The Role of Food Image in Promoting Domestic Tourism

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Abstract
This study investigate the influence of food image and satisfaction on response behaviour in Ipoh's local food. The study utilised a quantitative approach where data collection involved 384 domestic tourists via a snowball sampling method which was conducted online. The analysis utilised multiple regression and PROCESS macro in explaining the relationship and the mediating effect. The results revealed that the taste of local food as part of food image had a significant impact on domestic tourists' satisfaction and response behaviour. Furthermore, tourist satisfaction has a significant relationship as a mediating variable between food image and response behaviour. From the practical view, Ipoh Tourism Board and local authorities could enhance the authentic food image of Ipoh through aggressive campaigns and policies in luring tourists to visit and revitalise the tourism industry due to pandemics. Business establishments and marketers could allocate more resources to advertise Ipoh's food and culture that generate the feeling of enjoyment, pleasure, and excitement as a potential place for visitation to local and international tourists. The finding demonstrates that the response behaviour of domestic tourists on Ipoh's food tourism is driven by the food image (especially taste), and the significant role of satisfaction as a mediator even further boosts the decision.
Keywords: Food Image, Local Food, Tourist Satisfaction, Response Behaviour, Ipoh

Introduction
The pursuit and enjoyment of unique and memorable food and beverage experiences for both far and near is known as food tourism (World Food Travel Association, 2021). Previous researchers proved that food and tourism were a complement to each other which generate continuous intense research interest (Atikahambar et al., 2018; Chi et al., 2013; Fauntain, 2021; Jalis et al., 2009; Karim et al., 2010; Park et al., 2020; Rousta & Jamshidi, 2019; Yeap et al., 2019). Since food has been a major attraction for visitors, many destinations have tried to give tourists unique culinary experiences (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Tsai & Wang, 2017). Thus, food is one of the key elements in decision-making on tourist travel.

Research indicates that local food is becoming a key source of tourism (Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2016; Pérez et al., 2017; Stalmirska, 2021). Local food is the uniqueness of a destination, similar to a symbol of a place (Niedbała et al., 2020). The local cuisine is a unique and valuable tourist attraction source. Local food consumption satisfies the needs of tourists and promotes full involvement (Zhang et al., 2018). A tourist's local food experience creates a positive image that can influence travel decisions at a destination. Destinations may promote their local food as an efficient tourist resource for a unique experience that also improves the satisfaction of tourists (Ali et al., 2019; Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2014; Bintarti & Kurniawan, 2017; Zhang et al., 2019).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism sector was one of the world's largest markets. However, due to the pandemic, all worldwide destinations introduced travel restrictions in response to the situation starting from March 2020 by closing their borders for travellers and stopping international flights (WHO, 2020). According to the World Food Travel Association (2020), visitors spend around 25percent on food and beverages on their travel budget. Additionally, the association indicated that spending could range from as little as 15percent on low-cost establishments to 35percent on luxurious ones. Overall, avid food tourists spend significantly higher than the average tourists, which is around 25 percent.

As one of the nations in Southeast Asia renowned for its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multilingual society, Malaysia is known for its vast number of gastronomic foods that can be offered to international tourists (Jalis et al., 2009; Sanip & Mustapha, 2020). The segment represents the third-highest food expenditure, with 13.3 percent more revenues than other industries (Yusof, 2020). According to Tourism Malaysia (2020), with a growth of 8.1 percent compared to the previous year, 239.1 million domestic visitors were recorded, totalling 78.2 million in 2018. However, since the COVID-19 pandemic, a survey on domestic travel indicates the tourism industry is losing about RM19.2 billion in tourist arrivals over three months from March to May 2020 due to the first Movement Control Order (MCO) (Tourism Malaysia, 2020). The MCO has almost completely stopped the operation of all sectors in the country. A survey conducted from March to May 2020 by Tourism Malaysia (2020) shows that travelling for food (72.2percent) falls as the second motive that encourages them to travel domestically. The second phase of the survey conducted in October 2020 stated that the domestic tourist's interest in food and beverage has further shown an increase of about 2.2 percent, which accumulated around 74.4 percent. The rank remains as the second place out of five categories.

