

Comfort Food as Consumer Preference in Purchasing Decisions

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Abstract - This study attempts to determine the comfort food preferences of consumers that are chosen when making selections about purchases. Whereas traditional food, which is a popular choice among consumers, will be the focus of the researcher's case study. The descriptive qualitative method was employed in this investigation. Domain analysis was the analytical approach used in this study. Simple random sampling as a data collection method. 100 residents of Jabodetabek participated in the study as participants. In order to discover more about the respondents' choices, a questionnaire is used in this study, and interviews are conducted to elicit more detailed responses. Three respondents were interviewed after the questionnaire was given to 100 respondents by the researchers. The study's findings demonstrate that the younger generation's excitement for traditional cuisine as comfort food is excellent. Price, ease of obtaining food, and the food's characteristic taste are the next factors that affect consumer preferences for comfort food while making purchasing decisions. Culinary entrepreneurs will have opportunity to establish themselves in the food and beverage industry thanks to the comfort food boom. Thus, businesses should find it intriguing to offer classic cuisine varieties that the younger generation is less familiar with as a consumer alternative. These businesspeople's indirect expression of their love for Indonesia's motherland is to make traditional food the centerpiece of their cafes and restaurants. So that people don't solely rely on comfort food from abroad.

Keywords: Comfort Food ; Traditional food ; Consumer Preferences ; Buying decision

1. Introduction

According to Wang & Wang (2020), consumption makes up the largest portion of a nation's national GDP and is a basic necessity of society. Food, clothing, and entertainment are only a few examples of the diverse items that are regarded to be consumed by the general public (Colasante & D'Adamo, 2021). Currently, retailers offer a variety of food items based on their classification. For instance, fast food, traditional foods, snacks, substantial meals, and cuisine that has been modernized to suit the times (Adeosun et al., 2022).

For many people, eating is a go-to activity that they use to temporarily lose focus about their troubles and stress (Nasathur et al. 2017). According to Pinto et al. (2020), comfort food has a soothing and pleasurable effect. Everybody has a go-to dish for when they are unhappy, stressed out, or experiencing other unpleasant emotions (Vuillier et al. 2021). Comfort food, which is currently popular, is a sugary, fatty, and unhealthy sort of meal. This behavior also became more prevalent right after the entire globe was attacked by a pandemic, which angered everyone (DeFries, 2021). Pursuant to a conduct surveys that was carried out by a trade publications for the food business in the United States, two out of every three Americans eat more comfort food to relieve mental stress (Wang et al. 2021). According to a referendum, almost half of the women and almost a quarter of the male respondents indicated they had put on weight

during COVID-19 as a result of social isolation (Karra et al. 2023).

According to Shen et al. (2020), reminiscence is another factor in the appeal of comfort food. Many people have personal recollections of particular foods, perhaps ones that are connected to happy times or their childhood (Rixon et al. 2019). Pressure (stress) is an increasingly prevalent occurrence, particularly for people who reside in large cities, assert Moraci et al. (2019). Jakarta received a total score of 7.84 in a 2017 poll by Zipjet, placing it among the top 18 most stressful cities (Ramadhiani, 2017). It wouldn't be unexpected that people utilize a variety of coping mechanisms, including eating or drinking comfort food (Soffin & Batsell, 2019). According to American Psychological Association research, 38% of adults say that when they overindulge in unhealthy eating out of stress, they regret it afterwards (Handayani, 2018). A sudden craving for certain foods or a tendency to eat more than normal but feel bad later are two symptoms of emotional eating that we can spot (Pranita, 2018).

Food is calming as well as filling (Strien et al. 2019). Comfort foods are described as foods that make one feel at ease (Finch et al. 2019). According to Souza et al. (2022), juvenile stress exposure may enhance the likelihood that an adult may experience anxiety or stress. Comfort food can help reduce this anxiety, among other things. especially if it is a childhood favorite. Everybody has a favorite comfort



meal (Kinser et al. Meatballs, instant noodles, chicken noodles, potato chips, ice cream, and other foods are acceptable to some people. the study by Guerrero-Hreins et al. (2021), eating foods high in fatty acids will have an impact on brain regions that control emotions or moods. In the words of Turner and Rogers (2019), the taste and aroma of comfort foods, particularly those with a sweet or savory flavor, can lift a person's mood. A hormone related to dopamine, a neurotransmitter linked to pleasurable sensations, is released by the body when a person eats comfort food (Oskis, 2021).

