

FACTORS INFLUENCING DINING OUT INTENTION IN AN EMERGING MARKET : EVIDENCE FROM MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This study examined how four key determinants like price consciousness, food variety-seeking, physical environment and perceived hygiene quality, influence dining out intention, among Malaysian consumers, in the post-pandemic context. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 548 valid responses, through structured online questionnaires and analysed by using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The findings revealed that all four predictors significantly and positively influenced dining out intention, with physical environment emerging as the strongest predictor, followed by price consciousness, food variety-seeking, and perceived hygiene quality. These results would contribute to consumer behaviour literature, by establishing a comprehensive framework, integrating economic, psychological, and environmental factors, within an emerging market context. The study could provide actionable insights for foodservice businesses, to enhance dining experiences, through strategic investments in ambience, dynamic pricing strategies, menu diversification and visible hygiene protocols. Policymakers could utilise these findings, to develop regulatory frameworks, supporting Malaysia's foodservice sector growth.

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Keywords: Dining out intention; Price consciousness; Food variety-seeking; Physical environment; Perceived hygiene quality; Consumer behaviour; Foodservice industry.

JEL Code : D12, M31 and L83.

Paper Received : 25.06.2025

Revised : 01.07.2025

Accepted : 04.10.2025

1. Introduction

The foodservice industry has witnessed transformative growth over the past decade, propelled by urbanisation, increasing disposable incomes, changing culinary preferences and growing consumer reliance on convenience (Ma & Yin, 2024). Dining out, once considered a luxury, has become an integral part of modern lifestyles, across diverse demographic and socioeconomic segments (Effendi et al., 2025). Consumer behaviour towards dining choices is increasingly being shaped by both tangible and intangible cues, including price consciousness, food variety-seeking, physical environment and hygiene quality (Jeong et al., 2022; Mohamad et al., 2023). Understanding these cues is vital for restaurateurs, policymakers and scholars, seeking to predict dining preferences and enhance engagement and satisfaction, across the foodservice experience.

Recent studies in consumer behaviour, highlight that dining decisions are influenced by a combination of personal and situational factors. Among these, price consciousness affects consumers' purchase intention, based on their tendency to seek discounts and make cost-saving decisions (Ye, 2024) while food variety-seeking behaviour drives experimentation and novelty in menu preferences (Nanu et al., 2024a). The physical environment, including ambience, layout and atmosphere, has been influential in dining experiences and choices (Cavus et al., 2024; Zhong & Moon, 2020). Equally, perceived hygiene quality, especially post-pandemic, has emerged as a critical determinant of consumers' decisions to dine out (Ghorpade & Dasgupta, 2022).

While dining out has been widely examined in developed markets, there remains a limited body of integrated research, connecting economic, psychological and environmental cues within a unified framework in emerging economies. The rapid urban growth, shifting lifestyles and rising service quality expectations, in these regions, are reshaping the way consumers evaluate dining experiences (Wiastuti et al., 2024). By exploring the role of price consciousness, food variety-seeking, physical environment and perceived hygiene quality in influencing dining out intention in Malaysia, this study could contribute, both theoretically and practically, to the field of consumer behaviour and foodservice management in an emerging market. It advances understanding of key determinants, affecting behavioural intention to dine out and offers actionable insights for restaurant managers and policymakers, to better align service delivery with evolving consumer expectations.

2. Review of Literature

Recent research has established that dining out intention is shaped by distinct economic, psychological and environmental factors. These aspects influence consumer decision-making processes, forming a comprehensive framework for understanding dining preferences (Koay et al., 2024; Shin et al., 2024).

From an economic perspective, price consciousness has emerged as a significant determinant of dining choices, particularly in emerging economies where consumers demonstrate heightened sensitivity to value propositions (Suttikun, 2023). Price-conscious consumers prioritise perceived value and actively

engage in price comparisons before making dining decisions (Ngan et al., 2022). Research on discount activities, further demonstrates the significant influence of price-related factors on purchase intention and consumer behaviour in restaurant settings, highlighting the continued importance of price consciousness in consumer dining decisions (Ye, 2024).

Psychological factors, particularly food variety-seeking, represent another critical factor. Food variety-seeking has been identified as a significant predictor of dining establishment preferences across diverse restaurant segments (Lee et al., 2020; Miocevic & Kovacevic, 2025). Variety-seeking tendencies drive consumers to explore diverse culinary options and novel menu experiences (Nanu et al., 2024a). This psychological orientation towards novelty leads consumers to diversify their dining choices across restaurant types, creating expansion opportunities for businesses operating multiple concepts (Tsaour et al., 2024).

