

日本とドイツの若者のエスニック料理に対する好奇心： ベトナム料理を例に

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The openness of Japanese and German young people to ethnic foods: The case of Vietnamese cuisine

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Abstract

The introduction of distinctive foods by immigrants and other minority communities can enrich national gastronomy in various ways and contribute to the social interaction and inclusion in the host. Using Vietnamese ethnic food as a medium for multiculturalism, the research explores the determinants of acceptance by the host-country young generation for Vietnamese cuisine, and how this may facilitate not only culinary multiculturalism but also deepen social interaction between migrants and host societies. Empirical data was derived from public surveys conducted between 2021-2022 on the perception of young individuals from Japan and Germany with the participation of 340 participants (257 Japanese and 83 German) aged between 18-40 years. Moreover, two artifact-focused group discussions were conducted in June and October 2022, which were centered on the youth interaction with fresh spring rolls. The preliminary findings highlight specific distinguishing characteristics of Vietnamese cuisine such as healthiness, as perceived by young people. The results suggest that individual attributes and exposure to foreign cultures play a role in shaping attitudes towards ethnic food and the principles guiding the preparation of Vietnamese cuisine in international kitchens.

1. Introduction

Heritage food or ethnic cuisine can be defined as the culinary traditions linked to a particular cultural or ethnic group, as opposed to the dominant culture. This type of food often incorporates unique ingredients with unusual flavors and aromas, or employs distinct cooking methods to prepare familiar ingredients (Choe & Cho, 2011; Guzek et al., 2021; Olabi et al., 2009). There is a focus on the preservation of culinary heritage among different ethnic groups, including indigenous populations, ethnic minorities, and transnational immigrants. Furthermore, research has explored how the dominant society responds to such preservation efforts in diverse ways. In some cases, customers from the dominant society may incorporate these foods into mainstream culinary culture, either in authentic or hybrid forms, which can contribute to the success of cosmopolitan societies.

For instance, American Chinese food caters to not only Chinese immigrants overseas but also local residents and global tourists with an Oriental curiosity; and later contributes to the transformation of America into a nation of multinational diners (Barbas, 2003; Frost & Laing, 2016). Nonetheless, ethnic foods might be used as a means of radical and class discrimination showing a hostile attitude against “Others” - those with low social status and creating a cultural boundary between people and culture (Barbas, 2003; Sutherland, 2007). In other words, the perception of public customers toward immigrant food can be an important marker of social interaction and inclusion between the minority and mainstream society.

Various external and internal factors could influence individual openness to ethnic foods. Previous studies highlighted external determinants like the country's place and cultural conservation can affect the acceptance of other food cultures (Choe & Cho, 2011; Guzek et al., 2021; Szakály et al., 2021). Based on the popular Food Neophobia Scale by Pliner and Hobden (1992), a similar pattern has been reported that Asian people, Chinese, and Korean, are more neophobic to non-traditional food than Western customers (Choe & Cho, 2011; Olabi et al., 2009). The papers contended that culinary unfamiliarity in terms of ingredients, flavors, and principles of cooking and eating between the dominant and minority cultures is the main challenge. For instance, Western customers often show their reluctance in trying raw fish (sushi), fermented soybeans (natto), and non-traditional shiitake and azuki bean dishes (Farrer, 2015; Guzek et al., 2021). At the same time, the personality of the customers plays a leading role in accelerating their acceptance and willingness to try novel food. Adventurous and open-minded individuals can be more willing to try and explore novel foods, flavors, and aromas than neophobic people (Skrbis & Woodward, 2007; Szakály et al., 2021). Furthermore, socio-demographic factors, especially gender, age, and generational gap are reported as significant antecedents of a person's acceptance to trying new food (Guzek et al., 2021; Okumus et al., 2021; Szakály et al., 2021).

