

The Influence of Pahang Heritage Food on Behavioral Intentions among Malaysian Domestic Tourists

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Abstract

This study investigated how domestic tourists perceive Malaysian heritage food and how this may influence behavioral intentions. A survey was distributed through social media applications, and 164 tourists responded, with three being international, which were then discarded. In this study, correlation and regression analyses are used to analyze the responses and found that a positive and significant influence exists between emotional value, quality value, epistemic value, and a domestic tourist's behavioral intentions to consume heritage foods. This study helps expand the understanding of Pahang's heritage food's consumption value elements and its influence on the domestic tourists' behavioral intentions.

Keywords: Consumption Value; Heritage Food; Behavioral Intentions; Domestic Tourists

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1.0 Introduction

Tourism plays a significant role in the Malaysian economy representing nearly 16% of its total GDP (DOSM, 2020). Domestic tourism represents more than half of all tourism receipts and is critical to the nation's efforts to move from a resource-based economy to a more service-oriented one (Puah, Jong, Ayob & Ismail, 2018). As a result, it is paramount to understand better the factors that may influence domestic tourists. One factor that influences destination choice is a strong food culture (Bjork & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). Recent studies have recognized that Pahang's heritage food (HF) could be a strong driver for domestic and international tourism (Atikahambar, Zainal, Rahayu & Mokhtar, 2018; Saad, Abdul Rahman & Umadi, 2019).

Studies have focused on how food may influence tourism, but few regarding how domestic tourists perceive Malaysian HF and how this may influence behavioral intentions (BI). Thus, more research is needed to understand this vital tourist segment. Hence, to better understand how tourists perceive Malaysian HF and how this may influence BIs, this study is guided by consumption values theory which states that consumer choice is a function of different weight. These values help consumers to differentiate between options (Sheth, Newman & Gross, 1991).

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While the theory focuses on five values; functional values, conditional values, social values, emotional values, and epistemic values, Sheth et al. (1991) stated each value is independent of the others. Thus, this study will focus on functional values (quality value), emotional values, and epistemic values. This study will not investigate both conditional and social values as they relate specifically to the utility that may be attached to a specific event or circumstance or obtained through an association with one or more social groups. As this study is concerned with domestic tourists as a whole and does not wish to segment the population, conditional and functional values will not be evaluated at this time.

This study offers destination marketers an improved understanding of how domestic tourists perceive HF consumption values and how they may influence domestic tourists' BIs. Specifically, the main research objective is to investigate whether Pahang HF's perceived consumption values have influenced the BIs of domestic tourists to consume Pahang's HF.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Heritage Food (HF) in Malaysia

HF has been defined as the "typical local culinary, embedded with cultural values that represent the social community lifestyles, traditions or features that have been handed down from one generation to the next (Omar et al., 2015). The Department of National Heritage describes heritage as something passed down from one generation to the next. Heritage is a national treasure that a group or individuals own, and it becomes a collective responsibility for the protection and preservation (Department of National Heritage, 2021). A recent study focused on the awareness of Malaysian consumers about the origin of HF and found that respondents considered HF to be traditional foods in which respondents understood the description of the food heritage, the characteristics, and styles of food and associated with the identity of food (Ramli, Zahari, Halim & Aris, 2017). This familiarity with HF and its origins may be the reason why domestic tourists seek out HF, thus leading to increased domestic tourism (Atikahambar et al., 2018). Fig. 1 illustrates several prevalent HF from Pahang.



