JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY
KSTCL IIUM
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA
Garden of Knowledge and Virtue

Food-Choice Motives Influencing UiTM Students' Intention to Consume Kadazan-Dusun Ethnic Food in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah

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ARTICLE HISTORY
Received : 30/7/2026
Accepted : 03/8/2026
Online : 30/9/2026

KEYWORDS
Kadazan-Dusun; Ethnic Food; Food-choice Motives; Intention to Consume; University Students

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ARTICLE CLASSIFICATION
Research paper

Abstract - This study examines the effects of price, sensory appeal, familiarity, health and convenience on UiTM students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted among diploma and bachelor's degree students in the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management. Data were collected through a bilingual online questionnaire adapted from established food-choice studies. After data screening, 192 valid responses were analysed using descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, Pearson's correlation and multiple regression. All five food-choice motives were positively correlated with intention to consume. The regression model explained 52.2% of the variance in intention. Sensory appeal was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .341$, $p < .001$), followed by familiarity ($\beta = .289$, $p < .001$), price ($\beta = .195$, $p = .002$) and health ($\beta = .161$, $p = .010$). Convenience did not make a significant unique contribution ($\beta = -.110$, $p = .085$). The findings indicate that students' intention is primarily influenced by sensory enjoyment, recognition of the cuisine, perceived value for money and health considerations. Food operators and tourism stakeholders should therefore emphasise consistent sensory quality, culturally informative presentation, reasonable pricing and credible nutritional information. Universities may also strengthen familiarity through food demonstrations, tasting activities and cultural programmes. The study contributes to ethnic-food research by comparing the relative effects of five food-choice motives among young consumers situated within Sabah's indigenous culinary environment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethnic food extends beyond nourishment by embodying the history, identity and

eISSN: 3122-6744

collective knowledge of its community of origin. Ingredients, preparation techniques, preservation practices and eating customs transmit cultural knowledge across generations while reflecting local ecological resources and social values (Harmayani et al., 2019; Ting et al., 2017). In tourism and hospitality, ethnic cuisine contributes to destination distinctiveness by enabling consumers to experience local culture through taste, aroma, presentation and social interaction (Kim & Eves, 2012; Ting et al., 2019). Increased mobility, migration and digital food communication have further expanded consumers' exposure to culturally distinctive cuisines, strengthening their relevance to destination marketing and consumer-behaviour research (Ting et al., 2019; Youn, 2024).

Ethnic-food consumption is shaped by functional, sensory, psychological and cultural considerations. Taste, aroma, appearance, healthfulness, affordability, convenience and familiarity may reduce uncertainty and influence consumers' willingness to try or repeatedly consume culturally distinctive dishes (Kim & Eves, 2012; Ting et al., 2017). However, the relative importance of these motives varies across consumer groups and settings. Ting et al. (2017) found that health and sensory appeal positively influenced non-Dayak Malaysians' intention to consume Dayak food, whereas Arsil et al. (2022) identified distinctive taste, personal preference, origin and tradition as important motivations for consuming Padang food. These findings indicate that ethnic-food choice involves both practical evaluations and the cultural meanings associated with a cuisine.

Research in tourism settings further demonstrates that ethnic-food intention cannot be explained through a single universal model. Ting et al. (2019) identified national and regional differences in tourists' intentions to consume ethnic food, while Fam et al. (2020) found that Chinese, European and Malaysian tourists differed in the motives influencing their intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun food in Sabah. Ahmad et al. (2020) also showed that food-choice motives shaped attitudes towards Pakistani ethnic food, which subsequently influenced purchase intention together with subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. More recent studies indicate that perceived authenticity and media influence contribute to millennials' intention to consume Chetti Malacca cuisine, while visual presentation affects perceived risk and purchase responses towards ethnic food (Ismail & Latip, 2024; Youn, 2024). Positive local-food experiences may also strengthen cultural understanding and subsequent behavioural intentions towards both the cuisine and its destination (Lin et al., 2023).

