

An ethnographic enquiry towards the influences and behaviour on food choices of long-term tourists in urban Malaysia.

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Abstract

Despite its importance, food habits of an individual in a foreign location has not received adequate attention in Asian research. Most of the previous studies were based in the US and Europe and focused on the students from a specific discipline (Greaney et al., 2009, LaCaille et al., 2011) or specific backgrounds (Nelson et al., 2009, Cluskey and Grobe 2009). Since the host culture is an important influence towards food consumption behaviour, this ethnographic study provides a unique, Malaysian perspective on international student's food consumption patterns. The objective in this research was to ethnographically explore the food choice behaviour and influences on international students in private universities around Subang Jaya, Malaysia. Participant observation along with semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with the respondents.

The various emerging themes of the food consumption behaviour of international long-term education tourists included food neophilia, stress eating, convenience and health and the influences comprised of price, social networking sites, friends, and word of mouth. Difference in age between researcher and other international students along with the limitations of conducting semi-structured interviews were some of the major limitations. This research can

Resumen

A pesar de su importancia, los hábitos alimentarios de un individuo en un lugar extranjero no han recibido la atención adecuada en la investigación asiática. La mayoría de los estudios anteriores se basaron en los EE. UU. Y Europa y se centraron en los estudiantes de una disciplina específica (Greaney et al., 2009, LaCaille et al., 2011) o antecedentes específicos (Nelson et al., 2009, Cluskey y Grobe 2009). Dado que la cultura anfitriona es una influencia importante en el comportamiento del consumo de alimentos, este estudio etnográfico proporciona una perspectiva malaya única sobre los patrones de consumo de alimentos de los estudiantes internacionales. El objetivo de esta investigación fue explorar etnográficamente el comportamiento y las influencias de la elección de alimentos en los estudiantes internacionales en universidades privadas alrededor de Subang Jaya, Malasia. La observación participante junto con entrevistas cualitativas semiestructuradas se llevaron a cabo con los encuestados.

Los diversos temas emergentes del comportamiento de consumo de alimentos de los turistas internacionales de educación a largo plazo incluyeron la neofilia alimentaria, la alimentación por estrés, la conveniencia y la salud y las influencias compuestas por el precio, los sitios de redes sociales, los amigos y el boca

help policymakers make informed choices regarding sustainable developmental and tourism marketing for similar long-term tourists. It can help sensitize local population on the challenges and issues faced by foreign students in a new country. Furthermore, this can help the F&B industry as well as the society get a deeper understanding on how to cater to foreign long-term tourists.

a boca. La diferencia de edad entre el investigador y otros estudiantes internacionales junto con las limitaciones de realizar entrevistas semiestructuradas fueron algunas de las principales limitaciones. Esta investigación puede ayudar a los formuladores de políticas a tomar decisiones informadas sobre el desarrollo sostenible y el marketing turístico para turistas similares a largo plazo. Puede ayudar a sensibilizar a la población local sobre los desafíos y problemas que enfrentan los estudiantes extranjeros en un nuevo país. Además, esto puede ayudar a la industria de alimentos y bebidas, así como a la sociedad, a comprender mejor cómo atender a los turistas extranjeros a largo plazo.

Keywords: Food Consumption Behaviour; Long-Term Tourists; Educational Tourist; International Students; Qualitative Research, Ethnography.

Palabras clave: Comportamiento de consumo de alimentos; Turistas a largo plazo; Turista Educativo; Estudiantes internacionales; Investigación cualitativa, etnografía.

INTRODUCTION

With the increasing globalisation and the relatively free movement of people across the entire world, people are travelling to various parts of the world not just for business and leisure but also for health, physical and psychological and educational needs. The need for food along with the need to travel are hedonic choices that fall under the category of premier physiological needs, with clear and simple objectives and a simple solution on how to be satisfied (Mela, 1999). Food choices may vary and are not necessarily straightforward, which means that there are lots of influences that affect them. It is common knowledge that we all have different food preferences since we all have different backgrounds, behaviours, and characteristics.