Comparing Vietnamese food in Japan and Germany offers a promising approach to understand the openness to ethnic food in different contexts. While Germany is often viewed as an immigrant country that actively welcomes people from different backgrounds and cultures to live and work there permanently, Japan is seen as a more ethnically homogenous country (Liu-Farrer, 2020; Sutherland, 2007). Also, Japan is closer to Vietnam country and food culture, such as eating rice with chopsticks and using fish in multiple ways. In terms of migration, Vietnamese people have come to the two countries in different stages and schemes. Closely tied to Germany's political and social progression, including the East-West German dichotomy, Vietnamese immigrants migrated to Germany in various forms of boat people after the 1975 Vietnam War, contracted guest workers under the socialist agreement in the late 1980s, and even a more diverse group following German reunification. Over time, these Vietnamese immigrants became well-integrated into German society, leading to a "Vietnamese miracle" phenomenon among subsequent generations (Hillmann, 2005; Sutherland, 2007). Vietnamese restaurants were established as a vital way for migrants' financial sources and resettlement in Germany, and are positioned within a vague pan-Asian group dominated by Chinese and Japanese key players (Farrer, 2015; Stock & Schmitz, 2019). In contrast, Vietnamese people in Japan have become a topic in only the last decade debate when the number of temporary

migrants, coming as technical trainees and international students, rose (Liu-Farrer, 2020). Meanwhile, a recent “Vietnam boom” or heightened interest among Japanese tourists outbound to Vietnam (The Japan National Tourism Organization), was cut short due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but ultimately led to a sharp growth of the Vietnamese population and food providers in Japan as Japanese customers gradually started seek out local outlets for Vietnamese cuisine.

Using Vietnamese ethnic food as a medium for food multiculturalism, the study aims to explore how the Japanese and German young generations perceive, accept and domesticate Vietnamese food in their daily eating. Also, it attempts to identify the factors and agencies influencing the acceptance and modification of ethnic food in the two different reception settings. The young generation is selected as targeted subjects because of their acknowledge and active engagement in social movements like Slow food, vegetarianism, and sustainable eating lifestyle (Rossi & Rivetti, 2023). The study attempts to answer three main questions:

- (1) What is the contemporary openness to Vietnamese food among Japanese and German young people?
- (2) Which key factors influence the youth’s openness to Vietnamese ethnic food?
- (3) How does the younger generation modify and reproduce Vietnamese food in their kitchens?

2. Method

The study draws on two main data sources, consisting of questionnaire surveys on youth perception and two focus group discussions (FGD). For the quantitative surveys, the targeted respondents of the study are current residents of the host society Japan and Germany at the survey time, aged between 18-40 years old, and interested in food and/or cultural exchange. The recruitment was based on a convenient sampling selection for both in-person and online surveys with a pre-survey consent statement for all participants. The surveys were distributed through several university lectures and events on Vietnamese culture and international cultural exchange at two main hosts: Kyoto University in 2021-2022 and Göttingen University between July-September 2022. To gain deeper insight into the survey results, particularly concerning the dynamics of younger generation’s food acceptance and modification, two artifact-FGDs on fresh spring rolls were carried out in June and October 2022 in Kyoto.

The questionnaire utilized a variety of question formats, including open-ended inquiries about the names of foods and preconceived notions about Vietnamese cuisine. Additionally, it included 5-point Likert scale questions regarding participants' receptiveness to trying and familiarity with foreign and Vietnamese foods and cultures. The study also incorporated multiple-choice questions to determine how participants became acquainted with Vietnamese cuisine and the challenges they faced when attempting to prepare ethnic dishes at home. In parallel with the questionnaire, the analysis consisted of three stages. Firstly, a text analysis was conducted on the responses to the open-ended questions in English, German, and Japanese. Secondly, multiple Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFA) were performed to create variables related to exposure to foreign cultures, Vietnamese culture, and

receptiveness to Vietnamese cuisine. Finally, regression tests were carried out to examine the relationship between openness to trying Vietnamese food and the aforementioned variables. After cleaning the database on the participant's age and survey completion, 340 responses are qualified for follow-up analysis, including 257 Japanese and 83 German participants (Table 1). The sample size was comprised of 60% female and a significant percentage being students. Notably, German participants reported a higher incidence of travel and residency outside their home regions compared to Japanese participants, with experiences primarily in Europe and Japan, respectively. As a result, the sample can be a good representation of young people in Japan and Germany.

