

Predicting Factors on Destination Food Image among International Tourists in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify factors influencing destination food image among the international tourists in Malaysia. Food tourism is becoming a trend among tourists. By trying different foods from different countries, tourists able to understand and gained knowledge on the country's culture. In Malaysia, the food knowledge among the international tourists are limited. Although there are several Malaysian foods which are popular, it still remained unknown for the tourists. This caused international tourists to feel strange and unfamiliar with the food heritage in Malaysia. A quantitative research was carried out, where questionnaires were distributed to the international tourists in Malaysia using Google Form. Sample size of 278 respondents were collected, and Partial Least Square – Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM), SmartPLS 3.0. was used to run the data. Result showed among the five independent variables, only Social Media do not have significant relationship with Destination Food Image. Discussion and result of these 5 variables were explained in this study. Lastly, limitations and recommendations were included to provide contribution to the future academicians who are interested in the related field.

Keywords: Food Tourism; Destination Image; Malaysia; Food Image; PLS-SEM

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Factores de Predicción de la Imagen Gastronómica del Destino entre los Turistas Internacionales en Malasia

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RESUMEN

Este estudio tiene como objetivo identificar los factores que influyen en la imagen alimentaria del destino entre los turistas internacionales de Malasia. El turismo gastronómico se está convirtiendo en una tendencia entre los turistas. Al probar diferentes alimentos de distintos países, los turistas pueden entender y conocer la cultura del país. En Malasia, el conocimiento de la comida entre los turistas internacionales es limitado. Aunque hay varias comidas malayas que son populares, siguen siendo desconocidas para los turistas. Esto hace que los turistas internacionales se sientan extraños y no estén familiarizados con el patrimonio gastronómico de Malasia. Se llevó a cabo una investigación cuantitativa, en la que se distribuyeron cuestionarios a los turistas internacionales en Malasia utilizando Google Form. Se recogió una muestra de 278 encuestados y se utilizó el modelo de ecuaciones estructurales de mínimos cuadrados parciales (PLS-SEM), SmartPLS 3.0, para analizar los datos. Los resultados mostraron que, entre las cinco variables independientes, sólo las redes sociales no tienen una relación significativa con la imagen de la gastronomía del destino. En este estudio se explica la discusión y el resultado de estas 5 variables. Por último, se incluyeron limitaciones y recomendaciones para contribuir a los futuros académicos interesados en el campo relacionado.

Palabras clave: Turismo gastronómico; Imagen de destino; Malasia, imagen alimentaria, PLS-SEM

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1. Introduction

Food tourism started to become a trend in year 2012 as that was the year when social media became a mainstream. It has thereafter turned out to be the main motivation for tourists to choose their destinations (World Food Travel Association, 2020). Food tourism shows capability to grow continuously in the travelling industry. World Food Travel Association (2020) stated the ratio for tourists who choose destination by food and beverage is at 7.2 out of 10. Cole (2016) argued that about 88% of tourists and travellers considered food as a defining element of the travel destination, and over one third of travellers spending is devoted to food.

Lai, Khoo-Lattimore and Wang (2017) symbolized food as a country's cultural element and it acted as a functional factor to push a country's tourism activities. In order to boost country's tourism, Malaysia has started to promote local food (i.e. nasi lemak, roti canai, chicken rice, asam laksa, briyani, fried rice, noodles, nasi kerabu, char kuey teow, satay, etc) by participating in popular food festivals such as "The Melbourne Food and Wine Festival". With varieties and unique food culture in Malaysia, the Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board (MTPB) has embarked on various strategies to promote Malaysia local food cuisines all around the world through Malaysia Food Promotion campaign where the activities were held in cities around the world including London and Moscow (Gani, Mahdzar, Abdullah & Rosmaliza, 2017).