In term of food consumption behaviour, the number of factors involved in the decision-making process has been known to be complicated (Vabo and Hansen, 2014). Nowadays although tourists have their own food preferences, they are eager to try different flavours; including food from other cultures to satisfy their evolving preferences (Dewan, 2020). Food is not only important for subsistence but is also an important vehicle of identity. Our food habits correspond with our personal influences like socio-economic background, belief system, and health condition. Ecological influences governing the availability and sustainability of types of food items in a tourist destination also affect our behaviour. Other influences like price, mood, health, convenience, sensory appeal, body mass index and foods natural content also affect our food choices (Steptoe et al., 1995).

Social influences have an attitudinal effect that plays a role in the changes in our food consumption behaviour. There is a higher chance of similarity in food choices when

people eat in a group, especially when the group consists of familiar people (Teng and Wang, 2015). While the pressure from family and peers are a source of idea or reference for certain food choices, including the willingness to try new food; our economic and time constraints also play an important role, especially for students staying alone in a new country.

The consumption of food, according to Rozin (1996) can only be accepted in a social context. Due to our varied backgrounds, we can see differences in food traditions and cuisines (Montanari, 2006). The relation between our food choice and our perception of taste is different, knowing that people come from different demographic, sociocultural and economic factors (Drewnowski, 1997). People coming from the same culture or region would have been influenced culturally and would tend to have similar food preferences compared to people from another region of the globe. Other researchers have deduced that there are several other factors, like price, mood, health, convenience, sensory appeal, body mass index, and foods natural content that affect our food choices (Steptoe et al., 1995).

Food choice tends to converge when people eat in a group, especially when the group consists of familiar people (Teng and Wang, 2015). According to Rozin (1996), the consumption of food can only be accepted in a social context. As the background of international students may differ, we can see differences in their food traditions and cuisines (Montanari, 2006; Drewnowski, 1997). Academic tourism is, in some ways, different from other kinds of tourism, because it invariably involves long periods of stay in non-native locations. Extended stay in a foreign location and extended contact with a foreign culture has its implications on language, behaviour, and personality, of the tourist.

Despite its importance, the aspect of food habits of an individual in a foreign location has not received adequate attention in Asian research. Most of the previous studies were based in the US and Europe and focused on the students from a specific discipline (Greaney et al., 2009, LaCaille et al., 2011) or specific backgrounds (Nelson et al., 2009, Cluskey & Grobe 2009). Some of these influences have been extensively studied before but the effect of extended stay on food habits of international students' needs to be explored. According to Tomasi, Paviotti and Cavicchi (2020), international students are considered tourists because they take advantage of the opportunities to visit local attractions or travel to other regions of the host countries, alone or with friends and relatives.

Many researchers have shown that some of the main reasons for students to choose international locations is not just the universities quality of education but also how attractive the country is as a tourism destination (OCED, 2020; Rahman, Osman-Gani and Raman, 2017; Abubakar, Shneikat and Oday, 2014; Michael, Armstrong and King, 2004;

Nyaupane, Paris and Teye, 2011; Tashlai and Ivanov, 2014; Lam, Ariffin and Ahmad, 2011; Lee, 2014).

Considering these studies, this paper focusses on long term educational tourists coming to Malaysia. The objective of this research is to explore the food choice behaviour of international students in private universities around Subang Jaya, Malaysia and to appreciate the influences that affect their food choices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bellisle (2006) reviewed, categorised, and grouped various influences that affect our food choice as biological determinants (hunger, appetite, and taste), economic determinants (cost, income, and availability), physical determinants (access, education, and time), social determinants (culture, family, peers, and meal patterns), psychological determinants (mood, stress and guilt) and attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge about food. While not being an intensive and permanent list in its own, food choices may get altered all through our life because of our individual's personal preferences and unique personalities, knowledge, awareness and others factor that may affect our brain (Bellisle, 2006).

