

Overview of Hipster food culture development in Malaysia

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Abstract

Food culture evolves and subjects to alteration, modification, and changes. This is related to the types of foods, methods of cooking, ingredients, eating decorum and consumption pattern. The influences of food cultures on peoples have changed in the many parts of the world in recent decades which food currently assigned as a commodity in the modern-day diet system. Hipsters' food is one of the new food cultures in the society nowadays. Hipster food culture often shows differences in foodways and rejects mainstream consumerism. This paper reviews the determinants and foodways (the preparation and consumption) that associated with the development of hipster food culture and raising the issue in the Malaysian context and proposing the empirical investigation.

Keywords:

Hipster food, food culture, determinants, foodways, culture development

1 Introduction

Culture is widely used in social sciences, and it has brought different meanings in the different fields (Doherty, 2000). In general, culture is closely associated with expected behaviour, beliefs, values, languages and the living practices (Herbig & Dunphy, 1998). They further noted that culture is also dealing with traditional ideas, systems, commodities of actions the attached values including the religious and political system, customs, languages, tools, clothing, buildings, music and works of arts and many others including food.

According to Counihan and Van Esterik (2012), food culture is associated with what we consume, how we gather it, who prepares it and who's at the table. Food culture is constantly connected with the ethnic, belief, religion and habits which form cultural identity and it is not only dealing with one ethnic or community, but also a group of people who are footing their interest (Kittler, Sucher, & Nelms, 2012). It involved several aspects ranging from technology, science, arts, customs, traditions, philosophy, production, processing to the consumption which also contribute to significant economic growth, job opportunities, cultural development within the local and global levels (Ayoufu, Yang & Yimit, 2016). Food culture, however, is a living thing which evolves and subjected to alteration, modification and creating some new things and this is, in fact, occurring in the communities, ethnics or groups that hold the culture. This is related to the types of foods, methods of cooking, ingredients, eating decorum and consumption pattern (Zahari et al. 2011; 2008). According to Zahari et al. (2011), education, lifestyle, modernization, the changes in demand of customers' tastes, a magnificent blend of foods and eating habits cause the causation.

Based on the literature, scholars have discussed the influence and the formation of new food cultures in the community and the young generation of the modern world (McMichael, 2000; Pretty, 2002; Alexandratos, 2006; Goto, Ominami, Song, Murayama, & Wolff, 2014). Besides fusion and molecular, hipsters' food is one of the new food cultures that appears in line with the modernization process (Cronin et al., 2014; Khaled, 2012). Although there is no consensus on its definition, hipsters' food refers to the type of foods that are created by embedding the latest food trends, fashions and being outside the cultural mainstream thus creating its identity. Fancy hamburgers, sushi burritos, zucchini pasta, fancy salad, dressed-up donuts, fruit loops and freak shakes are some of the examples of hipsters' food.

Hipster foods not only deal with the ingredients, preparations and consumption but also the uniqueness in its products, branding, and authenticity that creates their own identity (Jonathan, Sherman & Laura, 2014; Maly & Varis, 2015). Jonathan, Sherman, and Laura (2014) state that this type of foods inspired by unique and wonderful characters which indicate that the food itself is a great mediator of cultural variability and according to McCracken (2010), hipster food culture often shows the differences than the mainstream consumerism.

As with other countries in the globe, Malaysia without an exception is also influenced by the hipster food culture. This is evident when hipster cafés are mushrooming all over the places, usually occupying a strategic corner of the shop lots especially in the urban areas. The hipster cafes in Malaysia are normally recognized through the creative name used in foods and drinks, the ingredients used as well as their unique presentation (Syakirah, 2015). Syakirah (2015) also mentioned that hipster food culture in Malaysia had brought a new obsession and the influence of this food culture not only contributes to their food preparation, consumption or foodways but also lifestyles. The ever-changing lifestyle of the public has encouraged them in practicing new eating habits and resulting from the current waves of food trend (Ali & Abdullah, 2012). Noraziah, Norihan and Abdullah (2008), Mat (2003) and Baweh (2004) cites that changes of the eating habits, eating place, time of eating and types of foods is parallel with social transformation in a community.

In the case of hipster food culture, youth or young generations are the recognized group that is engrossed or influenced by this new food culture. Scholars strongly argue that eating habits, the tendency of trying something new and avoiding the mainstream food significantly associated with young age, young gender and social behavior (Drewnowski, 1997; Goldberg & Strycker, 2002). The young generations tend to choose a new kind of food, and they often experience it with their friends, family, and peers (Muhammad, Karim, & Hamzah, 2015). Sobal and Bisogni (2009) and Wen, Tchong, and Ching (2015) deduce that cost of living, new experience, cultural rules and personal reasons are some of the factors that ruined the eating habits, food choices and food purchase decision among the young generations.

