

The extrinsic factors affecting food preferences among Generation Y

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Abstract

Diet related diseases are due to poor food selection, and changes in lifestyle and these include cardiovascular disease and obesity. The prevalence of obesity in Malaysia had doubled up in the last decade, and this has affected general health and lifestyle of Malaysian. This study examined the main factors that influenced Generation Y's food preferences in Malaysia. The survey had been conducted in Shah Alam and Puncak Alam, Selangor and had focused on three extrinsic factors; marketing, social and economic and food sensory attributes; as the influencing attributes for Generation Y food preferences. Two hundred fifty usable questionnaires had been used for analysis using SPSS version 20. Most of the respondents agreed that food sensory attributes ($M = 4.080$) are the main factor influencing their food preferences. Additionally, the results showed that food sensory attributes ($\beta = .354$) are the strongest attributes that influence Generation Y's food preferences. The emphasis of producing food with high palatability has taken its toll on the society. Therefore specific measures need to be a plan to encounter this situation. This finding hoped to provide some input for government and food industry planning for future types of food that could resolve the obesity issues, especially among the younger generations.

Keywords:

Extrinsic Factors, food preferences, Generation Y, marketing, social and economic, food sensory attributes

1 Introduction

Food has always been the main themes in our life, be it for survival, social, economic or psychological agenda. People associate food for companionship and diet. However, for many developing countries such as Malaysia, people's diet has slowly shifted towards a 'westernized' pattern which resulted in a new nutrition scenario (Sidik & Ahmad, 2004). Furthermore, youngster nowadays will buy any available items on the shelf without considering its health impact. This new dietary pattern has to lead to obesity and malnutrition (Sidik & Ahmad, 2004). Obesity among Malaysian in the year 2008 is 24%. It was an increment of nearly 9% from 2001 where only 16.5% Malaysian are obese (Rasyedah, 2012). When comparing consumers in the United States and Malaysia, the level of consumer awareness towards healthy foods in Malaysia is too low (San, Lim, & Tan, 2013). Noticeably, the majority of Malaysian consumers prefer convenient food rather than healthy food, especially among young peoples who are busy with their works (San et al., 2013). Alarmingly, the numbers of diet-related health problems like diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension are prevalent amongst youngster in Malaysia. Obesity leads to many diseases from chronic to severe and sometimes can cause death. Lifestyle surrounded with attractive food had become a threat to most people as they tend to eat high-fat food, carbohydrate, and simple sugar especially among Generation Y (O'Brien, 2006). Generation Y who will become the pillars for future country developments were seen as an asset for Malaysia. Thus, they must perceive diet-related disease like obesity as a serious matter.

Generation Y or known as Echo Boomers are recorded as the highest population who conquered the front line in any economic sectors (Fougere, 2008). The numbers were estimated as high as 70 million (Fougere, 2008). Obviously, the significant difference between generation Y and the other generations are they grew up in emerging technology phase (Fougere, 2008). Technology had allows the users to receive latest information and access to information without barriers worldwide (Schroer, 2012). The speed of information spread through the internet has to lead to changes in people lifestyle (Schroer, 2012). And this includes their food preferences. Generation Y in Malaysia is the young generations aged between 16 to 36 years old and are people who still have strength and ability to work and contribute to country's development. According to Malaysia Department of Statistic, 33.7 % from the total of 28,306 people in Malaysia are from Generation Y cohort (Fadzil, 2010).

Generation Y lifestyles are more related to technology and media, and additionally, they are easily attracted to advertising (Noble, Hyatko & Phillips, 2009). The higher the price of which they can afford, the better perception of others (Casidy, 2012). Hence, the same sensitivity applies to food too as most of them love to dine at places such as fine dining restaurant that will show standard without concerning other factors like health (Dammann & Smith, 2009). Kavitha, Souji, and Prabhu (2011) have a different opinion; they claimed that peers influential have a strong magnitude up to 60% in food preferences among Generation Y. Peers might influence Generation Y in selecting a

restaurant to dine-out by up to 40% (Weber & Lewis, ND). This phenomenon occurs due to more social time spent with friends. As this poor dietary pattern has widespread, some studies conducted by Blissett and Fogel (2013), Sheperd (1990) and Kavitha, Souji, and Prabhu (2011) had proven that there are extrinsic and intrinsic factors which lead to poor food selections. According to Blissett & Fogel (2013), extrinsic factors are defined as the surrounding factors that influenced food selection like environment and family. Whereas, intrinsic factors include individual food selection such as taste, knowledge and the willingness to try a new food or known as neophobia (Blissett & Fogel, 2013).

