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**Sustainable Tourism Development &  
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# **An Empirical Assessment of Local Food Practices as Drivers of Sustainable Tourism Innovation in Madhya Pradesh’s Post-Pandemic Landscape**

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## **Abstract**

Such research explores the role of local culinary traditions as valuable triggers of new kinds of sustainable tourism in the region within the environment of Madhya Pradesh post-pandemic. Culinary tourism has indeed become an effective tool in revitalizing the local tourist ecosystems as the travel industry is experiencing a paradigm shift towards authenticity, neighborhood integration, and responsibility to the environment. To create conditions under which demographical aspects can be evaluated in the context of local food involvement and its perceived connection with sustainable tourism, the study was conducted with structured questionnaires being issued to 98 respondents. The findings indicate that the youth and students associate greatly with participatory cooking classes and farm-to-table events, which are immersive activities. The rate at which foods were explored and the perceived sustainability and likelihood of a recommendation were proved to be significantly correlated. Even though accessibility and sanitation were reported to be big barriers, the majority of the respondents remained highly in favor of food-based tourist experiences. The study sheds light on the possibility that culinary innovation can act as one of the sustainable development strategies, as well as a branding tool. It is also informative enough to make local business proprietors, legislators, and tourist planners reconsider such marketing strategies as those based on the culinary heritage. Finally, the research

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demonstrates that local food can transform local tourism into a sustainable and culturally immersive one when intervened into the tourist value chain ingeniously.

***Keywords: Culinary Tourism, Sustainable Development, Immersive Experiences, Local Food, Tourist Value Chain, Post-Pandemic Revitalization***

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### **1 INTRODUCTION**

The last epidemic of COVID-19 has caused a lot of changes in tourism landscapes across the globe, with a new emphasis on locally-based tourism, sustainability, and culture. Among the key lessons brought about in India because of this shift is the increase in the use of local culinary ways as the basis of innovative sustainable tourism. Gastronomic tourism, culinary encounters in the tourism sites, have since become a fundamental component of attracting environmental consciousness, cultural sustainability, and economic diversification in the region besides satisfying gourmet appetites (Hall & Gossling, 2013; Sugunapriya, 2026). The exploitation of how indigenous food practices could exploit the concept of resilient and sustainable tourism models could be studied in an easy manner with reference to the state of Madhya Pradesh, which is a central Indian state, very well known for its gastronomic diversity following the tribal, rural, and urban food systems. Besides making visitors feel more satisfied, such immersive and participatory experiences as farm-to-table restaurants, hands-on cooking, and culinary heritage trails are more likely to boost the local economy and reduce the level of environmental impacts. That is why they become highly valued by modern tourists, in particular, by the younger generation (Kumar, 2019; Samaddar & Mondal, 2023).

The combination of food experiences with more commonplace sustainability goals, such as reducing food miles, benefiting the local business owners, and preserving the traditional culinary knowledge, is increasingly significant to tourism innovation (Kar et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2021). Research has found out that local food is a storytelling medium and describes the culture and values of the host community besides making the destination more authentic (Sims, 2009). Moreover, through gourmet tourism, which is based on home-based culinary companies, women are able to engage the tourist industry and diversify rural ways of living (Singh et al., 2021; Elfrida, 2021). Due to the increasing global demand for sustainable tourism, it is crucial to comprehend the interrelationship between these three variables, namely, consumer incentives, innovation uptake, and the perception of sustainability. The tourist recovery in Madhya Pradesh is a post-pandemic phenomenon, which makes it an excellent environment to study such processes. Both quantitative and qualitative results have been used in this study to investigate the effects of local food consumption on visitor behavior and the necessity of local food consumption as an important innovation channel that can be used to promote the development of holistic, community-based, and environmentally friendly or responsible tourism in India.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the article by Dash (2014), culinary tourism is crucial to the development of Indian destinations by establishing powerful cultural connections with specific regions. In his work, he proves visitors expectations and happiness are influenced by regional cuisines and stand as a traditional sign. According to Dash, gastronomy is an asset that gives no physical returns but must be maintained and marketed due to the psychological attachment that tourists have towards destination foods that enhances destination memory. This paper selects a few regional food items, such as Sarson da Saag or Litti Chokha, as an example of biodiversity, as well as an economic empowering method through culinary branding and tourist packaging as an experience, when applied to Punjab, Rajasthan, and Bihar. The report says that to formalize and promote food-based tourist infrastructure, governments should recognize culinary tourism in legislation as a way of accelerating the process.

