Exploring Halal Nyonya Food Consumption Intention Among Tourists

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Abstract: The topic of tourists' intention to consume Halal Nyonya food in Malaysia has garnered increasing attention in recent years. Nyonya cuisine, a unique blend of Malay and Chinese culinary traditions, has long been a hallmark of Melaka's vibrant food scene. However, as Malaysia grapples with the diverse dietary needs of its growing tourism sector, the challenge lies in ensuring that Nyonya food offerings cater to the preferences of Muslim tourists seeking Halal-certified options. The main goal of this research is to explore and comprehend the preferences of tourists regarding the intention to consume Halal Nyonya's ethnic food in Melaka. The study focuses on tourists' gastronomic choices, particularly as it relates to their intake of Halal Nyonya food. The study involves local and international tourists who have experienced Halal Nyonya food in Melaka in 2024. Data was collected through surveys, on-site observations, and interviews to understand factors affecting Halal Nyonya's food consumption intention behavior. This research examines the association between independent and dependent factors that influence tourists from various geographical locations who visit Melaka to consume Halal Nyonya Nyonya food. It adds to the database of information already in existence by illuminating how tourists in Melaka from various locations approach and engage with Halal Nyonya's food. This deepens our comprehension of the dynamics of tourist preferences, cultural preservation, and culinary tourism. In conclusion, our research confirmed attitude, subjective norms, and perceived control will lead a tourist to have the intention to consume Halal Nyonya food.

Keywords: *Baba Nyonya, Halal, Melaka, Ethnic food, Gastronomy*

1. Introduction

The cuisine of various ethnicities has increasingly become a key attraction for tourists when visiting specific destinations. It represents a unique gastronomic identity distinct from national cuisines, often reflecting the cultural practices and heritage of ethnic or tribal communities (Shi et al., 2022). For many migrants in multicultural societies, cooking and eating are not merely symbolic acts but concrete means of preserving ethnic identities (Reddy & Dam, 2020). The Peranakan, also known as Baba Nyonya, serves as a significant example of a minority mixed-race community that has cultivated a culturally unique identity through the intermarriage of Malay and Chinese cultures (Mohd Fikri et al., 2021). This community is primarily found in Melaka, Singapore, and Penang (Zanzaizman et al., 2023), where tourists can experience the distinctive flavors of Baba Nyonya ethnic cuisine (Mohd Fikri et al., 2021). Halal Nyonya cuisine, a variation of Nyonya food that complies with Islamic dietary laws, is meticulously prepared according to Islamic principles, using permissible (halal) ingredients while avoiding forbidden (haram) ones.

In Melaka's gastronomic landscape, there is concern about the declining demand and popularity of halal Nyonya cuisine among tourists, largely due to a lack of understanding about this distinct and culturally significant food (Kamaruzaman et al., 2022). Indigenous cooking techniques and the organoleptic qualities of traditional foods are invaluable aspects of culture that should be preserved as intangible heritage (Mora et al., 2020). Given the importance of traditional food in preserving cultural heritage, it is crucial to explore the factors contributing to this decline.

Baba Nyonya cuisine is an integral part of the community's cultural heritage, combining unique culinary methods and ingredients that reflect their hybrid identity. This cuisine includes Ayam Pongteh, Udang Masak Lemak Nenas, Ayam Buah Keluak, Nyonya Mee Siam, and Nyonya Cendol (Zanzaizman et al., 2023). However, like many indigenous cuisines, it faces the risk of losing its authenticity over time. Understanding how visitors engage with Baba Nyonya food is essential for preserving this vibrant cultural heritage, as food choices are influenced by various behavioral factors (Heidari et al., 2023).

The lack of global and local attention, coupled with diminishing awareness among tourists, raises concerns about the potential fading of this culinary heritage. Therefore, this study aims to investigate tourists' attitudes towards consuming halal Nyonya cuisine in Melaka, analyze how subjective norms influence their intentions, and examine how perceived behavioral control affects their decision to consume this food. The research is focused on exploring the historical significance of halal Nyonya cuisine to raise awareness, foster admiration, and deepen comprehension of this culinary tradition. This will facilitate the long-term conservation and advancement of this culinary tradition.