Literature Review

The definition of food tourism is precise, and other scholars' definitions do not vary significantly. A typical food tourism concept will be a visit to primary and secondary food suppliers, food festivals, restaurants, and exclusive locations where food sampling and niche food processing regions are the key driving factors for travelling (Buhalis & Costa, 2006). Additionally, Cetin and Bilgihan (2016) define food tourism as travel to explore, enjoy, and preparing food and drink. Food tourism also includes memorable travel experiences to enjoy the exclusive and delicious food experience regardless of the location. The World Food Travel Association (2021) defines food tourism by claiming that the discovery and enjoyment of extraordinary and unforgettable food and drink is food tourism. Researchers have proposed that food tourism refers to travelling to other destinations to consume food and enjoy meals.

Also, food tourism includes visitors tasting and trying the fantastic local foods of a destination. Not only that, food tourism is also any tourism activity that one knows about or experiences marketed local culinary resources (Sharples & Hall, 2004). From a Malaysian perspective, there are strong ties between local food and tourism, as the two industries benefit from each other. The promotion of regional cuisine can reflect the nation while also strengthening the country's image and identity (Zainal et al., 2010). Cetin and Bilgihan (2016) study mentioned that food experiencing and discovery are the main driving factors for travel. Similarly, Quan and Wang (2004) also claimed that food tourism occurs only when a destination's food serves as the key motivator of a trip. Studies by Quan and Wang (2004) and Smith and Xiao (2008) highlighted the phenomena of tourists finding and enjoying the unique, authentic local food of a travel destination (Liu et al., 2017).

Malaysia offers spectacular views, stunning beaches and picturesque landscapes, together with the exclusive offer of local food (Omar et al., 2018; Rishad, 2018). The uniqueness of Malaysian food could be an opportunity for Malaysia to become an Asian destination for food tourism (Karim & Chua, 2009; Zakariah et al., 2012). Instead of engaging in the lifestyle of local states and sharing the food, tourists also encounter the culture when travelling (Nahar et al., 2018). People fly to areas where food is one of their main concerns (Solleh, 2015). Visitors may find that they may not learn about different food cultures (Omar et al., 2018). Thus, travelling enhances the opportunity for local tourists to venture food in other places.

Several main cities like Kuala Lumpur, George Town, and Bandaraya Melaka are the cities that get the most attention when it comes to food tourism and is well-known by food tourists. George Town regularly referred to as 'the food capital of Malaysia', is known as one of the major food tourism destinations where an increasing number of food festivals, markets, workshops and tours are organised that attracts many food tourists (Atikahambar et al., 2018; Gani et al., 2017; Ng & Karim, 2016; Pladdet, 2019; Tan & Teoh, 2019). On the other hand, Melaka is renowned for its Baba and Nyonya delicacies (Ng & Karim, 2016; Tan & Teoh, 2019). Tourists that visit Malaysia will take home a lasting memory of the country's cuisine and culture. However, a fundamental problem remains puzzling; domestic tourists will have to eat and try out the various local foods, only then can their views be interpreted and evaluated. After all, opinions and feedback from tourists are just as important as specific information about Malaysia's culinary offerings (Kivela & Crotts, 2009; Matos et al., 2012).