Fig. 1: Pahang Heritage Food
(Source: Google)

However, one of the challenges Malaysian HF faces is that the food presentation is not always considered attractive (The Star Online, 2019). For example, 'Sambal Hitam,' may taste good, but the dish's color is plain black. While the black color of this sambal originates from a fruit called 'belimbing buluh,' which is the main ingredient and helps provide the dish's flavor, this black color may not appeal to tourists unfamiliar with the local cuisine (Clydesdale, 1993). A recent survey found that while Malaysian cuisine may be considered tasty, tourists did not find it to be very appealing to them (The Star Online, 2019). The survey results may be due to the perception of those less familiar with the dishes' appearance. Researchers have found that familiarity with a local cuisine helps create a more positive interpretation of the food itself (Omar, Ab Karim & Omar, 2015). A fact hinted at by celebrity Chef Datuk Redzuawan Ismail who recently commented that Malaysian cuisine did not have the global footprint of other more popular cuisines like Thai and Vietnamese dishes suggesting this knowledge may have contributed to the survey results (The Star Online, 2019). Fig. 1 illustrates several prevalent HF from Pahang.

Globalization may also influence what is perceived as HF as the influx of visitors may incentivize local businesses to produce more palatable cuisine to specific cultures (Omar, Ab Karim & Omar, 2015). The globalization effect may also influence how locals perceive HF as their flavor preferences. The perception may also be altered by the availability of these different flavor profiles in specific cultural cuisines that may now be available to them. These factors may influence how domestic tourists perceive Malaysian HF. Therefore, as domestic tourism is such a significant part of Malaysia's overall tourism, it becomes paramount to investigate how domestic tourists perceive Malaysian HF.

2.2 Behavioral Intention (BI)

Theory of planned behavior (TPB) describes BI as the perceived probability of an individual or a subjective probability of engaging in a particular behavior (Ajzen, 1991). According to Ajzen (1991), it is vital to capture the motivational factors that influence behavior. It indicates how hard people are willing to try and how much effort they plan to perform a particular behavior. Generally, the stronger the intention to engage in said behavior, the more likely one performs the behavior. According to Sheeran (2002), "people do what they plan to do and do not do what they do not plan to do" (Sommer, 2011).

Similarly, Danner, Aarts, and Vries (2008) found that intentions may play a significant role in confirming goal-oriented behavior. Consequently, intents have emerged as the core and spirit of the action itself. Without any intention, it may be impossible for someone to reveal a specific action. When studying potential human behavior, it becomes essential to understand one's intentions to predict what one may do. In this study, the behavioral intention in referring to the consumer's intention to consume, intention to return, and intention to recommend to others.

2.3 Emotional Value

Emotional value refers to an individual's emotions. Sheth et al. (1991) described emotional value as the perceived effectiveness derived from an alternative's ability to stimulate an emotional response. The alternative acquires emotional value when associated with specific feelings, precipitates, or perpetuates said feelings. The emotional value may play a significant role regarding the perception of HF by domestic tourists as the food relates to a shared cultural history (Ramli et al., 2017). As Heddy et al. (2016) stated, increased knowledge may lead to a shift in attitude and emotion.

Understanding emotional value is essential as emotions are related to BI in previous studies. Sthapit et al. (2017) determined that food consumption emotions influenced revisit intentions and the intention to recommend to one's friends. A recent study also found that emotional value influenced food recommendations to others (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2020). This study, therefore, aims to explore the emotional value in the consumption of Pahang's HF. Thus, it is hypothesized that emotional value will positively influence domestic tourists' BI towards HF in Pahang.

2.4 Quality Value

The quality value is functional as it evaluates the utility aspect based on a quality perspective. In the Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, "quality" is defined as the degree of excellence. Studies evaluate how consumers determine what excellence is concerning the gap between expectation and performance (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml, 2002). In other words, if the performance of a product exceeds the buyer's expectations, they will experience satisfaction and perceive quality. The relationship between expectations and quality may signify that familiarity and knowledge may influence a consumer's perception of quality. Suggesting that if domestic tourists are exposed to more information regarding HF, they may form more realistic expectations, creating a quality perception.

This notion is vital as quality has been found to be related to BI in multiple studies. Altintzoglou, Heide, and Borch (2015) noted that quality was a significant factor in purchasing food souvenirs while on holiday. Similarly, Yan, Wang, and Chau (2015) researched restaurant intentions by reviewing online customer reviews and established that food quality and quality of service were antecedents of a customer's intention to revisit. Furthermore, another study noted that the quality of the overall experience also influences behavioral intentions, particularly the intention to revisit (Wu, Li, and Li (2017). Based on the literature review, this study would like to postulate that quality value will positively influence domestic tourists' BI towards HF in Pahang.