Sabah provides an important context for examining these issues because its food landscape reflects the traditions of numerous indigenous communities. The Kadazan-Dusun community possesses a distinctive culinary heritage based on locally available fish, rice, root crops, wild fruits, herbs and traditional preservation methods (Harmayani et al., 2019; Yakin et al., 2022). Foods such as hinava, tuhau, bosou, pinasakan, linopot, bambangan, losun and butod illustrate the cuisine's sour, fermented, aromatic and savoury characteristics (Harmayani et al., 2019; Ramli et al., 2023). These foods are embedded in household practices, agricultural traditions and cultural celebrations, while their growing presence in restaurants and food-tourism activities has increased their relevance to contemporary hospitality and tourism (Fam et al., 2020; Yakin et al., 2022). Although commercialisation may modify preparation and marketing practices, Kadazan-Dusun food continues to function as a marker of cultural identity (Yakin et al., 2022).

eISSN: 3122-6744

Geographical proximity, however, does not necessarily ensure extensive knowledge or regular consumption among younger consumers. Ramli et al. (2023) found that 46.8% of students surveyed at Universiti Malaysia Sabah demonstrated a low level of knowledge of Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food, while their evaluations of health, convenience, sensory characteristics, price and habit were generally modest. Although informative, that study was primarily descriptive and did not determine the relative contribution of these motives to intention to consume. Evidence based on tourists or the general public may not adequately explain student behaviour because university students differ in cultural exposure, purchasing power, food routines and access to traditional dishes.

The present study addresses this gap by examining whether price, sensory appeal, familiarity, health and convenience predict UiTM students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food in Kota Kinabalu. Specifically, it assesses students' perceptions of these five food-choice motives and determines which motive exerts the strongest influence on intention to consume. By applying established food-choice motives to an under-researched indigenous cuisine, the study extends ethnic-food consumption research among young adults in Sabah. Its findings may also assist food operators, educators and tourism stakeholders in developing strategies to enhance the visibility, accessibility and continued appreciation of Kadazan-Dusun cuisine.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Ethnic food and Kadazan-Dusun cuisine

Ethnic food refers to food rooted in the culinary heritage of a particular cultural or ethnic community. Its identity is shaped by locally available ingredients, inherited preparation knowledge and customary practices associated with the community's history and environment (Harmayani et al., 2019; Ting et al., 2017). It therefore embodies geographical, ecological, historical and symbolic meanings beyond its physical and nutritional attributes.

Ethnic cuisine may be consumed by members of the originating community, other local residents and tourists, but these groups may value different characteristics. Consumers with a cultural connection to the cuisine may emphasise familiarity, memory and continuity, whereas outsiders may seek novelty, authenticity and cultural learning. Ting et al. (2019) found that national and regional backgrounds altered relationships within an ethnic-food consumption model. Fam et al. (2020) similarly reported that sensory appeal was particularly important among Chinese tourists, while convenience and mood influenced Malaysian tourists' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun food.

Kadazan-Dusun cuisine reflects generations of indigenous knowledge concerning Sabah's natural resources, agricultural practices and food-preservation methods. Fish, rice, wild fruits, vegetables and aromatic plants are prepared through fermentation, pickling, acid marination, leaf wrapping and slow simmering, as illustrated by bosou, hinava, linopot, pinasakan and tuhau (Chan, 2017; Harmayani et al., 2019; Yakin et al., 2022). These methods create distinctive sour, fermented and aromatic profiles while demonstrating adaptation to locally and seasonally available ingredients. Foods such as bambangan and tuhau also function as cultural identity markers, although commercial production and modified preparation practices have introduced contemporary forms (Yakin et al., 2022).

Existing ethnic food studies offer an important comparative basis for

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Kadazan-Dusun cuisine. Ting et al. (2017) established that sensory appeal and health were the primary positive determinants of intention to consume Dayak food among non-Dayak Malaysians. Arsil et al. (2022) demonstrated that consumers' motivations towards Padang food were structured around its distinctive taste, personal preference, origin and traditional meaning. Ahmad et al. (2020) further showed that food-choice motives may operate indirectly through attitude before influencing purchase intention, while Ismail and Latip (2024) highlighted the relevance of authenticity and media-related factors among millennial consumers of Chetti Malacca cuisine. Visual cues are also important because food presentation may facilitate consumers' processing of an unfamiliar cuisine, reduce perceived risk and strengthen purchase intention (Youn, 2024).

These studies confirm that ethnic food consumption is influenced by multiple attributes, but their findings cannot be transferred uncritically across populations. Previous Kadazan-Dusun food research has primarily focused on tourists or descriptively examined students' knowledge and food-selection evaluations (Fam et al., 2020; Ramli et al., 2023). Consequently, limited evidence is available concerning the relative influence of specific food-choice motives on university students' intention to consume. Examining price, sensory appeal, familiarity, health and convenience simultaneously may provide a clearer explanation of which considerations are most relevant to younger consumers in Sabah.