In line with the above notion, the influences of hipster food culture not only affect their lifestyles but also contribute to their food ways, productions, and food consumptions. This hipster food culture development raises some critical questions that is; a). to what extent the determinants affect the development of hipster food culture occurring in Malaysia? b). What are the attributes that influence the development? Despite the proliferation and explicit findings on the factors that influenced the alteration or changing of eating habits, food choices and food purchase decision, there is still unclear understanding of the determinants of hipster food that influence the development of its culture and the extent to which that determinants influence the preparation and consumption (foodways) of it among the young generation. In fact, there is no study specifically looking at the impact of hipster food culture on young Malaysian generation.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Hipster phenomenon

Historically, the term hipster first appeared during 1940's when the white people in America adopted the lifestyle of the black jazz musicians due to the fact that their way

of dressing and acting was said to be hip (Hebdige, 1995). Kantor (2011) and Lott (2009) emphasize that the term hipster used to portray the counter culture of the middle-class youths who focus on adopting and adapting and celebrating the authentic elements of fashion and avoiding the mainstream. The Hipster Handbook by Lanham (2003) states that hipster refers to someone who enjoys tasting social behaviour and embracing new experiences which categorized themselves as hip and cool.

According to Frank (1998), hipster is a new modern cultural practice by a group that created the transformations and modification of many facets which they claimed themselves differently and unique through rejecting the mainstream or authentic products (Cronin et al., 2014). The phenomenon of hipster culture has broadened all over the world, especially in the large cities (Rasmussen et al., 2012). In addition, their numbers are increasing rapidly equivalent with their influences on hipster culture which grow together with their distinctive fashion and ideology (Elley, 2014). Maly and Varis, (2015) and Lanham (2003) accentuate that hipster's culture emphasizes on style, fashion and consumption and these elements are interconnected as an indicator of personality.

2.2 Determinants that are influencing the Hipster food culture development

According to Booth and Lazear (2015), cultural adaptation involves modifications to context, structure, and practice to meet the particular needs of the community or population which is also a key element that enables humans to understand the other individuals' skills, knowledge, techniques and experiences. This process assists the individuals to familiarize and adjust the new knowledge gained which leads or influences them to practice or develop the acquisition. One of the notable findings is that the cultural adaptation process is a mechanism used in reducing uncertainty and anxiety, especially involving two different cultures or developing a new culture. With this notion, the subsequent sub-section reviews the adaptation determinants of hipster food that are products authenticity, product brand, diffusion of culture and foodways.

2.2.1 Product authenticity

Authenticity has been comprehensively characterized as something genuine, real, and honest to goodness or unique instead of fake and pretentious, which involves original and traditional or conventional elements and authenticity become enactment of true self to the person (Peterson, 1997; Franzese, 2009). However, Gubrium and Holstein (2009) contend that authenticity is not specifically referring to objects or individuals itself, but also may categorized to things or actions as routine practices of meaning-making. According to Beverland (2009), to create the authenticity, something must be passed to the ten different types of outlines: founding, family, conflict and struggle, creation, history, community, place, consumer, and product service. In the context of food, authenticity normally deals with the originality of the food products ranging from ingredients, a method of preparation for the presentation of it.

With regard to hipster food, the uniqueness of its products in term combination of ingredients, preparation styles, and presentation determine its authenticity, and it is gradually developing the culture (Maly & Varis, 2015). Schiermer (2013) contends that Hipster food seriously demands the identity and it comes with very strong authenticity. This can be achieved through cultural borders, generational holes, social refinements, and social expressions. Michael (2015) believes that being authentic will makes hipster food being unique and develop its style of identity. Thus, originality of the products can be defined through the authenticity of one's culture and value based on their novelty and uniqueness which can be measured on their preparation, presentation, and uses of the ingredient (Aziz, Zakaria & Mohammad, 2014).

2.2.2 *Branding name*

Branding plays a major role in business strategy in order to gain customer awareness, helps customer choices making and express customer personality through their purchases of the products (Jansson, 2013). Scholars state that brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, design or any combination of that used to recognize the products or services which subsequently involve in the decision-making process (Bennett, 1988; Herbig & Milewics, 1997). Within the context of this study, the hipster food brands are about an establishment, creation, group, and consumers that assemble the authentic concepts in line with the hipster social development. Brand elements like the name of the food, technique of preparation and presentation alone do not communicate status, but how these elements interact with larger social structures lead to the creation and communication of shared meanings. According to Kantor (2011), through vital associations, correspondence strategies, and sound products, the brand would make the products credible inside the hipster society. Thus, hipster food products represent their brand names through typography, iconography, minimalist style, vintage themes, sign or pictures which attract consumers to buy the products (Rasmussen et al., 2012).

