



Faculty of Economics and Business

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**INFORMATION AFFECTING THE VISITORS'  
PURCHASE INTENTION OF ICONIC FOOD IN  
KUCHING SARAWAK, MALAYSIA**

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**Bachelor Degree in Business Administration with Honors  
(Marketing)  
2014  
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY**

The work described in this Final Year Project, entitled  
**“Information Affecting the Visitors’ Purchase Intention of Iconic  
Food in Kuching Sarawak, Malaysia”**

is to the best of the author’s knowledge that of the author except  
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Final Year Project Report

Masters

PhD

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Date: 26 JUNE 2015



## **ABSTRACT**

### **Information Affecting the Visitors' Purchase Intention of Iconic**

### **Food in Kuching Sarawak, Malaysia**

*By*

JENTIN CHAI

This research was conducted to examine the relationship between sources of information and the purchase intention based on two mediators; attitude and subjective norms. The 400 questionnaire distributed by hand and through face to face interacting with respondents had showed that the importance of information sources in promoting Kuching iconic food. The sources of information in this study has included of the social interaction, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and advertisement. These sources of information had affected the visitors' attitude and behavior toward Kuching iconic food. Each source has significantly related toward visitors attitude and subjective norms of Kuching iconic food. However, due to the incomplete and inaccurate tourist's information of Kuching, it has deceases reliability and validity of the information. It is predicted that the information source would become a strong indicator towards visitors' attitude and subjective norms, but the results showed that the relationship between information sources, visitors' attitude, and subjective norms is weak and low. Thus, the purchase intention toward Kuching iconic food was slightly affected as well. Practically, this study showed that the information source should be well established in order to improve the tourist's information system and enhance the visitor purchase intention toward Kuching iconic food.

## **ABSTRAK**

### **Informasi Yang Mempengaruhi Niat Membeli Pelancong Terhadap Makanan Ikonik Di Kuching Sarawak, Malaysia**

*Oleh*

JENTIN CHAI

Ujikaji ini dijalankan adalah untuk mengkaji hubung-kait antara sumber informasi and niat membeli pelancong dengan dua pemedia iaitu sikap dan norm subjektif. Sebanyak 400 borang soal-jawap telah diberi secara bersemuka dengan penjawap and keputusan daripada borang-borang ini telah menunjukkan bahawa interaksi sosial, perbualan elektronik dan iklan memberi kesan yang jelas kepada sikap dan tingkah-laku pelancong terhadap makanan ikonik di Kuching. Setiap sumber informasi mempunyai kesan yang mendalam dan positif terhadap sikap pelancong dan norm subjektif mereka terhadap makanan ikonik in Kuching. Namun, oleh kerana ketidak-tepatan and kesempurnaan sistem information pelancongan di Kuching, menjadi penyebab utama kepada ketulenan dan keyakinan terhadap sumber informasi pelancongan ini. Adalah diramalkan bahawa sistem informasi yang terkini and berasas akan membawa impak positif terhadap sikap and norm subjektif pelancong secara keseluruhan. Namun demikian, adalah ditunjukkan daripada keputusan ujikaji ini bahawa ia adalah tidak tepat. Sumber informasi membawa impak yang kurang jelas dan lemah terhadap sikap dan norm subjektif pelancong. Oleh itu, ia turut menjejaskan niat membeli pelancong secara minima. Adalah ditunjukkan bahawa sumber informasi seharusnya diperbaiki supaya dapat membawa impak yang lebih jelas dan positif kepada niat membeli pelancong terhadap makan ikonik di Kuching.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

First of all, I would like to express sincere thanks to my respectful thesis supervisor, Associate Professor Dr Mahani Mohammad Abdu Shakur as she patiently spent time to guide and encourage me to the right way of completing a successful thesis. By the way, not to forget the supervisees and friends for all the assistance and advices provided throughout the course of the thesis. Their guidance and support is much that I appreciate.

