

Factors influencing consumers' choice of retail stores for fresh meat in Malaysia

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Abstract

This research explores the preferred place for Malaysian consumers to purchase fresh meat using focus group discussions conducted in the Klang Valley. Participants indicated that their decision to purchase fresh meat from either a modern retail outlet or the traditional market was influenced by eight themes. The themes identified were the perceptions of freshness, Halal assurance, having good relationships with retailers, good quality meat, competitive price, convenience, varieties of products to choose from and retail outlets that have a good and pleasant environment for shoppers. Despite the increased number of supermarkets and hypermarkets, not only are the traditional markets able to coexist with modern retail formats, but they remain the preferred place to buy fresh meat.

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation of the food retail system has impacted on the distribution and marketing of fresh food. For most developing countries, including Malaysia, traditional retail formats are being replaced by supermarkets and hypermarkets (Goldman et al. 1999).

In many parts of Western Europe and North America, modern retail outlets now dominate the food retail market (Chen et al. 2005). An increasing number of modern retail outlets is also being observed in Latin America and Asia (Reardon et al. 2005), where increasing population and rising personal disposable income is resulting in significant shifts in the food demand. According to Reardon et al. (2003), supermarkets are perceived to be the place where more wealthy consumers choose to shop. However, modern retail formats struggle to maintain their position in the market for those consumers who do not have sufficient income. Irrespective, in the six leading Latin American countries, modern retail formats now account for 45-75% of sales. In Asia, ACNielsen (2003) reports that the supermarkets average share of overall food retail sales, (excluding fresh food) is 33% for Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, and 63% for the Republic of Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines.

In Malaysia, the structure of food retailing has changed dramatically over the last few decades. In previous years, the only retail formats were the traditional markets, grocery stores or mini-markets. Consumers purchase almost everything there including fresh fruit and vegetables, meat, chicken and fish, and other household supplies like dry food, bread, detergents, stationery and toys.

Since the 1990's, the food retailing industry in Malaysia has experienced tremendous growth. Modern retail outlets such as supermarkets and hypermarkets are dominating the local retail food trade (Shamsudin and Selamat 2005). With new retail outlets emerging, consumers are reviewing where they will do the majority of their grocery shopping. In 1995, for example, shoppers at supermarkets increased 1.5 times, while hypermarket shoppers have more than doubled (Eight Malaysia Plan 2001 – 2005).

Alongside the development of the food retail industry, the behaviour of consumers in Malaysia has also changed. Malaysian consumers are experiencing dramatic changes in their lifestyle, which impacts on the way they purchase their food. Several factors including an increase in personal disposable income, greater urbanisation, a greater awareness of food safety and food quality issues, and changes in diet are influencing the preferred place of purchase (Wong 2007). With more purchasing power, consumers have more choice as to where and when they purchase their food.

Modern retail outlets have impacted on both the traditional food retail environment and consumer behaviour in Malaysia. How consumers have responded to this complex situation is the main focus of this paper. As very little research has been undertaken to explore the food shopping behaviour of Malaysian consumers, this research project sought to identify which factors were most influential in the consumers' choice of retail outlet when purchasing fresh meat and to explore why consumers continue to shop at traditional markets when they have the opportunity to purchase from modern retail outlets.

RETAIL FORMATS IN MALAYSIA

The traditional retail formats in Malaysia consist of traditional markets and grocery stores. The traditional market, which comprises wet markets, fresh markets, night markets or farmer's markets, are popular among consumers when purchasing fresh food and are the oldest food distribution channel. The traditional market has been defined as a market with little central control or organisation, that lacks refrigeration, and does not process fresh foods into branded goods for sale (Trappey and Lai 1997). Goldman et al. (1999) described a typical wet market as an agglomeration of small vendors, where each vendor specialised in one fresh food line (meat, fish, fruit or vegetables) or in a sub line (fruit and vegetables). Traditional retailers complement each other as they offer a full assortment.

A fresh market and/or a wet market in Malaysia generally occupies one or two floors of a building that is located adjacent to a housing area where there is a high population density and high traffic flow. The ground floor is normally rented to retailers who sell fresh food or ready to eat items. The upper level is occupied by retailers who sell ready to eat items or non-food products. The night market and farmer's markets are usually a street market. Here, retailers normally set up their own stalls along the roadside.

