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Psychological Factors Affecting Universities' Students Food Choice

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Abstract

There are several factors that determine food choices among students. In research of Eating Habit and Factors Affecting Food Choice of Adolescents Living in Rural Areas stated that food choice in general is a complex process which depends on culture and is influenced by different factors such as personal, social, economic and emotional. Environmental factors such as cost of food and availability of fast food also play an important role in determining the food choices. As such, a survey is conducted among University Technology Mara Malaysia graduates to determine factors that contribute to graduates preferences in determining food choices. The research is carried out with the aims of identifying and determining the psychological factors affecting the food choice of graduates. It is hope by determining these factors, the food industries will understand better the preference of graduates in catering to their needs and an establishment of understanding the factors contributing to the psychological of food preferences.

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Keywords Psychological Factors, Graduates Preferences, Food Choices, Survey, Food Industries.

Introduction

Poor eating habit is a major health concern among young adults food choices of the student made by the students can be affected by several factors. In the [1] research of Eating Habit and Factors Affecting Food Choice of Adolescents Living In Rural Areas stated that food choice in general is a complex process which depends on culture and can be influenced by different factors such as personal, social, economic and emotional. On the other hand, [2] argued that environmental factors such as cost of food, and availability of fast food also affects the university students' eating habits. There are a lot of researches that have been done to determine what factor that indicates the effect of food choices by University students. It

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showed that students have their reason for choosing the food. Besides that, the factor varies by each person. Some of the factors are gender, cost of the food, ads, packaging, friends, nutrition value, and experienced. Further explain in [3] research of Factor Influencing Students' Food Choices When Shopping for Food stated that male and female have different preference in choosing food. For instance, female more likely to consume fruits while male is likely to consume on fast food or other kind of snack.

In [3] research also indicate that the amount of money spent for food are different between them and the students were influenced by informational influence such as ads, parents and friends, and magazine when choosing the food they eat. On the other hand [4] in their study about Environmental Influences on Food Choices, Physical Activity and Energy Balance stated that price play an important role for a particular person to choose what kind of food they eat. This is because when the person is on a tight budget, the taste of the food is not important compared to its price.

Research Objectives

The objective of this study is to analyses the factor affecting the food choices by universities' student. Among the factors are demographical factors such as gender, family background, experience, environmental influenced, price and taste of food. This study is focusing on several specific objectives stated below:

- I. To explore the psychological factors affecting the food choice of universities' student.
- II. To determine the several types of psychological factors that is usually affecting the choices of food of universities' student.
- III. To study the psychological factors effect that may influence the universities' student food choice.

Discussion

There are many factors that affecting the food choice among the students; part of it was the psychological factors, and psychosocial factors. Both of these factors are said to be related with each other when making food choices. Some studies show that these factors result in the rejection and acceptance of the food among students with the available food in the market. [5] stated in their study on "Gender differences in factors affecting rejection of food" that gender is one of the factor that contributed in the rejection of the food. On the other hand, food choice is also being affected by the internal factor of the students such as attitude whereby [6] argued in her studies that those attitudes will affect the food acceptance.

Another factor is the psychological factor is a part of it and it is defined as the behavior of a particular person such as emotion, mood, attitude and habits. According to [7], a person will responds spontaneously to a situation or object if he or she has the attitude and when the reaction of particular person has been established then the attitude is created [7]. This is the reason why psychological factor could affects the food choices of students. Apart from that, psychological would also create an attitude that will create a like or dislike on particular situation, person or event object [8]. Psychological itself is a huge area that is not fully covered in this study but some of it is the attitudes (attitude towards unfamiliar foods and attitude towards healthy foods) and emotion (sad, happy and tired). Some of the studies made states that psychological factor is an individual thinking influenced by the past experience that drive people to choose what kind of food they want [6].

Food attitude is one of the key in the psychological factor that will affect the student's food choices. Some studies made stated that attitude is something that cannot be measured directly with an observation however it has to be concluded by using the responses of a person or indicator [7]. According to [9], the belief that is created by a person such as the belief on the criteria of the food which is beneficial or convenience, and the food nutritional values is all contributed by human thinking part which is the attitude.

Apart from that, antagonism toward unfamiliar food can be defined as neophobia. Basically this attitude belongs to all organisms rather than human or animal. This attitude is occurs is when an organism felt that it is being exposed to a dangerous food such as toxic food. It would then result in the organism to seek for familiar food which is safe for them [10]. However [10] also stated that neophobia are prone to occur in animals because of they are more exposed to that situation while human are not. This is because normally all those dangerous foods will be removed from the market and will always be monitored. The attitude of food rejection also prone to be shown by some women that experienced more discomfort and disgust than men toward meat item foods [11]. Apart from that, a person whom is averagely hungry prone to not be choosy and show much lesser neophobia degree compared to when they are not [12]. While stated by [13] in their study, the neophobic is a mannerism among the children. By observing others' attitudes toward foods that show this neophobic attitudes will eventually change the neophobic rate of particular person.

Emotion and food cannot be taken apart because essentially people will eat on no matter what condition they are in. In a study that has been made show that, there are plenty of moods that will affect the selection of food [14]. In the study, it showed that people will chose variety of foods when they are bored while sweets are being chosen when they are happy. In additional, alcohol is more preferable for people whom are in love and in relaxed stated compared to when they are depressed or sorrow. While on the other hand, [10] stated that when people is in a bad mood such as anger, sorrow or stress, they are prone to take a sweet foods but this action is similar when they are in love and happy.

In the journal of 'Evaluation of Food Choice Behavior in Development and Validation of Health and Taste Attitude Scales' by [6] stated that food choices is a process that includes various factors that made it very complex. In the [6] journal by [15] also stated that food choices of an individual will be affected by internal and external factors.