Relating to the acceptance of food, preference has three different definitions (Kavitha, Souji & Prabhu, 2011). Firstly, preference refers to liking in food sensory attributes. Secondly it has the same meaning with choice, and lastly, it refers to purchase decision. Obviously, food preferences are closely related to two different factors, which are intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Kavitha, Souji & Prabhu, 2011). Appearance, smell, taste, and texture are part of the senses that being tested in sensory science (Irfan, 2007). As proved by Beriain, Sanchez, and Carr (2009), and Imm, Lee, and Lee, (2012) there is a relationship between preferences and food sensory attributes like taste, flavor, appearance, texture, etc. Thus, to overcome the problem, this study examines the extrinsic factors that might influence Generation Y food selection in Malaysia. The factors like marketing, social and economic, and food sensory attributes are being selected by referring to previous research regarding food preferences. For example, research conducted by Sheperd (1990) and Kavitha, Souji, and Prabhu (2011), proved that food, price, economic and social are the strongest factors influenced food preferences. It was also being proved in Germany where social, attitudes towards price, brands, and taste might affect consumers food choice (Hoppert, Maib, Zahna, Hoffmann & Rohm, 2012).

To complete this study, the researcher decided to test on two extrinsic factors that are social & economic and food sensory attributes as it has a strong and positive relation from a previous study (Sheperd, 1990). Additionally, one new factor was included, which is marketing because it is relatively less being studied in Malaysia. In Australia, it was also proved that the marketing tools such as branding and packaging were able to influence consumer's food selection (Mueller & Szolnoki, 2009). Hence, this study tested the impact of marketing towards population in Malaysia, especially among Generation Y. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the extrinsic factors affecting food choices among generation Y. Therefore, the objectives include to determine the food preferences attributes among Generation Y; to examine the relationship between factors influencing food preferences (marketing, social life and economic and food sensory attributes) towards food selection among Generation Y; and to examine the most influential factor in food preferences among the attributes.

2 Method

Questionnaires were distributed to more than two hundred and fifty respondents in Shah Alam and Puncak Alam, Universiti Teknologi MARA campus. They include people aged between 16 to 36 years old. The rule of thumb according to Sekaran and Bougie (2010) was used to determine representative population. In the research, respondent's demographic profiles such as age, gender, occupation, level of education, income, marital status, information technology (IT) gadgets and social network accounts were included in section E. Open-ended question were included to allow respondents to give suggestions or comments regarding the study. To increase the response rate, a brief explanation about the study was given before the respondents completed the survey questions. The result of reliability test using the Cronbach Alpha ranged between 0.669 and 0.887. Among all the independent variables, marketing being the highest value with 0.887.

3 Result

Based on the overall mean score of Generation Y characteristic and food preferences, it was proved that most of this generation prefer simple meal ($M= 4.09$, $SD= 0.79$) and food that can be eaten on the go ($M= 4.00$, $SD= 0.84$). Thus, the research objective one is answered. Figure 1 shows the result of multiple regression analysis.

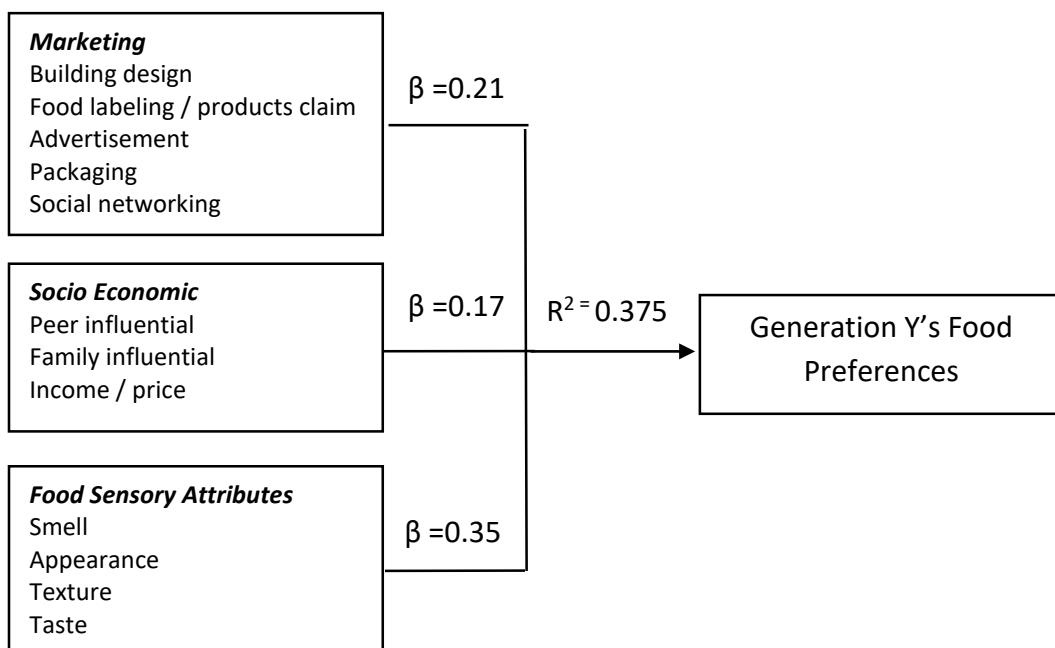


Figure 1: Multiple regression analysis

Figure 1 above shows that the predictors are comprising three dimensions of factors influencing Generation Y's food preferences namely marketing, social and economic and food sensory attributes. Based on ANOVA table, the model as a whole is significant (p -value<0.05). By referring to $R^2=.375$, it indicates that 37.5% of total variation in Generation Y's food preferences can be explained by marketing, social and economic and food sensory attributes, whereas the remaining 62.5% of total variation in Generation Y's food preferences were explained by other factors.

