

## Influence of Demographic Characteristics on Dining Out and Food Ordering Behaviour Among Older Persons

Bakar, A. Z. A.<sup>1</sup>, Ganesan, L.<sup>1</sup>,  
Sharifah A. Haron<sup>2</sup>, Siti Nurhayati Khairatun<sup>1</sup>, and Ishak, F. A.  
C.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Food Service and Management, Faculty of Food Science and Technology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia,

<sup>2</sup>Department of Resource Management and Consumer Studies, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400, UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

Email: lalitha\_29@hotmail.com, sh.azizah@upm.edu.my, snkhairatun@upm.edu.my, farahadibah@upm.edu.my

Corresponding author Email: ainulz@upm.edu.my

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### Abstract

Malaysia is a developing multicultural nation that is experiencing population aging with an estimated seven percent of the population made up of individuals aged 65 and above in 2020. The diverse cultures as well as the growing older persons population makes Malaysia an interesting population to be studied; however, the stereotypes held about older persons (limited spending power and frail) have prevented marketers from giving the rightful focus on this growing market segment. Food consumption trend is different among age groups, and little is known about the restaurant choice behaviour among older persons in Malaysia. This study explored demographic characteristics that influence older persons restaurant visiting and ordering behaviour. Through qualitative approach, 15 informants aged 55 and above were purposively sampled from Klang Valley. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded; then transcribed, translated, content analysed and coded into themes. The results of this study revealed that the demographic characteristics that influenced dining out behaviour were education level, income and employment status, and culture and religion. Surprisingly, those with higher education level were more empathetic and tolerant towards low-skilled foreign workers. Additionally, they preferred the indoor comforts of clean air and air conditioning of the foodservice establishment; whereas their counterparts preferred the natural and spacious environment of outdoor dining. This study revealed some insights on the demographic characteristics that influenced older consumers dining out and ordering behaviour in Klang Valley; in the hope to initiate

restaurateurs to better consider the new roles of older people as consumers in Malaysia to better meet their needs and expectations.

**Keywords:** Culture, Dining Out, Employment, Income, Silver Consumers, Religion

### **Introduction**

In 2020, Malaysia has transitioned to an aging population in which at least seven percent of its population is 65 years or older (World Bank, 2020). It is expected that by 2044 Malaysia will become an aged nation whereby 14% of the population will be 65 years and over. Furthermore, projections showed that Malaysia will become a super-aged country by 2056 (20% population 65 years and over). The challenges associated with ageing should not be underestimated; at the same time, the opportunities of the “silver economy” should not be ignored. The silver economy includes all those activities, products, and services designed to meet the needs of those aged 50 and above (IBERDROLA, 2021; Ong, 2013).

In Malaysia, more and more people are working beyond 60 years old ~~of age~~ which is past the compulsory retirement age. The attainment of higher education enables more women to participate in the workforce thus increasing their purchasing power, but reducing the time available for them to prepare food themselves (Jang, Kim, & Yang, 2011). This automatically increases the demand for food away from home. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) (2020), in 2019, Malaysian spent 13.9% of their monthly expenditure; which is RM630.23 from mean household expenditure of RM4534; into restaurants and hotels which is an increase of 0.5% from the year 2016. Housing, water, electricity, gas & other fuels (23.6%); food & non-alcoholic beverages (17.3%); restaurant & hotels (13.9%); and transport (13.5%) are the major components of the Malaysian household expenditure. Additionally, older people spent a large proportion of expenses on food and beverages (Ong, 2013).

The recurring growth of consumer expenditure for restaurant & hotels increases the need to understand and classify the consumer market better. Segmentation of consumer groups according to their demographic characteristic is one type of classifier; consumers can be divided according to their age, gender, education level, marital status, and other factors in demographic segmentation. Most of the literature assumes that consumers remain largely the same throughout their lifetime without considering a change in preference as one ages (Ong, 2010). Lesakova (2016) however, found that age influence perceptions and behaviour related to store evaluation in the food procurement process. Studying the demographic characteristics of each age segment can be beneficial to the marketers. This study explored the demographic characteristic (age, gender, ethnicity, education, income, and employment) of the older adults that affect their restaurant visiting behaviour as part of a larger research that identified factors influencing Malaysian older adult’s restaurant dining choice (see Bakar, Ganesan, Othman, Haron, & Ishak, 2020).