Psychological factors are also included as the internal factor of an individual to make foods choices. This was also supported by [16] in the same journal stated that the model of food choices that will be affected by the food, the individual and social-economic environment. Whereby in the model, food factor is included as their appearance and the nutrient it contains. The individual factor is based on the individual experience regarding particular food that will lead to different kinds of belief on the food and lastly the social-economic environment is based on the attitudes of an individual towards the sense of the foods or the healthiness of the foods. Basically this can be said that attitudes (attitudes toward healthy foods) play an important role in order for an individual to make food choices. This is similar to the finding by [17] that shows the result obtained from the interviews, participant are most likely to choose food for pleasure, health, tradition and convenience.

As this study move deeper into the attitude roles in the food choices, several kind of journals have been reported in order to get the findings and one of the journal is a journal about Role of Psychological Factors in Food Choices by [10]. The journal stated that attitudes can be a cause of neophobia. Neophobia can be defining as attitude of rejection of unfamiliar food by an individual. This finding stated that food choices can be affected by human attitudes that created neophobia. This was also supported by [18] that stated food neophobia

is one of the factors that will affect the food choices. Some other studies also stated that attitudes are the reason why human respond to like or dislike a particular object, person, institution or an event [8].

[13] showed in their study that behavior associated with the neophobia occurs among children. This is due to the observation; the neophobia rate of the food choices differs with the present of other neophobic or neophilic attitudes of the surrounding [10]. On the other hand, the degree of neophobia on the food choices is low when the person is mildly hungry and not particularly timid [12]. Attitudes towards unfamiliar food decrease if the level of education is high with the degree of urbanization [10]. [19] reported that neophobia is more often shown by young women than in young men. In contrast, men are more likely to be neophobic than women [10].

However attitudes also have the nature and beliefs such as beliefs about the food convenience degree and their nutritional contain [9]. Some people will consume the food because of their attitudes towards healthy foods. This was also supported by [20] people will pay attention on the food labeling because they are more likely to buy healthy foods. This is included as the individual attitudes will differ as the new information about the object is present. [8] and [21] found that other beliefs such as convenience and price are not really closely related as compared to taste and health beliefs. On the finding of [10] shows that women and older subject that health concern tend to appreciate the health value of fat.

This is supported by [22] as their finding shows that people are tend to buy minimally processed vegetables and packed fruit due to their natures which is good for health. In addition, those foods can be prepared faster and convenient. In the finding of [17] shows that consumption of healthy food will depend on various factors such as to minimize the risk of diseases or to gain good health, maintaining a good health and energy. The attitude towards healthy food is also shown by a study made on female students and they tend to choose healthy foods before pleasure, ideological reason and weight control [23]. However some of these studies show that, people are prefers more food that tastes good rather than nutritional food such as high-fat foods [24]; [25].

In the finding of [10] shows that food choices are emotional status which is complex. The food will be chosen by the individual in order to improve their state of emotion. Based on the [10] findings about the impact of emotion on the food choices among a hundred of young women, it showed that when the subject is angry, bored, sorrow, and stress or can be said as unhappy mood; they tend to choose sweet foods.

However sweet is also related with happiness and love. A part of that, the subjects prefer yogurts and fruit when they are tired and if they are bored, their reaction is to consume more food. In other studies shows that a person with high level of neophobic have a non-fixed eating pattern as they prefers more sour taste, meat and fatty dishes. [14] has come out with a finding that showed people tend to make a more variety in food choices during boredom. Sweet is related towards happiness and joy and alcohol are not really related to those people who are in sorrow or depressed. However it is more closely related to those who are in love or in relaxed mood, this is due to alcohol contributed in maintaining those good mood.

It is shown that psychological factors of food choices are more related to human attitudes towards foods and their emotion. Both factors give a different kind of effect in order to define the level of individual food choices. Attitudes play an important role in food choices process as their existence will create challenges to the food producers in order to create a food that is able to attract the people's interest towards a new product as people are tend to neophobic toward unfamiliar foods.

Other than that, a new investment in creating a product that will enhance and maintain human health should also be focused as people nowadays choose foods for their health concerns rather than taste. Even so, some people may also prefer taste rather than healthy foods. In addition, food choices are also closely related to people emotion. Their emotion will bring a different kind of result towards food choices process as different kind of emotion such as sorrow and happy will lead to different kind of food preferences. However there are not so many results to show that mood is related to male food choice, due to the entire journal found shows that only female participant are included in their findings.

Conclusion

Food choosing is the actions that make people to choose the foods that will benefit them in term of variety of factors. Choosing healthy foods is also a part of the decision in food choices. [17] stated that to have a good health, maintaining energy and health and preventing diseases are the reasons why people choose healthy diet. With so many studies on emphasizing the health condition shows that certain foods that been defined as health-enhancing foods have the ability to minimize the risk of chronic diseases [26]. On the other hand, a study that been made on the food choices of young and middle age females' shows that they prefer healthy food rather than other reasons such as pleasure, weight control and ideology reason [23].

With the changing of the people lifestyle and needs, the healthy food that can enhance the health and act as the treatment or prevention of chronic diseases increase their acceptance among the public and scientific community [27]. Moreover, many studies also been made that show antioxidants in the vitamin can become the prevention act of the chronic diseases such as cancer [28]. This can be the reason for individual to consume healthy food in their life style and also supported by [10] that stated people are more likely to choose low-fat food rather than high-fat foods due to their belief of the nutritional values of the food selected. However, some study also stated that people prefers more high-fat food due to their good taste compare to low-fat foods [24].

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