Grocery stores or mini-markets emerged at the same time as the traditional markets. These stores are family-owned retailers that sell a limited variety of products such as fish, fruit and vegetables, bread and milk, stationary, toys and household supplies. Consumers prefer to shop at these stores given that they are located close to their house or place of work. However, consumers may limit their purchase from these stores due to the high prices and limited product lines. Furthermore, while these old retail formats still comprise around 25% of all retail sales in Malaysia (Shamsudin and Selamat 2005), the number of stores in the traditional food retail market is rapidly decreasing.

In the past, selecting their preferred retail store was not a problem for most Malaysian shoppers as there were few other stores available beside traditional retail formats. However, with the expansion of modern retail outlets, consumers can choose which retail format to visit depending on various factors that they perceive as important.

In Malaysia, supermarkets began to emerge in the early 1990's (Wong 2007). Supermarkets are defined as self service stores, which offer one stop shopping, value for money and hold a large product selection in pleasant surroundings (Cheeseman and Wilkinson 1995). Trappey and Lai (1997) add that most supermarkets have facilities to process fresh foods and use a wide range of refrigerated facilities to hold chilled and frozen product.

In the past, modern retail formats have generally been built in larger cities which serve the rich and middle class society (Reardon et al. 2003). In Malaysia, modern retail formats are mainly located in the major urban centres (Shamsudin and Selamat 2005). Most hypermarkets are located in the states where the population is higher and more affluent – Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Johor and Penang. Selangor has the highest numbers of hypermarkets (Mui et al. 2003). In 2000, there were 392 supermarkets and 22 hypermarkets around Malaysia (Table 1). Five years later, the number of supermarkets in Malaysia had increased to 550 and the number of hypermarkets had increased to 81. Most hypermarkets are foreign-owned.

Table 1: Number of modern retails in Malaysia

Indicator	2000	2005	Average Annual Growth Rate (%) 2001-2005
Shopping complexes	392	550	7.0
Shop Units ('000)	242	297	4.2
Hypermarkets	22	81	29.8
Foreign	16	68	33.6
Local	6	13	16.7

Source: Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs, Ministry of Entrepreneur and Cooperative Development and International Data Corporation

More recently, modern retail outlets have started to spread into small towns in rural areas. This is to penetrate the fresh food markets of the poor. It has been reported by Reardon et al. (2003) that in Chile, about 40% of smaller towns have supermarkets. In Thailand, supermarkets have started to spread to other provinces beside Bangkok (Chen et al. 2005). In Malaysia, two hypermarkets are located in Negeri Sembilan, where the population is lower than the developed states (Mui et al. 2003).

Foreign-owned retailers dominate the retail sector in Malaysia. In 2005, there were 81 hypermarkets in Malaysia: 83% of them were foreign owned (Malaysia, 2006). Among the foreign owned retailers are Giant (Hong Kong), Jaya Jusco (Japan), Carrefour (France), Tesco (UK) and Makro (Holland). Local retail chains include The Store, Parkson, Ngiu Kee Corporation, Ocean Capital, Mydin, Bintang, Billion and EconSave.

Convenience stores and petrol stations are new retail concepts in Malaysia. These stores represent around 11% of retail sales and are located in major urban centres and along highways to capture those consumers who prefer convenience (Pricewaterhouse Coopers 2006). In Malaysia, the main convenience store is 7-Eleven. It is estimated that there are around 120 convenience stores and 500 petrol stations. These stores offer a greater variety of products, longer hours of operation and lower prices compared to the traditional grocery stores or mini-markets.

Although modern retail formats are dominating the food retail sector, supermarkets and hypermarkets generally concentrate on processed, dry and packaged foods, rather than fresh food items. The move towards fresh food lines is generally slow. As reported by ACNielsen (2003), between 80-90% of Asian shoppers still use the wet markets regularly. According to Goldman et al. (1999), supermarkets in other Asian countries like China, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan and even Malaysia are unable to dominate fresh food lines due to serious problems in handling the fresh food category. In the traditional markets, retailers are able to fulfil consumer's specific requirements such as requesting a specific size, quantity and quality. In terms of fish and meat items, consumers want it 'live and warm'. This

situation cannot be experienced in modern retail outlets where most fish and meat items are frozen or chilled.

Despite the dominance of modern food retailers in the West, traditional retail formats are still important in Malaysia, for they continue to capture a high percentage of groceries purchased (57%), compared to only 31% by supermarkets and hypermarkets (Idris 2002). Consequently, both retail outlets are expected to coexist for some time to come.

