

Original Research Paper

Culture and the Changing Food Consumption Among the Malay Middle Class

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Abstract: This article examines the consumption of foods among the middle-class Malays in Malaysia and the progress of food products that have been constructed to meet the halal logo and certification. This article challenges the standard view of the Malay middle class, predominantly Muslim that they are traditional and hesitant to accept changes in food consumption due to religion and culture. This article discusses ways foods are reconstructed to allow significant market consumption to be produced or manufactured based on culture and religion. This research utilized a qualitative method through narrative interviews with seven middle-class Malays Muslim descent respondents to conceptualize the changing food patterns and improvise. The narrative interviews were transcribed and thematic analysis displayed the findings. The result highlights that a new taste in foods urges the Malay Muslim to be creative and Syariah compliance. The middle-class Malay informants are flexible to the changing food consumption as long as the foods are halal. The changing food consumption is influenced by culture, identity, and modern way of living, and simultaneously strengthening social bonding.

Keywords: Food, Culture, Consumption, Malay, Social Bonding

Introduction

The generic term for food consumption can be used as a socio-economic indicator to review poverty, class, and health. However, this study proposes considering other factors, including culture, ethnicity, and customs, that invent a logical perspective to clarify the changing food patterns and lifestyle consumption. The subjectivity of interaction among multiethnic, religious compliance, customary and contexts, be it rural or urban, may forge new values and innovations for foods to be invented and later be supplied to people. Hence, it attempts to descriptively share the experience and observation of a Malay Muslim woman with a middle-class income level to narrate the pattern of changes in food consumption and lifestyle over the years. Personal statements, namely stories of the past, provide the narratives of the changing use of food and lifestyle. It was also trying to share some romantic elements of stories told by family, friends, and neighbors that are yet to be documented as a pinnacle factor influencing food consumption patterns.

This study outlines the discussions into a few subthemes, including the conceptual context of food, the Malay middle class, cultural dynamic, religion and diet, food pattern and lifestyle and supply chain, space, and society. The subthemes are by-designed to relate to how food consumption and lifestyles are connected other than the generic socio-economic factors such as class, poverty, and health. Moreover, the average food consumption is influenced by religious compliance, cultural dynamics, and an everyday-defined context and interaction. These factors urge the commercialization of foods to be in tandem with new values added to people's diets over time.

Furthermore, dietary habits are influenced by a few factors, including religious rules, culture, norms, income, price tag, and health condition that determines the lifestyle. For instance, religious restrictions may forbid the believers from consuming certain animal-based foods such as pork, a wild beast of sharp teeth and claws, amphibians, carcasses, slithers, arachnids, and many more. In Islam, pork-based is not the only restriction; the earlier lists apply.

Also, culture influences inner beauty and health. For instance, women in the Malay culture are advised to avoid any cold foods during menstruation. However, such advice is yet to be proven to disrupt their menstrual cycle or trigger period pain, including fruits and veggies categorized as cold and gassy to human bodies such as cucumber, honeydew, water spinach, jackfruit, yucca root, ice cubes, and watermelon. Interestingly, norms may refer to food intake that is best to consume before or after meals, mainly drinking a glass of plain water ten minutes before meals, stopping drinking while eating, and drinking a glass of water five minutes after meals. A reason for such practice is assumed to ease the digestion system-but it is yet to be proven.

Additionally, income and price tags also determine the kind of foods that individuals will consume. Income levels relate to the class, which affects a particular group of people with certain income levels to purchase meals from different places, vendors, quality of foods, and types of grains. Low-income or poor people have limited purchasing power and they are likely to buy cheap and fewer quality foods such as recycled cooking oil, non-organic, no fruits or veggies in a meal, and no or less protein in the daily diet. Poverty or low income or no income leads to nutrient deprivation too. The final factor is the health condition that may restrict the intake of certain foods. For example, a person with diabetes is ace sugar consumption or uses substitute sweeteners. While, a person with high blood pressure is recommended to reduce the intake of salt or salty foods in his or her diet and a person with renal end disease may have to look at all sorts of foods with a specific portion of intake of calcium, phosphate, phosphorus, and glucose for daily consumption. The restriction is complicated if a person is diagnosed with comorbidities.

Conceptual Discussion

In marketing strategy, customer insight is a vital component of market orientation. Sellers or the industries have to understand the buyers' current needs and later they can articulate those insightful opinions into new product innovations (Slater and Narver, 1999, p.1166). Customers' perspectives used marketing surveys to help them enhance or improve possible products for customer satisfaction. Therefore, market-oriented businesses emphasize customers' needs because they realize that such information innovates solutions and advantages in a competitive market (D'Aveni, 1994). Studies proved that both small and large businesses are market-oriented and firms are successful if they can develop relationships with customers and value their insights into market needs (Narver and Slater, 1990; Leonard-Barton, 1995).