This research focuses on Ipoh, Perak as the city is rapidly becoming a popular place among visitors. Ipoh has also been listed as a top destination for tasting local food by Booking Global (2018). In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Ipoh ranked 6th place above Penang (9th) based on the Department of Statistics' survey on COVID-19 in October 2020. Ipoh is currently recognised as a 'touch and go' place, with domestic tourists stopping there for lunch on their way to Penang or Kuala Lumpur or simply going up for the day and eating for the entire day before returning home (Pladdet, 2019). Several domestic tourists flock to Ipoh for food, while international visitors are unfamiliar with the city as a destination for food tourism. On the other hand, Ipoh is thought to have the potential to become a popular food tourism destination for both domestic and foreign visitors. Although Ipoh is quite known in Malaysia and Singapore for its excellent cuisine, it is not among Malaysia's top gastronomic dining

attractions. Ipoh has aspired to grow the same way as George Town has but has yet to succeed (Pladdet, 2019).

Hence, the present research focuses on the domestic tourists' view looking at the relationship of food image, satisfaction, and response behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. The hypotheses formulated are as the following:
H1: There is a relationship between food image and response behaviour
H2: There is a relationship between food image and satisfaction
H3: There is a relationship between tourist satisfaction and response behaviour
H4: Tourist satisfaction mediates the relationship between food image and response behaviour

Methods
The study utilised a quantitative method to generate a body of knowledge and understanding of phenomena and problems from the locals' perspectives. The measurement characteristics are the food image, satisfaction levels, and response behaviour via a structured questionnaire to generalise the results to the entire population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016; Fischer et al., 2014). The research process was based on a positivist paradigm, and data were gathered through an online survey, a similar method conducted by other studies on tourism research (Lee et al., 2017; Robinson & Getz, 2013; Williams et al., 2019). The structured questionnaire enables the collection of relevant information from respondents who are considered representatives of the entire population (Creswell, 2011). The population was identified based on domestic tourists who visited Perak in 2019 which the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2019) stated that there were 10.1 million. The statistic for the current year was unavailable due to MCO starting March 2020. Therefore, the researchers determined the sample size by utilising the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, which accounted for 384 (N) respondents for a population of one million and above. The survey form was circulated to domestic tourists who had visited Ipoh, Perak, and felt food as part of their motivation to travel through three screening questions via WhatsApp, Instagram, Linked In, and Facebook. The unit of analysis used in the research is Individual, as the data of a person's experience in food tourism were collected from April 11th to June 1st, 2021. A response rate of 100percent was achieved.

The survey instrument consisted of five sections, including the screening questions (3 items), demographic information (4 items), food image (18 items), tourist satisfaction (6 items) and response behaviour (7 items). All the instruments were adapted from previous studies by Nguyen et al. (2019) and Cheng et al. (2018). Different measurement scales were utilised: the 7-points Likert scale for food image and satisfaction and the 5-points Likert scale for response behaviour as a remedy to prevent common method bias as recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003). The questionnaire was designed in two languages: Bahasa Malaysia and English Language.

The study used the Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS) Version 25. Demographic profiles and screening questions were first analysed descriptively. The relationship of the factors between independent and dependent factors was examined using Multiple Linear Regression. The Mediating factor of the study was explained using Process MACRO.

Result

Demographic Profile

The demographic profile indicates that most of the respondents were male, with 52.6 percent (n=202) of the total respondents and 47.4 percent (n=182) were female respondents. For the residential state of the respondents, the result shows that most of the respondents were from Selangor (26.3 percent, n=101), followed by those from Kuala Lumpur (19.3 percent, n=74) and Pulau Pinang (9.9 percent, n=36) and the lowest percentage was from Sarawak (0.3 percent, n=1). Mostly, the respondents were in the 18 – 30 years old category (55.5 percent, n=213), followed by the 31-40 years old category (20.8 percent, n=80), and the lowest number of respondents were from the 61 years and above age category (4.9 percent, n=19). Based on the data, it can be assumed that young adults had a higher tendency to travel to Ipoh, Perak for food during the pandemic compared to those from other age groups. As for travel companions, it is indicated that the respondents commonly travelled with Spouse/Family (40.9 percent, n=157), followed by Friend(s)/Relatives (38.0 percent, n= 146).