PROCEDURES

In the absence of any substantial body of literature on the factors influencing the consumers' choice of retail store for fresh meat in Malaysia, focus group interviews were considered to be the most appropriate means of data collection. Focus groups are defined as a research method which consists of sessions focused on a theme in order to collect qualitative data (de Carlos et al. 2005). Focus groups aim to obtain information and opinions on subject matter with a group of participants simultaneously. Compared to personal interviews, focus groups allow participants to discuss, react to and to build upon the responses given by other group members. This method enables the researcher to identify subtle differences in responses and to ask follow-up questions immediately based on the responses given (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990). Focus group interviews have been widely used in exploratory research and are a popular technique in consumer research to understand consumer preferences.

For this study, a total of four focus group interviews were conducted between October and November 2007 in Kuala Lumpur to explore the preferred place to purchase fresh meat among Malaysian consumers. Table 2 provides a summary of profile of focus group participants.

Table 2: Profile of Focus Groups

	FG1	FG2	FG3	FG4
No. of participants	9	15	6	15
Gender	Female (9)	Female (15)	Female (6)	Female (14) Male (1)
Age	45-55 yrs (5) 55-64 yrs (4)	18-25 yrs (4) 26-34 yrs (11)	35-44 yrs (4) 45-55 yrs (1) 55-64 yrs (1)	18-25 yrs (1) 26-34 yrs (10) 35-44 yrs (3) 45-54 yrs (1)
Marital status	Married (8) Others (1)	Single (2) Married (13)	Married (6)	Single (2) Married (8)
Education level	PMR (1) SPM (4) STPM (4)	STPM (3) Degree (10) Postgrad (2)	PMR (1) SPM (2) STPM (2) Degree (1)	STPM (2) Degree (10) Postgrad (3)
Occupation	Work out (1) Housewife (5) Self-employed (1) Others (2)	Work out (14) Housewife (1)	Housewife (4) Others (2)	Student (1) Work out (13) Housewife (1)
Race	Malay (8) Chinese (1)	Malay (12) Chinese (1) Indian (1) Others (1)	Malay (4) Chinese (1) Indian (1)	Malay (11) Chinese (2) Indian (1) Others (1)

All focus group interviews were held in one of the seminar rooms at the Faculty of Economics and Business, National University of Malaysia (UKM), Bangi. Even though the focus group interviews were held in a seminar room, the researcher ensured that the discussion was held informally and relaxed to encourage spontaneous comments from participants. Participants received a cash payment of RM75 and a souvenir bag for their participation.

Each focus group followed an interview guide to provide direction for the discussion. The interview guide contained a list of questions under several sub topics that were developed from the research questions (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990; Lewis 2000). The interview guide contained mostly open-ended or unstructured questions. This allowed respondents to answer in their own words and from a variety of dimensions. There were also a few semi-structured questions. The information provided in the semi-structured questions was designed only as a guide to facilitate the moderator to encourage participation when dealing with any silent moment in the discussions.

The consumption of meat is important in the Malaysian diet. As a result of economic growth and increased per capita income, the demand for meat among Malaysian consumers is predicted to increase (Ishida et al. 2003; Paraguas 2006).

The target meats for this research were highly influenced by the ethnicity and cultural background of the Malaysian population. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country which consists of Malay (50.4%), Chinese (23.7%), indigenous (11%), Indian (7.1%) and others (7.8%) (The World Factbook 2009). It was reported that 60.4% are Muslims, 19.2% are Buddhist, 9.1% are Christian and 6.3% are Hindu. Chicken was chosen due to the high consumption among Malaysian consumers and the acceptability by most religions (Paraguas 2006). Since chicken is not too costly, it was reported by the FAO (cited in Tey et al. 2008) that the consumption per capita of poultry was 33.8 kg compared to per capita consumption of 5.8 kg for beef.

Beef was the other target meat for this research. Beef consumption among Malaysians is higher than mutton (Paraguas 2006; Tey et al. 2008). In 2003, the per capita consumption of mutton was low – only 0.5 kg (Tey et al. 2008). While the consumption of pork is high among the Chinese (Paraguas 2006), as the majority of Malaysians are Muslim and the consumption of pork is forbidden by religion, pork was not selected for this research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In general, participants from each focus group purchased beef and chicken from both modern retail outlets and traditional markets. However, the majority of respondents preferred to buy beef and chicken from traditional markets. Freshness and the guarantee of Halal were mentioned by all four groups when participants were asked why they selected traditional markets over modern retail outlets. Nevertheless, there were a small number of participants who chose to buy fresh meat occasionally from modern retail outlets.