### **Literature Review**

People are living longer than previously; and there are many contributing factors to the increased longevity such as the ‘rising living standards and better nutrition, safe water, improved sanitation, improved lifestyles, increased education and greater access to quality health services’ (United Nations, 2017, p.22). Many countries in Asia are said to be ‘getting old before getting rich’ (Hamid, 2015, p.15); however, the newer cohorts of older consumers have higher of educational attainment and income, and adopt a different lifestyle to that of their parents (Ong, 2013). Furthermore, the older population is sometimes the only growing yet neglected consumer segment in Malaysia (Ong, 2013; Ong & Phillips, 2007).

The ever-increasing number of the older population should be acknowledged by marketers as many sectors have been affected by the growth of this population. Specifically targeting the older people as consumer can be beneficial to marketers who are involved in 'senior living, care, managed care, healthcare, ageing in place, death care, pharmacies and drug stores, travel and leisure, beauty and cosmetics, fashion, retail, and technology, among other areas' (Bank of America Merrill Lynch, 2014, p. 10). The growth of senior citizens' population is a global phenomenon where the growth itself is said to bring changes to many industries (Angus & Westbrook, 2019). Despite their age, the older generation feels young and feel as full of life as their children (Angus, & Westbrook 2019; IBERDROLA, 2021).

Some of the food away from home related research on the senior citizens are about the food preferences (Hunter & Worsley, 2009; Jang, Kim, & Yang, 2011; Popper & Kroll, 2003; Yamanaka & Almanza, 2003), restaurant visiting factors (Kim, Bergman, & Raab, 2010; Knutson, Elsworth, et al., 2006a; Sun & Morrison, 2007), and restaurant experience (Parks & Fu, 2016). As compared to the younger generation, older consumer might not show much involvement in keeping updated with new products and markets but due to age, they have more experience in certain area of market segment (Berg, 2015). Having more leisure time helps the older people to accumulate information before making their purchasing decision. Most of these researches; however, were done in the Western countries which may not be applicable here due to disparate culture and lifestyle.

Few studies had focused on older adults as consumers in Malaysia carried out over a decade ago (e.g., Ong, 2013; 2010; Ong et al., 2008; Ong & Phillips, 2007); indicating that there is a real need for more studies involving older consumers. The stereotypes of the senior citizens are still very prevalent that few considered this age segment profitable or a worthy consumer segment to be studied. Most research in Malaysia were looking into the well-being of senior citizens, such as their health status (Forsyth & Chia, 2015; Karim, 1997), financial status and economic growth (Ismail, Rahman, & Hamid, 2015; Masud & Haron, 2008, 2014), and concerns for senior citizens (Leng, Khan, Vergara, & Khan, 2016; Poi, Forsyth, & Chan, 2004; Tyng & Hamid, 2015). In term of marketing profitability, marketer have overlooked this age segment (Ong, 2013). It is imperative to study the older population because rapid ageing is a crucial megatrend affecting Malaysia (World Bank, 2020).

Demographic variables have been found to impact consumer behaviour. Gender, age, and level of education for example were found to significantly influence Malaysian consumers' intention to purchase organic food (Omar, Nazri, Osman, & Ahmad, 2016). According to Sun and Morrison (2007), senior citizens tend to eat out for convenience and companionship. As ageing reduces one's ability, cooking themselves becomes a tedious assignment and eating out seems much more convenient and time saving. Due to the 'empty-nest' syndrome, senior citizens are using eating out to socialize and fulfil their need of companionship. Senior citizens have less interest eating in a fast food restaurant; if they do go to fast food restaurants, it is mostly to accompany the younger generation in the family, whereas coffee shops, hawker centres and restaurants were the most popular type of eating outlets among older consumer (Ong & Phillips, 2007). Knowledge about their who they are and what they want will help foodservice industry to develop communication and marketing programmes that are appealing to them.

