PAPER NAME

Full Article_Template MHJ 2024 - Turnitin.edited.doc

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WORD COUNT

4297 Words

CHARACTER COUNT

25286 Characters

PAGE COUNT

8 Pages

FILE SIZE

373.0KB

SUBMISSION DATE

Aug 22, 2024 2:04 PM GMT+8

REPORT DATE

Aug 22, 2024 2:05 PM GMT+8

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LOCAL CULINARY HERITAGE AND TOURISM MARKETING STRATEGY TO PROMOTE MALAYSIA AS TOURIST DESTINATION

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Abstract **-** Local culinary heritage is frequently seen as the foundation of destination/place marketing strategies to forge strong local economies and foster a sense of destination/place. This research examines the culinary heritage themes of multi-ethnic countries, with a particular emphasis on Malaysia, to promote the country and stimulate economic development and the local tourism industry. Malaysian culinary is commonly characterized as a fusion of local cuisines with a significant integration of Chinese, Indian, and Indonesian cuisine. Nevertheless, the cuisine of Malaysian ethnics encompasses genuine elements that set them apart from others, including various types of particular local food (such as rice and meat specialities) and how food is consumed and presented. This investigation employed a thorough examination of academic literature that was triangulated with secondary data. The findings suggested that Malaysia's culinary heritage and identity are frequently promoted by emphasizing local flavours. Perhaps, future research could delve deeper into marketing strategies within multi-ethnic, place/destination and culinary heritage tourism industries. To gain a deeper understanding of the role and importance of place culinary heritage in tourism, it is necessary to conduct qualitative research among the ethnic communities as well as taking into account tourists' expectations and experiences of local culinary heritage.

Keywords – Local cuisine; Multi-ethnic; Tourism industry; Marketing strategy

INTRODUCTION

As a component of cultural heritage, local culinary specialities have enormous tourism potential. Hospitality establishments that serve food are among its main advocates. Moreover, local culinary experiences are crucial in the growth of tourism and culinary heritage is an essential element to enhance the understanding of a destination/place's unique identity. Culinary heritage is the examination of the connection between culture and cuisine, as well as food arts. According to Hjalager (2002), the number of gourmets increased rapidly, culinary knowledge became a trend, and it spread from the home kitchen to numerous television cooking programs. Many professional chefs and food enthusiasts have been live-streaming their culinary skills and knowledge on social media platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube.

Conversely, there has been a surge in the interest in culinary heritage, tourism, and the social sciences regarding food in recent years. The development of gastronomic tourism is one of the topics that are discussed in culinary heritage (Pipan & Gačnik, 2021). The scope of culinary heritage encompasses not only the food and beverages of a specific location or group of people but also the physiological requirements and a more in-depth examination of the regional culinary identity. Additionally, it serves as an asset for the region in developing the tourism industry. Many tourism destinations have begun to market and provide their own locally produced products and brands including food after realizing the potential for tourism development presented by the relevance of local cuisine and its heritage value.

Within rural France, Bessière (1998) noted that culinary heritage is a social construct and a significant asset of local identity. This was done by actively promoting local agricultural products and offering locally produced food to the unique requirements of customers including tourists. The term "culinary" is frequently employed to characterize the unique cuisine/food speciality of a particular place/destination. Many scholars believe that culinary heritage functions as a territorial asset that generates significant social, ecological, and economic advantages, as well as a mechanism to attract tourists. The importance of local culinary heritage as a potential catalyst for tourism growth has been recognized by a multitude of hospitality establishments and tourist destinations. Consequently, it is not surprising that the culinary legacy has been the focus of numerous investigations in recent years.

Malaysia, the country's unique culinary heritage has been acknowledged for a considerable amount of time as a significant asset in the tourism landscape of the country. The broad range of culinary experiences has been created by the three primary ethnic groups: Malay, Chinese, and Indian influences, which have captured the attention of tourists from both within Malaysia and outside countries (Jalis, 2016). The Malaysian government has implemented a comprehensive strategy to strategically promote and integrate local culinary heritage into the country's destination branding efforts, recognizing the immense potential of this culinary heritage to drive tourism and nurture economic development.

