FOOD CHOICE FACTORS AFFECTING MALAYSIAN GREEN FOOD CONSUMPTION

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ABSTRACT

In concurrent with the world development, the market and consumers experience the impact that changes their consumption pattern. As food is the basic need for all living creatures, wiseful choice is necessary to sustain healthy life. Nowadays, people are more aware and concerned with their food consumption and tend to opt for green food. Hence, this study was performed to identify the influence of factors on green food choice. The selection of food by consumers was based on Food Choice Questionnaire (FCQ) consisting of nine factors namely sensory appeal, natural content, health, ethical concern, weight control, convenience, familiarity, mood and price. The study was conducted on 600 adult respondents selected through simple random sampling based on areas in Klang Valley. The extent of influence from factors affecting green food choice was determined using multiple regression controlled with socioeconomic characteristic. Apart from the FCQ factors, green food knowledge and attitude were also identified their strength of influence on green food choice. Familiarity (B=.299; p=.001) and weight-control (B=-.269; p=.012) were the only FCQ factors that was found to be significantly affecting green food choice. Attitude towards green food consumption (B=.499; p=.000) and household income (B=.974; p=0.017) were also significant in influencing green food choice. More aggressive promotion on green food must take place towards healthy living.

INTRODUCTION

In concurrent with the world development, the market and consumers experience the impact that changes their consumption pattern. As food is the basic need for all living creatures, wiseful choice is necessary to sustain healthy life. Nowadays, people are more aware and concerned with their food consumption and tend to opt for green food. Green food consumption lifestyles are currently steadily increasing in all over the world. Increasing environmental awareness together with concerns about animal welfare and food safety are the main factors for consumers to purchase green foods. Thus, green foods can be defined as foods that are consumably safe, of fine quality, nutritious, concerned about animal welfare and are healthy food, and produced sustainable development principle (Liu 2003). In conjunction to this, the growing demand for green food is due to the food being considered by consumers as healthier, safer and better quality as compared to conventional produce foods. Their green buying behavior is displayed through consumption of goods and products that are recyclable, beneficial to the environment and being responsible to the environmental concern (Lee 2009). Moreover, consumers consume green foods when the consumption achieved their needs and wants for quality, availability, convenience, performance and affordability and when consumers realize its capability to assist in solving environment problems (Ottman, 1999). Green labelled food logo can be found on the food products such as Malaysian Farm Accreditation Scheme (SALM), Malaysian Aquaculture Farm Certification Scheme (SPLAM), Good Animal Husbandry Scheme (SALT) and Malaysian Organic Scheme (SOM) (Teng, Golnaz, Zainalabidin, Mad Nasir 2012).

In conjunction to that, this study was performed to identify the influence of factors on green food choice. The selection of food by consumers was based on Food Choice Questionnaire (FCQ) consisting of nine factors namely sensory appeal, natural content, health, ethical concern, weight control, convenience, familiarity, mood and price. Apart from the FCQ factors, green food knowledge and attitude were also identified their strength of influence on green food choice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on green food had focused on various factors related to green food. Among all is the knowledge factor. Available information will influence consumer knowledge and will affect their attitude (Wei & Zeng 2009). With increase in education, together with increase in green food understanding, consumers felt safe and are more responsible towards the environment (Chin 2013). The research revealed significant factors in the relation with purchasing organic food among Malaysian consumers that are knowledge and education apart from environment concerns and government support and policy. Lack of knowledge on food is the main factor contributing to health problems (Sharf, Sela, Zenther, Shoob, Shai & Zamir 2012). Lyons, Lockie and Lawrence (2001) found that consumers knew green food as natural, filtered and are not processed food compared to the normal product. The taste of green food determined its quality hence, according to the consumer views, green foods have good tastes and taste better than normal alternatives. Smith and Paladino (2010) who did a study on Australian college students found that knowledge did not have an effect on purchase intentions and behaviours of organic food. The justification is referred to the financial constraint and the limited choice among the students who either lived in college or at home with food being served at college or home.

