination of the individual regression coefficients (*Table 4*) isolated the unique contribution of each predictor within the model, following the interpretive conventions emerged as the strongest positive contributor to the dependent variable, with an unstandardised coefficient of $B = 0.580$ ($SE = 0.087$) and a standardised coefficient of $\beta = 0.498$, a result that was highly significant, $t = 6.654$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.407, 0.752]. Perceived Behavioural Control likewise exerted a substantial and significant positive influence on the outcome, yielding $B = 0.457$ ($SE = 0.097$) and $\beta = 0.393$, $t = 4.718$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.266, 0.649]. Subjective Norms, by contrast, did not establish a significant independent relationship with the dependent variable once the remaining predictors were controlled, returning a negligible coefficient of $B = -0.014$ ($SE = 0.074$) and $\beta = -0.013$, $t = -0.188$, $p = .851$, 95% CI [−0.160, 0.132]. A comprehensive diagnostic evaluation was undertaken to confirm that the assumptions underlying linear modelling were satisfied. Multicollinearity was systematically assessed and subsequently ruled out, as the tolerance values for all independent measures remained well above the conservative threshold of 0.10, recorded at .387 for Attitude, .460 for Subjective Norms, and .313 for Perceived Behavioural Control. Correspondingly, the

Variance Inflation Factors fell comfortably below the accepted criterion of 5.0, ranging from 2.175 for Subjective Norms to 3.191 for Perceived Behavioural Control, confirming that the predictors are sufficiently independent of one another. Casewise residual diagnostics identified two minor outliers exceeding the conventional boundary of ±3.0 standard deviations, namely Case 141 (standardised residual = −3.368) and Case 147 (standardised residual = −3.443). The residuals nevertheless remained structurally stable across the full sample of 147 cases, retaining a mean of .000 and a standard deviation approaching unity (SD = 0.990), which supports the assumptions of normality and homoscedasticity in the underlying distribution.

Table 4. *Coefficients.*

Model	Unstandardized β	Std. Error	Standardized β	t	Sig.
TotalATT	.580	.087	.498	6.654	<.001
TotalSN	-.014	.074	-.013	-.188	.851
TotalPBC	.457	.097	.393	4.718	<.001

The regression analysis further revealed that Subjective Norms did not exert a significant influence on the dependent variable (β = −0.013, p = .851). This finding suggests that, within the context of the present study, social pressure exerted by others does not play a meaningful role in predicting the outcome. One plausible explanation for this non-significant result is that the behaviour under investigation is driven more strongly by personal determinants, namely individual attitudes and perceived behavioural control, than by social influence. As summarised in *Table 5*, attitude emerged as a significant positive predictor of food innovation adoption providing support for H1. Perceived behavioral control likewise exerted a significant positive influence, supporting H3. Subjective norm, by contrast, did not significantly predict food innovation adoption, H2 was therefore not supported. Taken together, the results indicate that students' personal evaluations of food innovation and their confidence in executing it carry greater explanatory weight than perceived social expectations.

Table 5. *Summary of hypotheses testing results.*

Hypotheses	Path	Decision
H1	Attitude → Food innovation adoption	Supported
H2	Subjective norm → Food innovation adoption	Not Supported
H3	Perceived behavioral control → Food innovation adoption	Supported

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the finding on attitude constitutes the strongest predictor of food innovation tendency (β = .498, p < .001) and carries direct implications for culinary curriculum design. This suggests a pedagogical shift in which social media is treated as a legitimate object of analysis within culinary subjects, such as trend interpretation, visual plating conventions, and audience-driven recipe adaptation rather than as an informal activity occurring outside the classroom. Assessment structures that require students to justify creative decisions with reference to observed digital trends would consolidate this attitudinal foundation while developing critical rather than imitative engagement. The significant contribution of perceived behavioural control (β = .393, p < .001), set against the non-significant effect of subjective norms (β = −0.013, p = .851), redirects practical attention from social encouragement toward capability provision. Interventions premised on peer influence or institutional advocacy are

unlikely to generate innovative output; what enables innovation is students' confidence that they possess the skills, equipment, and opportunity to act. For faculty management, this translates into resourcing decisions such as access to experimental kitchen time, ingredient budgets for non-prescribed work, and structured mentorship that convert intention into practice. For industry partners, the same finding indicates that internship and competition formats granting genuine creative autonomy will yield stronger innovative engagement than those emphasising conformity to established house standards.

This study advances the literature in three respects. It establishes the Theory of Planned Behaviour as a viable framework for explaining food innovation as a behavioural outcome, extending an application predominantly associated with consumption decisions into the domain of creative production. It provides empirical evidence from Malaysian culinary education, a context underrepresented in existing scholarship on social media and food innovation. Third, the divergence between subjective norms' strong bivariate association ($r = .591$) and its null multivariate contribution suggests that the relationship between subjective norms and food innovation tendency may be influenced by other variables in the model, a discrepancy that invites explicit testing of indirect effects in subsequent research on creative behaviour.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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