Neurotransmitters that promote happiness are released when comfort food is consumed (Bartkiene et al. 2019). The love hormone, or oxytocin, can be released by eating comfort food, especially if it has savory and salty qualities (Moss, 2021). Men and women use comfort food for different reasons. Women typically seek for comfort foods when they are feeling lonely, stressed out, or depressed. While men tend to eat only to relieve hunger (Saptorini, 2022). Currently, the general public believes that culinary goods can give connoisseurs a sense of comfort (Farrelly & Makkar, 2023). Most people refer to this dish as comfort food (Jaeger et al., 2021). In the neighborhood, this kind of food is rather typical. What people like determines how comfort foods are divided (Singh et al., 2021). Naturally, if people have discovered the comfort food they appreciate, their consumers will have an alternate option (Spence, 2021).

Price is typically a factor in consumer decision-making (Nurfauzi et al., 2023). Prior studies on a case study of home purchases by Oetarjo (2023) demonstrated that price affects buying decisions. Price is a major factor in customer purchasing decisions, according to research by Aliyas et al. (2023) using case studies of trifling products.

It is important to conserve traditional food for upcoming generations (Amin et al., 2023). The younger generation is beginning to turn away from foods that were introduced by our forefathers and are associated with health (Tarigan, 2020). This condition can be attributed to a variety of factors, such as a lack of interest in the shape, texture, or taste of the food as well as parental and familial ignorance that these traditional cuisines existed before the current popular foods appeared (Khomariah & Afdayeni, 2023). According to Aisyah (2023), there is still a lack of public comprehension regarding the significance of local knowledge in the culinary industry and the encouragement of the establishment of traditional food-serving culinary enterprises.

The background information provided above helps researchers to comprehend that food is a product with economic worth and the potential to be a lucrative venture for a large number of people. Because the younger customer generation would know almost nothing about traditional food, it is concerning that businesses have a tendency to pick

modern food over traditional food. Customers take pricing into account when analyzing their buying habits. Traditional food is stigmatized among customers as being expensive and difficult to obtain because it is uncommon.

This study attempts to identify the comfort food preferences of consumers that are considered while making selections about purchases. Whereas traditional food, which is a popular choice among consumers, will be the focus of the researcher's case study. So that information regarding customer preferences for traditional cuisine in purchase decisions will be made available as a result of this research. The novelty of the research in this study is a case study of comfort food versus traditional meals with variables for consumer choice. There hasn't been a prior research study that included simultaneous or partial correlation.

2. Research Methods

The descriptive qualitative method was implemented in this research. Pratiwi (2022) defines qualitative research as that which is descriptive in nature and frequently utilizes analysis. In order to discover more about the respondents' choices, a questionnaire is used in this study, and interviews are conducted to elicit more detailed responses. Three respondents were interviewed after the questionnaire was given to 100 respondents by the researchers. According to this theory, the researcher does the research utilizing interview techniques, departs from the data, builds upon existing theory as evidence for support, and concludes with a theory. Simple random sampling was used as the sample method. To get an overall comprehension of social objects or phenomena that are research topics, domain analysis is a procedure utilized as a data analysis method (El Syam et al. 2023).

The amount of information acquired for study provides a summary. Men and women living in Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Bekasi, and Tangerang, between the ages of 17 and 55, fulfilled the criteria for respondents in this study. Based on the researcher's and the respondent's ability to contribute, a place is selected from the demographics. In the study, questions about consumer preferences for comfort food were disseminated in the form of Google forms, involving a total of 100 respondents. Interviews with respondents will then be conducted by researchers to verify their responses.

3. Results And Discussion

There were one hundred youth respondents in this study. where participants complete a survey using a Google form that researchers have provided. Three persons, two of them were women and one a man, all between the ages of 25 and 30, were also questioned by the respondents. Respondents live in Bogor, Depok and Bekasi. Respondents in this study were final year students and private employees.

Respondents in this study stated that comfort food is consumed at least three times a week. When the researcher gives the respondent a choice of comfort food, the respondent's choices are presented in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1. Respondent's Choice of Comfort Food
Source : Processed Data (2023)

According to Picture 1, data gathered from up to 100 respondents using a Google form, as many as 40% of respondents selected nasi padang as their ideal comfort food. Then, at the same percentage, or 15% each, seblak and pempek were selected as the respondents' second-most favorite foods. Gudeg is ranked third among comfort foods, having received 14% of the vote from respondents. With 10%, ketoprak is the fourth most popular comfort food. With 3%, Serabi and Papeda are the least preferred comfort foods.

Nasi padang, as the name implies comes from the Minangkabau area, West Sumatra. The literal meaning for the phrase Padang is significant since it designates Padang, West Sumatra's capital. Many groups, notably the younger generation, have come to love cuisine that is characterized by spices and rich coconut milk served with a variety of side dishes. Connoisseurs are drawn to the gravy on some of these dishes because of its savory and spicy flavor. Right now, obtaining nasi padang is quite simple, because Padang eateries are already widely available in both large and small cities. The majority of responders chose this cuisine because it is relatively affordable.