Biological determinants

Neophobia & Neophilia

In the context of food sociology, familiarity and strangeness affect the neophobic and neophilic tendencies of taste, while among individuals, there is chance that both the tendencies can be found. An individual would like to try something new but at the same time be scared to try specific kind of foods (Fischler, 1988). Neophobia and neophilia is generated by both biological and cultural influences. Our religious or cultural choices may dictate what we can and cannot eat which translates into a fear when we eat outside the comfort of our home environment (Dewan, 2017).

Past researchers have found three main factors that contribute to food neophobia, sensory quality of the food itself, information regarding the food product and consumers' perception or personality traits (Tuorila et al., 1994). The understanding of food neophobia is not only seen as an avoidance to try new food but a restriction of the acceptance of new food flavours, styles, and ingredients (Johns et al., 2011). As such, food neophobia can be the moderator to check the effects that are affecting various behavioural outcomes (Chen, 2007; Eertmans et al., 2005). Neophobia is also strongly related to both physiological and emotional states of the individuals (Pliner et al., 1995). Alternatively, food neophilia involves an interest in new foods, in eating a wide variety of foods, familiar and unfamiliar ones with a great and positive pleasure (Raudenbush and Frank, 1999).

Visually Attractive

We eat with our eyes first and any appetising and well garnished food would usually be preferred by us instead of discoloured, smelly, or misshapen food. According to Delwiche (2004), visual presentation may affect or change our perception of taste, odour, and flavour of various foods. Food arrangement on a plate may modify a diner's expectation and leads to their positive experience of a dish (Spence et al., 2014). Visual composition of the food on a plate gives a significant influence over what people think about the dish (Apicius, 1936, Delwiche, 2004, Spence, 2015) and has given rise to the term 'food porn' on social media sites like Facebook and Instagram. Food porn is essentially the objectification and aesthetic presentation of food on a plate.

Past Experience

Our past experiences of food habits influence our choice of one food product over another. Our food choices are due to our knowledge of the food product and tastes that we may have experienced as infants (Capaldi, 2004). These choices continue to form throughout our lives (Nestle et al., 1998).

Food & Health

A study by Neumark-Sztainer et al., (1999) shows that youngsters were concerned about school, family, and friends, and eating healthy food was not something they needed to worry about. Youngsters did not worry about the importance of health and only started to think about health that when they got older and have heart problems (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 1999). Their study highlighted that students saw healthy foods as tasteless and high-fat food such as junk food tasting better.

Economic determinants

Price, Income & Availability

Previous research shows that food costs have a major contribution towards the food choice decision of the individuals and has also shown that low-income groups have a higher tendency to consume imbalanced meals, which in-turn caused lack of nutrients in their diet (Sanchez-Villegas et al., 2003). The research also showed that higher income households did not necessarily have a better quality of diet; rather they had a wider range of products to choose from.

Physical determinants

Convenience & Time

Our food choice might be altered by the amount of time we have or our willingness to spend time on food that we wanted to eat. People preferred spending their time on bed

rather than use the time for cooking breakfast, not wanting to wait in a long line for a food, preferred choosing fast-food restaurants because the time convenience that a fast-food restaurant provide, and choosing foods like simple meal that can be prepared quickly when they are doing the cooking (Neumark et al., 1999).

Social determinants

People

Food and eating are also associated with our social lives as most eating is done with people and often considered as the fun part of our cultural experience (Rozin, 2005). Social factors affect our food intake either directly (buying food) or indirectly (learn from peer's behaviour), either consciously (transfer of beliefs) or subconsciously. Even eating alone our food choices are influenced by social factors because through the communication with others, our character and manner are developed. Understanding the social influences on food consumption is challenging because of the unlimited possibilities of the changes that people have on the eating habits (Feunekes et al., 1998).

Food Trend / Globalization

Globalization has influenced many aspects of human activity, including food production and consumption (Lang, 1999; Wilhelmina et al., 2010). Although not a new area of research, the scope area and pace of change is accelerating, mostly because globalization is facilitated by the developments in transportation, information, and communication technology (Lang, 1999; Reiser, 2003).

