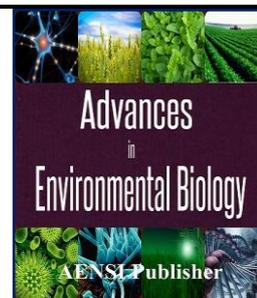




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Perception of The Malay Chefs on The Effectiveness of The Traditional Foods' Promotion For The Star Ratings Hotel In Klang Valley, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The expansion of tourism and hotel industry in Malaysia have generated significant source of income to the Malaysian economic development in this decade. One of the key element to outgrowth this industry is through the deliberate planning and development in the promotion and marketing campaign for the tourist to visit Malaysia besides of many other attractions such as food and beverage, shopping, entertainment and other related activities. This study examines the perceptions of the Malay chefs towards the effectiveness of the promotion and marketing campaign by their hotels in promoting the cultural Malay food to the customer. Qualitative study with an in-depth interviews with 10 Malay chefs that are currently working in the 3-star to 5-star hotels in Klang Valley were conducted in order to get their insights into this matter. One of the greatest challenges for the Malay chefs to uphold the strategic promotion for the traditional food is to come out with a great advertising campaign that gives a food value of a restaurant. However, in order to satisfy the customers, the hotel Malay chefs should devote extra efforts in upgrading their Malay food standards by providing an authentic food so that it will lead to revisit intention.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry in Malaysia has increased over the years with full support from the Malaysian Government, especially the Ministry of Tourism. This success is strengthened with the enforcement of sustainable tourism development, highlighted under the Ninth Malaysia Plan (NMP) 2006-2010. The NMP suggested an extensive marketing and promotion activities through product development, human resources improvement, and the development of more domestic tourism products [9]. On the other hand, one of the missions under NMP is to upgrade the employment sectors for *Bumiputeras* in the tourism industry, such as hotels and restaurants. The hotel industry has been recognized as one of the fastest growing industries in Malaysia, which requires strong key strategies to align it to meet the economic agenda of the nation. According to Abdullah *et al.*, [1] the service industry has listed hotel as one of the potential prospects to continue growing in Malaysia due to the highest standards of presentation. The increase in the hotel industry has led to an intense competition amongst the hotel sector and as a result, hotels need more development and strategic marketing to remain commercially viable in the industry.

2.0 Literature Review:

One of the supporting elements that have led the hotel industry to continue growing from year to year is their food and beverage operations. This food and beverage operations have been recognized as a secondary product or service that supports the primary components of the hotel industry, namely accommodation [12]. This statement is agreed by Dopson *et al.*, [7], in which they claimed that food and beverage revenues typically managed to bring the largest portions of a hotel's non-room revenue. The food and beverage operations in the hotel can be classified as a measurement tool to determine customer loyalty [13]. Mason *et al.*, [10] believed that loyalty comes from the satisfaction with food and beverage services aside from the hotel facilities, location,

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décor, and price. In addition, Mohamad *et al.*, [11] found that food is also one of the important criteria for tourists to visit any of the destinations in Malaysia, other than a safe place to visit and comfortable accommodation [16]. In brief, food is one of the key factors for tourists to travel and the most influential criteria to satisfy the tourists' need [14]. Therefore, it is very important for the food and beverage operations in hotels to take specific measures to attract tourists' attention by providing a wide selection of food and beverages to catch their interest.

One of the most successful steps undertaken in promoting food and beverage services in the hotel is by promoting the local food. Fabulous Food 1Malaysia for example, is one of the events organized by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC) to promote Malaysian food at various hotels and restaurants in Malaysia. This initiative has been considered as an annual event for the MOTAC to gain the tourists' attention to choose Malaysia as their favorite travel destination [15]. This annual event is held in the last three months of each year to celebrate and promote Malaysia's unique local cuisine, both at home and abroad. Malaysia's former Culture, Arts, and Tourism Minister, Dato' Dr. Ng Yen Yen said that these promotions were carried out with the aim to boost the tourism industry in Malaysia [8]. Therefore, it clearly shows great concern and attention should be given to promote Malaysian food in hotels, which had previously been taken for granted, as one of tourism products.

3.0 Methodology:

Qualitative approach was adopted in this study to gain more insights and understanding about the efforts of hotels' Malay chefs in promoting the traditional Malay food. Qualitative research provides the opportunity to explore new topics and directions; thereby using the respondents' own words to give meaning to their world [14]. The sampling technique chosen was a purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is one of the techniques which often employed in qualitative research investigation. With a purposive non-random sample the number of people interviewed is less important than the criteria used to select them. The characteristics of individuals are used as the basis of selection, most often chosen to reflect the diversity and breadth of the sample population [13].

For this study, the Malay chefs from the star ratings hotels in two Malaysia western states which is known as Klang Valley (Selangor and Kuala Lumpur) were selected as cases of this study. The Malay chefs embrace the reputation as a cooks and kitchen ambassador for most of the international hotels in Klang Valley, Malaysia. They act as a decision-makers and hold a responsibility to direct, plan and control all aspects of yearly food operation for the hotel. As a result, by targeting this group of respondents, the objectives of this study are achieved. Respondents were interviewed at their office in the hotel rather than at the F&B outlet or food production in order to achieve the accuracy of the instrument design and to encourage the reflection about strategy in planning the food programs and activities. It is also believed that participants also can speak freely and more honest especially when they are comfortable with the surrounding area where the interview takes place.