2.5 Epistemic Value

Epistemic value is described as the product's ability "to arouse curiosity, provide novelty, and/or satisfy a desire for knowledge" (Sheth et al., 1991). The epistemic value may play a significant role regarding HF due to its inherent novelty. Domestic tourists seeking HF or those who may not be seeking but become exposed to HF during travel may be curious regarding their heritage and look toward food to better understand their history (Ramli et al., 2017). Others may seek HF as a means of exploring something that may not be available, something new to them (Omar et al., 2015).

The epistemic value effect was investigated on public acceptance of genetically modified food in a study by Hu, Liu, Zhang, and Zhang (2021). The finding shows that once the consumers are familiar with the products, the epistemic value (trustable) can influence the modified food's acceptance. The results are essential because epistemic factors in previous studies have shown a significant ability to influence BI. Choe and Kim (2018) determined that epistemic values positively influence tourists' attitudes regarding food and that these attitudes influence BIs like revisit and intention to recommend. In another study regarding healthy, unhealthy, and hybrid food consumption values towards physical activity, the findings show epistemic value was positively associated with the hybrid food, considering that the consumers anticipate pleasure and reflective attitude in the study (Thome, Cappellesso, & Pinho, 2020). In Kaur, Dhir, Talwar, and Ghuman (2021), the epistemic, or visibility, was also tested on customers' intention toward food delivery apps (FDA). The epistemic value had the most substantial influence on purchase intentions of food via FDA. Based on this literature review, this study would like to postulate that epistemic value will positively influence domestic tourists' BI towards HF in Pahang.

To summarize, this study aims to fill literature gaps by investigating the effect of HF consumption values on domestic tourists' BI by narrowing the HF in the state of Pahang. Fig. 2 illustrates the proposed framework for this study.

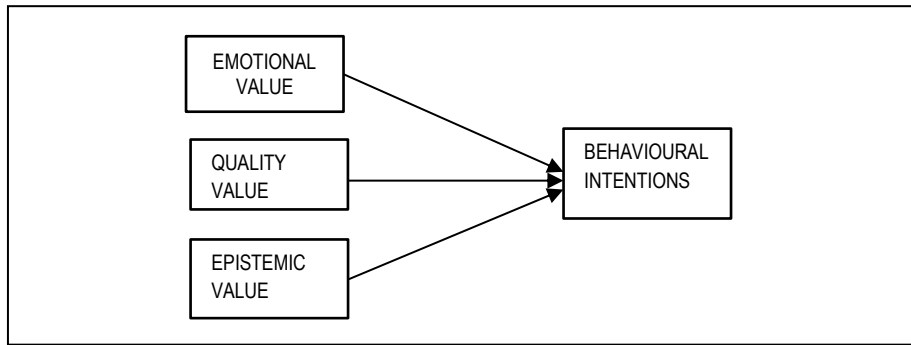


Fig. 2: Consumption Values Model

3.0 Methodology

This study had a quantitative approach and developed the questionnaire through a review of the literature. For the Consumption Values, this study adapted thirteen question items from Choe and Kim (2018) to measure emotional value, quality value, and epistemic value. Question items for the BI are adapted from Aprile, Caputo, and Nayga (2015) and Choe and Kim (2018). The questionnaire survey consisted of four sections. The first section was on respondents' demographic information, including gender, age, ethnicity, and state of origin. The second section asked respondents to rate perceived consumption values of emotion, quality, and finally epistemic values. The third section measured respondent's BI toward HF. Lastly, the fourth section asked respondents about their opinion and recommendations.

