

## Article

# The Influence of Consumers Socio-Demographic Characteristics on the Perception of Quality and Attributes of Traditional Food Products in the Hospitality and Tourism Market of AP Vojvodina (Republic of Serbia)

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## Abstract

Traditional food products (TFPs) hold a significant place in the cultural and gastronomic identity of Vojvodina, and consumer interest in these products is continuously growing, positioning them among the most relevant research topics in the fields of hospitality and consumer behavior. The aim of this study was to examine how consumers' socio-demographic characteristics influence their attitudes and perception of the quality and attributes of TFPs on hospitality and tourism market. The research was conducted on a sample of 507 adult respondents from the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, nonparametric tests (Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal–Wallis) and ordinal logistic regression. The results indicate that age, gender, education level and place of residence significantly affect attitudes toward the quality, price, availability, and advantages of TFPs compared to industrial or imported products. Respondents from rural areas, those with lower education levels and lower incomes, show a greater tendency to consume traditional products. The main barriers to consumption were identified as high prices and insufficient information. The regression results showed that gender and place of residence were significant predictors of consumers' tendency to choose dishes prepared with TFPs in hospitality establishments. The study highlights the need for tailored marketing and educational strategies to improve the accessibility, diversity, and visibility of TFPs on the market, with particular attention to their integration into the hospitality sector. However, the study is limited to the region of Vojvodina and relies on self-reported data, which may introduce response bias. Future research could explore comparative analyses across different regions or include qualitative insights into consumer motivations.

**Keywords:** traditional food products; consumer perception; hospitality; tourism; socio-demographic factors; Vojvodina



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## 1. Introduction

Traditional food products (hereafter TFPs), defined as foods with a long history of local production, characteristic of a specific region and prepared according to recipes and techniques passed down through generations (Guerrero et al., 2009), represent a cornerstone of the cultural and gastronomic identity of Vojvodina. In recent years consumer interest in these products is continuously growing, positioning them among the most relevant research topics in the fields of hospitality and consumer behavior (Kalenjuk Pivarski et al., 2022). Beyond their role in everyday diet and cultural identity, TFPs have become an essential component of gastronomic tourism. Their integration in hospitality services, such as restaurants, hotels, and rural households creates authentic experiences for tourists and strengthens the competitive advantage of destinations (Vanhonacker et al., 2010). In regions such as Vojvodina, where multicultural heritage and diverse gastronomy intersect, TFPs play a dual role: they shape consumer behavior in everyday markets and also serve as a valuable resource for hospitality and tourism development (Ivanović et al., 2022).

Despite their high reputation among consumers in tourism, the consumption of TFPs faces several challenges. Changes in lifestyle, the increasing availability of industrially produced food and contemporary patterns of consumption and dining out have reshaped perceptions of food quality and value (Garanti & Berberoğlu, 2018; Hawaz et al., 2025). Consequently, understanding consumer attitudes toward TFP in tourism has become crucial, both from the perspective of theoretical insights into consumer behavior and from the perspective of practical implications for producers, distributors, and hospitality professionals. It is particularly important to consider the role of socio-demographic factors, as gender, age, education, and place of residence can shape consumers' perceptions and decisions (Defta et al., 2025; Crasto et al., 2025).

The present study addresses a clear research gap by examining how socio-demographic factors shape perceptions of TFPs within the hospitality and tourism market of Vojvodina. While previous literature has focused extensively on the sensory, nutritional, and symbolic attributes of TFPs (Olsen et al., 2020; Wilcox et al., 2023), few studies have systematically examined how these perceptions vary across demographic groups and their implications for theory and practice. By synthesizing existing findings with the case of Vojvodina, which represents an exceptionally suitable tourism framework due to its multicultural character and rich gastronomic tradition, this research provides a more focused contribution to ongoing debates in gastronomy and consumer behavior (Kalenjuk Pivarski et al., 2023; Šmugović et al., 2024).

This study also contributes to the global discussion on TFPs by integrating socio-demographic analysis into the broader framework of consumer behavior theory and tourism consumption models. While previous research has mainly emphasized descriptive attributes of TFPs, our approach highlights how socio-demographic patterns intersect with perceptions of authenticity and experiential consumption, thus extending consumer behavior theory toward the cultural and symbolic dimensions of food in tourism. In this way, the case of Vojvodina offers not only a regional perspective but also a conceptual contribution to understanding how demographic variables shape the experiential value of gastronomy across destinations.

Building on these insights, the aim of this study is to examine consumer attitudes in tourism and hospitality toward the quality of TFPs, to identify the key attributes that consumers in tourism value, and to recognize the barriers and limitations that affect their consumption. In addition to examining perceptions and barriers, the study also aims to identify which socio-demographic characteristics significantly predict consumers' tendency to choose dishes prepared with TFPs in hospitality establishments, using an ordinal logistic regression model. In this regard, the research focuses on three research questions:

**Q1:** *What are consumers' perceptions of the quality of TFPs in the hospitality and tourism market compared to industrial and imported products?*

**Q2:** *Which attributes of TFPs do consumers in tourism and hospitality value as the most important, and how do these perceptions differ according to socio-demographic characteristics?*

**Q3:** *What barriers and limitations do consumers in tourism and hospitality identify regarding the consumption of TFPs, and how do these differ according to socio-demographic characteristics?*

**Q4:** *Which socio-demographic characteristics significantly predict consumers' tendency to choose dishes prepared with TFPs in hospitality establishments?*

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Food Quality and Consumer Perception

Food quality occupies a central place in consumer behavior research and represents a multidimensional construct that encompasses sensory, nutritional, safety, and symbolic aspects (Brečić et al., 2017; Petrescu et al., 2019). The literature emphasizes that the perception of quality is not always objective but is largely shaped by consumers' expectations, prior experiences, and cultural patterns (Stathopoulou & Balabanis, 2019). TFPs are particularly interesting in this context, as they are often qualitatively compared to industrial or imported alternatives, perceived as less authentic or standardized (Guerrero et al., 2009). Previous studies indicate that consumers associate traditional products with higher levels of authenticity and trust, whereas industrial products are more frequently linked to standardization and rapid availability (Balogh et al., 2016).

However, although these studies provide valuable insights, they often treat quality perceptions in a generalized manner, without considering regional differences or the influence of hospitality contexts. This limits the applicability of findings to environments such as Vojvodina, where food traditions are deeply embedded in multicultural identity.

### 2.2. Socio-Demographic Factors and Consumer Behavior

Socio-demographic characteristics play an important role in shaping consumer attitudes toward food. Gender, age, education, and place of residence influence consumers' perceptions and decisions (Defra et al., 2025; Crasto et al., 2025). Previous studies have highlighted the scarcity of research specifically examining socio-demographic characteristics in relation to the purchase and use of TFPs in tourism and hospitality (Caputo et al., 2018; Guinè et al., 2020). Although some evidence exists, findings are often fragmented and descriptive, which reduces their explanatory power.

The analysis of these factors represents an essential element in planning the development of the hospitality and tourism market for these products (Balogh et al., 2016; Mostafa Mohamed et al., 2024). A study conducted in 2018 showed that consumers in tourism, regardless of gender, are equally interested in the use of TFPs; however, further research on this topic is still scarce (Kocaman, 2018). Other studies, however, point to notable differences. For example, women more frequently associate food with health and family values, while men tend to prioritize price and sensory characteristics (Broussard, 2019; Yasmeen et al., 2024). The level and field of education also strongly influence the perception of TFP, especially regarding price and quality. The price of these products is often higher than that of mass-produced alternatives, but consumers in tourism are generally willing to pay more since they associate TFP with quality and/or organic production (Braghieri et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2019; Van Bussel et al., 2022).