I am very grateful to all respondents to spend time to give their valuable feedbacks. Without their willingness to answer my questionnaire, it will be a problem for me to complete my study smoothly. Besides that I would like to extend my gratefulness to my friends that willing to spend their time to help me distribute the questionnaire among the district of this study.

Last but not least, I would like to thank to my family that always support and encourage me throughout the completion of this thesis.

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter is illustrate the introduction and background of this research project. It is covered the problem statements, research questions and related the objectives of study and the significance of this study. This chapter also covered about the scope of study and the theoretical framework of this study.

### **1.1 Background**

According to Parmentier (1994), icon is use to define something representing sacred elements or objects in particular area. This is a cultural context, exploring on how the specific foods mirror expresses from groups of people, as opposed to the original religious meanings and connotations of the term "icon" (Berg, 2003). It is showed that Iconic foods are different meaning for different individual which based on their nationality, ethnicity, religious affiliation, or ideological beliefs. These indexes and symbols have meaning only in relationship to another object (Berg, 2003). For iconic foods, it is represent the uniqueness of the foods for each destination.

In Malaysia, iconic food is one of significant aspects in tourism industry. Malaysia has a total landmass of 329,847km<sup>2</sup>, which is divided by the South China Sea into two regions, West Malaysia and East Malaysia (Visit Malaysia, 2014). According to the analysis, approximately 26 millions of tourists came and visited our country in 2013. This has clearly showed that the visitor expenditure is important to visitors' related sectors and generating resonance towards other sectors. Thus, tourism stimulates the local economic progress and gaining widespread recognition.

The 10 of Malaysia's top dishes are Nasi Lemak, Roti Canai, Mee Goreng Mamak, Nasi kerabu, Ayam Percik, Popia, Laksa, Asam pedas and Char Koay Teow (Calderon, 2013). This is showed that most dishes in Malaysia are either based on rice or mee. Chinese's dishes main ingredient is pork. Indian dishes mostly is vegetarian and no beef. Malay's dishes have beef, chicken, mutton or fish as the main dishes but no pork. This is because Malay food are all "halal". According to the Malaysia Industrial Development Authority (MIDA), Malaysia is calmed as halal regional production in both meat and non-meat sectors with the recognized nation's halal certification (Canada, 2011). With this giant Muslin Halal food market, the visitors from western could taste the difference of foods and cultures in Malaysia.

In this thesis, Sarawak is chosen as major source of the study about their culture and their relationship with iconic food. Sarawak is the largest state in Malaysia with approximately 125,000 km<sup>2</sup> landmass in East Malaysia (Management Science/Operation Research Society of Malaysia [MSORSM], n.d.). With such a large landmass, the population of Sarawak is around 2 million and divided into different ethnic groups (Go2travelmalaysia, 2012). This rich ethnic diversity offers a unique local food and culture. This diversity of cultures and local food would definitely attract the interest of visitors for going to Sarawak to enjoy the local culture and local delicious cuisine (MSORSM, n.d.). As for those food lovers, Sarawak is a definite place to them to try out its iconic food. They will need to seek for related tourist information before they visit the place and foods. They might consult their friends who had visited the place or search for information from the internet such as online sites, forums and social media.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

As the capital city of Sarawak, Kuching has more iconic foods and products than any other cities in Sarawak. Information of these iconic foods is obtainable from travelling blogs, social media or friends who had visited Kuching which in this case, is less reliable. This source information is mainly based on personal experience and perceptions in which might be in contradiction from one person to another. However, this is the effective way to understand a place culture and their iconic product, such as food. Hence, there are three main source of information will be discuss in this study, which are electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), advertisement and social interaction among others.

