

# MOTIVES FOR MILLENNIALS' CHOICE ON TRADITIONAL FOOD AND THEIR LEVEL OF CONSUMPTION: A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON.

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## Abstract

Malaysian cuisine is known for its vibrant and diverse flavours which reflects the multi-ethnic makeup of its population. Hence, it is interesting to investigate how the differences of background and cultures lead to different food consumption and motives for food choices among different ethnic groups. This study aims to investigate the relationship between consumption of traditional food and motives for food choice among millennial in Malaysia with ethnicity as the moderator. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to 922 representative millennial which consisted of Malays (31%), Chinese (35.9%) and Indians (33.1%). The results of this study indicate that health concern, familiarity, mood and ethical concerns significantly influence the millennials' general attitude towards traditional food consumption. Additionally, PLS-Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) was employed to study the association of food choice motives, general attitude and the level of consumption among the young Malays, Chinese and Indians in Malaysia. The results show that the differences in background and cultures between Malays and Chinese, and Malays and Indians, moderate the effect of mood on the general attitude towards traditional food. While for Chinese and Indians, different background and cultures moderate the influence of convenience on the general attitude towards traditional food.

*Keywords: Food Choice Motives, Millennial, Multi-Group Analysis*

## 1.0. Introduction

The concept of traditional foods has been defined differently in the past literature. According to Trichopoulou, Soukara and Vasilopoulou (2007: 420), traditional foods refer to the types of food that have been consumed regionally by a population over an extensive period of time. While Jordana (2000) added on by commenting that a traditional product must be linked to a territory and represents part of the set of traditions to ensure its continuity over time. The European Commission works further by specifying the time of period of traditional food usage in the community market should be at least one human generation, which is at least 25 years and showing transmission between the generations (European Commission, 2006). Although the concept of traditional foods is well defined in the past literature, most of the definitions were derived from the experts except the published work by Guerrero *et al.* (2009) which defined the traditional foods based on consumer's perspectives. According to Gurrero *et.al.* (2009:348), traditional food product refers to "a product frequently consumed or associated with specific

celebrations and/or seasons, normally transmitted from one generation to another, made accurately in a specific way according to the gastronomic heritage, with little or no processing/manipulation, distinguished and known because of its sensory properties and associated with a certain local area, region or country". In other words, dietary patterns of a particular population, specifically their consumption of traditional foods is often seen as a reflection of their cultural inheritance.

