MEDIATING ROLE OF TOURIST SATISFACTION ON IMAGE AND TOURIST LOYALTY OF LOCAL FOOD IN PENANG ISLAND, MALAYSIA

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by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFT	Attitude Formation Theory
EWOM	Electronic Word of Mouth
F&B	Food and Beverage
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMTI	Global Muslim Travel Index
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
PIA	Penang International Airport
PLS	Partial Least Squares
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling
PTGA	Penang Tourist Guides Association
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Science
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
TRA	Theory of Reasoned Action
USM	Universiti Sains Malaysia
WFTA	World Food Travel Association
WOM	Word of Mouth
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council

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PERANAN PENGANTARAAN KEPUASAN PELANCONG TERHADAP IMEJ DAN KESETIAAN PELANCONG KE ATAS MAKANAN TEMPATAN DI PULAU PINANG, MALAYSIA

ABSTRAK

Imej destinasi dan masakan tempatan boleh dianggap sebagai aspek penting dari perspektif pelancongan yang memainkan peranan penting dalam dalam kepuasan pelancong dan niat kesetiaan. Sebalik peningkatan kajian dan cadangan akademik terhadap peranan makanan dalam pelancongan, masih terdapat jurang kontekstual dan kekurangan hujah teoritikal dalam penyelidikan pelancongan Malaysia mengenai konsep imej makanan tempatan, kepuasan pelancong, dan kesetiaan. Dalam konteks pelancongan di Pulau Pinang, terdapat kekurangan kajian dalam mengenal pasti dan mempelajari komponen imej makanan dalam pemasaran pelancongan, sumbangan nilai budaya, peranan warisan, dan agama (kesedaran halal). Kajian ini cuba menyiasat konstruk multidimensi imej makanan, mengambil kira kesedaran halal, dan menilai kesan terhadap pelancongan industry di Pulau Pinang sebagai destinasi pelancongan gastronomi terhadap niat untuk membeli semula, niat untuk mengesyorkan (mulut ke mulut/WOM), dan mulut ke mulut secara eletronik (eWOM). Sebagai tambahan, kesan pengantara kepuasan pelancong terhadap hubungan ini telah dikaji. Kajian ini direka bentuk sebagai kaedah kuantitatif, pengumpulan data dijalankan melalui soal selidik diuruskan sendiri. Kajian keratan rentas dan teknik persampelan rawak telah digunakan. Secara keseluruhan, 332 soal selidik telah dikembalikan daripada responden, dan hanya 329 soal selidik yang lengkap dan dapat digunakan untuk analisis data. Perisian SmartPLS versi 3.2 digunakan untuk menganalisis data, dan Pemodelan Persamaan Struktur Separa Kuasa Dua (PLS-SEM) telah digunakan.

Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa kedua-dua pelancong antarabangsa dan domestik sama ada pelancong Islam atau bukan Islam yang telah melawat Pulau Pinang menilai secara positif masakan tempatan dan menganggap Pulau Pinang sebagai destinasi gastronomi. Hasil kajian menunjukkan ketiga-tiga komponen imej makanan tempatan mempunyai kesan langsung dan signifikan terhadap kepuasan pelancong. Kepuasan pelancong dengan pengambilan makanan tempatan secara langsung dan positif mempengaruhi niat pelancong untuk membeli semula, mengesyorkan dan berkongsi maklum balas positif. Walau bagaimanapun, hanya imej afektif makanan mempunyai kesan langsung dan positif ke atas niat untuk membeli semula dan WOM, dan imej halal secara langsung dan positif mempengaruhi eWOM. Kepuasan makanan pelancong tentang masakan tempatan di Pulau Pinang memberikan kesan pengantaraan yang ketara antara imej makanan dan kesetiaan pelancong. Kajian ini mendedahkan bagaimana pasaran gastronomi pelancongan boleh menjadi lebih menarik bagi destinasi pelbagai budaya seperti Pulau Pinang. Akhirnya, memahami komponen imej makanan, bukan sahaja kognitif dan afektif tetapi juga kesedaran halal makanan, boleh menjadi kawasan penyelidikan yang berharga untuk pelancongan gastronomi di Pulau Pinang.

MEDIATING ROLE OF TOURIST SATISFACTION ON IMAGE AND TOURIST LOYALTY OF LOCAL FOOD IN PENANG ISLAND, MALAYSIA

ABSTRACT

Destination food image and local cuisines can be considered significant aspects from the perspective of tourism that play a substantial role in tourist satisfaction and loyalty intentions. Despite ever-increasing research and academic recommendation toward the role of local food in tourism, there are still a contextual gap and a lack of theoretical argument in Malaysian tourism research on the concept of local food images, halal awareness, tourist satisfaction, and loyalty. In Penang Island tourism, there is a lack of research in identifying and learning components of local food image in tourism marketing, the contribution of cultural value, the role of heritage, and religion (halal awareness). This study attempts to investigate the multidimensional construct of local food images, considering the halal awareness and beliefs, and assessed their impact in Penang Island tourism industry as a gastronomy tourism destination on intention to repurchase, intentions to recommend (Word of Mouth), and Electronic Word of Mouth. In addition, the mediating effect of tourist satisfaction on this relationship has been examined. This study was designed as a quantitative method, data collection was conducted by self-administrative questionnaire. It was a cross-sectional study and the random sampling technique was employed. In total, 332 questionnaires were returned from respondents, and only 329 completed questionnaires were found usable for data analysis. The SmartPLS software version 3.2 was used to analyse the data, and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was applied. The findings demonstrate that both international and domestic neither Muslim nor non-Muslim tourists who have visited Penang Island positively evaluated the local cuisines and perceived Penang as a gastronomic