A number of factors were mentioned during the focus group interviews which were then integrated under similar themes. A total of eight themes were identified as the major factors which most influenced the consumers' decision to purchase fresh meat from modern retail outlets or traditional markets (Table 3). The factors are not ranked according to importance as the purpose of this study was to identify the variables that were most often used by Malaysian consumers in their decision to purchase fresh meat for a retail store.

Table 3: Factors attracting consumers to purchase fresh and meat from modern retail outlets and traditional markets

Factors attracting consumers	Modern retail outlets	Traditional markets
Freshness	√	√
Halal guaranteed		√
Good relationship with retailers		√
Good quality		√
Competitive price	√	√
Convenience	√	√
Varieties	√	√
Good environment	√	

√ : represent responses mentioned from focus group discussions

Freshness

Freshness is often cited as one of the most influential variables impacting on the consumers' decision to purchase fresh meat (Munoz 1998; Verbeke and Viane 1999). In this study, freshness was a factor which attracted consumers to shop at both outlets. The findings of this study are similar to earlier research which indicated that consumers consider freshness alongside factors such as the reputation of the place of purchase (Cowan et al. 1999; Hsu and Chang 2002).

According to Kennedy et al. (2004), in order to judge freshness, product appearance, which comprises colour and the physical form of the meat, are utilised. How the product looks is important to judge the freshness of the meat, especially when meat has been packaged in retail outlets (Warriss 2000). At the time of purchase, consumers rely entirely on visual cues. For instance, in determining the freshness of beef, the meat was expected to have a bright red colour. One respondent commented on this issue:

'Colour indicates the freshness of the beef. Red implies that the beef is still new and the cow has just been slaughtered.'

In Malaysia, consumers prefer shopping at traditional markets for fresh meat. They emphasized the freshness of meat in traditional markets, given that fresh meat products were slaughtered early in the morning at slaughterhouses and delivered directly to retailers in various locations. The situation at traditional markets in Malaysia is similar to Taiwan where fresh meat is displayed on counters or hung on hooks (Hsu and Chang 2002). Consumers are allowed to touch the meat before deciding which cuts to buy.

The main reason why consumers seek freshness when purchasing meat is associated with food preparation. The majority of elderly participants from Focus Group 1 (FG1) and FG4 indicated that freshness was an important element in the preparation of meals at home. If the products bought were not fresh, the meal would not be tasty or healthy. A comment was made by a participant from FG4, indicating that:

'Freshness will affect the taste of your food. If the beef is fresh, you can taste the 'sweetness' of the beef in your cooking.'

This finding corresponds to other studies by Zinkhan et al (1999) and Goldman and Hino (2004). It is important to purchase fresh food to maintain good health and enjoy the taste of food. Therefore, fresh food like beef, fish, poultry and fruit are purchased at traditional

markets for these are where the requirements for freshness can best be met (Zinkhan et al. 1999). Goldman and Hino (2004) added that when consumers emphasised the use of fresh products in their food preparation, they were less likely to buy fresh produce from supermarkets.

Modern retail outlets have the advantage of offering fresh meat in refrigerated display units. Fresh meat in modern retail outlets is pre-cut and pre-packaged in sanitised conditions, then chilled and displayed on temperature controlled shelves (Hsu and Chang 2002). Younger participants from FG2 occasionally purchased beef and chicken from supermarkets as they were attracted to the clean, chilled and nicely packed meat. Furthermore, supermarkets and hypermarkets have the advantage of good retail procurement logistics, technology and inventory management (Reardon et al. 2003). In contrast, the food safety issue in traditional markets is questionable as the majority of retailers do not have the proper storage space, refrigeration and the knowledge to prevent fresh meat from becoming contaminated.

Halal guaranteed

In Malaysia, the majority of consumers are Muslims. Muslims have to follow a set of dietary laws intended to advance their well being (Bonne and Verbeke 2006). Under these special dietary laws, Muslims are prohibited from the consumption of alcohol, pork, blood and dead meat. They are only allowed to consume halal meat. Halal is an Arabic word which means permitted, allowed or lawful. When the word Halal is used in relation to food, it means permissible for consumption by Muslims. Beef, chicken or lamb has to be slaughtered according to Islamic rules to guarantee the halal status of the product.

