

# Religious and cultural influences on the selection of menu

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## 2.1 Introduction

Food—a necessity for our existence—is a large segment of business. This is affected by progressive technologies and the rapid process of globalization. Food preparation, food processing or manufacturing, and even food distributions are now emerging to a new level of efficiency and effectiveness. However, other than these notable elements, the industry responds to the consumers just like any other industry. The demands from consumers are vital to ensure the business will be able to run well, to the point that the industry players must explore and recognize the needs and desires of their consumers. Food is also a crucial factor for interaction between various ethnic, social, and religious groups (Riaz and Chaudry, 2004), which also plays an important role for the industry.

Consumers might demand or prefer certain food for their diet, regardless of their location including while traveling. It requires broader research to understand this element of consumers' food preferences. Food studies, for example, examine the complex relationships between food, culture, and society from multidisciplinary aspects (Almerico, 2014), which will be able to give appropriate understanding of the interaction between people and food, such as, two of the elements that influence the selection of menu by consumers—religion and culture. These two elements convey not only the nature or type of food desired by a group of people, but also an identity for an individual, as well as the society. Within the diversity of people around the globe, menu selection is often influenced by dietary laws of one's faith and food customs of a community.

## 2.2 Religious Influences

### 2.2.1 *Islam: Halal Matters to Muslims*

With a population of 1.8 billion people in 2015, Islam is currently the second largest religion in the world after Christianity (Desilver and Masci, 2017). This number is continuously growing where Islam is believed to be the world's fastest-growing religious group and is expected to surpass Christianity within these two decades

(Lipka and Hackett, 2017; Sherwood, 2017). Islam is not merely a faith, but rather a way of life. Muslims are practicing the religion as an act of worshipping their God not only in their obligatory daily prayers, but also in all aspects of their life such as in business and trading, relationships, and so forth. This includes food consumption.

Muslims follow specific dietary law as stated mainly in their noble scripture (Al-Quran), as well as the authentic narration and doings of their last messenger—Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)—known as Hadith and Sunnah. These two sources are considered their primary sources or guidelines (Kamali and Quraishi, 2000). Most scholars believe that, in principle, everything is permissible for human consumption unless proven otherwise according to the sources of Islamic law, in which it is stated in the noble Quran (2:172). This is where the term halal took its place, literally meaning permissible or lawful in Arabic. Although the halal concept is widely used to indicate various aspects of Muslim lifestyles such as finance and banking, services like facilities and hotels, and so forth, the term itself is predominantly fit for food and beverages.

In Islam, the unlawful food or haram food are evidently mentioned in several verses in their scripture which specified that all pure and clean food are permitted for consumption except certain categories. Some of them are as follows (Riaz and Chaudry, 2004):

- Pork or any of its derivatives
- Carrion or dead animals
- Intoxicants such as alcohol
- Flowing or congealed blood
- Animals slaughtered not according to Islamic law

Therefore, mainly, pork, alcohol, blood, dead animals, and animals slaughtered inappropriately are forbidden for Muslims. Besides, food which is originally acceptable for consumption will be prohibited if contaminated with these haram items.

Muslims also pay attention to not only the ingredients of the food, but also the preparation processes such as the usage of utensils and machineries, logistic matters such as storage and transportation, as well as its distributions and servings. What is unique and exceptional about all the regulations and methods in Islam is that Islam does not only promote halal food, but also complementing it with the concept of tayyib which means pure or good (Ramli and Jamaludin, 2011). Food must be halal according to the Islamic law, and in addition to that, Islam encourages nutritious and healthy eating, with proper food safety measurements. This also indicates that Islam opted for good quality from farm to fork (Toh, 2009).