A similar approach applies to understanding the changing in lifestyle and food consumption. Customers' cultural and religious beliefs are taken into account in marketing strategy. It is even essential to know that the Muslim population's significant size worldwide and the changing food requirement for the marketing strategy attract Muslim customers. This article showcases the changing food consumption due to the cultural and religious beliefs which demand the market to accommodate the peoples' demands. El-Bassiouny (2014) argues that the effort to marginalize one billion-plus Muslim consumers will disadvantage industries and the need for cross-cultural understanding is necessary for marketing strategy. The phenomenon is parallel with the rise of Islamic marketing and branding, which attract marketing academics and practitioners' attention from within and outside the Muslim world (Wilson *et al.*, 2013, p.25-33; Wilson and Liu, 2011; 2010). Therefore, it is necessary to understand the target customers' needs as embedded in particular subcultures and religions.

Food studies focus on various ways, especially context and cases. It continuously attracts scholars to discuss food within the meaning of culture, body and identity, relation and power. The perception of food as culture and identity also varies according to region and society. The community learns and embraces culture and it is not entirely inherited. Like food and character, food choices are often connected to ethnic behaviors and religious beliefs. Almerico (2014) argues that the closed affiliation of food and identity was due to collecting good feelings and memories associated with meals, family, relatives, and friends gathering to eat together constructively define an individual and their identity. Almerico (2014) further describes the Italian foods and characters, reflecting how food becomes culturally defined and inherited from generation to generation. For instance, the collection of good memories, the Sunday gathering, the matriarch event, and the potluck picnic bring about many homemade foods like spaghetti, ravioli, hot loaves of bread a basket of gifts from different families to the hosts and guests.

However, Kittler *et al.* (2012, p.33-45) cultural identity and foods are not restricted by ethnicity because social class, education, and health concern may cut across cultural identity associated with ethnicity. The social class factor is associated with the purchasing power to buy high-quality compared to low-quality foods. The former will include minimally processed foods such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, healthy fats, healthy protein sources, nuts, and yogurt. The latter includes high processed foods such

as refined sugar, fried foods, sugar-sweetened beverages, saturated and trans fats, and high glycemic foods. However, knowing high and low-quality foods comes with education to identify the big words of trans fat, saturated/unsaturated, and high glycemic foods. Ironically, these are foods categorized by the nutritionist who graduated from western varsities. Thanksgiving is another example that challenges the educational background as the indicator of class and quality. This event brings back the memory of survival and friendship. A native American community like the Wampanoag taught the pilgrims the method of cooking spices, cultivating corn, extracting sap from maple trees, catching fish in the rivers, avoiding poisonous plants, and eating local fruits like cranberries to assist the pilgrim that suffered from malnutrition, scurvy, and illnesses (<http://www.history.com/topics/thanksgiving/history-of-thanksgiving/print>). Thus, the local wisdom and experience have made cultural identity and foods contestable to ethnicity.

Another discourse on this matter is food habits as the foodways to describe how humans choose, acquire, distribute, prepare, serve and eat. In other words, a person's daily affirmation of eating habits reaffirms his or her cultural identity (Askegaard *et al.*, 1999). The epitome 'you are what you eat' is the expression that links food to identity, thus forming the culture of food as the manifestation of habits build over time and constructively defining a person's way (Diaz, 2011). However, personalized patterns could be due to a health condition. Nordstrom *et al.* (2013, p.357-58) argue that food is a helpful health tool and implies a very productive relationship with a person's health. Integrating the scientific approach with other cultural, emotional, ethical, and sensual foods depends on personalized nutrition. The individualistic notion of health and food varies and results in different health goals (Škreblin and Sujoldžić, 2003, p.470). Thus, food, body, and identity intermingled with health, becoming complicated. For instance, eating raw fish during pregnancy can be questioned of its likelihood of contact with harmful bacteria; thus, personalized nutrition for pregnant women could have changed their regular habits.

Food as relation refers to the concept of food as a medium that creates bonds between people (Belasco and Scranton, 2014). Communities are built concurrently with foods serve as the medium to relate to one another or start a simple conversation to get to know one another. The mutual obligation to ensure each member of kin or relatives is fed and happy for any get-together occasion signifies the companionship

and willingness to share food with all. The intention to court someone also will require foods to display admiration. Having dinner or just a cup of coffee shows a peaceful purpose for social interaction. Nevertheless, rejecting a kind invitation must be done politely to avoid misunderstandings.

While the concept of food and power refers to social strata that establish the cultural capital and roles in society (Counihan, 1999), the dimension of power relation in food reflects through cooking. Such a phenomenon displays the decision of what will be on the menus or what members of a family can or cannot eat. Simultaneously he or she can be identifying the role in the kitchen in terms of division of labor between females and males. The kitchen leader or the household would enjoy immense power to decide on the menu and determine who will do what and how. For instance, the kitchen leader will instruct the males to chop the poultry or cut the meat, while the females can peel the onions and garlic or do all the frying and grilling.

