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The ethics of eating: how do lifestyle politics shape tourists' ethical food consumption behaviours?

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Abstract

Purpose – Guided by the lifestyle politics theory, this study aims to examine how ethical food commitments are negotiated and reshaped within tourism experiences. It explores how travel settings affect political food consumerism by disrupting familiar routines, introducing new cultural and logistical constraints and leading individuals to adjust their food choices in ways that reflect ongoing ethical engagement.

Design/methodology/approach – Adopting a constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, the study uses a qualitative design based on semi-structured interviews with politically and ethically conscious

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consumers. The analysis, informed by the grounded theory, identifies key themes related to motivations, emotional dimensions and barriers in travel-related political and ethical food consumption.

Findings – Tourism disrupts the routines that political food consumerism usually relies on. In everyday life, ethical food choices are supported by habit, familiar products and like-minded social settings. But when people travel, they face new cultures and lose control over what food is available. From a lifestyle politics perspective, ethical choices are not fixed – they shift as situations change. In tourism, political food decisions often involve compromise, shaped by practical limits, cultural differences and being more visible. Tourism, therefore, functions as a space for ethical expression and as a context in which political food commitments are tested and redefined.

Practical implications – Understanding how ethical food commitments shift during travel can help providers better support value-driven consumption. This includes improving access to verified ethical food options, clearer sourcing information and recognising the cultural and emotional significance of food choices for ethically motivated travellers. By addressing the challenges faced in unfamiliar settings, industry actors can create more inclusive environments that align with expectations around ethical and sustainable consumption.

Originality/value – A lifestyle politics perspective is applied to political food consumerism in tourism, highlighting food as a highly moralised and contested area of consumption. It offers new insight into how ethical eating practices are shaped through travel and how these practices may contribute to sustainability transitions within tourism and hospitality.

Keywords Food consumerism, Political food consumption, Lifestyle politics, Tourist behaviour, Ethical consumerism

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Food consumption is a key focus of Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG 12), which calls for more sustainable production and consumption by addressing issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, obesity and food waste (Cozzio *et al.*, 2020; Gössling and Hall, 2022). In tourism and hospitality, these concerns are particularly visible because food consumption is both integral to the travel experience and a context where consumers encounter ethical, environmental and social dilemmas (Gössling and Hall, 2022; Liu *et al.*, 2014; Orea-Giner and Fusté-Forné, 2023; Sharma *et al.*, 2022). Travellers are often required to make food choices in unfamiliar environments, where such decisions are entangled with cultural practices, economic inequalities and ecological consequences. These circumstances make tourism a critical arena for examining how individuals respond to broader sustainability concerns through their consumption behaviour. Ethical concerns involve animal welfare, labour rights and fairness in production and distribution systems (Taheri *et al.*, 2024). Environmental concerns pertain to the ecological consequences of food systems, including emissions, land degradation, water usage and biodiversity loss (Gössling and Hall, 2022). Social concerns include the right to food, equitable labour conditions and the broader implications of food access and nutrition for community well-being (Hall, 2020). The concept of sustainability integrates all these domains.

Food consumption in tourism is relevant for examining these overlapping concerns because it links everyday routines with ethical values in highly visible and decision-heavy contexts. Food choice is a site of intense moral reflection and contestation during travel, where selections are shaped not only by taste and habit but also by ethical and political values (Halkier, 2016). Food consumption can reflect broader value commitments, particularly when individuals attempt to act on issues such as social justice, environmental sustainability and/or responsible sourcing (Halkier, 2022; Orea-Giner and Fusté-Forné, 2023; Sharma *et al.*, 2022). This focus is explained by the concept of political consumerism, which refers to the use of market-based choices – such as buying or avoiding certain products – as a means of influencing production systems and their ethical, environmental and social consequences

(Stolle *et al.*, 2005; Boström *et al.*, 2019). In food consumption, political consumerism reflects decisions oriented toward reducing harm (e.g. avoiding battery-farmed meat), supporting fairness (e.g. buying Fair Trade) and promoting sustainability goals (e.g. purchasing organic products) (Halkier, 2016, 2022). These choices are often driven by long-term ethical commitments that extend beyond personal satisfaction or dietary habit. These practices reflect what Bennett (1998) termed "lifestyle politics" – a form of political expression that is enacted through routine choices in everyday life. Lifestyle politics are not restricted to formal settings such as elections but instead take shape through personal practices, including diet, mobility and consumption (De Moor, 2017). Tourism represents a distinctive site for such lifestyle-based political expression, given the constant and visible negotiation of personal values, market constraints and cultural unfamiliarity (Seyfi *et al.*, 2023). In tourism, political food consumerism is shaped both by intention and by context: tourists may want to act ethically, but they must often do so under conditions of uncertainty, constraint or conflict.

Despite growing attention to sustainable food practices (e.g. Cozzio *et al.*, 2020; Gössling and Hall, 2022; Okumus, 2021; Yeoman and McMahon-Beatte, 2016), research on political consumerism in tourism remains limited. While studies have explored consumer behaviour around organic, local and Fair Trade foods (Balıkçıoğlu Dedeoğlu *et al.*, 2022; Boström *et al.*, 2019; Stolle *et al.*, 2005), they have rarely examined how tourists carry political and ethical commitments into travel settings or how these commitments are affected by the tourism experience. Little is known about how tourists make food-related decisions when faced with restricted availability, conflicting ethical frameworks or unfamiliar supply chains (Seyfi *et al.*, 2024). The emotional, practical and value-driven aspects of political food consumerism in tourism are underexamined, including how tourists feel about their decisions, their compromises and how they interpret their behaviour as political or moral action.