Regression Analysis

Table 1.

Regression coefficient of Food Image, Satisfaction, and Response Behaviour

		β	t	p	F	R	R²	Dependent Variables
Model								
1	(Constant)		-.793	.428	368.372	.701	.491	
	Food Image	.701	19.193	.000				Response Behaviour
2	(Constant)		3.635	.000	247.067	.627	.393	
	Taste	.627	15.718	.000				Response Behaviour
3	(Constant)		4.222	.000	229.134	.612	.375	
	Health Concern	.612	15.137	.000				Response Behaviour
4	(Constant)		3.712	.000	208.618	.594	.353	
	Price	.594	14.444	.000				Response Behaviour
5	(Constant)		-.698	.486	434.898	.730	.532	
	Food Image	.730	20.854	.000				Satisfaction
6	(Constant)		4.541	.000	250.709	.629	.396	

	Taste	.629	15.834	.000				Satisfaction
7	(Constant)		4.354	.000	285.099	.654	.427	
	Health Concern	.654	16.885	.000				Satisfaction
8	(Constant)		4.103	.000	238.022	.620	.384	
	Price	.620	15.428	.000				Satisfaction
9	(Constant)		3.603	.000	238.022	.620	.384	
	Satisfaction	.857	32.439	.000	1052.319	.857	.734	Response Behaviour

Based on Table 1, the result shows that the R^2 value was 0.491, which means 49.1percent of the variation in Response Behaviour can be explained by Food Image (Taste, Health Concern, and Price) where the R^2 value was significantly more than 0. As the p-value was 0.000; less than 0.05, this indicated that the overall regression was significant. The result can be interpreted by the equation as $F_{(1, 382)}$ = 368.372, $p < 0.05$, R^2 = 0.491. Overall, the regression analysis was statistically significant when those three (3) variables of food Image were together as a group; they predicted the dependent variable, that is, the Response Behaviour, significantly. Therefore, the assumption of the hypothesis testing, H1: *Food Image has a significant influence on Ipoh, Perak's local food and Response Behaviour of tourists*, is accepted. Overall, among all the food image variables, Taste has the highest coefficient (0.393), followed by health concern (0.375) and price (0.353) towards Response Behaviour. Additionally, the result also shows that the R^2 value was 0.532, which means 53.2percent of the variation in Food Image can be explained by Satisfaction. The ANOVA output shows that the R^2 value was significantly more than 0. As the p-value was 0.000; less than 0.05, this indicates that the overall regression was significant. The result can be interpreted by the equation as $F_{(1,382)}$ = 434.898, $p < 0.05$, R^2 = 0.532. Overall, the regression analysis was statistically significant where Satisfaction predicted the dependent variable, which is Food Image, significantly. The coefficient table explains how Food Image becomes a significant predictor of Satisfaction. The result obtained shows that the p-value for Taste (p-value=0.000) is less than 0.05, indicating that the Food Image is a significant predictor of Satisfaction. Therefore, the hypothesis testing, of H2: Food Image *has a significant influence on Ipoh, Perak's local food and tourists' satisfaction,* is accepted. Health Concern has the highest coefficient, followed by taste and price towards Response Behaviour based on the three variables.

The result shows that R^2 value was 0.734, which means 73.4percent of the variation in Satisfaction can be explained by Response Behaviour. The ANOVA output shows that the R^2 value was significantly more than 0. As the p-value was 0.000; less than 0.05, this indicates that the overall regression was significant. The result can be interpreted by the equation as $F_{(1,382)}$ = 1052.319, $p < 0.05$, R^2 = 0.734. Overall, the regression analysis was statistically significant where Satisfaction predicted the Response Behaviour where the p-value for Satisfaction (p-value=0.000) is less than 0.05. Therefore, the assumption of H3: Satisfaction

has a significant influence on Ipoh, Perak's local food and Response Behaviour of tourists, is accepted.