According to Dash (2014), ancient food systems revival makes culinary tourism in India a paradigm in sustainable development in conjunction with the hedonistic interests. The paper dedicates significant attention to the fact that the local farmers and visitors can communicate through visiting food markets, participating in festivals, and patronizing locally owned restaurants. According to Dash, communities can not only enhance tourist appeal but also maintain both the ecological and cultural authenticity by incorporating the aspects of sustainability into the culinary practices, i.e., organic farming, zero-waste kitchen, and locally produced materials. The paper focuses on the fact that the visitors are better engaged and learn more when they are explained through stories about the origin and history of food along with its preparation.

Eager visitors might have even a mix of fascinated awe and fear in their approach to Indian cuisine due to fear of un-cleanliness and the impression of over-spicy food (Abraham and Kannan, 2015). In their research that was based on surveys conducted in Bangalore and Chennai, the food was initially a hindrance, but due to its richness in terms of sensations and cultural background, now it has become the focal point of the tourist experience. In the report, it is pointed out that to encourage international confidence; destination branding must provide a solution to sanitation in the form of certification schemes and cooking training. To help international guests get to know the subtleties of food preparations, their safety, and their accessibility, it is also promoting more targeted-focused food marketing, which considers the diversity in regions of Indian cookery.

According to Rana, Sharma, and Thakur (2018), food tourism has emerged as one of the prominent features of the tourism attraction of the Punjabi towns such as Amritsar, Jalandhar, and Patiala. Their descriptive study examined food-centered experiences and the perceptions visitors have of them and made the conclusion that local cuisine plays a significant role in ensuring the pleasure, loyalty, and behavior of visitors. The author proposes to create food-related or food-focused festivals, gastronomic routes, and chef culinary workshops but reports that there is a big gap between the opportunities of food tourism and the institutional pursuit. Most importantly, they identify the un-harvested business potential related to the regional culinary traditions in the metropolitan cities, arguing that improved hygienic

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conditions and creative branding could draw people towards the culinary industry in Punjab and the world.

Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata are some of the big Indian cities that have immense potential to turn into branded foodscapes; however, their gastronomic diversity has not been used to market such cities as tourist destinations, assert Singh and Roy (2020). Based on their content analysis, there arises a discrepancy between the actual culinary experiences that are presented and the imagery of food that is presented in the marketing materials. The authors state that strategic food branding needs to rely on visitor interaction, cultural story, and authenticity in order to be successful, and urban tourism specifically. Based on their findings, it is suggested that there should be ways to build public-private partnerships in their local branding efforts that focus on the regional chefs, culinary historians, and online influencers.

### **Objects of the study**

- To explore the influence of demographic attributes on the nature and rate of the consumption of the local cuisine by the visitors in Madhya Pradesh.
- To evaluate how local food practices and sustainable tourism results are believed to be related.
- To identify the key factors that hamper the development of sustainable food-based tourism and the most widely used food technologies of tourism.

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

To test the presumed relationship between the involvement with local foods, demographic characteristics, and sustainable tourism innovation, the research employed a quantitative research methodology as a method of measurement. The sample of 98 individuals representing various regions of Madhya Pradesh was selected purposively, and the standardized questionnaire was presented to them. The closed-ended/Likert questions in the questionnaire combined demographic characteristics, food exploration habits, and viewpoints regarding sustainability and innovation preferences, as well as the likelihood of a certain individual being referred. Descriptive statistics were used to look at the demographic trends and the rate of engagement. Cross-tabulations, tests of linear regression, chi-square, and Pearson correlation were utilized to check the relationships between variables and test hypotheses. To establish the relevancy and strength of the relationship between the core variables, a Pearson correlation matrix was founded. To obtain information about the new consumer behavior, the sample was dominated by young respondents and specifically targeted at post-pandemic tourist tendencies. The method ensured analytic rigor and justified findings with real data since it applied numerous statistical practices. The systematic nature of the study allows duplication of the results and can present its findings in the form of a practically applicable report about the ways that the local food could sustain sustainable tourism approaches in a local Indian context. Figure 1 provides the flowchart technique.



