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## Influence of Acculturation on Foodways among Ethnic Groups and Common Acceptable Food

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### Abstract

Acculturation through education, social interaction and media remarkably catalyze the sharing of various ethnic foods through its preparation and consumption or foodways. The acceptance of it by each ethnic group will lead into the common acceptable food in a country. This study reports the comparative analysis on the extent to which acculturation through education, social interaction and media influence the foodways between three Malaysian major ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese and Indian). Result revealed that education, social interaction through event, media as part of acculturation attributes not only provides the understanding of food cultures, familiarize with the ingredients and recipes, the serving and eating of other ethnic's food but influence the foodways or the preparation and consumption of each other ethnic food. In addition, adaptation on each other ethnic food through foodways (preparation and consumption) creates a strong belief on the formation of common acceptable food.

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*Keywords:* Acculturation; foodways; ethnic; common acceptable food

### 1. Introduction

Food preparation and consumption created community affiliation on a variety of levels and in a variety of ways. Food preparation and consumption or popularly known as foodways give valuable insights to the people that perform the acts (Bentley, 2008). It works like a symbol that bringing implication, signal an individual's ethnic connection, beliefs and vehicle for the society. Food that common to a cultural group acts as a bonding mechanism between family and community. What, where, when and how we eat,

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and so as sharing the foodways in routine activities form everyday culture and shape personal and cultural identity (Lyons, 2007). When the two or more ethnic groups share's foodways together, they become closer and will longitudinally sharing a common food in the future (Cook, 2008). The sharing of foodways has long been involved within individual group and between the ethnic groups, (Smith, 2006) and these progressions is noticeable in multi-racial countries. On the same note, acculturation of knowledge, social interaction and media are also believed to catalyze the sharing of various ethnics' food through the foodways and this in turn will form a common acceptable food for a country. With that statement, this study empirically investigates to what extent the acculturation of education, social interaction and media influence the foodways (preparation and consumption) of each ethnic food by three Malaysian major ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese and Indian) towards the formation of common acceptable food.

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1. Acculturation and foodways*

Acculturation refers to a learning process, practices and customs of a new culture, acquiring the capability to function within the main culture while preserving the original culture (Newman & Sahak, 2012). It signify an act in which part of a cultural adopt the beliefs and behaviours of another culture. Acculturation explains the process of cultural and psychological change or alteration that results following a meeting between cultures (Sam & Berry, 2010). It has regarded as multi-dimensional process in which individual and groups undergo stages of adjustment and changes in several domains such as language, socioeconomic and cultural values (Lopez-Class, Castro, & Ramirez, 2011). Various elements in ethnic cultures through acculturation are increasing or lessening while participating in the larger identity (Jennings, Forbes, McDermott, & Hulse, 2006). Acculturation although engaging the minority in adopting habits and language patterns of the dominant group it can be a shared by all groups and vice versa (Berry, 2005). It involved interaction of at least two cultures or more by which a person learns and accept the norms and values of a different culture (Gharaei, Rafieian, & Jalalkamali, 2012).

Knowledge, language, media and social interaction as well contribute to food cultural acculturation and adaptation among different ethnic groups (Kim, 2006). The exchange of food cultural features occurs when different culture groups of individuals come into continuous contact then the original cultural patterns of both groups may possibly alter.

Foodways in every culture on the other hand constitute an organized system or a language that through its structure and components convey meaning and contributes to the organization of the natural world (Keane & Willetts, 1994). Foodways refer as an act or behaviors involved the preparation, presentation and consumption of food that characterized by individuals and society (Kemmer, 2000). It is related to cultural of foods, the tools, techniques and ingredients for which food is prepared and its customs (Germann Molz, 2007). Food consumed at the individual and community levels influenced by the availability and the cultural environment. Different foods often consumed by individuals with distinct statuses roles are important in maintaining their social positions.