This study addresses these gaps by applying the lifestyle politics theory (Bennett, 2012) to explore how political food consumerism operates within the tourism context. This theoretical lens positions consumption as a form of political action that is performed in everyday life, shaped by values, habits and structural limitations (de Moor, 2017). We focus on tourists who self-identify as politically motivated food consumers and investigate how they carry their ethical, environmental and social commitments into their travel practices. To do so, we conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants who consider their ethical food choices as part of their broader political identity. This study contributes to tourism and hospitality scholarship by identifying food as a key domain where political consumerism unfolds and by clarifying how ethical, environmental and social sustainability concerns are negotiated by consumers in travel contexts. It offers new insight into how tourist consumption provides a platform for ethical and political engagement. In doing so, the study advances debates on sustainability, consumer agency and the politics of tourism. It also offers practical insights into how foodservice providers in tourism and hospitality can better respond to the growing expectations of politically and ethically conscious tourists.

2. Literature review and theoretical background

2.1 Conceptualising political food consumerism

Political consumerism focuses on how individuals use their purchasing power to express political, ethical and environmental concerns (Copeland and Boulianne, 2022). Political consumers, often referred to as "consumer citizens" or "citizen-consumers", address civic issues such as justice, sustainability and societal well-being through their purchasing decisions, reflecting a form of citizenship in which personal choices are imbued with ethical

and societal impact (Boström *et al.*, 2019). From a broader perspective, political consumption signifies a shift towards individualised political participation that integrates justice, sustainability, animal welfare and other societal concerns (Bennett, 2012). Supporters of political consumerism argue that it empowers citizens to influence governments, corporations and public awareness through individualised collective action (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). However, critics suggest that systemic political measures may be more effective, as the complexities of daily life can hinder consistent ethical choices (Jacobsen and Dulsrud, 2007).

Food is closely tied to politics because of questions about access, distribution and rights. This has led to the idea of political food consumerism (Stolle *et al.*, 2005). Many studies have since explored how this plays out in different situations. For instance, Santaoja and Jallinoja (2021) view political consumerism as a way for individuals to establish social ties and construct food-based identities. Stolle *et al.* (2005) frame food choices as acts of civic engagement, portraying consumers as political agents who influence societal welfare through their everyday decisions. Ranta and Ichijo (2022) explore how food promotion and consumption act as expressions of political nationalism, reflecting broader cultural and political ideologies. Kennedy *et al.* (2018) emphasise the role of local food activists in challenging industrial food systems and promoting collective sustainability efforts, demonstrating how political consumerism can drive systemic change. Saraiva *et al.* (2021), applying Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity", identify three key political dimensions of organic food consumption: production, localism and activism, interpreting organic practices as forms of ecological and political resistance. Gundelach (2020) suggests that political consumerism plays a critical role in the Global South. For example, Mak and Poon (2024) demonstrate how food-related activism and digital consumerism shaped Hong Kong's pro-democracy "yellow" economy. In this case, food influencers used their platforms to share political messages and shape how people buy food, showing that political food consumerism can take many forms across the world.

2.2 Lifestyle politics and food consumerism in tourism

Political consumerism in tourism and hospitality is the use of market choices, such as selecting destinations, accommodations or food services, to advocate for ethical, environmental or political values (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013; Seyfi *et al.*, 2023). This phenomenon reflects tourists' alignment of their travel choices with their ethical and political commitments (Sharma *et al.*, 2024; Sirakaya-Turk *et al.*, 2024). Political consumerism in food consumption manifests in four key forms: boycotts, buycotts, discursive actions and lifestyle politics. *Boycotts* involve avoiding restaurants associated with unethical practices, such as worker exploitation or excessive food waste (Seyfi and Hall, 2020). Conversely, *buycotts* encourage supporting businesses that align with ethical values, such as those sourcing fair trade ingredients or using sustainable food preparation practices (Seyfi *et al.*, 2023). *Discursive* actions, such as social media campaigns or tourist reviews, also play an important role in tourism and hospitality, promoting businesses that align with tourist values or criticising those that fail to meet ethical standards. *Lifestyle politics*, the integration of political and ethical values into everyday choices, plays a transformative role in shaping tourism-related food systems. Defined as "the politicisation of everyday life, including ethically, morally or politically inspired decisions" (de Moor, 2017, p. 181), lifestyle politics emphasises that personal choices – such as what tourists eat, where they dine or the type of food experiences they seek – are inherently political acts (de Moor, 2017).

Within the food tourism context, lifestyle politics is reflected in practices such as veganism, Slow Food and sustainable dining, which contest mainstream consumption

patterns and advocate for sustainability (Bertella, 2018, 2020a, 2020b). These trends are particularly visible in food tourism, where ethical and political considerations shape consumer behaviour and influence industry practices (Hall, 2020). For example, the deliberate embrace of food tourism experiences like visiting organic farms or dining at vegan-friendly restaurants enables tourists to express their values while challenging industrialised food systems. In doing so, tourists contribute to the development of hospitality offerings, encouraging businesses to prioritise ethical and sustainable practices. Lifestyle politics, then, not only shapes how individuals travel but can also influence tourism and hospitality businesses by affecting what people want and encouraging more thoughtful ways of operating (Dobernig and Stagl, 2015).