Social Media & Advertisement

Through the internet, there are numerous ways a person can change a simple dinner at home to eating fast food or dining out in the restaurant. Posting and sharing food on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat has become quite popular. An increasingly high numbers of people are taking photos of their food while eating out (Menulog, 2014). Research focussed on advertising to children shows that food advertising makes the item to become a preference and increases the purchase intention of the products advertised (Hastings et al., 2003).

Religion & Culture

Food restrictions apply is for those who are restricted to take food due to religious or medical conditions. In Islam, eating is considered to be a matter of worship. Muslims are expected to eat for survival and good health, self-indulgence is not permitted. They are also encouraged to eat less, not share food, not to throw food or treat it with contempt. In a case where utensils are not used for eating, right hand is considered the clean hand that is used to eat, while the left is considered not clean (Kittler et al., 2016).

For example, in Hinduism, generally, we avoid foods that we believe hamper the development of the body or mental abilities. Many Hindus are vegetarians; they adhere to the concept of ahimsa, avoiding the infliction of pain on the animal by not eating meat. Vegetarianism in Hinduism entails eating Satwik food which is pure vegetarian in nature with an emphasis on milk and milk by-products like butter and ghee (Dewan, 2017). Although the consumption of meat is allowed, the cow is considered sacred and is not to be killed or eaten (Kittler et al., 2016).

Psychological determinants

Mood

The connection between food choices and our emotional status is complicated. We choose some foods specifically to improve our emotional state, reduce pressure and depression. Beverages like tea and coffee are considered to influence mood and refresh the mind. It is believed that these drinks restore the well-being and energy of the mind and body as the caffeine, nicotine and carbohydrates content inside the drinks create the effect of waking us up. (Smit and Rogers, 2002).

Some people show a decrease in appetite particularly when one is in a negative state of mind, with the connection between mental state and craving of food being higher in women (Jeżewska-Zychowicz, 1996).

Stress

Psychological stress is a typical element of the life nowadays and it influences the health, physical activity, smoking or food choice of people. The influence of stress on food choice (overeating as well as reduced consumption) is complex and much research have been dedicated to understand this link (Oliver and Wardle 1999).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research

For this paper, a qualitative research methodology, under the constructivist/ interpretivist paradigm is favoured. Interpretivists believe in reality being subjective and influenced by the context of the situation, namely our experience and perceptions, the social environment, and the interaction between the participant and us (Ponterotto, 2005). The interpretivist constructivist ontology says that knowledge is relative and exists in multiple mental constructions. Our reality may be local or specific and may be constructed or co-constructed with our participants (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Guba (1996) further reenforces that multiple realities exist and are dependent on the individual. My relativist ontological beliefs assume that reality as we know it is constructed inter-subjectively with me and the other international students together through the fluid and changing meanings and

understandings developed socially and experientially. In this research the reality in which the other international long-term tourists live may be different from the researcher but I have an affinity towards understanding their reality due to my living as a PhD student with them in Malaysia. This co-creation of reality is what makes the interpretivist ethnographic approach worth using in this research.

Ethnographic participant observations along with semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow the participants to respond in their own words and were encouraged to talk in detail. As ethnography entails examining the behaviour of the participants in a specific social situation and understanding their interpretation of such behaviour (Dewan, 2018) the relationship between the researcher and the participant was not strictly scripted and the list questions, while being mainly the same were tweaked as per the individual respondent's answers and context and setting of the interview (Yin, 2011). The researcher was undertaking his PhD and was a member of the student post-graduate council. This helped in snowball sampling while collecting the data from the respondents.

Scope & Demographic

The group data collection belongs to international students in various universities in Subang Jaya, Malaysia. Here the term 'international' refers to an individual that comes from another country to Malaysia and does not hold any Malaysian citizenship. The reason for choosing international students was that Malaysian private universities have a high percentage of international students from across the world and as they have their own cultures which are different from Malaysian, their food habits may also differ from when they were back home in their own reality. The age group for the interview respondents ranged from age of 17-24, with all of them as full-time students. Participant observations were also conducted with post graduate student who usually seemed to have a higher disposable income for their expenses.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Based on the objectives of the research, the observations and interviews were coded into themes/groups and are discussed according to thematic analysis.