destination. The results show that all three components of local food images have a direct and significant effect on tourist satisfaction. Tourist satisfaction with consuming local foods directly and positively influence tourist intentions to repurchase, recommend, and share positive feedback. However, only affective images of food have direct and positive effect on the intention to repurchase and WOM, and halal awareness directly and positively influence eWOM. The food satisfaction of tourists among local cuisine in Penang Island exerts a significant mediation effect between food images and tourist loyalty. This study revealed how the gastronomic market in tourism could become more attractive in fundamentally multi-cultural destinations such as Penang Island. Eventually, understanding the components of local food image, not only cognitive and affective but also halal awareness of local food, could be a valuable research area for gastronomy tourism in Penang Island.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

This chapter intends to cover the research topic, the overview of the background of the study, and the problem statement. Next, the research objectives, research questions, and significance of the study are addressed in detail. The organization of this research is explained at the end of this chapter.

1.2   Background of Study

Tourism has been recognized as one of the significant economic achievements in developing countries plays as a vital source of commercial activities, employment, GDP income, and international exchanges. In addition, tourism is a multifaceted industry that encompasses various aspects of the economy and culture of a country or region. In accordance with WTTC, 2018 report, the direct contribution of travel and tourism to Malaysia GDP was 4.8% of GDP in 2017, which is expected to grow by 5.1% by 2028. During the past decade, Malaysia tourism industry observation shows the surging growth due to increases in number of international and domestic visitors in which increase the demands for accommodations, foods, and transportation facilities.

One of the most prominent features of tourism is its ability to showcase local traditions, including food. Food is categorized as the primary source of tourist attraction that helps tourist to learn and experience the differences between their own culture and the destination they were visiting (Hussin, 2018). Having local foods at a tourist destination generally achieves more than enjoying the new meals or satisfying the hunger, but it is a way of deeply experiencing the culture of the destination in

incomparably. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the role of local cuisine in tourism, and how it can contribute to enhancing the tourist experience.

The multiculturalism in Malaysia produced a specific Malaysian cuisine that is accepted and consumable by all races and religions (Ling et al., 2010). According to the UNWTO (2017) reports, gastronomy tourism as a strategic priority asset of the tourism destination is one of the considerable factors that influences sustainable international tourism. It has also become an important motivational factor to visit a destination and offers a wide range of potential in the regional and national economy to enhance sustainability. The relation between food components and tourism have been highlighted in various researches (Alderighi et al., 2016; Ali et al., 2019; Antara et al., 2018; Babolian Hendijani, 2016; Boesen et al., 2017; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Dao, 2019; Ji et al., 2016; Sims, 2009; Tong et al., 2016). The three main products in Tourism Direct Gross Domestic Products (TDGDP) were accommodation, retail trade, food and beverage services with the combines share of 73.5% in 2021 (TourismMalaysia, 2021).

In the pioneer studies that were conducted on the food context, the food image defines as a complex concept and unique character where consumers' beliefs and feelings respond from its mind (Seo et al., 2017). Typically, food mage has its inherent characteristics, product attribute, and consumer benefits. Within food and tourism studies, the cognitive image of local food focuses on service experiences refers to the tourist beliefs, while affective image focuses on the emotional reaction and responses of customers (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015; Isa, Chin, et al., 2018; Mun Y Lai et al., 2019; Ryu et al., 2012; San Martín et al., 2019; Toudert & Bringas-Rábago, 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). In sum, cognitive image of local food such as food quality, physical

environment, cooking method, promotion of health, and hygiene is an important construct in explaining tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit the destination and recommend to purchase/repurchase (Mun Y Lai et al., 2019). While affective image or emotions such as like/dislike, pleasant/unpleasant, enjoyable/unenjoyable feeling are necessary to evaluate the satisfaction. These two dimensions, cognitive and affective image of food, are discussed as traditional and symbolic dimensions of food image in many tourism studies.

There is no doubt that local food has vital role in Malaysia tourism industry and the local food markets in Malaysia are able to attract a large number of tourists, both domestic and international tourists who seek for an extraordinary experience (Ling et al., 2010). Different varieties of cuisine due to the culture and traditions in Malaysia could enhance the positive images of foods to the tourists' mind. Malaysian cuisine is known for its diverse flavours, spices, and ingredients, influenced by the country's multi-ethnic population and cultural history. Local food is not only a means of sustenance but also a way of life in Malaysia, where food is an integral part of the culture and social fabric (Zhang et al., 2019). Tourists are drawn to Malaysia's local food for its unique tastes and flavours, which they cannot find anywhere else. Malaysian cuisine offers a vast array of dishes, from spicy curries and stir-fries to sweet desserts and snacks. Tourists can explore local markets, food stalls, and restaurants to experience the different tastes and flavours of Malaysian food. Malaysia is a melting pot of cultures, and its cuisine reflects this diversity (Som et al., 2020). From Malay, Chinese, and Indian to Nyonya, Sabahan, and Sarawakian cuisine, Malaysia's culinary landscape offers a plethora of flavours and textures that can tantalize any food lover's taste buds. Moreover, Malaysian cuisine contains various type of foods, which is affected by religions and beliefs. For instance, some Indian and