In line with above notion, some major ethnic foods in multiracial countries are believed to be adjusted and adapted by each ethnic group through the foodways which involved preparation and consumption. Foodways is conditioned by meaning with types of food that we eat, the manner in which we preserved, prepared and served (Angulo, 1988). It signals an individual's ethnic connections and competence (Mira Crouch & O'Neill, 2000). Keane & Willetts (1994) contended that foodways are a significant element in creating the common acceptable food and food identity formation for the society and nation. Cleveland et.al (2009) posited that acculturation through food knowledge (reading, language, education) media

(television, newspaper columns, magazines) and social interaction (social gatherings, events, parties) contribute to food cultural adaptation and gradually creates common acceptable food and a food identity. The acculturation and adaptation processes involve intertwine of the components and intervention with important principles, values, and realities of the new culture (Côté, 2006). In the context of this study, education, social interaction and media as part of the acculturation attributes are believed to influence the preparation and consumption of each other ethnic food by the three Malaysian major ethnic groups namely Malay, Chinese and Indian and presumably contribute to the common acceptable food among the ethnic groups.

## *2.2. Methodology*

Survey questionnaire is chosen for this research and the population was among individuals who experienced in preparing and consuming the three major ethnic foods. Restaurant customers are believed to be the best individuals to provide reliable information. The huge populations of Malay, Chinese and Indians restaurant customers however, limit researchers to collect the desired information throughout the country. Kelang Valley (Lembah Kelang) comprises of Kuala Lumpur, its suburbs and adjoining cities and towns in the state of Selangor, such as Shah Alam, Petaling Jaya, and Klang is therefore selected as the data collection setting.

This study employed self-administered questionnaire and questions are designed to measure levels of respondents' agreement with statements relevant to issue investigated. Seven points Likert scale used which score close to seven indicate a very strong attitude in favor of the statement. Meanwhile, a score close to one indicate a very strong attitude against the statement. The survey questionnaire containing questions relating the variables divided into five major sections. Section A with eight items focused on the respondents' demographic profiles. Section B with eighteen items assessed the influence of acculturation attributes through education toward preparation and consumption of major ethnic food. Section C with six items assessed the influence of acculturation attribute through social interaction toward the preparation and consumption of major ethnic food. The five items in section D used to assess the influence of acculturation attribute through media toward the preparation and consumption of major ethnic food.

Surveyed with experienced respondents undertaken at selected popular supermarkets namely Giants, Tesco Carrefour and shopping complexes such as SACC Mall, PKNS complex, Sunway Pyramid, The Store Pacific, Jaya Jusco, and Sogo Mall in Kuala Lumpur, Shah Alam, Petaling Jaya and Kelang. These shopping complexes are the most highly visited places in the city neighborhood especially during the weekend. Respondents randomly approached before entering the shopping malls with a screening question to whether they had experienced in preparing and consuming all three major ethnic foods. Those met the criteria's invited to take part in the study. The surveyed undertaken within five weekends and with a positive response, 392 questionnaires successfully collected.

## **3. Results and discussions**

### *3.1. Characteristics of the sample*

Based on frequency test, Malays constituted around 42.34 percent (n=166) of the total respondents compared to 31.88 percent (n=125) Chinese, and 25.76 percent (n=101) Indian. This proportion did provide a reasonable representation of ethnic ratios in Malaysia, which consist of 60:30:10 (Malay, Chinese and Indians). On religion, 42.34 percent (n=166) of the respondents were Islam, followed by

22.70 per cent (n=89) Buddhist, 17.85 percent (n=70) Hindu and 817.09 percent (n=67) Christian (Table 1).

Table 1. Participant ethnic and religion information

Ethnic	n	Percentage %
Malay	166	42.34
Indian	101	25.76
Chinese	125	31.88
Total	392	100%
Religion	n	Percentage %
Islam	166	42.34
Buddhist	89	22.70
Hindus	70	17.85
Christian	67	17.09
Total	392	100%

### 3.2. Comparison between ethnic groups on the influence of education as part of acculturation toward foodways (preparation and consumption)

