

INTRODUCTION

The rise of chronic diseases and environmental sustainability issues highlights the need for policies that promote healthy and sustainable food systems (Clark et al., 2020). Traditional Health Beliefs (THB), such as those from China, emphasize living in harmony with nature. Aiming to enhance personal health, THB highlights practices such as consuming local, seasonal foods and minimizing waste (Niu et al., 2025), aligning with sustainability. Therefore, THB has the potential to bridge health and sustainability concerns in food consumption.

OBJECTIVE

Investigate the psychological mechanism by which THB links healthy and sustainable food consumption. Examine how THB moderates the relationship between food-related health and sustainability concerns.

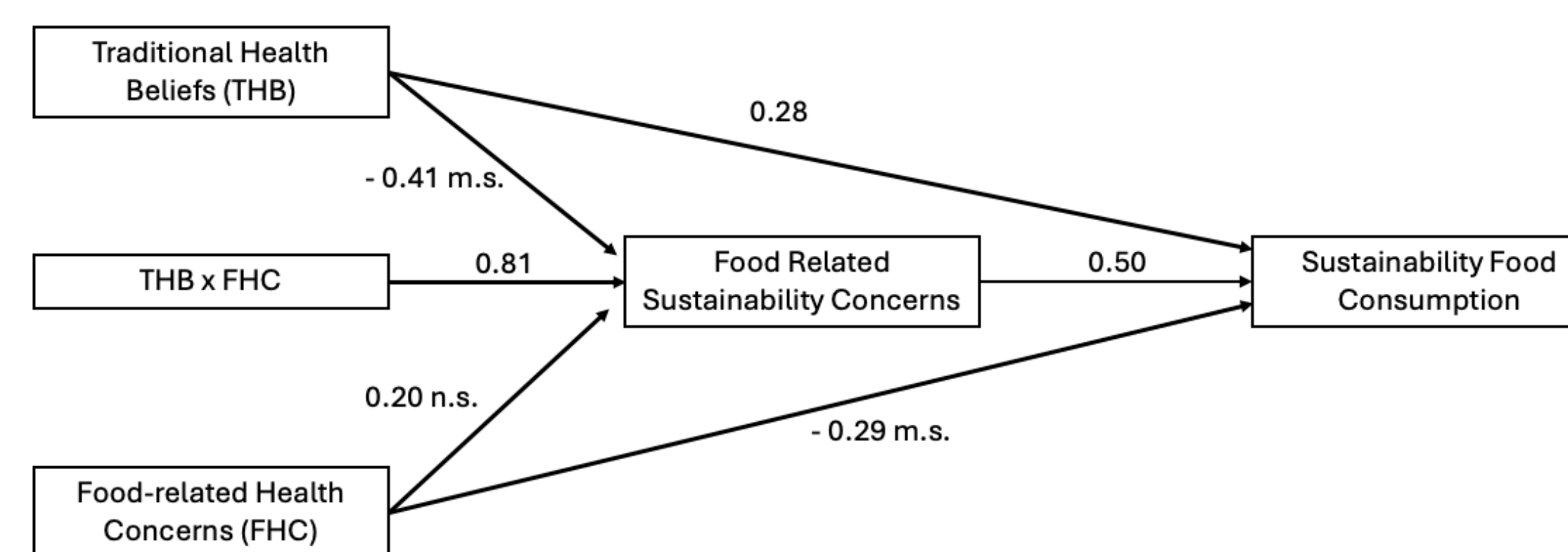
METHODS

This study surveyed 978 participants in China and asked questions regarding their traditional health beliefs, food-related health (Roininen et al., 1999) and sustainability concerns (Van Loo et al., 2017), and sustainable eating behaviours.

THB is measured in beliefs about Western versus Chinese medicine using a 4-item scale covering general medical care quality, therapeutic effects, and maintaining health (Chan et al., 2003). Sustainable eating behaviour (Van Loo et al., 2017) is measured in a 6-item Likert scale regarding sustainable consumption, such as organic food, local food, plant-based protein, and food waste reduction.

The data was analyzed in a structural equation model (See Figure 1), where sustainable eating behaviour was specified as an endogenous variable, with traditional health beliefs, food-related health concerns, and their interaction specified as extraneous variables.

Figure 1: The standardized estimated coefficients of the structural equation model



Goodness of Fit of model: AGFI=0.974, RMSEA<0.01, Chi-sq=0.158 (p=0.69).
 Note: n.s.=not significant; m.s.=marginal significant; all other estimated coefficients of paths are significant (p<0.05).

RESULTS

Direct effects:

A stronger sustainability concern predicts more sustainable eating behaviour (b=0.50, p<0.001).

The health concern is negatively associated with sustainable consumption behaviour (b=-0.29, p=0.01).

Participants with stronger THB demonstrated higher sustainable food consumption behaviour (b=0.28, p<0.001).

Moderating effect of THB:

Results clearly demonstrate a moderating effect of traditional health beliefs:

-THB has a marginally significant negative direct association with sustainability concerns (b=-0.41, p=0.06), while the path from health concerns to sustainability concerns is not significant (b=0.20, p>0.34).

-The interaction effect of traditional health beliefs by health concerns on sustainability concerns is positive (b=0.81, p=0.01).

This pattern of the results shows that THB links health concerns with sustainability concerns. Participants with high health concerns tend to be more concerned with sustainability if they have high THB.

CONCLUSION

THB is an effective belief system for aligning health and sustainability goals and promoting sustainable food consumption. For Canada's agri-food industry, integrating cultural values like THB into consumer education could address the growing demand for sustainable and healthy food systems.

POLICY IMPLICATION

- Canada's agri-food sector can incorporate THB principles, such as "living in harmony with nature," to bridge healthy and sustainable eating practices
- Campaigns could highlight the interconnectedness of personal health and environmental sustainability through the lens of THB.
- Highlight the contributions of immigrant communities to Canada's food landscape, promoting dietary diversity and cultural exchange.
- Future research should investigate similar belief systems from other cultures and broader consumer demographics.

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