Chinese cuisine not allowed cooking and consuming any beef items. Besides, Muslim in Malaysia as a majority of the population follow Islamic and halal laws and rules. Therefore, the halal attributes and awareness represent the characteristics that influences the purchase decision. According to Haque et al. (2019), halal awareness as an Islamic dimension may shape the consumption pattern in such Muslim countries like Malaysia. Nowadays, halal food markets have become one of the preferred means of addressing improving local economic prosperity and tourism industry development.

Indeed, due to the fast growth of Muslim population and number of Muslim tourists, the demand of halal food is escalating every day. However, halal food sometimes has not been considerably successful in meeting the growing tourism demands, especially in multi-culture countries such as, Malaysia and Turkey with the numbers of non-Muslim travellers (Ab Talib, 2017; Battour et al., 2018). According to GMTI (2020), the estimation for the Muslim travel to Malaysia market in 2020 is expected to grow to USS220 billion (RM 893.2billion). Malaysia Tourism Industry and the government also projected to jump this growth to US$300 billion by 2026. The Malaysian local food market can contribute to pleasurable activities, which can hold a great influence on tourism attraction. Besides, the local cuisine and specific food such as halal food is one of the key elements during the travel, that motivate the target tourist like Muslim tourists to keep coming to Malaysia and purchase the same favourite products and services (Battour et al., 2012).

The existing knowledge about the importance of local food and cuisine to determine tourist satisfaction mostly focus on tourist behaviour and destination image. Some researchers suggest that corporation between food and tourism can create value-add to the tourism industry and its services by expressing a particular culture or

specific local food (Peštek & Činjarević, 2014). It is therefore, the tourism industry encounters the potential by food tourism and gastronomy in meeting the tourist satisfaction (Mohamad et al., 2015). As such, it is noticeable how to manage the quality of the tourist experiences and expectations to persuade favourable satisfaction in the tourist's mind and memory. On the other hand, Wijaithammarit and Taechamaneestit (2012) demonstrated that customers behaviour and experience may change cognitive and affective factors such as environment and quality. It means customer satisfaction development could be examined by the cognitive and affective image from customers' perception and post-purchase experiences (Zhang et al., 2022). Findings of Seo et al. (2017) show that satisfaction contains cognitive and affective components as a traditional dimensions that are considered as the key driver of loyalty intentions.

Rodríguez Del Bosque et al. (2009) described the tourist satisfaction as an individual's cognitive and emotional state that come from tourists' experiences. Tourist satisfaction toward consuming the food is defined as a behavioural phenomenon that is formed by cognitive factors and affective feeling of tourist activities as well as various destination features and food elements (Allameh, Khazaei Pool, et al., 2015). However in tourism, some services like images of local foods are intangible which cannot be experienced before purchasing and it is extremely important to evaluate them (Matos et al., 2012).

The concept of tourist loyalty toward local foods is a critical aspect in tourism. Tourists who develop a taste for local foods tend to return to a destination, spreading the word and encouraging others to experience the local culinary culture (Zhang et al., 2019). Tourist loyalty in tourism literature frequently defines as revisit intention and recommend to others (Wan & Chan, 2013). Under this perspective, the majority of

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previous studies consider tourist loyalty as a bi-dimensional variable, which is behavioural and attitudinal components. Tourist loyalty towards local food can be emphasized in several ways, including: (i) Promoting local food: Tourists are often interested in trying local cuisine, so promoting local food through marketing campaigns, social media, and signage can attract them to local restaurants and food vendors, (ii) Offering unique dining experiences: Offering unique dining experiences that showcase local cuisine can create a memorable experience for tourists and encourage them to return in the future, (iii) Providing education about local food: Providing information about the history, culture, and ingredients of local food can help tourists appreciate and understand the value of local cuisine, (iv) Partnering with local producers: Partnering with local producers can ensure the availability of fresh and authentic local ingredients, which can help enhance the quality and taste of local food, and (v) Encouraging sustainable practices: Encouraging sustainable practices, such as using local, seasonal ingredients and reducing food waste, can attract tourists who value environmentally friendly practices. Thus, by emphasizing tourist loyalty towards local food, destinations can not only attract more tourists but also support the local food industry and promote the unique cultural identity of the region.

Loyalty intentions also could be crucial to indicate in tourism due to its role that plays in obtaining profitability (Yoo & Bai, 2013). The attitudinal loyalty represents a supportive emotion toward consuming products and services, while behavioural loyalty means intention to repurchase. Based on the mentioned definition, in tourism context tourist loyalty is an extension of the consumer loyalty which is interpreted as intention to revisit or recommend the products and services (Jiang et al., 2018; Yasami et al., 2021).