Another aspect equally highlighted is the concept of food and religion compliance. Although the religious aspect is likely to be included in food's cultural idea, religion has a deeper meaning than daily practice. Religion indulges with inner self-belief and devotion to God. For instance, the Buddhists keep the principle of ahimsa or non-violence and avoid all processed foods determined as harmful to an animal; Hinduism avoids eating cow as it holds the symbol of abundance; Judaism divides food into *kosher* (allowed) or *treifa* (forbidden) and outlines the characters for kosher with tons of rules between meat and dairy products. They practice certain fasting days and eat selected kosher fish with fins and scales. In Islam, the category of food is halal and haram. The former refers to foods eaten without a doubt (*halalan-toyyiban*). The latter refers to forbidden foods, namely pork, alcohol, animals with fangs and claws, amphibians, and products containing animal emulsifiers (gelatins and margarine). The Muslim fast in Ramadan and moderation in all aspects is the food and diet approach other than the behavior. As a result, food and religion are neat to observe the changing eating and ethics patterns among Malaysia's Malay middle class.

The Malay Middle Class

A Malay in the Federal Constitution of Malaya in Article 160 of 1957 (the latest amendment in December 2007) defines as a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language and conforms to Malay custom (Federal Constitution 2010). Perhaps, the Malays are not purely Malays. For instance, a Malay married to other races such as Chinese, Indian, Caucasian, Arab, and Punjab-as long

as they converted to Muslim, they become Malay by default. A hybrid community of Jawi Peranakan is an amalgamated community from the Punjab areas married to Malays. In most Jawi Peranakan communities, their preference for home-cooked meals is tremendous. The females in the family must learn how to cook even a simple dinner like kofta, curry, lentils, bread, and rice.

The social class in Malaysia is not showing a critical gap in society. The economic growth had been steady since the independence of 1957 and exhibited a few surplus economies over the years until the present, with inflation being monitored closely. Although Amy Chua (2004) argues that the minority Chinese are controlling the economy in Southeast Asia, the Malaysia New Economic Plan followed by other transformational national plans had helped the Malays and other ethnicities to keep abreast with competition over resources and opportunities (Shamsul, 2015; 2010). However, the pocket of poverty is still existed and scattered throughout the country. States like Kelantan, Terengganu, Perlis, and Kedah are among the states with a high level of and the majority are the Malays. Therefore, the determinant class among the Malays is to compare the Malay society within a few indicators like the level of education, income, property ownership (cars, houses, apartments, savings, bonds, and gold) Khalid (2014, p.67-70) proposes to assess the distribution of wealth or assets, rather than income to determine the meaning of inequality among multiethnic groups in Malaysia. He presented a result that approximately two-thirds of Malaysian workers earn less than MYR 3,000 per month (equal to Euro 647.88 exchange rate of 2019 Euro 1 equal to MYR4.63) and about 90 percent of Malaysians have nearly zero savings. Furthermore, birth wealth accumulation may lead to aristocracy hypocrisy rather than hard work or talent in Malaysia.

Thus, the social stratification is categorized as Malay aristocracy, Malay political elites, Malay middle class with steady incomes and highly educated, Malay proletariat (manufacturing, clericals, support staff), Malay agrarians such as peasants, fishers, and rubber plantation workers. The stratification is perhaps contested, but a simple personal observation assumes that the Malay middle class has a permanent job, a steady income, is highly educated, and dominates the public and private sectors. They have been the groups that shared many similarities due to their educational background and exposure to abroad practices and systems. Therefore, they are the moving factor that demands changes in the foods market, industry, process, supply change, and menus. Consumers have sufficient purchasing power in volume to push for the

new food market and taste; thus, food appearance and disappearance depend on the trend and lifestyle other than supply and demand.

Cultural Dynamic

The dynamism of culture allows foods to be in various colors, preps, cookies, and tastes. The cultural dynamic allows individuals to build their own identity regarding food, either to be vegan or vegetarian. For instance, a strict vegetarian or non-strict vegetarian enjoys eating foods with restrictions and may apply restrictions to diet due to religious beliefs, cultural norms, health, and allergic reasons, while a person who has no food restrictions may eat all foods with no taboo. The daily eating meal is created to an individual's preference. Thus, the word culture as a regular practice is not free from social interruption of individual principles, belief systems, and health matters. The acculturation context within food and society blends well without prejudice reaction and it continues to mesmerize all walks of life, especially those who appreciate the right delicious foods from all sources of culture and origin.

According to Merriam Webster Word History, the word "chef" comes from the French, with a different meaning. The English borrowed the word to create the word "chief" five centuries ago before the word was used to mean "skilled cook." To the French, the word chef by itself has no specific connection to food or cooking at all. The word Chef itself meant "head" in old French and originally from the Latin word "head" caput. The chef's skilled cook meaning is an abbreviated form of chef de cuisine, which means the "kitchen head" or "kitchen chief."