Furthermore, social interaction is another way to obtain tourist information. This interaction also known as non-market interaction (Scheinkman, 2008). It means that the relationship is not regulated by the price mechanism. This interaction applies the concept of face-to-face world-of-mouth, play highly interactive among consumer to build trust on information exchange. This information has high intention to change visitor' internal behaviour and perception toward iconic foods. For example, people who come from America would ask their peers that had visited Kuching. Those information gives some basic ideas to the visitors about the destination' iconic foods and its culture. This interaction provides the visitors with basic knowledge about the iconic foods and create intention. This kind of face-to-face communication makes information exchange more reliable, even the information is based on personal perceptions and experiences (Westbrook, 1987). Therefore, the visitors would try any recommended foods by his friends who had visited the place, even the foods might not

be the actual iconic foods of the place. This way, this interaction and information exchange would ideally affect the purchase intention of the visitor who visit Kuching.

In this digital world, everyone can easily search and obtain the needed information online about iconic food. One of them is through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). E-WOM is a practice WOM concept, which is personal informal exchange of information among consumers virtually through internet, is referred to as electronic or eWOM. According to Dellarocas (2003), the basis of internet differs from mass communication is its bi-directional nature, which is the two way communication among electronic users. These messages and information obtained from friends, family, and acquaintances are very important which might affect the consumers' purchase intention towards iconic food (Dellarocas, 2003). Visitors would seek related information online and interact with those people who have ate those foods. They might take those comments as advice to judge the foods and its worthiness to travel to Kuching. Those information brings the form of objective messages in addition to subjective personal opinion and experiences (Westbrook, 1987). These messages could be lead to both negative and positive impacts toward the iconic foods. If the foods had not satisfied their expectation, they might have written some bad comments in internet to persuade others not to try that foods. Thus, the visitors could be affected by the eWOM information in both negative and positive ways.

However, the public is still able to obtain information from advertisements, such as printed media advertisement and electronic advertisement. The printed media advertisement such as leaflets, brochures, guides and catalogues should well-designed and well-organized on and distributed by related agencies to ensure the visitors can

obtain this information easily (Iordache, Parpandel & Rizea, 2010). The electronic advertisement is including TV advertising and online advertising. This is a necessary expense and treats as the main sales tools for tour operators (Cooper, 1996). However, Malaysia has not put enough investment into advertising the iconic foods to public, especially in Kuching. The tourist advertisement of Kuching is more towards the sustainable nature and the variety ethnic culture. According to Dann, (1996) picture is the most effective way to convey important attributes and features of tourism destination. It is stated that the present picture of tourism destination is a highly effective method of tourism advertisement, as pictures are more easily recognized by consumer than words. Therefore, Malaysia should advertise the iconic foods with pictures and compound with the current tourism advertisement. On the other hand, the development of information and communication technology play an important role in the tourism industry to provide a new medium for promotion and advertising purpose (Gretzel, Yuan & Fesenmaier, 2000). The internet allows consumers to search information in a highly convenient way. This online platform allows visitors to have individual planning and configuration even before their arrival, which consequently requires a high degree of interaction and information quality. Visitors can easily obtain this information as references and purchase the iconic food.

Other than that, a well-known iconic food in a place would have positive impacts towards the growth of the local economic. With the accurate information reachable to the visitors, they would be able organised their visiting destinations and budget before going to the place for visiting and also food. Without this information, visitors are more likely to rush over these places due to time and budget constraint as they have not plan their trip before head. Therefore, the source of information should

be a major concern to make sure the visitors can obtain the correct information about Kuching especially its iconic food before going to Kuching.

### **1.3 Research question**

According to the problem statements that have been listed previously, there is discussed the sources of information and its effects towards the visitors purchase intention of iconic food in Kuching.

- What source of information affecting the visitor's purchase intention of iconic Food in Kuching Sarawak, Malaysia?
- How significant is this source of information influences the visitors' attitude and motivate subjective norms to affect their purchase intention?

### **1.4 Research Objective**

In this study, the research objective is divided into general and specific objectives.

#### **1.4.1 General objective**

The general objective of this study is to determine the information affecting the visitors purchase intention of iconic foods in Kuching.