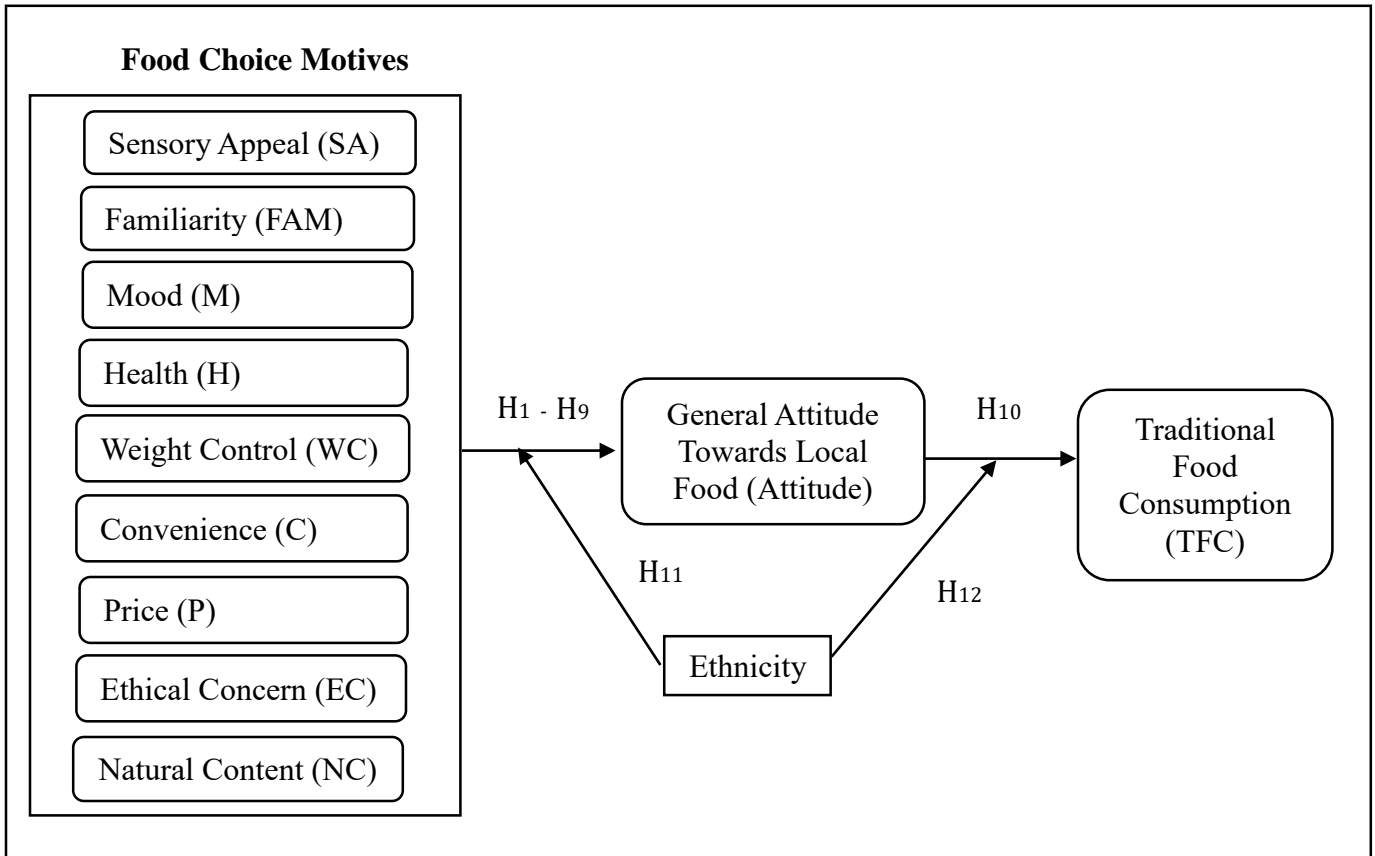
According to Laroche, *et.al.* (2005), food consumption relates closely with ethnic identity. Malaysia is a multi-racial country and each ethnic groups has its own unique traditional food. For centuries, Malaysia has been a melting pot of different cultures and the interaction and integration among the various ethnic groups makes the traditional foods in Malaysia unique as compared to other countries.

However, in Malaysia especially the younger generation has gradually ignored the practice of the traditional foods due to the influence of information technology (Nor *et.al.*, 2012). Many of them may know the traditional food but may not know the way of preparing them. Hence, scholars urged on the importance to preserve the techniques and skills of preparing traditional foods and transmitting them to the future young generation (Kwik, 2008; Yohannes, 2009) as it is consider part of the cultural identity.

Hence, this study aims to investigate on the factors that influence millennial traditional food consumption. To achieve this objective, this study will: First, to examine the relationship between food choice motives and general attitude towards traditional food among millennial in Malaysia; second, to investigate the association of general attitude towards traditional food and the traditional food consumption among millennial in Malaysia and lastly to compare the association of food choices motives, general attitude and traditional food consumption among young Malay, Chinese and Indian in Malaysia.

