Safeguarding Malaysian Heritage Food (MHF): The Impact of Malaysian Food Culture and Tourists’ Food Culture Involvement on Intentional Loyalty

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Abstract

Cultural heritage food experiences in tourism destination hold a boundless impression on tourists’ loyalty towards a destination. The researchers conducted a survey on 100 international tourists and used multiple regression analysis to verify the factors affecting the intentional loyalty on heritage food consumption. Consequently, this study encountered that both Food Culture Involvement and Malaysian Food Culture had impact on tourists’ Intentional Loyalty that involves revisiting Malaysia and repurchasing MHF. Also, this research outlines substantive recommendations on marketing strategies specifically for food providers to market MHF in establishing Malaysia as the distinctive food tourism destination in the eyes of the world.

Keywords: food culture; involvement; tourist; heritage food; intentional loyalty.

1. Introduction

Food is the utmost elements in the tourism sector that acts as a sense of place attraction for travelers (Bessiere, 1998; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Ryu & Jang, 2006; Seo, Kim, Oh, & Yun, 2013) who seeks for unusual or extraordinary food experience and different food culture that might not acquire at their home countries. A tourism destination may
be popular because of the unique cuisines it served for tourists. This is obviously being observed in the European Country such as France and Italy have their authentic food culture of pizza and pasta sensations (Henderson, 2009). Tourists usually involve in an aggressive searching and tasting the new sensation of food that found to be exciting and fun for their vacation. Indeed, tourists also spend almost half of the expenditure on food and drinks while having their splendid and pleasant holiday. As Mak, Lumbers, & Eves, (2012) stated that the proportion of tourists’ allocation on food is high, which contributed to 30% of tourism revenues. Hence, rather than fulfilling tourists’ satiety at a destination, the food itself could magnetize them to perform a second visit, encourage and sharing their best moments with family and friends or with someone special in their life.

Recently, Malaysia had received a myriad number of international tourists encompass various continents that lead to the development of tourism industry sector. In 2013, Malaysia has recorded at about 25.72 million of tourist arrivals and receipts RM 65.44 billion from tourism industry. Meanwhile, as delineated in Malaysia Tourism Transformation Plan (MTTP) 2020, the Malaysian government has proclaimed to achieve 36 million tourist arrivals through Visit Malaysia Year (VMY) 2014 campaign, namely theme “Celebrating 1Malaysia Truly Asia”. (MOTOUR, 2013). Although Malaysia is an eminence food paradise in serving miscellaneous ranges of local and global cuisines, the contribution of MHF on cultural values is still imperfect. This can be explained by a majority of the tourists which view Malaysia as a country with beautiful landscape, picturesque scenery and wonderful beaches but not for the exclusive offering of heritage food.

Even though the issue of food culture is a terrific debate around the globe, yet there is inconclusive literature investigating the relationship between the perceived importance of Malaysian Food Culture and tourists’ Food Culture Involvement towards Intentional Loyalty. For that reason, this research embodies the critical dimensions influencing the level of international tourists’ involvement and their perception of Malaysian Food Culture towards revisiting Malaysia and intention to repurchase MHF in the future. In the other hand, this study also aids in promoting MHF to be the world famous Malaysian cuisines which turn into a major reason for tourism destination selection. Therefore, the researchers constructed two research questions to determine the significant impact of independent variables on the dependent variable:

RQ1: How do the international tourists’ Food Culture Involvement and perceived importance of Malaysian Food Culture could predict international tourists’ Intentional Loyalty? How much variance of international tourists’ Intentional Loyalty can be elucidated by these two variables?

RQ2: Among these two predictors, which one predicts international tourists’ Intentional Loyalty the best?

Thus, the primary dimensional factors directing those international tourists’ intention to repurchase MHF and revisit Malaysia served as the backbone of the proposed framework model.