<Table 1. Questionnaire respondents' socio-demographic characteristics>

The FGDs centered on fresh spring rolls (生春巻き) and consisted of 6-8 Japanese participants for each session recruited via the Kyoto University network. The program started with a virtual game where participants could select preferred roll ingredients and dipping sauce for creating their ideal fresh spring rolls. After that, the participants engaged in a practical exercise of making Vietnamese-style fresh spring rolls and participated in a following group discussion on the similarity and differences between Vietnamese and Japanese fresh rolls or other similar foods. Upon the event's conclusion, each participant received ¥1000 to make their homemade fresh spring rolls either individually or in teams, and were requested to submit photos of the creations, along with reflection on their decision-making and rolling processes. A language interpreter was recruited to aid in facilitating the discussion in Japanese and translate the events' materials and discussion transcripts into English. Regarding the participants' demographic, the first event held in June gathered more experienced participants with an average age of 26.8, comprising of graduate students and the University alumni who currently work as company employees, non-profit organization staff and freelancers (Table 2). At the same time, the October event was aimed at a more domestic group, consisting of undergraduate students or those who have never traveled abroad. Out of the total 14 participants, 10 of them have sent back their reflection on homemade fresh spring: four participants collaborated with either another participant or friends/housemates to make the rolls.

<Table 2. Participants in FGDs>

3. Key results

3.1. Questionnaire surveys

As shown in Figure 1, Pho and spring rolls are the most popular dishes recognized by the respondents. German young customers tend to generalize the dishes into broader food categories such as noodle or rice dishes. Many German participants provided very general descriptions of Vietnamese food, such as "a bowl of rice noodles, vegetables, and meat" or one-plate dishes featured by a portion of rice and stir-fried vegetable with meat on the same plate. Also, some respondents conflate Vietnamese food with Thai and other Southeast Asian foods like Mi-Goren and Tomyum among Japanese youth, while German young people spuriously included other Asian dishes into Vietnamese cuisine, such as Japanese sushi, udon, and ramen or Chinese bao bun and roasted duck.

<Figure 1. Names of Vietnamese food>

Figure 2 displays the outcomes of text analysis demonstrating various impressions of Vietnamese food. Overall, the respondents seem to regard Vietnamese food as flavorful, healthy and filled with fresh vegetables and herbs. Japanese young people can describe more complex sweet-spicy and sour flavors, and identify stereotyped exotic ingredients such as fish sauce and coriander. In contrast, the German participants used more general terms to describe the food as flavorful, diverse, and fresh. Nonetheless, German respondents displayed a strong interest in the health aspects of the food and valued the availability of vegetable-based and vegetarian options.

<Figure 2. Impression on Vietnamese food>

Additionally, Figure 3 presents a summary of EFA results within the analytical framework regarding the second research question. For instance, the variable of exposure to foreign cultures is generated from five distinct variables, including contact with individuals with a migrant background, international travel or residency, and a willingness to try new ethnic food. The model is aimed to explore the impact of socio-demographic variables, exposure to Vietnamese individuals, and exposure to foreign culture on the respondents' openness to Vietnamese cuisine. The framework distinguished between contact with foreign cultures and Vietnamese culture to detect whether the acceptance of ethnic food is a result of interacting with people of the specific country where the food comes from or stems from a culinary cosmopolitan perspective. The EFA outcomes are used as inputs in subsequent analyses, such as OLS regression.

<Figure 3. Analytical framework with the EFA factor loading>

Table 3 displays the findings of OLS regression tests of Openness to Vietnamese food. Column (1) examines the impact of interacting with Vietnamese people, in addition to socio-demographic factors, while Column (2) incorporates exposure to foreign culture in the regression analysis. Notably, the nationality factor is controlled in all the tests. The results reveal that contact with ethnic people significantly affects the openness to ethnic food in both cases. However, when exposure to foreign culture is considered, its influence becomes the most critical factor in food acceptance, while the impact of the country of origin becomes insignificant. This implies that an individual's personality and life experiences are more powerful determinants of their openness to ethnic food than the mainstream society.