## **2.0. Methodology**

A quantitative survey was conducted to test on the framework (refer to Appendix 1). The conceptual framework was adapted from Pieniak, *et.al.* (2009) studies with the new moderating effect of ethnicity was tested in this study. 922 university students were selected by using judgmental sampling approach. The criteria used in the selection were: (1) the sample must born in 1979 to 1994 (2) the sample must be Malaysian to ensure their familiarity to Malaysia traditional foods (3) the sample must be either Malay, Chinese or Indian. The research context of the study was focus only in Selangor and the respondents were asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire which consisted of 40 items that adapted from Steptoe, Pollard and Wardle (1995) and Pieniak *et.al.* (2009) studies. The results of the study were analyzed by using Smart PLS version 3.0.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework. Adapted from " Association Between Traditional Food Consumption and Motives for Food Choice in Six European Countries," by Pieniak, *et.al.*, 2009, *Appetite*, 53, p. 102. Copyright 2009 by Elsevier Ltd.**

### 3.1. Respondents Demographic Profiles

From 922 respondents recruited, 42.7% are male and 57.3% are female. In terms of their education level, most of them are now pursuing their first degree, which is 71.8%. Out of these 922 respondents, only 3.5% are now studying postgraduate program.

While referring to the ethnicity of respondents, the sample had nearly equal proportions of the three ethnicities as 35.9% of the responses came from Chinese, follows by Malays, 31%, and the remaining 33.1% are Indians. Since the target group of this study is millennial, most of them are currently receiving tertiary education and have limited budget for food expenses as majority of them (87.7%) of them spent below RM600 on food monthly. The demographic breakdown of the respondents is presented in Appendix 1 below.

## **3.2. Measurement model**

### **3.2.1. Confirmatory factor analysis and construct validity**

The convergent validity was first being tested to show the degree of the multiple items used to measure a particular concept is in agreement. The factor loadings, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) are used to examine the convergence validity. These procedures are suggested by Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson (2009). The outer loadings on the constructs were all exceeded the recommended value of 0.5 (Hair *et.al.*, 2009). Thus, all the items were being used to interpret the factors. As presented in Appendix 2, the Cronbach's alpha, which is used to assess the internal consistency, were all above the suggested value of 0.7 (Nunally, 1978). To examine the average amount of variance in indicator that a latent construct is able to explain, the average variance extracted were recorded. The average variance extracted for all the constructs is above 0.5, which is a recommended value by Bagozzi and Yi (1988). The results are summarized in Appendix 2.

Discriminant validity tests the constructs that should be unrelated, in fact, are unrelated (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). Refer to the Fornell-Larker Criterion, the average variance extracted of a latent variable should be higher than the squared correlations between the latent variable and all other variables. All the inter-construct squared correlation as displayed in Appendix 3 are less than the average variance extracted of the construct. Thus, the measurement model satisfies the criteria of convergent and discriminant validity.

### **3.2.2. Structural Model**

The next analysis concerns on the causal relationships between the motives for food choice to the overall attitude towards traditional foods and the level of consumption. As according to Appendix 4, familiarity ( $p = 0.000$ ), Mood ( $p = 0.069$ ), Health ( $p = 0.009$ ), and Ethical concern ( $p = 0.043$ ) were significantly related to the general attitude towards traditional food.  $H_2$ ,  $H_3$ ,  $H_4$  and  $H_8$  were supported. These factors explaining 8.9% of the variance in the overall attitude towards traditional foods. The  $R^2$  was estimated to determine the predictive power of the model. This result shows a relatively weak predictive power as refer to the value suggested by Cohen (1988), where lower than 0.13 is consider weak.

In assessing the impact of the overall attitude towards traditional foods on the level of consumption, the  $p$  value was found to be very close to zero, which is significant. The  $H_{10}$  was supported. In addition, 29.3% of the variance in the level of consumption can be explained by the model. The predictive power is classified as moderate (Cohen,1988).