2.1.1 Selected Kadazan-Dusun ethnic foods

Kadazan-Dusun cuisine reflects indigenous knowledge of Sabah's natural environment, local ingredients and traditional preparation practices. Foods such as bambangan, bosou, butod, hinava, linopot, losun, pinasakan and tuhau were selected in this study because they represent a range of sensory characteristics, levels of familiarity and preparation methods relevant to consumers' food choices (Harmayani et al., 2019; Ramli et al., 2023). Bambangan is a wild mango commonly consumed fresh or preserved as a sour condiment, while bosou is a traditional fermented fish preparation characterised by a distinctive aroma and sour-salty flavour (Chan, 2017; Harmayani et al., 2019). Butod refers to sago grubs obtained from sago palm trunks and may be consumed raw or cooked (Chan, 2017). Hinava is prepared from fresh fish marinated with lime, chilli, ginger and shallots, while linopot consists of rice wrapped in leaves and traditionally served with indigenous accompaniments (Chan, 2017; Harmayani et al., 2019).

Other selected foods include losun, a mild wild spring onion commonly served as a vegetable dish; pinasakan, a preserved fish preparation simmered with turmeric and souring ingredients; and tuhau (Etlingera coccinea), an aromatic wild ginger stem typically prepared as a pickle or sambal (Chan, 2017; Harmayani et al., 2019). The distinctive taste, aroma, appearance and preparation of these foods make sensory appeal particularly relevant to their acceptance, while differences in consumers' prior knowledge and exposure highlight the importance of familiarity. Some traditional ingredients and preparation methods may also shape perceptions of health, whereas their availability in markets, restaurants and commercial forms relates to convenience and accessibility (Yakin et al., 2022). Ramli et al. (2023) further demonstrated uneven levels of recognition of Kadazan-Dusun foods among university students, indicating that familiarity with the cuisine does not necessarily extend equally across individual dishes. These characteristics provide an appropriate context for examining how sensory appeal, familiarity, health, convenience and price influence

eISSN: 3122-6744

students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food.

2.2 Food-choice motives

Food choice is a multidimensional decision shaped by consumers' evaluations of both the intrinsic and extrinsic attributes of food. Steptoe et al. (1995) developed the Food Choice Questionnaire (FCQ) to measure nine motives underlying food selection: health, mood, convenience, sensory appeal, natural content, price, weight control, familiarity and ethical concern. The FCQ has subsequently been adapted to different cultural, consumer and food contexts by selecting dimensions relevant to the population and product being investigated. In ethnic-food research, selected FCQ motives have been used to explain consumers' attitudes and intentions towards culturally distinctive cuisines, including Dayak and Pakistani foods (Ahmad et al., 2020; Ting et al., 2017). Research on local food consumption similarly identifies sensory appeal, health concern, cultural experience and interpersonal relationships as important consumption motivations (Kim & Eves, 2012). Based on the characteristics of university students and the measures included in the survey instrument, the present study examines five motives: price, sensory appeal, familiarity, health and convenience.

2.2.1 Price

Price reflects consumers' perceptions of affordability and value for money. In the original FCQ, this dimension assesses whether food is perceived as inexpensive, reasonably priced and worth the amount paid (Steptoe et al., 1995). Price may be particularly relevant to university students because their food choices are often made within limited discretionary budgets. A favourable price evaluation does not necessarily indicate a preference for the cheapest option; rather, it may represent an acceptable balance between monetary cost and the expected sensory, cultural and consumption experience.

Previous ethnic-food studies have reported mixed findings regarding the role of price. Ting et al. (2017) found a significant relationship between price and intention to consume Dayak food, although the positive direction contradicted their hypothesised inverse relationship. Ahmad et al. (2020) similarly reported that price significantly influenced tourists' attitudes towards Pakistani ethnic food. These findings suggest that consumers may interpret reasonable pricing as an indication of accessibility and value rather than assessing cost in isolation. In the present study, students who perceive Kadazan-Dusun food as affordable and offering good value are therefore expected to demonstrate stronger intention to consume.

H1: Price positively influences students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food.

