

The Movement of Traditional Malay Kuih in Mersing Towards Viability of Malaysia's Heritage Food: A Pilot Study

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ABSTRACT

Food has long been associated with the sustenance of human beings and since civilizations, it has also developed into an important and valuable heritage of differing communities. Especially in Malaysia, the multi-ethnicity nuances bestowed the land with a complex food heritage. Even the traditional Malay *kuih* offers delicacies ranging from sweet to savoury, together with different textures, aromas, and colours. However, the traditional Malay *kuih* itself is barely surviving in the local diet. Reports are increasing on the loss of some type of *kuih* from the local market. This pilot study is aimed to establish initial knowledge for ongoing research. The qualitative research method is employed and administered using the phenomenological case study approach. The primary outcomes were generated from three experts of traditional Malay *kuih* in Mersing, Johor. In-depth interviews were utilized to explore the efforts of keeping the viability of traditional Malay *kuih* in the contemporary diet era. This study seeks to explore the viability of such delicacies through the sustenance of its production and consumption between the supply and demand, theorized by the transactional communication model. Through transactional communication, the experts and consumers developed mutual relationships to keep the sustenance and existence of traditional Malay *kuih*. From the pilot study, the initial findings showed that several themes have emerged when the data were analysed employing the thematic analysis. The themes include 1). Innovating production practicality, and 2). Varying business scales with regards to the efforts on how the traditional Malay *kuih* is being made. Both are to equilibrate supply and demand which are recognized as the effective interactions between both parties that expand the niches of at-home productions as well as commercial productions. This is further supported by other themes that also emerged; 1). Communicating openly between experts and consumers, 2). Allowing exposure to inculcate heritage appreciation, and 3). Expanding business networks, in the attempt to make the traditional Malay *kuih* to be widely acknowledged, appreciated, and thus, viable in the local diet. These themes revolve around the communication of both experts and the consumers which then implies the existence of the traditional Malay *kuih*. The findings of this pilot study are sought to legislate future research with regards to the viability of traditional Malay *kuih*, and further, the sustainability of Malaysia's food heritage. As transactional communication theoretically explains the effectiveness of nurturing the viability of traditional Malay *kuih* between experts and consumers, inputs from the consumers are suggested to triangulate the main data for more rigorous future research. After all, both parties are the senders and receivers whose communications are vital to strengthening the existence and exposure of the delicacies in the local market and potentially to future enthusiasts.

Keywords: traditional Malay *kuih*, Malaysia's heritage food, heritage food, heritage food viability