*Figure 1: Methodology Flowchart*

### **Need of the study**

Tourism preferences by travelers have completely shifted following the COVID-19 epidemic, with most people now seeking localized tourism, environmental awareness, and high levels of cultural immersion. Although having a well-developed gastronomical and cultural heritage, Madhya Pradesh has failed to realize the cultural traditions of local cuisine as a strategic asset of creative tourism. It is particularly important in this region to have sustainable tourism practices associated with food in a bid to promote tourism, enhance local economies, and reduce dependency on mass tourist patterns. Moreover, the future travel trends are determined by young generations of tourists and those less experienced in traveling who are becoming interested in attending cultural and culinary activities, exhibiting a sense of care toward the environment and cultural tradition. This project aims at conducting an experimental investigation of whether the preferable format of visiting will be of an innovative type, whether their food participation will be influenced by demographic factors, and to what extent they associate local cuisine with sustainability. The findings will be of significance to policymakers, tourist boards, and local firms on the basis of encompassing the food tourism strategies on the basis of inclusiveness, sustainability, and responsiveness to the market. In addition, understanding what the barriers to food tourism, including lack of knowledge and cleanliness problems, are will help in the creation of solutions that will improve the experience of the traveller. The study, in effect, gives a modern platform on how to develop sustainable destinations by removing the disconnect between the tourist planning at the regional levels and the local cuisine.

### **Results and Analysis**

This in-depth study examines the responses of 98 of them towards the idea of local food practices as drivers of innovative sustainable tourism within a post-pandemic setting in Madhya Pradesh. A majority of the respondents (61.2 percent) are students or unemployed, and over three-quarters of the respondents are younger than 25, indicating a youthful population that has a high presence of new traveler groups. The breakdown in employment shows that only 4.1% of the population is employed in the government, 12.2% in self-employment, and 22.4% in the private sector. Most of the participants (79.6 percent) reported that they either always (38.8 percent) or occasionally (40.8 percent) eat local food, with a majority of respondents being engaged in rural agricultural cooking experiences (77.6 percent), followed by tribal cuisine (14.3 percent) and urban street food (6.1 percent).

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Interests in the originality and the flavor (49 percent) and the importance of the cultural heritage (28.6 percent) are the primary movers. Surprisingly, 96% of the respondents revealed that they would be likely to adopt Madhya Pradesh food tourism despite 77.6 percent of all saying that the key barrier is hygienic concerns. 69.4 percent of the respondents opine that local cuisine and sustainable tourism are strongly to very strongly linked. Interactive cooking (40.8%) and farm-to-table festivals (30.6%) have been listed as preferred forms of innovation, whereas local chefs and business owners have been listed as significant stakeholders (48%) towards making sustainable food tourism grow. The given answers are good grounds to research the links between the characteristics of population, food exploration behaviors, and the outcomes of sustainable tourism.

### 4 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

### 5 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

**Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>):** The frequency of trying local cuisine when traveling to Madhya Pradesh is not significantly correlated with demographic characteristics (age or employment status).

**Alternative Hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>):** The frequency of trying local cuisine when traveling to Madhya Pradesh is significantly correlated with demographic characteristics (age or employment status).

