

## Where to Eat: Exploring Silver Consumer Restaurant Dining Choice in Malaysia

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### ABSTRACT

Eating out among older adults are becoming the norm due to its convenience and potential for social interaction. Malaysia is expected to become an aged nation whereby 14% or more of its population will be 65 years and older by 2050. Very little is known about restaurant preferences and patronage behaviours of older adults in Malaysia even though there had been numerous researches done involving this population. It is important to acknowledge this age group not just because they are living longer; but also, because they are getting bigger in size and economic power. The purpose of this study is to determine the factors influencing Malaysian older or silver consumers' restaurant dining choices. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were done with Malaysian older people ages 55 and above. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed. Atlas.ti software (version 7) was used to complement researchers' analyses of interview transcripts and develop a visual

representation of qualitative data. Major thematic categories identified by older consumers in this study included food, service, and location. Data are visually mapped and relationships between different themes are presented. This study will be beneficial in providing more insights to restaurateurs in Malaysia to better meet silver consumer needs.

*Keywords:* Dining out, food away from home, older adults, patronage behaviors, restaurant preferences

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## INTRODUCTION

Worldwide demographic changes are transforming societies in developed and developing countries. The average life expectancy at birth globally had increased to 70 years between 2010-2015 (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2013). Furthermore, one out of four people in South-East Asia will be 60 years old and older by 2050; the world population is greying or in other words, growing old. Malaysia is expected to reach the “aged nation” status by 2050 (Hamid, 2015); whereby 14% or more of the population will be 65 years and older. Reduced fertility rate, increased life expectancy and good public healthcare have all contributed to the rise of the aged population. Despite the growth, relatively few studies have been conducted on older adults from a consumer perspective in Malaysia (Ganesan et al., 2019; Ong, 2012; Ong et al., 2008; Ong & Phillips, 2007). Furthermore, the allure of this segment is expected to grow since older consumers are expected to have higher education levels, income and lifestyle in addition to substantial disposable and discretionary income.

Although ageing is often associated with diminishing functional, mental, and physical capacity, older adults are an active consumer group (Gregoire, 2003; Mak & Caldeira, 2014; Ong & Phillips, 2007). In America, this age segment has high purchasing power compared to the younger segments (Wildes et al., 2001); however, marketers are focusing more on the younger generation and are risking overlooking the

mature market segment (Gordon et al., 2002). The potential benefit that can be gained from marketing to older adult is huge not only because of the large population size but also because they are wealthy (Gordon et al., 2002; Knutson et al., 2006a).

Malaysia, like many countries in Asia are said to be “getting old before getting rich” (Hamid, 2015, p. 15). Despite this, it is wise to target this segment as they will soon be the only growing consumer segment in the future if the trend of declining birth rate and increasing life expectancy continues (Ong & Phillips, 2007). The growth of the older population is a global phenomenon that brings changes to many industries. Targeting the older people as consumer can be beneficial to marketers particularly for those involved in senior care and services like senior living, managed care, healthcare, death care, pharmacies and drug stores, travel and leisure, beauty and cosmetics, to name a few (Bank of America Merrill Lynch, 2014). Passive behaviour towards ageing is slowly disappearing especially in the growing and developing countries (Euromonitor International, 2019) because older people are becoming more self-sufficient and self-reliance than they previously were.

Researches on older adults in Malaysia mostly concern their welfare, with discussions about financial security, health care system and policy for mature adults. There is a general paucity in the literature on older adults dining out behaviour in Malaysia; even though, the third-highest monthly expenditure (expressed as a

percentage of total expenditure) of older consumers in Malaysia was on food and beverage away from home; accounting for 11.4 percent of their monthly expenditure or an average spending of RM 148.20 (Ong et al., 2008). Apart from research which explored the barriers to visit restaurants among older adults in Malaysia (Ganesan et al., 2019), the restaurant preferences and patronage behaviours of older adults in Malaysia are recondite. The multiracial and multicultural nature of the older population in Malaysia makes them unique and worthy of research. Thus, this paper aims to investigate factors influencing older adults in Malaysia to dine out. The results from this study will provide the restaurant industry with meaningful implications in better serving the silver consumer market in Malaysia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the most widely used segmentation methods for the older people is based on the chronological age (Bone, 1991); however, there are many different limits or age ranges used to group the older people. Similarly, many terms are used to describe this group of people (Kinsella & Phillips, 2005). To date, there is still a lack of consensus on the term used to identify the older populations. Table 1 shows the list of terms and age ranges utilized to organize the older population worldwide.

