

Innovation in the Malaysian Traditional Food Industry: A Conceptual Paper

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, Malaysia 's sub-sector of the agricultural commodity industry, particularly the innovative and convenient traditional food products, is expanding in tandem with increasing urbanisation and women workforce, reduction in household size and current lifestyle changes respectively. There are a variety of products in the Malaysian market that have been created by incorporating innovation into traditional Malaysian foods. As such, this situation has led to intense competition and oversupply of products in the market, and it requires food companies to develop critical strategies for introducing innovations in traditional foods so as to be sustainable and more competitive. The aim of this paper is two-fold: firstly, to provide an overview of innovation development in the Malaysian traditional food industry. This paper reveals that, studies on innovation in Malaysian traditional food industry remains under-researched and scarce until to date. The present study also reveals that a clear understanding of consumer perceptions, needs, and preferences, as well as a product's quality attributes, is critical when making even minor changes to traditional foods, thus leading to successful introduction of innovation in traditional foods. Besides that, sustaining consumer continuance behaviour beyond initial purchase and consumption is crucial for innovative food product success and sustained market.

Keywords: Food Innovation, Traditional Foods, Innovation in Traditional Foods, Malaysian Traditional Food Industry.

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, the food and beverage (F&B) sector is growing significantly and is one of the most important sources of revenue for the country [1]. The value of Malaysia's food and beverage industry is projected to grow around 8% annually from 2023 to 2027, reaching US\$69.4 billion by 2027. In addition, there is also a growing global trend and demand for innovative and convenience Malaysian food products [2]. To meet the increasing global demand for food and to ensure food security in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal No. 2, technological advances and innovations have been introduced in the Malaysian food industry. A study by [3] on top-level management, owner or manager, and senior management or middle-level management of small and medium food and beverage manufacturers in Malaysia found that the most types of innovation implement were product innovation (74.4%), followed by process innovation (56.3%), marketing innovation 47.7%) and only 11.6% of them were active in organizational innovation including in health and functional products, raw materials for the food processing sector, restaurant/F&B retail chain establishment opportunities, coffee and complement products and convenience food products such as frozen food and ready to eat meal. The revenue in Malaysia's convenience food segment were approximately RM8.6 billion in 2022 [4].

Meanwhile, Malaysian food companies and public agencies have also shown a growing interest in the traditional food segment in recent decades [5]. Due to the growing universal interchange of trade, the movement of different ethnicities around the world, tourist travel options and globalization, ethnic and traditional food has become more popular and consumed in recent decades [6]. Malaysian Traditional foods consists of cooking traditions and practices prevalent in Malaysia and represents an impressive range of culinary differences resulting from Malaysia's multiethnicity. Some of the examples of well-known Malaysian Traditional food are *nasi lemak*, *char kuey tiaw*, *tosei*, *rendang*, *roti canai*, *lemang*, *nasi briyani*, *ayam percik*, *murtabak*, *tandoori*, *laksa*, *otak-otak*, *naan*, *bak kut teh*, to name a few. In order to meet the growing global demand for ethnic, national and specialty foods, Malaysian traditional foods are also no exception for development and innovation [7]. Innovations in traditional foods often relate to product attributes that extend the shelf life of the product, simplify packaging, improve the shape, size, and ingredients of the product, improve sensory quality, increase nutritional value, or new distribution channels and applications [8]. Some examples of innovative Malaysian traditional food products include ready-to-eat, pre-cooked, frozen, canned, retort-packed, microwaveable, pre-mixed, paste food products, and many more. However, introducing innovation, especially to traditional food products on the market may turn out to be challenging work for many food companies. Sustaining consumer continuance behaviour beyond initial purchase and consumption is critical for innovative food products success and sustained market survival [9]. Besides that, innovation in the traditional food segment presents additional challenges compared to other food categories due to the contradiction between the idea of traditional food and the concept of innovation, which increases the challenge of bringing satisfactory innovations to market in this food segment [10]. Therefore, this study will to provide an overview and analysed the development of innovation in the Malaysian traditional food industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Food Innovation Industry in Malaysia