Even in the history of the word "chef," the Malay community version of cooking in the kitchen is entirely different from the compartment of specific spaces of a kitchen that assume to be inside the house, apartment or mansion. A basic understanding of a kitchen is that a place with particular square feet occupies a space within the home for cooking purposes. However, on a specific occasion like a wedding, which still exists in rural society, the kitchen space is not limited just to the house. Weddings in rural areas such as *Kuala Nerang* and *Kodiang*, the collective cooking is still assembled and the community will build tents with all chopped logs and coals are used as fuel for cooking. Moreover, the food preparation processes underneath the tents with males and females working together to ensure foods are cooked on time and served at the wedding ceremony. The collective cooking has no kitchen chief to scream about or give orders around. The landlord will decide on the menus and the joint team will divide the jobs for preparing and cooking regardless of whether or not the landlord will be joining the cooking team. The reward is

togetherness and the opportunity to help one another in time of need and when a turn comes, a similar response is expected to be delivered.

Here, the collection of good memories is similar to Almerico's arguments (2014). People get together for reasons and food is the best memorable part of a social gathering. The meals for gathering later become categorized for different occasions due to the preparation process that may take longer hours to prepare and the options on menus are loveable by most people. For instance, food for a wedding takes a long hour to be prepared than the potluck. However, such an analogy is challenged. The changing pattern of demand and commercialization urges foods for a special occasion to be consumed at any time.

Furthermore, foods are cooked collectively or personally depending on the event-personal or community. The former refers to a home-cooked meal to feed the family, relatives, or guests. The latter refers to the Malays' wedding that can be ranged depending on socioeconomic class and status to either have plenty of foods with the combination of western cuisine and delicacy or a complete set of local cuisines. The modern, actively engaged, fancy, and frantic urban society will hire a private wedding planner to complete the foodservice package. The evolving culture from collective community cooking to private commercialized wedding services has changed the Malay middle-class community's food identity with a variety of packages including Punjab region, West Asia, Chinese foods, Mediterranean, Western or a mixture of any of these with typical Malays' menu of rice and dishes.

For instance, the Malay food for a wedding ceremony has evolved, including the foods serving the bride and groom that imitate the royals are exaggerated for social image and symbol. Hence, France's haute cuisine dated back centuries ago was a menu for the royals and aristocrats. The foods can be distinguished based on upper, middle, and low classes. The classification of foods ranges from royal to peasant dishes. In Thailand, Chef McDanga, a famous Thai celebrity chef, argues that the Royal Thai dishes are no different from the commoners (CNN, 2011). They share similar *tomyamgoong*, green curry chicken, and som tam meals. Though classified, as the tom yam paste recipes, the commoners have managed to imitate the paste with a uniquely hot and spicy taste. The only thing that differs from the Royal Thai dishes and the commoners is how they serve. The royal members may eat peeled and seedless fruits, boneless meat, poultry, fish, and attractive carved in a unique decoration. Thus, the myth of royal cuisine in a Malays wedding is undocumented, but the story behind this is to lift the happiness level for the couples because the story of king and queen or prince and princess has

always occupied the commoners with luxurious images, materials, and happiness.

One of the best eating food experiences was at a few wedding ceremonies in Kedah and Perlis's rural areas. The rare foods and delicacies were fascinatingly delicious and memorable. For instance, white rice eaten with meat or poultry gravy cooked with banana stem, sweet potatoes, spices, and coconut milk, or meat or poultry gravy cooked with bamboo sprouts, spices, and coconut milk. Additionally, the everyday Joe for the Malays' wedding serves in a simple sweet-scented white rice cooked or steamed with pandan leaf (*pandanus amaryllifolius*) or basmati biryani rice beef or poultry rendang. Such a rare, exquisite dish may not represent the class, but the superb taste makes everyone feels fortunate to be with the rural people who appreciate the gift of nature with a different source of fiber and protein that is yet to be explored or utilized by the upper class, ruling elites, and capitalists.

Still, in the Malay culture, dessert or delicacy has never been eaten right after meals. Some sweet treats, such as kuih kolekacang, pulut Seri Muka, and karipap, can be eaten in the morning as breakfast or eaten by choice, or served in the evening. In other words, the five meal courses of breakfast, lunch, hi-tea, dinner, and supper are not part of the Malay culture. Now, with the 'colonial knowledge' and the constant exposure to class images or the series of experiences eating and dining at hotels for several workshops, the five-time meals are common and acceptable in a new community. Desserts or delicacies become part of the menu to local people. Such insertion does not cause any trouble because foods are always welcome and our abdomen is quoted by the Malay's old folks' as the 'biggest sea of all seas' that is still hungry and will not stop munching. It is not surprising that Malaysia ranks Asia's fattest country with half of the population overweight and obese (<https://www.star2.com/health/2018/08/14/fat-state-of-affairs/>)

Religion and Diet

Since most Malays are assumed to be Muslim, Yunus *et al.* (2010, p.239) argue that in Islam, Allah s.w.t has made it compulsory for every Muslim to consume halal food (lawful) and of good quality with sufficient minerals and vitamins as needed. Additionally, the halal and a portion of good quality food will ensure physical health and a boosting factor to increase an individual's taqwa (God-fearing) and gratefulness to Allah. The word "tayyib" in foods means excellent and pure, including preparing and serving fresh meals and free from criminal elements such as corruption, bribery, exploitation, or other forms of falsehood elements in the legal context.