The increase on awareness in ethical concern related to environment issues among consumers creates sustainable consumers (Soonthonsmai 2007). In general, the more significant the attitude, the more desire to display the related behaviour (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist 2005). Hence, consumers should understand their own attitude so that they are able to control their desire while shopping (Hill & Lynchehaun 2002). Consumers who are more concerned on their health and the environment displayed a positive attitude towards green food in Malaysia (Abdul Rahim 2009). There are willingness to change purchasing and consumption behavior and to pay more for products that are needed in daily life. Squires, Juric and Cornwell (2001) found that consumers having positive attitude towards the environment tend to purchase more of the green food. Furthermore, Fotopoulos and Krytalis (2003) contended that positive attitude towards green food will increase the consumer willingness to pay. However, Alwitt and Pitts (1996) found that consumers attitude towards the environment did not influence their intention to buy green food.

Regarding the sensory appeal factor, Radman (2005) found that consumers are not attracted to visual characteristics of green food as it is the minimal factor for food choice among most consumers. However, Thompsom and Kidwell (1998) mentioned that the more visual defect exists for green food, the lower the probability for consumer to purchase it. In line with that, Armin, Chin and Neda (2013) stated that the high level of the defect in green food appearance would affect consumer purchase. Thus, there is an increase of awareness among consumers regarding the damage for green food. A more specific damage make the issue even bigger. McEachern and McClean (2002) who focused on organic diary products revealed that the main factor to purchase is by improving the taste. It is important to add flavour to increase the positive perception for green food.

Lockie, Lyons, Lawrence and Mummery (2002) suggests that natural content is the main reason to purchase green food. The natural content term or natural ingredient is related to food that has not been processed yet, no additive substance and free from chemical substance. Thus, the natural content term can also give a positive impact to consumer purchasing behaviour (Zeinab & Seyedeh 2012). For health factor, the vitamin content in green food are higher than in normal food. Vitamin C content for example has a high percentage in green food to protect the body. In addition, there may be nutritional content that will help to fight cancer. Research showed that green food intake can reduced the growth of cancer in the patient body (Armin et al. 2013). Milk produced from natural technique are more valuable with high percentage of required elements by the body (Huber, Rembialkowska, Srednicka, Bügel & van de Vijver 2011). In terms of the perception on weight control factor for green food, the nutritional content of green food is different from the conventional food due to the low fat and consists of more carbohidrate (Armin et al. 2013).

Ethical concern aspects were stated by Ottoman (1992) to influence green food purchasing and justify that a purchase is made whenever it met the atttributes that consumers are expecting such as having good quality, availability, good performance and also that green food assists in solving environment problems, food security issue, animal welfare and safe to use. As found by Fraser (2001), food safety, animal protection and environment protection are three factors considered by consumers in the selection of green food. From the public view, these factors are associated with green food production (Blandford, Bureau, Fulponi & Henson 2002). The increasing demand for green foods that are healthier food, safe food, have a good quality, protects the environment and animal reflected that consumers are worried about the negative impact of life style regarding nutrition which make them turned to green food for sustainable living (Williams & Hammit 2011).

Familiarity was the only factor found to have a significant relationship with organic purchase behaviour as well as purchase intention (Smith & Paladino 2010), while health consciousness and quality were found to influence purchase intentions only. Regarding price as the influential factor for green food

consumption, consumers sees green food as more expensive compared to normal food (Lea & Worsley 2005; Radman 2005). Price is the main factor in the purchasing process. However, consumers feel that green food should not be ore expensive than normal food (Magnusson, Arvola, Hursti, Aberg and Sjoden 2001). Consumers are also more concerned with value for money to explain the high price of green food (Padel & Foster 2005). Past research did found that most consumers will buy green food if its cheaper (Lea & Worsley 2005; Radman 2005). Specifically, consumers agreed to pay more for green food even with high price (Zeinab & Seyedeh 2012). Zeng and Wei (2007) added that Chinese consumers are willing to pay five to ten percent of premium for green food, however access to information on green food is important. Though the more concern a consumer towards the environment which will lead to buy green food, high price will constraint a consumer to purchase it. Moreover, it is proved from past research that consumers are faced with the decision between purchasing green food or savings it or spend for luxurious product (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist 2005).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Self-administered questionnaires were used to obtain necessary data from 600 respondents among households in Klang Valley. Four areas were selected through random sampling namely Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Ampang and Subang Jaya. The respondents in the selected areas were approached by trained enumerators to fill-up the questionnaire in shopping complexes where green foods were sold. On average a total of 30 minutes were used by each respondent to answer the questionnaire. The duration of data collection was two months from 15th April 2014 until 14th June 2014.