The stereotypes held about older adults are that they are homogenous, senile, calm, sexless, stubborn, unproductive and uncreative, having difficulty learning new skills, cranky, lonely and more religious than the younger generations which cannot be further from the reality. It is possible to enjoy ageing and among the key to ageing well is to

Table 1  
*List of terms and age limit assigned for senior citizens by researchers*

Terms	Age	Authors
Pre-elderly	50-59	Institute of Public Health (IPH; 2018)
Elderly	55 and above	Kang et al. (2013)
	60 and above	Aqlili et al. (2018), Sun and Morrison (2007)
	65 and older	Mohd et al. (2016), Sun and Morrison (2007)
	75 and above	Abrahamson et al. (2017)
Young-elderly	60-75	Nikou (2015)
Older people	56 and above	Hassan and Md Nasir (2008)
	60 and above	Annunziata et al. (2015), Nikou (2015)
	65 and above	Hwang (2015)
Older adults	55 and above	Chuan et al. (2014), Petry (2002)
Older consumer		Annunziata et al. (2015), Moschis et al. (1993)
Mature consumer	50 and above	Silvers (1997)
	55 and above	Harris and West (1995)
Younger older people	50-70	Holliday et al. (2015)
	60-64	Hwang (2015)
Senior	50 and above	Knutson et al. (2006b)
	65 and above	Fox and French (1985)

be physically and socially active; in addition to eating a healthy and well-balanced diet (Mak & Caldeira, 2014; Rodriguez, 2020). Despite the stereotypes, older people are as different from the younger generation as they are among themselves (Dychtwald, 1997; Moschis, 1992; Ong et al., 2008; Silvers, 1997). Researches have been done in various countries to study this growing market segment to further understand their restaurant dining choices (Kim et al., 2010; Moschis et al., 2003; Sun & Morrison, 2007) and dining experiences (Reynolds & Hwang, 2006; Wildes et al., 2001). Older consumers are not invisible consumers, they are ready and able to share their ideas and opinions regarding their needs and demands (Ong & Phillips, 2007). Consequently, the older person becomes the object of interest among researchers and marketers.

In Malaysia, researches on older adults tend to focus on their health status (Forsyth & Chia, 2015; Karim, 1997), financial status and economic growth (Ismail et al., 2015; Masud & Haron, 2008, 2014), and concerns for older adults (Leng et al., 2016; Poi et al., 2004; Tyng & Hamid, 2015). Few studies had focused on older adults as consumers. In a study looking into the consumption patterns of older consumers in Malaysia by Ong et al. (2008) over a decade ago, differences were found in gender, ethnicities, and age segments among the older consumers. They found that older male consumers spent significantly more on food and beverage away from home compared to older female consumers. Significant differences were observed among older

consumers from three major ethnic groups in Malaysia; the Chinese spent more on food away from home, while the Indian spent more on beverage away from home. The Malay spent significantly less than the other two ethnicities on both items. In terms of age, there were significant differences in the expenditure patterns for three product categories: beverages and tobacco, medical care and health expenses, and recreation, entertainment, education and cultural services among the three different groups: 55-64, 65-74 and 75 years or older (Ong et al., 2008). In an earlier study by Ong and Phillips (2007) found gender differences in choices of eating outlets. Older males preferred coffee shops (n=447), followed by hawker centers (n=403) and restaurants (n=358); while older females preferred restaurants (n=305), coffee shops (n=282) and hawker centers (n=263).

Apart from those studies, marketers in Malaysia have generally overlooked this age segment (Ong, 2012); it is high time for marketers to shift their focus to this generation as they will represent a larger proportion of the population in the future. Furthermore, through the Malaysian National Development Program which has been implemented since the nation's independence there has been an increase in educational attainability and income (Masud & Haron, 2014; Ong, 2012); the present Malaysian population is different from that of past generation. More and more older people are working beyond 60 years old; well past the retirement age. Higher education attainment enables more woman to participate in the workforce

thus increasing their purchasing power but reducing the time available to prepare food themselves (Jang et al., 2011). This automatically increases the demand for outside food. According to the Department of Statistics (2017), in 2016 Malaysian spent 13.4% of their monthly expenditure; which is MYR540.42 from the mean household expenditure of MYR4033; into restaurants and hotels which is an increase of 0.7% from the year 2014. It is time for the food and beverage industry in Malaysia to play a role in enabling Malaysian older adults to age healthily by providing meals and services tailored to their needs. Due to the segment's unique characteristics in addition to the ever-increasing number of the segment, and the potential for healthy ageing, it is imperative to investigate factors influencing older adult's restaurant selection criteria in Malaysia.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

A qualitative methodology, specifically face-to-face interviews using semi-structured questions were chosen as it allows in-depth exploration of the subject, flexibility to how and when the researcher can ask questions and how the interviewee can answer (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

Furthermore, the interview method was chosen as the interviewer is able to build rapport and trust with the interviewee, which was particularly important with the group of interest as they were suspicious of stranger. In fact, this study employed recruiters to identify informants for the research because

although the older consumers are very friendly and happy to share their opinion. They do this only if the researcher is introduced by a friend in common.