Even though the tourism industry struggled in the early 2020s as a result of COVID-19, it has been steadily expanding up until the present day. The efforts of the Malaysian government to elevate the culinary history of the country as a vital component of its tourist strategy may be seen through a variety of initiatives, such as the yearly festival known as "Citrarasa" which takes place at both the national and state levels. According to Jalis et al. (2014), the purpose of these programs is to highlight the variety and singularity of Malaysian food, to establish Malaysia as a "gastronomy paradise" and to improve the overall hospitality experience for tourists. The goal of Malaysia is to not only promote a greater awareness of its rich local multi-ethnic cultural history (Azhar et al., 2022), which includes its culinary heritage (Ishak et al., 2023) but also to attract more tourists by carefully blending local culinary traditions into the domestic tourism experience.

Nevertheless, it is still debatable whether the region's multiethnic culinary legacy should be incorporated into the travel and tourism sector to promote it. There is limited research that focuses on the different themes that the Malaysian government and other tourist stakeholders use to market the nation. Furthermore, tourism destinations/places are increasingly using food and cuisine images in their marketing. Tourism marketers and governments have paid close attention to the presentation of local culinary information in marketing materials such as travel guides, brochures, and posters. This study examines the themes that the tourism industry uses and plans to promote Malaysia's diverse culinary heritage as a component of travel experiences. This study establishes a foundation for the development of culinary heritage marketing strategies that capitalize on the multi-ethnicity of Malaysia, thereby enhancing the local culinary heritage. Additionally, this study is equipped with a well-organized analytical framework and several selected secondary data sources that facilitate the formulation of informed decisions regarding the marketing strategy by tourism-related stakeholders, including the Malaysian government, who are utilizing the local culinary heritage to promote tourism development. In addition, this research makes a significant contribution by supporting sustainable development practices in a country with a multiethnic population, such as Malaysia.

METHODS

The study's triangulation of data from a diverse array of sources includes a thorough evaluation of relevant academic literature and an analysis of secondary data derived from government and industry marketing material publications. The purpose of this research is to investigate the strategies and themes that tourism stakeholders have employed to promote Malaysia's multi-ethnic culinary heritage as a crucial element of tourism experiences. Marketing materials consist of promotional tourism pamphlets, travel guides, and advertisements that were

published by the relevant Malaysian government from 2020 to June 2024. This underscores the themes that were present in the marketing of Malaysia's local multi-ethnic culinary heritage as a component of the country's tourism experiences. Establishing a solid foundation for understanding the current research on the role of local culinary heritage in tourism development, as well as the branding and marketing of local culinary heritage, necessitates the evaluation of academic literature. Malaysia has implemented strategic initiatives and policies to leverage the potential of its culinary heritage for the growth of its tourism industry. This is demonstrated through the examination of data from both the government and the industry.

According to Kassarjian and Kassarjian (1988), the most common way to look at how marketing products show parts of culture or place is through content analysis. This analysis lets the researcher look into the theoretical and conceptual problems to better understand the data (Krippendorff, 2004). With content analysis, words that mean the same thing can be boiled down into fewer content-related themes or groups. Porchot (2003), Okumus et al. (2007), Horng and Tsai (2010), Lin et al. (2011), and Okumus et al. (2013) are just a few of the tourist studies that have used it to try to figure out how local food is used in destination marketing.

To examine the marketing of Malaysia's local multi-ethnic culinary heritage, a textual content analysis was done on the dataset to uncover distinct themes. The stages of the textual content analysis are as below:

1. Determine the scope of the analysis, which includes determining whether it will concentrate on individual words, and the meanings of words, phrases, or paragraphs in their entirety.
2. Take into account the total amount of concepts that need to be coded. Make an interactive or preset collection of categories or themes to be used in your project.
3. Determine whether you will be coding for the appearance of a concept or the frequency with which it occurs.
4. Come up with some rules for the encoding of the documents.
5. Figure out how to deal with information that is not necessary.
6. Encrypt both the text and the images.
7. Analyze the data, drawing conclusions and extrapolating generalizations where appropriate after doing so.

Table 1 presents the cumulative count of brochures, travel guides, and posters about tourism and culinary heritage gathered which were published by relevant tourism stakeholders including the Malaysian government and tourism representative from 2020 to June 2024.

