Relationships Between Malaysian Food Image, Tourist Satisfaction and Behavioural Intention

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Abstract: This study aims to examine tourists' satisfaction towards Malaysian food and their future behavioural intentions. A survey was carried out at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and Low Cost Carrier Terminal (LCCT) in Malaysia. A sample of 392 tourists was obtained at the respective departure halls using systematic sampling approach. The findings indicated that Malaysia has the potential of being a food tourism destination as the country is viewed as a melting pot of cultural food variety at reasonable price. In addition, the results reveal that image has a direct effect on satisfaction and tourists' satisfaction towards Malaysian food has a direct effect on behavioural intention. The findings, strengthens the notion of repeat visitation to experience the unique food culture. Practical and theoretical contributions are discussed, with future research suggested.

Key words: Malaysian food image · Destination marketing · Satisfaction · Food destination · Behavioural intention

INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian population is built on ethnic diversity; inheriting ancestral norms, culture, native language and culinary heritage that is being practiced till today. Over time, the ethnic assimilation formed a unique Malaysian culture. This 'multiculturalism' among the different races produced a distinctive cuisine of Malaysia is described as "Asia's greatest cuisines meet and mingle" that have been the bedrock in forming and shaping the dishes which are apparently accepted by people from all walks of life in the country [1]. Culinary practices had gradually changed in due course of time based on respect to each other's cultural and religious sensitivity. Consequently, intercultural culinary practices were evident, namely, the usage of Malay and Indian spices in Chinese food and the creation of halal version of Chinese food that is consumable to all races. This had significantly contributed to the variety of distinct cuisine in Malaysia.

Various festivals are celebrated throughout the year with each festival emphasising the uniqueness and diverse cultures and traditions in Malaysia. Traditional cuisine and warm hospitality coupled with mouth-watering cuisine forms the perfect ingredient to produce a positive image to tourists. These strengths could be capitalized to further enhance images that portray the true Malaysia. It has been generally accepted that image plays an imperative role in influencing an individual's perceived image, choice of destination, satisfaction and behavioural intention [2], [3], [4]. Images that meet tourists expectation will satisfy them and in turn repeat visitation and the likelihood of recommendation to friends and family will increase [5], [6].

Satisfaction was claimed as an outcome of pre-consumption expectation and post-consumption experience [7]. On the other hand, it was argued that, in predicting satisfaction, perceptions and experiences related to a product or service are important factors for

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satisfaction assessment [8], [9]. The perceptions on a product or service in fact, involve the benefits received for the prices and studies have empirically proven that perceptions have positive impact on both satisfactions and consumer's behavioural intention [5].

Destination image was defined as the psychological representation of perceptions and feelings of a destination [10]. In addition to being a mental illustration, destination image was claimed by past scholars to have influence on human behaviour such as decision-making process, evaluation of destination during on-site experience (satisfaction) and future behavioural intention (revisit intention and positive word-of-mouth) [4], [11], [12]. The gap between pre-visit perceptions and the actual visit experience was described as satisfaction [5] and generally, when perceptions matches the on-site experience, tourists' evaluation will be positive and this will lead to inner satisfaction [4]. Satisfied tourists were found to have higher tendency to revisit the same destination and provide positive comments to friends and relatives [5], [13]. The tendency of revisiting the same destination and positive word-of-mouth is labelled as an indication of destination loyalty in which the tourists' loyalty will be an intangible asset to a tourism destination [14].

Past studies confirmed the relationship between destination image and tourists' satisfaction [5], [15]. However, to date, the relationship between food image and satisfaction is still questionable. Limited studies have initiated research to determine the possible effect of food image on tourists' satisfaction.

Customer's repeated purchase and brand loyalty were suggested to be highly related to an individual's satisfaction with an initial purchase [16]. Meanwhile from the tourism perspective, tourists' satisfaction will influence tourists' intention to revisit a country [15]. Similarly, several scholars claimed that satisfaction is the antecedent of behavioural intention [17-19]. Scholars denoted that whether the relationship between word-of-mouth and satisfaction is linear or bell-shaped, a relationship is definitely exists and therefore it is practical to examine the influence of tourists' satisfaction level on tourists' behavioural intention [16]. Although the connection between tourists' satisfaction and tourists' behavioural intention is confirmed by past scholars, there has been a scarcity of research linking tourists' satisfaction on destination food experiences and tourists' revisit intention to the same destination.