Theme 1: Food Neophilia

The first theme which emerged was the neophilic tendencies of the participants. This could be because most of the respondents were hospitality management students and they seemed to have higher affinity towards novel food choices and experiences. The observations and interviews show that most of the respondents had an interest and curiosity towards in trying new cuisine.

"I am really excited about try on new food because I love to try something different every time I'm eating outside or even like trying to make it I will go for something new" (Respondent 3, female, Bangladesh)

"I mean, if there is something new and eye catching for me, or interesting for me, I will try" (Respondent 5, male, Indonesia)

According to Bell & Valentine (1997), a neophilic is a person that is excited/ interested to try new food and tend to have habits to travel.

"I'm pretty much an adventurous eater, so I had insects before and it was actually pretty good" (Respondent 1, female, Indonesia)

"Actually, it is very rare for me to taste Indian food, so I am a bit curious about the one in Malaysia" (Respondent 2, female, Indonesia)

The respondents were quite interested in sharing their food experiences and shared their more outgoing food escapades like consuming insects during their short holidays to Thailand (respondent 1). Even having Indian cuisine in Malaysia was a seen to be a joy inducing activity for respondent 2 and highlighted her neophilic tendencies.

Theme 2: Stress Eating

Eating because of stress can be interpreted as the changes (increased or decreased consumption) in food intake because of various reasons (Oliver and Wardle,1999). The consumption factors could be because of motivational differences (concern about weight and body image), physiological (reduce appetite) and practical changes in the availability of food, feeling of decide whether to eat or not, and the preparation of food.

"Lately I have been spending a lot of time in university, so I don't really control what I eat, because I'm doing a lot of projects, so mostly it's all stress eating, so I have been eating a lot of carbs, and fried foods" (Respondent 1, female, Indonesia)

"Like when it is exam time and when I feel stressed, I eat snacks more" (Respondent 2, female, Indonesia)

"When I am stressed and doing a lot of studies, so I will tend to crave for more food especially dessert, so I would really go for desserts" (Respondent 3, female, Bangladesh)

The behaviour of stress eating that the international students exhibited may have been because of overburdened schedules for projects and assessment submissions, assessments, and exams. As a student himself, the researcher himself felt the same pressures while undertaking his own studies at the university.

Theme 3: Convenience

The researcher observed that even though the respondents had time to spend on preparing food, they would choose to get food that was convenient and handy food that fit in backpack.

“Eating outside is easy cause you go there you order food, you eat, you pay, then ciao so it really convenience” (Respondent 1, female, Indonesia)

“It also more convenience if we order food, we don’t need to cook” (Respondent 2, female, Indonesia)

“I don’t have enough time, so I just go to restaurant, easier for me” (Respondent 5, male, Indonesia)

“The reason why I eat at campus is because I have no time to cook” (Respondent 4, female, Indonesia)

Various reasons for convenience meals and eating out that were observed. These ranged from them being too lazy to cook and clean afterwards, shortage of time between lectures and even weight management.

Theme 4: Price

The biggest and most consistent observations and answers during the interview was the cost factor of preparing food items at home or hostel. The respondents saw eating out as being cheaper than preparing full meals in their respective apartments or hostels.

“It really depends on which position in financial state I am. If I can afford more expensive food, then I will. In general, I don’t really like to spend that much on food” (Respondent 1, female, Indonesia)

“Price, mood, and time also” (Respondent 2, female, Bangladesh)

“Other factors might be the price as well. As I am a student, I have to manage my allowance and everything, so I always try to find something that is affordable for me.” (Respondent 2, female, Indonesia)

“Something like mamak or mix rice. ... I think for me is cheap, affordable” (Respondent 5, male, Indonesia)

The respondents seem to make a conscious choice during their monthly food consumption patterns. Multiple times over a period of a year the researcher observed that the post graduate students ate pricier meals during the start of the month and slowly the meals became unhealthier and more imbalanced. By the end of the month many of the students preferred eating cup noodles, chips, or cracker biscuits for lunch only. Also eating out is a norm in Malaysia and cooking full meals is not a daily occurrence here, especially for working households. There is also a feeling that eating out is cheaper than

cooking full meals at home and these local attitudes seem to rub off on the foreign students too.