Arguably, tourists would accept local food when the image of the food is favourable in their mind (Lai, Khoo-Lattimore and Wang, 2017). However, limited is known on the notion of food image that has brought attention for further research in this topic. There are studies on "Examining Factors Influencing Food Tourist Intentions to Consume Local Cuisine" by Levitt, Meng, Zhang and DiPietro (2017) as well as "Factors that Influence Local Food Consumption Motivation and its Effects on Travel Intentions" conducted by Gurbaskan (2019) but, research on factors influencing food destination image are still scarce. Thus, this research aims to examine the factors contributing to destination food image and the finding is important in analysing the potential and feasibility of food tourism in Malaysia.

Malaysia is relatively lacked of local food recognition in global platform. The Malaysian celebrity chef, Chef Wan commented that Malaysia did not have much of a global footprint hence Malaysian food is not ranked high among international tourists ("Malaysian food ranks low in global survey", 2019). The low exposure of Malaysian food in other countries made tourists felt strange and unfamiliar with the food heritage of this country. Omar dan Karim (2013) pointed that there are unattended gaps for Malaysia be recognised as a food tourist destination as compared to the neighbouring countries such as Thailand and Indonesia. Arguably, international tourists would not consider to visit Malaysia for food destination. Therefore, it is imperative to create the appropriate image and understand the factors contributing to its recognition.

2. Literature Review

The underpinning theory to support the understanding of the context of the study is Attitude Behaviour Context (ABC) theory proposed by Ellis (1956) specifically in addressing the multidimensional perspective of "affect, behavior and cognition" (Solomon, 2010:125). ABC theory is characterized as food consumption model (McSporran & Cho, 2017), as it accommodates the surroundings of the tourists (Guagnano, Stern & Dietz 1995). It consists of three parts: "A" as activating events; "B" as individual's belief of the events; "C" as the consequences of the individual's belief. Thus, if an individual has a rational belief (B) from the event on (A), the individual may result in a positive consequence or act favorably towards the event.

Attitude is defined as a predisposition that could be either likeable or dislikeable that was influenced by the personal experience and learning process. It will then cause the person to respond consistently toward a certain thing (Pereira, Gupta & Hussain, 2019) and influenced a person thinking thus reacted to it. Similarly, Kim and Kwon (2018) stated that attitude created would affect a person's behavioural intention. Therefore, a positive attitude of the customer towards a particular food would encourage them to purchase and try it, and possibly recommended to others (Choe & Kim, 2018).

Omar, Karim and Omar (2015) also supported that a person's attitude can strongly affected his or her acceptance and selection of a particular food. In this case, their positive attitude could affect their intention to visit or revisit a destination (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2019). Thus, it is proposed that:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between attitude and destination food image.

Social media is a set of social websites where people can shared and exchanged media in real time (Faizi, Afia & Chiheb, 2013). People are able to share their multimedia content like photos and videos to the platform. Manning (2014) pointed out that social media is a new form of media used for interaction between individuals. For example, one individual can shared their food experience through social media by expressing how they feel about the food and services in a particular country. This can influence others who saw the comments and images, changing their perception towards the food. In this study, social media is an effective promotional instrument as many social media users will upload and exchange their travel experiences with friends, colleagues, and even acquaintances (Radzi et al., 2014). Thus, it is proposed that:

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between social media and destination food image.

There is no specific definition to explain "local", but according to Stephan, Nicoletta and Mira (2019) it can be related to a particular area or one's neighbourhood. Local food refers to food that is originated in a home country where the person is located (Stephan, Nicoletta & Mira, 2019). Local food enabled tourist to know about the food and culture of the origin country through delivering its own cultural status and elements. This was supported by Frochot (2003) where he pointed out that local food can portrayed the image of cultural experiences and identity through local unique cuisines in the area and leaving a positive food image to the tourists. Rozin (2007) posits that food choice of tourists is positively related to the past exposure or experience, and most of the time, people will choose food that they have experienced. Having desirable food experience (i.e. from sensory experience of taste and smell) not only can satisfy the tourist physiological needs, but also psychological needs (Roosbeh, Ng & Boo, 2013). Thus, it is proposed that:

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between local food experience and destination food image.