The informants were chosen through purposive sampling with a pre-set criteria that fit the context of the study. This type of sampling is known as judgment sampling where the numbers of informants are not fixed, and the method does not need any underlying theories. In terms of the criteria, selected informants were at least 55 years old and resided in Klang Valley; they also must have patronized restaurants and were able to make their own dining out decisions.

This study was delimited to older adults aged 55 years and older because it included those five years prior to retirement age. Additionally, Klang Valley was chosen as the area of the study because it is densely populated, has numerous public transportation and houses a diverse variety of food establishment in Malaysia ("What exactly is Klang Valley?", 2014). Nine questions were formulated for the semi-structured interviews.

1. With whom do you go to a restaurant usually?
2. How often do you visit a restaurant in a month?
3. Why do you visit a restaurant?
4. What type of restaurant do you prefer visiting?
5. Do you frequent the same restaurant all the time?
6. Tell me about the positive experiences you had when you have visited a restaurant.

7. Tell me about the disappointments that you had when you have visited a restaurant.
8. Have you stopped going to the restaurant you used to go before? Why?
9. Of all the things we've talked about, what is most important to you when it comes to choosing a restaurant?

### Data Collection and Analysis

Fifteen interviews were conducted with 14 interview sessions recorded using a digital voice recorder. One of the interview sessions was written down verbatim at the request of the informant. Interim analysis of the data were carried out, whereby the process of collecting and analysis of data were done in a cyclical iterative or nonlinear manner. The data collection stopped when there are no new themes transpired from the interview sessions.

The obtained data were transcribed verbatim and translated to English as most of the interviews were either conducted in the Malay language or Tamil language. The translation was then validated through *peer de-briefing* by members of the research team. Final data or the transcriptions were then content analysed following the Six Phases of Thematic Analysis (familiarise with data, generating initial codes, search themes, review theme, define and name themes, produce report) as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). A codebook was developed to guide in the analysis of the interview data, in which both a priori and emergent coding were identified. *Atlas.ti*

software (version 7) was used to manage and complement researcher's analyses of interview transcripts and develop a visual representation of qualitative data.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Profile of Informants

The informants age ranged between 56 – 68 years; and all of them were married. Over half of the informants were male (n=9). The informants represented the three major ethnicities in Malaysia; Malay (n=6), Chinese (n=4), and Indian (n=5). With regard to the education level, there were informants that completed primary education (n=4), secondary education (n=6) and tertiary education (n=5). Less than half of the informants were still employed (n=6) while the remaining were retired (n=8), and one was a homemaker. Among the retirees, less than half were still working (n=3).

### Themes and Quotes

Eight themes influencing older adults in Malaysia to dine out was identified in this study. Figure 1 is the network view of the factors discovered. The following section will explain each of the themes identified with comparison to findings from previous studies.

**Ageing.** In relation to food consumption, the ageing effect was found to have a greater impact than the cohort effect (Wendt & Kinsey, 2007). The ageing effect causes physiological, psychological and sociological changes in life (Gregoire, 2003). Ageing causes diet changes due