All respondents need to sign a consent letter saying that they are agreed to get involved and participated voluntarily in the interview session. They were informed on the rules and procedures at the beginning of the interview session and reminded that the interview were audio-taped besides of researcher took a detailed note on the same time. The participants were also guaranteed that all the responses will be kept for confidential. The in-depth interview itself were completely led by the researcher. Altogether, the interview data were verbatim transcribed manually by the researcher using a SONY digital software recorder. At the end of the transcribing process, all the data were reviewed persistently for accuracy. Then, the data were collected, coded and analyzed manually with the assistance of peer reviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The majority of Malay chefs suggested the Ministry of Tourism to be directly involved in promoting and publicizing Malay dishes in hotels in the Klang Valley. The continuity of the cultural food promotions and events could stimulate awareness and sentiments of longing for traditional Malay food by the younger generation.

A Malay chef explained about the importance of promoting traditional Malay food in hotels:

"Previously, we invited expert cooks from every state to join us in a 'state food promotion' in the hotel. For two weeks they cooked traditional food and gave live cooking demonstrations. The next fortnight, our Malay team had to handle the food promotion. So we had to learn in a short period of time. But, in these few years, we don't have any more state food promotion in this hotel. Actually, there are not many expert cooks left nowadays." (Chef A, 27 years of experience, 3-star)

However there is a hindrance as one of the chefs explained:

"Promotion for traditional Malay food is expensive. Food needs to be presented traditionally using Malay cutlery, cooking utensils, equipment and cookware, but they are expensive and very hard to find nowadays. The

solid brass pot is one example. My hotel is reluctant to spend two hundred thousand ringgit just for a month's promotion." (Chef B, 12 years of experience, 3-star)

A chef stated the importance of promoting the preparations of Malay food in a traditional way:

"I remember a traditional Malay food promotion at the hotel that showcased the preparations of 'apam soda' or soda steamed cake using bamboo. They put the apam soda inside the bamboo and steamed it until cooked. Nowadays the modern steamer replaces the bamboo. For me, this is the element of traditional food that we are lacking and need to return to in order to sustain traditional Malay food in hotels." (Chef C, 13 years of experience, 4-star)

Another Malay chef explained his hotel's marketing strategy in promoting traditional food:

"Normally we will prepare the most authentic and traditional Malay food for the Ramadan buffet. We will bring out our best of Malay food using the best ingredients. Then, we will advertise in the media. While media coverage is important to attract people to come and dine in our restaurant, we have to deliver the 'wow factors' in order to be different." (Chef D, 26 years of experience, 5-star)

A chef described the usual scenario:

"Malaysians usually order western or ethnic food in hotels. Mostly it's the foreigners who order Malay food since they cannot get it at home. Therefore, they are the target and we should collaborate with the Ministry of Tourism on how to promote Malay food to them" (Chef E, 37 years of experience, 4-star)

Promotion should involve collaborating with other countries. However, great attention to details in displaying the ingredients and preparing traditional food are crucial for attraction. One Malay chef recounted:

"Every 2 years, we are invited by our international chain hotel to promote Malay food and give live cooking demonstration. I would take it as a challenge for me to promote our traditional Malay food internationally." (Chef F, 22 years of experience, 5-star)

The promotion should be a continuous improvement process which changes depending on the situation. All related parties must be involved in the promotion campaign and inspire a creative and innovative event for cultural food. If the event continues to grow in popularity, it will be able to sustain cultural food among the younger generation.

Conclusion:

The main goal of this study is to determine the efficiency of the traditional Malay food promotion and campaign by the Malay chefs and their hotels in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The results of this investigation show that the Malay food promotions were carried out only on certain occasions in the hotel. The state food promotions such as the expert chefs invited from all over the state to showcase their cooking in traditional Malay food was no longer become annual events for the hotel. Other than that, the study has shown that hotels organize different food promotions every 3 months. The Malay chefs are responsible to prepare the paper works and doing some research on the special menu that will appear on the food promotions. A previous study has identified that one of the problems in the preservation of traditional food is the lack of promotion to make the products known to the public. Therefore, hotels should step up aggressively in promoting the Malay food during special occasion such as a festive season, independent day and state food promotion to present the variety and uniqueness of Malay food to local and international tourists. The programs must also have to be intensifying in order to catch the attention of local people to attract them to dine and savour in the hotel. As food and beverage services have been identified as second major operating revenues in the hotel, the promotional campaign must be aimed to specific target customer.

This study has found that generally most of the Malay chefs agreed that collaboration among all Malay chefs in setting the standard for Malay food in Malaysia's hotels could enhance the values of cooking traditional food and therefore could promote this food in a better approach.

They admitted that the hotel industry should take a proactive action in promoting traditional Malay food in hotels with the support of Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board (MTPB). They suggested that the government and private institutions should continuously promote traditional food and incorporate these activities as food events in existing tour packages as a means of attracting food tourists who seek local authentic foods in Malaysia. This will amicably increase the number of tourists to Malaysia, especially with exciting tour packages offering local delicacies, which could be catered to individual needs. In addition, the increased number of tourists coming to Malaysia will stimulate employment growth in the hotel industry in Malaysia as a whole.

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