Earlier research suggested that place of residence was not a decisive factor in purchasing TFP, yet more recent studies point to the opposite, showing that respondents in rural

areas tend to purchase TFP more frequently than those in urban areas (Lacko et al., 2020). Such contradictions highlight the need for systematic analysis rather than isolated case studies. This is particularly significant for shaping hospitality and tourism offerings.

Despite these findings, the literature remains fragmented. Many studies have examined socio-demographic variables descriptively, without systematically analyzing their interactions with perceptions of authenticity, price sensitivity, or barriers to consumption. Furthermore, little is known about how these factors operate specifically within the hospitality and tourism market, which represents a gap this study seeks to address.

### *2.3. Attributes of TFP and Purchasing Decisions*

Contemporary literature emphasizes that consumers in tourism and hospitality evaluate TFPs not only through nutritional and sensory aspects but also by attaching symbolic and cultural value. This perception often integrates emotional and social dimensions, setting them apart from industrial food products (Fibri & Frøst, 2019; Peulić et al., 2023). Research further indicates that consumers consider a broad range of attributes, from product-related ones such as freshness, sensory quality, and origin, to wider socio-cultural aspects including regional identity, authenticity, and connection to tradition (Almli et al., 2011; Olsen et al., 2020).

As a result, TFPs are increasingly perceived not merely as food items but as part of identity and lifestyle, which grants them a distinct role in tourism and hospitality. However, the relative importance of these attributes is not uniform and depends on consumer characteristics and behavioral patterns. Recognizing these differences is essential both for interpreting consumer behavior and for tailoring marketing strategies in hospitality and tourism (Bryła, 2016).

When making purchasing decisions, consumers typically weigh multiple factors simultaneously, balancing functional attributes such as price, freshness, and availability with symbolic dimensions like authenticity and cultural identity (Ramya & Ali, 2016; Teeken et al., 2021). However, the relative importance of these factors is not uniform but varies across consumer groups, which indicates that quality attributes of TFPs cannot be understood in isolation. Instead, they need to be examined in interaction with socio-demographic determinants and broader consumption contexts (Bryła, 2016; Kalyva et al., 2024). Despite these insights, existing studies remain fragmented and rarely analyze such interactions systematically, leaving gaps particularly in the context of tourism and hospitality.

### *2.4. Barriers to the Purchase and Consumption of TFP in Tourism*

Although traditional products enjoy a high level of trust and are perceived as part of cultural identity, their consumption in the tourism and hospitality market may be limited by various barriers. The literature identifies price, availability, and adaptability to modern consumer habits as the most frequently reported obstacles (Azagba & Sharaf, 2011; Bryła, 2016). In addition, limited market visibility and insufficient consumer awareness of origin and production processes further restrict wider adoption (Almli et al., 2011).

Limitations in TFP consumption therefore do not stem only from objective economic or logistical circumstances but also from subjective perceptions and consumer attitudes (Chopera et al., 2022). Examining these barriers and limitations provides an opportunity to better understand the factors that hinder the wider affirmation of TFP and to explore how they differ across various consumer groups. Nevertheless, previous research rarely links these barriers to socio-demographic determinants, leaving unclear whether such obstacles are uniformly perceived or vary significantly across consumer segments. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing targeted strategies that can enhance market access, strengthen consumer trust, and promote sustainable consumption of TFPs.

### 2.5. Traditional Food Products in Tourism and Hospitality

Previous studies highlight that TFPs enhance the attractiveness of gastronomic destinations (Coelho, 2025; Batyrbek & Chisbiyah, 2025). Their integration into hospitality services, such as restaurant menus or food festivals, increases tourist satisfaction and contributes to destination branding (Demir & Dalgıç, 2022). Research in Mediterranean and Central European countries shows that tourists often perceive TFP as symbols of authenticity and cultural identity, which motivates them to choose local restaurants and visit rural areas (Bessiere & Tibere, 2013; Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). Despite this, limited studies have examined how consumers' socio-demographic characteristics shape the perception of TFP in the context of tourism and hospitality in Serbia, leaving a significant research gap.

In addition to their cultural and gastronomic significance, the concept of authenticity represents a central theoretical construct in understanding TFPs. Previous studies emphasize that authenticity is often perceived as an experiential dimension of consumption, closely linked to emotional, symbolic, and identity-related values (Lehman et al., 2019; Chang et al., 2020; Chang et al., 2021). This perspective can be further supported by theories of experiential consumption, which explain how consumers value not only the functional attributes of food but also the authenticity of the experience associated with its origin, preparation, and cultural meaning (Riefler, 2020). By connecting food authenticity with experiential consumption, the perception of TFPs in tourism and hospitality can be more comprehensively interpreted within a stronger theoretical framework (Nunes et al., 2021).

## 3. Materials and Methods

### 3.1. Questionnaire Design

The final version of the questionnaire consisted of three sections:

1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents in tourism, including gender, age, education level, employment status, and place of residence, with the aim of profiling consumers in the tourism and hospitality sector.
2. Perceptions of quality, price, and availability of TFP, measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Respondents expressed their attitudes toward TFP in the context of tourism and hospitality. This part was included in order to explore how perceptions of TFP influence choices in restaurants and how TFP can contribute to the gastronomic offer in tourism and hospitality.
3. Importance of TFP attributes, where 15 attributes of TFPs were assessed on a five-point Likert scale (1 = not at all important, 5 = extremely important). This enabled the most adequate answers to the proposed research questions. Some attributes are particularly relevant in the context of hospitality, as they shape restaurant menus and gastronomic tourism offerings.

All statements and attributes were formulated based on previous studies on TFP (Nguyen et al., 2018; Kalenjuk Pivarski et al., 2023) and adapted to the context of AP Vojvodina in order to provide data that are as reliable and authentic as possible. A pre-test with 20 respondents from the target population was conducted to ensure clarity and comprehensibility of the items, after which minor wording adjustments were made. The internal consistency of the Likert-type scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a value of 0.825, indicating good reliability. To ensure a clear understanding of the concept of TFPs, respondents were provided with the following definition at the beginning of the questionnaire:

*"Traditional food products are those with a long history of local production, characteristic of a specific region, made from local raw materials, and produced according to recipes and techniques that are passed down through generations". (Guerrero et al., 2009)*