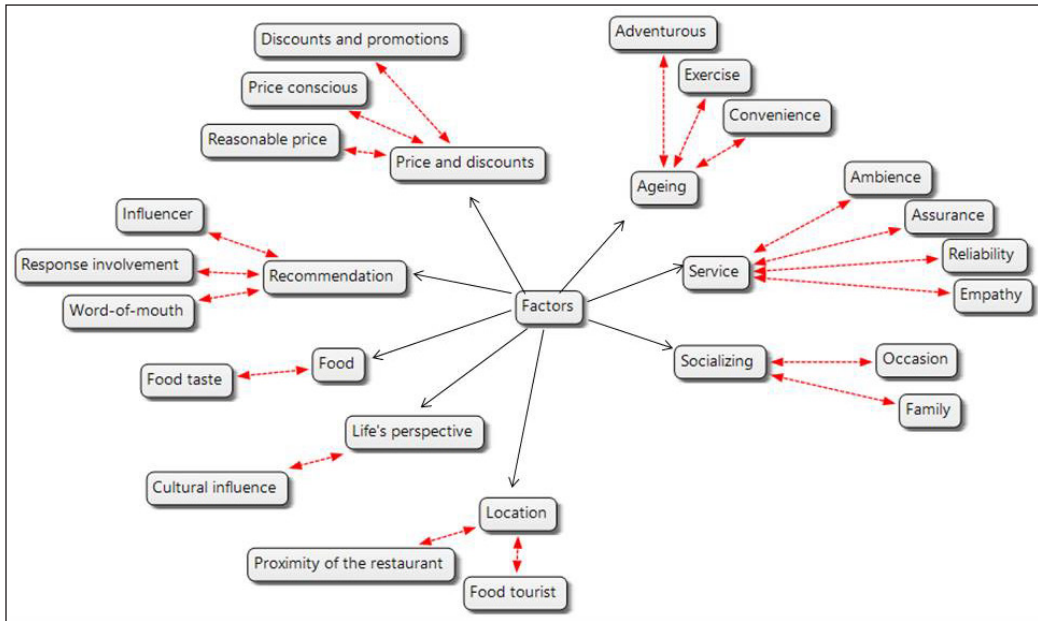


Figure 1. Visual representation of factors influencing older consumer dining out behaviour (Atlas.ti Version 7)

to factors such as food availability, new information, new cumulative experiences, and physiological changes (Wendt & Kinsey, 2007). As the body matures, physical limitation causes increasing demand for convenience of purchasing many services at a single location (Gordon et al., 2002) and also seen as a time-saving method, especially by those who have health conditions (Hu & Jasper, 2007). Older adults prefer to eat in a restaurant as part of another activity as it is more convenient for them.

*If I go to a restaurant on my own, it would be to the one in front of my house. I would go there and at the same time would go to 99 Speedmart to buy grocery items before going back to house. (Informant 2).*

According to Reynolds and Hwang (2006), the older consumer prefers not to spend their time in the kitchen; as mentioned most by female participants as they eat out to avoid the “hassle of creating a meal, from grocery shopping to cooking, to clean-up” (p. 30). Similar concern was shared by the informant in this research.

*Cooking in the house takes time. (Informant 11).*

This does not mean that older adults do not like to cook; interestingly, older adults were found to favour convenience and enjoy cooking as well (Lee, 2016). Most of the time older adults opt not to cook when they are tired, travelling or if it is the holiday.

*If I have time, I would rather buy the raw material and cook it myself. (Informant 10).*

Informants mentioned that they preferred doing exercise and other forms of physical activities rather than control their food intake as they believed that exercising could keep them healthy; this implies that they are very active food consumers.

*Rather than reducing the food, it is better to exercise. I believe we would be in good health if we start to sweat. (Informant 1).*

The multicultural characteristic of Malaysia has exposed informants to other cultural foods. Most of the informants stated that they were interested to try different types of food not consumed daily. Adventurous food consumers are people searching for uniqueness in the consumed food and will try foods that are unfamiliar and different from the norm (Lin & Wu, 2016). This contradicts with the finding that older consumers lack interest in trying newer food trends (Reynolds & Hwang, 2006). The stigma is that silver consumer was slow to exploring new food (Pederson, 1993); but, this is changing as older adults above 50 years were found to 'love to try new things' (Gordon et al., 2002). This was in line with the findings of this research as the informants mentioned different levels of willingness to try new foods. For some, it is based on their own choice; while others were influenced by their family members.

*Sometimes [I] would feel like trying [the food in] certain restaurant. [I] just saw the restaurant. [I] want to know what type of cooking, so [I] will try. Just like that. (Informant 7).*

*Usually, I will go for something different, not those that I can cook on my own such as curry. Usually will go for something different. (Informant 13).*

*I will try it. If any of my children said that it tastes nice, I would then try it. I would not go and try to eat something new on my own. (Informant 4).*

**Life's Perspective.** Mak et al. (2012) found that culture and religion were the major factors affecting consumption behaviour. Goodenough (1971) said that culture could be defined as "a shared set of characteristics, attitudes, behaviours, and values that help groups of people decide what to do and how to go about it" (as cited in Mak et al., 2012, p. 929). According to Vabø and Hansen (2014), everyone forms sensory perception almost in the same way but this perception can be affected by surrounding social and cultural contexts. Being Malaysian, all the informants have been exposed to the cultural diversity especially in term of food. This makes them unique and serves a reason why Malaysian finds it easy to go for different cultural food. Even though living in a multicultural environment, Malaysian people do not lose or forget their cultural root (Omar et al., 2014), especially pertaining to the food they consume. Regarding the frequency of consumption, older people tend to have food from their own culture more.