Halal and tayyib (or halalan tayyiban) coexist as a concept (Kocturk, 2002; Riaz and Chaudry, 2004; Ramli and Jamaludin, 2011) that has been practised by Muslims for food consumption, and thus, influences the selection of menu by Muslims. Even while traveling, Muslims are governed by the rules in Islam, however with certain exemptions based on circumstances such as there is a necessity for them to consume nonhalal food or they might jeopardize their lives. This flexibility in Islam is able to provide ease to Muslims as the nature of Islam is not to burden its believers based on Quran (2:286). Based on this obligation as a Muslim, Islam influences the choices Muslims made for their menu. Muslims preferably visit destinations with wider

options for halal food or some might even research for halal certification in restaurants or for ingredients sold in the market (Jafari and Scott, 2014).

### **2.2.2 Judaism: The importance of Kosher**

Pew Research Center (2015) reported that in 2010 there were nearly 14 million Jews around the world and this number is expected to grow over the coming years, reaching about 16 million in 2050. Just like the halal and tayyib concept of Muslims, Jews have their own guidelines on food preparation and diet called kosher, which means fit, in Biblical Hebrew (Eliasi and Dwyer, 2002). Similar to Islam, the food laws are Biblical in origin, manifested in their holy scriptures—mainly coming from the original five books of the Torah and has been extended by the rabbis to protect the Jews from violating any of the fundamental laws as well as to address new issues and technologies (Regenstein et al., 2003).

There are similarities between kosher and halal considering the connection that these two religions partake in the history. According to Tieman and Hassan (2015), the kosher dietary laws (kashrut) determine which food are fit or proper for consumption by those who observed Judaism. However, apart from the similarities that kosher holds with the halal concept in Islam, there are not as many categories as Islam. Judaism mainly focused on four issues in its dietary laws that revolve around the animal kingdom (Regenstein et al., 2003; Clay et al., 2009; Tieman and Hassan, 2015):

- Allowed animals
- Prohibition of blood
- Prohibition of mixing of milk and meat
- Parts forbidden for consumption

According to Regenstein et al. (2003), among the animals that are not kosher is pig, similar to the nonhalal animal in Islam. Kosher also pays attention to slaughtering or butchering process, designated equipment, assurance of complete separation of dairy products and milk, and traceability in their supply chain (Campbell et al., 2011; Tieman and Hassan, 2015). These qualities bear a resemblance to the halal and tayyib concept in Islam and brought about the same impact to the selection of menu for Jews. Practising Jews who are obliged to follow the rules in the Judaic food laws will most likely to choose their food based on this, therefore often making them to demand specific options especially while dining out. Industry players or service providers have to ensure that their menu selections are in compliance with the preferences of the Jews to be able to capture this niche in the market

### **2.2.3 Others: Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism**

India and Nepal are the two main countries with the majority of their population being Hindu, with >1 billion people in 2010 according to the Hackett et al. (2015) in the Global Religious Futures Report. According to the same report, the number of Buddhists around the globe is 488 million people and is expected to rise to 511 million in 2030. In the meantime, Christianity as the current world's largest religion is expected to grow its population from 2.2 billion Christians in 2010 to 2.9 billion in 2050.

These three faiths carried their own eating laws as well, although not as significant as Islam and Judaism. Most Christians, nowadays, do not observe the regulations in selecting a menu for their consumption. Compared to the halal and kosher terms in Islam and Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity are not globally known for a specific term in their dietary law. For example, in Hinduism, fasting is practised, though not the same as Muslims. However, their practises are not widely known by global community.

Attributable to the notion that cows are sacred in the Hindu community, Hindu devotees are normally vegetarians and refrain from consuming beef (Asraf Mohd-Any et al., 2014). Surprisingly for some people, Buddhists are practising the same morals where they avoid beef in their menu and some even adopt very strict diets with only vegetarian menus. The different denominations in Christianity, however, observed different approaches to food according to Patterson and Banks (2013) and Asraf Mohd-Any et al. (2014), where Mormons and Seventh Day Adventists avoided alcoholic and caffeinated drinks while Catholics also avoid meat like Hindus and Buddhists, but only on Good Fridays and Lent. Nevertheless, people adhering to the strict dietary principles by these religions—including the Muslims and Jews—may vary significantly throughout the world (Bonne et al., 2007), which may upshot the implications for both the demand and supply in the food industry. Table 2.1 summarizes the main religions and the food laws to be adhered by respective followers.