Therefore, tourist intention is considered as an important variable for predicting behaviour such as loyalty, and it is divided into cognitive (belief, perception) and affective (like or dislike) components. Compared with the definition of food image, mediating role of tourist satisfaction has been measured based on cognitive and affective dimensions which is positively influences the tourist loyalty. Besides, previous studies proved that there is a higher chance to remain loyal with particular products such as halal food when consumers have positive perception towards that.

In marketing literature, word of mouth (WOM) and repurchase intention are considered as two construct under customer loyalty. Yendra (2019) offered the WOM as an important promotion tool to spread the service and product quality that could affect positively on satisfaction and purchase intention. This means WOM is a measure for customer loyalty. In Malaysia, halal image of foods in tourism indicates the relationship with the willingness of the tourists in recommending halal food. It means halal food attributes such as halal certificate and logo have a significant impact on tourist loyalty in Malaysia (Ling et al., 2010; Rahman et al., 2018; Wardi et al., 2018). The below section will focus on the tourism industry in Malaysia briefly.

1.2.1 Penang Tourism and Local Food

By referring to the Malaysia tourism statistics report, Penang is one of the most attractive state for all tourists who come to Malaysia, and it is the third destination of domestic tourism after Selangor and Kuala Lumpur (DOMS, 2022) . Tourism is the second largest contributor to the Penang economy and plays a significant role in the expansion and promotion of the Malaysian tourism industry (OECD, 2018). These days, tourism plays a massive role in the Penang economy. The economic performance of Penang has been strong for the past decade and projected to be positive

with 6% of Malaysia's GDP by 2018 (Zui, 2018). The Penang statistic report revealed the 3,596,553 international and 4,187,049 domestic passenger movements from Penang International Airport by the end of 2018.The data shows a total of 7.6% (Y-O-Y) growth with the same period in 2017 (Quarterly Penang Statistics, 2018). The statistics reports still have not been covered the road trip and interstate travels.

Overall, Penang Island's gastronomy tourism industry has become a significant contributor to the island's economy, and has helped to raise the profile of Malaysia's rich culinary heritage. Whether you're a food lover or simply looking to experience the unique flavours of a new destination, Penang Island is definitely worth a visit. Penang Island, also known as the "Pearl of the Orient," is located on the northwest coast of Peninsular Malaysia. It is a popular tourist destination, particularly known for its rich culture and diverse culinary scene. Penang Island is often considered one of the top food destinations in the world, and has become a hub for gastronomy tourism.

Gastronomy tourism is a form of tourism that focuses on the exploration of local food culture. It involves experiencing the unique and authentic tastes of a destination, and learning about the history and cultural significance behind the dishes. In Penang Island, gastronomy tourism is an important aspect of the tourism industry, and is a major draw for visitors from around the world. Among other states, Malaysia tourism industry categorized Penang into the cultural and food tourism that offers international and domestic tourists' delectable taste to gain authentic experience (Atikahambar et al., 2018).

Penang Island's culinary scene reflects its multicultural population, which includes Chinese, Malay, Indian, and European communities. The island is particularly famous for its street food, which can be found in the many hawker centres and food

markets scattered throughout the island. Some of the most popular dishes include Char Kway Teow (stir-fried flat rice noodles), laksa (a spicy noodle soup), and Nasi Kandar (a meal of steamed rice served with a variety of curries and side dishes). In addition to street food, Penang Island is also home to a number of high-end restaurants, many of which serve a fusion of traditional and modern cuisine. These restaurants often use locally-sourced ingredients, and some even offer cooking classes or food tours to help visitors learn more about the local culinary culture.

During the past decade, the Penang government tends to generate some food festival idea in Georgetown area, which is located in heart of Penang Island. Georgetown is the north-eastern seaport of Penang Island, which is listed in UNESCO Heritage Cultural Site in 2008 (UNESCO, 2017). Every year, Georgetown celebrates its Heritage Day with the attractive demonstration of mix cultures and street foods. The Georgetown food festival typically divided into parts of a hawker, non-halal, and halal section, which can attract all types of tourists from all around the world.

Besides, tourism in Penang Island is successful in attracting different communities such as Thai, Indonesian, Arab, and middle-eastern people. All of these groups of tourists with different religions, culture, and cuisine made this island unique destination with harmonic colourful foods. The Malaysia Tourism Industry aims to promote Penang as a tourist-friendly destination with straightening the cultural heritage, cuisine, and attractive beaches. Penang state contributed RM6.2 billion value-added only in domestic travel receipts to Malaysia Tourism Industry by end of the year 2018 (Penang Statistics, 2019). Accordingly, the Penang government also launched the new program for the year 2020, which is called The Experience Penang

Year (EPY) 2020, with the tagline The Diversity to Asia that leads to the excitement, adventure, and new experience of visiting Malaysia.

In accordance to collected data on Penang Statistic Survey which is published by University Sains Malaysia (USM) every three month, by the end of December 2018 almost 65.0 percent of hotels and accommodation in Penang was occupied within this time period (USM, 2018). On the other hand, by referring to Penang Tourist Survey 2018, experiencing the local food was the first top five activities in Penang by 48.5 percent. Also, the market views at the same period indicated the 39.5 percent of Penang destination image is related to the local cuisine. The survey indicated that the highest level of tourist satisfaction was related to Penang cuisine with 50.1 percent, which means most tourists like Penang foods (PenangInstitute, 2019). Therefore, the strategic link between tourism and food sectors are considerably developing in Penang during the past few years. Penang Island as a famous destination for culinary heritage and culture diversity is expected to provide a gastronomic adventure where all types of foods to be served including unique, authentic, heritage, and even street food (Raji et al., 2018).