## **Materials and Methods**

Fifteen, one-to-one interviews were conducted among informants 55 years and older. All interviews were recorded utilizing a tape recorder, except for one interview which at the informant's request, was recorded by pen-and-paper method. Purposive sampling was used to choose the interviewees of the study. The three criteria for inclusion in this study included: Malaysian people aged 55 years old and older living in Klang Valley; independent (mentally sound and able to make their own decision); and mobile (able to move around without depending on others for assistance).

This study was delimited to older adults aged 55 years and older based on the criteria set by previous studies (Masud, Haron, & Gikonyo, 2008; Moschis, Curasi, & Bellenger, 2003; Ong, Kitchen, & Jama, 2008; Parks & Fu, 2016; Wildes, Demicco, & Seo, 2001; Yamanaka & Almanza, 2003). Additionally, Klang Valley was chosen because it is densely populated, has numerous public transportations and houses diverse variety of food establishments in Malaysia ("What exactly is Klang Valley?", 2014).

Semi-structured interviews were implemented to gather data in this research as the semi-structured questions help informants to have some guidelines on what to talk about (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008) and gave the researcher flexibility to ask questions in a non-orderly manner as some informants might have answered certain questions even before it had been asked (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). This list of questions also served as a checklist for the researcher to make sure that all the questions intended for the interview has been asked and to guide the interview in the right direction. The full list of questions is available in Bakar, Ganesan, Othman, Haron, & Ishak, (2020).

The data collection stopped when there were no new themes transpired during the interview sessions indicating data saturation. Data from the interviews were then transcribed verbatim and translated to English as most of the interviews were done either in Malay language or Tamil language. The transcribed data were content analysed using the *Atlas.ti* software. The analysis was guided by a codebook created during the study which included a priori and emergent codes. To confirm the validity and trustworthiness of the research, the data and findings were validated through peer de-briefing method; in which examination of the research methodology, transcripts, and final report were done by members of the research team (Debriefing.com, 2018; Spall, 1998). Peer debriefing sessions were conducted throughout the research process; at the beginning of research, following data collection and analysis, and development of the codebook to confirm that the findings and interpretations are worthy, honest, and believable.

## **Results And Discussions**

### **Profile of Informants**

The complete profile of the informants is presented in Table 1. The age range of the informants were between 56 – 68 years, with nine of the informants aged above 60 years old (beyond retirement age); and all of them were married. Over half of the informants were male (n=9). The informants represented the three major ethnicities in Malaysia: Malay (n=6), Chinese (n=4), and Indian (n=5). Regarding the education level, there were informants that completed primary (n=4), secondary (n=6), and tertiary education (n=5). Less than half of the informants were still employed (n=4) while the remaining were retired (n=9), and two were homemakers. Among the retirees, less than half were still working full time (n=4), and one working part time.

Table 1

*Profile of Informants*

No.	Age	Gender	Race	Marital status	Occupation	Education level
1	64	Male	Indian	Married	Employed full time	Primary school
2	59	Female	Indian	Married	Retired and not employed	Primary school
3	64	Female	Indian	Married	Retired and not employed	Primary school
4	68	Male	Indian	Married	Retired and employed full time	Primary school
5	65	Male	Malay	Married	Retired and not employed	Secondary school
6	63	Male	Malay	Married	Retired and not employed	Secondary school
7	57	Male	Malay	Married	Employed full-time	Secondary school
8	57	Female	Malay	Married	Employed full-time (own business)	Secondary school
9	67	Male	Chinese	Married	Employed full-time (own business)	Secondary school
10	59	Female	Chinese	Married	Homemaker	Diploma
11	68	Male	Chinese	Married	Retired and employed full time (own business)	Secondary school
12	61	Male	Indian	Married	Retired and employed part time	Master
13	56	Female	Malay	Married	Employed	Degree
14	56	Female	Chinese	Married	Employed	Diploma
15	64	Male	Malay	Married	Retired and not employed	Degree

**Themes and Quotes**

Three themes have transpired during the search for the demographic characteristics influencing restaurant visiting and ordering behaviour. These included education level, income and employment status, and the cultural and religious belief that will be discussed in detail below.