Beta score, the first, second and third hypotheses demonstrated that the marketing, social and economic and food sensory attributes were related to Generation Y's food preferences at the significant level of 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that H_1 , H_2 , and H_3 hypotheses are supported and the research objective two is answered. It evidently shows that food sensory attributes ($\beta=.35$) have strongest magnitudes toward Generation Y's food preferences and followed by marketing ($\beta=.21$) and social and economic ($\beta = .17$). Thus, the research objective three is answered.

The results of this study were supported by the previous study by Honkanen (2010), and Januszewska, Pieniak, and Verbeke (2011). In their study, sensory attributes were also found to be the most influential factor influencing food preferences of different generation namely children, adult, and senior citizen. Although the study was conducted in several countries, it was found that generation Y in Malaysia also had the same preference. The other factors that could influence food preference were probably factors such as mood, natural, availability, health, and price.

4 Discussion

The results show that most respondent's (Generation Y) food preferences are food that is flavourful, simple, fast and easy to be eaten anywhere. According to Brown (2007), Generation Y eating habits are those that excite the senses; foods with unique flavors and textures, products that are easy to consume and can be taken on the go. Besides that, Generation Y loves food that can be prepared by themselves without assistance from their mother or elder person (Brown, 2007). By conducting multiple regressions, it showed that there were relationships between all the dimensions in food preferences of Generation Y. The result has shown the same findings as Brüggen et al. (2011) and Bublitz (2011), which proved that marketing has a relationship with food preferences ($\beta=0.21$). Cong, Olsen and Tuu (2012) and Kavitha, Souji and Prabhu (2011), proved that social and economic have a relationship with food preferences and study conducted by Hoppert et al. (2012) proved that food sensory attributes have a relationship with food preferences. The results from this study were in line with the previous study. Thus, it indicates that all the dimensions have a relationship with food preferences.

Table 1: Factors affecting Generations Y food preferences

| Variables | Unstandardized β | SE B | Standardized β | Sig. |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|------|-------------------------|------|
| Constant | 1.31 | 0.23 | | .000 |
| Marketing | 0.17 | 0.05 | 0.21 | .001 |
| Social and Economic | 0.19 | 0.07 | 0.17 | .006 |
| Food Sensory Attributes | 0.33 | 0.06 | 0.35 | .000 |

Significant at p<0.05
(n= 250)

Based on the result shown above, food sensory attributes ($\beta= .35$) has the highest perception level in extrinsic factors that affect Generation Y's food preferences. The sequence followed by marketing ($\beta=.21$) and lastly social and economic factor ($\beta=.17$). The study conducted by Honkanen (2010), and Januszewska, et al. (2011) also revealed the same results that sensory appeal was the most influential factors in food preferences. Thus, the result had been justified by referring to the previous study similar findings.

5 Implications and Recommendation

Food sensory attributes were the most influential factors affecting food preferences among Generation Y. From the result, researcher suggests that food producer should take things seriously regarding food sensory attributes like the appearance, smell, taste, and texture. To produce healthy food and to grab attention from Generation Y, the food producer should meet the needs and criteria that being look by this group of the population. The food producer should always deliver something new and make improvisation of their healthy food product. Lachman and Brett (2013) found that Generation Y always seek for something new to try on and they are easily bored with something that is used by them for a long time.

Subsequently, the second influential factor from the three dimensions is marketing. As can be seen in real life, Generation Y is the heavy user of technology and gadgets. Nowadays, social network such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are among the top list to promote everything. In this case, food producer should take this opportunity in promoting and presenting their healthy food product, especially to Generation Y. When it comes to internet and technology matters, it could be shared with the whole world with one click while they are online. On top of that, food producer should not forget to market their healthy food products through printed media like newspaper and magazine. Banners, flyers, and brochure even though it is not the strongest marketing tools but sometimes it also can gauge the attention of these people.

Lastly, the lowest score of an influential factor is social and economics. Peers and family influence might be a strong factor in some cases regarding Generation Y, but in

this study, it is not the strongest factor. Generation Y nowadays is a type of people that are independent and have their thought in choosing what they prefer including their food preferences. Even though this is not a strong influence but food producer should not neglect it 100%. This is because, for some young adults who still live with their family, they might follow the family decision as well. Hence, the family should play an important role in guiding their children to choose healthy food products to reduce the number of obesity among young generation.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this study showed that food sensory attributes, marketing and also social and economic are some extrinsic factors that could lead to poor food preferences among Generation Y. In order to reduce the number of diet-related diseases among them, food producers and governing body who is responsible have to take action such as creating awareness for eating healthily, organize games and carnivals that introduce outdoor activities and at the same time propagate good food and active lifestyle to the youngsters. Additionally, to encourage the Generation Y to consume more healthy foods, food producers could play an important role. They must be alert with factors influencing Generation Y's food preferences and work hard in producing healthy food and promoting healthy food. It is not a difficult situation to accomplish but needs some proper plan to meet the current trends of Generation Y.

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