According to the Penang State Tourism Development, Arts, Culture and Heritage (PETACH), food is the main attraction for visitors to Penang, with 76% of tourists saying they visit the island specifically for its food. In 2019, Penang Island was ranked as the second best food destination in the world by CNN Travel, beating out cities like Tokyo and Bangkok (Li, 2019). A study conducted by TourismMalaysia (2019), in Malaysia found that gastronomy tourism contributes significantly to The Penang Hawkers' Fare, a food festival featuring local street food, has been held annually since 2010 and has attracted over 200,000 visitors each year. The Penang

International Food Festival, which was first held in 2017, has also become a major event on the island's gastronomy tourism calendar. The festival features food stalls, cooking demonstrations, and cultural performances, and attracts thousands of visitors from around the world.

Halal tourism in Penang Island has been gaining popularity in recent years, as the island is known for its diverse food scene and cultural attractions. Halal local food not only caters to Muslim tourists but also attracts non-Muslim travellers who are interested in trying the unique culinary offerings in Penang Island. Therefore, promoting and highlighting the availability of halal local food can be a valuable marketing tool for the tourism industry on Penang Island. halal local food plays a significant role in attracting Muslim travellers to Penang Island and can also be a draw for non-Muslim tourists. By providing a diverse range of halal food options, the island can continue to attract visitors from around the world and promote its unique cultural and culinary offerings. The observed tourism trends in Penang Island indicate the growth and increased demand for halal food-related tourism (Isa, Nie, et al., 2018). The programs such as Penang Heritage Day, Street Food Festival, and Halal Food Exhibitions intend to improve local food productions to introduce Malaysia and Penang as one of the main tourist spots in Southeast Asia locally and internationally. Further research on local food image in tourism, halal awareness in tourism, and tourist loyalty together can support these programs in Penang Island, and whole Malaysia to make it local foods more attractive and profitable while strengthening the position of Penang Island as a leader in the area of gastronomy tourism industry.

1.3   Problem Statement

Local food and cuisine are considered significant components in tourism and promoting tourist attractions. Due to the competitive tourism markets, one of the factors to remain successful in the gastronomy tourism sector is to retain current tourists as a loyal food traveller in the same region. On the other hand, the first purchase and impression of the dining experience could indicate tourists' future commitment to return and recommend (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2020). Ample pieces of evidence show that gastronomy tourism has recently been identified as a considerable potential segment in tourism destinations around the world (Boesen et al., 2017; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Mun Y Lai et al., 2019; Lee & Scott, 2015; Yasami et al., 2021). Some aspects like local food in tourism are receiving scholarly attention (Boesen et al., 2017; Ellis et al., 2018; Tong et al., 2016), while there are limited studies that have covered the food image components in detail and from different perspectives. It is widely recognized that local food and cuisine constitute tourism offerings that need to be presented by destination managers because they are vital aspects of tourism satisfaction and loyalty for destination differentiation. The essence of appealing tourism services such as food and beverage and destinations lie in tourism experiences, and play a critical role in creating a tourism experience. Tourists are attracted to destinations that offer unique and memorable experiences Tourist satisfaction and loyalty are regarded as significant factors influencing the sustainability and competitiveness of destinations such as Penang Island (Zhang et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2019).

Malaysia, specifically Penang Island, is a famous destination that offers various types of foods and local cuisine (Atikahambar et al., 2018). Penang Island is a well-known destination for its rich food culture and heritage, attracting a large number

of tourists every year. However, little is known about how gastronomy tourism experiences from local food influence tourist satisfaction and loyalty. There are some empirical studies on food and tourism research in Malaysia to indicate the power of gastronomy and local cuisine on tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Hussin, 2018; Karim et al., 2011; Ling et al., 2010; Maghsoodi Tilaki et al., 2016; Tong et al., 2016). Although the research and academic recommendations towards the role of food in this region are increasing, there is a lack of research in identifying and learning food images in tourism marketing, the contribution of cultural value, the role of heritage, and religion (halal awareness). Most of the existing research has focused on the role of food in creating tourist experiences in general, rather than specifically examining the impact of local food components on tourist satisfaction. However, not mentioned is the concept of local food image, together with halal awareness, on tourist satisfaction and loyalty in food tourism, which may pose several challenges. Therefore, this study will gap by interpreting the data and drawing meaningful conclusion by having a deep understanding of the local food cognitive and affective image, together with halal awareness in Penang Island gastronomy tourism industry, and tourism behaviour towards consuming local food.