Mediation Analysis
Table 2.
Result of the PROCESS macro analysis for mediation effect Satisfaction between Food Image and Response Behaviour

PROCESS Model 4					
Path	Coeff	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
a (X-M)	0.4185	20.8542	.0000	.3790	.4579
b (M-Y)	1.0970	10.5546	.0000	0.9867	1.2073
c (X-Y)	0.5969	19.1930	.0000	0.5358	0.6581
c'(X-Y)	0.1379	19.5546	.0000	0.9867	0.2011
Total Effect	0.5969	0.311	.0000	.5358	0.6581
Direct Effect	0.1379	4.2858	.0000	0.0746	0.2011
Indirect Effect	0.46			0.0739	0.0939

Figure 1. The coefficient result of total effect

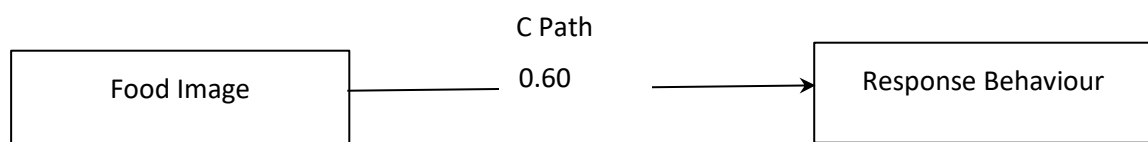C Path

0.60

| Food Image | | Response Behaviour |

Figure 2. The coefficient result of direct effect for Satisfaction towards Food Image and Response Behaviour

The result in Figure 1 indicates that the coefficient means for every 1 unit increase in Food Image (X), Response Behaviour (Y) score increased by 0.60, and the relationship was significant with a p-value <0.05.
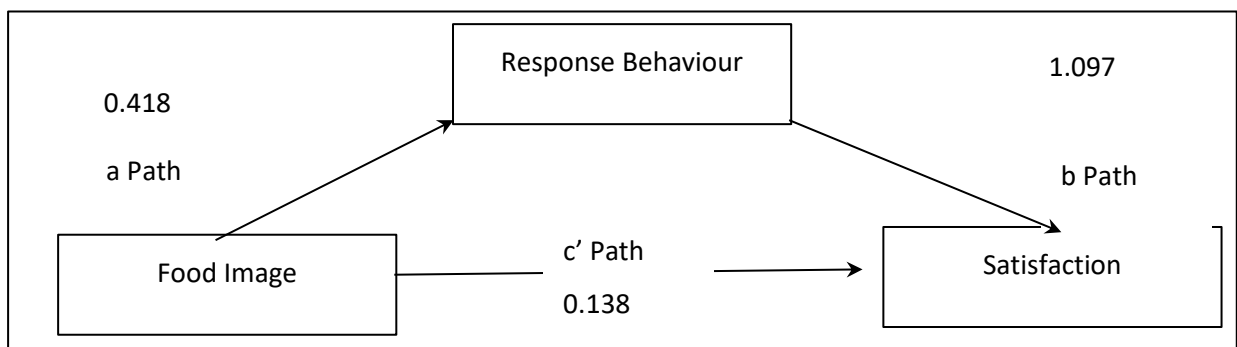

Figure 2 indicates first, that a path was statistically significant with a p-value less than 0.001. It showed that the coefficient value (a path slope) was 0.418. This coefficient value means that, for every 1 unit increase in Food Image, the Response Behaviour score increased by 0.418.

Second, the b path is also statistically significant with a p-value less than 0.001. It shows that the coefficient value (b path slope) was 1.097. This coefficient value means that, for every 1unit increase in Response Behaviour, the Satisfaction score increased by 1.097. The result

shows the indirect effect (0.46) was significant with a 95percent confidence interval, which did not include zero; that was to say, the effect was significantly greater than zero at a<0.01.