2. Literature review

2.1. Intentional loyalty

The concept of loyalty is divided into three groups; behavioral, attitudinal and composite. According to Sondoh, Omar, Wahid, Ishak & Harun (2007), attitudinal loyalty is known as “stated preferences, commitment or purchase intentions of the customers” (Mellens, Dekimpe, & Steenkamp, 1996), whereas behavioral loyalty is explained as the frequency of repeat buying or proportion of purchase. Next, the third approach is a composite approach which illuminates the combination of both attitudinal and behavioral to enhance the understanding of loyalty definition (Sondoh et al., 2007). On the other side, for a travel destination perspective, revisiting and recommendation to others are perceived to be linked to behavioral loyalty (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). This was also being supported by Opperman (2000) that claims tourists’ experience at a destination as a product, then their level of loyalty can be reflected through behavioral intention of revisiting the destination and recommend those experiences to friends and relatives. Meanwhile, doValle, Silva, Mendes, & Guerreiro (2006) added that research on tourists’ Intentional Loyalty is beneficial for both marketing and management team in the tourism industry to retain the loyal tourists as they contributed to economic value and the intentional loyalty study has been investigated since 1990s (Zhang et al., 2014; Dimanche & Havitz, 1994) until nowadays. Besides, Um, Chon, & Ro (2006), Petrick (2004) and doValle et al. (2006) also found that, a tourism destination could maximize its profit by impeding the reliable loyal tourists through repeat
visitation. Hence, the elements of repurchase intention and revisit intention were employed to predict tourists’ Intentional Loyalty behavior (Yoon & Uysal, 2005) in this study.

2.2. Food culture in Malaysia

Known as an overwhelming multi-ethnic country, Malaysia has demonstrated its fabulous culture and history through its heritage food. Malaysian Heritage Food or known as MHF which exhibits three major unique ethnic food tastes; Malay, Chinese and Indian. From Table 1, it shows the food cultures and traditions preparation that were practiced by Malaysian people according to their culture, beliefs and values. Formerly, Malaysian people love to spend time by eating special dishes at home whereby the women tend to be the best chef for their families. However, there is an emerging trend of new food culture in Malaysia which called as ‘eating out’ habit. This new food consumption practices are classified based on food types, places to get for the food and several types of consumers (Ali & Abdullah, 2012). Thus, through social transformation of urbanization, it has increased up the value of Malaysian homemade heritage food and give opportunity for international tourists to experience varieties of Malaysian dishes at everywhere during their vacation in Malaysia.

Table 1. Food culture practices of Malay, Chinese and Indian in Malaysia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Indian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic principles of food intake</td>
<td>Influenced by Al-Quran Concept of Halal and Haram heat, cold and wind - Eat when hungry - Not eat (for a harmonious element in the body).</td>
<td>Influenced by Yinshih (food and beverages) - Fan-ts'ai Cereals - vegetables and meat - The concept of five elements.</td>
<td>Influenced by Ayurveda - Usna (hot food) - Tampu (cold food) - Sama (neutral food) - Eat two times a day - Tridosha - Pitta, kappa, Vayu - The concept of five elements - Taboo - Vegetarian (a harmonious element in the body).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingredients in food</td>
<td>Depending on the material in the food resources available in the environment. Fishermen, fish Peasant-agricultural products.</td>
<td>North-more oily South-Szechwan and Hunan, were used in chili powder Kiangsu and Chekiang emphasize freshness. Cantonese-sweet.</td>
<td>North-milk South-rice West-sweet East-grain - Cooking by caste.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking techniques</td>
<td>Using the pot soil, pan, natural materials like bamboo, leaves, wood, shell, Palas leaves, banana leaves.</td>
<td>Using a wok, pot soil, and natural materials like bamboo, leaves, and wood.</td>
<td>Using the pot soil, pan, banana leaf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal</td>
<td>Festive meals, marriages, births, shaving the crown, herindil ceremony, the baby down the land, circumcision, death, gratitude.</td>
<td>New Year’s celebrations, lanterns, dragon boats month, the day the oldest, marriage, birth, commemorate the spirit, death.</td>
<td>Religious ceremonies, celebrations, births, pierce, death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and culture</td>
<td>Glutinous rice with yellow-Thanks giving betel leaves -entertain guests Raw materials associated with men-Cooking food-associated with females.</td>
<td>Cake basket-increasing status shark fish - more income cake roll-prosperous life Fruit orange-gold Ball in the sup-consolidation in the family.</td>
<td>Milk or Ghee - light sources Candy-goodness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Radzi, Murad, & Bakar (2010)

