

Assessing Demographic Factors in Affecting Customers Food Choices: The Case of Bandar Baru Bangi

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Abstract

Malaysia is well-known for its multi-ethnic population, culture, tradition and food. The entire country is heaven for foodies. The varieties of food have contributed to a melting pot of different cultures highlighting the Malay, Chinese and Indian cuisines. It is evident to discover factors affecting customers on their food choices. This study addressed three (3) demographic factors, namely income, age and gender factor in customers' selection of food choices. A survey focused deeply on gaining the exact data and accurate measurements focusing on Bandar Baru Bangi (BBB) as the selected destination for the study. The data from this study were analysed using the SPSS programme version 20.0, which comprised descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. Findings indicated that all three variables strongly affect customers' food choices. The findings of the study can assist business owners in improving their business by diversifying the food portion for high-quality food, attracting more customers from different levels of people, and making better decisions and suggestions for creating a range of meals that are acceptable for both men and women due to different gender have different food preferences. Future research is suggested at the end of this paper.

Keywords: Age, Gender, Income, Customers Food Choices

Introduction

Malaysia is well-known for its multi-ethnic population, culture, tradition and food. The entire country is heaven for foodies. The varieties of food have contributed to a melting pot of different cultures highlighting the Malay, Chinese and Indian cuisines (Safian et al., 2021). In Malaysia, food legacy is represented in certain communities' environmental history, beliefs, ideologies, and food technology (Ramli, 2020). In the case of this country, "multiracial" or "multi-ethnic" food characterises the local cuisine, which has also been defined as a "fusion cuisine" generated by the influences of the primary ethnic communities of Malay, Chinese, and Indian (Jalis, 2014). This characteristic has aided in developing numerous types of food

and cuisines throughout the country. Food has a sociocultural meaning in addition to physical nutrition. Food can be a trace of identity that helps define a country and a culture in the globe. Culinary customs differ considerably. The expression of location and people is also visible in local and ethnic foods and even in the food supply. On that note, there are several factors that affect an individual with regards to food choices. It relates to a person's daily diet habits, including certain diets calories and relative amounts. In order to investigate diet, Innai et. al (2020) states that, in addition to analysing food sources, it is required to examine food preparation. Regarding the key to food intake, Granier (1976) reinforced that food is not the food itself, but its link with the environment must also be taken into account. So, the elements determining the provision of food to society are exactly like what Rozin (2013) presents, dependent on the natural resources and the type of spices accessible.

To summarise, food choice is a complicated process influenced by personal, social, economic, and emotional aspects. Teenagers have a lot more freedom than youngsters in terms of making decisions. Furthermore, because eating is a social activity, their social networks and family can have an even greater influence on their dietary choices (Contento et al., 2006). Furthermore, globalisation is diminishing traditional cuisines while increasing food choices and availability, both of which may impact their food choices (Serra-Majem et al., 2007). The change is in fact, related to the availability of materials, food innovation and the consequences of the spread of mixed goods with other countries. The attitudes of society themselves are the cause of awareness of the choice of quality food. A high level of education is one of the factors involved. Other elements which encourage people to eat excellent and nutritious meals are the fact that people have a high income and are empowered to choose foods or otherwise to purchase.

Price is an important consideration in food choices, particularly for low-income customers. They are much more aware of value and price than customers with higher revenues. The problem lower income to the reduction of healthy foods and a lower Value Added Tax (VAT) rate on healthy foods. Customers with low revenues differ in price strategy preferences. Low-income groups have a much shorter life expectancy than high-income groups, which can be explained in part by lifestyle factors such as food habits. Low-income groups are also more likely to be overweight or obese (Novakovic et al., 2013). In particular, low-income customers could face financial barriers to healthy eating due to limited resources available (Drewnowski, 2004).