2.2.2 Sensory Appeal

Sensory appeal refers to consumers' evaluations of a food's taste, aroma, appearance and texture. These attributes provide an immediate basis for judging the expected enjoyment and acceptability of a food product (Steptoe et al., 1995). Sensory cues may be especially influential in ethnic-food settings because consumers are sometimes required to evaluate dishes containing unfamiliar ingredients, flavour combinations or preparation methods. Attractive visual presentation and recognisable sensory qualities may facilitate evaluation and reduce the perceived risk associated with trying an unfamiliar cuisine.

Empirical evidence consistently supports the importance of sensory appeal in ethnic-food

eISSN: 3122-6744

consumption. Ting et al. (2017) identified it as a positive predictor of Malaysians' intention to consume Dayak food, while Arsil et al. (2022) found that distinctive and spicy taste played a central role in consumers' motivations for selecting Padang food. Youn (2024) further demonstrated that the visual presentation of ethnic food influences perceived risk and purchase intention. These findings indicate that favourable evaluations of taste, aroma, appearance and texture are likely to strengthen students' willingness to consume Kadazan-Dusun food.

H2: Sensory appeal positively influences students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food.

2.2.3 Familiarity

Familiarity refers to the extent to which consumers recognise a food, have encountered or consumed it previously, or associate it with foods from their childhood and regular eating practices. The FCQ conceptualises familiarity through consumers' preference for foods they usually eat, foods they recognise and foods similar to those consumed during childhood (Steptoe et al., 1995). Familiarity may make culturally distinctive foods easier to interpret and evaluate because consumers can connect them with established knowledge and previous experiences. Evidence from traditional-food research also identifies familiarity as an important driver of consumption, although its influence may vary across cultural contexts (Pieniak et al., 2009).

Findings from ethnic-food studies remain inconsistent. Ahmad et al. (2020) found that familiarity significantly influenced tourists' attitudes towards Pakistani ethnic food. In contrast, Ting et al. (2017) reported that familiarity did not directly predict intention to consume Dayak food, possibly because respondents had limited knowledge of the cuisine despite having previously tried it. Such variation suggests that the effect of familiarity depends on the extent and quality of consumers' cultural and experiential exposure. As many respondents in the present study reside in Sabah and reported family as their main source of awareness, familiarity is expected to strengthen their confidence in recognising and selecting Kadazan-Dusun food.

H3: Familiarity positively influences students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food.

2.2.4 Health

Health motivation concerns the extent to which consumers select food based on its perceived contribution to nutrition and well-being. In the FCQ, health-related evaluations include perceptions of vitamin and mineral content, fibre, protein and the ability of food to support a healthy lifestyle (Steptoe et al., 1995). In an ethnic-food context, health perceptions may be informed by the ingredients and preparation methods associated with a particular dish. However, such perceptions may vary because traditional foods differ considerably in their nutritional composition, processing techniques and serving practices.

Health has demonstrated relevance in previous studies of indigenous and ethnic food. Ting et al. (2017) identified health as a significant positive predictor of intention to consume Dayak food. Among Universiti Malaysia Sabah students, health also recorded the highest mean among the food-selection factors examined, although respondents' overall assessment fell between neutral and agreement (Ramli et al., 2023). These findings indicate that perceived nutritional qualities may encourage ethnic-food consumption, particularly when consumers receive credible and dish-specific information about ingredients and preparation methods. Students who perceive Kadazan-Dusun food as nutritious and beneficial to

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their well-being are therefore expected to report stronger intentions to consume.

H4: Health positively influences students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food.

2.2.5 Convenience

Convenience concerns the time, accessibility and effort involved in obtaining, preparing and consuming food. The FCQ measures this motive through characteristics such as ease of preparation, short preparation time and availability in shops or other food outlets (Steptoe et al., 1995). Convenience is particularly relevant to university students, whose food decisions may be influenced by academic schedules, transportation, food-outlet availability and limited time for meal preparation.

Its influence on ethnic-food intention, however, is not consistent across consumer groups. Fam et al. (2020) found that convenience influenced Malaysian tourists' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun food in Sabah, suggesting that accessibility and ease of consumption may be important to visitors. Conversely, Ting et al. (2017) reported no significant relationship between convenience and intention to consume Dayak food. The contrasting evidence may reflect differences between tourists and local consumers, as visitors may depend more strongly on restaurant availability and ease of access. The relevance of convenience to Sabah-based university students therefore requires direct empirical examination.

H5: Convenience positively influences students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food.