Several issues on halal food production in Malaysia have raised concerns among Muslim consumers. For example, chicken meat and pork meat were found stored together in some supermarkets, sausages containing non-halal ingredients have been discovered and several food companies have recently been caught using expired halal certificates or fake halal logos (Che Man and Jinap 2005).

When participants were asked what they look for in their decision to purchase beef and chicken, the majority of respondents in all four focus groups indicated the importance of halal status. This finding was similar to Shafie and Othman (nd) who reported that 89% of consumers highlighted the importance of halal in their decision to purchase meat. The issue of halal and the relationship between butchers and customers is closely related. The basis of this argument arises as consumers place much value on being served by butchers of the same ethnic race and religion in the traditional market (Goldman and Hino 2005; Bonne and Verbeke 2006). According to one participant:

‘The question of Halal and where I buy my meat supplies from is important to me and my family. This is why I buy from the same butcher at the same fresh market every time I want to buy beef. I am confident on the source – where the seller gets the beef from’.

The introduction of an halal logo by the Malaysian Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) has provided a formal means of quality assurance for Muslim consumers. JAKIM is responsible for verifying and certifying every item which includes food for halal compliance. Beef and chicken which is slaughtered in Malaysia and available at modern retail outlets carries a halal logo from JAKIM, while imported beef from Australia carries a ‘Fresh Halal Aussie Beef’ logo. The halal logo attached to pre-packs of beef and chicken may provide a significant advantage compared to vendors from traditional markets that do not have halal certification.

However, this factor alone does not encourage most consumers to buy fresh meat from modern retail outlets. Consumers, especially the elderly, are less likely to buy meat from supermarkets or hypermarkets because they lack confidence (Bonne and Verbeke 2006). The majority of elderly participants from FG1 and FG3 still prefer to buy meat from their preferred butcher. A participant from FG1 commented that:

‘I will try my very best to avoid buying imported beef as I am not confident with the halal status of the meat. I wonder why imported beef does not carry halal-JAKIM labels?’

Another respondent from FG3 added:

‘I still have doubt with the halal system in our country. This is why I do not buy my fresh meat from supermarkets. I only buy my beef and chicken supplies from Muslim butchers’.

According to Shafie and Othman (nd), food products with halal logos have more meaning to consumers than other similar certificates of assurance. Nevertheless, the institutionalised quality assurance of an halal logo has only managed to capture younger consumers rather than the majority of consumers. Younger shoppers are more confident with the halal logo displayed on the packages of beef and chicken sold in modern retail outlets. Furthermore, they are strongly in favour of the halal label and the slaughtering method for the reason of convenience shopping (Bonne and Verbeke 2006). In this study, younger participants from FG2 and FG4 sometimes buy their fresh meat supplies from supermarkets and hypermarkets, especially on their way home from work. Bernues et al. (2003) agree with this argument and confirm that younger consumers were more likely to use product labels as a source of information.

Good relationship with retailers

Traditional markets constitute a place not only to purchase perishable goods, but also provide a place for meeting acquaintances. Relationships are built not only between vendors and customers, but also between buyers. For example, buyers exchange information about the quality of products or which stalls offer the best bargains. Traditional markets are perceived as a place to foster social relationships (Zinkhan et al. 1999).

Personal relationships built between retailers and consumers developed trust for both groups. Zinkhan et al. (1999) stated that the respondents who often visit the street market in Sao Paulo know each other by name and often engage in social conversation. Goldman and Hino (2004) reported a similar result as Arab Israelis prefer to buy fresh meat from a known and trusted source. This ensures customer loyalty as consumers continue to purchase from the same retailer. In this study, several respondents from FG2 and FG3 made similar statements about the importance of developing a good relationship with retailers:

‘I only buy chicken at Muslim butchers. This is to ensure that the chicken is being slaughtered according to the Islamic way. I believe that Muslim vendors practice the right way of slaughtering the chicken’.

‘I recognise very well the vendor. This is why I buy my beef supplies from her’.