Culture is defined as a social heritage acquired from a particular group (Johnson, 2013). It is a way of thinking, believing, and feeling of an individual towards particular forms. Culture also is referred to society and is defined as a set of belief and values that people shared with others, contributed a sense of belonging and identity in the group or society (Lebron, 2013). The same theory can be applied to food. People from different countries have different food culture. For instance, people from the Western countries choose fast food as their main course, instead of rice due to their past inheriting culture. People perceive Malaysia offers unique cuisines because of the different cultures available in the country. Malay, Chinese and India ethnic group has their own types of cuisine and has been a favorite dish among the people in the country regardless of their culture. Therefore, destination culture can act as a factor that influence the image of the food among international tourists in Malaysia. Omar et al. (2018) stated that food alone in Malaysia has helped the nation in creating favorable images, reflecting different cultures in Malaysia in sharing diverse food cultures. This has shown that the unique image of Malaysia food culture has influenced the perception of tourists towards the Malaysian food. Thus, it is proposed that:

H4: There is a significant positive relationship between destination food culture and destination food image.

Advertisement is a form of information sharing towards products and services and it can influence people's mind and attitude towards something (Frolova, 2014) by delivering precise information possible. Advertisements can be in many forms such as TV programs, social media advertisements, physical advertisements, and even a propaganda. These advertisements applied in the tourism industry too. According to Mirtaghiyan, Gharibi and Akbarnataj (2013), a country's positive image can be created by having a well-designed food tourism advertisement, this eventually will attract new tourist from other countries. Utilizing effective advertisement able to influence directly how the

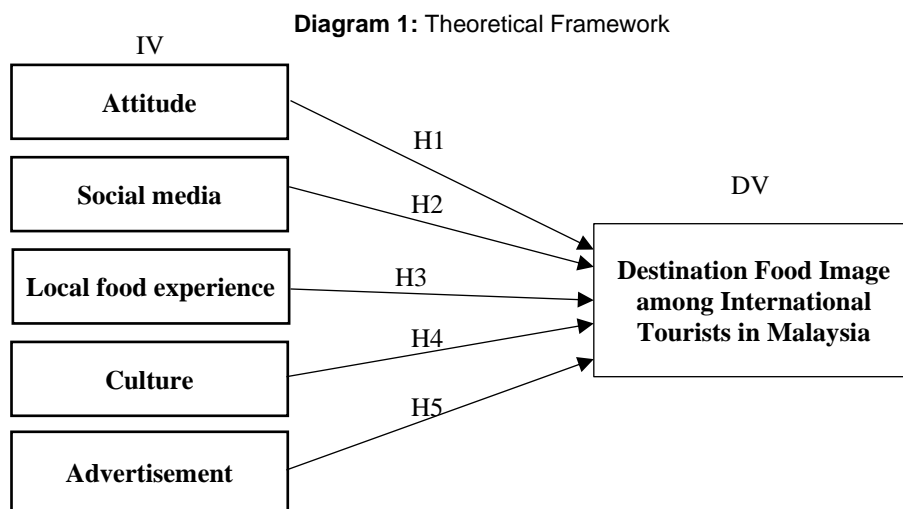
tourists acted to that publicity (Mirtaghiyan, Gharibi & Akbarnataj, 2013). To inform the tourists, the best way to use to advertise their local food is through using catalogues, posters, brochures, banners, virtual billboards. Thus, it is proposed that

H5: There is a significant relationship between advertisements and destination food image.