According to the Ministry of International Trade and Industry [11], investment in the food industry was increased to RM24.6 billion during the Industrial Malaysian Plan 2006-2020 (IMP3) period. The Malaysian food industry ranges from small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to multinational corporations (MNCs). SMEs play a crucial role and are considered Malaysia's pillar of industrial and economic growth [12]. [13] stated that small and medium enterprises dominate the food processing industry in Malaysia, accounting for more than 98 percent of total establishments. According to the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI, 2021), financial investment in the food sectors was increased to RM24.6 billion during the Industrial Malaysian Plan 2006-2020 (IMP3) period. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry (MAFI), in line with the Ninth Malaysian Plan, promotes innovation and the adoption of advanced technologies in the food sector, leading to higher productivity as well as more efficient, sustainable, and resilient food production processes (MIDA, 2023). Through MAFI, the government agency also aimed to increase the number of innovative food products in the next four years, having increased its research and development activities in the food sector. The government agency also aimed to increase the number of innovative food products after strengthening its food-related research and development (R&D). Innovations include necessities such as extending shelf life, improving food safety, minimising waste, improving nutritional value, convenience, and palatability [14]. Revenue in the Malaysian innovative convenience food segment was approximately RM8.60 billion in 2022 [4]. The market is expected to grow at an annual rate of 6.83% (2022-2027). A study conducted by [15] on SMEs in the food and beverage industry in Malaysia found that SMEs have a high level of innovation, especially in terms of new products, product improvements, and organisational improvements. However, the majority of SMEs in Malaysia tend to focus on the innovation process, product and marketing, and not really on organisational innovation [12]. At the same time, SMEs face fierce global competition and one of the solutions is innovation to achieve better cost management, more efficiency, and improved or new products. A study by [5] on the determinants of innovation in Malaysian food processing by SMEs found that the most influential determinants of food innovation success in these SMEs are the appropriate allocation of resources. Two key business resources, time and money, were found to be the most important factors to be managed systematically and efficiently in the business field. Many Malaysian government agencies such as the Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA), the Muda Agricultural Development Authority (MADA), and the Malaysian Institute of Agriculture and Development (MARDI) provide assistance and support to Malaysian SMEs in the food processing sector to expand the use of innovations. They help approve the application of innovations in processing technologies, product development, quality control, packaging, certification, and labelling. For example, MARDI provides access to processing resources, industry expertise, and strong analytical services needed to begin and monitor commercial and technical innovation activities. One example is the food technology test bed laboratory offered by MARDI, which is equipped with the latest machinery for small-scale production of selected food products.

Innovation in Traditional Foods

Innovation is closely interwoven with the fabric of tradition, and sooner or later most traditional foods, if not all, will have gone through a phase of innovation. According to [16], the urgency of innovation in traditional foods is inevitable to keep up with the changing lifestyle of

consumers. In addition, the requirements and demand for safety and preservation, improved shelf life, practical and convenient packaging, and advanced industrialization processes in production are forcing many traditional food companies to innovate [7]. Innovation in traditional food is the adoption of new concepts into traditional foods by improving or altering traditional food's characteristics, including changing traditional quality, adding nutritional value, reducing fat content, extending shelf life, special packaging, removing unnecessary flavours, improving product presentation, using a new distribution method such as selling products through vending machines to create a new facet of traditional foods [7]. [10] added that the preservation, processing, and improvement of food safety and hygiene have been facilitated by the use of advanced technologies. This is consistent with the suggestion by [17] that it is crucial to change the criteria for traditional foods to facilitate market expansion by meeting the expectations of modern consumers who tend to buy traditional foods. This is also important for consumers who are looking for functional and practical product attributes due to today's food packaging, processing and distribution methods. The same idea is found in another study by [18], which found that it is important for traditional foods to evolve by merging with innovations to meet consumers' diverse demands for healthy foods with good taste, convenience, and safety components.

In a study by [19] it is noted that many western countries show a high acceptance of product development and innovation in traditional foods, including diversification of form and/or texture, new combinations of ingredients, and greater variety in offerings. This is consistent with the findings of [20], who found that consumers are very positive about innovations in traditional foods that offer applicable and tangible benefits without significant changes. However, [21] argue that even if consumers accept the products, the innovation may compromise the authenticity and traditional characteristics of the food. This is because the implementation of innovation in traditional foods is very challenging, as tradition and innovation are two elements that are considered to be in opposition [7], [10], [22], [23]. Therefore, the degree of acceptance of traditional foods depends very much on the product itself and the categories of innovation applied.