Table 1. Marketing materials from 2020 to June 2024 by key Malaysian government and tourism stakeholders on tourism and culinary heritage.

Year	Brochures	Travel Guides	Poster
2024 (until June)	12	13	19

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culinary heritage consists of several sociocultural elements that have shaped its evolution and uniqueness. Thus, it covers a broad spectrum of agricultural and food products, a range of meals, local ingredients, food preparation techniques, equipment and appliances for food preparation, and ways of consumption, all of which are accessible on the tourist market (Bessière, 1998; Jalis, 2016; Khatimah et al., 2023). In this sense, culinary heritage acts as a sign of regional identity and emphasizes the complexity of this research field, which is now drawing increasing interest.

Although there have been numerous articles that have explored the concept of tourism products and experiences, there are few definitions of the local culinary heritage. The following definition of a local culinary heritage will be employed in this paper as a reconfigured concept, as expressed by Giovanelli (2019): The origins of food-related activities within a specific society or cultural group. The definition emphasizes any locally produced culinary heritage that

is being promoted in any tourism marketing efforts by relevant stakeholders, as this study focuses on the tourism industry.

Culinary Heritage, Marketing Strategy and Tourism Stakeholders Collaborations

The success of marketing a destination/place through its local culinary heritage is contingent upon the involvement of a variety of stakeholders, such as local food producers, restaurants, and accommodations. These excursions can be customized to focus on specific product categories, such as local cuisine, or they can encompass a diverse selection of local dishes and items. Participants in this form of tourism can collaborate to develop comprehensive tours or itineraries that incorporate recommended stops that provide travelers with the opportunity to learn about the stories behind the featured delicacies and meals. It raises concerns regarding collaboration in the context of such experience opportunities. For instance, in order for the food routes to be cohesive experiences for tourists, it is necessary for participants to possess a certain level of shared knowledge. This may prove to be a challenging endeavor.

Destination marketing and development have become significantly influenced by partnerships between local administrations and food and meal providers. Food and meal services have become increasingly significant in destination marketing as a result of their pervasive appeal. In addition to appealing to tourists who have a strong interest in cuisine, these offers have the potential to convey broader experiential benefits associated with the region, such as cultural perceptions and insights, even if they are not the primary cause for the trip. Additionally, culinary tourism integrates numerous advantageous attributes that are in accordance with sustainable tourism, which is becoming an increasingly significant component of destination development. There are three primary benefits of food tourism: the environmental benefit of minimizing food miles in local food tourism, the cultural benefit of rediscovering and developing crops, animals, food items, and meals, and the primarily local economic impact. These cultural enhancements not only enhance the local population's sense of cultural identity, but also assist travelers in better understanding the visited location.

Culinary offerings and meals are inextricably linked to locations of varying proportions. These gourmet attributes are indispensable for the purpose of branding these destinations in order to draw in visitors. For instance, on a global scale, collaborative endeavors have been undertaken to enhance and disseminate the concept of culinary specialties that are specific to a particular location or destination. This culinary technique is founded on the utilization of seasonal ingredients from the terroir of the location/destination, which offers a unique perspective on the cultural heritage of the ingredients and innovative uses of traditional dishes.