Guided by the theoretical lens of lifestyle politics, the study examines how tourists express their political and ethical values through food consumption and practices. In tourism, eating and food choices are not merely acts of sustenance but also opportunities for tourists to express their political and ethical commitments (Letourneau and Pigeon, 2023; Orea-Giner, 2023; Taheri *et al.*, 2024). Within hospitality, the role of food as a site of political consumerism is magnified by the industry's influence on global supply chains and sustainability outcomes. Ethical food choices in tourism have implications for reducing food waste, supporting local producers and promoting fair labour practices (Gössling and Hall, 2022). As Bertella (2020b) argues, food-related activism often seeks to advance political justice, environmental awareness and sustainability, encouraging tourists to reconsider their consumption practices and to prioritise choices that benefit both health and the environment.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design and approach

This study is grounded in a constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology. Constructivism posits that reality is socially constructed and subjective, meaning that individuals' perceptions and experiences shape their understanding of the world (Charmaz, 2017). Constructivism supports the idea that political food consumers have unique and context-specific experiences that shape their motivations, knowledge and practices (Charmaz, 2017). By adopting an interpretivist epistemology, the study seeks to understand these experiences from the participants' perspectives, focusing on how they interpret and give meaning to their food choices as ethical and political acts (Stolle *et al.*, 2005). By focusing on participants' subjective experiences, the study aims to provide rich, detailed insights into how individuals engage with political food consumption as a form of lifestyle politics (Saraiva *et al.*, 2021).

Aligned with the study's ontological and epistemological foundations, a qualitative research design was adopted, with semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. This approach enabled a detailed exploration of tourists' ethical food consumption during travel, focusing on their values, decision-making processes and practical challenges. The interview guide was informed by previous research on political consumerism and lifestyle politics (e.g. Boström *et al.*, 2019; Dobernig and Stagl, 2015; Halkier and Holm, 2008; Seyfi *et al.*, 2023) and adapted to the tourism context. The interviews began with broad, open-ended questions about participants' general food choices during travel and how these compare with their everyday habits.

Interviews explored how participants made sense of their political, environmental and ethical commitments while dealing with unfamiliar food environments. Discussions also centred on how they selected restaurants and food providers that aligned with their principles, whether and how they avoided or supported certain businesses based on ethical considerations and the strategies they used to sustain their practices while away from home.

Participants also reflected on how their food choices related to broader personal values, the perceived social and environmental impacts of their consumption and how their experiences affected their enjoyment and sense of fulfilment while travelling. The role of social media in expressing and sharing these commitments was also addressed, particularly in terms of its influence on both individual choices and wider engagement with political food issues. Follow-up questions invited elaboration on specific beliefs, difficulties and emotional responses. The interviews concluded by inviting any additional reflections. This format ensured consistency across interviews while allowing space for participants to reflect in their own words. Figure 1 provides a summary of the research approach and development.

3.2 Sampling and data collection

This study uses purposeful sampling to recruit potential tourists actively engaged in political food consumption. This sampling approach was chosen to ensure the collection of in-depth, meaningful data from individuals who are most knowledgeable about the topic, thus enhancing the quality and applicability of the findings (Campbell *et al.*, 2020). The criteria for selection include individuals who regularly base their food choices on political, ethical or environmental considerations, as well as ensuring diversity in terms of age, gender and socio-economic backgrounds. Recruitment strategies included outreach through online forums and social media groups focused on political food consumption, with a specific focus on Instagram, which has become a key platform for promoting political and ethical consumer behaviours (Orea-Giner and Fusté-Forné, 2023). Social media has become an increasingly popular tool for recruitment because it offers a fast and cost-effective way to reach a diverse, hard-to-reach, large and geographically diverse audience (Topolovec-Vranic and Natarajan, 2016). Instagram is well suited to this research because of its visual nature and its role in building communities centred around shared values, such as political and ethical food consumption (Orea-Giner and Fusté-Forné, 2023). The platform allows users to share their consumption habits, ethical beliefs and political actions, making it an ideal space to identify individuals actively engaged in food activism, ethical consumption, veganism and vegetarianism (Feldman, 2021; Orea-Giner, 2025).

However, we acknowledge the potential biases and limitations associated with using social media for recruitment. For instance, recruitment through Instagram may skew the sample toward younger, more technologically proficient individuals who are active on the platform, potentially overlooking those who do not engage with social media. Additionally,

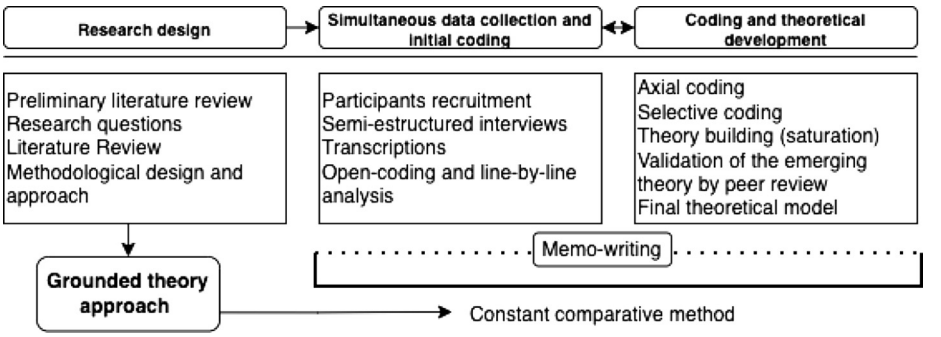

Figure 1. Research approach and development
Source: Author's own creation

snowball sampling, a method where existing participants recommend others who meet the study criteria, was used. This approach is particularly useful for reaching niche or hard-to-reach populations, as it leverages participants' social networks to expand recruitment (Parker *et al.*, 2019).