*We go to the Indian restaurants. I go to the Indian restaurant quite*



*often. She (informant's wife) likes having Indian breakfast. (Informant 1, Indian).*

*I frequent shop that serves 'Pantai Timur' (East Coast) food. I am from there. 'Nasi berlauk', 'nasi padang'... (Informant 5, Malay).*

The mixture of different cultures in one nation has brought rise to a variety of food options. Having different cultural food is not something out of the norm in Malaysia. There may be few restrictions though, due to religious belief held. As much as they love eating food of their own culture, the older people in Malaysia are comfortable consuming food from different cultures daily.

*Some if not most of the time I will go for Malay food. Malay food we must go once awhile. (Informant 11, Chinese).*

*I go for capati. I have been to Chinese Muslim restaurant. There is quite a lot of that type of restaurants here. If [I] feel like having Chinese style food, will go there. (Informant 13, Malay).*

Exposure to different cultural food makes Malaysian more receptive of new food, especially foods that resembles Malaysian foods. For example, Thai and Indonesian food (resembles Malay food); Taiwanese, Korean and Japanese food (resembles Chinese food); Indian and Pakistan (resembles Indian food) as is

evidence by the high number of Asian restaurants being operated in Malaysia with a market size worth RM8.0 billion in 2012 (International Euromonitor, 2013).

*The Thai restaurant I went the week before and I went again this week. (Informant 12).*

*I think Korean and Japanese are also our favourite places. (Informant 14).*

This shows that older adults in Malaysia are very well rooted in their culture and this is reflected in their eating habits; at the same time, they are willing to try different types of cuisines. These people are willing to try something new if they are familiar with it; in other word, adventurous with certain restrictions.

**Socialising.** Social factor is an essential determinant in food intake among elderly (Popper & Kroll, 2003). One of the strongest motivators for senior citizens to eat out is companionship (Knutson & Patton, 1993). Eating out is seen as an opportunity to socialise and a third of the respondent of the research had said that eating out gave them the opportunity to be with family and friends. This reasoning was used by both who were living alone or with family. Yamanaka and Almanza (2003) found that older people in their research ate out in a restaurant to socialise with friends and friendly people at their favourite restaurant. It is said that the most important reason for an older adult to dine out is so that they can

get together with friends and family (Sun & Morrison, 2007). These findings were consistent with the result of this research; almost all the informants eat out with either family members or friends but weighing more on the prior.

*No, I don't usually go to restaurant during work. I will go to the restaurant with my family. (Informant 1).*

*I prefer going with family rather than with friends. I want my family to be together, that's why I like to go out (to eat) with them. (Informant 7).*

*I would prefer gathering as a family. Sometimes the children will suggest the food at a certain place to be nice, so will go there. (Informant 13).*

*Friends ah, maybe... once in two months. Once in two months la meet up. Usually family la. (Informant 14).*

Other than that, the informants also mentioned another reason for dining out was to celebrate an occasion.

*When there is someone's birthday (in the family), we would go to a restaurant. (Informant 3).*

Previous research by Pederson (1993) found that older adults tended to dine out to celebrate special occasions while the younger adults dined out for social occasion

and convenience. When asked why they liked to go out with family members to restaurant, the informants mentioned that it was fun and joyous experience for them. Thus proving the fact that older consumer view restaurant dining experience as a way to socialise (Yamanaka & Almanza, 2003).

*When we go to a restaurant, we can sit as a family and eat. (Informant 1).*

*Sometimes with the people I (used to) work with and sometimes with the juniors that is still working there. They will sometimes ask me to join them, so I will join. With neighbours very seldom but the twice a month that I go I will go with my ex-colleagues. (Informant 6).*

*That's why is said that the ambience is important. Just to get along with ah... catch up with family members, children you know. So, chit chat with them. That's why I said the environment plays a role. Sometimes, as a family you sit there also talk about family matters to them... that kind of opportunities sometimes ah... is not present at home. (Informant 12).*

**Food.** As much as the restaurant is able to provide conducive environment for their patron to socialise, the activity of indulging is still affected by food taste. Customers do not seem to compromise on food taste even though they are looking for convenient food

(Jang et al., 2011). The taste detectability of older adults is significantly lesser than the younger generation. This altered the need for food taste to be different from other consumer segments. Ageing affects the appetite, taste and smell of a person (Popper & Kroll, 2003) and this is seen as a possibility that might influence the restaurant visiting behaviour (Pederson, 1993). Even though older people are undergoing changes related to their sense of taste, the informants stated preference to visit a restaurant that served tasty food.