Increased fruit and vegetable consumptions, greater dietary fibers and lower fat intakes are consistently reported in women. Women normally place greater attention on healthy eating in conjunction with these healthier food choices. In addition, females are more motivated by weight control and are more likely to consume or limit eating behavior. In terms of eating behavior, there are certain distinctions between masculinity and femininity. Certain personality qualities are related with femininity and masculinity. Males, being manly, will consume anything to satisfy their hunger (Monge-Rojas, et al., 2015). They would rather eat very quickly, and in great quantities. Similarly, they are unconcerned about gaining weight. Consume high-energy foods such as junk food and fried foods. Males have a greater normal body weight and metabolic rate; usually necessitates greater energy consumption than ladies (Caine-Bish & Scheule, 2009).

This research is conducted to study how demographic factors affect customer food choices. The study addressed the three customers' food choice attributes, namely income, age and gender factor in selection of food choices. This study focused deeply in gaining the exact data and accurate measurements, focusing on Bandar Baru Bangi (BBB) as the selected destination

for the study. BBB was chosen due to its known as "Bandar Berilmu", or knowledgeable city since 2008, as several universities are located in BBB, including the National University of Malaysia. Respondents are reachable and sufficiently capable of collecting data.

This study contributes to the body of literature on gastronomy by providing new insights into factors affecting food choices among customers. In particular, focusing on the improvement of various foodservice management and industry at BBB and contributing to the university as references by identifying whether the food choices will affect demographic factor. Being familiar with customers' needs is very important to always keep up to date. Thus, the findings of the study would assist people foodservice operators in improving their target market. They are also encouraged to take proactive steps to strive for their business to become more successful. Hopefully, they can reduce any amount of dissatisfaction among customers in the near future with the assistance of the findings of this study.

The paper is organised as follows. The following section provides a literature review of demographic factors affecting customers' food choices. Then, the research method is described, whereas the findings section presents the results through descriptive statistics, and the final section includes the conclusions of the study.

Literature Review

Demographic Factors (Income, Age, Gender) in Affecting Food Choices

Income is money received in return for work, the production of a thing or service, or the investment of capital by an individual or a corporation. Wages and salaries are the most common sources of income for most people. For most persons, disparities in income are based on their employment (Veerasha, 2019). Besides that, Veerasha (2019) also stated that businesses make money by selling goods or services at a higher price than they paid. Income determines how an individual will receive subsistence. Since a person with higher income may have no problem with their life, they most likely have the privilege to choose what they want from all the various options offered. In comparison to those who have a lesser salary, those with greater earnings feel more proud, more confident, and less nervous. With the income that they gain, they can comfortably live their life. Many things in life need money, and it is really essential (Ganeshan, 2010), but not all individuals are able and have difficulties in gaining much income. Compared to people with high income, lower-income people are much more nervous. The social and economic repercussions of this withdrawal are disproportionately felt by men, women, and children from low-income areas (Wilcox, 2015). These problems include difficulty getting inexpensive flood insurance, overexposure to certain risks, and a greater effect from material losses due to severe storms than individuals with higher incomes (Resources, 2014). People with low incomes are more vulnerable to the effects of heat waves than those with higher incomes. Low-income individuals have fewer options for products and services, may have poorer self-esteem, engage in fewer social activities, and are more likely to suffer from stress and anxiety than those with greater earnings (Marmot, 2010). To wind up, high-income people will have better emotional well-being than low-income people. Low income exacerbates the emotional agony of calamities such as divorce, illness, and loneliness. We find that a higher income buys life satisfaction but not happiness and that a lower income is linked to both a negative life appraisal and a negative emotional well-being (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). In all said, money indeed can and cannot buy happiness. In addition, income has a considerably greater influence on life expectancy in males than in women. Other variables significantly impact women's life expectancy (Walczak et al., 2021). How does the money we are looking into affect a person's life expectancy? Richer individuals