Image can be referred to an entity like firm, product, brand, or a store; also can be referred to pattern of beliefs and feelings in a consumer’s mind; and lastly referred to messages by advertising or public relations (Stern, Zinkhan & Jaju, 2001). Nelson (2016) defined image as beliefs, attitudes, ideas, and impressions that tourist holds about something and it played an important role in their decision making. In the past, food was a supporting role in tourism, but now it has been brought to the world as a trend and tourist around the world described “food” as their primary motivation to travel (Nelson, 2016). Thus, food image is another form of impressions, feedbacks, and attitude of people towards food. Study done by Chi, Chua, and Karim (2013) pointed out that food image only focuses on food image, behavioural intention of tourists, and food satisfaction while Lertputtarak (2012) revealed that food image should concentrate on the food and service style and the place where the food is offered. However, the image needs to be clear in representing the destination in order to capture tourist’s attention (Osman & Nazari, 2020).

In this study, destination food image act as a dependent variable where it can be affected by several factors like attitude, social media, local food experience, culture and destination marketing. These factors can affect how the tourist think about the food, and make decision about going to the restaurant and try the food. Food image can also be a factor to influence people to travel to the destination. Karim (2006) supported that destination food image and sources of information plays an important role in attracting travellers to visit the country.

3. Theoretical Framework



The above diagram 1 visualizes the theoretical framework in study, investigating the antecedents which including attitude, social media, local food experience, culture and advertisement that affecting the destination food image of international tourists in Malaysia.

4. Methodology

A 5-point Likert scale was used to indicate the level of agreement of the respondents for each of the exogenous and endogenous variables. Four (4) items from Hsu (2014) were used to measure attitude. Five (5) items were adopted from Pattanachai (2015) to measure social media, five (5) items were adopted from Wan Mohd Zain (2019) to measure local food experience, four (4) items were used to measure destination food culture Cheng, Joyce, Ong and Wong (2015) and four (4) items from Jaafar, Lalp and Naba (2012) to measure advertisements.

Pre-test was conducted to ensure the face validity of the items of the questionnaire can be the measurement instrument for destination food image. Minor modifications were made to the questionnaires for the next phase of data collection (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Non-probability sampling was used for data collection where respondents were choose in a non-random way. Questionnaires were distributed through online social media platform which is Facebook Malaysia Tourism Groups. Snowball technique was used to collect data in faster way due to limited channel in finding respondents that visited Malaysia and tried Malaysian foods. Checking were done after the completion to ensure no missing value. A total of 278 respondents were collected for analysis using Partial Least Squares – Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM). A two-stage model was carried out which were measurement model, that was used to measure the reliability and validity of the constructs and structural model which was used to carry out the hypothesis and the relationship between the variables.

Table 1: Respondent's Profile

	Number (N=278)	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	129	46
Female	149	54
<i>Age</i>		
Below 20	6	2.2
20 – 29	166	59.7
30 - 39	66	23.7
40 – 49	36	12.9
50 – 59	4	1.4
Above 60	0	0
<i>Highest Education Status</i>		
High School	58	20.9
Bachelor Degree	196	70.5
Master Degree	23	8.3
PhD	1	0.4
<i>Employment Status</i>		
Employed Full Time	126	45.3
Employed part time	7	2.5
Student	142	51.1
Housewives	1	0.4
Unemployed	2	0.7

Table 1 showed the general profiles of 278 respondents which includes 149 females (54%) and 129 males (46%). Most of them aged between 20-29 years old (59.7%) who possessed bachelor's degree (70.5%). Majority of the respondents are students (51.1%), with the second largest category which are working adults (45.3%).

Table 2: Reliability and Validity Assessments

Constructs	Items	Loadings	CA	CR	AVE
ATT	ATT1	0.699	0.860	0.817	0.528
	ATT2	0.762			
	ATT3	0.762			
	ATT4	0.678			
SCM	SCM1	0.912	0.846	0.835	0.719
	SCM3	0.778			
LFE	LFE1	0.738	0.826	0.883	0.602
	LFE2	0.817			
	LFE3	0.796			
	LFE4	0.705			
	LFE5	0.817			
ADV	ADV1	0.591		0.868	0.626
	ADV2	0.818			
	ADV3	0.827			
	ADV4	0.896			
DFI	DFI1	0.8	0.815	0.902	0.697
	DFI2	0.846			
	DFI3	0.862			
	DFI4	0.829			

Note: Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Attitude (ATT), Social Media (SCM), Life Food Experience (LFE), Advertisement (ADV), Destination Food Image (DFI).