A total of 260 individuals from 21 countries were contacted between September 2023 and 2024. Initial outreach was conducted in the language reflected in each person's public profile (e.g. Spanish, English or French) to ensure clear communication and improve response rates. Contact was primarily established through social media platforms, where potential participants had previously shared content related to ethical consumption, plant-based diets or sustainability, particularly in connection with travel. This provided an initial indication that the individual had both an interest in food-related consumer practices and had engaged in tourism. Eligibility was assessed through a brief pre-screening exchange before scheduling interviews. This informal exchange clarified the purpose of the study and outlined the participation criteria. The criteria included: having engaged in tourism within the past 12 months and having consciously engaged in food-related consumer practices during travel – specifically, making purchase or boycott decisions based on ethical, environmental or political considerations. This exchange functioned as a screening process. Individuals were considered eligible if they confirmed both recent travel and the application of ethical food consumer practices while travelling. Those who met the criteria were asked to complete an informed consent form, which also collected their email addresses for interview scheduling.

Out of the 260 individuals contacted, 34 met the eligibility criteria and agreed to participate. The final sample included participants from nine countries, with a predominance from Spain. This distribution reflects two factors: firstly, some of the researchers' existing online visibility in Spanish-language contexts likely increased participation from Spain; secondly, Spain has witnessed a marked rise in ethical and plant-based food consumption, with a 61% increase in plant-based diets between 2017 and 2021 (Unión Vegetariana Española, 2022). Sample size was determined through an iterative process of analysis, with interviews conducted and coded concurrently. Data collection ceased once thematic saturation was reached – when no new themes or insights were emerging from subsequent interviews (Hennink and Kaiser, 2022). Interviews were conducted using the Teams platform and lasted between 30 and 40 min (see Table 1 for the profile of interviewees).

3.3 Data processing and analysis

Data processing entailed the examination and organisation of the content obtained from the interviews' transcriptions. Most of the participants responded to the interview questions in the Spanish and French languages, whilst the remaining individuals supplied their answers in the English language. To mitigate the risk of losing important implications, the information was first analysed in the language of the original interview and then back-translated into English. The data analysis for this study used a grounded theory approach, which was particularly suited for exploring the complex phenomenon of political food consumption through the lens of subjective experiences and meanings. Grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Stumpf *et al.*, 2016) is an inductive method of qualitative analysis that aims to generate theory from the data itself rather than testing existing theories (Charmaz, 2017).

The analysis involved several steps. Firstly, the data was reviewed thoroughly by reading through the transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews multiple times. This initial phase was aimed at gaining a general sense of the content and immersing in the participants' narratives. During this phase, notes were made on emerging patterns, recurring topics and notable quotes. Open coding was then conducted, where the data was broken down into

Table 1. Profile of interviewees

Code	Year of birth	Country of birth	Country of residence	Gender	Diet and lifestyle
P1	1989	Spain	Spain	Male	Omnivorous. Prefers local products, avoids ultra-processed food
P2	1988	Poland	Spain	Female	Flexitarian/climatarian. Supports social economy, zero waste, ecological and local commerce, cooperatives
P3	1997	Spain	Spain	Female	Flexitarian. Lactose-free diet
P4	1999	Spain	Spain	Female	Omnivorous. Follows Mediterranean diet, prioritises local trade, traditional foods and an active lifestyle
P5	1996	Spain	Spain	Male	Omnivorous. Combines Mediterranean diet with natural and local food, reduces waste, active lifestyle
P6	1998	China	Spain	Male	Omnivorous. Traditional and sustainable food choices
P7	1998	Spain	Spain	Female	Flexitarian. Zero waste, avoids sugar and ultra-processed food, prefers natural and local products
P8	1961	Spain	Spain	Female	Vegan. No sugars, no ultra-processed food, prefers natural products, traditional cuisine, local foods
P9	1992	Spain	Spain	Male	Vegetarian. Avoids sugar and ultra-processed food
P10	2003	Spain	Spain	Female	Vegetarian (vegan when possible). Reduces waste, unnecessary purchases, supports neighbourhood commerce
P11	1990	Argentina	Spain	Female	Vegan. No sugar or ultra-processed food, reduces waste and unnecessary purchases, supports local trade
P12	1959	Spain	Spain	Female	Flexitarian. Prefers fresh, bulk products, reduces waste
P13	1991	Spain	Spain	Male	Flexitarian. Reduces waste and sugar intake
P14	1993	Spain	Spain	Male	Flexitarian. Zero waste, avoids sugar and ultra-processed food, reduces waste and unnecessary purchases, supports local commerce
P15	1972	Spain	Spain	Male	Vegan. No ultra-processed food or alcohol, reduces waste, supports second-hand shopping and local trade, promotes reduced consumption
P16	1993	Spain	Spain	Male	Vegetarian. Practices active mobility, reduces waste, recycles, uses second-hand products and supports local trade and travel
P17	1995	Chile	Chile	Male	Vegan. Cruelty-free, reduces waste and consumption
P18	1987	Spain	Spain	Female	Vegan. Avoids ultra-processed food, supports reuse, second-hand shopping and local trade
P19	1998	Spain	Spain	Female	Vegan. No ultra-processed food, supports second-hand shopping, local trade and reuse

(*continued*)