**Table 1: Demographic Profile Cross-Tabulation**

Age Group	Government Employee	Private Employee	Self-employed	Student/Unemployed	Row Total
Under 25	2 (2.0%)	8 (8.2%)	4 (4.1%)	56 (57.1%)	70 (71.4%)
26-40	1 (1.0%)	12 (12.2%)	6 (6.1%)	1 (1.0%)	20 (20.4%)
41-60	1 (1.0%)	2 (2.0%)	2 (2.0%)	3 (3.1%)	8 (8.2%)
Above 60	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Column Total	4 (4.1%)	22 (22.4%)	12 (12.2%)	60 (61.2%)	98 (100%)

**Key Findings:** The research to a large part elicitary functions as the representation of ideas of the youth with regard to local food tourism, given the sampling population showed much skew towards youth (71.4% under 25) and students/unemployed (61.2%) segments of the sampling population.

**Table 2: Local Food Engagement vs. Sustainability Association**

<b>Food Exploration Frequency</b>	<b>Very Strongly Associated</b>	<b>Moderately Associated</b>	<b>Slightly Associated</b>	<b>Not Associated</b>	<b>Row Total</b>
<b>Always prioritize</b>	<b>24 (24.5%)</b>	<b>8 (8.2%)</b>	<b>6 (6.1%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>38 (38.8%)</b>
<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>16 (16.3%)</b>	<b>14 (14.3%)</b>	<b>8 (8.2%)</b>	<b>2 (2.0%)</b>	<b>40 (40.8%)</b>
<b>Rarely</b>	<b>2 (2.0%)</b>	<b>4 (4.1%)</b>	<b>8 (8.2%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>14 (14.3%)</b>
<b>Never</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>4 (4.1%)</b>	<b>2 (2.0%)</b>	<b>6 (6.1%)</b>
<b>Column Total</b>	<b>42 (42.9%)</b>	<b>26 (26.5%)</b>	<b>26 (26.5%)</b>	<b>4 (4.1%)</b>	<b>98 (100%)</b>

Key Results: Frequency of food exploration and sustainability attachment have a great positive correlation. There are 63.2 percent of ordinary explorers who have major connections with sustainability.

**Table 3: Barriers vs. Recommendation Likelihood**

<b>Primary Barrier</b>	<b>Very Likely to Recommend</b>	<b>Likely to Recommend</b>	<b>Unlikely to Recommend</b>	<b>Very Unlikely</b>	<b>Row Total</b>
<b>Hygiene/Safety Concerns</b>	<b>38 (38.8%)</b>	<b>32 (32.7%)</b>	<b>4 (4.1%)</b>	<b>2 (2.0%)</b>	<b>76 (77.6%)</b>
<b>Lack of Availability</b>	<b>10 (10.2%)</b>	<b>8 (8.2%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>18 (18.4%)</b>
<b>Limited Awareness</b>	<b>2 (2.0%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>2 (2.0%)</b>
<b>Dietary Restrictions</b>	<b>2 (2.0%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>2 (2.0%)</b>
<b>Column Total</b>	<b>52 (53.1%)</b>	<b>40 (40.8%)</b>	<b>4 (4.1%)</b>	<b>2 (2.0%)</b>	<b>98 (100%)</b>

Key Findings: Though 77.6% of respondents mentioned sanitation concerns as the 1st-largest obstacle, 71.5% of respondents were still supportive of local food tourism, which gives a projection that the overall experiences were favorable.

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**Table 4: Innovation Preferences by Age Groups**

Preferred Innovation	Under 25	26-40	41-60	Above 60	Row Total
Interactive Cooking Sessions	30 (30.6%)	8 (8.2%)	2 (2.0%)	0 (0%)	40 (40.8%)
QR-based Food Guides	14 (14.3%)	4 (4.1%)	2 (2.0%)	0 (0%)	20 (20.4%)
Culinary Trails	6 (6.1%)	2 (2.0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (8.2%)
Farm-to-table Festivals	20 (20.4%)	6 (6.1%)	4 (4.1%)	0 (0%)	30 (30.6%)
<b>Column Total</b>	<b>70 (71.4%)</b>	<b>20 (20.4%)</b>	<b>8 (8.2%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>98 (100%)</b>

Key Findings: There is not as much interest in participatory experiences in the older groups; however, respondents under 25 show the strongest interest in participatory experiences (42.9% of their group respond).