This study omitted the midpoint answer and measured the items using a 6-point Likert-type scale, where 1=strongly disagree and 6=strongly agree. The plan of data collection was through the online survey via the Google form. This method has a limitation, which heavily depends on each respondent's effort to snowball the survey. This study also carried out a pre-test activity at two levels to ensure the question items' validity. Language lecturers reviewed the English and Malay sets of questionnaires from the Department of English and Department of Malay at the International Islamic University in Johor's Kulliyah of Languages and Management. The experts' viewpoints in the Department of Tourism were also considered for some modifications. A pilot study was then conducted before the mass data collection process. A total of 29 were analyzed for reliability purposes. All items achieved an acceptable Cronbach's alpha value, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Result of Cronbach's Alpha for the Variable Items

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
IV 1: Emotional Value	0.935	5
IV 2: Quality Value	0.868	5
IV 3: Epistemic Value	0.812	5
DV: Behavioral Intention	0.896	9

3.1 Data Collection

The tourism statistics showed that the number of tourists arriving in Pahang in 2019 was 13,992,313 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). This study is intended for domestic tourists who traveled for Pahang's HF, thus purposive sampling. Questionnaires were distributed online through social networking systems, including WhatsApp, Messenger, and Telegram. Data collection took place from 13 October to 13 November 2019. It was a snowballing selection approach to provide the researcher with a generalized sample (Sharma, 2017), intending to have 384 respondents for a population of more than 13 million people, as suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

4.0 Findings

4.1 Sample Profile

The total number of responses received was 164. It achieved 42.7% of the target set based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) recommendation. Three of the respondents were non-Malaysian and, therefore, were excluded from the analysis. Of the 161 usable data, 80.7% were female. About 78% were the age group ranged from 12 to 24. The Malay respondents were the majority (95% respondents), and most of the respondents (41.6%) were from Pahang. The findings tapped the agreement of 99.4% of respondents that HF consumption preserves the culture. More than 97% of respondents answered 'Yes' to the idea of commercialization activities of HF in Pahang should be commercialized to reach other destinations.

Interestingly, this study was able to determine which regions in Pahang are common for the HF. As a result, almost 74% answered that Temerloh was the region that mostly HF in Pahang can be found. Refer to Table 2 below.

Table 2.: The Statement Opinion on the Consumption of HF in Pahang

Statements	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Consumption of HF is one of the efforts to preserve the culture	Yes	161	99.4
	No	1	0.6
Commercialization activities of HF in Pahang to other destinations	Yes	157	97.5
	No	4	2.5
Region that mainly sells Pahang's HF	Bentong	26	16.1
	Bera	18	11.2
	Cameron Highlands	13	8.1
	Jerantut	59	36.6
	Kuantan	88	54.7
	Lipis	58	36
	Maran	20	12.4
	Pekan	75	46.6
	Raub	46	28.6
	Rompin	23	14.3
	Temerloh	119	73.9
Kuala Krau	17	10.6	
Total		542	349.1

4.2 Reliability Analysis

The Cronbach's alpha estimate for the emotional value of 0.923 (four items), the quality value of 0.896 (four items), and the epistemological value of 0.912 (five items). All construction items are considered to have good reliability. Please refer to Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach Alpha
Emotional value	5.14	.912	.921
Quality value	5.16	.847	.896
Epistemic value	5.08	.961	.912

4.3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was used to describe the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the variables. Epistemological, emotional, and quality values all have a strong relationship. All study variables are considered strongly correlated and significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed). See Table 4.