Table 1. Continued

Code	Year of birth	Country of birth	Country of residence	Gender	Diet and lifestyle
P20	1984	Spain	Spain	Female	Vegan. No sugar or ultra-processed food, supports second-hand shopping, recycling and reuse
P21	1996	Spain	Spain	Male	Vegan. Prefers products from producers/cooperatives, avoids ultra-processed food, reuses and avoids buying clothes
P22	2001	Spain	Spain	Female	Flexitarian. Prefers seasonal products and supports local trade
P23	1973	Perú	Spain	Female	Vegan. Gluten-free, avoids ultra-processed food, active lifestyle, supports recycling and seasonal products
P24	2000	Spain	Spain	Male	Vegan. Supports second-hand shopping, recycling, reuse and reduces packaging
P25	1978	Spain	Spain	Male	Omnivorous. Healthy diet, reduces meat, sugar and ultra-processed food, avoids alcohol, reuses packaging
P26	1985	Spain	Spain	Female	Vegan. No sugar or ultra-processed food, supports second-hand shopping, recycling, reuse and local trade
P27	1993	Venezuela	Spain	Male	Flexitarian. Engages in second-hand buying/selling and recycling
P28	1989	Argentina	Spain	Male	Conscious eating. Practices intermittent fasting, slow life, spirituality, buys local, avoids ultra-processed food and sugar
P29	2000	Spain	Spain	Female	Vegetarian (vegan at home). Reduces unnecessary purchases, recycles, buys local products, avoids ultra-processed food and sugar
P30	1991	Venezuela	Portugal/Spain	Female	Vegan. Cruelty-free, reduces unnecessary purchases, shops second-hand, buys local produce, recycles and reuses
P31	1995	Spain	Spain	Female	Vegetarian. Reduces unnecessary purchases, supports second-hand shopping, sustainable products, cruelty-free and local trade
P32	1980	France	France	Male	Flexitarian. Zero waste, avoids sugar and ultra-processed food, prefers natural and local products
P33	1988	France	France	Female	Omnivorous. Healthy diet, reduces meat, sugar and ultra-processed food, avoids alcohol, reuses packaging
P34	1991	France	France	Male	Flexitarian. Zero waste, avoids sugar and ultra-processed food, prefers natural and local products

Source(s): Authors' own work

discrete parts, and initial codes were assigned to these parts. Each segment of data was examined line-by-line with codes applied to describe the content. These first codes helped reflect the main idea of what was being discussed. Subsequently, the initial codes were examined for patterns and grouped into categories. This categorisation process involved sorting and comparing codes to identify broader themes that reflected common aspects of the participants' experiences. Axial coding involved the process of reassembling data that had been fractured during open coding. This step was focused on connecting categories and subcategories to explore their relationships and interactions. This stage helped in clarifying how different aspects of the data intersect and contribute to a deeper understanding of the overall phenomenon. Selective coding, the final stage of the grounded theory analysis, concentrated on integrating and synthesising the categories into a coherent theoretical framework. During this phase, core categories were identified, representing the central theme of the data.

Throughout the process, the concept of theoretical saturation was applied. This means continuing data collection and analysis until no new information or insights are emerging from the data. Theoretical saturation ensures that the categories and theory are well-developed and robust (Stumpf *et al.*, 2016). In practice, this involves continually comparing data, codes and categories until the researcher is confident that the data adequately represents the phenomenon under study. Lastly, the emerging theory is validated through member checking and peer review. Member checking involves returning to some participants with preliminary findings to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflect their views and experiences. Peer review involves discussing the findings and theoretical framework with other researchers to ensure credibility and rigour. The feedback received during these processes was used to further refine the theoretical model.

4. Findings and discussion

The analysis of the interview data revealed four primary themes, which are depicted in Figure 2.

4.1 Digital advocacy: transforming food choices into acts of activism

While political food consumerism is embedded in many participants' everyday routines, tourism experiences introduce distinct constraints and opportunities that reshape how these commitments are enacted and communicated. When travelling, tourists often face unfamiliar local supply chains, fewer clearly ethical options and less control over how food is sourced. These challenges usually lead them to change how they engage with food (Seyfi *et al.*, 2024). Rather than continuing their practices unchanged, participants described becoming more deliberate in how they expressed their values – particularly through digital platforms. A notable shift during travel involved increased use of social media, not only for information-sharing but also as a form of visible advocacy. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok were used to elevate political messages, raise awareness and document ethical consumption practices in unfamiliar or unsupportive settings. Digital tools enabled participants to respond to the uncertainties of tourism environments by reframing food choices as public statements and provided a means to maintain ethical coherence and influence others. As P14 explained, tourism presented both a challenge and an opportunity to raise awareness, particularly in settings where ethical consumption was not widely recognised or supported:

> […] it's a very big change of culture that has to be made. […] On my Instagram account, I dedicate myself precisely to what I'm telling you, to make people aware of the ecological footprint of 1 litre of beer […] (P14).