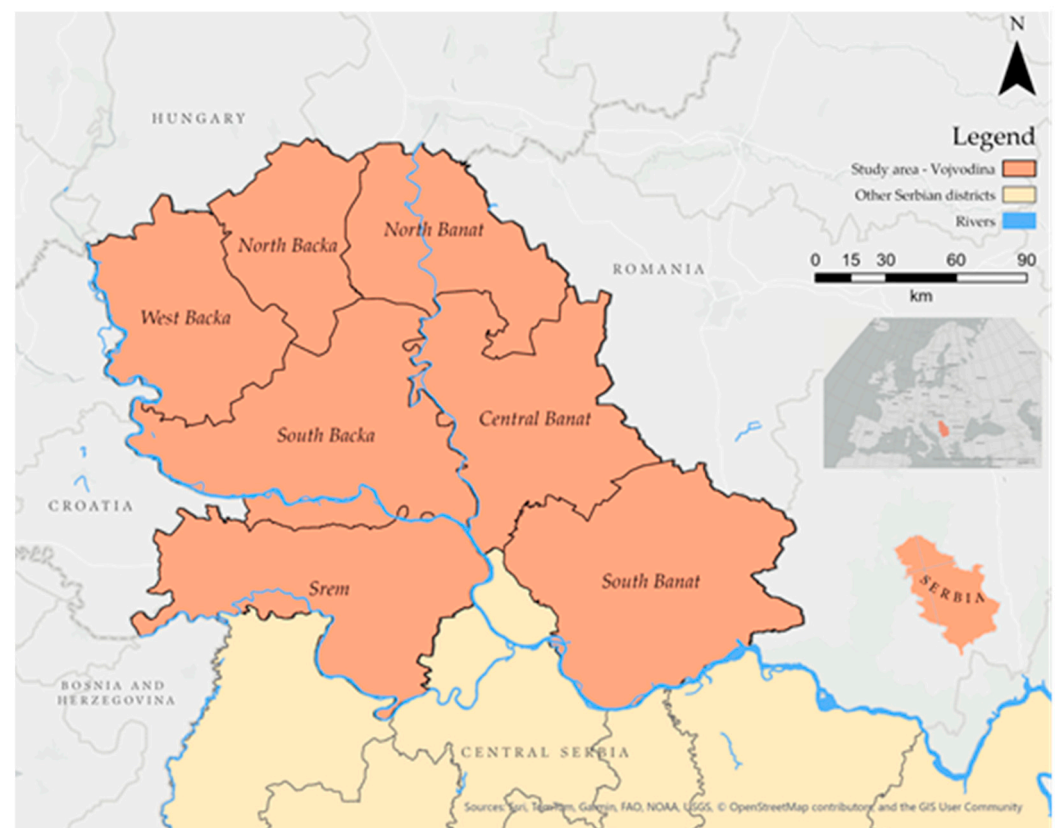


### 3.2. Research Area and Time Frame

The study was conducted in the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, a region well-known for its rich and diverse gastronomic tradition. Vojvodina is recognized for a large number of authentic food products that reflect the multicultural character of the region, which makes it an exceptionally suitable context not only for examining consumer habits but also for analyzing the potential of TFP in the development of gastronomic tourism and hospitality offerings (Petrović et al., 2011; Grubor et al., 2022).

Data were collected across all districts of the province, with the sample proportionally distributed according to the number of inhabitants in urban and rural areas, based on the data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2023, Census 2022). This approach increased the diversity of the sample and reduced potential territorial bias, although no strict demographic quotas were applied for age, gender, or education. This distribution allowed meaningful comparisons between consumer attitudes from different types of settlements, which is particularly relevant for developing hospitality strategies and destination management.

The research region is presented in Figure 1. The survey was conducted from October 2024 to March 2025. Questionnaires were distributed both electronically and through direct contact. In face-to-face settings, respondents were provided with a tablet and completed the survey themselves via the same online link used for the web distribution. This approach ensured identical formatting and administration of the questionnaire across both modes. Preliminary checks did not reveal noticeable differences in socio-demographic characteristics or in key perception variables between online and in-person respondents.



**Figure 1.** AP Vojvodina (R. Serbia). Source: Author interpretation.

A non-probability convenience sampling method was applied, which allowed the collection of a sufficient number of responses within a limited time frame and budget. Although this approach does not guarantee full representativeness of the population, it is

widely used in consumer behavior studies, particularly in exploratory research, as it provides access to diverse demographic groups and enables meaningful statistical comparisons.

In total, 800 questionnaires were distributed, of which 507 were validly completed, representing a response rate of 63.4%. Participants were informed in advance about the objectives of the study, participation was voluntary and anonymous, and only adults (18+) took part in the survey.

Although the convenience sampling method enabled us to collect data efficiently, it may have introduced potential biases. For example, younger and more educated respondents, who are more active online, could be overrepresented compared to older or less digitally engaged groups. This may limit the generalizability of the findings even within Vojvodina, as the sample may not fully reflect the structure of the wider population.

3.3. Statistical Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) were applied in order to examine the basic characteristics of the sample and the general attitudes of respondents. To determine the existence of statistically significant differences in attitudes between socio-demographic groups, non-parametric tests were used: the Mann–Whitney U test (for comparisons between two groups) and the Kruskal–Wallis test (for comparisons among more than two groups). The choice of these tests is justified by the ordinal nature of the data and the assumption of unequal variances. Additionally, tests of normality indicated non-normal distributions, further supporting the use of non-parametric tests. In addition, an ordinal logistic regression was employed to examine whether socio-demographic characteristics significantly predict consumers’ tendency to choose dishes prepared with TFPs in hospitality establishments. The independent variables included gender, age, education level, employment status, monthly income, and place of residence. To assess the adequacy of the model, standard goodness-of-fit measures (Pearson and Deviance statistics) were examined, as well as the Test of Parallel Lines to verify the proportional odds assumption. The results of these tests confirmed that the model provided an acceptable fit to the data, allowing for reliable interpretation of the estimated parameters. The results obtained were interpreted in relation to the research questions and previous findings in the literature, with special emphasis on implications for hospitality and tourism.

3.4. Sample Description

Based on the results presented in Table 1, it can be observed that out of 507 respondents, 39.1% were male and 60.9% were female. Regarding age structure, the largest share of respondents belonged to the group up to 30 years of age (48.3%), followed by the group aged 31 to 45 (26.8%), the group aged 46 to 60 (18.7%), while the smallest share belonged to respondents over 60 years of age (6.1%).

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 507).

Variables	Category	N	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	198	39.1
	Female	309	60.9
Age	Up to 30 years	245	48.3
	31–45 years	136	26.8
	46–60 years	95	18.7
	Over 61 years	31	6.1
Education level	Secondary school	199	39.3
	College/University	225	44.4
	Master/PhD	83	16.4

**Table 1.** *Cont.*

Variables	Category	N	Percentage (%)
Employment status	Employed	357	70.4
	Unemployed	26	5.1
	Student	99	19.5
	Retired	25	4.9
Place of residence	Urban	386	76.1
	Rural	121	23.9

Source: Author interpretation.

According to the level of education, the largest share of respondents had completed college or university (44.4%), while the smallest share (16.4%) consisted of those with a completed master's or doctoral degree. The majority of respondents (70.1%) were employed, 19.5% were students, 5.1% were unemployed, and 4.9% were retired. Most respondents (76.1%) reported living in an urban area, while 23.9% stated that their place of residence was in a rural area.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Analysis of Perceptions of the Quality and Availability of Traditional Products in the Hospitality and Tourism Market

In the subsequent phase of the research, respondents assessed their level of agreement with statements related to the quality and availability of TFPs in the market. Table 2 presents the results of this descriptive statistical analysis. Overall, the findings show that respondents clearly perceive TFPs as superior in quality to both industrially produced and imported food. The highest levels of agreement were recorded for these two statements, while the lowest were related to the justification of higher prices and the ease of purchasing TFPs in the hospitality and tourism market.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics of Perceptions of the Quality and Availability of Traditional Products in the Hospitality and Tourism market (N = 507).