Table 2 shows 3 items with outer loadings lesser than 0.7 were removed as the AVE is lesser than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2019). The removed items were SCM2, SCM4, and SCM5. Result was adjusted to satisfactory value after items were removed. There were still 3 other indicators with outer loading which lesser than 0.7. Removal of these 3 indicators that have values between 0.4 to 0.7 was unnecessary as the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) has met the requirement which is more than 0.7 and more than 0.5 respectively. All values are within the recommended threshold indicating internal consistency reliability and convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019).

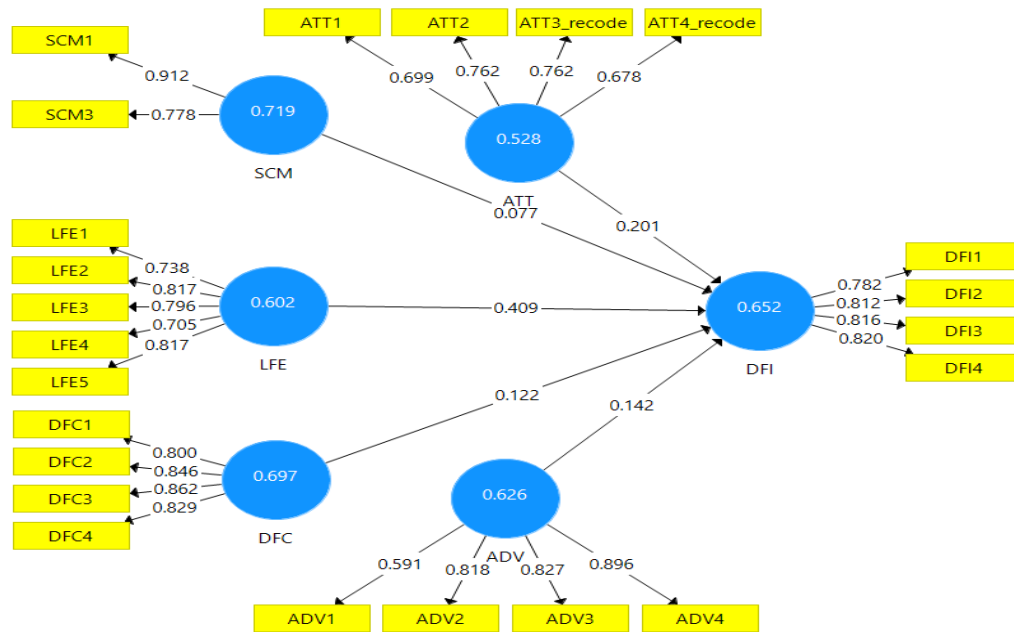
To measure the construct validity, convergent validity and discriminant validity were examined. Average variance extracted (AVE) was used to examine the convergent validity and Heterotrait – Monotrait (HTMT) was used to examine the discriminant validity. Refers to table 2, all 5 constructs had exceeded requirement value which is >0.5, recommended by Bagozzi and Yi (1988). While for the discriminant validity (Table 3), the HTMT ratios for each construct are lower than 0.85, which was recommended by Byrne, B. (2016), representing satisfactory discriminant validity.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity: HTMT

Constructs	ADV	ATT	DFC	DFI_	LFE	SCM
ADV						
ATT	0.181					
DFC	0.215	0.275				
DFI_	0.282	0.443	0.409			
LFE	0.236	0.269	0.394	0.651		
SCM	0.185	0.43	0.323	0.417	0.42	

Note: HTMT Values<0.85

Diagram 2: PLS-SEM model with path coefficients



Note: SCM-Social media, ATT-Attitude, LFE-Life Food Experience, DFC-Food culture, ADV-Advertisement, DFI-Destination Food Image.