To evaluate the existence of differences among the ethnic respondents on the impact of foodways through education, analysis of One-Way ANOVA and Scheffe post hoc multiple comparisons was employed. Six items showed statistically significant differences between ethnic groups. The majority of the ethnic respondents shared the same view by agreeing with most of the items. They perceived education contribute to their understanding of each ethnic food (Malay,  $M=5.85$ , Indian,  $M=5.67$  and Chinese,  $M=5.63$ ,  $p = .256$ ) and create their understanding of the ingredients of each ethnic popular food (Malay,  $M=5.65$ , Indian,  $M=5.74$  and Chinese,  $M=5.59$ ,  $p = .829$ ). They agreed education makes them familiar with some of each other ethnic recipes (Malay,  $M=5.61$ , Indian,  $M=5.63$  and Chinese,  $M=5.66$ ,  $p=.211$ ) and education contribute to their understanding of how some of popular each ethnic food served and consumed (Malay,  $M=5.62$ , Indian,  $M=5.69$  and Chinese,  $M=5.71$ ,  $p = .363$ ). The three ethnic groups still sharing the same view on the item that education catalyst the sharing of each ethnic food (Malay,  $M=5.90$ , Chinese,  $M=5.55$  and Indian,  $M=5.70$ ,  $p = .376$ ).

Statistically significant appeared on the item that education gives the ability to at least prepare some of other ethnic foods with Malay ( $M=5.82$ ) agreed with the statement compared to somewhat agree given by Indian ( $M=5.02$ ) and Chinese ( $M=4.98$ ,  $p < .05$ ). With small different appeared, three Malaysia major ethnic groups in this sample perceived that education plays its role in the acculturation process and influence the foodways or the preparation and consumption of each other ethnic food. In other word, foods cross culturing or sharing each other food occurring among three major ethnic groups.

### 3.3. Comparison between ethnic groups on the impact social interaction (event) as part acculturation toward foodways (preparation and consumption)

Based One-Way ANOVA and Scheffe post hoc multiple comparisons, out of six items, four items showed no statistically significant differences between ethnic groups. Ethnic groups respondent strongly agrees that social events, gatherings, and festivals contribute to their understanding of each ethnic food

culture (Malay,  $M=6.55$ , Indian,  $M=6.52$  and Chinese,  $M=6.52$ ,  $p=.868$ ). They were sharing the same view that social events, gatherings and festivals create understanding each major ethnic recipes (Malay,  $M=5.56$ , Indian,  $M=5.59$  and Chinese,  $M=5.60$ ,  $p=.152$ ). Similarly, they believed that social events, gatherings and festivals contribute to their understanding of how some of each ethnic food served and consumed (Malay,  $M=5.82$ , Indian,  $M=5.68$  and Chinese,  $M=5.63$ ,  $p=.610$ ). The same result received that the social event, gathering, and festival catalyst the sharing of the each other ethnic food (Malay,  $M=6.14$ , Indian,  $M=6.29$  and Chinese,  $M=6.28$ ,  $p=.371$ ).

Difference view appeared on the item that social events, gatherings and festivals contribute to an understanding of the ingredients of some popular each ethnic food. Malay inclined toward agreeing (Malay,  $M=5.54$ ) compared to less agreement given by Indian ( $M=5.27$ ) and Chinese ( $M=5.13$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Different perception also received on item that social events, gatherings and festivals give the exposure and the ability to at least prepare some of each two major ethnic foods whereby Malay agree ( $M=5.82$ ) this item compared to Chinese ( $M=5.38$ ) and Indian ( $M=5.33$ ,  $p<.000$ ). The differences probably laying that Malays are always organizing or attending social gathering as compared to Chinese and Indian. With only two differences, it could be said that social interaction through events plays its role in the acculturation process and influence the foodways or the preparation and consumption of each other ethnic food. In other word, social interaction through events creates the sharing of each other ethnic food.

### *3.4. Comparison between ethnic groups on the influence of media as part acculturation toward foodways (preparation and consumption)*

Based on similar tests, statistically significant differences appeared on four items. The differences mostly occurred between Malay and Chinese respondents. On item that newspaper, magazines and book contributes to understanding of each other ethnic recipes, Malay, ( $M=5.77$ ) and Indian ( $M=5.55$ ) agreed on this statement compared to less agreement given by Chinese ( $M=5.35$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Malay, ( $M=5.62$ ) and Indian ( $M=5.53$ ) perceived that newspaper, magazines and book reading contribute to their understanding of how some each popular ethnic food served and consumed as opposed slightly agreed given Chinese ( $M=5.24$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Malay, ( $M=5.66$ ) and Indian ( $M=5.54$ ) have a greater level of agreement to Chinese ( $M=5.30$ ,  $p<.01$ ) that newspaper, magazines and book reading give them the exposure and the ability to at least prepare some of each ethnic foods. On the item that newspaper, magazines and book reading catalyst the sharing of each ethnic foods, Malay, ( $M=6.68$ ) and Indian ( $M=6.43$ ) agreed with the statement compared to less agreement given by Chinese ( $M=5.30$ ,  $p<.01$ ). The same result appeared in the item that newspaper, magazines and book reading create their understanding of ingredients on some of each popular ethnic food (Malay,  $M=5.77$ , Indian,  $M=5.69$  compared to Chinese,  $M=5.62$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