<Table 3. OLS Regression of Openness to Vietnamese food on Vietnamese and foreign exposure>

3.2. Focus group discussions

In addition to the quantitative results, the paper provides some insights into the perception and adjustment of ethnic food among young people through FGDs. Table 4 illustrates the top ingredients chosen by participants in the virtual game section of the two exhibitions, which are categorized into vegetables, meat, and noodles for the fresh spring rolls, as well as the corresponding dipping sauce. According to the findings, Japanese young participants consider that the ideal fresh spring rolls contain 1-2 types of salad vegetables, 1-2 pieces of sliced meat or fish with optional noodles,

wrapped in rice paper and dipped with generic commercial sauces like sweet-chili sauce or peanut sauce. Compared to the variations commonly found in Vietnam, the participants reproduced their stylized image of spring rolls by replacing freshly boiled pork and shrimp with various processed seafood and meat ingredients that are seasoned with strong flavors while tropical aromatic herbs other than the well-known coriander were absent. Additionally, among the two events, the first-group participants were more concerned about achieving a good balance between meat and vegetables, while the younger group placed more emphasis on meat, fish, and animal-derived products.

<Table 4. Top ingredients of virtual fresh spring rolls, by components>

Following the virtual game and practical activity of making Vietnamese-style fresh spring rolls, the group discussion commenced by eliciting the participants' impressions of fresh spring rolls before and after the hands-on exhibition. The Japanese participants initially conveyed their preconceived imagination of Vietnamese or ethnic cuisines as having unpleasant flavors and strong smells that do not align with Japanese palates, hindering Japanese people from trying such ethnic foods. However, after trying the Vietnamese fresh spring rolls, the participants were surprised to discover that the rolls were not as pungent or difficult to eat as they had previously heard and thought. In fact, a few participants found the flavorful dipping sauce made from fish sauce, lemon juice, garlic, and chili pepper to be stimulating.

“The fish sauce and coriander are not hard to eat as I thought before. Many people told that. But it is even stimulating.” (Female, 20, 2022/10/20)

“Such a great combination of tastes: The light taste of the fresh roll matches well with the flavorful dipping sauce made of aromatic fish sauce and refreshing lemon juice.” (Male, 2x, 2022/10/20)

Furthermore, the participants engaged in a discussion regarding the similarities and differences between Vietnamese fresh spring rolls with Japanese hand-rolled sushi, known as *temaki-zushi* in Japan (手巻き寿司). The participants noted that both Vietnamese spring rolls and Japanese sushi are hand-rolled and freshly consumed right after rolling, but Japanese sushi uses seaweed as wrapping material, is filled with vinegared rice and raw fish, and rolled in a triangle shape that all the insides are visible and dipped with soy sauce. On the other hand, Vietnamese fresh spring rolls use moisturized rice paper and are filled with more diverse range of aromatic herbs, vegetables, and boiled shrimp or pork and are dipped in a flavorful fish sauce. Despite the differences, both dishes share the same characteristics of being light, freshly made and eaten at the dining table, and often eaten socially with family or friends.

“It was my first time to get together and eat with other people in the shared house through this fresh spring roll party. I also want to remake it with my family members when I come back to my parent's house.” (Female, 28, participated in June 2022 event, Feedback on homemade practice)

The Japanese young participants encountered various difficulties during their on-site and at-home practice of making fresh spring rolls. These challenges included missing essential ingredients like rice paper, fish sauce, and coriander when shopping at conventional Japanese supermarkets, difficulties in portioning the ingredients, and in rolling the ingredients in a long shape in the moist stretchy rice paper. However, with a few rounds of practice, they were able to overcome these challenges and derive immense satisfaction from making beautifully crafted rolls. For homemade practice, they even went on to create innovative fresh rolls: sashimi rolls filled with raw fish or dessert rolls filled with a few kinds of fruits such as persimmon and grapefruit and dipped in honey.