Abu (2004) agrees with the importance of personal interaction between vendors and customers which eventually develops customer loyalty. Customers are more loyal to a store which offers warm and friendly service. Vendors in traditional markets often give feedback to customers who are looking for quality products. Factors such as the ability to truthfully

answer customers' questions, giving regular customers individual attention and vendors' knowledge of their product attracts customers to shop from a particular retail outlet (Dabholkar et al. 1996; Darian et al. 2001). The social environment in traditional markets provides a leisurely experience for consumers which cannot be experienced when shopping at supermarkets or hypermarkets. Furthermore, there are no channels for immediate feedback for customers who shop from modern retail outlets.

It is difficult for small retailers to compete in the market with large and powerful retailers such as supermarkets and hypermarkets. Klemz and Boshoff (2001) suggested that small retailers should compete by improving their service rather than competing on price. Vendors in traditional markets are able to offer numerous services to their consumers compared to modern retail outlets. In Taiwan, for example, a few chickens are kept alive behind counters and slaughtered for customers with special requests (Hsu and Chang 2002). Other services such as chopping, slicing, skinning, de-boning, grinding and packing are also provided by butchers in traditional markets.

Good quality

With increasing income, consumers are becoming more demanding of food quality. According to Sloan et al. (1984) and Steenkamp and Van Trijp (1989), consumers are willing to pay more to purchase the quality food they demand. With more consumers having higher education and being more practical, Farhangmehr et al. (2000) highlighted the importance of quality, followed by price when purchasing food. Previously, consumers were more concerned about low prices. Currently, consumers have shifted their focus towards quality and gaining better value for money. Mceachern and Schroder (2002) confirm that quality and taste were cited as the most important criteria in selecting fresh meat in Scotland.

The majority of participants from all focus groups recognised that there was a difference in the quality of fresh meat between both retail outlets. Most stated that the fresh meat available from traditional markets was of higher quality compared to that available from supermarkets and hypermarkets. Zinkhan et al. (1999) reported that 88% of survey respondents cited that the quality and freshness of fresh produce was the most important reason why they shopped at traditional markets. Several consumers purchased meat solely from their preferred butcher, as they perceived it to be better quality than the meat sold at supermarkets (Mceachern and Schroder 2002).

Quality means many different things to different people. For Arab Israelis, meat is of high quality when it is freshly killed, still 'warm' and not chilled or frozen (Goldman and Hino 2004). According to Zinkhan et al. (1999), Brazilian consumers determine the quality of fresh meat by touching or smelling the product. These characteristic of quality are better fulfilled in traditional markets, which leads consumers to buy their fresh meat there.

Competitive price

Competitive price was mentioned as a reason for consumers to buy their fresh meat from both outlets. In marketing, price is a powerful and convincing tool to attract consumers to purchase from a particular retail outlet. According to Pride et al (2005), price is a tool which informs consumers about the value of the product. Value ultimately brings satisfaction to the consumer.

Generally, retail outlets offering good quality products at a lower price will attract more consumers. According to Trappey and Lai (1997), offering lower prices is an important reason for consumers to shop at supermarkets. The fact that the price in traditional markets is higher motivates consumers to buy goods from hypermarkets or supermarkets (Farhangmehr

et al. 2000). Modern retail outlets are capable of offering more competitive prices for the products they stock as they have the economies of scale in procurement. Furthermore, competition between the major chains is forcing prices down. In Malaysia, Giant, Tesco and Carrefour have engaged in a price war to entice consumers to purchase from their stores. Carrefour has cut prices for about 1,200 products and Giant is reported to have sacrificed profits in order to maintain their low-price leader position in the country (Arshad et al. 2006). While price-wars may be advantageous for consumers, it does put pressure on local retailers to provide a similar price.

However, prices of fresh meat in the traditional market are not always cheaper than modern retail outlets (Farhangmehr et al. 2000; Hsu and Chang 2002). Hsu and Chang (2002) recorded the unit prices of various meat cuts from both retail outlets in Taiwan. Based on the data collected, several fresh meat products in traditional markets were sold at a higher price compared to supermarkets. For example, retailers in the traditional markets in Taiwan sold a whole chicken for \$5.80/kg compared to \$2.90/kg from supermarkets.