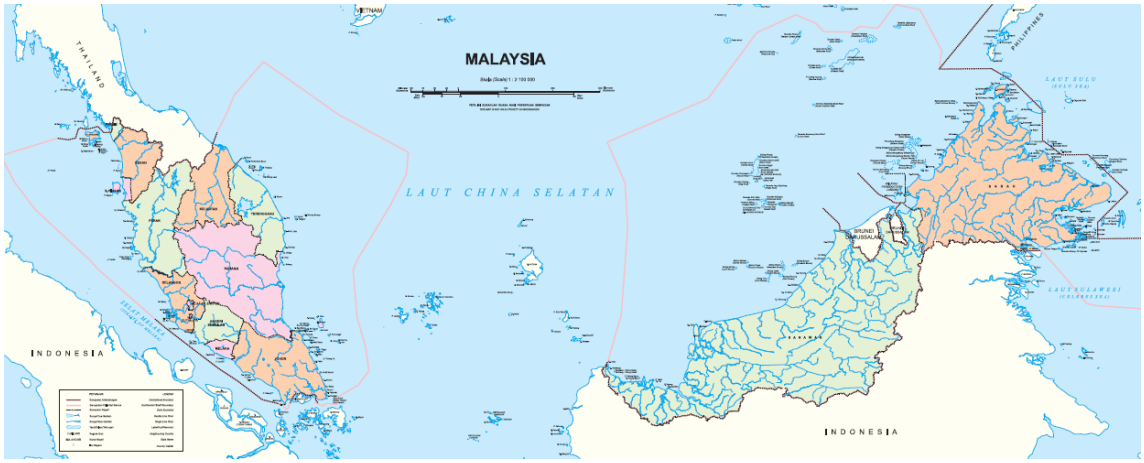
Nevertheless, the challenge of establishing a reputable food destination in the international market is daunting, regardless of its scale, as a result of the intense competition from renowned culinary destinations such as Italy, France, and Spain.It is crucial to cultivate collaboration and coordination between the corporate and public sectors in order to establish oneself as a renowned culinary destination. This collaboration is essential not only within each industry but also within the culinary and tourism sectors.

Multi-Ethnic Malaysia and Local Culinary Heritage as Tourism Experience

Malaysia is divided into Peninsular Malaysia (sometimes called West Malaysia or Malaya) and East Malaysia (on the island of Borneo) by the South China Sea. East Malaysia consists of the Federal Territory of Labuan, the two states of Sarawak and Sabah, and both. The four main regions of Peninsular Malaysia are the East Coast (Pahang, Terengganu, and Kelantan), Central (Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, and Putrajaya), Southern (Johor, Melaka, and Negeri Sembilan), and Northern (Perak, Kedah, Penang, and Perlis). Peninsular Malaysia is situated between Thailand and Singapore. Peninsular Malaysia is made up of two territories and eleven states. Figure 1 gives an illustration of this.

Apart from a range of minority ethnicities including indigenous tribal groups like Sarawak's Dayak and Iban peoples, Baba Nyonya or Chinese Peranakan, Chetty or Indian Peranakan, and Portuguese, Malaysia has three main ethnic groups: Malay, Chinese, and Indian. This adds to the complexity of territories and political structure inside the country. Although

Islam is the official religion and Malay is the national language, every ethnic group is free to preserve their own culture and cuisine, practice another religion, and speak their tongue.



Source: Department of Survey and Mapping Malaysia (JUPEM), 2018
Figure 1. Map of Malaysia

According to Ismail et al. (2014), Malaysia's unique culinary legacy has been acknowledged for a long time as a significant asset in the tourism landscape of the country. The diverse and harmonious community of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and European cultural influences has resulted in a rich blend of flavours and culinary experiences that have profoundly captivated and fascinated both local and foreign visitors. This has been the case when it comes to culinary experiences. Visitors from all over the world come to Malaysia to immerse themselves in the different flavours and culinary traditions that are prevalent throughout the country (Jalis et al, 2009). This one-of-a-kind gastronomic mosaic, which reflects the multicultural background of the country, has become a defining aspect of Malaysia's tourism offering.

The government of Malaysia has implemented a comprehensive strategy to strategically promote and integrate local cuisine into the country's destination branding efforts (Abdullah & Isa, 2020). This strategy was implemented in recognition of the enormous potential that this culinary legacy has to drive tourism and foster economic development. The government of Malaysia has the goal of establishing Malaysia as a "gastronomy paradise" and improving the overall experience of tourists by highlighting the variety and singularity of the country's distinctive culinary traditions (Roslan, 2021). A greater appreciation for Malaysia's rich cultural legacy is one of the goals of the strategic assimilation of local culinary traditions into the tourism scene (Hussin, 2018). This is done with the intention of not only attracting more tourists but also expanding the tourism market. Table 1 reports the number of tourists that arrive and the amount of money that is earned from tourism.