**Table 2.1 The main religions and food laws**

Categories		Population	Sources	Beliefs
Islam (Halal)		1.8 billion in 2015	- Al-Quran - Hadith and Sunnah	Everything is permissible for human consumption unless proven otherwise according to the sources of Islamic law, in which it is stated in the noble Quran.
Judaism (kosher)		~14 million in 2010	- 5 books of Torah	Fit/proper for consumption by those who observed Judaism.
Others	Hindu	>1 billion in 2010		- Practice fasting - Vegetarian and refrain from consuming beef
	Buddhist	488 millions		- Vegetarian and avoid beef in their menu
	Christians	2.2 billion in 2010		(1) Mormons & Seventh Day Adventist - avoid alcoholic caffeinated drinks (2) Catholics - avoid meat only on Good Fridays and Lent

## 2.3 Cultural Influences

Culture is defined as the beliefs, values, and attitudes practiced and accepted by members of a group or community (Almerico, 2014). Almerico also believes that culture has a strong relationship to anthropology and focuses on the fact that humans create culture as a way of making sense of their social and physical worlds. Kittler et al. (2012) stated in their book—*Food and Culture*—food is a means of forging and supporting identities, mainly because what we consume and the way we consume are such basic aspects of our culture. Food habits or food culture is the manner in which humans use food from farm to fork (Kittler et al., 2012) and the significance of this particular culture process is that it is unique to human beings.

Larson and Story (2009) conducted a research on what influence the choices people make in food consumption. It is believed that culture norms and values which fall under the macroenvironment segment influence food and eating behavior. With such impacts that a culture brings to an individual and people around him, selecting a menu normally portrays one's culture. Just like how a religion and its dietary law influence people's selection of menu, a culture plays the same role in food preferences including in culturally different environment. To support this matter, there is a term called food neophobia revealed by Pliner and Hobden (1992) and Hobden and Pliner (1995), which has been defined as the reluctance to eat or avoidance of new food by certain people.

Although one might not be able to consume a dish 100% according to his or her preferences based on his culture norms, a familiar taste of it will contribute to the choices made on his selection of menu (Chang et al., 2010). For instance, in the study conducted by Chang et al. (2010), Chinese participants conveyed that they are satisfied with the local specialty while traveling which is cooked in Chinese style and the addition of familiar flavor in certain food items like soy sauce and pickled vegetables could help mitigate the unfamiliar taste of the local food; thus, proving that Chinese culture affected the choices they make for a menu.

Other Asian culture influences are like the Japanese and Koreans. Both considered rice as their staple food (Kazuko and Song, 2010) just like the Chinese and often prefer their meal to be completed with rice and various side dishes. The Koreans, in particular, prefer spicy food (Korean Food Foundation, 2014) compared to the Japanese (Barber, 2004), because of the norm of their culture that has been using red chilli pepper paste or powder in their cuisine as one of the most important flavoring ingredients. Table 2.2 highlights how culture can influence dietary routine of people. In fact, in Islam, there is one area of law which considered custom as a factor in determining whether a custom of a society is good for them and therefore encourage continuing being practise. This source is known as 'urf in Arabic, which is very closely related to 'adah (tradition) and includes food consumption as well (Abdul Ghani, 2011). This shows that a culture should be taken into consideration in all aspects of human's lifestyle.