While the haram food is forbidden, though it may contain superior quality and is highly demanding, its consumption is believed to have led to immoral or improper behaviors and would cause unwarranted effects for individuals and their families at present and hereafter. Based on Sunnah Prophet Muhammad (PBH), the haram foods will promote unethical, immoral, and harmful behaviors that lead to eternal doom in life and hereafter. Foods that we eat become nutrition to our body through our bloodstreams and system. Thus the haram foods will dirty our hearts and soul while the *halal* foods will give good health, heart, and soul. Anas, Wan Mohd, and Mahani (2010) further opine that the aspect of halal and haram should be prioritized in Muslim life; it is the self-discipline of Allah and confidence in his beneficence. Within the norms of Islamic law, haram matters are tiny compared to allowed issues. Nothing is haram or forbidden without Allah's clear and explicit words and or from the Prophet (PBH) as logical proof. In the absence of clear and precise evidence (NAS) that says it is forbidden or haram, such matter is called *mubah*, a neutral act whose commission and omission are equal.

With 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide, the demand for halal food is enormous and the trading for halal foods is estimated to reach USD2.3 trillion dollars. The law regulating halal food certification in Malaysia is under jurisdiction to ensure Sharia compliance is achieved. For instance, Selangor's state has the Religious Department of Selangor (JAIS) and the Religious Department of Kelantan (JAHEIK) is responsible for the State of Kelantan. However, the state religious department is accountable for endorsing the halal certification to manufacturers, industries, and restaurants. The Muslim community in Malaysia is still experiencing forgery in the halal certification, imitation of the halal logo, food processing issues that comply with the Islamic rule and regulations, filthy operation areas and tools, and uncertainty of sources (Hamidon, 2015). So far, there are twenty-nine cases reported in 2012 about halal certification in the compliance process and risk of sources, but none of these cases were brought to court for prosecution by the Ministry of Domestic Trade, Cooperatives, and Consumerism. Most cases are settled by cash penalty. Thus the paid-and-go method needs coercive enforcement to ensure such cases are not repetitiously committed, including higher cash penalties or monitoring and supervising the program to provide such *Syariah* compliance has adhered. Besides that, Suraiya *et al.* (2016) show that halal is a vital characteristic determining food product marketing success in the Muslim community. The findings demonstrate that consumers rely on various intrinsic and extrinsic signals to obtain relevant cues on food products' halalness before purchase and consumption.

The external signal shows that the religious principle of halal requirement is essential for Muslim consumers.

The evidence is clear that the demand for halal food is enormous and the profit returns are by far the most enriching; in Malaysia, the suppliers for Chinese, Japanese, and Western cuisines are willing to comply with the *Syariah* regulations regarding food processing, sourcing, and packaging. The introduction of Chinese foods like tofu, fish cake, fish balls, soy sauce, dim sum, spring roll, rice noodles, yellow egg noodles, and kueyteow is made possible by the Muslim entrepreneurs, Chinese Muslims or Malay Muslims. Besides, the Al-Arqam was the organization that promoted Chinese foods such as noodles, fish cake, fish balls, and tofu to the Malay Muslim communities, convincing them of the halal ingredients of these foods. The late Ashaari Mohammad founded Al-Arqam and was later banned by the Malaysian government in October 1994, accused of diversion in *aqidah*, which means becoming pagan, and the possible existence of a revolutionary army (Jahid, 2013). However, the introduction of new food tastes and alternatives spread out like wildfire heats all kitchens in Malaysia, especially among the middle-class Malay Muslims to cook noodles, Hueytown, fish ball, fish cake soups, tofu, and soy sauce, later improvise the recipe to please their taste. The acculturation of food in Malaysian society is a lot more pervasive and prevalent than identity itself.

The Changing Food Pattern and Lifestyle

Foods can coexist within differences in values, principles, and religions (improvise foods), cut ethnic lines, and massively penetrate the ethnic taste that urges individuals, community, and local wisdom to invent new recipes. The improvised method to meet absolute religious compliance, the context of war or peace, and trending modern lifestyles like being vegan or vegetarian are essential factors that transform society regardless of ethnicity. For instance, the remedy of being a vegan is said to be fruitful to kick off a cold fever. A story by a blogger at *ieatgrass.com* shares her experience of frequently having upper respiratory infection every winter and she has to visit the Emergency Room (ER), treat with antibiotics and scans for chest x-rays. Later she becomes vegan and drinks wheatgrass, packed with high antioxidants, vitamin A, C, E, and Zinc. She declares that her health is getting better, her immune system is boosted and she can now enjoy her outdoor activities and appreciate the cold season without sneezing and running nose.