**Education**

In terms of the education received, the informants can be divided to three subgroups: primary (n=4; 26.7%), secondary (n=6; 40%), and tertiary education (n=5; 33.3%). In this study, the majority (66.7%) of informants had completed primary and secondary education similar to the study by Ong (2013) in which 75% of respondents completed primary and secondary education. As expected, the informants' educational level seems to influence their restaurant patronization behaviour. This is because education has a direct influence on the income level of older adults. Having a higher education enables the older adults to secure good paying jobs. Additionally, when older adults retire, their pension is generally higher than those with lower education which impacts their spending power.

***Indoor versus Outdoor Dining***

In Malaysia, it is common for restaurants (serving foods at low to mid-level price range) located in shop lots to extend their service area beyond the actual building onto nearby parking lots or street. This occurrence usually happens in the evenings for dinner meals when the temperature is cooler. The security of the restaurant is related to the



layout of the restaurant. Most of the informants interviewed like to dine out in the open but there is a clear difference of opinion when the education of the informants was observed. One of the factors mentioned by those with education up to tertiary level is security when dining out in the open. Security here refers to how safe the informants feel when they dine out. These informants were more concerned about the health risk they must face when they had to dine in an open area. The interviewees indicated that they do not like to dine in an open area as it is dusty, and the risk of inhaling carbon monoxide released from vehicles are higher.

- *“Environment of the place like away from smoke (smoking area), away from dust and with air-cond (air-conditioner) not that hot.” (Informant 12, Master’s degree)*
- *“If it is near roadside, of course I won’t go. It is not good to eat near the roadside. We are actually taking a lot of carbon monoxide.” (Informant 14, Diploma)*
- *“Oh, I like in [referring to dining in the restaurant] because outside... car, dust... it is less risky (to dine in a restaurant). I like inside. Usually will eat inside. Sometimes I do eat outside. But mostly will be inside. If the restaurant is far away from road, then it is okay.” (Informant 15, Bachelor’s degree)*

Only one of the informants with less than tertiary education mentioned security as a reason for him to visit a restaurant, but his idea of security was different than those with tertiary education. He mentioned that dining in an open area of a restaurant is a risky move as it increases the risk of accidents and burglary.

- *“I would see where the table is situated. If the table is (situated) beside the roadside, I won’t want to go there. Because if the table is on the roadside... people now days are driving like crazy (laughs). If you seat out, you are not safe. But most of the shops are like that. But now days I don’t go too much of Teh Tarik, for my health number one. Number two is that cannot stay too long in a restaurant. People will come and rob. They will come and rob la. Even Mamak stall also... er, quite lot of students sitting down there with their laptop. They [referring to thieves] will come in three four motorbikes with ‘parang’ (machete) and starts taking the laptops, taking money and all that. So, another problem there.” (Informant 11, Secondary school)*

Informants without tertiary education like to dine out in the open air because of many reasons such as:

- *“I do not like a noisy environment. It must be quiet and open-air. Even if I go to a restaurant, I would not sit inside and dine.” (Informant 1, Primary school)*
- *“Because it would be breezy on the outside and we could enjoy the scenery while eating.” (Informant2, Primary school)*
- *“I like to sit outside. Because I want to smoke (laugh).” (Informant 7, Secondary school)*
- *“I like sitting in the outdoor. I feel spacious. When we eat, we want to look (at the surrounding) but if we sit indoor feel like cramped. At the outdoor we feel spacious, it’s a relief. We can sit and enjoy the environment.” (Informant 8, Secondary school)*
- *“He said that he will mostly go to Genting Highland. To him, the food offered there is good and at the same time he could enjoy the beautiful scenery of the place.” (Informant 8, Secondary school)*

Some interviewees feel that within the walls of the restaurant it is quite cramped and suffocating. Eating in the open allows them to enjoy the scenery and feel the natural

breeze. Feelings of being cramped is felt by older adults may be due to the table arrangement where the tables are placed to close together; thus, creating concern for older adults when they visit restaurants (Almanza, Ghiselli, & Jaffe', 2000).