Profiling of the respondents was conducted to provide respondents' insights on socio-demography, knowledge and attitude towards green food and green food consumption. Knowledge on green food having 15 items was measured using a dichotomus response of 'yes' and 'no'. Attitude towards green food was measured using ten items having Likert scales while green food consumption used eight items with a 5-scale frequency. Food choice items from food choice questionnaire (FCQ) developed by Steptoe, Pollard and Wardle (1995) consisting of nine factors namely sensory appeal, natural content, health, ethical concern, weight control, convenience, familiarity, mood and price were used as potential influential factors on green food choice.

Sensory appeal involves smell, taste and appearance while natural content is concerned with the use of additives and natural ingredients. Health factor consists of items related to nutrition leading to well-being. Ethical factor includes items that are environment concern and weight control consists of items that are related to weight concern. The factor on convenience includes items on purchase and preparation of food. Familiarity includes items concerning the importance for the person to eat accustomed diet. The mood scale contains items related to general alertness and mood, as well as to relaxation and stress control while price is focusing on value for money product. The respondent had to choose from four responses from 'least important', 'not important', 'important' and 'most important'. A multiple regression was used to identify influential factors on green food consumption. Prior to the regression, factors as independent variables were determined their significance on green food consumption using independent samples t-tests and Pearson correlations. Factors with significant differences and relationships were included in the multiple regression.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Profile of Respondents

Respondents' profile in Table 1 displays the distribution of the background. Female were about two-third of the respondents with majority of them are at the young age. Majority of the respondents were the household member and not the household head. Two-third of them were Malay, were not degree holders and were currently married. There were half of them who were from small households and working in the private sector. Majority earned a household income of less than RM4,000 ($1,400AUD) that is considered as below the mean household income for Malaysia.

TABLE 1: PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Back-ground	%
Gender	
Male	39.7
Female	60.3
Age (year)	
20-30	51.8
31-40	25.0
41-50	13.5

>50	9.7
Respondent's position in the household	
Household head	28.3
Spouse	32.2
Household member	39.5
Ethnicity	
Malay	63.7
Chinese	27.7
Indian	8.7
Household size (person)	
1-4	50.2
5-7	42.2
8-12	7.7
Education	
Primary & secondary school	26.0
Certificate-Diploma	37.2
Degree	36.7
Marital status	
Married	60.3
Single/Divorced	39.6
Job sector	
Public sector	24.8
Private sector	45.2
Businessman/self-employed	16.5
Housewife/unemployed	10.8
Retire	2.7
Job categories	
Management & professional	24.8
Technical & service	34.9
Support staff	20.8
Monthly income (RM)	
2000-2999	30.2
3000-4000	47.5
4001-9000	18.2
> 9000	4.2

Descriptives for Green Food Knowledge, Attitude, Consumption and Factors

Green Food Knowledge

Table 2 shows the 'yes' responses for green food knowledge. Respondents were required to response to fifteen statements regarding knowledge on green food with four negative statements. Two statements on 'Green food is good for health' and 'Green food is environment-friendly' had the highest number of respondents answering 'yes'. This means that most respondents knew that green food is a healthy food and environment-friendly. Most of them also knew that organic food is also known as green food, high-nutritional content compared to conventional food, high in vitamin or mineral content, no usage of insectide or herbicide and involved natural growth. However, one third of the respondents did not know that green food is concerned with animal welfare or whether green food does involved genetic modification.

It was found that two third from the respondents answered wrongly the statements on whether green food is free from genetically modified organism, whether we can determine that it is a green product based on the external characteristics of the food or whether green food consists of green coloured food. However only one third of the respondents answered wrongly for the statement on 'The growth involves chemical fertiliser'. This means that more of the respondents knew that the growth of green food does not involve chemical fertiliser compared to knowing the previous three statements.