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
I am satisfied with the offer of TFPs in the hospitality/tourism market.	3.63	1.091
I am satisfied with the quality of TFPs in the hospitality and tourism market.	3.62	1.011
I believe greater diversity is needed in the offer of TFPs in the hospitality and tourism market of Vojvodina.	3.73	1.134
I believe the price of TFPs is justified by their overall quality.	3.33	1.168
I am satisfied with the ease of purchasing TFPs in the hospitality and tourism market.	3.37	1.141
I believe TFPs are of higher quality than industrially produced food.	4.33	0.953
I believe TFPs are of higher quality than imported food.	4.27	0.948
In hospitality establishments, I generally choose dishes prepared with TFPs.	3.62	1.112

Source: Author interpretation.



Based on the analysis of the results regarding the perception of the quality and availability of TFPs in the market, it can be observed that respondents agreed the most with the statement that TFPs are of higher quality than industrially produced products ( $M = 4.33$ ), as well as with the statement that TFPs are of higher quality than imported products ( $M = 4.27$ ). The lowest level of agreement was expressed with the statements that the price of TFPs is justified by their overall quality ( $M = 3.33$ ) and that respondents are satisfied with the ease of purchasing TFPs in the hospitality/tourism market ( $M = 3.37$ ). The highest level of variability was observed in relation to the statement that the price of TFPs is justified by their overall quality ( $SD = 1.168$ ), indicating that respondents expressed divided opinions on this issue.

#### 4.1.1. Analysis of Gender Differences and Perceptions of the Quality and Availability of Traditional Products in the Market

Table 3 presents the results of the Mann–Whitney U test, which was conducted to determine the existence of differences between male and female respondents in their perceptions of the quality and availability of TFPs in the market. Gender-based comparisons reveal that women tend to express slightly more positive perceptions of TFPs, especially regarding their superiority over industrial products. However, differences between men and women were generally small, with statistical significance confirmed only for one statement.

**Table 3.** Mann–Whitney U Test of Gender Differences in the Perception of the Quality and Availability of TFPs in the Hospitality and Tourism Market ( $N = 507$ ).

Statement	Mean		<i>p</i> -Value
	Male	Female	
I am satisfied with the offer of TFPs in the hospitality/tourism market.	3.67	3.60	0.399
I am satisfied with the quality of TFPs in the hospitality and tourism market.	3.59	3.64	0.614
I believe greater diversity is needed in the offer of TFPs in the hospitality and tourism market of Vojvodina.	3.77	3.70	0.523
I believe the price of TFPs is justified by their overall quality.	3.35	3.32	0.792
I am satisfied with the ease of purchasing TFPs in the hospitality and tourism market.	3.38	3.37	0.774
I believe TFPs are of higher quality than industrially produced food.	4.24	4.39	0.023
I believe TFPs are of higher quality than imported food.	4.18	4.33	0.070
In hospitality establishments, I generally choose dishes prepared with TFPs.	3.52	3.68	0.070

Source: Author interpretation.

Based on the results presented in the previous table, it can be observed that a statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) between genders was found only for the statement that TFPs are of higher quality than industrially produced products, with female respondents expressing a higher level of agreement with this statement.

#### 4.1.2. Analysis of Age Differences in the Perception of the Quality and Availability of Traditional Products in the Market

Subsequently, using the Kruskal–Wallis test, an analysis was conducted to determine whether there are differences among respondents of different age groups regarding the perception of the quality and availability of TFPs in the market (Table 4). The results show

that younger respondents expressed the highest satisfaction with the ease of purchasing TFPs, while older groups reported more reserved attitudes, suggesting that age influences expectations and experiences related to product accessibility.

**Table 4.** Kruskal–Wallis Test of Age Differences in the Perception of the Quality and Availability of TFPs in Hospitality and Tourism Market (N = 507).

Statement	Mean				<i>p</i> -Value
	Up to 30 Years	31–45 Years	45–60 Years	Over 60 Years	
I am satisfied with the offer of TFPs in the hospitality/tourism market.	3.74	3.52	3.52	3.52	0.115
I am satisfied with the quality of TFPs in the hospitality and tourism market.	3.69	3.56	3.54	3.65	0.502
I believe greater diversity is needed in the offer of TFPs in the hospitality and tourism market of Vojvodina.	3.72	3.79	3.65	3.71	0.763
I believe the price of TFPs is justified by their overall quality.	3.38	3.38	3.16	3.35	0.396
I am satisfied with the ease of purchasing TFPs in the hospitality and tourism market.	3.54	3.31	3.12	3.10	0.005
I believe TFPs are of higher quality than industrially produced food.	4.37	4.37	4.21	4.23	0.503
I believe TFPs are of higher quality than imported food.	4.33	4.29	4.15	4.16	0.315
In hospitality establishments, I generally choose dishes prepared with TFPs.	3.57	3.67	3.67	3.55	0.798

Source: Author interpretation.

By applying the Kruskal–Wallis test, it was determined that there is a statistically significant difference between respondents' age and their satisfaction with the ease of purchasing TFPs ( $p < 0.005$ ). The results of the post hoc test indicated a statistically significant difference between respondents under the age of 30 and those aged 46 to 60 ( $p = 0.021$ ). Based on the mean ranks, it can be observed that the youngest respondents expressed the highest level of agreement with this statement.

#### 4.1.3. Analysis of Differences in Education Level and Perceptions of the Quality and Availability of Traditional Products in the Market

Subsequently, using the Kruskal–Wallis test, an analysis was conducted to determine whether differences exist between respondents of different education levels regarding their perceptions of the quality and availability of TFPs in the market (Table 5). Respondents with higher education levels (Master/PhD) expressed the lowest satisfaction with the offer and availability of TFPs in the hospitality/tourism market.

By applying the Kruskal–Wallis test, it was determined that there is a statistically significant difference in respondents' education level and their satisfaction with the offer of TFPs in the hospitality/tourism market ( $p < 0.005$ ). The results of the post hoc test showed that statistically significant differences exist between respondents with completed college/university education and those with completed master's/doctoral studies ( $p = 0.034$ ). Respondents with master's/doctoral degrees expressed the lowest level of satisfaction with the offer of TFPs in the hospitality/tourism market.

Statistically significant differences in respondents' education level ( $p < 0.005$ ) were also found for the statement regarding satisfaction with the ease of purchasing TFPs. Post hoc analysis confirmed significant differences between respondents with completed college/university education and those with completed master's/doctoral studies ( $p = 0.021$ ),

with respondents holding master's/doctoral degrees expressing the lowest level of agreement with this statement.

**Table 5.** Kruskal–Wallis Test of Education Level Differences in the Perception of the Quality and Availability of TFPs in Hospitality and Tourism Market (N = 507).

Statement	Mean			<i>p</i> -Value
	Secondary School	College/University	Master/PhD	
I am satisfied with the offer of TFPs in the hospitality/tourism market.	3.78	3.54	3.48	0.020
I am satisfied with the quality of TFPs in the hospitality and tourism market.	3.71	3.56	3.57	0.183
I believe greater diversity is needed in the offer of TFPs in the hospitality and tourism market of Vojvodina.	3.73	3.69	3.81	0.576
I believe the price of TFPs is justified by their overall quality.	3.38	3.24	3.47	0.247
I am satisfied with the ease of purchasing TFPs in the hospitality and tourism market.	3.54	3.26	3.29	0.022
I believe TFPs are of higher quality than industrially produced food.	4.28	4.32	4.47	0.071
I believe TFPs are of higher quality than imported food.	4.24	4.26	4.41	0.150
In hospitality establishments, I generally choose dishes prepared with TFPs.	3.71	3.52	3.65	0.187

Source: Author interpretation.