In recognition of understanding the role of image components in tourism, the previous discussions on tourism studies mainly have covered destination development, destination image, and destination food image in different tourism destinations (Choe & Kim, 2018; Rodríguez Del Bosque et al., 2009; Seo et al., 2017; Wang & Li, 2019; Yasami et al., 2021). The relationship between destination food image and tourist satisfaction has been confirmed in past studies in another part of the world (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010; Alderighi et al., 2016; Ali et al., 2019; Antara et al., 2018; Dao, 2019; Mun Y Lai et al., 2019; Promsivapallop & Kannaovakun, 2019). For instance, Zhang

et al. (2019) findings only described the relationship between authenticities like food quality and physical environment as a cognitive food image with satisfaction in China, but not the affective factors. Seo and Yun (2015) arguments in Korea as a food tourism destination explained that measuring only the cognitive image could not describe consumers' emotions and feeling sufficiently as an intangible component prior and post-purchasing that may influence consumer satisfaction. Meanwhile, some existing literature covered both cognitive and affective food images in tourism destination (Chi & Qu, 2009; Mun Y Lai et al., 2019; Li et al., 2019; San Martín et al., 2019; Seo et al., 2017; Toudert & Bringas-Rábago, 2019). Among the factors that are included the quality and uniqueness of local food, accessibility, pricing, authenticity, and overall destination experience. Thus, this study contributes to explore the relationship between some of these mentioned factors and tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Since the subjectivity is considerable and measuring tourist satisfaction and loyalty intentions on local food depends on the destination can be subjective, as it depends on individual preferences and experiences, this study will provide interesting findings for Penang Island tourism.

Tourist satisfaction is considered the main antecedent of tourist loyalty (Muskat et al., 2019). Thus, managing tourist loyalty is crucial and one of the most difficult challenges for a tourism destination. Several different approaches exist concerning the role of involvement on the satisfaction-loyalty relationship but there is a lack of integration between approaches. According to the previous findings, satisfied tourist will return to revisit the destination, repurchase the food and service, and engage in positive WOM (Chen and Chen, 2010; Prayag et al., 2017). The direct effect of tourist satisfaction on tourist loyalty has been discussed in previous studies and based on an assumption of tourist loyalty behaviour to a particular destination (Ali et

al., 2019; Eid, 2015; Elsayeh, 2020; Prayag et al., 2013; Tanford & Jung, 2017; Zhang et al., 2014). There are numbers of studies explained the tourist loyalty and behavioural intention predictors towards destination (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Huang et al., 2015; Rodríguez Del Bosque et al., 2009; Tsai, 2016). Other studies have addressed direct effect of tourist food satisfaction and its relationship with loyalty such as intention to repurchase and recommend but not mentioned on the role of eWOM (Tanford & Jung, 2017; Ali et al., 2019; Van Nguyen & Viet, 2019; Zhang et al., 2019; Yasami et al., 2021). The latest study has been done by Kim and Hwang (2021) suggest that food satisfaction is a good indicator of tourists' eWOM. This study will provide the evidence that the changes in local food satisfaction level may exert a stronger impact on eWOM.

Some of the existing studies noted that favourable foods in visited destination lead to a higher level of influence on tourist loyalty and their intentions to return (Ali et al., 2019; Dao, 2019; Seo et al., 2017). The topic of tourist loyalty such as intention to return (revisit and repurchase), and intention to recommend (WOM and eWOM) in food tourism studies has received considerable academic attention (Chi & Qu, 2008; Han & Hyun, 2017; Li et al., 2010; Toudert & Bringas-Rábago, 2019; Yasami et al., 2021). However, despite the importance of the destination food image on tourist loyalty, limited research has done on relationship between local food images components in details and tourist loyalty.

In Malaysia, some researchers investigated the relationship between food image components and tourists loyalty towards the culinary experience (Chi et al., 2013; Karim et al., 2011). The latest research on local Malaysian cuisine includes the state of Terengganu (Mohd Abd Majid et al., 2020), Melaka (Tong et al., 2016), Kuala

Lumpur (M. S. Rahman et al., 2018), and Penang (Atikahambar et al., 2018b). There is no doubt that Penang is one of the well-known states in Malaysia due to the local food and associated with a perceived tourism destination image in terms of local cuisine (Atikahambar et al., 2018b; Mohamad et al., 2015) but, tourist loyalty intentions towards local food, particularly in Penang Island still remain scarce. This is an important and considerable research gap to identify as loyalty is a key factor for destination marketers in building long-term relationships with customers.

Previous studies are widely discussed and accepted that the image can be formed by the interpretations of tourist belief and emotions as a consequence of interrelated components, cognitive and affective (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Chi & Qu, 2008; Mun Y Lai et al., 2019; Li et al., 2010; San Martín et al., 2019). The cognitive-affective model has been most frequently discussed in previous studies in the field of the destination image (Huang et al., 2015; Mun Yee Lai et al., 2019; Stylidis et al., 2017; Sulaiman et al., 2023). One of the contributors to the favourable attitudes of tourists is local foods that are formed by evaluating food attributes (Seo et al., 2017). According to Seo et al., (2017), there is a positive relationship between cognitive and affective image of destination food.