*If the taste of the food matches my need, I will go there without my friends also. (Informant 5).*

*I swallow everything. As long the food is tasty. If western, I like the sauce of chicken chop. I find it delicious. For example, the black pepper sauce. If it is not spicy, I am not so much interested. (Informant 7).*

Older consumers are uncompromising towards consistent and great tasting food (Kim et al., 2010); they are willing to pay more when served with good food.

*I do not mind the price, but the food must be tasty. Sometimes when we eat, there is no taste. There will not be salt taste, spiciness could not be felt, and so it is useless. (Informant 7).*

*About the price being expensive is not a concern. As long as it is tasty.*

*No need to think about price and everything. (Informant 8).*

Ageing can cause reduced digestive ability and the reason the preference for fish increase while the preference for meat and heavy foods decreases (Whitelock & Ensaff, 2018). Older adults avoid consuming food that is hard to chew and digest; hence, older adults prefer having fish compared to meat.

*My favourite food in non-vegetarian food is fish. Fish and egg... Around four to five years I have reduced chicken intake. Before that I have been eating chicken quite a lot. It must have been four to five years. I start not to like chicken... (Informant 4).*

*But if the dishes, like for example I go out with my children as a family, let say we went for seafood. If they did not finish it, I will be the one to finish...I will usually go for 'roti', 'roti canai' or 'capati'. My favourite is 'capati' because it is non-greasy. That's it, other food I would not take. (Informant 6).*

**Service.** A small gesture from the service staff such as communicating in a polite manner and greeting customers suffices as good service quality. This gesture of extending gratitude by the marketers are appreciated by the older adults (Gordon et al., 2002).

*Aaa... let they have...what was it... ha, they have good service. They*

*will ask us in a good and sweet manner. What you would like to eat and all. By the time we want to get out, they will greet us again by saying thank you for coming and please come again. We would feel like we must go there again. (Informant 8).*

Service staff attentiveness and friendliness are influential in older adults' decision to patronize and to revisit a restaurant. The assurance-empathy dimension can be used to determine the revisit intention and word-of-mouth of older adults (Parks & Fu, 2016).

*The staffs there take good care of us and talks very nicely. That is why we normally go there. (Informant 1).*

Some informants had said that they were not afraid to venture and try new food; but they worry that they might make a mistake while ordering. This might be related to the level of education received and the medium they studied in. In a situation such as this, the role of service staff is very crucial. The staff must recognize these people and be knowledgeable about the menu so they could explain clearly to the older consumer. A knowledgeable service staff is able to increase the level of satisfaction among older adults (Wildes et al., 2001).

*I have eaten in a restaurant inside a mall only with my children. Never eaten there at least once on my own. The main reason is that I do not know how to order food there.*

*I don't even know how to say the name of the food there. Let say we go there and order something but the one that came was not the one we ordered, what can we do? We cannot do anything. (Informant 4).*

Outdoor seating is favoured by the informants due to the spacious feeling that they get when dining in an open area; the noise level is significantly lesser. However, this preference depends on the location of the establishment. Specifically, they do not like to dine outside if it is near the roadside mostly due to health reasons.

*I do not like a noisy environment. It must be quiet and open-air. Even if I go to a restaurant, I would not sit inside and dine. (Informant 1).*

*Because it would be breezy on the outside and we could enjoy the scenery while eating. (Informant 2).*

*He said that he will mostly go to Genting Highland. To him, the food offered there is good and at the same time he could enjoy the beautiful scenery of the place. (Informant 9).*

**Location.** As people age, location becomes more important as they “lose some agility, dexterity, eyesight, and speed” in doing things (Knutson, 2002); thus preferring to doing things in one go. For example, older consumer prefers if the store or restaurant that they are visiting are near the other places that they patronize or the place they

live or work (Moschis et al., 2011). Most of the informants preferred eating nearby their residential area; but some are willing to travel just to relish a certain food regardless of distance.