#### **1.4.2 Specific objective**

- To determine the source of information affecting visitor's purchase intention on iconic food in Kuching.
- To determine the effect of source of information toward attitudes that affect visitor's purchase intention of iconic food in Kuching, Sarawak.
- To determine the effect of source of information toward subjective norms that affect visitor's purchase intention of iconic food in Kuching, Sarawak.

### **1.5 Significant of Study**

The knowledge of this study is to provide better understanding of the relationship of sources of information and visitors' purchase intention on iconic food. In recent, relatively less of iconic food research has been conducted. The previous studies mainly focus on other tourism factors rather than the consumption of the local iconic food. Therefore, this study is significant for getting a better understanding on how the sources of information affects the purchase intention of the visitors for iconic food. The Theory Reasoned Action is widely utilised for many purchase intention study. Hence it is chosen and used for this thesis. However, there are less studies which apply this theory to study about the visitors' purchase intention on iconic food.

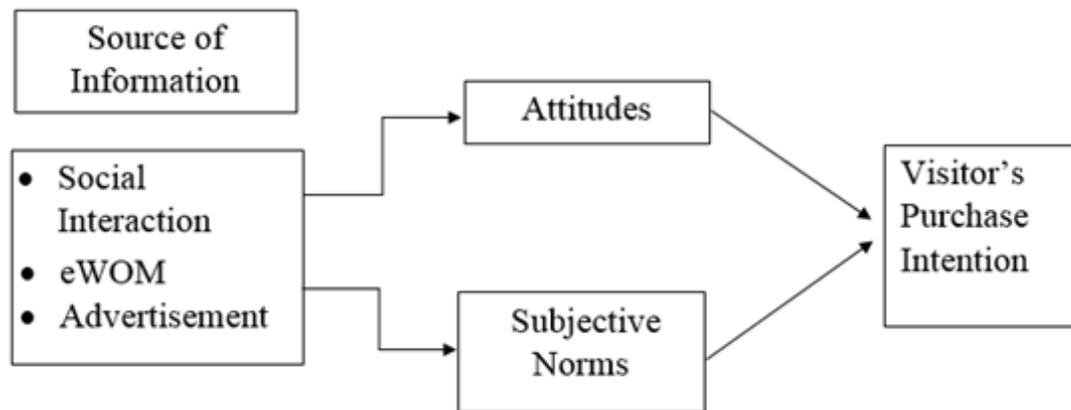
In this study, the available information affect visitors purchase intention, but also influences their attitude and motivate subjective norms for visitors making a purchase decision. With the variety of media, the created information does not only get visitors attention, but as well encouraged them to share the information with others willingly to make the message widely spread. This information can become an important source if the communication is built to make an information appeal to be shared. The study is designed to help local tourism understand the importance of the reliability and validation of sources of information in preparation to promote local tourism to the world. The related sectors should control the qualities of foods and provide reliable information for visitors.

### **1.6 Scope of Study**

This study is to be conducted in Kuching, Sarawak. According to the analysis of MSORSM (n.d.), Kuching is the capital and having the highest population city in

Sarawak. Kuching has approximately 4.0 million of visitors came from different countries and other states who had visited Sarawak in year 2012 (Ji, 2013). Kuching has Kuching International Airport to serving the entire south-western region Sarawak and located at 11km away from Kuching city (Oii, 2012). This international airport play as the first entrance of visitors who interest travel to Sarawak. The scope of this study is around Kuching area because there is a large number of visitors travel in Kuching in year 2011 to the year 2012.