As for item that newspaper, magazines and book reading contributes to their understanding of each ethnic's culture, all ethnic respondents showing the similar patent of agreement when no statistical differences appeared (Malay,  $M=5.84$ , Indian,  $M=5.64$  and Chinese,  $M=5.71$ ,  $p=.514$ ). These findings suggest although a fewer differences appeared in term of familiarity, understanding of how each ethnic food served and ability to prepare but overall newspaper, magazines and book reading as part acculturation giving impact or slightly influence the foodways or the preparation and consumption of each other ethnic food.

### *3.5. Comparison between ethnic groups on the impact of adaptation toward foodways (preparation and consumption)*

This sub-section compares and contrast view of three ethnic groups with regard to the impact of adaptation toward foodways or the preparation and consumption. This analysis is to see whether any

differences occur between ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese and Indian) on the level of adaptation toward preparation and consumption of each other ethnic food. It predicted when the items modified and developed there would be small differences between the three major ethnic. This assumption holds true with no statistically significant difference appeared in any eight items used either from ANOVA or by means of a Scheffe post hoc multiple comparisons. Ethnic respondents had the same view toward all the items.

Ethnic groups respondent clearly felt attached on some of each other ethnic foods after preparing (Malay,  $M=5.54$ , Indian,  $M=5.57$  and Chinese,  $M=5.53$   $p=.174$ ) and consuming it (Malay,  $M=5.81$ , Indian,  $M=5.69$  and Chinese,  $M=5.62$   $p=.476$ ). They felt comfortable using each other methods of cooking in their food preparation (Malay,  $M=5.66$ , Indian,  $M=5.79$  and Chinese,  $M=5.60$ ,  $p=.473$ ) and comfortable of using each other recipes (Malay,  $M=6.12$ , Indian  $M=6.31$  and Chinese,  $M=6.29$ ,  $p=.117$ ). This is evident when they accepted each other ethnic food as long not opposed to their religious believed (Malay,  $M=6.03$ , Indian,  $M=6.02$  and Chinese,  $M=6.00$ ,  $p=.720$ ) and easily adapted each other ethnic methods of cooking (Malay,  $M=6.80$ , Indian,  $M=6.77$  and Chinese,  $M=6.82$ ,  $p=.721$ ). Most importantly all ethnic groups believe the adaptation of the popular each other ethnic type of foods contributes to a common acceptable food for Malaysian (Malay,  $M=6.79$ , Indian,  $M=6.73$  and Chinese,  $M=6.82$ ,  $p=.752$ ). This sub-section analysis clearly indicates cross-culturing processes and adaptation of each other ethnic food are occurring among the Malay, Chinese and Indian as Malaysian major ethnic groups or in multi racial country.

#### **4. Conclusion**

A very clear picture emerged in the study that education, social interaction and media as part of acculturation attributes provides the understanding of food cultures, familiarize with the ingredients and recipes, the serving and eating of other ethnics' food (Kline & Liu, 2005). The study-finding manifests that food cross culturing in the multiracial country like Malaysia gradually evolves through education, social interaction and media as part of acculturation. In fact, acculturation attributes plays significant role in influencing the foodways or the preparation and consumption of each other ethnic food. Most importantly and remarkable finding is that adaptation on each other ethnic food through preparation and consumption creates a strong belief on the formation of common acceptable food. This strengthening other researcher notion that the adaptations of various ethnic foods by different ethnic group in multicultural/ethnic nation will lead to common acceptable food and longitudinally forming what could be called national food identity (Fox & Ward, 2008). Not only that, food could also act in strengthening the integrative force, solidarity and social bonding and alliances among the communities and ethnic groups. In sum, these optimistic indications not only provide the fundamental basis for us to further investigate on this issue and other researchers to replicate the study in other multiracial contextual setting.

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