*Sometimes will go up to Melaka to eat. If alone means, not often. I can always go with my wife if I want but I prefer going with everyone together. Fun. No matter how far it is. (Informant 7).*

*I am quite a traveller (laughs). I can go up to Melaka. I don't mind (the distance). As long as the food is good. If there is time for us to go, will go. Will have grilled fish in Melaka. I also go to a restaurant in Klang... what is the name...ha, Muara. I always go there. Its far am I right. For dinner will go there straight from home. (Informant 13).*

*There is one where it is just roti canai but because of the gravy, mutton and everything...I will go to Bahau. Sometimes, when we pass by the place will drop by and eat there since it is delicious. But yes, sometimes I will go there if I do not have any work. Will go there in the morning. Sometimes will go up to Tanjung Karang to have seafood. (Informant 15).*

Age does not seem to slow or stop their adventurous spirit to try different types of food/restaurant and traveling beyond immediate neighbourhood to find great

food. The informants mentioned that if they had the time, they were willing to travel for food. Some of the informants had mentioned that occasionally they were willing to travel quite a distance to eat, but mostly ate in places near to their house. Based on the result of this paper, we can deduce that older adults are getting more mobile in term of their food venture.

**Price and Discounts.** Older adults do not always consider food price as a major factor to visit a restaurant because they are willing to pay more if they feel they receive good food and service. This is consistent with the study by Kim et al. (2010) that found mature consumers gave more importance to taste and consistency of the food rather the pricing; thus giving restaurant managers flexibility in terms of food pricing. In today's economy, everyone is feeling the pressure to save money. The informants do spend their money dining out occasionally as dining out can be expensive.

*When compared with other expenses, this food expense is high. The food is very costly. I would do the calculation on how much is the expenses. I would make sure my lunch expenses would be below RM10. If the expense goes more than that, I would only eat there once and would not go there again. (informant 4).*

*Now it is not cheap to eat out. Generally. Even hawker stall also is not cheap. If it is more than 20*

*(ringgit), I'll say it is too expensive for a meal. Then will see, what our budget is (at) that time. So, I think budget is the main factor that we need to consider because as a small family we are... we are cautious. (Informant 10).*

Despite having a budget for dining out, older adults are willing to pay more for good service and quality food.

*If going out with family, normally we go for quite an established restaurant. Why? Because the environment, the ambience alright. Ahh... the cleanliness of the place and ah... we don't mind the price as long as they serve healthy food la. (Informant 12).*

*I like going to Krathong and Sabai-sabai. I like there. Why? Because when we go in their premise it is clean, the service is good and the ordered food taste delicious. Even though it is a bit expensive but when we give our feedback, they are positively responsive about it. I like that. (Informant 13).*

The informants were not very keen with the idea of discounts as they questioned how much price cut the restaurant could provide. A 10% discount they felt would not make much difference on the amount they had to pay and that limiting their food option just to get the discount was not worthwhile. If the promotion was on their favourite food, they might consider it but said that it was

not necessarily a factor to influence their decision. Likewise, Tsydybey et al. (2014) found that older consumer looked for price incentives on their special brand but did not switch if no incentives were provided.

*I might consider. Depends on which item they are discounting on. If the dish is my favourite, then I will go. It is but that isn't necessarily because of that I would visit this particular outlet. But I will consider. If the discount is good and the food is good, why not. It could be a factor, right? (Informant 12).*

*No, promotions do not influence my decision. For me what is important is what I want to eat. It is because the promotion is not much usually. No as far as I know, it will not influence that much. It is because for me and my family the most important thing is the food. If I am there, I will ask for it. I won't go just because the promotion is available." (Informant 15).*

The older adults in this research prioritize quality of food and service over discounts and promotions which is in line with the result obtained by Kim et al. (2010).

**Recommendation.** Recommendation or suggestion is a form of advice given regarding particular issue or behaviour. A recommendation can either be verbal (suggested by people) or non-verbal (such as from articles, books, blog, and social



media). The reason people search for recommendations and suggestions are that they want to learn as much possible before making any purchase decision (Ahmad, 2014). Altobello et al. (2009) studied older adult's information search behaviour and found that those respondents with inability to search for information to choose the best service provider would ask for recommendation from their friends.

Word-of-mouth is a form of informal advertising that is usually spread by experienced friends, family or associates. In a study on consumer purchasing decision, 86% of respondents strongly agreed that they made a purchasing decision by consulting their family, friends and associates (Ahmad, 2014). The advice given is considered a reliable source of information because it is usually given based on experience and it comes from trusted people.