2.2.3 *Diffusion of culture*

Culture diffusion by simple meaning is a social process through which elements of cultural and social activities spread from one society or social group to another, or it is a process of social change. Ideas, values, concepts, knowledge, practices, behaviors, materials, and symbols are things that are spread through the diffusion. Many people, especially among the sociologists believe that cultural diffusion is the primary way through which modern societies developed the cultures that they have today (Dell'Era & Verganti, 2010). Diffusion of culture will go through different phases, and according to Dell'Era and Verganti (2010), it begins very slowly at the initial stage because many people may not be very familiar with the products. However, in the middle phase, with the acceptance, it will grow quickly and spreads until it reaches the last stage where the diffusion will be completed and, it can be said that the similar process happened to hipster food. Dissemination of culture may be influenced by mass media effect and word-of-mouth (Shi, Chumnumpan & Fernandes, 2014). Cronin, McCarthy, and Collins

(2014) contend that hipsters use word-of-mouth to share their personal experiences with the products which are different than the mainstream ones.

Diffusion of culture can be categorized into external and internal influences. The internal influences normally come from person personal perspectives who learn to like products that are sufficiently different from familiar concepts (Sproles & Burns, 1994). Scholars suggest that the internal influences might also come from other members of the society or culture in which it is varied from the broad circles to close friends who later form a chain reaction of acceptance and adoption within a group (Miller, McIntyre & Mantrala, 1993; Midgley, 1977; Muir Wood, Moultrie & Eckert, 2008). Eckert and Stace (2000) note that great and creative advertising will encourage people to like the products and this can be categorized as external diffusion. Thus, speedy encouragement, coverage, and volume of communication can rapidly make new products style available at a different price (Sproles & Burns, 1994).

2.2.4 Foodways

Essentially, foodway is a combination of two words which are 'food' and 'ways' and dealing with the way the food is prepared, served and consumed by humans. Theorists and scholars have given vast definitions of foodways, and indeed precision in the term has not yet reached the consensus. Camp (2009) notes that foodways are a combination and intersection of food and culture, while Powell (2007) posits that foodways are an approach to identify the identity of a community, age, ethnicity, gender, locale, occupation and religion through its food culture. According to Tourigny (2017), foodways is an expression of a culture which emphasize the production, preparation, and consumption of food practices from the older generation to the younger through observation and participation, seasoned by the experiences of lifetimes. Despite this, the most acceptable definition to suit the context of this paper is that foodways are the production and consumption of food characterized by individualism, group or society (Gutierrez, 1999; Freeman, 2002; Cusak, 2003; Gold, 2007; Williams, 2007). All these scholars argue that foodways not only refers to food and cooking but also to all food-related activities, concepts, and beliefs shared by a particular group of people and which give meaning to their identity.

Foodways is continuously changing especially among the young generation. Through knowledge and reasoning, it is known that various groups have their own sets of preference in terms of food and cuisines when dealing with the ingredients, cooking methods, and types of foods and this happen to hipster food. In the context of hipster food culture, there is a limited study of adaptation on hipster foodways where previous studies paid more attention to hipster fashion, music, clothing, and their lifestyles only (Tolstad, 2006; Alfey, 2010; Bancic, 2016)

3 Methodology

3.1 Desk research

This paper will use secondary data approach based on the previous journals obtained from the Internet search engine and online databases on the related topic. From Google scholar search, there are 14,000 results related to hipster food culture. The key word used were 'hipster, 'hipster food culture, 'hipster authenticity, 'hipster branding, 'hipster foodways, and 'hipster diffusion culture. Besides that, other related journals and articles will also be referred to in collecting the information on the trend as well as critical issue in the development of new food culture.

3.2 Survey

Apart from the Internet searches, the qualitative approach will be used as one of the study methods to get the information by interviewing the respondents. Few hipster café/restaurants' manager had been chosen as interviewees to get first-hand information regarding the development of hipster food culture in Malaysia. Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur had been chosen as the data collection setting as most of the hipster restaurants are located in this area.

4 Contribution

It is worth mentioning that this study contributes to the current debate on the relevance of academic research regarding the development of hipster food culture. This contribution deals with the opportunity to prolong the body of literature in the formation of hipster food culture. In this context, previous studies on the hipster culture mostly dealt with fashion, music, lifestyles, and clothing with very little attempts to concentrate on the food culture. Thus, filling the gaps of the study will add some information to this particular topic.

This paper will create awareness to food entrepreneurs and allow them to grab the opportunity to open new food business while this development is still growing. In this sense, it is proven that the hipster food creates a huge phenomenon of gastronomic culture in Malaysia. In other words, understanding this phenomenon will aid them to look for better strategies in re-inventing, innovating or recreating new food products for the ever-changing taste among the new generation. In a nutshell, recommendations and information that will flow from this study will facilitate restaurant operators with valuable information so they can be more sensitive and effective in operation management techniques as managing customers' needs is becoming more important especially when the world economy today is highly service-oriented.

5 Conclusion

Overall, food products, diffusion of culture and foodways influence the development of hipster food culture in Malaysia. On the part of the hipster food products and foodways, it is essential to embrace the hipster food authenticity which often presents the unique combination of styles and ingredients to sustain their identity. In this sense, good strategies in branding and excellent market positioning will attract customer to experience the products thus create branding awareness of hipster food culture.

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