### 1.7 Theoretical Framework



*Figure 1.1: Framework of the source of information affecting the visitor's purchase intention of iconic food in Kuching*

The conceptual framework for this study is distributed as Figure 1.1. This conceptual framework is developed from long-standing collaborative research by eminent psychologists, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975, 1980). Then, in this study, the conceptual framework is divided into four parts, which include source of information, attitude, subjective norms, and visitors' purchase intention. In the source of information, there are 3 major information sources that influence visitor's purchase intention for Kuching iconic food, which include social interaction, electronic Word-

of-Mouth (eWOM), and advertisement. The individual perception and social consideration are the important variables that would be affected by the form of information. Thus, this conceptual framework will be further discussed in Chapter 2. This chapter will determine source of information and discuss about the effect of individual perception and social consideration based on the form of information. This study also evaluates the relationship among the variables, attitudes, and subjective norms, and thus lead to visitor' purchase intention.

### **1.8 Definition of Terms**

**Source of Information:** is known as the origin of knowledge and facts as primary source of information (“Primary Source”, 2014). Source of information can be acquired from two platforms, verbal and non-verbal. Information can deliver in the form of words. The source of information can obtain from printed media, online media and communication.

**Social Interaction:** is one of the information sources that would influence consumer purchase decision. According to Cabrales, Calvó-Armengol and Zenou (2011), social interaction is exchange information between individuals and their reference group which would affect an individual's value. The reference group having closer relationship with the individuals, such as family, neighbours, friends and peers. In this study, the social interaction is included the interaction between the residents and the visitors in the destination. Those interactions are informal and actively involved in the journey.

**Electronic World-of-mouth (eWOM):** is one of the information sources that would influence consumer purchase decision. According to the Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan

(2008), eWOM is informal communication among consumers which the particular goods and services deliver through internet-based technology. In this study, eWOM consists of recommended products or brands with exiting online advertising from the users. The users can share their experiences and leave their comments for the next user.

**Advertisement:** is one of the information sources that would influence consumer purchase decision. According to Kotler and Keller (2008), advertising is paid by an identified sponsor for non-personal presentation and promotion of products or services, such as government agencies, business firms and non-profit organization. This kind of advertising presents the needed information in term of words and pictures to transmit information to people. In this study, the advertisement is grouped into two types, printed advertisement and electronic advertisement. Those advertisements appear in any media platforms to attract visitors and enhance the local brands and product image.

**Attitudes:** is a complex combination of personal attributes and values, which is including an individual's personality, beliefs, values, behaviours, and motivations,. Attitudes includes three components, affect, cognition and behaviour (Pickens, 2005). Attitude cause individuals to act in a certain way toward an object or person with the changing of internal thought. In Theory of Reasoned Action, attitude is examine outcomes of performing of behaviour and evaluate expected outcome which is determined by the individual's beliefs (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

**Subjective Norms:** is a function to coordinate people' expectation in interactions that possess multiple equilibria. According to the Lewis (1969), norms is established as rule to doing thing in particular way and others prefer to conform the rule. Thus, there is a standard of expectation that others will follow and accept the rule. In Theory of

Reasoned Action, norms is subjective norms that depends on beliefs about how the community think the individual should behave and the motivation to comply with community (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

**Visitor:** is a person visiting someone or somewhere, especially socially or as a tourist (“Visitor”, 2014). In this study, visitors are individuals who come from west Malaysia, Sabah and other countries.

**Purchase Intention:** is a potential of purchase. According to Whitlar, Geurts, and Swenson (1993), purchase intention as an individual would actually buy the product with a standard of purchase probability linked with an intention. In Theory of Reasoned Action, individual’ intention to behave in a certain way is affected by the particular attitude and subjective norms (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

## **1.9 Concluding Remarks**

In this chapter, the background of this study, the problem statement, scope of study and also the significance of it has been identified and discussed. According from what have been discussed, a research question and research objectives have been developed which result into the theoretical framework.

## **CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.0 Introduction**

Chapter 2, is the past literature review by other studies that support this research and further discuss. Chapter 2 is discussing about the variables and focus on the influence of source of information of purchasing iconic food. Furthermore, the relationship between the variables will be discuss and the adapted theory will be provided to show the relationship between the variable.