are less stressed, eat better food, have healthier lives, sleep more, get a better education, and access better health care (Chen et. al., 2012). The difference between these two groups can be very different, but nothing impossible in life, for example, even people from lower income may be able to stay healthy; they may just need to do extra work to achieve those things. Do people with different incomes eat different things? Do people from a different group of income get different nutrition? People tend to choose what they eat based on what they are willing to pay or can afford. Individuals with higher income have no problem choosing what they want to eat because they can afford it. For example, since most healthy food is quite expensive, people with higher income are capable of buying them. Low-income families are finding it difficult to purchase it. When food expenses are factored in, low-income families are frequently forced to live in poverty (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). People in low-paying occupations, particularly those who are only working on a part-time basis, are underemployed or are on a government pension due to retirement, sickness, or caring responsibilities, face a variety of financial pressures, the most serious of which is food insecurity (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). Low-income people are more likely to have an imbalanced diet, with low consumption of fruits and vegetables in particular. However, having more money does not always imply a higher-quality diet, but the variety of items available to pick from should expand (Bellisle, 2006). Individuals with lower income do not have a choice but to choose affordable food without thinking about nutrition and a balanced diet. They will likely choose quantity over quality. It is better if they pay more for the quantity of the food instead of paying more for quality. Overall, a customer concerned about nutrition does not need to consider their income, as many low-cost items are innutritious (Chen et al., 2012).

Age

Adolescents and older people, on the other hand, share a desire to associate with more highly valued age groups, distorting or shifting their perceptions of ageing. Even in the face of age-group separation, older individuals may extend their desired life expectancy to an older age out of self-preservation (Chopik & Ryan, 2018). Humans develop the ability to think concretely from 6 to 12 years old. In addition, adolescence is defined as the period between 12 and 18. This age group's children and teenagers engage in more sophisticated reasoning. Formal logical operations are another name for this style of reasoning. That includes thinking about possibilities, forming new ideas or questions, comparing or debating ideas or opinions, and being aware of thought processes (Adler & Turley, 2020). If older individuals have made a similar decision previously, they may not have to think too hard. This is because, based on their prior experience, they will already know what to do. Moreover, while we all have different amounts of experience, older individuals will, on average, have more decision-making experience than younger adults. Many of the judgments we must make may be made more easily. For example, rather than searching for the greatest choice on every criterion, it might save a lot of time and effort to come up with an option that fulfils the minimal needs. So, it is apparent that getting older is not all bad when making excellent judgments. Because making sound judgments necessitates both experience and emotional intelligence, which may grow with age (Bruin, 2009). That's close to how is age influence for decision-making. Once you are at the age where you are able to think smart or wise, you are allowed to make a decision. Of course, when you are underage, you need to ask the adults for their agreement. It turns out the grown-up knows better because they have much more experience than the youngsters.

Obviously, age may affect the choice of food. Our hunger is not set in stone; it evolves as we grow older. Let's start from the earliest age as a baby; of course, babies do not know how to choose what they want to eat, they cannot even speak, and all they can do is cry and mumble words. Meals can cause parents of young children to struggle at mealtimes. However, repeated tasting and learning in a happy atmosphere can help children learn about new but necessary foods like vegetables (Johnstone, 2018). Puberty is marked by a change in appetite and height brought on by hormones throughout adolescence. How adolescent views eating during this formative stage will influence their lifestyle choices in the future (Johnstone, 2018). Growing up, we had a different favourite food. We also might love something we found disgusting before. When you grow older, you will like less sugary food or drinks and starts to like something like coffee. Of course, this does not apply to all human beings, and we still have our own preferences.

The older we get, the more we need to be careful at choosing food because body fat is often difficult to lose. When we consume less energy than we need, the body sends strong desire signals to eat, but the impulses to avoid overeating are less, which can lead to a cycle of overconsumption. Many physiological and psychological variables make sustaining a healthy eating pattern easier over time (Johnstone, 2018). We must remember that food is not just sustenance but also a social and cultural event to savour. We are all food experts since we consume it daily (Johnstone, 2018). All human beings need a meal at least thrice a day every day since food is like fuel for humans, but different stages of age have their own food choices.