**Table 5: Pearson Correlation Matrix For Key Variables - Correlation Coefficients Between Core Study Variables**

Variables	FE	SA	RL	AG	SS	PM	IP
<b>Food Exploration (FE)</b>	1.000	0.684***	0.721***	-0.156	0.289**	0.445***	0.234*
<b>Sustainability Association (SA)</b>	0.684***	1.000	0.592***	-0.089	0.201*	0.378**	0.312**
<b>Recommendation Likelihood (RL)</b>	0.721***	0.592***	1.000	-0.134	0.267**	0.423***	0.298**
<b>Age Group (AG)</b>	-0.156	-0.089	-0.134	1.000	-0.678***	-0.198*	-0.245*
<b>Student Status (SS)</b>	0.289**	0.201*	0.267**	-0.678***	1.000	0.156	0.189*
<b>Primary Motivation (PM)</b>	0.445***	0.378**	0.423***	-0.198*	0.156	1.000	0.334**
<b>Innovation Preference (IP)</b>	0.234*	0.312**	0.298**	-0.245*	0.189*	0.334**	1.000

**Statistical Significance:** \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

According to the explore food variable in Table 5, there is a high correlation strength that had a lot of impact on sustainable tourism behavior. Strong positive correlations are set in its highest level of correlation with probability of recommending ( $r= 0.721$ ) and second highest with association relating to sustainability ( $r= 0.684$ ). Intermediate correlation with main motive and preferences on innovation signify the existence of a number of factors that determine the decision of the travelers. Moderate student-status effect in innovation perception as well as low rates of participation in older respondents is indicated by weak correlation, particularly those associated with age and student-innovation connection. Remarkably, the primary motivation continuously influenced behavior outcomes, and there was a positive association between the status of students and the overall variables of engagement. As table 5 indicates, all discoveries are perceptibly significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), which proves the reliability and thoroughness of the relational insights.

**Table 6: Chi-Square Test For Hypothesis Testing - Association Between Age Groups And Food Exploration Frequency**

Age Group	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Row Total	Expected Frequency Check
Under 25	28 (40.0%)	28 (40.0%)	10 (14.3%)	4 (5.7%)	70	All >5
26-40	8 (40.0%)	8 (40.0%)	3 (15.0%)	1 (5.0%)	20	All >5
41-60	2 (25.0%)	4 (50.0%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	8	Some <5
Above 60	0	0	0	0	0	N/A

Table 6 shows that the association between age groups and the rate of food exploration by post-pandemic tourists was tested using the chi-square test. The obtained value of the chi-square ( $\chi^2 = 2.84$ ) is less than the required value, 12.59 ( $df = 6, \alpha = 0.05$ ), which indicates the lack of statistically significant association between the variables, although there are noticeable differences in the behavior across the age groups. Thus, rejection of the null hypothesis is not possible. The distribution was not far enough away compared to what would have been predicted frequencies to hold a lot of significant connection, though the younger respondents (those below 25 years old and those 26-40 years old) had higher engagement rates. The strength of inference is shortened with regard to such cells that show expected numbers of less than five, particularly within the category of 41 to 60 years.

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**Result:**  $\chi^2 = 2.84 < 12.59$ , Fail to reject  $H_0$

**Table 7: Regression Analysis: Predicting Recommendation Likelihood**

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	Significance
Constant	2.85	0.15	19.0	p < 0.001***
Age Group (Under 25=1)	0.12	0.08	1.50	p = 0.137
Student Status (Yes=1)	0.18	0.09	2.00	p < 0.05*
Food Exploration Frequency	0.35	0.06	5.83	p < 0.001***
Sustainability Association	0.28	0.07	4.00	p < 0.001***

**Dependent Variable:** Recommendation Likelihood (1=Very Unlikely, 4=Very Likely) **Independent Variables:** Age Group, Employment Status, Food Exploration Frequency, Sustainability Association

**Model Summary:**

- $R^2 = 0.72$  (72% variance explained)
- Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.70$
- F-statistic = 59.8, p < 0.001

