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Malaysian Consumers' Acceptance of Indonesian Food Quality and Restaurant Attributes

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Abstract

The popularity of Indonesian cuisine in Malaysia has resulted in the increased number of Indonesian restaurants that serve as ethnic restaurants. Due to the nearly similar-taste dishes to the local food, Indonesian foods are now becoming popular in many Malaysian diets and have been ingrained in the Malaysian food culture of dining out. Nevertheless, the differences in culture and value can have an impact on how decisions are made and businesses are run, thus making it tough for foreign companies to succeed. Therefore, the objective of this study is to better understand the Indonesian food quality and restaurant attributes towards customers' acceptance in Malaysia. The quantitative research design was used in this study, and the information was acquired using a self-administered questionnaire from Malaysian customers aged 18 to 60 who have dined in Indonesian restaurants in the Klang Valley area. Overall, this study confirmed that the majority of the consumers moderately accepted Indonesian foods, particularly pertaining to sensory quality properties and restaurant attributes. It is suggested that the restaurant operators should concentrate on their food quality, hygiene and service quality, which are likely to gain repeat customer patronage and favourable word-of-mouth.

Keywords: Food Quality, Restaurant Attribute, Customer Acceptance, Indonesian Food

Introduction

Today's consumers are looking for new flavour combinations and eating experiences. As consumers are exposed to various ethnic food cultures in their own diets, food choices are likely to diversify as societies continue to expand and change (Ting et al., 2017). Due to the growing universal interchange of trade, the movement of different ethnicities around the world, tourist travel options and globalization, ethnic food has become more well-known and consumed in recent decades. More people are eating ethnic food because they enjoy experiencing the foreign culture and the taste.

Malaysia and Indonesia are two neighbouring countries whose people share many commonalities while still having significant distinctions. Both nations are mostly populated by Malay ethnicities with similar ancestors, whose majority practice Islam as their religion (Raji et al., 2017). Unexpectedly, many resemblances in the culture and way of life are shared by the majority of the populations of both countries (Subhan et al., 2014). Migration from numerous parts of Indonesia to Malaysia, including ethnic Bugis, Javanese, Kampar, Banjar, Mandailing, Minangkabau and others, has made them practice the tradition of each region's customs, acculturation, assimilation, and subsequently evolution until today (Flores, 2019). Through migration, Indonesian cuisine has affected the cuisines throughout Malaysia, particularly in the south and central areas. For instance, due to the migration, a high number of Javanese who resided in the southern part of Malaysia over the years have influenced many Malay cuisines, as the sour, sweet, and spicy cuisine of Java may be plainly noticed (Zahari et al., 2013).

Malaysia is perceived as the second home for Indonesian expats and culinary enterprises, which leads to an increasing interest in consumer preferences and perceptions of Indonesian dishes (Agus et al., 2018). The popularity of Indonesian cuisine has resulted in an increase in the number of Indonesian restaurants in major cities and small towns that serve as ethnic restaurants for Malaysians. Because of the nearly similar-taste dishes to the local food, Indonesian foods are now being immersed in many Malaysian diets and have been ingrained in the Malaysian food culture of dining out on a daily basis (Wijaya, 2019). Nevertheless, despite the similarities in food characteristics between both countries, there are still differences that may entail distinct approaches for food enterprises to be successful internationally. According to Glazer and Karpati (2014), differences in culture can have an impact on how decisions are made and businesses are run as the culture is one of the most challenging parts to control and manage, thus making it tough for foreign companies to succeed. Multinational and global firms must keep this in mind when attempting to operate outside of their native country (Szkudlarek et al., 2020). According to Indonesia's Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy, having so many different traditional foods at the same time has made it difficult for the government to choose the dishes to be promoted to the worldwide market.

Presently, practitioners and academics have made little attempt to undertake empirical or non-empirical research, particularly on the topics linked to customer satisfaction and the acceptability of Indonesian food in Malaysia. Consumer satisfaction and acceptance research in food consumption have generally concentrated on other ethnic foods in Malaysia, such as Korean Japanese (Agus et al., 2018), Thailand (Bunmak, 2013; Zakaria et al., 2010), and Arabic cuisine (Omar et al., 2015), rather than on Indonesian cuisine. Indonesian dishes and restaurants have garnered little attention despite the distinctiveness and popularity in Malaysia's restaurant businesses. Therefore, the objective of this study is to better understand the Indonesian food quality and restaurant attributes and their influence on customers' acceptance in Malaysia.