Moreover, concern about health and awareness of food quality and a balanced diet drives a new food and society movement. Certain groups of people with particular food identities such as vegan, vegetarian, just organic groups, street eaters, and exotic eaters are setting a new trend and lifestyle. Therefore, new outlets, restaurants, and grocery stores keep abreast with these new trends by creating a

particular aisle for organic, gluten-free, and vegan foods. The advantage is that middle-class people with health concerns or curiosity are eager to try new foods and spend on such products. Also, the private airline companies are ready to cater food for such groups of people, allowing them to place their order while making a reservation online before the flight journey.

Another food invention is the food packed in the can, invented during the war period. Phillips (2007) argues that Napoleon Bonaparte's idea (1769-1821) was made available to feed soldiers in the war zone. In 1795, the French government offered 12,000 francs to preserve foods for the army supply. Chef Nicholas Appert was awarded the prize for his brilliant process of packing meals in bottles, corking them, and submerging them into boiling water to stop foods from getting spoiled quickly. Heats' idea destroys or neutralizing the ferments that cause food spoilage urged Appert to open the world's first commercial cannery business in Paris (Phillips, 2007). Later, military food rations were further enhanced by Americans in World War II, which added sardines and tuna. However, the American public distasted the salty, oily, and smelly taste of tuna or sardines and questioned how the country could be fed the soldiers distasteful food. The invention later changed tuna and sardine by removing all the fish fats and adding olive oil to keep it moist, salt, and sometimes tomatoes or mayonnaise to make tuna and sardine in the can taste better. The evolution of foods in the can consumed until today.¹

Other than the war context that urges people to be creative for survival, the curiosity to learn a new recipe, new ingredients, and new food processes from the different communities shared in a multiethnic society. The fresh market can be a place for recipe exchanges among people who go to the market, bump into each other and share a brief idea of cooking that instantly rehearses a good interaction and relationship. Families or community gatherings also become an integration platform where people exchange 'pot luck' food with recipes absent of intellectual property demand. Hence the interaction is more meaningful for social bonding and healthy relationships. Herewith, Table 1.0 displays the narrative interviews with seven informants of diverse Malays, including the amalgamated Malays like Malay-Indian, Malay-Chinese, and Jawi Peranakan communities. They were sampled purposively based on middle-income status (earning more than RM150,000 yearly, working in both private and public sectors as grade A and above). Respondents were coded as R1 to R7. The thematic analysis (Taylor and Bogdan 1984)

¹See, the History Channel, S 13 E3 Canning (TV-PG), Aired on: Jan 31, 2007. It is the unsung essential of modern life. Canning is the method of preserving and packaging food, without which civilization would never have ventured beyond the local food supply. It changed the way the world eats and revolutionized the food industry. There are self-heating and self-cooling cans, microwaveable cans, ozone-safe aerosol cans, and cans that store nuclear waste. We will explore where canning has been, where it is now, and where it is going in the future

displays the responses to informants' stories about food and social experience.

Furnivall (2010;1967) argues that interaction in plural society was relatively brief because they met in the market with no interaction and were artificially related. His observation is contested as the ethnic boundary becomes thin over the years. Cross-cultural interaction helps different ethnic groups accept foods as the integration platform for social bonding. The acceptance level and the joyous expression connecting foods for social inclusion work in tandem with the 'great good places' ideas of building trust and relationships through spaces that allow people to sit, dine, interact and enjoy the tranquility as a nation (Oldenberg 1997; Olmedo 2014; Kartini *et al.* 2021).

Moreover, the globalization factor in spreading fast food outlets and franchises creates a new lifestyle and eating habits looking for ready-cooked meals, cutting all the hours of preparing the meals and making eating and dining fast and easy. Consumers worldwide accept that food and restaurants are part of the consumerism culture shared by many. Even in a small remote area in Ba'Kelalan Sarawak,² A small local restaurant exists in this area. Cities are fancy with a variety of foods and types of restaurants. At present, hipster restaurants that serve foods and sell stylish attires, scarves, and pashmina are trending in cities like Kuala Lumpur, Bangi, and Shah Alam. Such a modern and straightforward lifestyle seems to be accepted well by city dwellers and beginning to spread to other cities in different states where the Malays, as the majority, reside (Kartini *et al.*, 2021).

Food and all that halal

The halal food supply chain illustrates the need for Syariah principles in chain management begins with the sources, processes, and packages until the product reaches the consumers. Mentzer, DeWitt, Keebler, Min, Nix, Smith, and Zacharia (2001, p.5-8) argue that the supply chain management is all about the progression of logistic management, which seeks to build mutual trust, sharing and exchanging information about the market supply and demand, developing new products and reducing the maintenance cost of manufacturer's equipment for food processing. In the long term, the idea of supply chain management will assist the development of a long-term relationship between vendors and manufacturers as a result of cost-efficient enjoyed by consumers.