### **2.1 Iconic foods**

Malaysia is one of a country with endowed with an abundance of beautiful natural resources which is suitable developing for tourism use. A well-tourism industry brings positive impacts to the economy through maintain the sustainability and create economic viability. In late years, for visitors, consumption is an integral aspect of the tourist experience, the visitor consuming not only the sights and sounds of the destination, but also the taste of a place (Llín & Gaztelumendi, 2012). All visitors eat and usually dine out. According to Symons (1999), iconic food is a fundamental element of a place's attribute, increase the attractions and enrich visitor experiences. This makes iconic food become an essential component of tourism production as well as consumption. Iconic food is a shape of tourism experience in which a person learns about, appreciates and reflects the local culture and tradition with the uniqueness of local food.

According to Llín & Gaztelumendi (2012) mentioned that visitors are attracted to iconic products and thus many countries are enhancing their uniqueness product

development and marketing accordingly. Hence, iconic food of the place is one of the iconic product which is deeply connected to its origin, which is truly unique and appealing to those travellers who look to feel part of the place through its flavours. Besides that, iconic brings positive impact to traditional economic at rural areas (Llín & Gaztelumendi, 2012) It is a comparative advantage to serving up traditional fare to create large opportunities for communities' income and work opportunities locally. Besides that, the gastronomic routes such are one of the attractions for the visitors. Food tourism is an experiential trip to a gastronomic region (Hall, Sharples, Mitchell, Macionis, & Crambourne, 2003). It is showed that visitors is seek for the experiential journey which associated to certain lifestyle that implies culture learning, the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of the qualities and attributes related to tourism products that having culinary specialities produced in the place through the consumption. Therefore, the local cuisine is an iconic products of the destination to enhance the local gastronomy.

“Malaysia, Truly Asia” is an adopting slogan of Malaysia Tourism to embrace iconic foods as a strategically situated to ride on cultural diversity. According to the Llín & Gaztelumendi (2012) claimed that spices is the most important food ingredient of Malaysia iconic food which is attribute by multi-ethnic society from ancient until now. This is due to the strategic position of Malaysia was an significant sea route for the transportation of valuable tea and spice cargos between Europe and Asia (Khalid, 2005). The historical of Malaysia change the spice trade from Portuguese traders followed by the Dutch and the British fought over the control of earth equally well as the precious spices bound for European markets (Llín & Gaztelumendi, 2012)). Therefore, the histories combined the cultures and traditions would later take on a

substantial part in the attraction of visitors. Cohen (1972) claimed that visitors travel looking for novelty and exoticism and same degree of familiarity for enjoying their journey. It is showed that the Malaysia diverse ethnic groups hold their unique traditional dishes as the iconic products which is based on a subtle balance of tropical spices and ingredient used in Malay, Chinese, Indian cuisines. Cohen (1972) stated that the categories of foods are of great value in tourism and are efficient in the typology of visitors' part (Cohen, 1972). Therefore, some of the area trying to categorize their iconic foods based on ethnicity to attract more visitors, such as Kuching has Sarawak Laksa (vKeong, 2013) and Penang has Penang Laksa (Penang Laksa, n.d.). Therefore, this two destination have their own iconic foods to promote the uniqueness and tradition dishes for their states. Thus, all countries and even cities expand their unique culinary attractions to enhance their area' tourism (Dann, 1996).

Iconic food in Malaysia is particularly prominent in city centre areas (Llín & Gaztelumendi, 2012). The food stalls having operated for generations offer an extensive array of Malaysia favourite food delights and snacks to the residents and thus build attractiveness to visitors. The role of food as a code deliver the information about social relations and the commonalities of the structure of each meal across culture (Douglas, 1984). Visitors are excited to try any famous and recommended foods. However, some people opt for not trying strange things such as unfamiliar meals (Fischler, 1988), such as western food behaviour is contrasted with Asia. In the other hand, visitors' dining out can both be necessity and a pleasure. The variety of foods in Malaysia could satisfy the visitors and increase the intimacy.