Theme 5: Health

The international students in the three universities were very aware of the health benefits of a balanced diet, yet most of them did not follow that kind of lifestyle regularly. While many were aware of the positive health benefits of healthy eating, when the cravings and hunger took over their thoughts, they tend to choose unhealthier choices.

“Healthy eating lifestyle, first of all it has to be balanced diet, so u can’t take too many carbs or protein or too much of one nutrient in one go, so you have to have everything on a plate, you have to have protein, you have to have carbs, fibre, fats, all the nutrients that u need in a plate, and it all has to be balanced” (Respondent 1, female, Indonesia)

“I actually like to have a balanced meal, carbs, protein, veggies and fruits. But sometimes I don’t care because I like to eat dessert as well. I know that I shouldn’t consume too much sugar which is fat, but it is frustrating that when I wanted to eat dessert and then I also think of healthy lifestyle” (Respondent 2, female, Indonesia)

Quite a few of the respondents had low intake of fruits, vegetables, and dairy foods along with high intake of fast foods and other foods high in fat along with unhealthful dieting and meal skipping (Neumark-Stainzer et al., 1999).

“I have been eating a lot of carbs, and fried foods, and I realize that is not healthy but at home I try to eat as healthy, I eat veggie, fruits, or umm I tried to have at least clean breakfast” (Respondent 1, female, Indonesia)

“Mostly I skip my breakfast” (Respondent 3, female, Bangladesh)

“Sometimes I’m worried about my weight but then sometimes I really want to fulfil my cravings, my needs” (Respondent 4, female, Indonesia)

According to a study by Neumark et al., (1999), students think that eating healthy food is not something they need to worry about.

“I think like as a student and as a student life I’m not calling much of that healthy eating and I’m not having much of healthy food, but I am aware of healthy eating, healthy food” (Respondent 3, female, Bangladesh)

Neumark-Sztainer et al., (1999) stated that ‘Students say that if you want young people to do something you have to make it cool, make it the “thing to do”’. They discussed the effect of media on adolescents and suggested better advertising and packaging designs for healthful foods.

Theme 6: Social Networking Sites

Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and other platform are ever popular with the university students because of photo and video sharing feature in these applications.

“I use a lot of Facebook, Instagram, Snapchats, Youtube. ... You got so many reviews on social media, you got a lot of people that can say anything, pretty much anything” (Respondent 1, female, Indonesia)

“Instagram, Facebook. ... But it really helps me, Instagram. If I wanted to search for food. Let us say I’m craving for waffle, then I typed and search on Instagram search, ‘#waffle, then all the pictures with all the hashtag of waffles will comes out” Respondent 2, female, Indonesia)

“I love to take photos” “I think social media plays a very important roles, nowadays, umm because I think its influences and attract customers like us” (Respondent 3, female, Bangladesh)

“Instagram and Zomato. ... Before I go to the restaurant, I will find the information first about the restaurants. See the rating” (Respondent 4, female, Indonesia)

From the observations and interviews regarding the type of social media in use, it was observed that Instagram are the most used social media among international students, followed by Facebook. The respondents used social media as a reference tool and usually checked online reviews and ratings before choosing a new restaurant. Similar to a survey by Menulog (2014), photo taking and sharing of the menu items was a common trend in all the three university students.

Theme 7: Friend & Word of Mouth

Social life plays an important role in our food choices. According to Rozin (2005), we tend to eat along with other people and talking while eating is perceived by our brain as a fun part to social interaction (Rozin, 2005). Consequently, it is obvious that our eating behaviour, including our food choices, are deeply affected by our social interactions.