#### 4.1.4. Analysis of Differences in Place of Residence and Perceptions of the Quality and Availability of Traditional Products in the Market

The following table (Table 6) presents the results of the Mann–Whitney U test conducted to determine whether there are differences in respondents' place of residence regarding their perceptions of the quality and availability of TFPs in the market. Clear differences emerged between urban and rural consumers. Rural respondents expressed higher satisfaction with the offer, quality, and accessibility of TFPs, and were more likely to choose dishes prepared with them.

Based on the results presented in the previous table, it can be observed that a statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) in respondents' place of residence was found for the statement that they are satisfied with the offer of TFPs in the hospitality/tourism market, with respondents from rural areas expressing a higher level of agreement with this statement.

The results also indicated statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) regarding the statement that respondents are satisfied with the quality of TFPs in the hospitality/tourism market, with respondents from rural areas once again reporting a higher level of agreement.

Statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) were also identified in relation to the statement that the price of TFPs is justified by their overall quality, with respondents from rural areas showing higher agreement compared to those from urban areas.

Furthermore, the Mann–Whitney U test confirmed statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) concerning satisfaction with the ease of purchasing TFPs, where respondents from rural areas expressed greater agreement.

Finally, statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) were also observed in relation to the statement that, in hospitality establishments, respondents generally choose dishes prepared with TFPs, with rural respondents once again expressing a higher level of agreement.

**Table 6.** Mann–Whitney U Test of Place of Residence Differences in the Perception of the Quality and Availability of TFPs in Hospitality and Tourism Market (N = 507).

Statement	Mean		<i>p</i> -Value
	Urban	Rural	
I am satisfied with the offer of TFPs in the hospitality/tourism market.	3.54	3.88	0.003
I am satisfied with the quality of TFPs in the hospitality and tourism market.	3.57	3.79	0.036
I believe greater diversity is needed in the offer of TFPs in the hospitality and tourism market of Vojvodina.	3.71	3.79	0.597
I believe the price of TFPs is justified by their overall quality.	3.26	3.57	0.011
I am satisfied with the ease of purchasing TFPs in the hospitality and tourism market.	3.27	3.70	0.000
I believe TFPs are of higher quality than industrially produced food.	4.32	4.35	0.972
I believe TFPs are of higher quality than imported food.	4.26	4.833	0.003
In hospitality establishments, I generally choose dishes prepared with TFPs.	3.55	3.83	0.036

Source: Author interpretation.

#### 4.2. Attributes of Traditional Food Products

To identify the factors influencing respondents' perceptions of the importance of TFP attributes, 15 statements were defined. The results of the descriptive statistical analysis of these statements are presented in Table 7. Among the examined attributes, freshness and nutritional quality were rated as the most important, while brand and uniqueness of the offer received the lowest scores.

**Table 7.** Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Answers Regarding the Importance of TFP Attributes (N = 507).

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
Sensory quality	4.11	1.006
Nutritional quality	4.27	0.899
Uniqueness of the offer	3.77	1.017
Market availability	3.82	1.003
Menu diversity	4.10	0.922
Familiarity with the producer	3.90	1.041
Organic production	3.85	1.099
Environmentally friendly production approach	3.88	1.052
Local production	4.09	0.954
Freshness of the product	4.50	0.851
Ease of preparation	3.94	0.966
Familiarity with the production process	3.78	1.134
Price	3.98	1.015
Brand	3.48	1.167
Seasonality	3.79	1.032

Source: Author interpretation.

Based on the results of the descriptive statistical analysis presented in the previous table, it can be observed that respondents agreed the most with the statements highlighting freshness of the product ( $M = 4.50$ ) and nutritional quality ( $M = 4.27$ ) as the most important attributes. The lowest level of agreement was expressed for the statement that brand is an important attribute of TFPs ( $M = 3.48$ ). The highest degree of variability was recorded for the statement that brand is an important attribute of TFPs ( $SD = 1.167$ ).

#### 4.2.1. Analysis of Gender Differences in Respondents' Perceptions of TFP Attributes

The following table (Table 8) presents the results of the Mann–Whitney U test conducted to determine whether there are differences between male and female respondents in their perceptions of TFP attributes.

**Table 8.** Mann–Whitney U Test of Gender Differences in Respondents' Perceptions of TFPs ( $N = 507$ ).

Statement	Mean		<i>p</i> -Value
	Male	Female	
Sensory quality	4.25	4.02	0.008
Nutritional quality	4.26	4.27	0.529
Uniqueness of the offer	3.81	3.75	0.597
Market availability	3.96	3.74	0.008
Menu diversity	4.15	4.06	0.334
Familiarity with the producer	3.89	3.91	0.662
Organic production	3.89	3.83	0.503
Environmentally friendly production approach	3.88	3.88	0.924
Local production	4.18	4.03	0.059
Freshness of the product	4.60	4.43	0.048
Ease of preparation	3.90	3.96	0.511
Familiarity with the production process	3.83	3.74	0.243
Price	4.09	3.91	0.057
Brand	3.58	3.42	0.118
Seasonality	3.91	3.72	0.071

Source: Author interpretation.

Based on the results presented in the previous table, it can be observed that a statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) in respondents' gender was found for the attribute sensory quality, with male respondents considering this attribute more important compared to female respondents. Market availability was another attribute where statistically significant gender differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) were identified, with male respondents rating this attribute as more important. A statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) was also observed for the attribute freshness of the product, where male respondents again considered this attribute more important than female respondents.

#### 4.2.2. Analysis of Age Differences in Respondents' Perceptions of Traditional Food Product Attributes

Subsequently, using the Kruskal–Wallis test, an analysis was conducted to determine whether differences exist between respondents' age groups and their perceptions of TFP attributes (Table 9).

By applying the Kruskal–Wallis test, it was determined that there is a statistically significant difference in respondents' age and their perceptions of seasonality as an attribute of TFPs ( $p < 0.005$ ). Post hoc test results showed a statistically significant difference between respondents under 30 years of age and those aged 46–60 ( $p = 0.038$ ), as well as between respondents under 30 and those over 61 years of age ( $p = 0.010$ ). Based on the mean values,



it can be observed that the youngest respondents considered this attribute more important compared to the other age groups.

**Table 9.** Mann–Whitney U Test of Age Differences in Respondents’ Perceptions of TFPs (N = 507).

Statement	Mean				p-Value
	Up to 30 Years	30–45 Years	45–60 Years	Over 60 Years	
Sensory quality	4.14	4.14	4.02	4.03	0.463
Nutritional quality	4.31	4.26	4.22	4.13	0.393
Uniqueness of the offer	3.76	3.82	3.76	3.71	0.893
Market availability	3.76	3.96	3.86	3.65	0.230
Menu diversity	4.08	4.18	4.09	3.87	0.370
Familiarity with the producer	3.79	4.07	4.00	3.74	0.086
Organic production	3.82	3.96	3.84	3.65	0.522
Environmentally friendly production approach	3.84	3.89	3.96	3.90	0.942
Local production	4.06	4.16	4.16	3.74	0.062
Freshness of the product	4.46	4.60	4.55	4.23	0.079
Ease of preparation	3.89	4.04	3.89	4.10	0.398
Familiarity with the production process	3.70	3.93	3.77	3.71	0.386
Price	4.00	4.06	3.91	3.74	0.158
Brand	3.45	3.58	3.51	3.26	0.415
Seasonality	3.84	3.78	3.54	3.32	0.018

Source: Author interpretation.