²e outside world. It is located 4km from the Sarawak-Kalimantan border and is 3,000 feet above sea level. The pristine beauty of Ba'Kelalan offers a sense of adventure for those who are keen to experience life in one of the last outbacks in the country. Visitors are encouraged to engage with the locals to experience their simple life. See Ravichandran DJ Paul, Sweet Home, Ba'Kelalan, the Brunei Times at http://www.bt.com.bn/life/2008/04/05/sweet_home_bakelalan (Accessed on September 27, 2021)

Table 1.0: The community responses on food and social bonding in Malaysia

Code	Theme: Favorite food
R 1	"... Anything rice is my favorite because I am from eastern Malaysia and grew up with much rice in my diet and nasi kerabu is my favorite...."
R 2	"...plain rice and beef Pattaya Thai style is my favorite, and I love spicy food...."
R 3	"... I choose nasi lemak though in our everyday diet, carb is high and noodles are typical, nasi lemak, I can eat it for breakfast, lunch, and dinner..."
R 4	"... I am now so much into K-drama, and Korean foods and so many restaurants offer halal Korean foods...."
R 5	"...we are very traditional when it comes to food, toesai, capati; also rice is always available here, and I will go for capati in the morning and rice with dhal for lunch...."
R 6	"...well, fish curry or chicken masala is my favorite, and I prefer bread like naan over rice...."
R 7	"... our dishes are mostly rich ranging from sweet to savory. My favorite is biryani with cashew nuts, saffron, and chicken korma."
Code	Theme: Sharing recipe
R 1	".. my working hours limiting my capacity to cook but I know my mother who receives recipes from my aunty and neighbor and she will try to cook it, and we are the food testers.."
R 2	".. pot luck gathering is always creative with new meals to try, and also you can learn from the story how a person cooks the meal, only if the meal is delicious and compliments by many..."
R 3	"...nasi lemak is common and does not need a big promotion, but you can see hipster cafés with new ways of promoting it like ice-cream nasi lemak, nasi lemak cheesecake, so new invention may need promotion...."
R 4	"... I still remember all Chinese mainstream foods were improvised in terms of recipes and ingredients to cater to demands from the Malay Muslim communities, suddenly tofu, kueyeteow, fish ball, the fish cake became accepted when the Malays knew the ingredients and how these food products are produced."
R 5	"... I am a mixed Malay-Indian, and I teach my friends how to make toesai and capati. My Malay friends like to eat them with spicy anchovy sambal, but my non-Malay friends like toesai and capati with dhal or curry. we do exchange recipes."
R 6	"... I can find frozen roti canai in the supermarket, and even my brother who lives in Vancouver can buy frozen roti canai in the oriental store is made in Malaysia, so I think the frozen food business is making Malaysia prosperous, but frozen roti canai means you have to cook the dhal or curry, so I gather recipe from youtube..."
R 7	".. foods that you cooked at home are always good for your body and mind because you do not eat preservatives or any food additives, so my food recipe is green, veggies, and lentils, so I share my lentils recipe with friends."
Code	Theme: Preference
R 1	"... I barely cook at home, my work is relatively rigid, I commonly buy food, and GRAB Food application makes it easy nowadays...."
R 2	"... I live with my mom and cook whatever she cooks, and my mom is super good...."
R 3	"... I like the Malay version of Nasi Lemak, there are a few versions of nasi lemak improvised by ethnic groups, Chinese or India has its version, but the Malay version with <i>Daun Pisang</i> (banana leaf) and the chili gravy is spicy, I cannot cook nasi lemak, mostly I buy them...."
R 4	"... I cook sometimes and a simple meal like fried eggs, instant noodles and watching K-drama enticing me to eat instant noodles too...."
R 5	"... I cook and my family never complaint about my food, if they complain they have to cook themselves (smiling), and most of the time I change the recipe according to whatever is available in the freezer..."
R 6	"...a simple food like curry, dhal, I can cook, but I love naan bread, and it is cheaper to buy than to make one.."
R 7	"... I cook every day, but it is easy to find a restaurant that caters to Jawi community dishes, especially in Penang,its close to Arab and Indian foods with the local herb."
Code	Theme: social bonding
R 1	".. before COVID19, we have pot luck gathering and I may effort to cook nasi kerabu, and it is loved by families and friends...."
R 2	"Food connects you and your family so well. If you are ill, mom's porridge helps, and food is love.."
R 3	".. I think nasi lemak is recognized as a national dish, and through nasi lemak, people are bonding to feel they are Malaysians because all Malaysians, regardless of ethnicities, eat nasi lemak."
R 4	" I am a food lover, and I try almost all cuisine be it from East or West Malaysia, and when it comes to social bonding, foods are capable of bringing inclusivity to all, .. because our taste for food allows us to tolerate differences, we can sit and dine together regardless of ethnicity and class, I mean who does not like good foods, right?"
R 5	".. toesai, capati, roti canai, are originally from Indian culture, but we can see the acculturation is well accepted here, you can see the other ethnic groups go to Indian restaurants too, and now we have the improvised version especially curry to fit in the Malays' taste, Chinese's taste...."
R 6	".. we are Malaysians, and we eat all foods, and we learn from each other either to change or to invent new recipes, but as consumers, food businesses bring us closer as rational beings.."
R 7	"... I do want to share and promote my Jawi-Peranakan community's food, and this will help others to get to know us better, our culture and identity.."