Gender

Gender refers to men's and women's socially established roles and behaviors. Distinct cultures have different gender norms or expectations for men's and women's behavior. Some societies, for example, require women to stay home and handle domestic duties while males are expected to work. Gender roles are particular tasks that men and women are expected to fulfil within society or even within the family, and these standards are also known as gender roles (Nations, 2019). Gender is a significant factor in looking at how societal norms and power structures affect the lives and possibilities of men and women from various backgrounds. Each gender has different preferences for many things. Like how they dress, what to do during their free time, their everyday routine or how they study. Many civilisations have imposed the idea that a person is either a male or a woman based on their physical traits for millennia (Torgrimson & Minson, 2005). Guys and girls may have a different perspective about things. A researcher said, "Men are not from Mars and women are not from Venus, but their brains really are wired differently". On average, women have superior verbal memory and social cognition, whereas males have higher physical and spatial skills. According to brain imaging studies, women have a larger amount of gray matter, the brain's computational tissue, while males have a bigger percentage of white matter, the brain's connecting connections.

In terms of eating habits, there are certain distinctions between masculinity and femininity. Certain personality characteristics are linked to femininity and masculinity. Masculine guys will consume everything to satisfy their appetites. They tend to consume large quantities of food in a short period of time. Similarly, they are unconcerned about gaining weight and consume high-energy items such as junk food and a variety of fatty foods. Males need more energy than females since they have greater typical body weight and metabolic rate. So a study said that if men eat less and more slowly, they are considered to be less masculine (Monge-Rojas, 2015). Compared to males, women with strong femininity will eat less and eat more slowly. They eat for longer periods of time than men because they take more bites. It is

regarded as masculine or unfeminine for a lady who eats a lot and does not care what she eats. Diet diversity influences females' food consumption more than men (Sook Wah, 2016). Women were more likely than males to avoid high-fat meals, eat fruit and fibre, and limit salt consumption. They were also more likely to be on a diet and place a higher value on good nutrition. In contrast, men usually involves in simple healthy eating behaviors. Because of their reproductive nature, young women are more prone than young males to suffer from dietary inadequacies (Johnstone, 2018). Most say that women are more likely to pay extra attention to their eating. Women, in fact, are more involved in food-related issues, have a greater understanding of food and nutrition, are more likely to go on a diet, and see themselves as having to lose weight. It is also stated that women consume more fruits and vegetables, eat more dietary fibre, and eat less fat and salt than males, implying that healthy eating is more important to women (Arganini et al., 2012).

Findings

Demographic Profiles

The descriptive statistics on the responding customers are presented in Table 1. This study focuses on the demographic factors (namely age, income and gender) towards customers' food choices in Bandar Baru Bangi (BBB), Selangor. BBB was chosen due to its known as "Bandar Berilmu", or knowledgeable city since 2008 as several universities are located in BBB, including the National University of Malaysia. According to Boddy (2016), the purpose of sample size is circumstantial and partially dependent upon the scientific paradigm under investigation is taking place. Rules of thumb for determining the sample size suggest that example measures bigger than 30 and less than 500 are proper for most research (Roscoe, 1975). This research has 120 respondents as a sample size, utilising convenience sampling. The data from this study were analysed using the SPSS programme version 20.0, which comprised descriptive statistics and correlation analysis.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics

	n. 120	%
Gender		
Male	59	49.2%
Female	61	50.8%
Age		
Adolescent (below 17)	15	12.5%
Young Adults (18-25) Adults (26-40)	59	49.2%
Middle-Aged Adults (41-50)	25	20.8%
Older Adults (over 50)	12	10.0%
	9	7.5%
Marital Status		
Single	85	70.8%
Married	29	24.2%
Single Parent	6	5%