Pempek is a cuisine that originated in Palembang, South Sumatra, and is made from processed mackerel fish. This dish must be served with *cuko* and dried shrimp in order to be considered complete. Pempek is a snack that is simple to find,

and this product has inspired a lot of modern developments. For instance, mackerel is not used in pempek with sausage, mozzarella cheese, and other pempek ingredients. The name for this kind is pempek dos. Respondents ranked seblak as the second-most comforting cuisine after pempek. Wet crackers are commonly associated with seblak, which hails from Bandung in West Java. The distinctive feature of this meal is the use of kencur spices. Noodles, rice cakes, pasta, chicken feet, sausages, meatballs, and vegetables are frequently added to seblak as variations, with the level of spice adjusted to the palate of the consumer. Seblak is presently popular because public personality Rafael Tan shared a guide on how to create his take on the dish and it was well-received. This is what distinguishes seblak and keeps its devoted connoisseurs coming back for more. Many young people enjoy the traditional meals of pempek and seblak. Connoisseurs tend to embrace these two dishes really fast. According to the findings of the respondent interviews, the earlier research by Khomariah & Afdayani (2023) is therefore inappropriate.

Gudeg is a food that comes from Yogyakarta. This meal has a sweet flavor and is characterized by young jackfruit. Gudeg cuisine is not as common as nasi padang, pempek, and seblak. In order to find the best stores with authentic cuisines outside of Yogyakarta, respondents must look for recommendations. After Gudeg, a Central Javan comfort food, ketoprak is the fourth most popular choice. Vermicelli and peanut sauce are the two foods that are appropriate for both morning and evening meals. Ketoprak is frequently available from roadside vendors for a reasonable price. Connoisseurs tend to embrace these two dishes really fast. According to the findings of the respondent interviews, the earlier research by Khomariah & Afdayani (2023) is therefore inappropriate.

The Serabi and Papeda dishes featured comfort food, which was the voters' last preference. Serabi is a native of the West Java region. Connoisseurs choose foods that can be prepared in sweet or savory variations. It is a great option for snacks for customers who don't want to buy heavy cuisine because of the small servings. Many are available, simple to locate, and reasonably priced. Maluku and Papua are known for their sago porridge dish called papeda, which is typically served with turmeric-seasoned tuna. Papeda is white, has a glue-like texture, and a tasteless flavor. Given that the preparation is still natural and that high-protein fish and a variety of seasonings are added, papeda has a high nutritional value. Papeda are typically hard to come by and are exclusively offered at establishments that specialize in Maluku and Papuan cuisine.

The price, simplicity of obtaining the food, and taste of the food themselves are all factors that respondents saw as relevant when picking comfort food as a preference. Consumers will buy items at

reasonable costs in line with the principle of demand. The ability of sellers to make price modifications that are beneficial to purchasers is crucial for consumers. The convenience of acquiring food as a factor for consumers when making purchases. Consumers can choose products readily based on price if the food is simple to find and has a competitive selling price. The expense of transportation is also more reasonable if food is likewise simple to find.

Consumers are able to request food right now via an online delivery service. When it comes to food's flavor, if customers think it tastes good on their tongues and has unique qualities not present in other dishes, they are far more likely to buy it again. It is beneficial for customers to love traditional food so that it can be maintained and passed down to future generations. Younger respondents are highly enthusiastic about the idea of recognizing traditional meals as comfort food. They see the comfort food craze as a trend that will open up business prospects for chefs in the food and beverage sector. Therefore, offering consumers the option of classic dishes that are more or less familiar to the younger generation should be a lucrative potential for businesses. According to Aisyah (2023), there is still a deficiency in the public's knowledge of traditional cuisine.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the research and the discussion above, it can be concluded that customer preferences for comfort food are impacted by the cost, the ease of acquiring food, and the characteristic taste of the food. Culinary entrepreneurs will have opportunity to establish themselves in the food and beverage industry thanks to the comfort food boom. Thus, businesses should find it intriguing to offer classic cuisine varieties that the younger generation is less familiar with as a consumer alternative. The managerial implication of this study is that business owners in the food and beverage sector should love the nation they represent more through rendering traditional food the main course in restaurants. So that people don't solely rely on comfort food from abroad. Because not all of the traditional foods that are currently available are represented in consumer choices, the research in this study has certain limitations. Therefore, you can continue this inquiry with traditional food by including a variety of meal types, or you can look into Comfort Food that has been adapted from Chinese or Western culture.

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