By understanding the relationships between future behavioural intentions and its antecedent determinants such as image and satisfaction, destination tourism managers would be better in-charge on how to improve their marketing efforts to maximize their use of resources. The current study accepts the basic tenet of past scholars' argument in that the three concepts of image, satisfaction and behavioural intention are interrelated and should be examined holistically. The study was empirically tested with two hypotheses as follows:

- There is a relationship between tourists' perceived image of Malaysian food and tourists' satisfaction.
- Tourists 'satisfaction towards the image of Malaysian food will significantly contribute to tourists' revisit intention.

METHODOLOGY

Data used in this study were collected from a cross-sectional survey in two major airports of Malaysia: Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and Low Cost Carrier Terminal (LCCT). The survey was conducted by six trained enumerators from April to May 2009 at predetermined resting areas by the airport authorities. The targeted sample was tourists who visited Malaysia within 24 hours to less than 12 months of duration [20-21]. Voluntary respondents were screened by answering a few questions prior to be qualified to participate in the survey. Malaysian residents and tourists who had no prior experience of Malaysian food were excluded from the survey.

The sample size of this study was determined using the confidence interval formula [22]. The formula suggested a minimum sample size of 384 by considering ±5% of accuracy, 95% of confidence level and 50% of variability estimated in the population. However, over sampling method was suggested to account for uncooperative subjects [23]. As a result, 433 international tourists were approached but only 392 tourists voluntarily completed the survey questions. A total of 53 questionnaires were discarded due to more than 50% of missing values in the survey questions out of the total 392. In order to minimize biasness, the data collection procedure was administered by using systematic sampling approach at three different times in a day across the data collection duration; 9 a.m. to 12p.m., 2 p.m. to 5p.m. and 6 p.m. to 9p.m [24-25].

Data analyses comprised of descriptive analysis and inferential analysis. The data was analysed using SPSS software, version 14.0 for Windows. Frequency and percentage were used to examine the demographic pattern of the respondents. Mean and standard deviation scores were used to present the findings on the image of Malaysian food, tourists' satisfaction and tourists' behavioural intentions towards Malaysian food. In addition, regression analysis was used to approximate the variation in tourists' satisfaction explained by Malaysian food image; and tourists' behavioural intention explained by tourists' satisfaction [25-26].

Findings

Demographic Profiles: A total of 339 respondents were analysed. About 63.1% (214) were males and 36.6% (124) were females. Majority of the respondents fell under the age group of 21-30 with 30.7% followed by the age group of 31-40 with a frequency of 96 (28.3%). Nearly half of the respondents held executive/managerial/professional position (41.9%) and this might be due to them having higher disposable income [27]. Majority of the respondents were Europeans (36.3%) followed by Asians (29.2%) and a minority came from Africa with a percentage of 2.9.

There were 27.1% of the respondents stayed in Malaysia for 3 to 6 days and 15.3% for 1 to 2 days. A large number of respondents noted they have tasted Malaysian food more than once (93.5%) and this was positive indications that repeat visitation have occurred whereas only 5.6% of the respondents notified that they had merely experienced Malaysian food for once prior to the survey. Majority of the respondents visited Malaysia for holiday/pleasure purpose with 51.3% of responses whereas 1.5% indicated they were food lovers and came to Malaysia for Malaysian food in particular.

Majority (74.6%) of the tourists visited local food outlets or restaurants. This was followed by night markets / hawker stalls / street food. The results could be a good indicator that tourists in Malaysia were more open to try new food and might have the tendency of food neophilic where food neophilia was claimed to be a motivating factor for food tourism and globalization of a destination's cuisine [28]. Positive comments were given to hawker's food especially in Penang where a variety of food can be found. Hawker's food was popular among the international tourists; however their main anxiety was on its sanitation and hygiene level.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of the Image of Malaysian Food

Attributes	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reasonable prices	4.12	0.88
Rich in flavours	3.97	0.89
High availability of food	3.87	0.99
Food providers are friendly	3.85	0.85
Contain a lot of herbs and spices	3.82	0.85
Variety of local specialties	3.71	0.84
Appealing to human senses	3.70	0.88
Services by food providers are good	3.66	0.91
Food spots are located in convenient places	3.61	0.89
Hot and spicy	3.51	0.97
Clean and safe to consume	3.43	0.96
Well presented	3.43	0.99
Uses variety of cooking methods	3.41	0.99
Comfortable eating surroundings	3.32	0.92
Various information guide on local food	2.92	0.96

Note: A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the perceived image
Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree

Perceived Image of Malaysian Food: The findings on tourists' perceived image of Malaysian food are tabulated in Table 1. 15 attributes were adopted from past studies and tailored to measure tourists' perceived image of the Malaysian food context [29-35]. The major strength of Malaysian food was found to be centred on food price, rich in flavours, high availability, good services and variety. However the respondents did not perceive strongly on attributes such as 'clean and safe to consume' (3.43), 'well presented' (3.43), 'variety of cooking methods used on Malaysian food' (3.43), 'comfortable eating surroundings' (3.41) and 'various information guide on local food' (2.92). Seeing that respondents had rated relatively poor on food hygiene, food presentations and accessibility of local food information, it is suggested that food providers should be more attentive to these attributes in order to attract tourists and confer a positive image of Malaysian food and hospitality. Food outlets should have menus provided with descriptions of local food such as the ingredients used and the level of food spiciness. This will surely helps tourists to make a wise choice according to their preference besides educating them on Malaysian food culture.