2.3 Intention to Consume and Conceptual Framework

Intention to consume refers to an individual's stated willingness, readiness or plan to perform a particular behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour, intention captures the motivational factors underlying behaviour, including how strongly individuals are willing to try and how much effort they plan to invest in performing the action. It is regarded as the most immediate antecedent of behaviour, although its translation into actual behaviour also depends on the degree of control individuals possess over the action (Ajzen, 1991).

Although food-choice motives are not core constructs of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, they may function as salient evaluations that shape consumers' attitudes and readiness to select a particular cuisine. Ahmad et al. (2020), for example, modelled food-choice motives as antecedents of attitude, which subsequently influenced ethnic-food purchase intention together with subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. The present framework is grounded primarily in the Food Choice Questionnaire and positions price, sensory appeal, familiarity, health and convenience as direct predictors of intention to consume, consistent with Ting et al. (2017). This parsimonious approach enables the unique contribution of each motive to be assessed while controlling for the others. However, the framework does not represent a complete Theory of Planned Behaviour model because attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control were not directly measured.

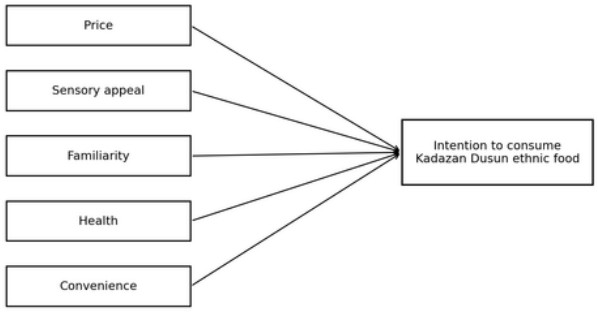

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study (adapted from Ting et al., 2017)

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3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative, correlational and cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships between price, sensory appeal, familiarity, health, convenience and students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food. The target population comprised full-time diploma and bachelor's degree students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Sabah Branch, Kota Kinabalu Campus, with an accessible population of 494 students from the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample-size table, 214 respondents were initially targeted. Convenience sampling was employed because respondents were recruited based on their accessibility and willingness to participate within the specified data-collection period. A total of 220 responses were received. During data screening, 28 incomplete questionnaires were excluded, resulting in 192 valid responses for analysis, representing 38.9% of the accessible population.

Although the final sample was slightly below the initial target, it remained adequate for multiple regression analysis. Green (1991) recommends a minimum sample size of $N \geq 50 + 8m$ for testing the overall regression model and $N \geq 104 + m$ for testing individual predictors, where m represents the number of independent variables. With five predictors, the respective minimum requirements were 90 and 109 respondents. Therefore, the final sample of 192 substantially exceeded both recommendations and was considered adequate for assessing the overall model and the individual effects of the five food-choice motives on intention to consume. Nevertheless, the use of convenience sampling restricts the generalisability of the findings beyond the sampled population.

Data were collected using a self-administered bilingual questionnaire in English and Bahasa Melayu. Section A measured demographic characteristics, while Section B assessed familiarity with Kadazan-Dusun foods, sources of awareness and whether respondents had known, encountered or consumed specific dishes. Section C measured price, sensory appeal, familiarity, health and convenience, whereas Section D assessed intention to consume. Items were adapted from Ting et al. (2017) and Ramli et al. (2023) and measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument contained three price items, six sensory-appeal items, three familiarity items, five health items, six convenience items and six consumption-intention items.

A pilot test involving 30 respondents was conducted to assess questionnaire clarity and internal consistency. The final questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms for one month beginning on 14 November 2025, with the survey link shared through WhatsApp, Telegram and Instagram. Participation was voluntary, and incomplete or invalid responses were excluded before analysis.

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 17. Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations summarised the respondent profile and study variables. Cronbach's alpha assessed internal consistency, with values of .70 or above considered acceptable. Pearson's correlation examined bivariate relationships, while multiple linear regression determined the unique contribution and relative strength of each food-choice motive. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Respondent Profile

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The final sample comprised 192 respondents. Most were female (82.3%), aged between 22 and 25 years (57.3%), Christian (67.2%), Bumiputera Sabah (85.4%) and residents of Sabah (89.1%). Bachelor's degree students accounted for 66.7% of the sample, while the remainder were diploma students. This profile indicates that the findings predominantly represent young, Sabah-based students and should therefore be interpreted cautiously rather than generalised to the wider UiTM student population.