Thus, supply chain management is categorized in spatial with urban and rural areas assumed to impact dwellers differently. Most middle-class Malays have resided in urban areas. The consumption habits and purchasing behavior are also modified according to spatial and population. Consumers in the metropolitan area are the working class with steady income and careers; therefore, they are likely to spend less time preparing food or cooking and willing to dine for ready-made meals at restaurants, and ready to purchase processed foods in cans or another form of food packaging where one can heat and eat. Simultaneously they are concerned with food quality, safety, and halal certification. Consequently, the most popular Malay community would expect the State Religious Department to screen the imported or processed/manufactured foods.

The *halal* concept is applied to all products, including foods and non-edible products because the meaning of *halal* is proper to be consumed or used (Emi Normalina, Harlina Suzana, Muhamad Rahimi, and Faisol Nasruddin, 2014). Non-edible products such as pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and financial services are included in the halal supply chain as each is interrelated and necessary for consumers' consumption. Halal processes indicate the supply chain's integrity until consumers consume the products with the fundamental idea of safety and security. The food supply chain's transparency would guarantee food sources' origin and health and help the disease control management unit quickly identify an outbreak of food contamination or animal-transmitted disease.

Food is improvised according to trends and styles. The popular Korean pop and drama enticing the middle-class Malays to try new foods like halal Korean Yopokki Topokki (instant rice cake), Kimchi, Sajo, Gochujang and Samyang Jjajang. All menu and ingredients are subject to improvisation according to culture and religion, affecting the marketing strategy. As a result, the growth of halal Korean restaurants like Pocha, Uncle Jang, Buldojang, Seoul Garden, etc., around metro Kuala Lumpur is tremendous and becoming the must-do list for local tourists (<https://www.klook.com/en-MY/blog/best-korean-food-restaurant-kl/>).

Overall, *halal* food is always available in urban and rural areas, even before the concept of halal becomes part of mainstream business activity. Halal food access and supply chain management are a non-issue for most Muslims in Malaysia, but the issue becomes paramount to those selling at retail shops or wholesale hypermarkets/supermarkets. Halal food construction becomes formalized into non-edible items, such as medicines, cosmetics, and toiletries. Consequently, the new consumerism values daily consumption other than a

concern on contamination or products not tested on animals as an ethical value to prevent animal cruelty. The *halal* symbol is mandatory for all food and non-food items to have screened to fulfill the *Syariah* compliance.

Conclusion

The changing consumption of food patterns and lifestyle is in tandem with a few factors: Religion, culture, health concerns, taste, and desire. For the popular Malay community, new food and recipes emerge from other ethnics' foods and cooking observations, which later improvise to fit into the halal compliance. The acculturation of human invention through menus has pulled the multiethnic society to respect and share mutually. The changing food consumption patterns from rural to urban areas also show a significant evolution due to the modern lifestyle. Individuality, innovation, and profit push forward the idea of a restaurant, fine dining, fast food, food in cans or packages, heat and eat food that demands state legislation to screen for halal, safety, and security for consumers in Muslim communities. Food and consumerism highlight quality, taste and halal coordination to be integrated to ensure healthy foods. Interestingly, the food impact and contribution to social context are mostly hovering over nutrition, body image, or identity among immigrants - thus, this conceptual discussion added to the value that food can become the platform of integration in managing ethnic diversity in a plural society because all consumer regardless of ethnicity can consume the *halalan-toyyiban* food processes.

Therefore, in marketing strategies, culture and religious beliefs become essential to market the products, especially to one billion Muslim consumers worldwide. The marketing strategy needs not to be expensive but requires continuous observation and openness to accept the culture and religious elements that significantly impact the food industries' profit. Here, adaptive learning gathers from the everyday-defined experience accumulates to provide generous benefits to food industries.

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Author's Contributions

Kartini Aboo Talib Khalid: Analyzing the literature review, developing the conceptual framework, conducting interviews, and synthesizing the concept and empirical data.

Zaireeni Azmi: Analyzing data and building the thematic analysis.

Hanim Ismail: Collecting literature reviews and secondary data analysis.

Nurul Asmaa Ramli: Collecting literature reviews, logistic arrangement, and transcribing the interview statements.

Ethics

The authors confirm that no ethical issues will arise after the publication of this manuscript.

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