Innovation in Malaysian Traditional Food Industry

The Malaysian sub-sector of the agricultural commodity industry, especially the innovative and convenient traditional food products, are seen to be increasing in line with the rise in urbanisation, increase in working women, reduction in the number of households and current lifestyle changes [24]. The traditional food industry has received attention from local food businesses and authorities since 2006 [25]. The National Agriculture and Food Policy (DAN, 2011-2020) also emphasises the aspects of local food production and focuses on increasing the efficiency of the local food industry along the value chain to make the industry more productive, competitive and rival. The Malaysian National Agriculture and Food Policy (2011-2020) has outlined several directions for the national strategy, focusing on research and innovation activities that are more responsive to industry demand. In addition, the Malaysian government has recognised the importance of strengthening the economy, especially in rural areas, through the promotion and innovation of traditional food products.

Innovations in traditional Malaysian foods are inevitable for a modern society with a hectic lifestyle and little time to prepare food [5]. As [26] noted, preparing traditional Malaysian food from scratch requires a lot of time, work, and usually relatively high costs due to the use of

variety of ingredients. The availability and accessibility of a wide range of innovative processed foods such as ready-to-eat meals, meals in a box, premixes, frozen foods, convenient packaging, canned foods, help people to save costs and energy and reduce the time spent on food preparation [27]. However, study by [24] on the use of innovation and technology in traditional food among consumers in Malaysia discovered that 49% of Malaysian consumers preferred both traditional and modern food processing methods, 47.8% favoured traditional food that is produced traditionally, and only 3.1% of consumers choose modern food production methods. This is consistent with [28], who noted that consumers who have a strong sense of cultural traditions and demand more natural foods may not tolerate innovations or foods produced with advanced production methods. In addition, the negative image and controversies about modern processed food production have weakened consumer confidence, making them sceptical and uncertain about modern industrial food production [29]. [30] found that some consumers within a given culture are unwilling to accept innovation and show resistance to innovative traditional food products in the market due to slow changes in consumer tastes, cultural habits, traditions, uncertainties, or sociodemographic behaviour which are considered an essential element of cultural heritage that may hinder the success of traditional food innovations.

A study by [24] on consumers' evaluation of the level of technology used in traditional Malaysian food products found that 27.9% of Malaysian consumers agreed that the most important factor influencing the purchase decision of innovative traditional food products is the production method and formulation, safety factor (15.3%), longer shelf life of the product (13.7%), storage method (11.5%) and packaging (11.4%) (Figure 1). These purchasing factors are in line with Malaysian consumers' growing awareness of food authentication and safety assurance.

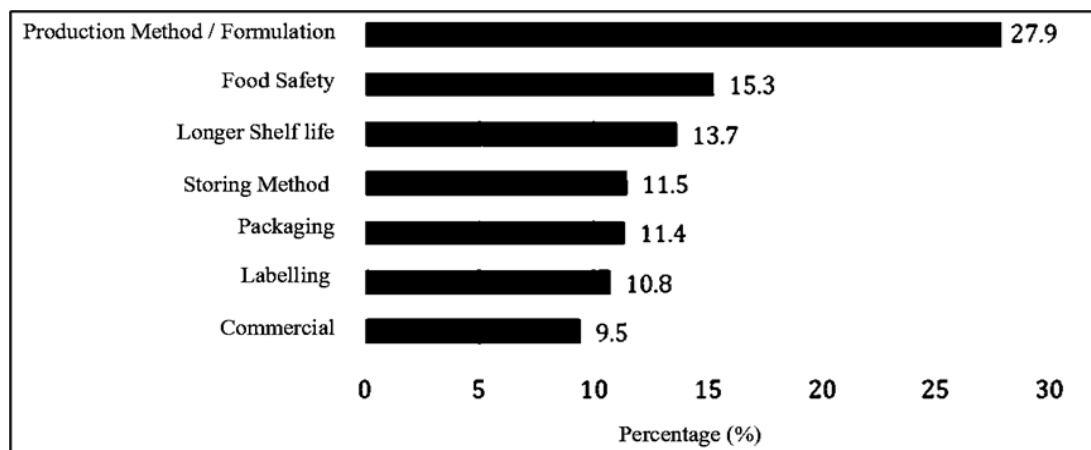


Figure 1: Factors That Influence Consumers' Purchase of Convenience Traditional Foods in Malaysia

Source: Rusli (2017)