#### 4.2.3. Analysis of Education Level Differences in Respondents’ Perceptions of Traditional Food Product Attributes

Subsequently, using the Kruskal–Wallis test, an analysis was conducted to determine whether differences exist between respondents’ education levels and their perceptions of TFP attributes (Table 10).

**Table 10.** Mann–Whitney U Test of Education Differences in Respondents’ Perceptions of TFPs (N = 507).

Statement	Mean			p-Value
	Secondary School	College/University	Master/PhD	
Sensory quality	4.16	4.01	4.27	0.090
Nutritional quality	4.28	4.19	4.43	0.101
Uniqueness of the offer	3.79	3.73	3.84	0.672
Market availability	3.82	3.80	3.89	0.899
Menu diversity	4.09	4.05	4.24	0.362
Familiarity with the producer	3.93	3.85	3.96	0.597
Organic production	3.89	3.81	3.89	0.877
Environmentally friendly production approach	3.92	3.85	3.86	0.822
Local production	4.17	4.03	4.06	0.269
Freshness of the product	4.49	4.48	4.58	0.445
Ease of preparation	4.01	3.91	3.87	0.260
Familiarity with the production process	3.90	3.65	3.80	0.075
Price	4.05	3.96	3.87	0.351
Brand	3.60	3.37	3.51	0.109
Seasonality	3.85	3.73	3.82	0.605

Source: Author interpretation.

By applying the Kruskal–Wallis test, it was determined that there is no statistically significant difference in respondents’ education level and their perceptions of TFPs ( $p > 0.005$ ).

#### 4.2.4. Analysis of Place of Residence Differences in Respondents' Perceptions of Traditional Food Product Attributes

The following table (Table 11) presents the results of the Mann–Whitney U test conducted to determine whether there are differences between respondents' place of residence and their perceptions of TFP attributes.

**Table 11.** Mann–Whitney U Test of Place of Residence Differences in Respondents' Perceptions of TFPs (N = 507).

Statement	Mean		<i>p</i> -Value
	Urban	Rural	
Sensory quality	4.05	4.29	0.033
Nutritional quality	4.27	4.26	0.871
Uniqueness of the offer	3.75	3.83	0.656
Market availability	3.82	3.83	0.889
Menu diversity	4.07	4.19	0.235
Familiarity with the producer	3.84	4.09	0.015
Organic production	3.83	3.93	0.458
Environmentally friendly production approach	3.85	3.98	0.300
Local production	4.04	4.23	0.049
Freshness of the product	4.50	4.50	0.993
Ease of preparation	3.90	4.08	0.077
Familiarity with the production process	3.70	4.00	0.016
Price	3.94	4.11	0.059
Brand	3.41	3.72	0.011
Seasonality	3.75	3.93	0.149

Source: Author interpretation.

Based on the results presented in the previous table, it can be observed that a statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) in respondents' place of residence was found for the statement that sensory quality is an important attribute of TFPs, with respondents from rural areas expressing a higher level of agreement with this statement. The results also revealed statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) regarding the statement that familiarity with the producer is an important attribute of TFPs, with rural respondents agreeing to a greater extent. Statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) were further identified for the statement that local production is an important attribute of TFPs, where respondents from rural areas expressed higher agreement compared to those from urban areas. Based on the results of the Mann–Whitney U test, statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) were also established regarding the importance of familiarity with the production process as an attribute of TFPs, with rural respondents again expressing stronger agreement. Finally, the test results confirmed statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) for the statement that brand is an important attribute of TFPs, with respondents from rural areas showing a higher level of agreement with this attribute as well.

#### 4.3. Ordinal Logistic Regression Results

An ordinal logistic regression analysis was performed to examine the factors influencing consumers' preferences for traditional food products (TFPs). The dependent variable was based on the statement "In hospitality establishments, I generally choose dishes prepared with TFPs", measured on a five-point Likert scale. The purpose of the analysis was to assess whether socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (gender, age, education, employment status, monthly income, and place of residence) significantly predict the

likelihood of choosing TFP dishes in hospitality establishments. The results of the ordinal logistic regression are presented in Table 12.

**Table 12.** Ordinal logistic regression of socio-demographic factors influencing TFP purchase intentions (N = 507).

Predictor	B	SE	Wald $\chi^2$	p	Odds Ratio (Exp(B))	95% CI for OR
Gender (Male vs. Female)	−0.362	0.172	4.44	0.035	0.7	0.50–0.98
Residence (Rural vs. Urban)	−0.457	0.195	5.47	0.019	0.63	0.43–0.93

Source: Author interpretation. Note: Reference categories: Female, Urban. Other predictors (age, education, employment status, monthly income) were tested but were not statistically significant.

The ordinal logistic regression model demonstrated adequate fit, as indicated by the Deviance statistic ( $\chi^2 = 523.044$ ,  $df = 531$ ,  $p = 0.589$ ). The Test of Parallel Lines confirmed that the proportional odds assumption was not violated ( $\chi^2 = 52.478$ ,  $df = 39$ ,  $p = 0.073$ ), allowing for valid interpretation of the model coefficients.

The analysis revealed that two socio-demographic characteristics significantly predicted consumers' tendency to choose TFP dishes. Gender was a significant predictor, with men being less likely than women to report stronger tendencies to select TFP dishes (OR = 0.70,  $p = 0.035$ ). Similarly, place of residence showed a significant effect, as rural respondents had lower odds of choosing TFP dishes compared to their urban counterparts (OR = 0.63,  $p = 0.019$ ). Other variables, including age, education, employment status, and monthly income, did not significantly influence consumer responses.

## 5. Discussion

First Research Question was (Q<sub>1</sub>): *What are consumers' perceptions of the quality of TFPs in the hospitality and tourism market compared to industrial and imported products?*

The results of the study indicate that, regarding gender, women show a higher level of positive perception of traditional products in the hospitality and tourism market compared to industrial alternatives. This finding can be explained by the fact that women, in comparison to men, are more likely to associate food with health and family values, making them more sensitive to attributes of quality and authenticity (Das & Mishra, 2021). Similar results were reported by Walch et al. (2019) and Reddy and Dam (2020), who emphasized that women demonstrate a more critical stance toward industrial food products and are more inclined to choose traditional and local alternatives offered in hospitality settings.

Regarding age, younger respondents expressed more positive perceptions of the offer and accessibility of TFPs, whereas older groups were more reserved. While this pattern is often interpreted as a generational shift toward valuing novelty and diversity (Jakubowska & Pacholek, 2022), our findings also suggest a form of expectation gap, older consumers may be more critical because they compare today's TFPs with long-standing traditions of production and distribution, which are difficult to replicate in modern hospitality markets. This nuance challenges the assumption that positive perceptions of authenticity automatically increase with age, showing instead that experiential references to the past can make older groups more demanding consumers (Fernández-Sánchez et al., 2023).