Dimension of Satisfaction: The dimension of satisfaction was adapted from past research in the field of destination marketing [36-37]. Overall, respondents' satisfaction was fairly skewed to the positive side (Table 2). Attributes with the highest mean score was 'Malaysian food contributes to the quality of my visiting experience' (3.89).

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of Tourists' Satisfaction towards

Malaysian FoodAttribute	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tourists' Satisfaction		
Malaysian food contributes to the quality of my visiting experience	3.89	0.96
Malaysian food contributes to my eating pleasure	3.84	0.90
Eating Malaysian food adds to my visiting enjoyment	3.81	0.97
The food experience in Malaysia meets my expectation	3.70	0.94
I experienced the culture of Malaysia through Malaysian food	3.46	0.92

Note: A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure tourists' satisfaction

Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis of Tourists' Behavioural Intentions towards

Malaysian Food	Attributes	Mean Std. Deviation
Tourists' Behavioural Intentions		
I will recommend Malaysian food to my friends and family	3.86	0.95
I have good impression on Malaysian food	3.84	0.92
I strongly remember my food experiences in Malaysia	3.77	0.97
As a whole, Malaysia is a good food tourism destination	3.75	1.01
I will revisit Malaysia for Malaysian food	3.15	1.18

Note: A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure tourists' behavioural intentions

Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree

This was followed by 'Malaysian food contributes to my eating pleasure' (3.84), 'eating Malaysian food adds to my visiting enjoyment' (3.81) and 'the food experience in Malaysia meets my expectation' (3.70). The result indicated that Malaysian food played an important role to impart memorable and positive image of Malaysia as a tourism destination as tourists' were deemed to be agreeable that Malaysian food added values to their vacation experience in Malaysia. However, the attribute 'I experienced the culture of Malaysia through Malaysian food' was rated slightly lower (3.46) compared to other attributes mentioned. This could imply that tourists' did not perceive there was enough information to educate them about Malaysian lifestyles and food cultures. Consequently, more advertising materials such as websites, brochures and even promotional booths should be made available for tourists to access information on Malaysian food and culture. This would in turn, construct a possible opportunity for Malaysian food to penetrate the global market in the tourism sector.

Dimension of Behavioural Intentions: Five attributes were used to measure tourists' behavioural intentions (Table 3) and these items were generated through extensive review of the literature [2], [29], [36], [38]. Based on the results, the respondents were very likely to have positive word-of-mouth about Malaysian food. However,

on the other side of the result, respondents' had rated the lowest mean score for 'I will revisit Malaysia for Malaysian food'. This result can entail several implications. First, respondents might think that Malaysian food is worth trying due to its multicultural features where variety of food can be found at one stop, though not for repeat visitation solely for food but for other attractions in Malaysia. Second, to some respondents, they might consider Malaysian food is too spicy especially for the western tourists.

Perceived Image of Malaysian Food vs Satisfaction: A simple linear regression analysis was used to approximate the coefficient of the linear equation between tourists' perceived image of Malaysian food and their satisfaction level (Table 4). Findings showed that a significant model had existed [$F(1, 337) = 169.647$, $p =. 000$] and the result supported the alternative hypothesis that suggested the existence of a relationship between tourists' perceived image and tourists' satisfaction towards Malaysian food. Tourists' perceived image contributed approximately 33.5% ($R^2 =. 335$) in tourists' satisfaction towards Malaysian food. For every one unit increase in tourists' perceived image of Malaysian food, tourists' satisfaction will increase by. 579 units. In addition, there was a positive and moderate correlation between tourists' perceived image and tourists' satisfaction ($R = 0.579$).