Despite the diversity of Malaysia's culinary heritage, the government's efforts to position this as a powerful asset in the country's tourism landscape have faced challenges. While the rich variety of flavours and culinary experiences may captivate domestic and international visitors, a lack of strategic promotion and integration into the country's destination branding has limited its full potential to drive tourism and economic development (Lo et al., 2018). Acknowledging the immense potential of Malaysia's rich culinary heritage to drive tourism and foster economic development, the Malaysian government has implemented a comprehensive strategy to strategically promote and integrate local cuisine into the country's destination branding efforts (Ishak et al., 2023; Jalis et al., 2014).

Scholars have highlighted the significant role of Malaysian cuisine in shaping tourist perceptions and influencing their decision to visit the country (Ishak et al., 2021). By strategically incorporating local culinary heritage into the tourism landscape, Malaysia seeks to

not only attract more visitors but also foster a deeper appreciation for its rich cultural heritage (Solleh, 2018).

The assimilation of the country's rich culinary heritage into the tourism industry may be impeded by the current challenges in promotional strategies and collaborative initiatives between the Malaysian government and various stakeholders (Ishak et al., 2021). Despite the government's efforts to strategically promote and exhibit the diversity of Malaysian cuisine through annual programs such as the "Citrarasa," there is still much that can be done to fully leverage the potential of this cultural asset to drive economic development and tourism (Solleh, 2018). Additionally, the preservation of Malaysian heritage food and its promotion as a world-renowned cuisine will be facilitated by the development of economic growth and the examination of local cuisine, thereby providing a significant compelling reason for tourists to choose Malaysia as a destination (Putri & Baskoro, 2021).

Preserving Malaysia's culinary heritage and elevating it to the status of a globally recognized culinary experience will need the creation of economic growth and a deeper understanding of the concept of its cuisine. This can be accomplished by implementing programs that strengthen and assist regional food producers, improve culinary education and training, and encourage more robust public-private sector partnerships to create cutting-edge, immersive culinary tourist experiences (Stone et al., 2021). Through the implementation of targeted marketing initiatives and the reinforcement of connections between the tourism sector and regional food systems, Malaysia has the potential to establish itself as a veritable "gastronomy paradise" that draws in tourists eager to immerse themselves in the nation's rich cultural legacy via its varied and delectable cuisine

Furthermore, the advancement of economic expansion and the appreciation of regional cuisine would contribute to the preservation of Malaysian heritage foods and their promotion as globally recognized cuisines, therefore providing a compelling cause for tourists to select Malaysia as their holiday destination. This can be accomplished by promoting partnerships between the public and commercial sectors, empowering and supporting local food producers, improving culinary education and training, and marketing Malaysian culinary heritage as a component of tourism experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A textual content analysis was performed on gathered marketing materials published by relevant tourist stakeholders, including the Malaysian government. The results of this analysis are displayed in Table 2, which highlights the multi-ethnic culinary heritage themes that emerged from the analysis.

Table 2. Key themes identified to promote Malaysia's multi-ethic culinary heritage specialities

Themes	Number of Words	Per cent (%)
• Flavours	76	24.8
• Local Ingredients	63	20.6
• Specific Meal/Dish	58	19
• Eating Ettiques	42	13.7
• Place/Location	38	12.4
• Year of Restaurant Business	17	5.6
• Person/Family-Owned Business	12	3.9
TOTAL	**306**	**100%**

The findings of this research indicate that the Malaysian government and tourism stakeholders frequently employed phrases that encapsulated the local multi-ethnic culinary heritage flavours (76 words or 24.8%) to market the country. The use of words that signify

flavours, such as "spicy," "sweet," "creamy," and "hot," underscored the fact that spices, coconut milk, and sugar (as seasoning) are among the ingredients that are frequently employed by the majority ethnic groups in Malaysia's culinary heritage. Additionally, the incorporation of terms that represent the novelty of local cuisine is intended to communicate the types of local culinary heritage experiences that tourists will encounter when consuming Malaysian cuisine. For instance, "...spicy Malay dishes include masak lemak cili api and sambals...". The second theme that is commonly used to explain the multi-ethnic culinary legacy of the area is local ingredients, with 63 terms, or 20.6%, according to the study of secondary data from publications by government and tourism-related organizations. These outcomes supported the conclusions of Jalis et al. (2014) and Cetin and Alrawadieh (2019), who found that flavour through sensory appeal and local ingredients are the two most important factors in characterizing the quality of local food and cuisine in a particular place.