In addition, the consumption and acceptance of innovative traditional foods is usually influenced by improved convenience attribute. For example, *ketupat*, *nasi impit*, *lemang*, *rendang*, *otak-otak*, *sambal belacan*, *nasi beriyani*, *tosei*, *roti canai*, *assam pedas*, *nasi lemak*, and *sate* are some of the most popular traditional Malaysian foods that traditionally required a long and careful preparation time, but are now readily available in various packages and only need to be heated or cooked for consumption. For example, Sri Nona Food Industries Sdn. Bhd, one

of Malaysia's successful food manufacturers, has introduced innovation in another traditional Malaysian food, *ketupat palas pulut hitam*, which is now available as a ready-to-cook food with convenient packaging. This effort was awarded gold at the 2019 Product Innovation Awards. The advantage of this product innovation is that it not only reduces preparation time and energy consumption, but also provides consistent high quality. In addition, the company also produces Nona instant *lemang*, which is packaged in high-density polyethylene (HDPE) packaging that is safe to cook at high temperatures and complies with FDA regulations. It can be said that traditional Malaysian foods are also forced to innovate in order to survive in a competitive industry and maintain or increase their market share and profitability.

Indeed, there are a variety of products in the Malaysian market that have been created by incorporating innovation into traditional Malaysian foods. Some of the popular brands in Malaysia that produce innovations in traditional foods are Adabi, Yeos, Kawan Food, Brahims', Kart's, Asian Meals, and many others. *Appendix 1* shows examples of Malaysian innovative traditional foods that are available in major retail outlets across Malaysia and also through online platforms. From the table, it can be seen that there is a plethora of innovative and convenient traditional foods available in the market. However, most of the products are very similar, such as *rendang* paste, *sambal* paste, ready-to-eat *nasi lemak*, chicken curry, *nasi impit*, *laksa* and *roti canai*. Therefore, this situation leads to strong competition and oversupply of products in the market and requires food companies to have a critical strategy for introducing innovations in traditional foods to survive in the market.

CONCLUSION

Malaysian food manufacturers are becoming more sophisticated about the categories of products they produce and how those products are sold. In addition, the Malaysian government has also shown growing interest in strengthening the rural areas economy, through the promotion and innovation of traditional food products. The Malaysian innovative and convenient traditional food products, are seen to be increasing in line with the rise in urbanisation, increase in working women, reduction in the number of households and current lifestyle changes. However, Despite the advantage of innovation in the food industry, the implementation of innovation in traditional food also produces others downside as too much modification of traditional food been done, the food authenticity will have threatened and the use of unnatural and artificial ingredients in the production of innovative food may gave impact on the communities' health. Therefore, a clear understanding of consumer perceptions, needs, and preferences, as well as a product's quality attributes, is critical when making even minor changes to traditional foods, leading to the successful introduction of innovation in traditional foods. In this sense, the critical aspects of innovation acceptance in traditional foods concern convenience, healthy, and safer products that are maintained without compromising sensory attributes, product variety, origin, convenience-oriented features, and authenticity attributes. This is in line with [31] study which mentioned that as long as there are no modifications to the sensory quality, innovations that enhance food safety, boost nutritional quality, or make it more convenient are generally received favourably. Consequently, the traditional food industry must innovate to compete with ever healthier, tastier, safer, cheaper, more convenient, more diverse, and more sustainable foods while maintaining the quality and authentic attributes of traditional foods. Numerous studies have been conducted on consumer behaviour and technology-based innovations concept within traditional food segment. However, despite various studies on innovations in traditional foods such as willingness to pay [25], [26], consumer acceptance [21],

[27], [28], packaging, convenience, quality, variety and market innovation [29], perceived traditional character [28], innovation in traditional honey [30], and consumer attitudes toward innovation in traditional foods [31], [32], but there are few studies that specifically address consumer continuance acceptance particularly within Malaysian context. Therefore, investigating Malaysian consumer intention to continue to accept innovative traditional food products is important for any food company to promote long-term product success and considered worthwhile and would be strategic to the food industry and Malaysian economy and safeguard the authenticity of traditional Malaysian food in both aspects.