“It depends, but most of the time for lunch, I eat with my friends at campus, so I just eat whatever everyone agrees to eat” (Respondent 2, female, Indonesia)

“My friends, it could be the factor” (Respondent 4, female, Indonesia)

Research by Anderson et al. (1998) also stated that family and friend as the crucial factor in food decisions. Our families are a source of encouragement in making and sustaining dietary change and adopting dietary strategies.

“If I’m in Indonesia, my mom always cooks for me, so most of the time I eat at home. It is very rare for me to eat outside, usually only on the weekends with my family” (Respondent 2, female, Indonesia)

LIMITATION & RECOMMENDATION

One of the first limitations the researcher faced was to become a friend to the group of the younger students. As a matured PhD candidate as well as a full-time lecturer, it was quite a challenge to make new friends and acquaintances who were not aware of the researcher's actual background. These friendships grew over a period and the researcher was also nominated as a post graduate student council member for a period of one year. This leadership position further made engagement with more respondents possible.

Undertaking semi-structured open-ended interviews was also a challenge as it was quite difficult for the researcher to find a mutual free time to formally sit down and interview the respondents. This problem was overcome by finding free time on weekends when both the researcher as well as the respondents were relatively free to talk and interact. Another major limitation faced was that most of the respondents that the researcher interacted with were graduate and post graduate students from the hospitality and tourism industry. These students already have a higher interest in food and beverages, and this may have skewed the results towards the hospitality student's food choice behaviour as compared to it being behaviour of students from all fields.

For future research, it is recommended that most a more diverse group of respondents are chosen from diverse nationalities, course of study and religions.

While this data collection comes from three private universities in Subang Jaya, which is a prosperous cosmopolitan town on the suburbs of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; future research could be done on university students in smaller towns and cities across Malaysia, especially from government funded universities. Future researchers can also choose a more diverse respondent group of international students with a more diverse age group. This may lead to much deeper understanding of the food habits and motivations of international students.

6 CONCLUSIONS

As international students and long-term tourists in another country, the respondents have a tendency to explore and assimilate new foods habits. Other than neophilia, they spend their eating time outside, even though they sometimes cook at home. The reasons not to cook are attributed to long purchasing, cooking, and cleaning time as well as higher costs. Convenience eating was the general trend observed and this was seen across the groups from degree to masters to even young doctorate students.

Stress eating behaviour was also a very prevalent trait seen across all groups of international students. Most of this stress was due to constant deadlines of assessments, assignments, projects, and examinations. Due to the stresses of deadlines and time shortage between lectures, convenience eating was also seemed to be a major food

choice behaviour. This saved them time as well as reduced the effort for them to choose what to cook, when to buy and cook as well as how much cleaning needs to be done after cooking and eating.

The biggest influence on the eating habits of the students was the price of cooking food at their residence. As is the culture of Malaysia, eating out is relatively cheaper as well as convenient for most of the population here. The students seem to assimilate and enjoy this habit. Health was also seen to have an impact on the food choices but at a lower level as compared to price. The students were seen to disregard healthy food for cheaper and more convenient alternatives due to time constraints.

Social networking and photo sharing sites were seen to be another major source of influence on the food choice behaviour of the international students. Word of mouth from friends, food, and restaurant review websites as well as online food blogs were also seen as an influencing factor for respondents in private universities of Subang Jaya, Malaysia.

Due to a dearth of research focusing on the food consumption patterns based on long-term tourists in Malaysia, this study contributes to the theoretical body of knowledge by providing an exploratory study on them. Practical contributions include assisting government bodies explore a newer niche markets group and appreciate their perspectives and attitudes towards food consumption in Malaysia. This in-turn can add to the economic value addition to the tourism and hospitality industry by making them understand and adapt to the food consumption patterns of this overlooked long-term tourist group. From a management perspective, tour operators, F&B businesses and the tourism ministries of countries can use this research to identify and conceptually design food and beverage options for similar long-term tourist groups to increase their customer base and generating more revenue.

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