2. Literature Review

Tourist Intention to Consume Halal Nyonya Food
Tourists, in particular, are known to be picky, and their exploration or analysis of offerings, particularly Halal options, can considerably influence their acceptability and eventual resonance in their consuming behavior. This study seeks to illuminate the multifaceted factors that influence tourists' decisions regarding the consumption of Halal Nyonya cuisine (Elfrida et al., 2020). Tourists' intention to consume Halal Nyonya cuisine reflects a psychological state that encompasses their willingness and readiness to engage in this particular consumption behavior. The intention to consume Halal Nyonya food is a psychological construct that reflects an individual's mental state regarding their willingness to do or react to a particular consumption-related behavior (Fadzil & Sawari, 2021).

Meanwhile, attitudes toward consuming food refer to the feelings, beliefs, and evaluations that individuals have regarding the act of eating and the food choices they make. Individual attitudes toward consuming Halal Nyonya food can vary, such as personal preferences, cultural background, and dietary preferences. Attitudes play a crucial role in influencing consumer behavior and are considered an integral component of consumer behavior (Puhad et al., 2023).

People's attitudes towards consuming Halal Nyonya food are generally positive and enthusiastic. In terms of cultural appreciation, some individuals may have a positive attitude towards consuming Halal Nyonya food as a way to appreciate and experience the rich cultural heritage of the Nyonya food while adhering to Halal dietary restrictions. However, an attitude is the nature of human behavior to react not only positively but also negatively to food. The perception of Halal Nyonya food may be associated with a negative attitude, leading to a lack of positive reception among consumers. This unfavorable perception has consequently resulted in reduced consumption of Halal Nyonya cuisine (Rahmat et al., 2021).
H1: *There is a relationship between attitude and the intention to consume Halal Nyonya Food in Melaka*.

Subjective Norm Towards Consuming Halal Nyonya Food
Subjective norms are concepts in psychology that play an important role when determining the behavior and decisions made by an individual in a social context (Gross & Vostroknutov, 2022). In the context of consuming Halal Nyonya food, subjective norms refer to perceived social pressure or influence from other people who are important to themselves in making a decision. It is affected by the perceptions and beliefs of people in one's social circle, which represent the general expectations about acceptance and preference for Halal-certified Nyonya dishes (Maidah et al., 2021). The development of subjective norms surrounding the consumption of Halal food is influenced by social factors such as cultural traditions and communal norms that collectively contribute to the decision-making process regarding Halal food choices within Nyonya food.
H2: *There is a relationship between subjective norms and the intention to consume Halal Nyonya Food in Melaka.*

Perceived Control Towards Consuming Halal Nyonya Food
Perceived control is a basic psychological construct that has a great impact on consumer behavior. This cognitive element is the foundation upon which many studies on individual attitudes and behaviors of consumers have been conducted. Prior research has frequently employed perceived behavioral control as a precursor to diverse dietary and environmental behaviors (Yuriev et al., 2020). Perceived behavioral control is used to describe whether the behavior is complex and whether it is under their control (Lei et al., 2022). Perceived control is very relevant in Halal Nyonya food consumption and thus greatly impacts customers' very diverse decisions.

In the context of Halal Nyonya consumption, personal beliefs about capacity (PBC) refer to the idea that one has what it takes to go past the obstacles or hurdles involved in selecting and eating Halal Nyonya food. The PBC concept shares similarities with self-efficacy. Subsequent studies have highlighted the distinction between PBC and self-efficacy (Flores et al., 2023). It proved that perceived behavioral control improves intention about positive attitudes and subjective norms. However, the actual significance of PBC adapts according to the situation, and it could reduce the impact of attitudes on behavior.

H3: There is a relationship between perceived behavioral control and the intention to consume Halal Nyonya Food in Melaka.