Nevertheless, participants who shop in the traditional markets enjoy competitive prices, for they are allowed to bargain, whereas the price in modern retail outlets is fixed. Participants mentioned that they felt satisfied with their purchases from traditional markets after gaining the product through negotiation with vendors. This cannot be experienced when shopping from modern retail outlets. Zinkhan et al. (1999) argued that the prices of fresh produce in traditional markets tended to be higher only at certain times like early morning. In order to receive further discounts or price reductions, consumers were encouraged to visit traditional markets later in the afternoon. Nevertheless, the trade-off when shopping later is not getting the best quality products

Convenience

Convenience was mentioned as one of the factors attracting consumers to shop from both outlets. Convenience was seen from the shoppers' perspective as selecting their preferred shopping outlet based on hours of operation and travel time (Kaufman 1996). According to Pride et al. (2005), convenience not only saves time, but also reduces stress, cost and other expenditures. Basically, convenience eases consumer discomfort.

Convenience has different meanings, depending on which retail outlet is chosen and to which age group the consumer belongs. The concept of convenience and location is very much related. Retail location theory states that consumers prefer to shop as close to home as possible (Kaufman 1996). According to Bell, Ho and Tang (1998), location of retail outlets indicates where consumers purchase their food. Their argument is that consumers are more likely to visit the retail store which brings the lowest total shopping cost. Mui et al. (2003) reported a significant correlation between the place of residence with the shopping premises that shoppers patronise. In Malaysia, 45% respondents stated that they were willing to spend no more than 15 minutes to travel to retail outlets. Shoppers prefer to shop at retail outlets which are nearer to their home or place of work.

In this study, participants who shopped in the traditional markets described convenience as those markets which were close to where they live. Older participants from FG1, FG2 and FG4 mentioned that they had been visiting the same local markets which were perceived to be more convenient for them. Since traditional markets seldom provide any parking place, shoppers who live nearby simply walk to the market. According to Trappey and Lai (1997), traditional markets have an older population of consumers who live nearby and are familiar with and loyal to local vendors. Goldman and Hino (2004) suggest that if the travel distance to supermarkets is greater, then the probability of shopping at traditional markets is higher.

When shopping from a modern retail outlet, convenience means anything that saves or simplifies work and brings comfort to consumers. According to Trappey and Lai (1997), younger consumers who are more occupied with work and family prefer to shop in modern retail outlets which better satisfy the needs of a faster-paced lifestyle. Convenience for them meant that the store provided facilities such as car parking, trolleys and baskets, proximity to other shops, extended trading hours, a low level of in-store crowding, good presentation of products, signage, and the desired width and depth of the product range (Geuens et al 2003). Shoppers who purchase from modern retail outlets do not always live near the supermarkets. Convenience for them meant one-stop shopping.

According to Farhangmehr et al. (2000), convenience makes consumers more practical. Since most goods are available from modern retail outlets, it is more practical to buy everything at the same time from the same place. Besides buying daily necessities, Malaysian consumers were reported to accomplish other activities such as relaxing and dining with family and friends, watching movies, bowling, visiting the hair salon and banking at modern retail premises (Mui et al 2003). Similar findings were reported in Goldman and Hino (2004). Convenience motivates Arab Israelis to shop at large supermarkets as it is perceived as a family event where all family members participate.

Variety

In the traditional markets, variety means more choice. There are various stalls that sell fresh meat and chicken, fruit and vegetables, fish, traditional cakes and several other ready-to-eat food items. Traditional markets were viewed as 'fresh food supermarkets', providing one-stop shopping for a large variety of fresh foods (Goldman et al. 1999). Zinkhan et al. (1999) reported that the majority of respondents in Sao Paulo shopped for fresh products at traditional markets because of the variety of products available. Vendors in traditional markets are regarded as product specialists, for they provide a deep selection of products from a narrow range of items. If a stall is charging too much, consumers will often visit another stall as there are plenty of alternatives to choose from.

Where consumers decide to shop is also related to the product category. When it comes to beef, consumers can choose whether to buy local beef or imported beef. In this study, the older participants from FG1 and FG3 preferred to visit the traditional markets to buy local beef. Most older participants from both groups seldom buy imported beef. As a result from this, they hardly ever visit the supermarkets or hypermarkets. In contrast, the younger participants from FG2 shop at modern retail outlets to purchase different cuts of beef and chicken. For example, one participant claimed she goes to supermarkets to buy minced chicken and beef steaks which are not available from the traditional market. Most respondents in Malaysia prefer to purchase fresh produce from supermarkets (41%) and hypermarkets (28%) (Shamsudin and Selamat 2005). The reason given were modern retail outlets have various kinds of fresh food which is always available. Conversely, the limited range of products offered by the traditional market is one reason why some consumers prefer to shop at modern retail outlets.