Table 4. Correlation Matrix for Study Variables

Independent Variables	Behavioral Intention
Emotional value	.715**
Quality value	.683**
Epistemic value	.835**

Note. N=161. Significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

4.4 Hypotheses Testing

The output generated from the multiple regression explains the overall model at 74.2%. The ANOVA result indicates that the model as a whole value is significant. In evaluating each variable, which is reflected by the hypotheses, all three variables statistically significantly contributed to the BI. This study shows that emotional value positively influences domestic tourists' BI towards HF in Pahang. The beta value received was 0.115, with a significant p-value of 0.000, it supported the first hypothesis. For the second hypothesis, the regression results show the beta value obtained was 0.196 with a p-value of 0.004. Hence, the hypothesis is also supported, which quality value also positively influenced the domestic tourists' BI towards HF in Pahang. For the third hypothesis, the results recorded that the beta value obtained for the epistemic value is 0.630, with a significant p-value of .000. The epistemic value had the most considerable contribution to other consumption values by 63%. All hypotheses can be accepted and are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Regression Analysis Results

Hypothesis	Standardized parameter est.	Sig.	Conclusion
H1: Emotional value positively influences domestic tourist' BI towards HF in Pahang	.115	.000	Supported
H2: Quality value positively influences domestic tourist' BI towards HF in Pahang	.196	.000	Supported

5.0 Discussion

Food tourism is on the rise and can potentially contribute to economic growth in Malaysia. The study results indicate that the consumption values of HF can influence the domestic tourists' BI. Domestic tourists can ultimately promote their consumption intention based on the perceived value of HF. The findings should be considered when developing new marketing; marketers should increase familiarity with HF, particularly potential domestic tourists. It further enhanced how tourists feel and react to HF, which providing valuable guidance in overcoming tourism-related marketing challenges. The results provide valuable information that can be used as a reference for developing HF tourist destinations. Familiarity can influence the emotional, quality, and epistemic values and, in turn, influence visit and consumption intentions and the intention to recommend to others (Heddy et al., 2016; Rahman et al., 2018; Roustaf & Jamshidi, 2020). By examining the relationship between familiarity and intention, besides probing its effects, this study uncovers the processes that motivate tourists' decisions when visiting a particular destination. It can add an essential element by understanding tourist destination intentions (Kim, Lehto, & Kandampully (2019).

Overall, the result indicates that most respondents accepted the determinant factors in this study, which influenced Pahang's HF consumption for their behavioral purposes. A closer look shows, the epistemic value had the most significant influence among all the variables analyzed. This notion signifies the ability of epistemic value to motivate interest among tourists on Pahang HF BI. The results align with recent studies like Hu et al. (2020), Kaur et al. (2021), and Thome, Cappellesso, and Pinho (2020). The feeling of curiosity and the sense of novelty influence motivation for tourists to try Pahang HF. The inherent novelty of Pahang HF acts as a catalyst, satisfying a desire for knowledge among tourists. To re-emphasize, variety of ingredients used, good quality ingredients, appealing flavoring, and a high standard of quality for HFs regarded by the respondents in this study are consistent with Bjork and Kuppinen-Raisanen (2015), Choe and Kim (2018), and Yan, Wang, and Chau (2015).

5.1 Implications

An improved understanding of the relationship between consumption values and BI may allow destination marketers to improve their message to potential domestic tourists and focus on providing information that will augment these values' perceptions. Also, this research improves our understanding of how consumption values may relate to food tourism and particularly products that rely on heritage and authenticity.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

This study determined that the perception of emotional, quality, and epistemic values related to HF significantly influenced domestic travelers' BI to Pahang, Malaysia, with epistemic value having the most substantial relationship. These results support the findings discussed in the literature. However, two possible limitations of this study are that the domestic tourists in this study included people from Pahang who traveled for Pahang's HF and scarce information on the local FH in this state. In the future, respondents may be extended from non-Pahang domestic tourists or international tourists' viewpoints. A critical view of HF consumption dimensions could also be related to the location and food image destination. New studies can incorporate and facilitate in-depth gastronomic experiences to those who have never tried Pahang's heritage cuisine. It is also encouraged to replicate or compare studies among different populations in other geographic regions and repeat studies on first-time, domestic or international tourists to improve the understanding of the consumption of HFs. In summary, future studies should review other areas of Malaysia to reaffirm the findings of this study.

Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper adds to gastronomy literature, particularly in the literature of food heritage and domestic travelers' behavioral intentions in Malaysia.

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