Malaysia is highly dependent on low-wage and low-skilled foreign workers to support its growing economy; the sustainability of the foodservice industry in Malaysia is highly dependent on the foreign labour (Yong & Latip, 2021). Another notable difference between those with tertiary education and those without tertiary education is their tolerance level when it comes to handling service staff that have low language competency. People with tertiary education seem to be more patient in giving out their order once they knew that their service staff was not able to communicate well and felt that it is acceptable if they receive a wrong order.

- *“So, initially we did not know that he doesn’t speak Malay (language). We thought that, because it’s a Mamak stall you see, so we ordered in Malay. But he can’t really understand what we want. So, we try to speak in English, but we have to go to his level of English, to get what we want. Because we are not in a hurry and then we have time to... to tell him and communicate to him what we want.” (Informant 10, Diploma)*
- *“If they can communicate in the simplest term, then that shouldn’t be a problem for me. Because we are not going to spend whole day with them. As long as they understand what we are ordering, they don’t mix up our orders, fine.” (Informant 12, Master’s degree)*
- *“Sometimes the owner will say sorry and replace a new one or sometimes we’ll say okayla, the food came already (food different than the one ordered), we just eat la. And that’s it. So far not big hassle la, no big issue about that. Yes, miscommunications (due to language barrier) and they (workers) do not understand what we wanted.” (Informant 14, Diploma)*

Informants with less than tertiary level education are not as empathetic towards service staff’s lack of skill. This group of people have higher service expectation and are easily angered if the service does not meet their expectation. Different from the study by Mhlanga and Machingambi (2016) who said that customer with tertiary education has higher expectation of food and beverage, and service.

- *“Sometimes the staff would not understand as they are not from here. I had felt that it is better not to visit the restaurant rather than explain what we want to them.” (Informant 2, Primary school)*
- *“Sometimes, their service is sometimes not very good. Sometimes this becomes their problem. For example, there is a lot of Indian Muslim restaurant in Malaysia and they hire foreign workers as their staff. Language is an issue. We ask for something but the one that being served would be different. They do not understand our language. The way they write down order is so keen but when the food arrives, it is something else.” (Informant 6, Secondary school)*
- *“They [the foreign staff] do not understand (local language) and they [restaurant operators] place this people to take order from customers. We say something and they do not understand it. How are we not supposed to be angry? We order for something else, but we receive something else.” (Informant 7, Secondary school)*

Older adults with higher education do not only rely on the words of the people they know; but also, people they have not met, such as the suggestions that they take from the media.

The informants educated up to tertiary level believe that the media can give them good suggestions and are reliable. They either search for the information themselves or depend on others to look it up for them. The older adults will look for information before going to a restaurant especially if they are going to try it for the first time.

- *“So, we don’t ah... so called out of the blue and then just pop in to one (restaurant) and then without knowing anything. So, normally we try to find out what is nice in that particular shop; what is the so called the signature dish kind of thing. Then, we try the signature dish. That’s all.” (Informant 10, Diploma)*
- *“I do survey as well. Will check the internet and see where nice (food) is. I follow TV program ‘Jalan-jalan Cari Makan’. If I feel it (the food portrayed in the program) is nice, will invite the family there. But now, it is seldom. Seldom because the children had all grown up. When they were small, will follow the program and if it (the food) seem nice, will bring the family there. Like the ‘Jalan-jalan Cari Makan’ program, I will take down the information of the place mentioned in it. Then, will try the place suggested. Will plan out the trip.” (Informant 13, Bachelor’s degree)*
- *“I am the type that anything (try to mean that she is okay with any type of food). He [informant’s husband] would be the one that would be googling, and he finds that okay, we try this and then we will just go. My survey is I see got people; I find that (the restaurant is) okay then will go in. Or people tell me this place is nice, and then we will go.” (Informant 14, Diploma)*
- *“Cupcake Kuantan...the one in the Facebook, the popular one... it is because my son is very active in surfing the net. So, when we go Kuantan, we’ll look for it. I remember where we went three times for a cupcake and only the third time the shop was open. And we able to get what we wanted to eat.” (Informant 15, Bachelor’s degree)*

