



CONSUMER'S PERCEPTION TOWARDS STREET FOOD IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Eating out is part of the culture in Malaysia. Street food, in particular, has been popular not only among the locals but also the international tourists. Due to its popularity and low entry threshold, the street food market is competitive in Malaysia. Understanding the consumers and give them what they want becomes critical for the success of street food vendors. Thus, this descriptive study aims to examine consumers' perception towards street food in Puncak Alam, a newly developed town in Selangor, Malaysia. Quantitative method was employed for this study and 379 questionnaires were conveniently distributed to the residents in Puncak Alam, Selangor and 301 usable questionnaires were collected. The data were analyzed using SPSS and it was found that consumers perceive street food positively in the areas of perceived value, food safety, price, environment, and health consciousness. These results are useful for people who are already in the street food business as well as for those who intend to embark on this business.

KEYWORDS: *Street food, Consumers' perception, Malaysia*

INTRODUCTION

By definition street food is food sold at the streets with low time preparation and served to customers in form of packaged for take away (Deivanai, 2016). Street food is a common features of most towns and cities in many developing countries (Alimi, 2016). With its affordable price, easy access, variety of choices and convenience street food has been growing in demand (Trafialek, Drosinos, & Kolanowski, 2017, Singh, Dudeja, Kaushal, & Mukherji, 2016, Choi et al., 2013). Street food has always been popular in Malaysia. With the change of life-style and heavier responsibilities from society, work and family,

Malaysian often look for other meal alternatives rather than home-cooked food. This contributes to making the already popular street food even more popular (Ismail, Chik, Muhammad, & Yusoff, 2016, Fransisca du Plessis, 2015).

However due to its popular and lucrative nature street food is a competitive business as it attracts many vendors to enter the market. Maintaining the current customers and creating new customers become a constant challenge for many street food operators (Bakar & Farinda, 2012). Street food vendors need to know their customers well in order to come up with a strategy to gain competitive advantage (Sun et al.,



2012). Understanding customer's perception towards the various critical areas of street food operation can help increase the chance of success in such a competitive market. The aim of this study is to investigate consumers' perception towards street food. The research findings can help get ready those who are interested to start a street food business as well as to help those who are already in the business better understand their customers.

CONSUMERS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS STREET FOOD

One of the main reasons for the increasing purchasing of street food among consumers is the perceived value. Perceived value can be described as he overall assessment of what is received and what is given (Li & Green, 2011). It is a gap between consumer perceived benefits (quality) and perceived costs, both monetary (price) and non-monetary (time, effort) (Pham, Tran, Misra,

Maskeliunas & Damasericious, 2018; Bassey, 2014; Muturi, Wadawi & Owino, 2014). For street food this value include the affordable price consumers pay for the large portion, the quality food and service they get for the price they pay as well as the time and effort in obtaining the food (Phan & Mai, 2016).

Most consumers who eat street food are dependent on the food vendors who cook and prepare food for them in which their hygienic implementations affect them directly (Calopes et al., 2017). However due to the limited accessible facilities of street food operation consumers perceive street food of being high food safety risk. The inadequate food storage, mediocre personal hygiene, cross-contaminating between raw and processed food, improper procedures of heating and reheating of food, cooking food inappropriately, allowing food to experience too much exposure without covering it, utilization of food additives, and banned hazardous chemicals, and selling expired products are just some of the main perceived street food safety risks of consumers (Mahiranissa & Hudrasyah, 2015; Monney, Agyei & Owusu, 2013; Rahman, Arif, Bakar & Tambi, 2012).

When consumer purchase a product, price is considered one of the main components in which it has a large impact on purchase intention (Omar, Juhdi, Ahmad & Nazri, 2014; Nguyen & Gizaw, 2014; Mohamad, Rusdi & Hashim, 2014). Consumer's intention to acquire a particular product may be affected by how they perceive a certain price of either being high or low. In addition, consumers normally observe and compare the price paid by other consumers as well

as the priced charged by other food vendors to ensure fairness is applied among them as fairness affects consumer's perception and ultimately influences purchase intention (Razak, Nirwanto & Triatmanto, 2016; Lee, 2012).