As such, the first step in the mediation model, the regression of Food Image with Response Behaviour, ignoring the mediator, was significant, ß=0.60, t= 19.19, p <0.001. The next step shows that the regression of Food Image with the mediator, Satisfaction, was also significant, ß=0.42, t=20.85, p <0.001. The mediation process states that the Satisfaction (mediator), controlling for Food Image and Response Behaviour, was significant, ß=1.10, t=10.55, p <0.001. Finally, the analysis reveals that controlling for the Satisfaction (M), Food Image was a significant predictor of the Response Behaviour, ß= 0.14, t= 4.29, p <0.001.

According to the results, it was shown that the direct effect was significant, and the indirect effect also remained noteworthy. Approximately 53.24percent of the predictors' variance in Satisfaction was accounted for (R^2 = 0.53). The indirect effect and total effect (VAF) are larger than 20percent and less than 80percent can be characterised as partial mediation. Partial mediation implies that there is a significant relationship between the mediator and the dependent variable, as well as some direct relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Thus, it was concluded that Satisfaction mediates the relationship between Food Image and Response Behaviour. Therefore, the assumption of hypothesis testing, *H4: Tourist Satisfaction, mediates the relationship between Food Image and Response Behaviour,* is accepted.

Discussion, Conclusion and Implications of Research
The findings demonstrated that food image variables (taste, health concern, and price) significantly influenced tourist satisfaction, leading to response toward local food in Ipoh, Perak. Above all, taste implied a strong relationship towards tourists' satisfaction. The major strength of Ipoh, Perak's local food was found to centre by the tastiness "The local food in Ipoh is tasty" (T1), with the highest mean score (4.58). The highest coefficient in the regression analysis is consistent with the studies performed by Atikahambar et al. (2018), Lertputtarak (2012) and Nguyen et al. (2019). Tasting local food functioned as a primary motive and was influential in planning the tourists' trip. A possible justification for tasting local food as a primary motivation is that most respondents travelled to Ipoh, Perak for the local cuisine, which is a unique fusion of culturally and climatically diverse cuisines. In addition, Ipoh is known for its hawker and local food, which is unique to consume not that far from Kuala Lumpur city.

The health concern is important in the pandemic condition as supported by a previous study (Mertens et al., 2020) stating that a wide range of worries people face towards the COVID-19 pandemic can be in various dimensions, including food choice (Carlos et al., 2021). However, there is no evidence to suggest that handling food or consuming food is associated with COVID-19 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Also, "*The local food did not cause unexpected illness during my trip*" (HC 1). Generally, before entering a restaurant or stall, tourists can predict the environment and its cleanliness level. In 2018, the State Health Department and the Ipoh City Council conducted inspections of all restaurants (Kaur & Loh, 2018) and about 40percent of the eateries in Ipoh were categorised as Grade A. The cleanliness and hygiene of all facilities, particularly those that handle food, is always a top priority, said Ipoh's Mayor, Zamri Man (Kaur & Loh, 2018). This demonstrates

that food service in Ipoh, Perak is conscientious about hygiene and cleanliness, as evidenced by the fact that most respondents did not contract an unexpected illness while visiting Ipoh, Perak for food.

Prices also significantly influence domestic tourists. With the highest mean score, "*The tasting of local food in Ipoh is worth the experience*" (P5), and "*The price of the local food is reasonable*" (P1). Customers who are valued and believe that restaurants offer good value for money would develop positive attitudes toward the local food served by such establishments and are frequently satisfied consumers (Lai, 2015). Customers who generally like food are willing to pay a premium to protect their interests (Awuni & Du, 2016; Tully & Winer, 2014; Xu et al., 2012). Nonetheless, the words "affordable," "inexpensive," and "reasonable" in the price category convey a positive connotation of Malaysian cuisine as one that provides good value for the money spent on it (Jalis, 2014). However, local cuisine has become important sales, marketing, and promotion tool for the food and beverage industry due to the increasing consumer demand and interest in this type of food (Kocaman, 2018).