Research Framework
A framework is a model that provides a logical sense to understand the relationships between the various aspects that have been determined to be significant to the problem. The plan, design, and organization that direct a research project make up a research framework. It facilitates the organization of ideas, the definition of important variables, and the establishment of connections between those variables for researchers.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework adapted from Ting et al., 2019.
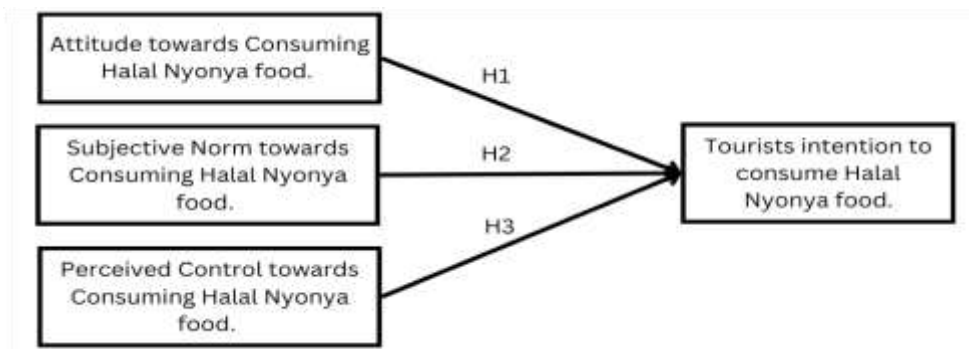
Theoretical Underpinning
The theory of planned behavior (TPB) expands upon the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) to address the original model's inadequacy in managing behaviors where individuals possess limited volitional control (Ajzen, 1991). The study uses the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to investigate tourists' intentions to consume Halal Nyonya food when they visit Melaka. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a widely recognized psychological framework that offers insight into and enables the prediction of human behavior. TPB provides a theoretical underpinning for assessing the impact of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavior (Gansser & Reich, 2023).

The main factors that influence intention to consume Halal Nyonya food include individual attitudes toward the behavior which this factor refers to an individual overall evaluation of a particular behavior. It would involve understanding individuals' attitudes towards consuming Halal Nyonya food, such as positive and negative feelings and beliefs associated with the behavior. Moreover, subjective norms are a component of TPB that could influence the tourists to consume Halal Nyonya food. Subjective norms involve perceptions of social pressure and influence. It considers the influence of other people's opinions, expectations, and the perceived social norms related to the behavior.

Moreover, perceived behavioral control is a factor that indicates an individual's assessment of their capability to execute the behavior. It considers factors such as resources, skills, and opportunities that might facilitate or hinder the execution of the behavior. In summary, the Theory of Planned Behavior suggests that individuals are more likely to engage in a specific behavior if they have a positive attitude toward it, perceive social approval, and believe they have the necessary control over the behavior.

3. Methodology

A quantitative research methodology was utilized to examine the data collected for this study. The study employed purposive sampling to identify individuals who have had exposure to the distinctive cuisine, with a total of 234 participants. The surveys were conducted at key tourist sites identified as the most suitable locations for this study (Hair et al., 2017; Pelletier et al., 2016). The sample size was determined using the G*Power method, which ensured the robustness of the findings by considering key statistical parameters such as effect size and power (Faul et al., 2007).

The questionnaire was carefully designed to capture relevant data, including attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, which are essential for understanding tourists' culinary preferences. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS (Version 29.0), focusing on descriptive statistics to summarize the central tendencies and variability within the dataset. The primary analyses encompassed a descriptive study to scrutinize the demographic profile, a reliability assessment to gauge the consistency of the measurement tools and a regression analysis to appraise the relationships between the independent and dependent variables.

4. Research Findings

The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for all variables in this research surpasses 0.6. The score related to attitudes is affected by an independent variable with a value of 0.66. The values for subjective norms and perceived control are 0.67 and 0.75, respectively, while the intention to consume stands at 0.60. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for every section are above the 0.6 benchmark, showcasing an acceptable reliability level. The outcomes displayed in the preceding table align with Raharjanti et al. (2022) work, supporting the reliability and validity of the measurement items used in this research. As per Sekaran and Bougie (2013), a Cronbach's alpha coefficient above 0.6 is considered sufficient for reliability.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis

Variable	No of Item	Cronbach's Alpha
Attitude	4	0.66
Subjective Norms	4	0.67
Perceived Control	4	0.75
Intention to Consume	3	0.60