The physical environment is one of the first impressions encountered on an establishment by consumers. Physical environment has been found to influence consumer's perceived quality of an establishment (Boo, 2017; Githiri, 2016; Omar et al., 2014). Tangible elements such signs, symbols and décor, as well as intangible elements such as lighting, music, temperature and scent can all help bring consumers' experiences to another level (Ivkov, Blesic, Stefanovic & Raljic, 2014). In addition to expecting the satisfaction, pleasure and excitement brought about by positive environment of the street food operation consumers perceive the condition behind the preparation area s import as the easily visible front part of the operation (Bhakar, 2017; Emmanuel Nondzor, 2015).

Though convenient, time-saving and economical street food is perceived as a less healthy food choice. Many consumers are concerned that, with its high level of fat, salt and usually high in calories, consuming too much street food might cause heart disease, diabetes and obesity (Musaiger, 2014). As consumer's demand for healthy food is growing street food vendors which provide healthy food options receive enriched consumer perceived value, perceived evaluation, satisfaction as well as experience regarding the food (Fransica du Plessis, 2015).

Unlike other established cities such as Kuala Lumpur and Shah Alam where the street food market is already saturated, Puncak Alam as a newly developed city presents many opportunities to those who want to start up a business as street food vendor as well as those who are already operating. This study intends to help provide better understanding on consumer's perception towards street food in Puncak Alam.



METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design using a quantitative approach through cross sectional study was employed to identify consumer's perception toward street food. This study uses quantitative method as it emphasizes on objective measurements and also because the study uses statistical analysis to derive the data that will be collected through the distribution of questionnaires. A cross-sectional survey is conducted among consumers in Puncak Alam, Selangor area. For this survey, it focuses on consumers that purchase street foods in that particular area and it is personal-administered questionnaire.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE SIZE

The people living around Puncak Alam areas will be the population for this study whereas the consumers who eat out as the sample. Puncak Alam is a township in the Ijok community of Kuala Selangor constituency in Selangor, Malaysia. According to the District Council of Kuala Selangor (2018), the populations of Puncak Alam areas is around 25 000 people. Based on the population, the chosen number of sample size is determined according Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. Hence, the sample size of this study is around 384 respondents. This study distributed the questionnaire to 384 people from the population and the questionnaires were dispersed to the samples in a month.

INSTRUMENTATION

A questionnaire was developed based on relevant literature (Phan & Mai, 2016; Samapundo, Cam Thanh, Khaferi, & Devlieghere, 2016; Emmanuel Nondzor, 2015). There are three sections in the questionnaire: Consumer's Perceptions, Consumer's Profile and Demographic. Five-likert scale was used, from strongly disagree to strongly agree, for the perception. Items for consumer profile and demographic are nominal. Pre-test was conducted to ensure validity and reliability was achieved before the real survey is done.

DATA COLLECTION

This study targeted consumers in Puncak Alam, Selangor who have purchased street food before. Convenience sampling was adapted to collect data through self-administered questionnaire survey. Data collection took about a month and a total of 384 respondents took part in the survey. However only 301 answered questionnaires were valid and usable.

DATA ANALYSIS

SPSS version 20.0 was used to run descriptive statistics analyses on respondents' perception, profile and demographics.

FINDINGS

DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS

The majority of the respondents are male 52.8% compared to female 47.2%. The percentage of responses is the highest for the age group of 18-25 years old 36.2%, followed by 26 - 35 years old 27.6%, 36 - 45 years old 23.6%, and 46 - 55 years old 11.3%. The least percentage of response are for the age group of 56 - 65 years old 1.0%, and that of below 18 years old 0.3%. Based on the data collected, most of the respondents are single 56.1%, which is more than half of the sample whereas the married respondents are 41.2% and widow or divorced respondents are only 2.7%. In term of personal income, 31.9% of the respondents earn above RM 3,000, followed by those who earn less than RM 1,000 28.6%, RM 2,001 - RM 3,000 27.2%, and RM 1,000 - RM 2,000 12.3%. The respondents mainly have the education level of College or University 61.5%, and the rest are at the level of Secondary School 37.5%, and Primary School 1%. As for profession, 30.6% of the respondents are from Government sector, followed by 27.2% students, and 24.6% Private sector, 15.6% self-employed and the least are 2% unemployed respondents.



Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	159	52.8%
	Female	142	47.2%
Age	Below 18 years old	1	0.3%
	18 - 25 years old	109	36.2%
	26 - 35 years old	83	27.6%
	36 - 45 years old	71	23.6%
	46 - 55 years old	34	11.3%
	56 - 65 years old	3	1.0%
Marital Status	Above 65 years old	0	0
	Single	169	56.1%
	Married	124	41.2%
	Widow/divorced	8	2.7%
Personal Income per Month	Less than RM 1000	86	28.6%
	RM 1000 - RM 2000	37	12.3%
	RM 2001 - RM 3000	82	27.2%
	Above RM 3000	96	31.9%
Education	College/University	185	61.5%
	Secondary School	113	37.5%
	Primary School	3	1%
Profession	Student	82	27.2%
	Government sector	92	30.6%
	Private sector	74	24.6%
	Self-employed	47	15.6%
	Unemployed	6	2%

Table 1 Respondents Gender, Age, Marital Status, Personal Income per Month, Education and Profession

CONSUMERS' PROFILE

The majority of the responses received are from consumers who have purchased street food before 99.3% compare to those respondents who have never purchased street food, 0.7%. The survey results show that most of the respondents get to know about street foods by passing by the food stall 84.7%, followed by recommendation 52.5%, social media 37.9%, and advertisement 23.6%. In term of frequency of street food purchase, most of the respondents purchase street food twice a week 39.9%, followed by once a week 28.9%, more than 3 times a week 15.6%, and once a month 12.6%. As for the time of the day to consume street food, most of the respondents consume street food in the evening 58.8%, followed by at night 46.5%, in the morning 29.2%, and in the afternoon 25.6%. The highest percentage of respondents claim to buy street foods in a group of 2, 41.5%, followed by in a group of 3, 33.6%, alone 13.3%, and in a group of more than 3, 11.6%.

The reason for most respondents to buy street foods is due to variety of food 74.8%, followed by convenience 64.8%, cheap price 62.1% and taste 55.8%. Based on the collected data, the reasons why people do not buy street foods are mostly because the food is not healthy 81.7%, followed by the individual prefers home cooked food 61.5%, the food is too foreign 43.9%, the food is expensive 34.6%, and the environment is dirty 1.8%. For the amount of money spent on street foods per person per visit, most respondents spend RM 5.00 - RM 10.00 47.2%, followed by RM 11.00 - RM 15.00 34.2%, less than RM 5.00 12.6% and above RM 15.00 6%. Lastly, in term of meal the respondents usually buy street food for, most of the respondents buy food for dinner 40.5%, followed by snacks 32.2%, lunch 14%, and the least is for breakfast 13.3%.



Items	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Have you ever purchased street foods?	Yes	299	99.3%
	No	2	0.7%
*How do you get to know about the street foods?	Advertisement	71	23.6%
	Recommendation	158	52.5%
	Social Medias	114	37.9%
	Passed by the food stall	255	84.7%
How often do you buy street foods?	Once a month	38	12.6%
	Once a week	87	28.9%
	Twice a week	120	39.9%
	More than 3 time a week	47	15.6 %
	when i craving for some food	1	0.3%
	Depending on situation	1	0.3%
	when i feel like eating street food	1	0.3%
	Don't have specific time	1	0.3%
	Seldom	1	0.3%
	Twice a month		
	When too busy only		
	*What time of the day do you normally consume street food?	Morning	88
Afternoon		77	25.6%
Evening		177	58.8%
Night		140	46.5%
I usually buy street foods	Alone	40	13.3%
	In a group of 2	125	41.5%
	In a group of 3	101	33.6%
	In a group more than 3	35	11.6%
*Your reasons for buying street foods	Cheap	187	62.1%
	Convenient	195	64.8%
	Variety of food	225	74.8%
	Tasty food	168	55.8%
*Reasons for people who do not buy street food	Not healthy	246	81.7%
	Expensive	104	34.6%
	Too foreign	132	43.9%
	I prefer home-cooked food	185	61.5%
	Dirty environment	6	1.8%
The amount spent on street foods per person per visit	Less than RM 5.00	38	12.6%
	RM 5.00 - RM 10.00		
	RM 11.00 - RM 15.00	142	47.2%
	Above RM 15.00	103	34.2%