Literature Review

Indonesian Food Market in Malaysia

Indonesian food is renowned for being one of the world's most vibrant and delectable. Indonesian cuisine is evidently rich in variety and flavour due to its immense geographic and cultural diversity (Wijaya, 2019). There are hundreds of native foods that might serve as a

powerful focus point for portraying Indonesian culture. Today's society, with its emphasis on modernization, stimulates people's desire to consume cuisines from other nations (Poulain et al., 2015). With so many similarities to Malaysian culture, it is no surprise that many Malaysian consumers have a strong preference for Indonesian dishes. As a result, Indonesia and Malaysia diet that evolved on almost the same land and under similar weather conditions, but acquired distinct regional characteristics as a result of the impact of history and civilization on the cultures of the two nations. Even before the differences, some parallels and commonalities immediately become apparent. There are many Indonesian restaurants serving Indonesian cuisine in almost every part of the world (Rahman, 2020). Many previous studies highlighted the effects of immigrants who migrate to another country and use their culinary cultural skills to operate restaurant businesses where they can find potential customers and consider the growth of ethnic restaurant businesses operating outside of their native country. Indonesian cuisines are widely consumed across the world and are common in Malaysian daily diets (Nahar et al., 2018). The growth of Indonesian restaurant enterprises in Malaysia is linked to migration from Indonesia to Malaysia, as well as the craving for Indonesian food among Malaysian tourists returning from Indonesia and the desire to dine out in Malaysia (Flores, 2019). As a result, there is a growing emergence of numerous Indonesian restaurants that serve authentic Indonesian foods throughout Malaysia, such as Ole-ole, Bumbu Bali, Ayam Penyet, Waroeng Penyet, Es Teler 77, Ayam Penyet Ria, Warung Leko, to name a few.

Indonesian Food

The Indonesian food culture is molded by numerous aspects including history, nature, race and tradition. Due to its huge geographic and cultural diversity across the archipelagos, Indonesian cuisine is evidently rich in variety and taste (Taviani, 2019). Each region of Indonesia, for example, creates its own combinations and intensities when utilizing fresh herbs and spices to generate a culinary taste that is spicy, strong, hot, sweet, sour, or a combination of these flavors. The interesting and unique foods names such as the popular *gado-gado* (the salad of blanched vegetables), *bebek betutu* (duck breasts in Balinese spices), *marabak kubang* (Sumatran stuffed pancakes), *lapis legit* (spiced layered cake), *sop buntut* (oxtail Soup), *nasi rawon* (beef stew from East Java), *nasi uduk* (rice cooked in coconut milk), *pempek* or *empek-empek* (made of fish and tapioca and contains an egg in the middle), and many others.

In general, Indonesian cuisine may be divided into several categories based on the country's six largest islands. Each has its own culinary culture, which is formed by natural circumstances, history, and culture (Wijaya, 2019). Padang restaurant chains, for example, may be found all across Indonesia as well as in neighbouring countries like Malaysia and Singapore, making Padang one of the most popular Indonesian regional cuisines among international tourists. Aside from rice and side dishes, condiments such as chili-hot sambal and something crunchy to contrast with like deep-fried small anchovies (*ikan teri*), deep-fried tempeh or tapioca crackers (*krupuk*) are typical. Tempeh is a type of tofu that has been adapted to the Indonesian tropical environment.

Restaurant Quality Attributes

Various previous studies highlighted the customers' perception of restaurant quality in relation to the purpose of the physical environment. According to Omar et al (2015), the restaurant environment significantly relates to the feelings of pleasure, excitement, and

relaxation. As a result, numerous tangible cues from atmospheric elements can be utilized by customers to evaluate the quality of a restaurant (Yu et al., 2018). Omar et al (2015) identified that restaurant features including dining area layout, interior design, and lighting have an impact on customers' perception and satisfaction. Besides that, several other atmospheric characteristics include auditory and visual cues such as colour, space, and music. As mentioned by Rajput and Gahfoor (2020), to entice and build customer loyalty, it is crucial for restaurants to place importance on ambience. However, Andaleeb and Conway (2006), on the other hand, stressed that restaurant's appearance and physical design have no influence on customer satisfaction. Farooq (2019) also found that service quality has an important impact in determining customer satisfaction and loyalty in a restaurant setting. Many previous researchers identified that restaurant business success depends on the service quality to determine the company's profitability.

Perceived Food Sensory Quality

According to Kotler (2011); Keller et al (2008), quality is referred to the full set of characteristics and features of a product or service that are capable of satisfying the stated or implicit demands of the product or service. However, quality is a subjective matter, and each individual interprets it differently. Some studies have shown that the definition of quality is not static, but rather relies on the standpoint from which it is measured: a definition in technical and industrial terms may differ from the impression of customers (Steenkamp, 1990). In fact, multiple elements contribute in determining the quality of a food product from the consumer's perspective, including not only intrinsic traits such as flavour and other sensory features, but also external criteria such as labelling and origin (Symmank, 2018). Consumers are often unable to judge the quality of food goods prior to purchase, so they rely on quality cues such as labelling, brands, or pricing (Chamhuri & Batt, 2015).