Most respondents reported being familiar with Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food (91.1%). This high level of awareness may be partly explained by the composition of the sample, as the majority were Bumiputera Sabah and had their permanent residence in Sabah. However, respondents' general acknowledgement of familiarity should be distinguished from the multi-item familiarity construct used in the subsequent correlation and regression analyses, which assessed the extent to which Kadazan-Dusun food was recognised, routinely consumed and associated with previous eating experiences.

Family was the principal source of awareness of Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food, accounting for 77.1% of responses, followed by friends at 19.3%. Festivals and social media collectively represented only 3.6% of respondents' exposure. These findings highlight the importance of family and interpersonal networks in transmitting indigenous food knowledge across generations. At the same time, the limited contribution of festivals and social media suggests that organised cultural activities and digital communication played a relatively minor role in introducing the cuisine to this group.

Exposure also varied across individual food items. Tuhau was the most widely tried or recognised food (83.4%), followed by bambangan (80.3%), linopot (71.0%) and bosou (65.8%). Hinava was reported by 56.5% of respondents, whereas losun, pinasakan and butod were less frequently identified or consumed. This variation indicates that broad familiarity with Kadazan-Dusun cuisine does not necessarily correspond to equal knowledge or experience of all its dishes. Some foods appear to have greater visibility and accessibility, while others may remain more closely associated with particular households, localities or cultural occasions.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, internal consistency and Pearson correlations

Construct	M	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Price	3.91	0.77	.793	—					
2. Sensory appeal	4.29	0.67	.872	.435**	—				
3. Familiarity	4.03	1.02	.862	.316**	.632**	—			
4. Health	3.91	0.78	.928	.384**	.499**	.490**	—		
5. Convenience	3.54	0.84	.866	.523**	.473**	.393**	.373**	—	
6. Intention	4.30	0.70	.912	.439**	.637**	.602**	.507**	.327**	—

*Note. N = 192. α = Cronbach's alpha. **p < .001 (two-tailed).*

4.2 Descriptive Statistics, Reliability and Correlations

As shown in Table 1, intention recorded the highest mean (M = 4.30), followed closely by sensory appeal (M = 4.29). Familiarity (M = 4.03), price (M = 3.91) and health (M = 3.91) were also evaluated positively. Convenience had the lowest mean (M = 3.54), indicating greater uncertainty about

eISSN: 3122-6744

availability and ease of preparation. Cronbach's alpha ranged from .793 to .928, demonstrating acceptable to excellent internal consistency.

All five motives were positively and significantly correlated with intention at $p < .001$. Sensory appeal had the strongest bivariate association ($r = .637$), followed by familiarity ($r = .602$), health ($r = .507$), price ($r = .439$) and convenience ($r = .327$). The correlations among predictors ranged from .316 to .632, with no coefficient approaching a level that would by itself indicate severe redundancy.

4.3 Regression and Hypothesis Testing

The multiple regression model was statistically significant, $F(5, 186) = 40.671$, $p < .001$, and explained 52.2% of the variance in intention to consume ($R^2 = .522$; adjusted $R^2 = .509$). Four of the five hypotheses were supported. Sensory appeal was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .341$, $p < .001$), followed by familiarity ($\beta = .289$, $p < .001$), price ($\beta = .195$, $p = .002$) and health ($\beta = .161$, $p = .010$). Convenience had a small negative coefficient and was not significant ($\beta = -.110$, $p = .085$); therefore, H5 was not supported.

Table 2. Multiple regression results

Hypothesis	Relationship	B	SE	β	t	p	Decision
H1	Price → intention	.178	.057	.195	3.137	.002	Supported
H2	Sensory appeal → intention	.356	.075	.341	4.752	< .001	Supported
H3	Familiarity → intention	.199	.047	.289	4.241	< .001	Supported
H4	Health → intention	.144	.056	.161	2.596	.010	Supported
H5	Convenience → intention	−.092	.053	−.110	−1.730	.085	Not supported

Note. Dependent variable: intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food. $R = .723$; $R^2 = .522$; adjusted $R^2 = .509$; $F(5, 186) = 40.671$, $p < .001$.

4.4 Discussion

The regression model explained 52.2% of the variance in students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food, indicating that the five food-choice motives collectively provided meaningful explanatory power. Sensory appeal, familiarity, price and health had significant positive effects, whereas convenience did not make a significant unique contribution. These findings suggest that intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun food is influenced more strongly by sensory evaluation, prior familiarity, perceived value and health considerations than by convenience. However, the findings should be interpreted in relation to the sample profile, which was predominantly female, Bumiputera Sabah and resident in Sabah. This concentration may have increased respondents' prior exposure to Kadazan-Dusun cuisine and influenced the strength of the observed relationships, particularly for familiarity and sensory appeal.