Older adults without tertiary education listen to recommendations and suggestions or word-of-mouth of people they are close to rather than listen to suggestion provided in the media.

- *“If other has complains about the shop, for instance they saw a fly in the food; I will not go to the restaurant.” (Informant 4, Primary school)*
- *“Usually my restaurant going choices is from the suggestions of friends and children.” (Informant 7, Secondary school)*
- *“Other reasons would be friends. Sometimes friends will invite, say there is a new place. They will say “come let’s have a drink at this new place”. So, we have to see if the food served there does not match our taste, we don’t have to go there again.” (Informant 5, Secondary school)*
- *“My husband and kids will suggest we eat this and that.” (Informant 8, Secondary school)*

### **Income and Employment Status**

Older adults do not have to be employed to have income as suggested by Knutson, Elsworth and Beck (2006) because retirement income, social security, and investment income and in some cases, part time employment is a form of income for older adults. In a nation of high family attachment and bonding, together with the concept of filial piety, older people in Malaysia also obtain money from their children and most of their expenses are covered. It is common for the children to pay for elders not because the older people are unable to support themselves; but because of the filial piety responsibilities taken by the children (Masud & Haron, 2014). Since eating out is a family occasion, the check for the meal is sometimes being shared out among family members.



- *“If we go with our children, they would pay. If I go with my wife, my wife would pay. She is the ‘cashier’. Whoever has the money would pay normally.” (Informant 1, Operator in a company)*
- *“Uncle (informant’s husband) will give me money every month. My children would give me as well. They will bank-in to me.” (Informant 2, Homemaker)*
- *“So long I’ve been paying [referring to who is paying restaurant bill]. Now my children are working, they start paying already (laughs).” (Informant 12, Part-time lecturer)*

Even though some of the interviewees are still working, they feel that the price of the food to be too high and it is not advisable to eat out often. Reluctance to dine out were reported because even though they are working, they still have responsibilities. This was shared by those interviewees who were either working for small wages, those who had retired or not formally employed like a homemaker. For mature adults with low discretionary income, price may be an important factor to consider before making a purchasing decision (Bone, 1991).

- *“We have family to consider you see. Yes, I have income, but eating in a restaurant on a daily basis is not practical. We won’t spend a lot of money. One trip to the restaurant, it will cost RM100 above. For us it seems as a big money.” (Informant 1, Operator in a company)*
- *“I feel that it is more than my salary. When compared with other expenses, this food expense is high. The food is very costly.” (Informant 4, Lorry driver)*
- *“Now it is not cheap to eat out. Generally. Even hawker stall also is not cheap.” (Informant 10, Homemaker)*
- *“We do not go to restaurant very often because very expensive now.” (Informant 11, Own business)*

The older segment of the mature adults is found to be more price conscious compared to the younger segment due to the fact that most of the people at this age are either unemployed or on limited income (Knutson et al., 2006); in line with this research as age affects the employability of a person. As older adults age, the harder it is for them to get a job. The younger segment of the older consumer cohort in Malaysia especially those who were born after the independence (1957) have higher chance of obtaining education (Masud & Haron, 2014). Having education not only increases the employability of the older adults, but also the income obtained by them. Those with higher income do consider the price of food as a factor to eat out as the lower income older adults do; but the price margin is usually higher for the former. The average check per person that they are willing to spend differs among that earning higher compared to those earning less.