4. Discussions

At the time of writing, the author is still in the process of analyzing and interpreting the results, so a few initial discussions are presented in this paper. The results regarding the determinants of food openness reveal that young people from multicultural societies tend to be more open to trying non-traditional food compared to those from more homogeneous cultures, as found in German and Japanese perception surveys. Another contextual factor is culinary familiarity with the ethnic cuisine, and unlike previous studies, this study finds that similarity does not necessarily guarantee a willingness for young customers to accept ethnic food. Despite having a closer proximity to the country and Vietnamese food culture, Japanese respondents are even more skeptical about experiencing less-familiar Asian cuisine. Furthermore, personality, particularly exposure to foreign cultures and people is overall more important than experience with a specific country in shaping the openness to new food. The survey country is only significant when exclusively considering contact with ethnic people, but insignificant when the individual's foreign exposure is included.

Furthermore, FGDs and follow-up reflection can draw out some key rules of Vietnamese food and highlight modifications in the Japanese context based on personal preference. The essential principles of fresh spring rolls include using rice paper, combining ingredients with contrasting textures and flavors, (e.g., crunchy carrots, cucumber, soft-boiled shrimp and rice noodles), maintaining a well-balanced ratio of vegetables to meat and creating an environment for socializing and collaboration. Through food reflections, young people can accommodate Vietnamese food rules by complying or breaking and sometimes surpassing them. Deliberately, they prioritize aesthetics by creating neatly rolled rolls and flavor/mouthfeel contrasting of less aromatic vegetables with strongly seasoned ingredients. Participants also work within resource limits and substitute with affordable and readily available ingredients such as using perilla instead of coriander, cabbage to lettuce, or pre-made, processed rather than fresh ingredients.

5. Conclusion

To summarize, the young generations of Japan and Germany perceive Vietnamese cuisine as healthy, vegetable-rich, and flavorful; it can be tailored to individual palates, such as being vegetarian or using local ingredients. In terms of determinants of their willingness to try new ethnic food, German youth tend to categorize food using more general food groups and expressions due to the

dissimilarities of food culture, but are generally more receptive to non-traditional foods compared to their Japanese counterparts. Nevertheless, personality traits, particularly exposure to foreign cultures and people, are significant determinants of openness to ethnic food when controlling for nationality and country of origin. Finally, young people can modify and recreate ethnic dishes within the constraints of their local food circumstances, while maintaining essential elements of Vietnamese cuisine, as evidenced by the case of Vietnamese fresh spring rolls.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. Questionnaire respondents' socio-demographic characteristics

	Germany (n=83)	Japan (n=257)	Combined (n=340)
Age (Mean ± Std.)	24.51 ±4.38	22.49 ±5.43	22.98 ±5.26
Gender			
Male	32.5%	42.4%	39.5%
Female	69.9%	57.6%	85.5%
Occupation			
Formal/Salary employment	12.0%	16.7%	15.4%
Student	88.0%	82.1%	82.6%
Retired and housewife		0.8%	0.6%
Self-employed worker		0.4%	0.3%
Nationality		n=203	n=286
Japanese	1.2%	96.6%	68.9%
German	83.1%		24.1%
Other	18.1%	3.4%	7.7%
Rate of abroad living	40%	3%	12%
Abroad travel		n=115	n=201
Never	21.7%	30.4%	26.4%
1 time	13.3%	21.7%	17.9%
2-3 times	18.1%	20.0%	18.9%
More than 3 times	47.0%	27.8%	36.8%

Source: Youth perception survey, 2021-2022

Table 2. Participants in FGDs

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Occupation	Major	Event Time
A	Female	26	Doctoral student	Education	23/6/2022
B	Female	30	Doctoral student	Letter	23/6/2022
C	Female	28	NGO employee	Global Environmental Studies	23/6/2022
D	Female	27	Graduate student	Asia-Africa Area Studies	23/6/2022
E	Male	2x	Having a gap year	Letter	23/6/2022
F	Female	25	Master student	Agriculture	23/6/2022
G	Male	25	Company employee	Letter	23/6/2022
H	Male	28	Doctoral student	Agriculture/History	23/6/2022
I	Male	19	Undergraduate student	Medicine	20/10/2022
K	Female	19	Undergraduate student	Medicine	20/10/2022
L	Male	2x	Master student	Agriculture	20/10/2022
M	Male	19	Undergraduate student	Integrated Human Studies	20/10/2022
N	Female	20	Undergraduate student	Economics	20/10/2022
O	Female	21	Undergraduate student	Economics	20/10/2022