What meal do you usually buy street food for?		18	6%
	Breakfast	40	13.3%
	Lunch	42	14%
	Dinner	122	40.5%
	Snacks	97	32.2%

Table 2 Consumers' Profile*** Respondents can choose more than 1 answer.****PERCEPTION TOWARDS PERCEIVED VALUE**

Most of the respondents prefer to purchase street food because it saves them time (M=4.01). The respondents also agree that they prefer to purchase street food because it offers good and fast customer service (M=3.86), and they believe that they receive

good quality food with the amount of money they pay (M=3.56). However, the respondents are neutral about purchasing only cheap-priced street food (M=2.94), and they also slightly disagree to purchasing street food because it tastes better than home-cooked food (M=2.43).

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I only buy cheap-priced street food.	2.94	1.194
I prefer to purchase street food because it saves me time.	4.01	0.821
I prefer to purchase street food because it offers good and fast customer service.	3.86	0.912
I prefer to purchase street food because it tastes better than home-cooked food.	2.43	1.143
I prefer to purchase street food because I believe I receive good quality food with the amount of money I pay.	3.56	0.973

Table 3: The Mean of responses for Perceived Value (N=301)**PERCEPTION TOWARDS FOOD SAFETY**

From the collected data, it shows that the respondents agree to be concerned with the quality and safety of street food (M=4.32), as well as the amount of

artificial additives and ingredients in the processing of street food (M=4.11). However, the respondents neither agree nor disagree that street food is safe because it has been fried and processed thoroughly (M=3.03).

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am concerned with the quality and safety of street food.	4.32	0.747
I think street food is safe because it has been fried and processed thoroughly.	3.03	1.048
I am concerned about the amount of artificial additives and ingredients in the processing of street food.	4.11	0.942

Table 4: The Mean of responses for Food Safety (N=301)**PERCEPTION TOWARDS PRICE**

Most of the respondents agree that price is their first consideration when going to buy street food (M=3.85). The respondents also agree that they compare prices of the street foods before buying (M=3.83). Moreover, the respondents think the price of

the street food nowadays is affordable (M=3.74), and cheaper-priced foods may lead to low quality of food and higher health risks (M=3.50).



Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
My first consideration when going to buy street food is the price.	3.85	1.106
I think the price of street food nowadays is affordable.	3.74	0.926
I compare prices of the street foods before buying.	3.83	1.048
I think cheaper-priced foods may lead to low quality of food and higher health risks.	3.50	1.290

Table 5: The Mean of responses for Price (N=301)**PERCEPTION TOWARDS ENVIRONMENT**

The survey results show that the respondents strongly prefer to buy street food with clean environment around the stall and far from rubbish, waste water, toilet facilities, open drains and animals (M=4.59), as well as to buy food at a clean condition

food stall (M=4.58). Apart from that, the respondents agree that they prefer to buy street food with access to potable water at the site or close to the site (M=4.38), and prefer to buy street food with adequate waste water or food disposal facilities available (M=4.37).

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I prefer buying food at a clean food stall.	4.58	0.598
I prefer to buy street food with access to potable water at the site or close to the site.	4.38	0.767
I prefer to buy street food with adequate waste water or food disposal facilities available.	4.37	0.784
I prefer to buy street food with clean environment around the stall and far from rubbish, waste water, toilet facilities, open drains and animals.	4.59	0.602

Table 6: The Mean of responses for Environment (N=301)**PERCEPTION TOWARDS HEALTH CONCIIOUSNESS**

Looking at the mean score, most respondents are concerned about their health status when purchasing street food (M=4.13) and they are aware that eating street food excessively would be harmful to their health

(M=3.88). In addition, the respondents basically prefer street food containing less fat and more vegetables (M=3.66). However, the respondents are neutral about street food providing enough energy and being as healthy as any other foods (M=3.04).