Malaysians' Food Consumption

Malaysian consumers' food consumption habits have changed dramatically as a result of increased income levels and the expansion of education (Lian & Gopal, 2021). Key metropolitan districts with strong purchasing power and a large population have experienced an increase in the number of upscale restaurants and food courts, driving many customers to frequent restaurants to enjoy high-quality cuisine in pleasant surroundings (Xiao et al., 2019). Ting et al (2017) highlighted in their study that despite the abundance of food options in Malaysia, customers are prepared to experiment with different cultures and cuisines when it comes to choosing their meals. Malaysia, in particular, has experienced consistent expansion in the ethnic food sector. Furthermore, they seek to improve dining experiences with strong flavours and extraordinary textures. The increase in eating out has been linked to the expansion of a wide range of dining options, including fast-food restaurants, hotels, pubs, and ethnic restaurants, in Malaysian towns and cities (Trung et al., 2021). Eating out is also connected to the emergence of ethnic restaurants, where consumers may try something new, take a break from cooking, and enjoy mingling, relaxing, and celebrating (Reddy & van Dam, 2020). In addition, eating at ethnic restaurants provides exposure to outside culture that links food and cultural identity. It has been discovered that apart from taste fulfilment, there is an increasing emphasis on well-being and sustenance, which adds to the growth of the ethnic food sector. Customers are delighted to sample unique highlights of ethnic food and new foods that satisfy their well-being, desires, and cravings (Agus et al., 2018). A study found that customers are prepared to allow or embrace non-local or novel eating regimens that cater

their preferences. In addition, according to previous studies, Malaysians are becoming more knowledgeable about eating foods that are healthy, wholesome, safe, and environmentally friendly. Besides, Xiao et al (2019) added that the increase in dining out consumption is accompanied by an increase in consumer interest in healthier diets. In particular, in Malaysia, the number of customers who have food-related issues has grown, including worries about nutrition, health, and cleanliness.

Methodology

The quantitative research design was used in this study, and the information was acquired using a self-administered questionnaire from Malaysian customers aged 18 to 60 who have dined in Indonesian restaurants in the Klang Valley area. The majority of the items were adapted from previous research on a similar issue in order to achieve the study's objective (Agus et al., 2018; Bunmak, 2013; Yu et al., 2018). The preliminary part addressed the samples' demographic data, such as age, education, gender, and marital status. Section B was designed with four items to assess the perceived food quality. Restaurant quality attributes were measured in section C with five items, and lastly, consumers' acceptance was measured in section D with five items. A five-point Likert scale was used to elicit responses from the respondents, with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 5 representing "strongly agree." To interpret the information, the whole data gathered was entered into the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23. Only 185 responses were usable throughout the information screening procedure. To describe the data of the variables, descriptive statistical analysis was used to determine the frequencies, rates, mean score, and standard deviation. The standard multiple regression analysis was used to determine how much variation in consumer acceptance was explained by the influence of perceived food quality and restaurant attributes. A pilot survey was conducted with 32 respondents to check the reliability, and the final items were slightly amended depending on their feedback.

Findings

Perceived Food Quality of Indonesian Foods

This section of analysis looked into the Perceived Food Quality of Indonesian Foods. The mean score is depicted in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Perceived Food Quality of Indonesian Foods

	Perceived Food Sensory Quality	Mean	S.D.	N
1.	The taste and flavour of the foods are very delicious and authentic.	4.2	.43	185
2.	The appearance and the presentation of the foods make them visually appetizing and tempting.	3.5	.54	185
3.	The foods served are fresh and at the appropriate temperature.	3.2	.51	185
4.	The texture of the foods is suitable to my appetite.	3.8	.42	185
5.	The texture of the food is suitable for my appetite.	4.2	.45	185
6.	The portion of food served is sufficient.	4.0	.41	185

Results in Table 1 show that the majority of the consumers agreed that the taste and flavour of Indonesian food were delicious and authentic ($M = 4.2$), the smell of the foods increased their appetite ($M = 4.2$), and the portion of foods served was appropriate ($M = 4.0$). They also slightly agreed that the appearance and presentation of the foods looked appetising and tempting ($M = 3.5$) and that the texture of the foods was suitable for their appetite ($M = 3.8$). However, they slightly disagreed that the foods served was fresh and served at the right temperature ($M = 3.2$).