Sensory appeal emerged as the strongest predictor of intention to consume, suggesting that taste, aroma, texture, appearance and presentation are central to students' evaluations of Kadazan-Dusun food. This finding is consistent with Ting et al. (2017), who identified sensory appeal as a significant predictor of intention to consume Dayak food, and Arsil et al. (2022), who found distinctive taste to be central to consumers' motivation towards Padang ethnic food. Youn (2024) similarly demonstrated that visual presentation can influence perceived risk and purchase responses towards ethnic food. In the present study, the strong effect of sensory appeal may also reflect respondents' relatively high exposure to the cuisine, as many

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were culturally and geographically close to Kadazan-Dusun food. Their evaluations of taste, aroma and texture may therefore have been informed by previous encounters rather than expectations of an entirely unfamiliar cuisine.

Familiarity was the second strongest predictor, indicating that recognition and previous exposure increased students' willingness to consume Kadazan-Dusun food. This finding differs from Ting et al. (2017), who reported no significant direct effect of familiarity on Dayak food intention, but is consistent with Ahmad et al. (2020), who found familiarity to be an important antecedent of attitude towards Pakistani ethnic food. The present sample provides a plausible explanation, as most respondents were Sabah-based, had prior familiarity with the cuisine and identified family as their main source of awareness. Familiarity may therefore reflect repeated exposure, family-based knowledge, previous consumption and confidence in recognising particular dishes rather than simple awareness. The relatively strong familiarity effect may consequently be weaker among consumers with less cultural or geographical exposure to Kadazan-Dusun cuisine.

Price also had a significant positive effect, indicating that students were more willing to consume Kadazan-Dusun food when they perceived it as affordable and offering satisfactory value for money. Ahmad et al. (2020) similarly found that price influenced attitudes towards Pakistani ethnic food, while Ting et al. (2017) reported a significant positive relationship between price and Dayak food intention despite hypothesising an inverse association. These findings suggest that price may represent perceived value and accessibility rather than merely a preference for the cheapest option. This consideration is especially relevant to university students, whose food choices may be influenced by limited discretionary budgets.

Health was the weakest of the four significant predictors, although its positive effect indicates that perceived nutritional value still contributed to intention to consume. This result supports Ting et al. (2017), who identified health as a significant determinant of Dayak food intention, and complements Ramli et al. (2023), who reported health as an important food-selection factor among Universiti Malaysia Sabah students. Respondents may associate traditional ingredients such as fish, wild vegetables, fruits and herbs with freshness and nutritional value. Nevertheless, health perceptions should be interpreted cautiously because the nutritional characteristics of Kadazan-Dusun dishes vary according to ingredients and preparation methods. Health-related promotion should therefore rely on credible, dish-specific information.

Convenience was positively correlated with intention to consume at the bivariate level but became negative and statistically non-significant when the other predictors were controlled. The negative coefficient should not be interpreted as evidence that convenience discourages consumption; rather, convenience did not explain additional variance beyond sensory appeal, familiarity, price and health. This result is consistent with Ting et al. (2017), who found no significant effect of convenience on Dayak food intention, but differs from Fam et al. (2020), who found convenience relevant among Malaysian tourists consuming Kadazan-Dusun food. The difference may reflect the present sample's greater exposure to the cuisine. Students living in Sabah may encounter Kadazan-Dusun food through family, local markets, cultural events or familiar eateries and therefore place less emphasis on accessibility than tourists.

The predominance of female respondents should also be considered when interpreting the results. Because the sample was not gender-

eISSN: 3122-6744

balanced, the estimated relationships largely reflect the evaluations of female students. However, as no gender-based subgroup or interaction analysis was conducted, the study cannot determine whether male and female students differ in their responses to sensory appeal, familiarity, price, health or convenience. Future research should employ more balanced or stratified samples to assess whether these relationships vary by gender, ethnicity or place of residence.