Modern retail outlets are capable of offering a wide variety of food and non-food items for consumers. When consumers buy their fresh meat, they can also buy fruit and vegetables, dairy, canned or packed goods, household cleaning products and other non-food items at the same time. Farhangmehr et al. (2000) confirmed that Portuguese consumers preferred to shop at modern retail outlets because of the possibility of buying everything under one roof. When asked why they shop at shopping malls, the majority of respondents in Malaysia cited the variety of shops and products as the main criteria to shop at modern retail

outlets (Mui et al. 2003). Supermarkets and hypermarkets are the preferred place for shopping in general.

Good environment

Store environment and layout may influence the consumer's choice of retail store (Baker 1990). The concept of store image is the way consumers 'see' the store in their minds (Farhangmehr et al. 2000). According to Yalch and Spangenberg (1990), the right use of colour, lighting, sound and furnishing may stimulate perceptual and emotional responses within consumers, which eventually affects their behaviour. Espinoza et al. (2004) further state that a good store atmosphere and pleasant surroundings may increase the consumers' willingness to buy.

Modern retail outlets offer a good environment for shoppers. These modern retail outlets are described as clean and comfortable; the store is air-conditioned; it's easier to buy goods with the trolley provided; and modern retail formats are a suitable place to shop and to bring the children. Although the prices of certain similar items may be relatively higher than traditional markets, consumers still shop at modern retail outlets due to comfort and good parking facilities (Abu 2004). The good environment provided by most modern retail outlets is used as a marketing tool to attract more customers.

Conversely, participants described traditional markets as crowded and the market was hot and stuffy. This was not dissimilar to how consumers in Hong Kong described traditional markets: dirty, slippery, crowded, smelly, unorganised and noisy (Goldman et al. 1999). According to Hsu and Chang (2002), the floor in most traditional markets in Taiwan is wet and dirty. Furthermore, fresh meat products may be easily contaminated as the butchers do not wash their hands between handling fresh meat and doing other tasks. In Indonesia, many consumers complain about the dirty condition of wet markets and are often robbed by pickpockets (Muharam 2001).

Despite portraying traditional markets as having a poor environment, the traditional markets continue to offer goods and services which attract loyal customers. Trappey and Lai (1997) indicate that a poor environment had less impact on shoppers coming to traditional markets. The traditional markets offered a more convenient location, a greater variety of products and superior product quality which far outweighed the inferior shopping atmosphere (Trappey and Lai 1997; Goldman et al. 1999; Hsu and Chang 2002). The strong bond between vendors and their customers also explains why consumers continue to shop at traditional markets.

CONCLUSIONS

Even though modern retail outlets are expanding, purchasing fresh meat from traditional markets is still the preferred place of purchase in Malaysia. Consumers have not abandoned traditional markets when purchasing fresh meat due to several pull factors such as having a good relationship with retailers, the meat is of good quality and Halal guaranteed, the ability to bargain on price and the ability to choose fresh meat. The findings of this research suggest that older consumers are more likely to continue to buy from the traditional markets. These findings are not dissimilar to Trappey and Lai (1997) and Zinkhan et al. (1999). Older shoppers appreciate more the relationship built between them and vendors. Even though traditional markets do not provide a pleasant environment, it creates a surrounding in which interpersonal relationships thrive and the community is brought closer together. Shoppers visit traditional markets not only to buy goods, but also to visit friends and acquaintances.

Nevertheless, Hsu and Chang (2002) indicate that grocery shoppers who purchase fresh meat from supermarkets tend to keep shopping from the same location.

Urbanisation and the increase in personal disposable income has influenced shoppers, especially the younger shoppers, to seek a place in which to shop without constraint (Hsu and Chang 2002). Younger shoppers value more the convenience factor that supermarkets and hypermarkets have to offer. According to Hsu and Chang (2002), there is a tendency for grocery shoppers to change their shopping habits and shift to modern retail outlets for meat products due to meat safety issues. This is an advantage for modern retailers as perishable products are being handled and stored in chilled and refrigerated sections. Fresh meat sold in modern retail outlets remains fresh for longer, and supermarkets and hypermarkets have the advantage of offering a more competitive price on a greater variety of products.

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