Table 3. OLS Regressions of Openness to Vietnamese food on Vietnamese and foreign exposure

	Openness to Vietnamese food	
	(1)	(2)
Exposure to Vietnamese people	0.429*** (0.056)	0.305*** (0.071)
Exposure to foreign culture		0.346*** (0.074)
Age	0.023* (0.012)	-0.004 (0.019)
Female	0.282*** (0.103)	0.269** (0.103)
Occupation	0.088 (0.164)	0.002 (0.210)
Country	0.996*** (0.310)	0.047 (0.109)
Nationality dummies	YES	YES
R squared	0.45	0.59
N	187	150

Notes: Robust standard errors are in parentheses. ***p < .01, **p < .05, *p < .1.

Table 4. Top ingredients of virtual spring rolls, by components

	1st event (28 rolls)	2nd event (27 rolls)	Combined (55 rolls)
Vegetables	Lettuce (8), Mizuna (6), Coriander (5), Carrot (5), Tomato (4), Onion (4)	Lettuce (11), Avocado (4), Cucumber (3), Coriander (3)	Lettuce (19), Carrot (9), Coriander (8), Onion (7), Mizuna (6), Cucumber (6)
Meat	Smoked salmon (7), Boiled shrimp (6), Boiled pork (4)	Smoked salmon (6), Beef (6), Salmon caviar (5), Cheese (3), Boiled pork (3), Boiled shrimp (3), Sashimi (3)	Smoked salmon (13), Boiled shrimp (9), Boiled pork (7), Beef (6), Salmon caviar (5), Cheese (5), Bacon (4)
Noodles	Rice noodles (4), Glass noodles (3)	Glass noodles (3)	Glass noodles (6), Rice noodles (5)
Dipping sauce	Sweet chili sauce (15), Peanut sauce (15), Oyster sauce (15)	Sweet chili sauce (10), Peanut sauce (10), Oyster sauce (10)	Sweet chili sauce (25), Peanut sauce (25), Oyster sauce (25)