The other objective of this study is to examine the association of food choice motives, general attitude and the level of consumption among the young Malays, Chinese and Indians in Malaysia. Appendix 5 shows the results of the multi-group analysis between the young Malays, Chinese and Indians. There were only three significant differences can be found from two factors, mood ( $H_{11c}$ ) and convenience ( $H_{11f}$ ), between the three ethnic groups. The effect of moods on the overall attitude towards traditional food was significantly difference between young Malays and Chinese ( $p = 0.053$ ), and young Malays and Indians ( $p = 0.087$ ). Besides this, a significant

difference was found in the factor of convenience between young Chinese and Indians ( $p = 0.085$ ) too.

#### **4.0. Discussion and Conclusion**

As presented in Appendix 4, four of the nine food choice motives demonstrated a significant relationship with the general attitude towards traditional motives among the young Malaysian. In this study, health is significant in affecting young Malaysians' attitude toward traditional foods. However, the result of this study is in contrast with Pieniak *et.al.* (2009) study which focused on investigating factors influencing European Consumers' food choices. The difference of the result may be caused by dietary and cultural dissimilarities (Steptoe *et al.*, 1995) between Malaysia and Europe as the Europeans' perception on traditional foods are often full of fat and have high microbial risk (Pieniak *et al.*, 2009).

Mood is another motive that significantly affects millennials' general attitude toward traditional foods too. This finding is similar to a study done in China, where mood is important in affecting consumer's purchase intention of traditional foods and European foods (Wang *et.al.*, 2015). The importance of mood in influencing millennials' eating behaviour could be explained by their emotional states that are in high levels of stress, depression, and hopelessness (Taub & Robertson, 2013) due to the study and having the traditional dishes especially prepared by their mother make them feel happier as these are the comfort foods that nurturing their soul and body since childhood (James, 2004).

Furthermore, familiarity showed positive association with millennial's general attitude toward traditional food. According to Pieniak *e.al.* (2009), a positive effect on the attitude toward traditional food means that people who attached more importance to familiar products are more likely to go for a traditional food product in their daily food selection (Pieniak *et al.*, 2009). This result may hinted that young Malaysians were not so adventurous in traditional food choice. Thus, they are more likely to purchase traditional foods that are familiar or available in familiar markets (Wang *et al.*, 2015). This result is not surprising as even the young generation in Malaysia are open to try foods other than one's own, they are bounded by the basic values such as religion. Religion plays an important role in shaping one's dietary habits on choosing the foods that should eat or avoid (Kittler *et.al.*, 2012).

Another surprising result derived from this study is the importance of ethical concern in influencing millennials' attitude towards traditional food. In Pieniak *et.al.* (2009) study which aims in comparing food choice motives towards consumers' attitude towards traditional foods in six European countries, the influence of ethical concern on consumers' attitude was not a significant one (Pieniak *et al.*, 2009). However, the contradiction of the results may due to the age group of the population studied as in Pieniak *et.al.* (2009) study age ranged for the samples recruited was from 20 to 70 while in this study, it focuses only on millennial, which fall within 22 to 37 years old. From the past studies (e.g. Ares & Gambaro, 2007; Westenhoefer, 2005; Steptoe *et.al.*, 1995), socio-demographics characteristics such as age, gender and income leads to differences food choices motives among the population.

While for the comparison of the association of food choices motives, general attitude and level of consumption among Young Malay, Chinese and Indian in Malaysia, only mood and convenience moderates the food selection among these three ethnic groups. As refer to Appendix 5, the effect of mood on the attitude toward traditional food for young Malays was significantly different from those of young Chinese and Indians. Besides this, young Chinese and Indians have a different perception on that the traditional foods are easy and simple to prepare or purchase from store (Convenience). These findings were contradicting to Mohd-Any, Mahdzan and Chua (2013) study, which there was only a significant difference found (familiarity) in the food choice motive between Malays and Chinese.

Besides the importance contributions made by this study, some of the limitations of the study worth to be noted. First, the measurement of traditional food consumption by using single item. Although there is increasing positive voice for the use of single item in the measurement to reduce the length of questionnaires, which are likely to overload respondents (e.g., Wanous, Reichers and Hudy, 1997; Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2009), the use of multi-item scales remain domain in the field of research. Additionally, the sample of this study is biased towards higher education millennials as the investigation focused only on university students. It is advisable for the future researchers to expand the population to include those who with lower education level as it might affect knowledge may affect one's food decision too.