Table 4: Regression Model for Perceived Image of Malaysian Food Vs Satisfaction

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin– Watson
1	0.579[a]	0.335	0.333	0.644	1.817

ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	70.251	1	70.251	169.647	0.000[a]
	Residual	139.551	337	0.414		
	Total	209.802	338			

Coefficients[a]	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	0.563	0.246		2.285	0.023		
Perceived Image	0.877	0.067	0.579	13.025	0.000	1.000	1.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Image

b. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

Table 5: Regression Model for Satisfaction Vs Behavioural Intentions

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin– Watson
1	0.809[a]	0.654	0.653	0.501	1.893

ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	160.130	1	160.130	638.311	0.000[a]
	Residual	84.542	337	0.251		
	Total	244.672	338			

Coefficients[a]	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	0.406	0.132		3.074	0.002		
Satisfaction	0.874	0.035	0.809	25.265	0.000	1.000	1.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Satisfaction

b. Dependent Variable: Behavioural Intentions

The findings supported the research by past scholars who have empirically tested the relationship between image and satisfaction [4-6], [12]. Scholars claimed that images are personal values that consumers attach to a product or service characteristics. Image plays an important role in influencing satisfaction [12]. Individuals having favourable image on a product, service or destination will have greater satisfaction levels on post-consumption experience [4].

Satisfaction Vs Behavioural Intentions: Satisfaction was characterised as tourists' emotional state after exposure to the opportunity [39]. In addition, other scholars claimed that satisfaction can be a good predictor of future behavioural intention [40-41]. The findings in this study supported the previous study [36] that suggested that tourists' who are satisfied with their food experiences while visiting a destination are more likely to revisit the country and recommend to their friends and family. Table 5 shows a significant regression model had existed [$F (1, 337) = 638.311$, $p =. 000$]. The regression model implied that tourists' satisfaction towards Malaysian food will significantly contribute to tourists' behavioural intentions. Satisfaction explained approximately 65.4% ($R^2 =. 654$) of total variance in tourists' behavioural intentions. There was a positive and high correlation ($R =. 809$) between tourists' satisfaction and tourists' behavioural intentions. This signified that tourists' satisfaction towards Malaysian food will significantly contribute to tourists' behavioural intentions.

Given that tourists' satisfaction contributes significantly to tourists' behavioural intentions with high correlation, tourists' satisfaction should be monitored from time to time to obtain up-to-date and precise information from tourists. This will help to predict revisit intention and good word-of-mouth.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study investigated the tourist behavioural intention by constructing a model that has taken image and satisfaction into consideration. The relationships between all variables in this study were tested using data obtained from a structured survey at two major airports in Malaysia. Numerous research in destination marketing supported that favourable image will lead to greater satisfaction and satisfaction will result in positive behavioural intentions [4], [17], [39-41]; however little empirical research has been done to examine a destination based on its gastronomic features. This study differs from previous studies by examining food image in the tourist satisfaction and behaviour model.

The relationship analysis indicates that food image appears to have direct effect on satisfaction and satisfaction has direct effect on behavioural intentions such as intention to revisit and positive word-of-mouth. The finding is consistent with past studies that confirmed the relationships of image, satisfaction and behavioural intention [4-6], [12], [36]. Therefore, efforts should be directed to further engage the image of Malaysian food in destination marketing strategies in order to facilitate the development of food tourism in the country in parallel with other niche tourism products.

One major limitation of the study is the dates and duration for the survey which was predetermined by the airport authorities. Hence this may impose possible biasness on the data collected although systematic sampling approach was administered to minimise the partiality of the data. Theoretically, the findings have contributed to the literature and provided better understanding of the image associated with Malaysian food. On the other hand, the findings showed a positive inclination to travel agencies in which a new target market has emerged in the tourism industry. Hence, travel agencies should take proactive action to incorporate gastronomic activities or food events in existing tour packages as a means of attracting food tourists. This will amicably increase tourist arrivals in Malaysia when there are more exciting tour packages that could cater to individual needs. In addition to increasing tourist arrivals, foreign exchange currency and employment in Malaysia will as well ascend. The findings of this study could also be used to enhance the image of Malaysian food and consequently to position Malaysia as one of the popular food destinations in Asia. Also, with the government efforts to promote Malaysian food around the globe by supporting entrepreneurs to set-up Malaysian restaurants in major cities such as New York, London and Tokyo, which in turn will help to generate awareness and interest among travellers from other countries on the uniqueness of Malaysian food.

Finally, tourists' satisfaction should be monitored continuously to keep track on the current trend among tourists and their dining predilections in Malaysia; this will surely help to predict their revisit intention to Malaysia. Eventually this will aid in catalysing the growth in the tourism and hospitality industry in Malaysia. Similar studies can be replicated using the identical attributes to further validate the satisfaction level among tourists and their behavioural intentions. Tourists' pre and post consumption of Malaysian food experience is also recommended for future research attention to allow better understanding of tourists' satisfaction and behavioural intentions. To date, the definition of Malaysian food has yet to be established and this should be addressed and warrant future research attention.

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