Indonesian Restaurant Attributes

Results from Table 2 show that most of the respondents were slightly satisfied with the cleanliness of the restaurant ($M = 3.5$) and agreed that most of the staff practiced good hygiene ($M = 3.8$). They also agreed that the food was reasonably priced ($M = 4.0$) and the staff was friendly and provided prompt service ($M = 3.8$). However, the majority of the customers slightly agreed that the ambiance of the restaurant was comfortable and attractive.

Table 2

Indonesian Restaurant Attributes

	Restaurant attribute	Mean	S.D.	N
1.	The restaurant is clean.	3.5	.55	185
2.	The staff of the restaurant practices good hygiene.	3.8	.57	185
3.	The price of the foods is reasonable	4.0	.60	185
4.	The ambiance of the restaurant is comfortable and attractive.	3.2	.59	185
5.	The staff is friendly and provides fast service.	3.8	.55	185

Consumer Acceptance on Indonesian Foods

This section discusses the general consumer acceptance on Indonesian food quality and restaurant attributes. The respondents were required to answer each of the items using a five-point Likert scale. The mean score and standard deviation are tabulated in the table below.

Table 3

Mean Score of the Consumer Acceptance on Indonesian Foods

	Consumer acceptance	Mean	S.D.	N
1.	I like and enjoy Indonesian foods	3.8	.43	185
2.	I will purchase the Indonesian foods again in the future	4.3	.52	185
3.	I will recommend the foods to others	3.5	.47	185
4.	I can eat Indonesian food everyday	3.2	.58	185
5.	I am satisfied with the overall food and the restaurant quality.	4.1	.56	185

Table 3 shows that the majority of the respondents relatively liked and enjoyed the food (M= 3.8) and will purchase the food again in the future (Mean = 4.3). It shows that the respondents would possibly recommend the products to others (Mean =3.5). Nevertheless, they moderately agreed to eat Indonesian food as their daily meal (M = 3.2). Overall, they were satisfied with the quality of the food and restaurant attributes (M = 4.1).

Relationship Between Perceived Sensory Quality and Restaurant Attributes Towards Malaysian Consumers' Acceptance of Indonesian Foods

The relationship between perceived food sensory quality and consumer acceptance of Indonesian foods was further analysed with standard multiple regression. The beta value under standardised coefficient was evaluated by linking the contribution of the independent variables to the dependent variable. According to the findings in Table 4, perceived food sensory quality and restaurant characteristics explained 54% (p.001) of the variance in consumer acceptance of Indonesian foods. By looking at the beta value, perceived food sensory quality ($\beta=.61$, $p=0.00$) had a moderate influence on consumer acceptance of Indonesian foods. The beta value for restaurant attributes ($=.43$, $p=0.000$) follows, indicating a slightly lower influence on

customer acceptance. This result indicates that all of the variables have a significant influence on customer acceptance, albeit in a moderate amount.

Table 4

Multiple Regression Result

Independent Variable (IV)	Dependent Variable (DV)
	Acceptance of Indonesian foods
<i>Beta Coefficients and Significance Levels</i>	
Sensory Quality	.61*
Restaurant attributes	.43***
R²	.54
F-Change	52.25***

Conclusion

As revealed in the above sections, the result shows to what extent perceived food sensory quality and restaurant attributes had an impact on Indonesian food acceptance (or rejection) of Indonesian foods. Overall, this study confirmed that the majority of the consumers moderately accepted Indonesian foods, particularly pertaining to sensory quality properties and restaurant attributes. Relying on the sensory quality features of Indonesian foods, it is important for Indonesian expats and culinary enterprises to focus their attention on food sensory properties, specifically the taste, flavour, appearance, and texture as perceived by their customers. This considerably improves the product's perceived value across various consumers. Being aware of the restaurant's quality attributes result, it is suggested that the restaurant owners and managers should concentrate on their hygiene and service quality, which is likely to gain repeat customer patronage and more favourable word-of-mouth. In addition, emphasis on polite, fast, simplified, and standardized service in a visually pleasing and clean atmosphere may be appropriate. This is argued by Omar et al (2015) in which interior design, music, colour, furniture, and layout contribute to customer satisfaction. Furthermore, customer acceptability is crucial for food producers and marketers since they have invested significant funds in food product development and promotion. The limitation of the study is that the dimension of this study only focuses on food quality and restaurant attributes within the Klang Valley area. Therefore, similar investigations on the acceptability of foods that highlight other dimensions as well as different contextual settings are suggested for better generalization in future studies.

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