Relevant tourism stakeholders including the Malaysian government believed that highlighting specific local meal names could connect tourists to better understand the Malaysian multi-ethnic culinary heritage. “Nasi lemak”, “rendang”, “roti canai”, and “char kuey teow” are among 58 words (or 19%) found in the collected marketing materials. As described by Boyne and Hall (2004), the concept of recognising a specific meal/dish is rooted in the profound connection between local food and cuisine and the place (Boyne & Hall, 2004).

The Malaysian government, together with other tourism stakeholders, strategically employed both eating etiquette (42 words or 13.7%) and place/location (38 words or 12.4%) to highlight the country's unique tourism experience by highlighting its diverse local culinary heritage. This was in addition to the taste profiles and locally sourced ingredients. The promotional materials often incorporate expressions such as "using chopsticks and spoon" (which are predominantly linked to Chinese gastronomic customs) and "using right hand" (which are synonymous with Malay, Indian, and indigenous gastronomic customs). An example of this is that "Indians generally use their right hand for eating," while "Chinese people generally use chopsticks and a spoon." Furthermore, it is fascinating to see that certain local multi-ethnic culinary traditions are being promoted by linking them to a particular place or region. Illustrative examples are the renowned “…masak lemak itik salai in Negeri Sembilan…”, “…the exquisite nasi kerabu of Negeri Kelantan...”, and “…Penang char kuey teow…”. Jalis (2024) elucidates that all these elements, namely the co-branding effort associated with a particular food brand or place/location, serve to educate visitors about the culinary heritage of the destination/place and provide an explanation of its unique tourism experiences.

Analysis of textual content has also shown that key stakeholders in relevant tourism stakeholders and the Malaysian government often use themes to convey information regarding the year of establishment for restaurant businesses (17 words or 5.6%) and the particular person/family-owned businesses (12 words or 3.9%). It seems that these two themes serve to educate tourists about the authentic recipes and the culinary heritage of the family, which is transmitted from one generation to the next. The most frequent words emphasize in the marketing materials (i.e., the dataset): i) the years of establishment, such as "since the 1970s" and "original family recipe from 1957", and ii) specific restaurant name/brand such as “nasi kandar Pelita, Pulau Pinang” and “satay kajang Haji Samuri” to communicate to tourists that the restaurant or food establishment offers authentic Malaysian cuisine that has been intergenerationally transmitted within the owners' families. The practice of associating specific culinary traditions with individual or family names enables tourists to conveniently decide to buy and taste local culinary heritage while exploring different regions of the country. The results of this study support the claims made by Skallerud (2019) and Jalis (2024) that a branding approach that includes precise information such as the creator and the year of founding could be an effective method to promote and educate people about the local culinary history.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In conclusion, the Malaysian government and its primary tourism stakeholders have meticulously devised a well-considered marketing plan to promote the country as a tourist destination by using its diverse local culinary traditions. This study has determined that flavours, specific meals/dishes and local ingredients play a vital role in not only boosting the tourism sector but also in enlightening tourists about the distinctive features of Malaysia's multi-ethnic culinary heritage. This validates that these stakeholders possess a comprehensive understanding of the concept and distinctiveness of local culinary heritage, as well as the appropriate methods for conveying it in the marketing materials. Moreover, it serves as proof of the preservation of Malaysia's abundant cultural heritage and the exhibition of its distinctive culinary offers to the global community through the acknowledgement, protection, and promotion of local culinary heritage and delicacies. These government-led marketing strategies, which are especially advantageous to the flourishing tourism sector, enhance the economic growth of the country by fostering cooperation with many stakeholders, such as the tourism industry, local communities, and culinary specialists. By empowering local communities, preserving traditional knowledge, and fostering a deeper appreciation for the diversity and authenticity of Malaysian cuisine, the government's commitment to enhancing Malaysia's culinary heritage reinforces the country's status as a unique gastronomic destination.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank Tourism Malaysia (i.e., the DMO) and the Tourism Ministry for their material contributions, as well as the Universiti Teknologi MARA Terengganu Branch for their involvement, collaboration, and support for this research.

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