As food tourism destination accommodates tourists with delicious food selections, MHF is having a delightful sense of taste that offers them with a wonderful, unforgettable experience. Furthermore, Malay, Chinese and Indian food is described in details. First, the main heritage dish of Malay is Nasi Lemak which contains a coconut milk boiled rice served with chilies (sambal), fried anchovies (ikan bilis goreng), hard-boiled egg, roasted peanuts and slices of cucumber, traditionally wrapped in a fresh, cleaned banana leaf (Yoshino, 2010; Hutton, Wendy, & Tettoni, 2005). While Chinese food used to add some of Malay famous spices and improved the taste of its cuisines to suit with all
Malaysian taste buds. For instance, one of the famous cuisines is Char Kuey Teow made from flat white noodles, stirred and fried with soy sauce, cockles, bean sprouts, eggs, chives and spread with some lime. (Yoshino, 2010). Other than that, Mamak food often describes Indian food in Malaysia. Mamak restaurants are abundantly available everywhere in Malaysia that served Halal food and offered a culinary fusion of one Malaysian food (Malay, Chinese and Indian food) that operates 24 seven. Roti Canai (round-flat bread served with dhal curry) is popular, favorite and acceptable Indian food by the Malaysian since ages ago for their breakfast. To sum up, Malaysian Heritage Food could be illuminated as “hot and spicy, miscellaneous sensory exploration, strapping multi-views and impression of culture” (Omar, Ab Karim, & Omar, 2014) and the examples of Malay, Chinese, and India MHF are shown in Fig. 1.

![Fig. 1. Examples of MHF (a) Nasi Lemak; (b) Char Kuey Teow; (c) Roti Canai](Source: Google website)

2.3. Perceived importance of Malaysian food culture

As a matter of fact, culture is a social factor which hold a favorable influence in making a decision. Even though it can be a potential predictor, still it has been disregarded when exploring the tourist-destination relationship (Ng, Lee, & Soutar, 2007). In fact, some travelers are food novelty seekers; they travel to many countries and places to experience something new and exciting in fulfilling their desires (Mak, Lumbers, & Eves, 2012; Kivela & Crotts, 2006). This was supported by a qualitative research done by Omar et al. (2014) whereby one of the international tourists said, “I tried Malaysian food while dining out with my husband and I think it is so amazing and different from our culture” which clearly shared their excited feeling while experiencing Malaysian Food Culture during their holiday visit in Malaysia. Arguably, cultural distance or different food culture also has a strong tendency to become an impediment factor for tourists’ decision making process (Shenoy, 2005; Cohen & Avieli, 2004). Also, Shenoy (2005) found that this group of tourists as ‘food neophobicist’ who perceived novel food which is unfamiliar to them acts as a hurdle to revisit a particular restaurant or a destination. For that reason, it requires for further investigation on the perceived importance of Malaysian Food Culture of international tourists and its impact on their intention to revisit Malaysia and repurchase MHF.

2.4. Tourists’ food culture involvement

Involvement represents the level of interest or importance of an object to an individual, or the centrality of an object to an individual ego structure (Zaichowsky, 1985) as cited in Bennett, Rebekah, Kennedy, Janet, Coote, & Leonard (2007). The authors also stressed that involvement plays a crucial role in making a decision, especially when it comes to influencing their purchasing power towards a product or services. Moreover, it has been comprehensively demonstrated a positive relationship with attitudinal loyalty in business. Recently, international tourists’ involvement in food cultural study used to be a typical issue even though this concept was introduced earlier in leisure and tourism research since 1999 (Dimanche and Havitz, 1994). However, previous research indicated that involvement has different dimensional scales based on what it expected to measure at that particular destination level (Gursoy & Gavcar, 2003). Nowadays, globalization and urbanization are kept on threatening the cultural practices among food service providers which has led to the minimization of tourists’ Food Culture Involvement to experience the food
cultural heritage values on their vacation. For this research, the researcher aimed to investigate international tourists’ Food Culture Involvement and its effect on Intentional Loyalty since it has received little attention owing to the crucial role it plays in decision-making practices.