On top of that, we are not only looking at the influences that this cultural aspect has brought to people while traveling or being in a society outside of their own, we are

**Table 2.2 Culture influences on selection of menus**

<b>How culture influence dietary routine</b>	<b>References</b>
<p>Food habits or food culture is the manner in which humans use food from farm to fork</p> <p>Culture norms and values which fall under the macroenvironment segment, influence food and eating behavior</p> <p>Food neophobia has been defined as the reluctance to eat or avoidance of new food by certain people</p> <p>Chinese culture affected the choices they make for a menu while traveling</p> <p>Rice as their staple food similar to Chinese and often prefer their meal to be completed with rice and various side dishes</p> <p>The Koreans prefer spicy food because of the norm of their culture that has been using red chilli pepper paste or powder in their cuisine as one of the most important flavoring ingredients</p> <p>In Islam, custom known as ‘urf in Arabic according to which culture should be taken into consideration in all aspects of human’s lifestyle</p> <p>The religious intensity is also a factor in determining how a religion influences the selection of menu or food consumption</p>	<p>Kittler et al. (2012)</p> <p>Larson and Story (2009)</p> <p>Pliner and Hobden (1992) and Hobden and Pliner (1995)</p> <p>Choe and Cho (2011)</p> <p>Chang et al. (2010)</p> <p>Kazuko and Song (2010)</p> <p>Korean Food Foundation (2014)</p> <p>Abdul Ghani (2011)</p> <p>Heiman et al. (2004)</p>

opting to also consider what happens to food and cuisine when they enter a new environment especially in the name of globalization. Pizza as an Italian cuisine and famous all over the world has been through improvisation in different countries. Domino’s Pizza Malaysia, for example, is promoting its pizza menu with sambal (spicy gravy) as an option for their toppings to suit the taste of the locals in Malaysia (Domino’s, 2017). World famous Western fast-food, McDonald’s on the other hand, offers menu like Teriyaki Burger, Ebi Fillet-O (Shrimp Burger), Sakura Teritama Burger for spring, and Full Moon Cheese Tsukimi Burger during autumn, when entering the Japanese market (Smaili, 2017).

McDonald’s, MOS Burger, and some other fast-food chains and their establishment resonate the Japanese life and culture, therefore making them flourish in Japan (Traphagan and Brown Keith, 2002). It shows that culture and lifestyles of a society have given such impacts to the marketers to study the market they would like to venture into, by understanding the preferences of their local consumers. Menu selection and its culture influences are essential. The relationship between these two involved both the food receiver who is the consumer as well as the food sender which is the industry player such as restaurants or food manufacturers (Ceccarini, 2010).

## 2.4 Conclusion

We are focusing on two aspects—the religion and the culture—as the influences for menu selection. However, there are further issues to be explored based on these two elements. Other than these two, the selection of menu is also affected by other matters such as individual, social environments, physical environments, and macro-level environments (Larson and Story, 2009).

Although religious influence is an essential feature, the religious intensity is also a factor in determining how a religion influences the selection of menu or food consumption (Heiman et al., 2004), which requires further studies. However, in general, the values that a religion carries contributed to the preferences of its believers not only in food consumption, but as well as their overall lifestyles including the choices for clothing, traveling, and so forth.

Conjointly, a custom or culture which has been committing for years by a society plays a very distinctive role identical to a religion in menu selection. However, despite the similarities that these two elements have shared, religious influences are more likely sturdier than cultural influences. People's value system affected their lifestyle and consumption pattern. The cultural elements, although resulted in a term like food neophobia (Pliner and Hobden, 1992; Hobden and Pliner, 1995; Chang et al., 2010; Choe and Cho, 2011), are a lot more supple to human beings where toleration and understanding come into the picture.

This exploration of religious and cultural influences on the selection of menu could also assist the industry players in the preparation and processing of food to their customers. We have discovered the powerful impact of both elements in food industry, as one could perceive a menu to be acceptable, attractive, feel appreciated, and likeable when their religious practise and traditions of their people are taken into account. However, with modern technologies coming into this era, giving globalization a faster growth opportunities, culture and religion might be facing further challenges to sustain and being practised.

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