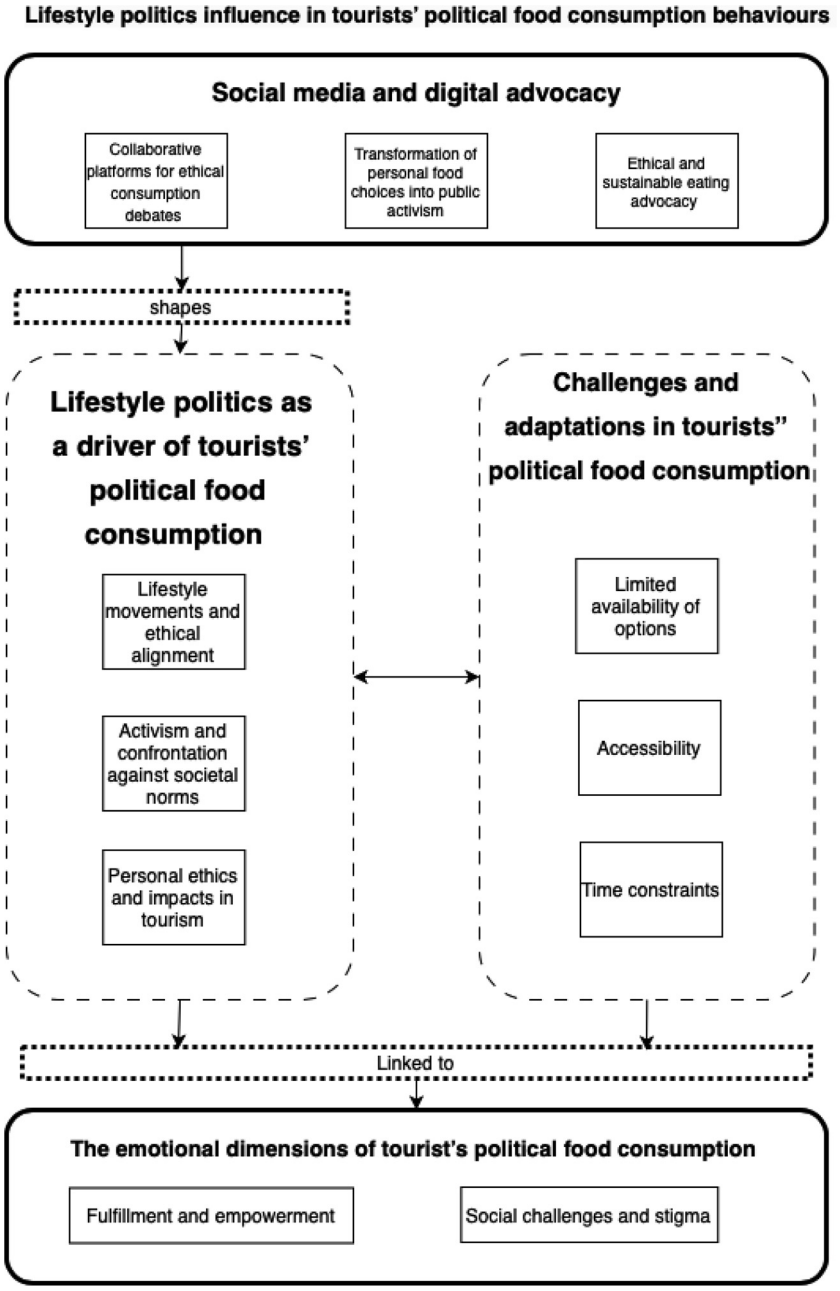

Figure 2. Emerging conceptual model illustrating lifestyle politics in tourists' political food consumption behaviour

Source: Author's own creation

Similarly, P34 emphasised the value of sharing practical advice during travel:

> I use my social media to talk about ethical eating. I like sharing tips on sustainable food practices and local vegan spots to help others make better food choices and raise awareness (P34).

P32 explicitly frames their digital presence as a tool for political engagement, especially during travel:

> My Instagram isn't just for personal use; it's a tool for activism. I post about food justice and ethical consumerism to get my followers thinking about the impact of their food choices (P32).

4.2 Lifestyle politics as a driver of tourists' political food consumption

While many participants mentioned their political food choices were based on everyday values, being in a tourism setting brought new situations that led them to change their habits and rethink some of their ethical views. Participants had to deal with new food systems, interpret local norms and respond to commercial environments that did not always align with their values. These moments of negotiation were shaped by the fluid and transient nature of tourism, where time constraints, limited information and cultural distance complicated ethical decision-making. Rather than abandoning their commitments, participants described adapting them – often framing food choices as deliberate political acts. This reflects a mobile form of lifestyle politics that is enacted through continuous evaluation within changing travel contexts. As DaSilva *et al.* (2020) and Novo Vazquez and Garcia-Espejo (2021) argue, lifestyle politics extends into public and mobile spaces, including tourism, where consumer actions become part of ethical self-positioning. Participants saw their food choices not as passive or incidental but as intentional efforts to maintain political coherence while moving through varied tourism experiences. For example, P9 noted:

> Obviously, like any person who decides in this world, it is a political decision. I do it for ethical and political reasons, but I don't do it with a view to bringing about change; I do it simply to live a lifestyle in accordance with my ethical commitment and my values (P9).

P15 also reflects on how lifestyle choice becomes a form of resistance, especially when placed in contrast to dominant norms in travel environments:

> I think that the fact of being vegan in itself already leads you to activism, because of that, because you are confronting what is established (P15).

Participants also described travel as a site where consumer power is exercised intentionally through boycotts and selective spending. P17 emphasised:

> The boycott is what drives companies to change the way they serve us. If people are not going to pay for something, they are going to say, why are they willing to pay for me to produce it? (P17).

Critiques of standardised food systems also took on heightened meaning during travel. P9 stated:

> We don't go to chains because they are establishments that end up occupying and displacing the more local types of catering and restaurants. Suddenly they offer you a standardised product so that you can eat the same hamburger in London as in Seville or Madrid, but, well, the quality is terrible, even if it is cheap (P9).

Lastly, participants often sought out establishments that aligned with their ethical values, even when this required effort. P21 noted:

> I find restaurants usually by recommendation. I ask for a 100 % plant-based restaurant, preferably owned by vegans, so that my money goes to a place where people share my values (P21).

4.3 The evolution of political food consumption: broadening commitments through tourism

Political food consumerism in tourism is responsive to context. For many participants, travel interrupted their usual ethical habits, leading them to reflect, make changes or even rethink what they were committed to. Pre-existing values – such as veganism, environmental concerns or labour ethics – did not vanish during tourism experiences but were placed under pressure by unfamiliar food systems, differing cultural expectations and the nature of tourism spaces. Rather than compromising, participants often re-evaluated and expanded their ethical positions. Tourism, in this sense, served as a context for ethical growth. For P18, what began as a concern for animal welfare evolved into broader environmental awareness, shaped directly by being a tourist.

> […] as I learnt more, I realised the significant environmental impact that I had not previously understood (P18).