3. Conceptual model and research hypothesis

The model was adapted from the Zaichkowsky’s involvement model (1986) and combined with cultural capital theory (Bourdieu, 1984 in Shenoy (2005) via cognitive-affective-conative traditional style (Oliver, 1999; Dabholkar, 1994; Chiu Droge, & Hanvanich, 2002; Sondoh et al., 2007). Previous researcher affirmed that, cognition about the object would influence emotion (affect), which in turn, led to intention (conative) or behavior (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978; Ray, 1977). Accordingly, this model proposes to examine the Intentional Loyalty based on tourists’ Food Culture Involvement and perceived importance of Malaysian Food Culture in tourism destination.

3.1. Relationship between involvement and loyalty intention

Besides, previous scholars have strongly agreed to include involvement as the antecedent of intention behavior and attempt to have a great influence towards behavioral decision making process, in particular to predict future brand loyalty that needs for a high involvement and high perceived risk (Sondoh et al., 2007). Also, Huang, Chou, & Lin (2010) found that intention is directly influence by involvement in a study investigating advertisement involvement and purchase intention. Therefore, the anticipated hypothesis is:

H1: International Tourists ‘Food Culture Involvement has a significant relationship with Intentional Loyalty

3.2. Perceived importance of Malaysian food culture and intentional loyalty relationship

Furthermore, the relationship of culture and its influence in shaping tourists’ decision or behavioral intention is a phenomenal issue and has gained considerable attention and application in behavioral research, tourism and marketing. Shenoy (2005) stressed that culture is viewed as a construct value that reform one’s intention. Additionally, understanding destination’s food culture would help food service providers to understand their nature, such as eating habits led to satisfaction and revisit intention (Tran, 2011: Quan & Wang, 2004). The linkage between culture and intention is positively proven by Liu, Furrer & Sudharshan (2001) in a study investigating the relationships between culture and behavioral intentions toward services. Hence, this research proposed the next hypothesis:

H2: Perceived Importance of Malaysia Food Culture has a significant relationship with Intentional Loyalty

4. Methodology

This study acquired the primary data through survey analysis via self-administered questionnaires. The data collection was gathered by distributing the instrument directly to the target respondents, In this case, international tourists who departed at KL International Airport (KLIA 1) from July 2014 to September 2014. To avoid bias, the time for data collection were split into three sessions which was morning, afternoon and evening sessions. In this preliminary study, only 100 respondents were being surveyed instead of 300 respondents. The survey instruments were divided into five sections; Section A (Perceived Importance of Malaysian Food Culture, which consisted of four dimensions (Cultural Preparation, Serving Menu and Staff integrity, Table eating Manner, and interior/exterior, which are adapted from Sukalakamala & Boyce (2007) with some modification and measured using 5-points Likert scale (1=strongly not important, 2=not important, 3=neutral, 4=important, and 5= strongly important). The second section (Section B), International tourists’ Food Culture Involvement has been adapted from Jalis, Zulkifly, & Othman (2009). In Section C, the dimensions of Intentional Loyalty were embraced from Zeithaml, Berry, Parasuraman (1996) and (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). These three sections were measured using 5-points Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5= strongly agree). The last two sections are to identify the details of respondents’ profile upon their visitation to Malaysia and three open-ended questions asked for tourists’ general opinion on MHF.
5. Findings and analysis

Predominantly, the majority of the respondents were male (52%). Concerning the variable age, the range of ages is from 26 to 35 years, contributing to a total of 52%. Most of the respondents were tourists originated from Asian countries, about 65%, followed by Africa (22%), Europe (10%), Oceania (3%) and America (3%). Apart from that, the majority of respondents were single, Muslim and were postgraduate degree holder. For income level, almost all of them have a low income below than USD 10,000 and were self-employed. Besides, the respondents stayed in Malaysia more than 5 nights are at about 72%. The top three reasons for visiting Malaysia were holiday and pleasure, visiting friends and relatives and attending business or meeting. When it comes to food selection, 48% tourists enjoyed Malay food, 35% Chinese food and the remaining 17% has chosen Indian food. The restaurant has been selected by the majority of respondents as the best place to experience MHF. In terms of food expenditure, tourists spent an average of USD 10 per day basis.