TABLE 2. DISTRIBUTION FOR GREEN FOOD KNOWLEDGE

Please response to the following statements regarding green food...	% (N = 600)

No usage of herbicide.	80.2
Free from genetically modified organism.*	64.8
The growth involves chemical fertiliser.*	33.0
Green food is good for health.	88.2
Green food is environment-friendly.	88.2
No usage of insecticide.	81.7
Natural growth.	80.7
High in vitamin/mineral content.	82.7
Organic food is also known as green food.	87.7
Green food is produced under environmental standard, production technology and healthy standard.	86.0
Green food involved genetic modification.	66.7
We can determine whether it is a green product based on the external characteristics of the food.*	64.7
Green food has a high nutritional content compared to conventional food.	85.0
Concern about animal welfare.	66.0
Green food consists of green coloured food.*	67.3

* Negative statement

Attitude towards Green Food

Table 3 gives the mean scores for green food attitude items. There are four negative statements on attitude towards green food. All positive attitudes towards green food mean scores are slightly more than the average score. Hence, the respondents in general are displaying a slightly high positive attitude towards green food. This reflects that they tend to prefer green food as compared to conventional food. For those negative attitude statements, the mean scores for the attitude are slightly lower than the average score except for the statement that states 'Green food consumption does not help to protect the environment' and 'I am not interested in green food'. This means that the respondents think that green food does not contribute to a better environment and that they have no interest in green food. Overall, the attitude towards green food is slightly positive suggesting that the preference is slightly high.

TABLE 3. MEAN SCORE FOR GREEN FOOD ATTITUDE

Green food attitude	Mean (1-5)
Green food consumption does not help to protect the environment.*	3.77
I am not interested in green food.*	3.59
I am sure that green food have high quality.	3.80
I believe green food contain high content of nutrient.	3.86
I face difficulty in identifying green food.*	2.69
I am willing to buy green food.	3.55
I don't care to spend my income for green food.	3.42
I trust the safety of green food.	3.67
I feel that green food is expensive.*	2.44
I am confident that the price of green food is appropriate even though its expensive.	3.31

*Negative attitude

Green Food Consumption

Mean scores for green food consumption are displayed in Table 4. All the means scores for positive statements are slightly above the average score which shows that the tendency to consume green food is quite high. However, the highest score is for reading the label before buying the the green food followed by 'I suggest green food to others'. This reflects that respondents have a slightly high tendency to confirm the information regarding green food before buying it and they are confident in using green food thus they will suggest to others. However, for two negative statements on their willingness to pay more for green food, the mean score is also slightly more than 3.0 which mean that slightly more respondents tend to say that they are not willing to pay more for green food or trying to avoid buying green food.

TABLE 4. MEAN SCORE FOR GREEN FOOD CONSUMPTION

Green food consumption	Mean (1-5)
I avoid from buying green food.*	3.40
I buy green food.	3.08
I eat green food.	3.13
I am not willing to pay more for green food.*	3.20
I suggest green food to others.	3.16
I search for green food information.	3.06
I buy green food even though it is expensive.	3.12
I read the label before buying green food.	3.43

Negative statement

Food Choice Factors

The distribution for food choice factors are displayed in Table 5. It shows that most of the respondents' stated that health is the most important factor for food choice followed by weight-control. This means that they are more concerned on the effect of green food on their health and on their weight-control. Meanwhile familiarity, mood and ethical concern are among the least important food choice factors as stated by the respondents. The food choices do not depend much on familiarity of the green food, the effect of green food on their mood or whether they are concerned with ethics. Other factors such as convenience, natural content, sensory appeal and price are among factors that are considered moderately by the respondents in making food choices.

TABLE 5. DISTRIBUTION FOR FOOD CHOICE FACTORS

Food Choice Factor	Not Important %	Important %
Health (mean=21.1317; SD=3.28466)		
Contains a lot of vitamins and minerals	7.0	93.0
Keeps me healthy	5.5	94.5
Is nutritious	6.0	94.0
Is high in protein	7.0	93.0
Is good for my skin/teeth/hair/nails etc	7.2	92.8
Is high in fibre and roughage	4.7	95.3
Mood (mean=17.8317; SD=4.73223)		
Helps me cope with stress	31.2	68.8
Helps me to cope with life	25.7	74.3
Helps me relax	24.0	76.0
Keeps me awake/alert	26.3	73.7
Cheers me up	25.5	74.5