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### **Author's Biography**

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**Appendix1: Demographic Breakdown of the Sample (n=922)**

	<i>Frequency (n)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Gender		
Male	394	42.7
Female	528	57.3
Race		
Malay	286	31.0
Chinese	331	35.9
Indian	305	33.1
Education Level		
Pre U/Foundation	122	13.2
Diploma	106	11.5
Degree	662	71.8
Postgraduate	32	3.5
Monthly Expenses on Food		
RM 200 or lower	194	21.0
RM201-400	392	42.5
RM401-600	223	24.2
RM601-800	73	7.9
RM801-1000	24	2.6
RM1000 and above	16	1.7

## Appendix 2: Factor Loadings and Reliability

<i>Constructs</i>	<i>Outer Loadings</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha (<math>\alpha</math>)</i>	<i>CR (<math>\rho</math>)</i>	<i>AVE</i>
<b><i>Sensory Appeal</i></b>		0.803	0.869	0.625
Smells nice	0.831			
Looks nice	0.754			
Has a pleasant texture	0.803			
Taste good	0.772			
<b><i>Familiarity</i></b>		0.729	0.846	0.648
Is what I usually eat	0.816			
Is familiar	0.826			
Is like the food I ate when I was a child	0.772			
<b><i>Mood</i></b>		0.824	0.870	0.532
Helps me cope with stress	0.499			
Helps me cope with life	0.803			
Helps me relax	0.788			
Keeps me awake/alert	0.764			
Cheers me up	0.692			
Makes me feel good	0.784			
<b><i>Health</i></b>		0.844	0.885	0.562
Contains a lot of vitamins and minerals	0.780			
Keeps me healthy	0.770			
Is nutritious	0.787			
Is high in protein	0.728			
Is good for my skin/teeth/nails, etc	0.727			
Is high in fibre and roughage	0.701			
<b><i>Weight Control</i></b>		0.903	0.939	0.836
Is low in calories	0.890			
Helps me control my weight	0.928			
Is low in fat	0.924			
<b><i>Convenience</i></b>		0.776	0.840	0.515
Is easy to prepare	0.681			
Can be cooked very simply	0.707			
Takes no time to prepare	0.600			
Can be bought in shops close to where I live or work	0.800			
Is easily available in shops and supermarkets	0.781			

**Appendix 2: Factor Loadings and Reliability (Continued')**

<i>Constructs</i>	<i>Outer Loadings</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha (<math>\alpha</math>)</i>	<i>CR (<math>\rho</math>)</i>	<i>AVE</i>
<b><i>Price</i></b>		0.804	0.881	0.712
Is not expensive	0.860			
Is cheap	0.828			
Is good value for money	0.842			
<b><i>Ethical Concern</i></b>		0.747	0.852	0.658
Comes from countries I approve of politically	0.795			
Has the country of origin clearly marked	0.839			
Is packaged in an environmentally friendly way	0.800			
<b><i>Natural Content</i></b>		0.853	0.908	0.768
Contains no additives	0.842			
Contains natural ingredients	0.884			
Contains no artificial ingredients	0.901			
<b><i>General Attitude Towards Traditional Food</i></b>		0.804	0.885	0.719
Unhappy---- Happy	0.836			
Dull----- Exciting	0.850			
Terrible -----Delightful	0.857			
<b><i>Traditional Food Consumption</i></b>		1.000	1.000	1.000
To what extent do you consider yourself a consumer of traditional food	1.000			