For reliability test, the value of Cronbach alpha is used to test the internal consistency of a particular instrument. Ideally, Sekaran (2003) advocated the value of 0.91 to depict the high consistency coefficient of items or variables. The validity of this research is verified with the data show closely related to each other. From the findings, all Cronbach alpha coefficients for the variables was more than 0.7. Likewise, According to Pallent, (2001), a scale with Cronbach alpha coefficient above 0.7 is good to ensure its reliability and validity.

Furthermore, this study used multiple linear regression to assess the sophisticated relationship between elements in the involvement-culture model and Intentional Loyalty behavior. Figure 2 shows a significant relationship between perceived importance of Malaysian Food Culture and International Tourists’ Intentional Loyalty (β=0.252, p<0.05) which means 25.2% variance in tourists’ Intentional Loyalty is explained by the perceived importance of Malaysian Food Culture. Subsequently, tourists’ Food Culture Involvement has a significant relationship with Intentional Loyalty (β=0.357, p<0.05), indicates that 35.7% variance in tourists’ Intentional Loyalty is explained by tourists’ Food Culture Involvement. The results answered for the first research questions. It is clearly identified that tourists’ Food Culture Involvement has larger β value compare to the perceived importance of Malaysian Food Culture. Therefore, tourists’ Food Culture Involvement is strongly predicts the Intentional Loyalty behavior of international tourists’ and provides direct respond to the second research question.

![Multiple regression analysis](image)

Table 2 shows a significant value of F, which clarifies the regression model fits the data. Besides that, R square is the percentage of the variable variation that describes by a linear regression line. At about 24% of variance in international tourists’ Intentional Loyalty was explained by both independent variables (tourists’ Food Culture Involvement and perceived importance of Malaysian Food Culture). Hence, there was significant positive and moderate correlation between tourists’ Food Culture Involvement and perceived importance of Malaysian Food Culture (R=0.505). Besides, all coefficients used in the model were statistically significant at 95% confidence level. Again, the findings managed to respond to research hypotheses been addressed earlier; 1) international tourists ‘Food Culture Involvement has a significant impact with Intentional Loyalty, and 2) perceived importance of Malaysian Food Culture has a significant impact on Intentional Loyalty.
Table 2. Multiple regression analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable entered</th>
<th>Standardized Beta Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig. t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Malaysian food culture</td>
<td>.252</td>
<td>2.657</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total food culture involvement</td>
<td>.357</td>
<td>3.768</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Multiple R= 0.505
R square=0.255
Adjusted R square=0.240
Standard error=0.65
F=16.287
Sig=0.000

Dependent Variable: Total Intentional Loyalty

6. Conclusions and recommendations

To put into a nutshell, this study established the relationship between constructs which have not been tested before. Both independent construct have shown strong linkage with the examined dependent variable whereby construct labeled ‘tourists’ Food Culture Involvement acts as a stronger contributor on tourists’ loyalty intention to repurchase MHF and make up their minds to revisit Malaysia. Also, the results able to verify and signify the relationship between perceived importance of Malaysian Food Culture and tourists’ Food Culture Involvement with tourists’ Intentional Loyalty. It is highly recommended that this model could be tested with a high number of sample size, or within the different field of study other than tourism to see its implication and the effectiveness of this model holistically. Apart from that too, this study suggested to exert more dimensional factors and considering the use of higher statistical analysis such as Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modeling approach.

The implications of this study had to go beyond the fact that international tourists’ Intentional Loyalty is strongly influenced by their level of involvement, values and practices which they perceived very important while consuming destination’s cultural food. It is highly recommended that the Malaysian government should regulate adequate policies with regard to cultural and heritage practices among food service providers in safeguarding the continuity of those unique and valuable food cultural practices, as well as embarking Malaysian Heritage Food’s magnificent role as a major tourism destination attraction.

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