P28 elaborates on how travel environments leads people to become more thoughtful and deliberate about what they consume:

> I am focused on reducing the consumption of unnecessary things, for example, not consuming alcohol or other options, and trying to deduce the fast life, like the slow life movement, or these kinds of movements, like being more conscious of what you do in every moment. You do some of these things, or I also forgot about conscious eating (P28).

Participants also discussed how their food choices during travel had broader implications – not only for themselves, but for tourism and hospitality. P24 describes the importance of consumer demand in shaping restaurant offerings:

> It is also good to go to restaurants, because in the end if they see that vegan products are successful, they will offer more, which is also what is of interest when it comes to eating out: that a person, not just a lettuce and tomato to eat, but more things start to be offered (P24).

Beyond dietary or environmental concerns, travel also expanded participants' attention to labour rights and local economies. P13 noted:

> I try to buy as much as I can locally, with the minimum level of exploitation or even the minimum level of pollution possible (P13).

These findings show that tourism creates a changing setting where people face conflicts, encounter new ethical questions and are encouraged to think more deeply. The data supports earlier research on the evolution of political consumerism (Stolle *et al.*, 2005) but extends it by demonstrating how tourism experiences serve to broaden rather than merely replicate existing commitments. Participants actively rework their ethical positions in response to new encounters, constraints and opportunities. This process strengthens the link between tourism and lifestyle movements such as veganism and slow living while also contributing to debates on how ethical consumption influences broader industry practices. Tourism is not only as a site of ethical expression but also a space for ethical transformation (Seyfi *et al.*, 2024).

4.4 Challenges and adaptations in tourists' political food consumption

In the context of tourism experiences, the commitment to ethical and political food practices is less stable due to the unpredictability and fluidity of travel settings, creating a tension between intention and action. Ethical stances do not disappear but are continuously

recalibrated in response to practical constraints. Political food consumerism during travel is therefore shaped by both ideological commitment and the situational pressures embedded in the tourism experience. P8, for example, shared how reliance on supermarkets became a solution when ethical food options were unavailable:

> Sometimes we've had some disappointments, but that's what we try to look for where there are vegan options, and if we don't find it, which has happened to us, we go to the supermarket, we look there, and there are always options that we can buy this or that (P8).

P33 described how menu standardisation in tourism hospitality creates a sense of exclusion:

> When you go out to eat, many restaurants don't have anything other than salad for vegans, which can be frustrating. It's like they aren't prepared for people like us (P33).

To counter these limitations, participants often relied on proactive planning. P32 described how information-seeking became integral to the travel experience:

> I always research in advance, using apps or reviews to find vegan-friendly places. It's part of the experience for me, and I think it's important to support businesses that align with my values (P32).

These findings build on prior research (Bertella, 2020a; Halkier, 2016; Seyfi *et al.*, 2024), which highlight the situated, adaptive strategies tourists use to uphold their values. The challenges described by participants are shaped by the structure of tourism itself: compressed timeframes, unfamiliar supply chains and standardised offerings that prioritise convenience over ethics. Moreover, the role of supermarkets, apps and digital reviews points to the importance of infrastructure in enabling or constraining ethical consumption while travelling. These tools offer tourists a way to maintain political food practices, even in difficult contexts, and aligns with findings by Rahman *et al.* (2018) on the role of information access in sustainable tourism decision-making.

4.5 The emotional dimensions of tourists' political food consumption

4.5.1 Empowerment and fulfilment through ethical eating. For many participants, adhering to their ethical eating commitments while travelling is not only a moral practice but also a source of emotional reward. The act of maintaining one's values in unfamiliar and often challenging environments was framed as a form of personal achievement. The emotional impact of this commitment – especially when confronted with logistical and cultural obstacles – was repeatedly described in terms of empowerment, validation and fulfilment. P32 reflected on this:

> Sticking to my ethical eating habits while travelling makes me feel really good. It's satisfying to find places that respect my diet, and it feels great to know I'm staying true to my values, even when I'm away from home (P32).

Social media also played a role in reinforcing the sense of empowerment. For participants like P34, the tourism context presented an opportunity to turn personal practices into public advocacy:

> Sharing my travel experiences and promoting ethical dining on social media makes me feel empowered. It's rewarding to see my efforts contribute to a larger movement and inspire others to make mindful food choices (P34).

4.5.2 Challenges and stigmas faced by political food consumers. While many participants described empowerment and fulfilment through ethical food practices, they also recounted experiences of frustration, exclusion and social stigma – particularly in tourism

contexts where their values were not widely understood or supported. Travel often intensified these challenges: unfamiliar social settings, lack of control over food environments and differing cultural norms can make ethical eaters more visible and, sometimes, more vulnerable. Participants reported that the act of maintaining a plant-based or ethically motivated diet during travel often subjected them to stereotyping or dismissive reactions. This was made more personally difficult in tourism contexts, where participants lacked established support networks and had limited opportunity to explain their values. P24 described a common form of stereotyping, which was experienced more frequently when travelling:

> There are negative reactions like being told "you don't eat anything", those kinds of phrases: […] you just eat lettuce (P24).

P32 elaborated on the emotional burden of this ongoing negotiation:

> I often have to explain why I follow a plant-based diet, especially when I'm eating out. It can be exhausting to constantly justify my choices, and sometimes it feels like I'm defending my values instead of just enjoying my meal (P32).

Participants reported feeling isolated or misunderstood, particularly when their dietary decisions were seen as a rejection of the destination's cultural norms. P29 described this sense of marginalisation:

> I feel a bit discriminated against, […], because when it comes to what I say, the [tourism] environment is not very supportive (P29).