### Appendix 3: Fornell-Larker Criterion Analysis (Inter-construct correlation)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Convenience	<b>0.717</b>										
Ethical Concern	0.127	<b>0.811</b>									
Familiarity	0.239	0.221	<b>0.805</b>								
General Attitude	0.159	0.158	0.194	<b>0.848</b>							
Health	0.256	0.305	0.208	0.213	<b>0.750</b>						
Traditional Food Consumption	0.120	0.095	0.132	0.541	0.095	<b>1.000</b>					
Mood	0.296	0.191	0.161	0.176	0.366	0.097	<b>0.729</b>				
Natural Content	0.277	0.281	0.113	0.119	0.483	0.091	0.228	<b>0.876</b>			
Price	0.403	0.114	0.204	0.130	0.289	0.118	0.231	0.330	<b>0.844</b>		
Sensory Appeal	0.354	0.139	0.221	0.177	0.343	0.142	0.360	0.314	0.391	<b>0.791</b>	
Weight Control	0.214	0.293	0.150	0.139	0.456	-0.001	0.232	0.492	0.321	0.231	<b>0.914</b>

### Appendix 4: Structural Model

Relationship	Standard Path Coefficient, $\beta$	T-Statistics	P Values	Supported
H <sub>1</sub> : Sensory Appeal -> Attitude	0.062ns	1.640	0.101	No
<b>H<sub>2</sub>: Familiarity -&gt; Attitude</b>	<b>0.117***</b>	<b>3.650</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>H<sub>3</sub>: Mood -&gt; Attitude</b>	<b>0.066*</b>	<b>1.821</b>	<b>0.069</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>H<sub>4</sub>: Health -&gt; Attitude</b>	<b>0.110***</b>	<b>2.612</b>	<b>0.009</b>	<b>Yes</b>
H <sub>5</sub> : Weight Control -> Attitude	0.022ns	0.569	0.569	No
H <sub>6</sub> : Convenience -> Attitude	0.052ns	1.457	0.145	No
H <sub>7</sub> : Price -> Attitude	0.009ns	0.244	0.807	No
<b>H<sub>8</sub>: Ethical Concern -&gt; Attitude</b>	<b>0.072*</b>	<b>2.027</b>	<b>0.043</b>	<b>Yes</b>
H <sub>9</sub> : Natural Content -> Attitude	-0.030ns	0.770	0.441	No
<b>H<sub>10</sub>: Attitude -&gt; Traditional Food Consumption</b>	<b>0.541***</b>	<b>20.199</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>Yes</b>

Note: \*Significant at  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*Significant at  $p < 0.01$

**Appendix 5: MGA between Malay, Chinese & Indian**

	Malay vs Chinese		Malay vs Indian		Chinese vs Indian	
	Path coefficient diff	p-value	Path coefficient diff	p-value	Path coefficient diff	p-value
H11a: Sensory Appeal-> Attitude	0.013	0.448	0.096	0.159	0.083	0.820
H11b: Familiarity -> Attitude	0.035	0.676	0.017	0.416	0.052	0.757
<b>H11c:Mood -&gt; Attitude</b>	<b>0.139*</b>	<b>0.053</b>	<b>0.124*</b>	<b>0.087</b>	0.015	0.424
H11d:Health -> Attitude	0.018	0.427	0.011	0.537	0.028	0.368
H11e:Weight Control-> Attitude	0.028	0.611	0.053	0.692	0.025	0.393
<b>H11f:Convenience -&gt; Attitude</b>	0.018	0.419	0.106	0.861	<b>0.124*</b>	<b>0.085</b>
H11g:Price -> Attitude	0.047	0.690	0.108	0.861	0.061	0.253
H11h:Ethical Concern-> Attitude	0.147	0.947	0.043	0.672	0.104	0.883
H11i:Natural Content -> Attitude	0.093	0.211	0.057	0.317	0.036	0.359
H11j: Attitude -> Traditional Food Consumption	0.047	0.771	0.028	0.341	0.075	0.883

Note: \*Significant at  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*Significant at  $p < 0.01$