*Usually my restaurant going choices is from the suggestions of friends and children. (Informant 7).*

*We have travelled there (Sabah). Yeah, we can (referring to the travel distance). But I feel that there is nothing special about it (the fish). But people said delicious, so we said okay (to travel and taste it) because of family. So, we fly there, and we just go and eat la. (Informant 14).*

Word-of-mouth can be a liability to the marketers when mishandled because it has more impact on purchasing behaviour

than any other advertising method as it is considered to be more reliable (Ahmad, 2014). Majority of the respondents (59%) agreed that they would not try any products that they had heard bad things about.

*If someone says that they have experienced something unpleasant at the restaurant, I will think whether to go to the restaurant or not. I will not go. I could change my decision by not going to the restaurant. Yes, if other has complains about the shop, for instance they saw a fly in the food; I will not go to the restaurant. (Informant 4).*

Older adults trust in suggestions and recommendations given verbally by the people they know; however, this is not the only way for them to obtain information regarding a product or service. Older adults are showing more involvement in purchasing behaviour now and this is known as response involvement. According to Leavitt et al. (1981) response involvement refers to 'a behavioural orientation which involves information acquisition and decision processes' (as cited in Michaelidou & Dibb, 2008, p. 10). In the context of this study, the decision process refers to the decision to visit a restaurant by older adults. Older adults are said to be more susceptible to informal sources of information such as a recommendation from friends or family rather than searching for information on social media. According to Weiss (2001), this behaviour is somewhat changing as the matures nowadays are more informed and

are more active in searching for information before purchasing (as cited in Gordon et al., 2002).

Informants in this research had shown involvement in information search about a restaurant before going there. This behaviour is seen most prevalent when they are about to try a new restaurant. They gather information that they need from the internet, television program and from friends and family.

*So, we don't ah... so called out of the blue and then just pop in to one (restaurant) and then without knowing anything. So, normally we try to find out what is nice in that particular shop; what is the so called the signature dish kind of thing. Then, we try the signature dish. That's all. (Informant 10).*

*I do survey as well. Will check the internet and see where nice (food) is. I follow TV program 'Jalan-jalan Cari Makan'. If I feel it (the food portrayed in the program) is nice, will invite the family there. But now, it is seldom. Seldom because the children had all grown up. When they were small, will follow the program and if it (the food) seem nice, will bring the family there. Like the 'Jalan-jalan Cari Makan' program, I will take down the information of the place mentioned in it. Then, will try the place suggested. Will plan out the trip. (Informant 13).*

*Cupcake Kuantan...the one in the Facebook, the popular one... it is because my son is very active in surfing the net. So, when we go to Kuantan we'll look for it. I remember where we went three times for a cupcake and only the third time the shop was open. And we were able to get what we wanted to eat. (Informant 15).*

## CONCLUSION

This study identified eight factors (ageing, life's perspective, socialising, food, service, location, price and discounts, recommendation) influencing the silver consumer dining out behaviour that is useful to the food operators in targeting silver consumer in Malaysia. Both local and international food establishments can benefit from this research to form their marketing plan to target this untapped segment. Among the eight factors identified, food, service, location, price and discounts, and socialising can be coordinated by the restaurateur, and as such recommended to be used to plan strategies to attract silver consumers.

## Recommendation

In this study, good food and service are the keys to older adult's re-visit intention, and they are willing to pay more to experience it. It is recommended that service staff should pay attention to the service provided throughout the dining experience; from the moment the silver consumer enters the restaurant till they leave. They appreciate guidance when placing their order, especially

if it is their first experience at the restaurant and because of the physiological changes related to vision and hearing associated with ageing.

A foodservice establishment that is located nearby other service providers or in a shopping mall has the potential to attract silver consumers because they tend to carry out multiple activities when they go out (e.g., grocery shopping, paying bills, then dine out). Dining out is usually an activity that they enjoy with their family or friends; enabling them to focus on socialising. New restaurant outlets should consider their location in order to benefit from the silver consumer segment.

Contrary to previous research, the informants of this study were quite adventurous with their food choices with consideration to religious requirements and similarity of food to their own culture. As such, Indonesian, Thai, Korean, Japanese and Indian cuisines were among sought out foods for the informants. Restaurateurs may benefit from this by introducing special menus featuring these cuisines to entice silver consumer to their restaurant.

Paying attention to the factors discussed in the paper will be beneficial to those targeting the older generations. As mentioned, silver consumers are more likely to dine out for socialisation rather than convenience, but their choice of food would be based on their experience and health. It is also important that the restaurant takes care of its customer well as word-of-mouth seems to influence the decision of this generation.

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