On the other hand, a few studies have merely investigated the particular barriers like religion differences and its influence on tourists' food consumption (Rahman et al., 2019; Rashid et al., 2020) while other kinds of barriers such as cultural and psychological differences may have the reason for this lack of information in this study area. From the theoretical point of view, the recent tourism studies only tested the theoretical model to explore the role of halal awareness of food in tourism studies (Isa, Nie, et al., 2018). There is a research gap regarding the interplay between

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cognitive image, affective image, and halal awareness in the context of Penang Island's gastronomy tourism. Investigation into the relationship between cognitive image and halal awareness is insufficient. There may be a research gap in exploring how tourists' cognitive image perceptions of local food influence their awareness and preferences for halal food options (Isa et al., 2015; Sulaiman et al., 2023). Understanding this relationship is important, especially for Muslim tourists who seek halal-certified or halal-friendly food choices (Islam & Chandrasekaran, 2013; Jia & Chaozhi, 2020). On the other hand, limited investigation on the relationship between halal awareness and affective image of local food could involve exploring the emotional feeling such as, enjoyment, or fulfilment derived from accessing halal food options. However, the direction of the relationship between cognitive and affective images of local food with the halal components still remains arguable and inconclusive, especially in tourism studies in Malaysia and in Penang Island context.

Contemporary research on food images in tourism has investigated the mediating effect of overall satisfaction by exploring the relationship between cognitive and affective images of destination food and loyalty (Mak et al., 2012; Ji et al., 2016; Lai, Khoo-Lattimore, et al., 2019). To respect unfamiliar foods in which image or characteristics enhance local food business performance may require a broader perspective that emphasizes the satisfaction of fit between tourist loyalty and intention to purchase or recommend. Some researchers discussed the role of affective image and emotional feeling of satisfied tourists, while the rest argued the cognitive food image such as quality and environment premises are more impressive (Ali et al., 2019; San Martín et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). More importantly, previous studies paid little attention to clarify either cognitive or affective food image with halal component is more influential on tourist satisfaction and WOM communications in this area. While

some studies have explored the relationship between local food and tourism experiences, there is a need for more empirical evidence to support the role of local and halal food in creating tourist loyalty with indirect effect of tourist satisfaction.

Regarding the tourist perceptions of local food images, there have been a limited review to illustrate the role of halal awareness and beliefs of local foods and its effect on tourist loyalty intentions with mediating role of tourist satisfaction (Awan et al., 2015; Haque et al., 2015; Khalek & Ismail, 2015; Ratnasari et al., 2020; Wardi et al., 2018). Although in these studies, it was confirmed that tourist satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between cognitive images (food quality, hygiene, and dining environment), affective images (emotions), and halal awareness (beliefs) with loyalty intentions (repurchase/revisit and recommend), there is not enough empirical evidence in the extant literature on local food image components (cognitive, affective) and halal awareness in Penang food tourism. Only a few researchers (Atikahambar et al., 2018; Karim, 2014) discussed the relationship between Penang's food quality and tourist satisfaction in predicting tourist revisit intention. There is still an inadequate focus on halal awareness in food tourism studies. Halal awareness is an important factor, especially for Muslim tourists, but it has not been extensively studied in relation to the proposed mediation model. There is a need for more research that focuses on the role of halal awareness in shaping tourist satisfaction and loyalty intentions. Thus, there may be other variables that influence the relationship between cognitive images, affective images, halal awareness, tourist satisfaction, and loyalty intentions that have not been accounted for in the proposed model which consider potential confounding variables that may impact the results.

1.4   Research Questions

This present research intends to address the following questions to reveal research objectives and to describe problems:

Research Question 1: Do local food image components (cognitive, affective, and halal awareness) influence tourist satisfaction in Penang Island gastronomy tourism?

Research Question 2: Does tourist satisfaction influence tourist loyalty in Penang Island gastronomy tourism?

Research Question 3: Do local food image components influence tourist loyalty in Penang Island gastronomy tourism?

Research Question4: What is the relationship between the cognitive, affective image, and halal awareness of local food in Penang Island gastronomy tourism?

Research Question 5: Does tourist satisfaction mediate the relationship between local food images component and tourist loyalty in Penang Island gastronomy tourism?

1.5   Research Objectives

This study aims to narrow the gaps by investigating the linkage between local food image components, tourist food satisfaction, and development in tourist loyalty intentions among the local food consumption in Penang Island tourism. In particular, this study pursues to identify the indirect effect of tourist satisfaction when tourist beliefs and emotions are engaged and indicates the direct relationship between the images of local food with tourist loyalty.

Thus, the five objectives of this research are stated as follows:

RO 1: To identify the direct effect of the local food image components (cognitive, affective image, and halal awareness) on tourist satisfaction in Penang Island gastronomy tourism.

RO 2: To examine the direct effect of tourist satisfaction on tourist loyalty in Penang Island gastronomy tourism.

RO3: To investigate the direct effect of the local food image components on tourist loyalty in Penang Island gastronomy tourism.

RO 4: To investigate the relationship between cognitive, affective image , and halal awareness of local food in Penang Island gastronomy tourism.

RO5: To examine the indirect effect of tourist satisfaction on the relationship between the local food images components and tourist loyalty in Penang Island gastronomy tourism.

1.6   Significance of the Present Study

The significance of the present study on the role of local food on tourist satisfaction and loyalty can be manifold. The significance of the present study lies in its exploration of the concept of tourist loyalty toward local foods in tourism. The economic and non-economic benefits of food are frequently discussed in tourism literature. Nowadays, the significance of tourism development in competitive global markets and its economic growth has no doubt. Food is one of the most considerable elements of the destination to attract tourists and to employ the greatest level of the tourism industry potential. Since Malaysia decided to be a pioneer of the global halal

hub in the competitive tourism market, it is crucial to illustrate the cognitive, affective, and Islamic components of local and halal foods, products, and its importance.