Demographic Analysis

Table 2 contains the demographic details of those surveyed in this research. Out of the 234 individuals surveyed, there was a gender split of 32.9% male and 67.1% female participants. The age distribution was notably skewed towards the 18-26 age bracket, which made up 63.7% of the respondents, primarily consisting of undergraduate students. The next significant age category, 27-39 years, comprised 15.4% of the participants. The older age brackets of 40-55 and 56-69 years made up 16.2% and 1.3% of the sample, respectively, with those aged 70 and above accounting for 3.4%. A vast majority, 82.5%, of those surveyed were of Malaysian nationality, with 67.9% identifying as Malay in terms of ethnicity. Regarding occupation, nearly half of the surveyed population, 47.4%, were students. The income level of the majority was below RM1,500, representing 56.4% of the sample. When visiting Melaka, the preferred travel companions for the majority were friends, cited by 31.6% of respondents. Moreover, 44.4%, or 104 individuals, discovered Halal Nyonya food through social media platforms.

Table 2: Demographic Analysis

Category	Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	77	32.9
	Female	157	67.1
Age	18 - 26	149	63.7
	27 - 39	36	15.4
	40 - 55	38	16.2
	56 - 69	3	1.3
	70 and above	8	3.4
Nationality	Malaysian	193	82.5
	Non-Malaysian	41	17.5
Ethnic	Malay	159	67.9
	Chinese	40	17.1
	Indian	22	9.3
	Others	13	5.6
Occupation	Employed	100	42.7
	Unemployed	19	8.1
	Student	111	47.4
	Others	4	1.7
Income	Below RM 1,500	132	56.4
	RM 1,500 - RM 3,500	42	17.9
	RM 3,600 - RM 5,500	43	18.4
	Above RM5,600	17	7.3
Travel Companion	Alone	38	16.2
	Partner	50	21.4
	Family	72	30.8
	Friends	74	31.6
How do you Know about Halal Nyonya Food?	Social Media	104	44.4
	Relatives	45	19.2
	Knowledge	51	21.8
	Advertisement	34	14.5

Correlation Analysis

The research framework analyzed the variables using Pearson's correlation coefficient to determine the linear relationship between two continuous variables. This was depicted through a correlation matrix, showcasing the coefficients and their significance levels for variables such as intention, attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control, drawing on data from 234 participants. Each matrix cell above the diagonal line reveals the relationship's strength and direction between variable pairs. A strong positive correlation was noted between intention and attitude ($r = 0.659$, $p < 0.000$), suggesting that an increase in attitude is likely to lead to an increase in intention. Similarly, a strong positive relationship was observed between intention and subjective norm ($r = 0.636$, $p < 0.000$), indicating that higher subjective norms correlate with increased intention. The relationship between intention and perceived control ($r = 0.663$, $p < 0.000$) was also solid and positive, implying that intention is likely to increase with perceived control. With p-values less than <0.000, these correlations are statistically significant, strongly advocating for rejecting the null hypothesis, which posits no correlation exists, affirming solid connections among the variables.

The findings highlight a positive correlation between increasing attitude, subjective norms, and perceived control. Moreover, these three factors are positively linked with the Intention variable. These outcomes offer

critical insights into the interrelations between these essential variables, setting a foundation for future analysis and interpretation of the study's dataset.

Table 3: Correlations Analysis

		Intention	Attitude	Subjective Norm	Perceived Control
Intention	Pearson Correlation	1	0.659	0.636	0,663
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	234	234	234	234
Attitude	Pearson Correlation	0.659	1	0.653	0.617
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.000
	N	234	234	234	234
Subjective Norm	Pearson Correlation	0.636	0.653	1	0.718
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.000
	N	234	234	234	234
Subjective Norm	Pearson Correlation	0.663	0.617	0.718	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	
	N	234	234	234	234

Regression Analysis
The multiple regression analysis focuses on how attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence the outcome variable, intention. A summary of the model sheds light on the dynamics between these factors. This summary evaluates how well the regression model predicts outcomes and its fit to the data. In this study, the variables of interest as predictors include attitude, subjective norms, and perceived control regarding the consumption of Halal Nyonya cuisine, to understand tourists' intentions towards consuming such food. By applying regression analysis, the investigation delves into how these three predictor variables such as attitude, subjective norms, and perceived control affect the outcome variable and intention. The analysis results, including the coefficients, are detailed in the preceding table. The coefficient of determination, R^2, stands at 0.554, indicating that the predictors such as attitude, subjective norms, and perceived control related to consuming Halal Nyonya food explain approximately 55.4% of the variance in the outcome, satisfaction. This denotes a relatively strong correlation between the predictors and the outcome. The adjusted R^2 value is 0.548, slightly lower than R^2, offering a more cautious estimate of the model's explanatory power by accounting for the number of predictors used. This suggests that the regression model closely aligns with the observed data. The significance of the model is underscored by an F-test score of 95.131 with a p-value of less than 0.001, pointing to a meaningful relationship among the studied variables. The unstandardized coefficients reveal a positive linkage between the independent and dependent variables. As depicted in Table 4, the analysis uncovers the impact of the independent variables on the dependent one. Specifically, attitude (B= 0.342, t=