Education level also proved significant, with more educated respondents expressing greater criticism of the market offer. This result is consistent with studies that highlight higher expectations among highly educated consumers (Lu et al., 2016; Hou et al., 2019). Chousou and Mattas (2019) also note that highly educated respondents place stronger emphasis on information about origin and production methods, making them more likely to identify shortcomings in the market offer. Yet, rather than treating this only as a socio-economic effect, our findings point to the importance of informational transparency. Highly

educated respondents may not reject TFPs per se but perceive gaps in communication about origin and production methods. In this sense, the negative evaluations reflect a lack of adequate signaling in hospitality markets, rather than a rejection of TFP quality itself.

The most pronounced differences were observed between rural and urban consumers. Respondents from rural areas expressed greater agreement with the statements that TFPs are of high quality, accessible, and justifiably more expensive, and they were also more likely to choose dishes prepared with traditional products in hospitality settings. Similar findings were reported in a study conducted in Romania (Soare et al., 2023). These results can be explained by closer contact with producers and shorter supply chains, which foster higher trust and quality perceptions. Understanding such perceptions among rural consumers can assist hospitality and tourism stakeholders in entering the market and provide valuable insights for strategic planning. Del Castillo et al. (2024) highlight that local identity and familiarity with producers play a key role in shaping positive perceptions of TFPs.

Second Research Question was (Q<sub>2</sub>): *Which attributes of TFPs do consumers in tourism and hospitality value the most, and how do these perceptions differ according to socio-demographic characteristics?*

The results of the study show that among the 15 examined attributes of TFPs, the most highly valued were product freshness, nutritional quality, dietary diversity, and local production, whereas brand and uniqueness of the offer were assessed as the least significant. These findings are consistent with numerous studies (Moraes et al., 2020; García-Barrón et al., 2021; Wilcox et al., 2023), which consistently emphasize that consumers in tourism and hospitality primarily associate TFP with naturalness, sensory quality, and nutritional value, while factors related to branding and marketing carry relatively less importance. This pattern can be understood through the lens of experiential consumption theory, as Chang et al. (2021) and Nunes et al. (2021) show that consumer evaluations are primarily shaped by authenticity and intrinsic product attributes, while extrinsic cues such as branding play a secondary role. Unlike Western European and North American contexts, where branding often signals product quality (Pedeliento et al., 2016), our findings suggest that consumers in Vojvodina view branding as irrelevant or even conflicting with authenticity. This highlights that in culturally embedded contexts, extrinsic market cues may reduce rather than enhance trust, challenging mainstream theories that assume branding universally increases perceived value.

When gender differences are considered, men placed greater emphasis on sensory quality and freshness, while women tended to highlight nutritional and health-related aspects of the products. These results align with the findings of Grzymisławska et al. (2020), which indicate that women are more likely to associate food with health and safety, whereas men devote greater attention to sensory characteristics. These gendered differences can be explained by identity construction theories in food consumption (Turner et al., 2013), where women's preferences reflect a stronger link between food and health or identity, while men's focus corresponds to hedonic consumption models that emphasize pleasure and taste.

Across age groups, the only statistically significant difference was found for seasonality—younger respondents valued this attribute more highly than older ones. This result may appear counterintuitive, as older generations are often presumed to have stronger associations between food and seasonal availability. A possible explanation lies in the influence of sustainability and ecological trends, where younger generations perceive seasonality as a value in itself (Gazzola et al., 2020). This interpretation is further supported by Bonadonna et al. (2022), who note that younger consumers increasingly seek comprehensive product information, including its seasonal and local dimensions. These insights can serve as practical guidance for hospitality and tourism providers: by incorporating

seasonal ingredients into their menus, they may attract younger market segments and thereby gain a competitive advantage over rivals.

Place of residence proved to be particularly relevant, as respondents from rural areas emphasized the importance of knowing the producer, local production, sensory quality, and the production process to a greater extent. These findings are fully consistent with the literature, which highlights that interpersonal trust and short supply chains shape perceptions of quality and elevate the significance of certain product attributes (Cruz et al., 2021; Domagała & Zawadzki, 2025). Conversely, urban respondents attached less importance to these factors but placed relatively more emphasis on aesthetic and practical dimensions, reflecting different consumer patterns and expectations. From a theoretical perspective, this supports short food supply chain theory, where physical and social proximity between producer and consumer enhances trust and authenticity, while urban consumption patterns reflect more mediated, experience-oriented models of gastronomy.

Third Research Question was (Q<sub>3</sub>): *What barriers and constraints do consumers in tourism and hospitality identify in relation to the consumption of TFPs, and how do these differ according to socio-demographic characteristics?*

The analysis of the third research question indicates that the consumption of TFPs faces several significant barriers, among which high price and limited availability stand out as the most prominent. These barriers were not measured through a separate barrier scale but were instead derived from respondents' perceptions of price and availability of TFP. The statement that the price of TFP is justified by their quality received very low ratings, suggesting that a considerable portion of consumers in tourism and hospitality view TFP as overpriced relative to what they offer. Similarly, the statement that consumers are satisfied with the ease of obtaining TFP also scored low, pointing to availability as a serious challenge. These results corroborate the views of Salvador et al. (2022), who emphasize that economic and distributional barriers represent key challenges for expanding TFP consumption in the hospitality and tourism market. Likewise, the findings are consistent with studies by Taleizadeh et al. (2019) and Adam et al. (2023), which underline that, despite high perceived value, traditional products remain limited in broader market penetration due to pricing issues and underdeveloped distribution channels.

Socio-demographic differences reveal persistent barriers to TFP consumption. Rural respondents were generally less concerned with availability and more accepting of higher prices, while urban consumers pointed to limited access and insufficient information. Similarly, lower-income individuals frequently cited price as a constraint, whereas more educated respondents criticized the limited variety and low market visibility. Although TFP are widely perceived as high-quality and nutritious, structural barriers, such as high prices, restricted availability, low visibility and issues with branding, continue to constrain broader acceptance. This raises important questions about the effectiveness of current marketing and distribution strategies, particularly in reaching diverse consumer segments. Comparable findings have been reported by Bryła (2016) and Pham et al. (2019), underscoring that without targeted interventions, these barriers may continue to hinder broader acceptance of TFP in tourism and hospitality contexts.

In the context of hospitality and tourism, however, the high price of TFP may be less problematic if these products are positioned as a premium offering in restaurants and hotels, or as part of an authentic gastronomic experience that tourists both expect and are willing to pay more for (Zocchi & Fontefrancesco, 2020). Limited availability and weak distribution, on the other hand, remain critical obstacles as they reduce the visibility of TFP and hinder their broader use in hospitality establishments. From a practical perspective, these barriers can be mitigated through several targeted strategies. Strengthening direct partnerships between farms and restaurants can improve distribution and reliability of



supply, while storytelling and menu labeling can justify higher prices by emphasizing authenticity and tradition. Additionally, bundling strategies, such as offering TFPs together with complementary dishes or cultural experiences, could further increase perceived value and reduce price sensitivity. Gastronomic events and promotional campaigns led by tourism organizations may also play a key role in raising visibility and consumer awareness.

While the first three research questions provided insights into consumer perceptions, valued attributes, and perceived barriers to TFP consumption, the fourth research question aimed to move beyond descriptive patterns and assess which socio-demographic factors significantly predict consumers' tendency to choose dishes prepared with TFPs in hospitality establishments.