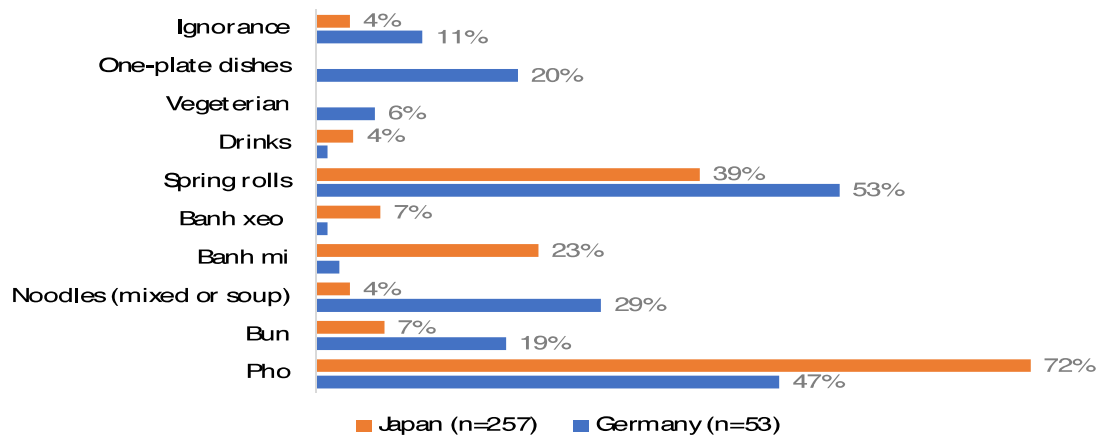


Figure 1. Names of Vietnamese food

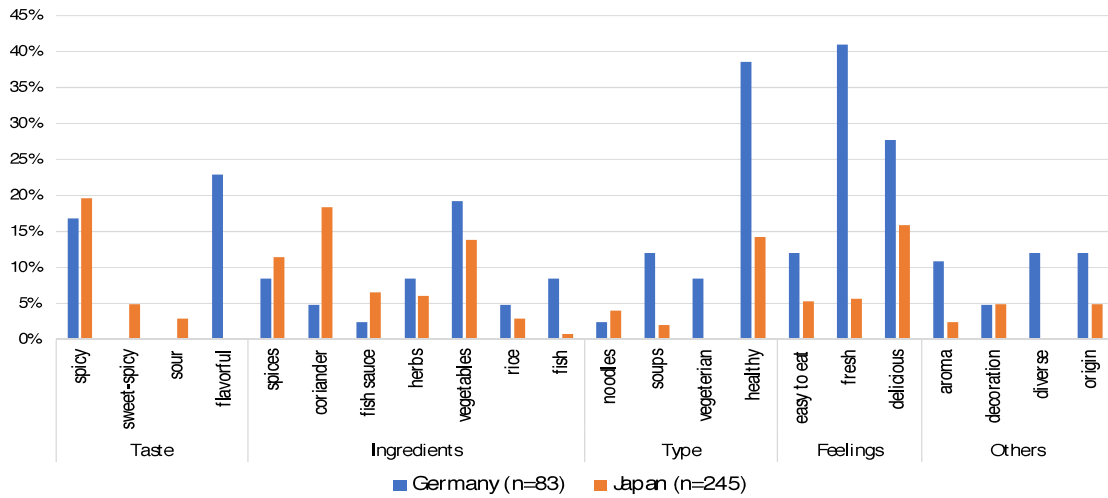
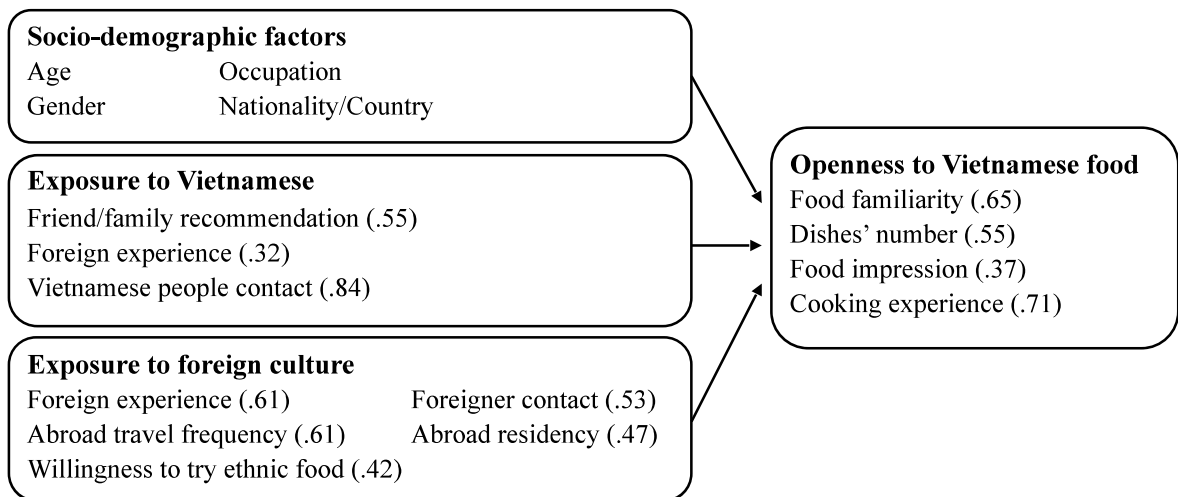


Figure 2. Impression on Vietnamese food



Notes: Maximum likelihood, Retained factor=1. Factors with a loading score smaller than 0.3 are excluded.

Figure 3. Analytical framework with the EFA factor loading