- *“On average they (restaurant) are charging around RM7 to RM7.50 for vegetarian food. Before this it was around RM2 to RM2.50 only. Now, it is not less than RM7 or RM7.50. Certain shop charges around RM6 to RM6.50 for a meal.” (Informant 4, 67 y/o<sup>1</sup>, Income RM1501-RM2000)*
- *“For breakfast, I will spend around RM10, for a person. But sometimes it does not amount to that if I take food that cost me RM8 including water. Depends on the dishes as well. Sometimes it can be RM7 or RM 6 depending on the dishes chosen.” (Informant 5, 64 y/o, Income RM2501- RM3000)*
- *“Mm.. usually if I am alone, it will cost within RM10. I will have my favourite drink, Iced Nescafe ‘O’, which is now at RM2 per glass. ‘Roti’ (canai) is around let say RM1.50. The*

*total cost is around RM4. It does not even cost RM5. But if I go out with friends, the maximum it would go is RM15 per seating.” (Informant 6, 62 y/o, >RM3000)*

- *“Will be around... I mean current market price la. Average maybe not more than 20 la (RM20).” (Informant 10, 58 y/o, Homemaker)*
- *“(With) friends or individually (will spend) about RM30 to RM40 (per seating).” (Informant 12, 61 y/o, Income >RM3000)*
- *“A meal for per person? Okay let say usually... RM20, RM25 per person.” (Informant 14, 56 y/o, Income >RM3000)*

Findings showed that the younger generation of the older adults are more willing to spend for food; which may be because they are still employed or are receiving higher pensions or has multiple sources of income.

### **Culture and Religion**

Culture of the older adult and the surrounding cultures form the food preferences of the interviewee which eventually becomes their restaurant visiting behaviour. Even though it was said that the older consumer is willing to eat different cultural food, it was clear that the Malay and Indian informants were not quite as comfortable due to their religious restriction. As previously mentioned, people from each ethnicity continue to practice their ancestors' cultural customs. As such, most Malays in Malaysia are Muslim by religion. People of this faith are not permitted to consume pork or any non-halal food. Due to this restriction, it can be observed that the Malay older adults in this research do not mention going to restaurants serving different culture's food. Even if they followed this restriction, they made sure to mention the halal status of the restaurant. The Indian people on the other hand are mostly Hindu. This religion does not allow the consumption of beef. During some of the major festivals (Deepavali and Thaipusam) and auspicious day (where many observe fasting), most Hindus practices vegetarianism. This restriction causes them to be particular in choosing restaurants to avoid breaking their fast. Some prefer to not visit ethnic Malay restaurants as they pre-dominantly serve beef.

It was previously discussed that older adults in Malaysia like to eat food of similar cultures to them and this has given rise to the growth of one restaurant type that is the Mamak restaurants. Mamak restaurants in Malaysia are growing at a fast rate recently (Bakar & Farinda, 2012; Omar, Juhdi, Ahmad, & Nazri, 2014) and are said to have the most consistent growth in Malaysia (Aziz, Siti Nur'afifah, & Eik Koon, 2014).

The informants of this research mostly like to have food at Mamak restaurants except for the Indian informants. This might be due to the fact that most of the food served in this type of restaurant resembles Indian food and they can have it at an Indian restaurant or at home easily. Only one out of the five Indian informants mentioned going to a Mamak restaurant; eventhough he does not spend a lot of time there.

- *“Like mamak place right. We also go there but we don't spend much time there. Normally families no, with friends yes... sometimes. But I don't spend much time there.” (Informant 12, Hindu)*

Malay Muslim informants have restrictions when eating out because they must make sure the food that they consume is halal. Due to this restriction, the Malay older adults go to Mamak restaurants if they feel like having Indian food. Even though most Indian restaurants are halal certified, the older adults prefer having meals at Mamak restaurants as they believe that the staff is Muslim and prepare the food according to the halal standard.