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am concerned about my health status when purchasing street food.	4.13	0.943
I am aware that eating street food excessively would be harmful to health.	3.88	1.064
I prefer street food containing less fat and more vegetables.	3.66	1.154
I do think street food provides enough energy and is as healthy as any other foods.	3.04	1.110

Table 7: The Mean of responses for Health Consciousness (N=301)**INTENTION OF REPURCHASE**

Consumers agree they will continue to buy street food (M=4.06) at least once a week (M=3.52) and are willing to recommend their family and friends to purchase street food (M=3.65), and they will at least buy street food at least once a week (M=3.52). However, consumers disagree that they intend to

increase the frequency of purchasing street food (M=2.74).



Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
I will continue buying street food.	4.06	0.789
I will buy street food at least once a week.	3.52	1.041
I intend to increase the frequency of purchasing street food.	2.74	1.057
I am willing to recommend my family and friends to purchase street food.	3.65	1.099

Table 8: The Mean of responses for Behavioral Intention (N=301)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study basically are in support of those from the previous studies. For the perceived value, consumers prefer the street food which has positive perceived value such as good and fast service, tasty quality food, and sold at lesser price. As for food safety, consumers basically perceive street food as safe for consumption. However, their main concern is about the amount of artificial additives and the quality of ingredients used in preparing the food. When it comes to price consumers do consider and compare price before buying street food though they perceive street food price as affordable. However, it is important to note that consumers do not perceive price as an indicator of food quality and disagree that they would buy street food simply because it is cheap. As for environment, consumers have positive perception towards street food with clean environment, as well as with access to potable water at the site or close to the site and with adequate waste water or food disposal facilities available. Finally, as regard to health consciousness consumers are concerned about their health status when purchasing street food and perceive street food as harmful if taken excessively. Consumers perceive more positively towards street food containing less fat and more vegetables.

The findings of this research are beneficial to those who want to start up a street food business as well as those who are already operating. Though consumers agree that they would continue to buy street food and would recommend street food to family and friends they don't seem to have the intention of increasing the purchase of street food. With these study results, street food vendors can design new strategies to increase purchase and revisitation, which will in turn assist in increasing profits. It is important to know that street food is perceived as affordable, convenient, fast service, and with variety of food choices. However, consumers do not see fast food as a healthy food choice and are not very confident about the cleanliness and hygiene level of street food operation. In order to succeed and be sustainable in such a competitive market, street food vendors must ensure good and fast service, quality food with reasonable price, and clean and hygienic

environment. There are also opportunities for street food operators who would like to venture into healthy menu and food with home-cooked taste.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

There have been a few limitations during the process of conducting this research. Firstly, the sample was taken only from Puncak Alam, which is only part the Selangor state in Malaysia, therefore the study results might not be able to represent the whole Malaysia. The respondents of this study are aged 18 and above which exclude the teenagers, specifically, the age group of 13 to 18 years old. Teenage consumers are also very fond of street food. They may provide information with different perception towards street food. And due to the descriptive nature of this study, the information gathered is only on consumers' perception and their intention of repurchase and recommendation. How perception might influence consumer's behavioural intention is not investigated.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There is some possible future research that can be explored in relation to this topic. Further studies can be conducted to cover different areas and cities in Malaysia to provide more accurate insights on consumer's perception towards street foods. It is also recommended that future researchers focus their studies on certain demographic group, such as teenagers, college students, office workers, international tourists, etc. Street food vendors with specific target customers would benefit from these study results. Correlation or causal studies can be carried out to examine the relationship between perception and behavioural intention. These studies can provide more in-depth and detailed explanation on how consumers' perceptions towards the different areas of street food operation might influence their behavioural intention. With this information, street food operators would be able to develop effective strategies to motivate consumers to repurchase, to increase their purchase frequency and to recommend street food. The future research should also



explore other dimensions that may have significant effect on consumers' behavioural intentions.

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