Race		
Malay	90	75.0%
Chinese	16	13.3%
Indian	14	11.7%
Education		
Secondary School	18	15%
Diploma	23	19.2%
Degree	61	50.8%
Master	18	15.0%
Employment Status		
Government Sector	12	10.0%
Private Sector	31	25.8%
Self-employed	13	10.8%
Homemaker	9	7.5%
Student	55	45.8%
Monthly Salary		
Below RM1,000	57	47.5%
RM1100-RM1500	16	13.3%
RM1600-RM2500	27	22.5%
Above RM2600	20	16.7%

In this study, the majority of the respondents are from the age group of young adults 18 to 25 years old, with 59 respondents (49.2%), followed by the age group of an adult 26 to 40 years old, with 25 respondents representing 20.8% of the study, adolescent below 17 years old with 15 respondents, represented (12.5%) and the age groups of middle-aged adults consist 41 to 50 years old, with 12 respondent (10%) and lastly older adult over 50 with nine respondents represented 7.5%. Figure 1 depicts the age range of respondents in this study.

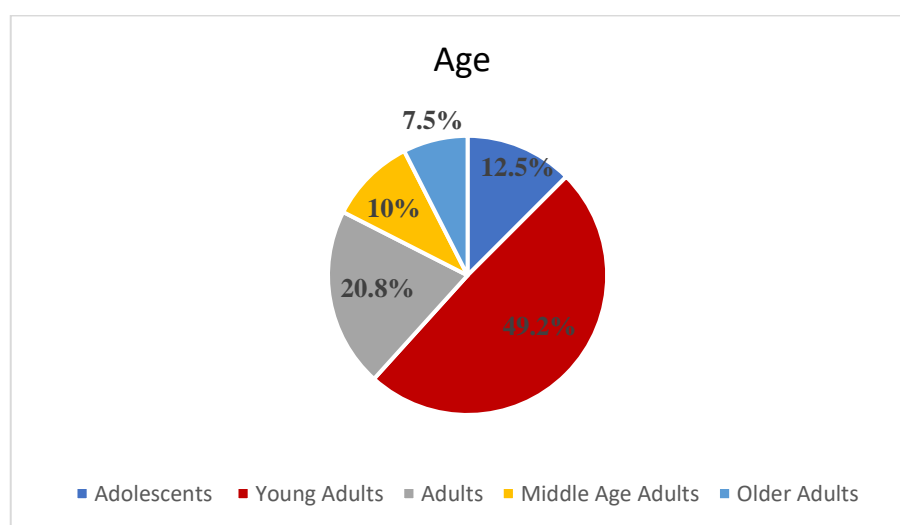


Figure 1: Ages Range of Respondents

Figure 2 presents the monthly salary of the respondents. It is interesting to discover that most respondents are students from the lowest income category (below RM1000), with 57

respondents, 47.5%, followed by the one who gained RM1600-RM2500, with 27 respondents, 22.5%. Next, from the group who gain above RM2600 monthly, with 16.7% (20 respondents). Lastly, from the group who gain RM1100-RM1500 in a month, with 16 respondents and 13.3%.