Makes me feel good	25.8	74.2
Convenience (mean=15.8250; SD=3.36252)		
Is easy to prepare	18.5	81.5
Can be cooked very simply	17.5	82.5
Takes no time to prepare	15.9	84.1
Can be bought in shops close to where I live or work	17.5	82.5
Is easily available in shops and supermarkets	19.7	80.1
Sensory Appeal (mean=12.4433;SD=2.49744)		
Smells nice	24.5	75.5
Looks nice	18.2	81.8
Has a pleasant texture	16.7	83.3
Tastes good	11.9	78.1
Natural Content (mean=10.1517; SD=1.91261)		
Contains no additives	15.0	85.0
Contains natural ingredients	9.7	81.3
Contains no artificial ingredients	10.1	89.9
Price (mean=9.2650; SD=2.32029)		
Is not expensive	18.9	81.1
Is cheap	23.7	76.3
Is good value for money	22.8	77.2
Weight Control (mean=10.1850; SD=2.04558)		
Is low in calories	9.6	90.4
Helps me control my weight	9.9	90.1
Is low in fat	10.0	90.0
Familiarity (mean=8.5400; SD=2.33255)		
Is what I usually eat	29.8	70.2
Is familiar	33.8	66.2
Is like the food I ate when I was a child	32.0	68.0
Ethical Concern (mean=9.03832; SD=.12078)		
Comes from countries I approve of politically	19.5	79.5
Has the country of origin clearly marked	36.3	63.7
Is packaged in an environmentally friendly way	20.8	79.2

Differences in

Green Food Consumption Based on Socioeconomic Characteristics

The mean scores for Green Food Consumption based on socioeconomic characteristics are presented in Table 6. Only household monthly income was found to be significantly differentiating green food consumption. Those earning higher household income consumed more green food as compared to the lower household income. In terms of consuming green food, the independent t-test showed that young and old, male and female, married and not married, possessed low and high education displayed the same level of consumption.

**TABLE 6. DIFFERENCES IN GREEN FOOD CONSUMPTION BASED ON SOCIOECONOMIC
CHARACTERISTICS**

Socioeconomic Characteristics	Green Food Consumption	t (p)

	Mean		
Age (years)			
19 to 39	25.3492	-1.850	
40 to 59	26.3237	(.066)	
Gender			
Male	27.6429	-1.352	
Female	28.2624	(.177)	
Marital status			
Single	25.7403	1.010	
Married	25.3235	(.313)	
Education			
Certificate	27.7763	-1.400	
Degree	28.4292	(.162)	
Monthly income			
< RM4,000 (AUS1,400)	27.5258	-3.857*	* Significant at p ≤ 0.05
≥ RM4,000 (AUS1,400)	29.7239	(.000)	** Significant at p ≤ 0.01

Correlations of Factors with Green Food Consumption

The positive significant correlations of factors with green food consumption are displayed in Table 7. Green food knowledge and attitude, and the nine factors of FCQ were significantly related to green food consumption. In terms of the strength of correlation, attitude towards green food has the strongest relation with green food consumption ($r = 0.552$; $p = 0.000$) with a moderate strength followed by mood ($r = 0.209$; $p = 0.000$) having a weak relationship with green food consumption. The weakest relationship is between weight-control and green food consumption ($r = 0.090$; $p = 0.027$). With a positive relationship, the higher the factor the higher score will be for green food consumption, hence a positive attitude towards green food and a positive mood will result in consuming more the green food. That goes the same for green food knowledge and other food choice factors.

TABLE 7. CORRELATIONS OF FACTORS WITH GREEN FOOD CONSUMPTION

	r	p
Green food knowledge	.147	.000
Green food attitude	.552	.000
Sensory appeal	.159	.000
Natural content	.155	.000
Health	.168	.000
Ethical concern	.150	.000
Weight control	.090	.027
Convenience	.157	.000
Familiarity	.197	.000
Mood	.209	.000
Price	.120	.003

 * Significant at p ≤ 0.05
** Significant at p ≤ 0.01

Factors Influencing Green Food Consumption

Table 8 presents the results of the multiple regression performed to identify influential factors affecting green food consumption. Nine factors in Food Choice Questionnaire were included in the regression apart from income, green food knowledge and attitude towards green food. Both models were valid having significant F values with an explained variance of 33.9 percent for green food consumption in the final model.