Overall, the findings reinforce the context-dependent nature of ethnic-food consumption. Cultural and geographical proximity can shape consumers' exposure to a cuisine and, consequently, the importance assigned to particular food-choice motives (Fam et al., 2020; Ting et al., 2019). Other studies have likewise identified different combinations of authenticity, media influence, novelty and food-related motivations across consumer groups (Cengiz & Cengiz, 2023; Ismail & Latip, 2024). In this study, the predominantly Sabah-based sample may have strengthened the influence of familiarity and sensory evaluation on intention to consume. Therefore, the relative importance of the predictors should be interpreted within the demographic and cultural composition of the sample, and replication with more diverse respondents is recommended.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined the effects of price, sensory appeal, familiarity, health and convenience on UiTM students' intention to consume Kadazan-Dusun ethnic food in Kota Kinabalu. The model explained 52.2% of the variance in intention to consume, indicating that the selected food-choice motives provided substantial explanatory power. Sensory appeal emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by familiarity, price and health, whereas convenience did not make a statistically significant unique contribution. These findings suggest that students are more likely to consume Kadazan-Dusun food when they perceive it as appetising, recognise the dishes and ingredients, consider the food reasonably priced and associate it with positive health attributes.

The study contributes theoretically by demonstrating the applicability of selected Food Choice Questionnaire dimensions to an indigenous-food context. It also highlights the importance of examining food-choice motives simultaneously rather than relying solely on bivariate relationships. Although convenience was positively correlated with intention to consume, its effect became non-significant after the other motives were controlled. This indicates that convenience did not explain additional variance beyond sensory appeal, familiarity, price and health. The findings further extend research on Bornean ethnic cuisine by showing that the relative influence of food-choice motives may differ according to consumers' geographical, cultural and experiential proximity to the cuisine. While sensory appeal was consistent with previous findings on Dayak food, the significant role of familiarity suggests that repeated exposure and local cultural experience are particularly relevant among Sabah-based students.

From a practical perspective, food operators should prioritise the consistent sensory quality of Kadazan-Dusun dishes, particularly their taste, aroma, texture and visual presentation. Menu descriptions should explain unfamiliar ingredients, preparation methods and cultural meanings in an accessible manner without compromising authenticity. Pricing strategies should emphasise value rather than low price alone. Student-sized portions, tasting platters, set meals and campus pop-up stalls may reduce the perceived financial risk of trying unfamiliar dishes while encouraging exposure to a wider range of Kadazan-Dusun

eISSN: 3122-6744

foods.

Universities, tourism organisations and food businesses can also strengthen familiarity through repeated and meaningful cultural engagement. Cooking demonstrations, food-tasting sessions, cultural storytelling and Kaamatan-related activities may be incorporated into hospitality education, student orientation programmes and campus events. As social media represented only a minor source of awareness in this study, culturally accurate short-form videos, chef demonstrations and student-generated content could be used to improve the visibility of less familiar dishes. Health-related promotion should remain evidence-based and specific to individual dishes, ingredients and preparation methods rather than presenting all traditional foods as inherently healthy.

These initiatives may also generate wider social and economic benefits. Increased exposure among younger consumers can support the intergenerational transfer of culinary knowledge, strengthen demand for indigenous ingredients and create opportunities for local food producers and small enterprises. Collaboration among universities, Kadazan-Dusun community practitioners, tourism agencies and food operators may therefore position food promotion not only as a commercial strategy but also as a means of sustaining Sabah's culinary identity and supporting inclusive local development.

The findings should nevertheless be interpreted in light of several limitations. Convenience sampling and the concentration on students from one faculty restrict the generalisability of the results. The sample was predominantly female, Bumiputera Sabah and resident in Sabah, which may have contributed to the high reported level of familiarity with Kadazan-Dusun food. In addition, the cross-sectional and self-reported design measured intention to consume rather than actual purchasing or eating behaviour. The model was also limited to five food-choice motives and did not incorporate potentially relevant factors such as perceived authenticity, attitude, subjective norms, food neophobia, cultural identity, media influence and perceived behavioural control.

Future research should employ probability or stratified sampling across faculties, universities and geographical locations to obtain a more diverse sample. Comparative studies could examine differences between indigenous and non-indigenous consumers, Sabah residents and visitors, or students and working adults. Longitudinal and behavioural studies are also needed to determine whether intention to consume translates into actual food choice. Structural equation modelling could be used to test indirect relationships through attitude, authenticity, enjoyment or cultural identity. Experimental research may further evaluate how menu descriptions, visual presentation, tasting formats, social media content and pricing strategies influence responses to familiar and unfamiliar Kadazan-Dusun dishes.

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eISSN: 3122-6744