Travel often placed participants in settings where they had less agency and support. Unlike in their home environments – where routines, relationships and food systems can enable their choices – participants encountered resistance or lack of understanding from locals and other tourists. The emotional labour of maintaining one's values in unfamiliar contexts became a recurring theme. These findings reinforce the dual nature of political food consumption in tourism. On one hand, participants experience empowerment through alignment with their values on the other, they face the social cost of standing out in unfamiliar or unsupportive environments (Seyfi *et al.*, 2024). The tourism setting itself exacerbates these tensions, as tourists move through cultural spaces where norms around food, hospitality and social behaviour may differ from their own.

5. Conclusion, implications and limitations

5.1 Theoretical implications

This study offers several key theoretical contributions by addressing the lack of attention to political food consumerism in tourism and hospitality research (Seyfi and Hall, 2020). Firstly, while the lifestyle politics theory has been applied to consumer behaviour (Boström *et al.*, 2019; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013), it has not yet been explored in the context of food consumption during travel. Previous research has mostly focused on everyday eating at home (Dobernig and Stagl, 2015; Halkier and Holm, 2008) or on ethical consumer movements like Fair Trade and organic food. Yet, because food plays a central role in tourist experiences, applying the lifestyle politics theory here opens up new ways to understand the ethical and political aspects of tourism and hospitality. This study frames political food consumption in tourism as a context-dependent and relational form of lifestyle politics. It shows how ethical choices around food are shaped by the physical, cultural and technological conditions of travel, and how these choices can express political and ethical agency. Eating ethically while travelling is not just a personal habit – it can be a form of

action shaped by what the tourism setting allows or limits. This supports Wahlen and Laamanen's (2015) view that lifestyle politics responds to specific challenges, and it highlights how values influence travel behaviour. By applying the lifestyle politics theory to tourism, the study adds to our understanding of consumer activism and shows that food choices, even during short trips in new places, can support sustainability and question mainstream food systems.

Secondly, most research on political consumerism has focused on incentives and market behaviour (Halkier, 2016; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013), while the emotional experiences of political food consumers remain largely overlooked – especially in tourism and hospitality, where emotions and social interactions are often more intense. This study shows that trying to maintain ethical food choices while travelling can be empowering and satisfying but also brings challenges. Tourists may face social pressure, awkwardness or even stigma, which can shape how they act and how they experience the trip overall. These findings highlight how emotions both shape and are shaped by ethical food choices during travel. This adds an emotional dimension to the political consumerism theory and supports calls to move beyond rationalist views of consumer behaviour (Nawijn and Biran, 2019). Exploring these emotional aspects offers new insights into how people live out their values through food while travelling and how such choices are influenced by the social and emotional environment of tourism.

Thirdly, while political food consumerism has been widely studied in everyday life, its role within tourism and hospitality remains underexplored. Most existing research focuses on broader patterns of consumer sustainability, with limited attention to how tourists' ethical food choices might influence business practices on the ground. This study begins to fill that gap by examining how these choices operate at a micro level – shaping demand for sustainable and locally sourced food, and encouraging businesses to respond accordingly. By applying the lifestyle politics theory, the research shows how tourists can use their purchasing power not only as consumers but as value-driven actors who actively shape the foodscape of destinations. These actions – such as choosing plant-based menus, prioritising ethical sourcing or favouring local producers – can contribute to subtle but meaningful shifts in business behaviour. This extends political food consumerism into the tourism context and links it more clearly with sustainable tourism scholarship, highlighting how individual consumption decisions may collectively support environmental, ethical and community-based goals within tourism economies.

5.2 Practical implications

This study offers several takeaways for tourism and hospitality providers aiming to support ethically and politically conscious travellers. Firstly, expanding ethical food options – such as local, plant-based, vegan, vegetarian and gluten-free meals – can help meet demand without requiring a complete overhaul of existing menus. Clearly labelling ingredients and highlighting the use of organic or locally sourced produce may not only align with customer values but also support local economies and reduce environmental impact. Yet, ethical alignment should extend beyond menu design. Food providers need to think holistically about the service environment. This includes sourcing practices, staff training and communication strategies. For example, training staff to be sensitive to diverse dietary choices and reducing stigma for those who eat differently can improve the experience for ethically motivated guests. Moreover, social media plays a key role in connecting with this group. Promoting sustainable menus, ethical sourcing and customer feedback – especially on platforms like Instagram – can attract a values-driven audience. Visual storytelling around these topics helps reinforce a business's ethical identity and

invites deeper engagement. Lastly, at a broader level, policymakers and tourism bodies can contribute by strengthening sustainability and ethics certification schemes. These should go beyond environmental indicators to include fair labour standards and transparency in food sourcing. Publicising this information helps tourists make informed decisions and encourages industry-wide commitment to ethical and sustainable food systems.

5.3 Limitations and directions for future research

While this study offers useful insights, several limitations should be noted. Firstly, the sample reflects a particular group of political food consumers and may not represent the wider population. This limits how far the findings can be applied elsewhere. Future studies should involve larger and more diverse groups from different regions and cultural settings to enhance generalisability. Secondly, the study is based mainly on interview data. While this provides in-depth perspectives, it may not reflect the full range of behaviours and attitudes. Future research could use surveys or mixed methods to help validate and expand on these findings. Thirdly, the focus was mainly on dietary choices and psychological experiences, without directly examining how factors such as socioeconomic status, gender or ethnicity influence political food practices. These dimensions could shape how people engage with food ethics while travelling and deserve further attention. Fourthly, although fairness and labour concerns emerged in interviews, these themes were not included in the interview design. Future work could directly explore how political food consumption connects with wider questions of social justice, such as labour rights, food equity and local community impacts. Lastly, this study did not consider how travel companions influence food choices. Future studies could explore how social dynamics – such as compromise, conflict or support – affect individuals' ability to maintain ethical commitments while travelling.

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