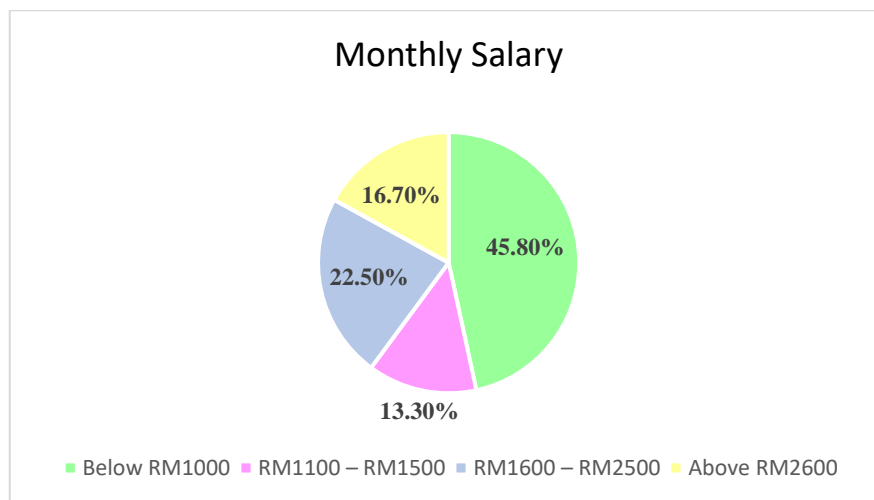


Figure 2: Monthly Salary of the Respondents

Figure 2 below shows the respondent's gender distribution. Among 120 subjects, there 59 were male, and 61 were female. The male respondents represented 49.2% of the responses, and the female respondents represented 50.8%. The percentage shows that the female respondents are much higher than the male respondents.

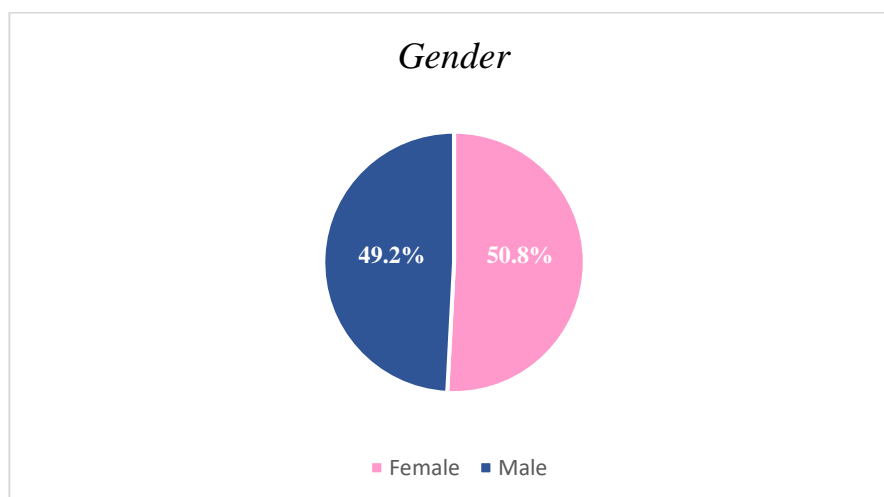


Figure 3: Gender

In this study, based on the result, Income factor scored ($r= 0.928$, $p < 0.05$), indicating a very strong relationship between income and food choice. Income factors have the highest correlation with food choice with ($r=0.928$, $p < 0.05$). Age scored ($r= 0.884$, $p < 0.05$) indicates a very strong relationship between age factor and the selection of food choice. Gender scored ($r=0.864$, $p < 0.05$), indicating a very strong relationship between gender factors and food choice. The research objectives of the study are fully achieved.

Table 2

Pearson Correlation Matrix for Study Variables

Dimensions	Test of Significant	Academic Performance	Correlation Coefficient Indicator
Income	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.928 0.000 120	Very strong
Age	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.884 0.000 120	Very strong
Gender	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.864 0.000 120	Very strong

The result of this study can create awareness among all the business owner who has business in the food industry. First, as for the income factor, the business owner can improvise their business by diversifying the food portion for high-quality food so that even an individual from a lower income can purchase and eat healthy, high-quality food. Therefore, restaurant owner needs to be wise in choosing and making the restaurant's menu to attract more customers from different group level of people. Second, restaurant business owners must be more alert about the menu offered in the restaurant. It is much more convenient to have choices of meals for different stages of age. Since parents agree to let their children choose their own food, it is much better to include menus for kids too. Other than that, it is also a good idea to include a meal for older people, since they need to be careful in choosing their food. The ideal restaurant menu offers a balanced mix of food to choose from. Last of all, the findings of this study helped restaurant owners make better decisions and suggestions for creating a range of meals that are acceptable for both men and women due to different gender having different food preferences. Future research can be replicated from this study focusing on different areas in Malaysia or abroad and populations to see whether the same patterns exist.

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