- *"I usually go to Mamak to have Thosai or Capati." (Informant 5, Muslim)*
- *"Will go to Indian, Indian Muslim shop quite a lot. Goes there mostly looking for Roti canai." (Informant 6, Muslim)*
- *"I always go to NZ (a Mamak restaurant in KL). I will always take thosai. I take roti canai, very seldom. It is seldom for me to take roti canai." (Informant 7, Muslim)*
- *"Sometimes mamak (restaurant), the curry is okay as well. If I eat, I will take mutton curry. I like (laugh)." (Informant 8, Muslim)*
- *"Sometimes this... mamak shop, once we know that they are not Muslim I won't be going there again. It is because his practice will not be of a Muslim practice. First, we thought they are Muslim, then after that we found out that he is not a Muslim. So, won't go after that." (Informant 15, Muslim)*
- *"In the morning I take roti canai... (unclear) I take nasi lemak. Sometimes, I take capati, thosai... ha, like that la. Because I know things like less oil and stuff." (Informant 15, Muslim)*

Indian older adults of this research do not mention much about going to Malay restaurants. They mostly mentioned going to Chinese restaurants if not Indian restaurant. Two informants mentioned that they do not eat at a Malay restaurant because of their religious belief.

- *"I will not go to Malay restaurant. He (informant's husband) does not like it. Will go to either Indian or Chinese restaurant." (Informant 3, Hindu)*
- *"I do not eat Malay food. They serve beef, that's why. It is not because the shop is not clean but because they serve beef what causes me not to eat there. For that reason, I do not eat in their (Malay restaurant) shop. If let say there is no other shops in the place I went, I would just take tea in the Malay restaurant." (Informant 4, Hindu)*

As for the Chinese informants, only one of them mentioned that he has started observing vegetarianism due to religious belief.

- *"Due to religious vow that he took, he is now a complete vegetarian." (Informant 9, Buddhist)*

### **Conclusion And Recommendation**

The findings of this study will bridge the gap and enrich the existing literature in food service business. Specifically, this study identified the demographic characteristics that impact the overall restaurant choice among older persons through an in-depth view of the older persons' restaurant visiting behaviour. Since the food industry is an ever-growing industry, keeping track with the preference of the customer is becoming particularly important to sustain in the industry. The informants of this study were interviewed in detail regarding what influence them to visit a restaurant and how their demographic characteristic impacts their overall restaurant dining choice. Three demographic characteristics that influenced the behaviour were education level, income and employment status, and culture and religion.

In terms of income and employment status of the older adults, some of the informants of this research are still working. Employment is not the only income generation for older adults. They have other incomes such as retirement income, social security, and investment income and money given by children. Even though they are having income, most of the older adults' expenses are settled by their children. Thus, they do not have any commitments and burdens. Despite not having high commitments, older adults' earning value in

this study differs. Restaurateurs need to be able to identify the person paying for the meal because in some instances, the children may settle the check for the meal. In general, people with higher income tend to spend more than the ones with lower income. Eating out at a restaurant is considered as a luxury; having been around for a long time the older persons have experienced various food price changes throughout their lifetime. They are aware of the increasing food prices; to mitigate this, restaurateurs may consider offering food with different price points to attract older persons with different earning levels.

For culture and religion, older adults in Malaysia are people of many different faiths. In terms of religion, there are several restrictions that should be considered by the restaurant operators. This is because religion is a sensitive issue and when it involves food, extra care must be taken. Knowledge and understanding of diverse cultural and religious requirements are important for restaurateurs especially in a diverse population setting such as Malaysia. Food operators must understand the term halal, vegetarian, and various food restrictions that are associated with different religions.

Malaysian likes to eat food of similar cultures to them because it is the food they grow up with, this has given rise to the growth of one restaurant type that is the Mamak restaurant. Indians do not seem to patronize Mamak restaurant much possibly due to the similarity of the foods to ethnic Indian restaurants. As for Malays, the need to consume Halal food is important to them; thus, when they want to eat Indian food, they tend to patronize Mamak restaurants. This is because Mamak restaurants are believed to be halal and practice the halal way of food preparation. Additionally, Mamak restaurants usually offer a variety of food options at affordable prices.

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