Diagram 2 was presented with a direct path from social media, attitude, life food experience, destination food culture and advertisement. All variables show that are significant at the p-value, attitude (0), life food experience (0), destination food culture (0.022) and advertisement (0.001) respectively. All variables are contributed towards destination food image except for social media. Life food experience contributed the highest with on destination food image for international tourists.

The models had:

- 1) a direct path from attitude towards destination food image
- 2) a direct path from life food experience towards destination food image
- 3) a direct path from destination food culture towards destination food image
- 4) a direct path from advertisement toward destination food image

Table 4: Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Description	Std_Beta	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	P Values	VIF	Decision
H1	ATT -> DFI_	0.201	0.051	0**	1.131	Supported
H2	SCM -> DFI_	0.077	0.051	0.133	1.188	Not supported
H3	LFE -> DFI_	0.409	0.064	0**	1.251	Supported
H4	DFC -> DFI_	0.122	0.053	0.022*	1.19	Supported
H5	ADV -> DFI_	0.142	0.044	0.001**	1.066	Supported

Note: P-value<0.05*, <0.01**

Table 4 shows that attitude, local food experience, destination food culture and advertisement are positively related to destination food image, supporting H1, H3, H4, and H5. Social media (H2) did not find support, indicating a non-significant relationship between social media and destination food image. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was examined to identify multicollinearity issue. Table 4 shows that multicollinearity is not an issue among the exogenous latent constructs, since all VIF values were below 5. Thus, multicollinearity is not a threat in this study.

5. Discussion, Limitations and Recommendation

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors predicting destination food image among international travellers in Malaysia. Our study shows that attitude is significantly related to destination food image. This result is concurrent with Gupta and Hussain (2019) which showed attitude is the main factor that influenced consumers toward destination food image. Local food experience plays a vital role in predicting destination food image. The findings of this study show that there is significant relationship between local food experience and destination food image. This is supported by past studies which pointed out having desirable food experience can satisfy the tourist physiological and psychological needs (Roozbeh et al., 2013) and the sensory experience of taste and smell leave tourists a deep impression about the local food, and probably changing the tourists' perception towards the foods (Getz, 2000).

Destination food culture has influenced how people perceive the foods. People think Malaysia offers unique cuisines and foods, mainly because of different ethnic and religion. Previous study by Omar et al., (2018) mentioned Malaysian food has helped the country to create favorable images. This finding is parallel to our study findings which stated destination food culture has significant relationship with destination food image. Many local food companies have started to invest money in advertisement. Our study shows advertisement has significant relationship with destination food image. With attractive advertisements, it could change the tourists' perception towards local food when the information provided is clear and precise. As mentioned by Frolova (2014), advertisement can influence people's mind and attitude towards food and Mirtaghiyan et al., (2013) stated a good advertisement can help create positive image and attract tourists from different countries.

However, based on the result, it was shown that social media does not affect the destination food image in Malaysia. This could be due to tourists prefer to experience food in real life by tasting it whereas social media platform can only share information in virtual forms where tourists cannot touch and taste it.

In summary, the result of our study reveals some new aspects that contribute to the existing body of literature through empirical evidence. There are several factors identified in this study that are needed to strengthen destination food image. This can contribute to Malaysia tourism sector as we can attract more tourists to our country as part of tourism income. Hence, our study found out that attitude, local food experience, destination food culture and advertisement play a significant role in contributing to Malaysia destination food image.

Every research has its own limitation. The limitation for the current study is its R square value of 0.401 which did not meet the expectation. Four independent variables which are predicting only 40.1% to the destination food image. There should have other related variables can be used in measuring the destination food image. Future researcher is encouraged to explore wider range of factors that might influence food image of international tourists to bring more significant effect to the industry or academia. Besides, this study was only conducted using English language. Thus, it was suggested that future studies may consider better proportion of the respondents as there are still various international tourists in Malaysia.

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