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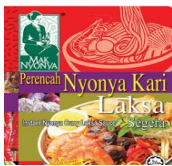
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APPENDIX 1**Examples of innovative Malaysian Traditional Food Products available in Malaysian Market**

No.	Brand	Food Name	Innovation type	Product
1.	Maggi 	Paste nasi briyani Paste ayam percik Paste ayam goreng berempah Paste nasi goreng	Paste	
2.	PA Food 	Chapati Naan Roti Paratha Steam bun mutton curry, Satay peanut, dhal Curry, mamak curry Sambal Mamak Curry	Microwaveable / Frozen/ Heat and serve	
		Penang Assam Laksa Rendang Nyonya Curry Mee rebus Mamak curry	Concentrated Paste	
3.	Tisha's Food 	Paratha Chapati Roti Puri Murtabak Roti boom Pisang goreng	Frozen	
4.	CP FOOD 	Nasi Lemak with egg / rendang Nasi goreng Kampung Tumeric Fried Chicken	Frozen Ready Meal	
		Shrimp Wonton	Cooked Instant food	
5.	Kawan Food 	Nasi Dagang Nasi Ayam Nasi Ayam Kapitan Nasi Lemak Nasi Goreng Ayam Nasi Ayam Lemak Cili Api Sambal Anchovies Dhal Curry	Ready-To-Eat meals	
		Chappati/ Prata/ Naan Samosa Spring Roll	Frozen Microwaveable	

6.	Brahim's foods 	Kuah Kari Ikan Kuah Rendang Kuah Pajeri Kuah Kari Ayam Kuah Masak Merah Kuah Asam Pedas Kuah Masak Lemak Nasi Briyani Paste Percik Sauce Tandoori Sauce Tomato Rice Paste	Ready to cook paste	
		Beef Kurma Beef/ Chicken Rendang Sambal Ikan Bilis Briyani Chicken/Lamb Rice Nasi Lemak And Sambal Tomato Rice Fried Rice	Ready to eat meals / retort pouch	
7.	Kembara 	Daging Salai Masak Lemak Kuzi Kambing Rendang Daging Nasi Lemak Nasi Tomato Nasi Goreng Kampung	Portable self-heating ready to eat meal	
8.	Flavorista 	Masak Lemak Cili Padi Masak Lemak Kicap Rendang Powder Premix Sambal Tumis Powder Premix	Powder premix Ready-to-cook	
9.	RKG FOOD 	Sambal Telur with Basmati Rice Ayam Masak Lemak Rendang Daging Kurma Ayam Ayam Masak Merah Sambal Ikan Bilis	Ready to eat pouch paste	
10.	Nona 	Ketupat Palas Lemang Ketupat Palas Durian/ Pulut Hitam	Ready to cook	

11.	Adabi 	Kuah Kacang Kari Ayam Kari Kambing Rendang Ayam Sambal Kupang Sambal Ikan Bilis Kurma Ayam Sup Tulang	Canned products/ Ready-to-eat/	 
		Sambal Tumis Mee Bandung Asam Pedas Ikan Bakar Rendang Nasi Goreng	Paste	
12.	Sharifah Food 	Nasi Briyani Gam Ayam Rendang Dendeng Sambal Sotong Sambal Ikan Bilis Nasi Goreng Kari Ayam	Ready to eat pouch product	
13.	Yeo's Food 	Kurma Daging Kurma Ayam Rendang Ayam Vindolo Ayam Ayam Masak Kicap Sambal Sotong	Canned ready-to-eat	  
		Nasi Goreng Laksa Paste Mee Udang Paste	Paste	
14.	ITP Foods 	Nasi Lemak Paste Soto Ayam Paste Penang Char Kuey Teow Sauce Penang Curry Mee Penang Assam Pedas Penang Hokkien	Paste	 
15.	Noraini's 	Cekodok Pisang Apam Balik Cekodok Manis Bingka Kuih Bakar	Instant Premix	 
16.	Sri Talamaz 	Karipap Cucur badak Keria Kasturi Samosa	Frozen	

17.	D'Kochet 	Roti Bom Popia Otak-Otak Lepat Koci Kari pap	Frozen	
18.	Mak Nyonya 	Asam Pedas Ikan Kari Ayam Rendang Ikan Kukus Portugese Nasi Ayam Nyonya Kari Laksa	Paste / Instant Sauce	
19.	Ayam brand 	Asam Pedas Rendang Chicken Curry Sambal Tumis Laksa	Concentrated Paste	
20.	Dollee Food 	Assam Laksa Curry Laksa Prawn Noodle Rendang Chicken Curry Hainanese Chicken Rice	Concentrated Paste / Bottled	
21.	Aroma Saji 	Rendang Nasi Biryani Masak Hitam Sambal Nasi Lemak Asam Pedas	Premix powder	

Source: Develop by researcher