This research contributes to both theory and practice by providing a better understanding of contributing factors to the cognitive, affective, and halal images of foods in Penang Island besides proposed tourism products and services. In particular, the mediating role of tourist satisfaction, tourists' positive or negative Word of Mouth (WOM) and eWOM towards consuming foods, food-related products in Penang Island, and their indirect effects on tourism development can provide a clear direction to guide food tourism operators. The finding of this study will put out insights into how the local foods operators and halal food producers, manufacturers, and entrepreneurs can be effectively influenced tourism industry with upgrading their products based on the current tourism market expectation. This knowledge also essential to better understanding the level of halal food awareness among Muslim and non-Muslim tourist satisfaction who visit Penang Island. The present study may able to provide practical guidelines on how to educate, train, and support local food operators in the future to achieve sustainable gastronomy tourism. The study aims to investigate the mediating role of tourist satisfaction and use a tourist satisfaction-based approach to empirically show how food operators and their products affect cognitive and emotional local food image outcomes and halal value related to tourism industry development. This research also contributes to explore the role of the Islamic attributes and halal awareness in the process of tourist satisfaction formation.

For example, this study includes recommendations on how policy makers can prioritize support programs for greater tourism industry results by referring to the tourist satisfaction in Malaysia, and particularly in Penang Island. In addition, the

results aim to demonstrate that the halal rules and awareness required to be synchronized with the current tourist demands to ensure its benefits to both Muslims and the non-Muslims group of travellers who travel to Penang Island. Another benefit of this research is, that by demonstrating the unique information about tourists' behaviour and their concern about food during their trip, the researcher will be able to know the variables that affect their satisfaction and level of loyalty intentions. This knowledge helps to predict future sustainable growth in Malaysia tourism development. Thus, this study contributes to demonstrate the local food images and characteristics besides halal awareness that help to develop sustainable local food consumption in tourism in Penang Island, Malaysia.

This research also represents an initial effort in helping food entrepreneurs and operators in the tourism industry to understand what factors influence local hosts' image, tourist satisfaction, and the effects of these factors on tourist loyalty toward consuming local signature foods. This research aims to identify which factors of food image have a greater impact toward the tourist behavioural intention, intention to repurchase and recommend. Eventually, this study will provide a significant contribution to both food operators and researchers. These research findings also could be the exploration of the culinary tourism and halal tourism marketing methods and other possibility for developing food products and services in Penang Island tourism.

Overall, findings from this study will help to enrich existing research on the cognitive, affective image, and halal awareness of local food and its relationship with tourist satisfaction and loyalty in Penang Island tourism.

1.7   Scope of the Study

The present study focused on tourists' local food consumption and was confined to the gastronomy tourism in Penang Island, Malaysia. This study examines the relationship between local food image (cognitive, affective image, and halal awareness), tourist satisfaction. This research also focuses on direct effect of mentioned local food images on tourist loyalty (intention to repurchase, intention to recommend, and eWOM). This research also looks into the indirect effect and mediating role of tourist satisfaction between local food image and tourist loyalty among gastronomy tourism in this area.

This Respondents for this study were both international and domestic tourists, either Muslim or non-Muslim. Penang Island has been chosen as the area of this research due to the wide range of tourists and different variety of local foods. It allows this research to obtain more reliable results to identify the tourist loyalty level toward purchasing and consuming local foods when tourists travel to the Penang Island area. Data was collected through online questionnaires. However, due to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, many obstacles limited the data collection progress and took a long time as expected to receive sufficient responses.

1.8   Definition of Key Terms

The most appropriate definition of keywords that have used in the present study is defined as follows by referring to the previous researches with a similar investigation in the same field and subject.

Food Image: The food image has tangible and intangible unique characteristics to differentiate one item from others (Seo et al., 2017).

Cognitive food Image: The cognitive image of food generally refers to the consumers' belief and their knowledge, such as price, quality, and hygiene about that specific product (Mun Y Lai et al., 2019).

Affective food Image: Affective food image is defined as an individual feeling, such as pleasant/ unpleasant or like/ dislike, which depends on cognitive function appraisal (Peštek & Činjarević, 2014).

Food Quality: Food quality is a cognitive attribute that is concerned with the functional value of food, which contains taste, appearance, freshness, and price (Namkung & Jang, 2007).

Promotion of Health and Hygiene: Food hygiene and safety as a cognitive component implies for both services and products, which significantly influences consumers' behaviour (Mun Y Lai et al., 2019).

Physical Environment (Physical Dining Quality): The physical environment refers to non-human elements in food and restaurant business include ambient conditions, operational efficiency, ergonomics, and cleanness, which have a positive impact on customer satisfaction and behavioural intention (Han & Ryu, 2009).

Halal Awareness: The halal components and other religious determinants that have a substantial impact on intention to purchase are explained as halal awareness (Haque et al., 2019).

Halal Certificate (Logo): The purpose of halal certificate and logo on products' packaging and services provides approval to represent quality standards based on the Islamic rules, especially on dietary standards (Muhamad et al., 2017).