The results in Model 1 showed that knowledge on green food significantly and positively influence consumption of green food controlled by income. Respondents who knew much about green food tend to consume green food however when attitude towards green food and the factors from FCQ were included in Model 2, the influence of green food knowledge diminished. Green food knowledge was no more a significant factor in determining the consumption. Attitude towards green food ($t = 14.824$**; $p = .0001$) was found to be highly significant in influencing the outcome of consuming green food controlling the effects from income and knowledge. Positive attitude towards green food will increase the tendency to consume green food. Only

familiarity (t = 3.397**; p = .001) and weight-control (t = -2.508*; p = .012) were found as significant factors in ininfluencing green food consumption. However weight-control was found to be negatively influencing the output. It can be explained that respondents who were concerned over their weight management had less tendency to consume green food. This may be due to the perception of the eating healthy food would increase their body weight.

The most influential factor was green food attitude (beta = 0.552) followed by familiarity (beta = 0.141), weight-control (beta = -0.111) household income (beta = 0.082). According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), many studies have found a positive relationship between consumer attitudes and purchase behavior. This result is also concurrent with the research by Squires et al. (2001) on attitude towards environment. Being used to specific product will affect the chances of using the product again, hence familiarity with the product specifically green food was justified as influential factor towards consumption of green food. This result is similar to a study by Smith and Paladino (2010) on purchasing of organic food. Individuals need to be aware of the green products in the market and the benefits associated with it. However, the FCQ factors that reflected the benefits of consuming the green products are not the main concern of the households, as found from this study. The significant familiarity factor proved that the focus of the consumers in food choice does not depend on the benefits but on whether the products are new to them or not. The weight-control factor which gave a negative relationship with green food consumption also showed that the benefit of green food is not preferred by the consumers.

TABLE 8: MULTIPLE REGRESSION FOR GREEN FOOD CONSUMPTION

Model	B	S.E.	Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	VIF
Model 1							
(Constant)	23.115	.900		25.696	.000		
Income	2.001	.478	.169	4.188**	.000	.991	1.009
Green food knowledge	.277	.121	.092	2.284*	.023	.991	1.009
Model 2							
(Constant)	7.782	1.501		5.186	.000		
Income	.974	.405	.082	2.403*	.017	.952	1.051
Green food knowledge	-.203	.108	-.067	-1.879	.061	.863	1.158
Green food attitude	.499	.034	.552	14.824**	.000	.801	1.249
Emotion	.071	.048	.068	1.459	.145	.517	1.935
Sensory appeal	.096	.077	.048	1.243	.214	.737	1.357
Natural content	.043	.115	.016	.370	.711	.560	1.786
Ethics	.007	.098	.003	.076	.940	.631	1.586
Convenience	-.084	.069	-.057	-1.211	.226	.498	2.007
Familiarity	.299	.088	.141	3.397**	.001	.644	1.552
Price	-.047	.084	-.022	-.560	.576	.722	1.384
Health	.049	.069	.032	.703	.482	.523	1.910
Weight-control	-.269	.107	-.111	-2.508*	.012	.562	1.779

* Significant at p ≤ 0.05
** Significant at p ≤ 0.01

Conclusion and Implication

Familiarity and weight-control were the only FCQ factors that were found to be significantly affecting green food choice. Attitude towards green food consumption and household income were also significant in influencing green food choice. Green food knowledge was not significant when consumers considered the FCQ factors. The food choice of the consumers from this study showed that the consumers' choice was not solely based on the benefits but more on other aspects such as familiarity of the green product which time is the essence.

Displaying a positive attitude towards green food also involved a long period of time hence more aggressive promotion should be carried out to increase the attitude. Aggressive promotion will also increase familiarity of product to the consumer hence will potentially increase the consumption of green food. This will later lead to healthy living. In the long run, households may put green food as their priority in their expenditure as compared to non-green food. As stated by Lau, Krondl and Coleman (1984), cultural influences lead to differences in the habitual consumption of certain foods and in traditions of preparation, thus culture factor should be considered in future research on green food consumption. Furthermore, whether social status

influence green food consumption as Sanjur (1982) stated that food is a main thing in social interaction and ''prestige'' foods consumption may become an index of social status.

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