Fourth Research Question was (Q<sub>4</sub>): *Which socio-demographic characteristics significantly predict consumers' tendency to choose dishes prepared with TFPs in hospitality establishments?*

The ordinal logistic regression results showed that gender and place of residence significantly influenced consumers' tendency to choose TFP dishes. Women displayed a stronger inclination than men, aligning with studies that emphasize women's greater orientation toward health, family values, and authenticity in food choices (Chen et al., 2024; Mushi et al., 2025). Urban respondents were also more likely than rural ones to select dishes prepared with TFPs, a finding consistent with their broader exposure to diverse gastronomic offers and marketing channels, which may foster more favorable attitudes toward traditional and local products in hospitality settings (Thomas & Cankurt, 2024; Del Castillo et al., 2024). Other socio-demographic factors, including age, education, employment status, and monthly income, were not statistically significant. While these results underscore the importance of gender and spatial differences, they also suggest that commonly assumed predictors such as income or education may play a less decisive role than expected. Consequently, hospitality providers and tourism managers should consider targeted strategies, particularly aimed at engaging male and rural consumers through tailored communication and experiential offerings.

## 6. Conclusions

TFPs constitute an exceptionally important part of the hospitality and tourism offer in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. Consumers represent one of the key actors in the chain of production, distribution, and consumption of TFPs. The socio-demographic characteristics of consumers shape their perceptions of the products they consume and influence their decision-making processes regarding purchases. The results of this research indicate that consumers in hospitality and tourism generally express a positive attitude toward the quality of traditional products, particularly in comparison with industrial and imported alternatives. However, differences among groups clearly demonstrate that gender, age, education, and place of residence play an important role in shaping attitudes: women are more sensitive to health and nutritional attributes, men to sensory attributes, and younger consumers value seasonality and innovativeness, while rural consumers perceive traditional products as more accessible and authentic than urban consumers. In addition, the results of the ordinal logistic regression showed that gender and place of residence significantly predict consumers' tendency to choose dishes prepared with TFPs in hospitality establishments, while other socio-demographic variables did not have a statistically significant effect. This emphasizes that demographic and spatial characteristics are more decisive in shaping consumer choices in hospitality settings than purely socio-economic factors.

When it comes to specific attributes, consumers in hospitality and tourism place the greatest value on freshness, nutritional quality, dietary diversity, and local production, while factors such as brand are considered marginal. This finding confirms that the perception of

value in traditional products is based primarily on authenticity, origin, and connection with the producer, rather than on commercial signals of quality. Despite the high level of positive perception, the research also highlighted key barriers limiting broader consumption. The most significant obstacles relate to high prices and limited availability, while insufficient market visibility and low consumer awareness represent additional challenges. Branding, which in theory could contribute to recognition and differentiation, is in the context of traditional products often perceived as undermining authenticity.

From a practical perspective, the results offer clear guidelines for hospitality and tourism stakeholders, but their effective application requires more concrete strategies. Restaurants and hotels in urban areas could design menus that emphasize seasonality and health-related attributes in order to attract younger and more educated tourists. Rural hospitality providers, on the other hand, may achieve stronger market positioning by offering farm-to-table packages, guided visits to local producers, or storytelling-based menus that emphasize authenticity and personal connection with producers.

Tourism boards and policymakers could operationalize these insights by developing regional branding initiatives that go beyond slogans—for instance, through quality labels for certified local TFPs, digital platforms mapping seasonal availability, or annual food festivals that highlight sustainability and authenticity. Producers, as key actors in the distribution of TFPs, can improve market acceptance by introducing QR codes on packaging that disclose production methods, offering transparent pricing schemes, and partnering with hospitality providers to co-create gastronomic events that directly involve consumers.

The inclusion of traditional products in hospitality and tourism offerings opens space for their stronger recognition within a broader social and cultural context. In addition, raising consumer awareness and emphasizing the connection with local producers can significantly contribute to strengthening trust and willingness to purchase. Such efforts could be supported through educational campaigns in schools and universities, social media storytelling on local traditions, and interactive workshops at gastronomy events. These implications highlight the pathways through which the findings of this study can support the sustainable development of gastronomic tourism in Vojvodina and beyond.

### *6.1. Theoretical Implications*

The findings of this study contribute to the theoretical understanding of consumer perceptions of TFPs, by highlighting how socio-demographic characteristics influence the evaluation of product attributes. In addition, the results have clear implications for tourism and hospitality. Within hospitality establishments, TFPs can be positioned as premium-quality items, thereby justifying their higher price, while authenticity and local origin can serve as key messages in communication with consumers and tourists. The integration of TFPs into the menus of restaurants, hotels, farmsteads, and ethno-houses contributes to the creation of authentic gastronomic experiences that tourists increasingly seek. In this way, TFPs represent not only food but also a cultural resource that strengthens the identity of the destination.

By situating these insights within the broader context of gastronomic tourism, the study demonstrates that traditional foods function not only as consumable products but also as cultural and experiential resources. In regions with strong culinary traditions, consumer assessments are driven more by authenticity and experiential factors than by extrinsic branding cues. These findings underscore the importance of integrating socio-demographic considerations into theoretical models of consumer behavior in tourism, particularly when analyzing the symbolic and experiential dimensions of food consumption.

### 6.2. Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should expand the analysis to other regions of Serbia and the broader Balkan area in order to enable a comparative examination of consumer perceptions of traditional products across different cultural and market contexts. In addition to a quantitative approach, the use of qualitative methods—such as in-depth interviews and focus groups—is recommended, as these would provide deeper insights into the motives and values that consumers attribute to traditional products. It would be particularly useful to investigate consumers' willingness to pay a premium price, as well as the role of marketing tools in building greater trust and recognition. Furthermore, the analysis of generational differences and their connection with sustainable food trends could provide additional understanding of the dynamics shaping consumer perceptions. From a destination management perspective, the inclusion of TFPs in gastronomic tours, food festivals, and marketing campaigns may contribute to branding Vojvodina as an attractive gastronomic destination. At the same time, organized cooperation between producers, hospitality providers, and tourism organizations can both enhance the visibility of TFPs and strengthen the local tourism offer. While the present study focused primarily on descriptive and group-comparison analyses, it also introduced an ordinal logistic regression model to assess the predictive power of socio-demographic variables in relation to consumers' tendency to choose TFP dishes. Future research should further expand the application of multivariate methods—such as logistic regression, structural equation modeling, or cluster analysis—to gain deeper insights into the interplay of socio-demographic factors and consumer perceptions.

### 6.3. Research Limitations

The study was conducted on a sample of consumers from the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, which limits the possibility of generalizing the results to the wider population of Serbia or the region. Although the sample was proportionally distributed according to the 2022 Census across all administrative districts of AP Vojvodina and the urban/rural population structure was considered to enhance territorial representativeness, the study still relied on a non-probability convenience sampling method. No formal quotas for age, gender, or education were applied, which may affect the validity of socio-demographic comparisons. In addition, the research relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias and respondents' subjective interpretation. Another limitation concerns the cross-sectional design of the study, which does not allow for the observation of changes in attitudes over time. Despite these limitations, the findings provide valuable insights into patterns of consumer perception and behavior, which may serve as a starting point for future research employing more diverse methodological approaches.

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