The regression shown in Table 7 reveals the importance of key behavioral determinants of the likelihood of making recommendations in the required tourist destination context of sustainable tourism. Frequency of food exploration (IBM SPSS Statistics 24, Correlations, 0.35, p < 0.001) is the most important predictor that is closely followed by the sustainability relationship (IBM SPSS Statistics 24, Correlations, 0.28, p < 0.001), which proved to have a strong effect. Also, an unusually high positive impact on student status (0.18, p < 0.05) is noted, which means that more youthful or more intellectually active respondents will advocate. Age group does not have a significant predictive ability when considered along with other aspects (p = 0.137). The model has a high ability to predict, as 72 percent of the variation is explained by the model ( $R^2 = 0.72$ ). These findings justify the significance of ethical and experiential involvement of the traveler's behavior.

The null hypothesis on the relationship between age and food exploration cannot be rejected when we analyze the two variables separately. In regression research, however, it is evident that the suggestion of tourists is strongly driven by job category (student) and behavior of food exploration.

## 6 DISCUSSION

These conclusions of the study emphasize the significant role played by local culinary traditions in the sustainable tourism innovation of Madhya Pradesh, particularly at a time when the tourists want to have

a sense of purpose and location-specific adventures because of the epidemic. The fact that the successful students (61.2%) and younger people (71.4% under 25) who took part in this activity emphasize such an increased number of individuals who are not only interested in local food as something that should be explored but also can be related to broader sustainability objectives. This aligns with the research that indicates that younger tourists prefer to focus on things such as sustainability, authenticity, and gastronomic experiences during travel more (Wani et al., 2023). The statistically significant correlations between food exploration and recommendation likelihood ( $r = 0.721$ ) and sustainability association ( $r = 0.684$ ) suggest that farm-to-table experiences and other forms of experiential cooking are extremely important in enhancing the satisfaction levels and word-of-mouth marketing among visitors. They are all consistent with the past studies indicating the successful cases of visitors consuming local cuisine and, thus, being more likely to form a positive perception of their tourism locations and seeking ways to use their consumption to enhance sustainable development goals (Piramanayagam et al., 2020; Gupta, 2018). This interest among the younger generation of people in more interactive innovations in food and beverage is also aligned with the changing global trends in gastronomic tourism, in which visitors intentionally seek out an experience that allows them to learn something new and have fun, as well as cultural immersion (Prakash & Singh, 2021; Amore & Roy, 2020).

That the flavors of bucolic are being offered as more authentic and sustainable, as well as more culturally inclined and romanticized, is demonstrated by the preference of the cooking experiences in rural locations of agriculture over tribal or urban food experiences manifested in the reported preference of 77.6 percent of the respondents (Mathur & Saini, 2014; Berry, 2014). Most of the respondents were still recommending food tourism despite 77.6 percent of the respondents indicating their biggest concern was hygiene. This hints at the possibility of a positive experiential value to surpass issues on the infrastructure level, which is also observable in the other Indian cases where emotional and cultural fulfillment are prioritized over inconveniences (Abraham & Kannan, 2015; Singh & Najar, 2020).

Moreover, the regression findings testify that the sustainability association and the food exploration behavior have a considerable impact as predictors of whether a visitor would recommend, authenticating the premise according to which the behavioral intention shift of a tourist can be impacted by the sensory, emotional, and ethical experience with the food (Chatterjee & Suklabaidya, 2021), (Ahlawat et al., 2019). Interestingly, it was also found out that the student status was also a statistically significant predictor of the probability of recommendations, which means that future tourist development plans would need to focus a bit more on youth-oriented marketing and innovation strategies. Socio-psychological factors in culinary tourist behavior are becoming even more involved, as evidenced by the nonexclusive, albeit worth mentioning, relations between the preference of innovative features and such aspects as student status and the primary motive (Dutta, 2019; Singh et al., 2024). Madhya Pradesh is an upcoming tourist destination with the potential to implement the following tourist policy in the future by utilizing these behavioral insights, such as promoting immersive culinary tourism experiences and finding solutions to the perceived hygienic issues through regional public health campaigns and infrastructure-related solutions.