The results confirmed that the tourists' overall positive experience depended on different factors. Moreover, the foodservice sector should maintain and even improve their gastronomy offerings that will contribute to the tourists' loyalty, recommendation, and revisit intentions. With the highest mean score of 5.97, "*I will choose Ipoh again for one of my upcoming trips*" (RB1) and "*I would choose local Ipoh food again for my future travel.*" (RB2). This showed that the respondents intended to travel to Ipoh for their future travels. Also, with a mean score of 6.11 was the item "*I will definitely recommend local and/or international tourists to experience food tourism*" (RB4). This showed that the respondents would recommend both local and international tourists about the local food in Ipoh, Perak. Another item with a mean score of 6.10 was "*I will definitely revisit Ipoh to enhance the experience of local food tourism in future*" (RB7). This proved that respondents would revisit Ipoh for the local food in the future. It can be concluded that tourists' satisfaction towards local food in Ipoh, Perak was influenced by Response Behaviour.

Satisfaction has a significant relationship as a mediating variable between food image and Response Behaviour. This result supported the studies by Nguyen et al. (2019) and Zhong et al. (2020) in their study on the effects of local foods on tourists' recommendation and revisit intention, influenced by satisfaction as a mediating variable.

Conclusion

The study aimed to gain more profound knowledge about the satisfaction of domestic tourists with the food image of local food in Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, which leads to their Response Behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. Three attributes of food image were chosen for the research (taste, health concerns, and price), which matched with the situation of the pandemic. Generally, domestic tourists would still travel regardless of the situation faced within the country. However, the restrictions of the pandemic are stopping domestic tourists from doing currently. All the attributes showed a positive relationship with satisfaction which led to a positive relationship with Response Behaviour. This result is consistent with findings from past research (Namkung & Jang, 2008; Kim & Eves, 2012; Nguyen et al., 2019).

The respondents who participated in this study were domestic tourists who had experienced eating local food in Ipoh, Perak. Food has taken precedence over other forms of entertainment. Pleasures are a new wealth, and the food delivers one of life's most delightful experiences, with something new to sample at every turn when tourists travel. As a result, it is logical that younger travellers define their vacations in terms of how excellent the food will be while they are away. Many Malaysians are looking foward to dine outside their home as they have been confined to their place for such a long time due to COVID-19. The desire to travel will escalate when Malaysians have the opportunity to dine outside their homes or states. Food is likely to influence most the resetting of tourism on a more resilient and regenerative pathway. It has been proven that there was an increase in customers at restaurants on the first day of the retractation relaxation in Ipoh, Perak, in February 2021 (Arif, 2021). The public, on the other hand, should not dismiss the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, according to The Stars News in 2021, most restaurants in Ipoh, Perak rely primarily on tourists from Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Kedah, and Selangor, which led to the findings of this study where the majority of the respondents were from Kuala Lumpur, followed by Selangor. Most domestic travellers seemed to be there for the food.

Through the analysis, the study also provided practical implications for tourism marketers in searching the positive influence of food image on tourist satisfaction, which leads to their loyalty, positive word-of-mouth/recommendations, and return to Ipoh, Perak's local food. Also, since COVID-19 has been on everyone's mind and concerns, food safety training and supervision are critical, as tourists are also concerned about it now and then. According to research findings in terms of health, the origin of food ingredients and the environment of the food place have a significant impact on food quality and satisfaction. As a result, authorities should pay more attention to solutions for monitoring the cooking process and the provenance of components. In conclusion, the information and results gathered can be used for the industry to understand tourist satisfaction towards Response Behaviour. Besides that, the result would also help the industry to determine whether to increase the quality of local food while maintaining the authentic taste and technique for tourists to enjoy. Lastly, this study would also help restaurants' management improve their daily operation and marketing strategies.

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