5.642, p=0.000) was found to have a significant predictive relationship with intention. Similarly, the subjective norm (B= 0.183, t= 2.672, p=0.008) was also a significant predictor of intention. Lastly, perceived control (B= 0.320, t= 4.859, p=0.000) significantly predicted intention. In summary, the regression analysis underlines that all three factors significantly contribute to predicting intention.

Table 4: Regression Analysis

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t-stat	p-value
Constant	0.701	-	3.272	0.001
Attitude	0.369	0.342	5.642	0.000
Subjective Norm	0.176	0.066	2.672	0.008
Perceived Control	0.313	0.320	4.859	0.000
R				0.744
R^2				0.554
Adjusted R^2				0.548
F-test				95.131
Sig.				0.000

Dependent variable: Intention

Discussion
This study sheds light on the dynamics influencing tourists' desire to partake in Halal Nyonya cuisine in Melaka. A vital link was observed through correlation analysis among attitudes, social influences, and the control individuals feel over their actions. It was found that tourists are more inclined to try Halal Nyonya food as they develop positive perceptions, feel a more robust social push, and believe they have adequate control over making such decisions. This echoes the findings of Altekreeti and Daud (2020), noting that tourists' eagerness to try Halal Nyonya food grows with more favorable views, societal pressures, and a sense of empowerment over their choices. Moreover, the influence of societal expectations and the belief in having the means to obtain Halal Nyonya food also play a pivotal role in reinforcing this intention, a sentiment supported by Rodya (2023). Through regression analysis, it was confirmed that these variables are critical predictors of the willingness to consume Halal Nyonya cuisine, underscoring the importance of positive attitudes, societal norms, and perceived control over one's actions. According to Puhad et al. (2023), maintaining a positive outlook towards an activity significantly elevates the likelihood of participating, with the converse also holding. The concept of perceived control is also vital, denoting an individual's belief in their ability to execute an action. This belief, when vital, enhances the intent to act; however, perceived obstacles can weaken this resolve (Lei et al., 2022). Gaining a deeper understanding of the Baba and Nyonya culture contributes to the advancement of theoretical frameworks like the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). This also addresses a significant gap in the literature concerning the food preferences of Muslim tourists, while simultaneously supporting the preservation of the culinary heritage of the Baba Nyonya ethnic group. The study also underscores the economic and cultural significance of promoting Halal Nyonya food, which could help position Melaka as a distinctive culinary destination. These findings suggest important policy implications for the tourism industry, including the development of targeted marketing strategies, enhancing the culinary experience through food festivals or tours, and increasing the visibility of Halal Nyonya cuisine. Additionally, policymakers should support initiatives that promote cultural preservation and encourage local food operators to adopt Halal certification, which would attract more visitors, strengthen the local economy, and preserve the unique culinary traditions of the Baba Nyonya community.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate a positive correlation between attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control, with all three variables showing a positive relationship with intention. These results offer important insights into the interactions among these key factors, providing a foundation for further analysis and interpretation within the context of the study's dataset. This research contributes valuable knowledge regarding tourists' intentions to consume Halal Nyonya cuisine in Melaka. The limitations related to time constraints, sample size, diversity of respondents, and reliance on self-reported data should be considered

when interpreting the findings. As researchers deepened their understanding of the dynamics of this culinary phenomenon, a critical gap emerged in understanding the important role played by individual attitudes towards Nyonya's halal food in influencing their actual consumption during a visit to Melaka.

Further research utilizing longer timeframes, larger and more diverse samples, and potentially integrating objective behavioral measures could mitigate these limitations and offer a more thorough understanding of the subject.

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