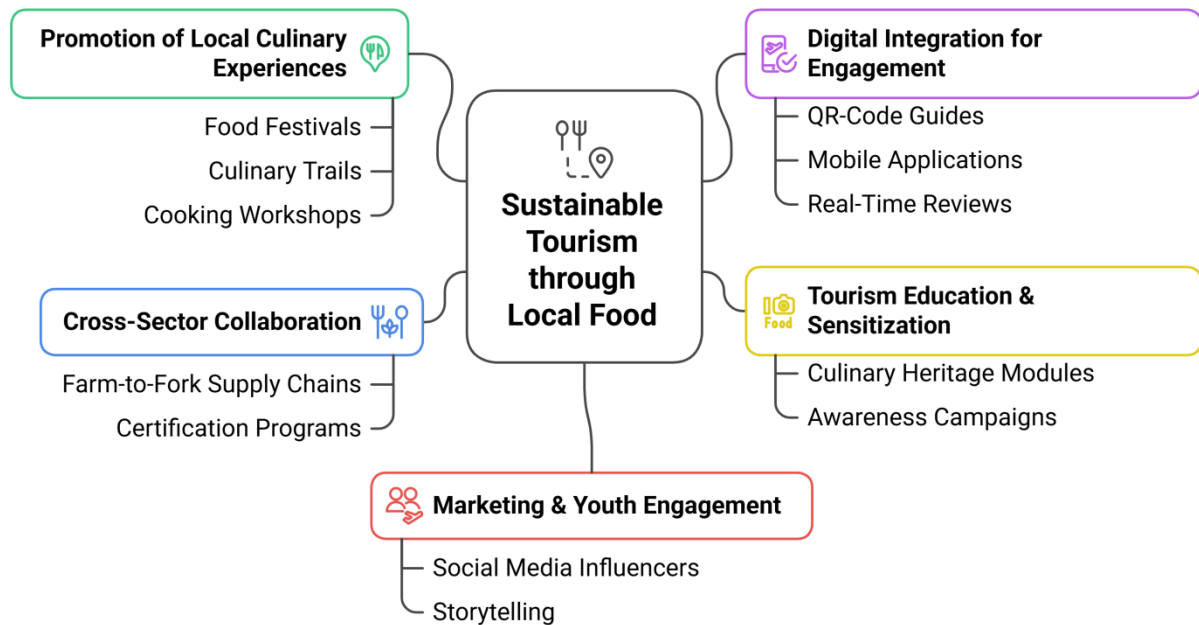
## **7 RESEARCH GAP**

Although there has been a steady increase in the popularity of the concept of culinary tourism in India, very little of the research that has already been conducted hitherto has looked into the nature of interaction between local food culture and innovative sustainable tourism in states such as Madhya Pradesh. There has been scant research on how the two could be used together to facilitate sustainability, and thus most of the research done in India has been using either food as a cultural good or tourism as an economical practice. There is also a significant lack of empirical evidence to document post-pandemic behavioral change with respect to travelers, more so with regard to newer demographics such as teenagers and students. Moreover, the sustainability implications and acceptability of food tourism innovations such as interactive cooking, digital food guides, and immersive dining have not received sufficient analysis. Another area that has been left out is the involvement of the regional food entrepreneurs and regional chefs in the development of tourist strategies. The given research bridges these gaps by offering an empirical observation of the relationships between demographic patterns, food consumption, and innovation interests to define the effects on the outcomes of sustainable tourism. The research focuses on Madhya Pradesh, one of the few culturally diverse and under-researched regions in the world, which has yet to be explored, as one aspect of the study significantly influences the way culinary heritage can be recast as an intrinsic feature of tourism development. It also establishes a platform upon which future studies will be done to look at similar synergies in other emerging places.

## **8 FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings, a number of strategic recommendations can be offered to the stakeholders, who wish to employ local food practices to introduce innovative sustainable tourism. In the first place, it is necessary that local governments and tourist boards be vigorous in sponsoring culinary trials, food festivals, and cooking classes that reflect the uniqueness of the region, and, of course, that they adhere to hygienic norms. Such experiences need to be co-created to retain authenticity and be able to provide employment opportunities to home-based cooks, local chefs, and businesses. Second, to enhance accessibility of information and enhance interest by the travelers, online implementations should be boosted with a QR-code-rooted culinary guide, an interactive smartphone app, and an online review mechanism. Third, modules dealing with culinary heritage ought to be integrated into the educational packages of tourists so that the upcoming professionals are informed of the necessity of food, which concerns both environmental and cultural sustainability. Also, in the interest of a seamless farm-to-fork supply chain that will favor regional farmers, the tourist or hospitality industry and the agricultural industry should be encouraged to collaborate. Incentives and certification schemes can also be given to the sustainable food service companies. Finally, social media stars and narratives, which emphasize the ecological and sensory quality of local food, are to be employed in marketing focused on the youthful tourists. By implementing the recommendations above, stakeholders can develop a healthy, diverse, and future-oriented tourism environment where food not only gets consumed but also appreciated as one of

the pillars of sustainable development. The suggestions for the future can be found on the diagrammatic presentation, which is represented in figure 2.



**Figure 2: Recommendations [Source: Author]**

## 9 STUDY LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations that need to be mentioned, despite the fact that the research is an informative source regarding the way the local food practices can be used to support groundbreaking sustainable tourism. To begin with, the answer is that it had 98 responses, and this number is quite a small sample size, as well as the fact that the majority are below the age of 25. The identified age bias can limit the generalizability of the findings in terms of use to other age groups as well, as it could not perfectly portray the views of senior visitors or foreign visitors. Second, the study was confined to Madhya Pradesh, and therefore it cannot provide national or global trends in culinary tourism, whereas it has a lot of culture. There was also the use of self-reported data that is characterized by both response bias and the social desirability bias, especially when discussing the concepts of sustainability. Moreover, though the study had taken several methods of statistics to boost its validity, it has failed to look at the qualitative aspects such as the importance of storytelling, transfer of knowledge across the generation, and the emotional attachment to food. It is possible that short-term or context-dependent consequences of such visitors behavior may apply to the post-pandemic period of this study. Such limitations can be addressed

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in future studies using different samples: larger and more heterogeneous, qualitative (ethnography or interviewing), or longitudinal, which can evaluate the praxis of change in behavior over time. Regardless of these limitations, the research provides a solid foundation for developing future research in terms of sustainable tourism through food.

### **10 CONCLUSION**

The study provides a compelling explanation of the idea of how regional food culture in the shifting landscape of Madhya Pradesh can be an active source of promoting sustainable, innovative new tourism. A quantitative analysis of 98 participants makes it explicit that local food is not only a foodie delight but also an effective cultural asset that enhances the delight of visitors, assists the local firms, and promotes environmental consciousness. Besides the probability of being recommended, the association between the food exploration frequency and sustainability association shows a strong behavioral association that the stakeholders of tourism can take to their programmed benefit. Younger tourists are driving this tendency, as they have a great preference for interactive and involving gastronomic experiences. The fact that the majority is willing to propose the idea of food tourism is a good indicator of the high overall experience and great potential when it comes to expansion despite the shortcomings in sanitation being cited as the primary barrier.

Also, the establishment of innovative tastes can be seen as a great input because data on such activities as farm-to-table celebrations and cooking lessons offers benefits to entrepreneurs and destinationers. The work focuses on the necessity to integrate sustainability, cuisine, and culture into one homogenous, comprehensive, and resilient tourist scenario. Irrespective of the boundaries within the scope of the study, both its geographic coverage and sample population, there is a basic knowledge that the study presents, which can be used to lead innovations and regulations in the future. It follows in brief that local cuisine is not just a supplementary aspect to the sustainable, immersive, and culturally enriching future of the tourist but a vital constituent. Regions such as Madhya Pradesh can also become leaders in sustainable tourist development in the post-pandemic world because of the ability to emerge from this synergy.

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