Environmental aspects of dining behaviour encompass both physical environment and perceived hygiene quality. The physical environment, comprising atmospheric elements such as ambience, decor and aesthetics, can enhance dining satisfaction, thus influencing dining out behaviour (Hamid et al., 2024; Mohamad et al., 2023). The multisensory aspects of the physical environment create experiential value, that affects consumer emotions, thereby improving dining experiences (Yuan et al., 2023). Overall, the physical environment serves as a critical determinant in consumers' formation of dining out intentions, as favourable environmental perceptions increase the likelihood of revisit and patronage decisions (Cavus et al., 2024; Meng & Choi, 2018).

Perceived hygiene quality has emerged as the most prioritised decision factor while dining

out, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic (Ghorpade & Dasgupta, 2022). With consumers becoming more aware and concerned about hygiene standards of food establishments, hygiene practices significantly impact consumer gratification and dining choices (Kumar et al., 2024). Hygiene perceptions function as a psychological safety mechanism, that can influence consumer satisfaction and restaurant visit intentions (Al-Zyoud, 2024). The heightened emphasis on cleanliness and sanitation protocols represents a paradigm shift in consumer priorities within the dining context (Jeong et al., 2022).

3. Statement of the Problem

The foodservice industry is undergoing a significant transformation, fuelled by urbanisation, changing economic dynamics and evolving consumer preferences (Ma & Yin, 2024). These macro shifts are particularly pronounced in emerging markets where socio-economic change, digital exposure and shifting lifestyles are reshaping dining expectations (Wiastuti et al., 2024). This evolution has been further intensified by post-pandemic consumer priorities, regarding hygiene, safety and health, which are central to dining decisions (Ghorpade & Dasgupta, 2022). Understanding the key factors, that influence dining out intention, has therefore become critical for foodservice businesses, seeking to adapt their strategies to this rapidly evolving landscape.

Although existing studies have examined variables related to price, food variety, physical environment and hygiene in various dining contexts, these economic, psychological and environmental factors in relation to dining out, have been primarily studied in isolation or in some combinations (Al-Zyoud, 2024; Mohamad et al., 2023). Further, with hygiene quality becoming a prominent post-pandemic

determinant of dining preferences and consumer trust, its inclusion, alongside established predictors like price consciousness, food variety-seeking, and physical environment, is both relevant and timely (**Kumar et al., 2024; Mohamad et al., 2023**). This research addressed these identified gaps, by empirically testing the role of these four direct predictors like price consciousness, food variety-seeking, physical environment and perceived hygiene quality, on dining out intention. The findings could contribute to ongoing academic discourse within consumer behaviour research and practical implications for foodservice management, particularly in the post-COVID era.

4. Need of the Study

This study addressed this critical gap in consumer behaviour research, by providing an integrated examination of four key determinants of dining out intention, in an emerging market context. While previous research has examined these factors in isolation, this study offers a comprehensive framework, that simultaneously considers economic (price consciousness), psychological (food variety-seeking) and environmental (physical environment and perceived hygiene quality) influences, on dining out intention. Given the transformative impact of COVID-19 on consumer priorities and the rapid urbanisation in emerging economies, understanding these factors is essential for both theoretical advancement and practical application.

The findings would benefit foodservice businesses, including restaurant managers and policymakers, by offering actionable insights into evolving consumer expectations, particularly regarding the heightened importance of hygiene quality post-pandemic. Additionally, this research could contribute to the academic literature, by developing a unified model, that examined key

factors influencing dining out intention in contemporary dining contexts, thereby enabling more nuanced understanding of consumer behaviour in emerging markets like Malaysia.

5. Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study was to examine the influence of price consciousness, food variety-seeking, physical environment and perceived hygiene quality on dining out intention among Malaysian consumers. This investigation would quantify the direct relationships between these four predictors and consumers' intention to dine out, identifying whether each factor significantly influenced dining decisions in an emerging market context. The study would also determine the effect of economic (price consciousness), psychological (food variety-seeking), and environmental (physical environment and perceived hygiene quality) factors on dining out behavioural intention.

6. Hypotheses of the Study

Based on the literature review, economic, psychological and environmental factors influencing dining out behaviour, were examined. Price-conscious consumers demonstrated heightened sensitivity to pricing and discount offerings, directly impacting their dining decisions (**Ngan et al., 2022; Suttikun, 2023**). Food variety-seeking behaviour encouraged experimentation with diverse culinary options, leading to increased dining frequency (**Nanu et al., 2024a, 2024b**). The physical environment created experiential value through multisensory elements, enhancing consumer experiences and intention to dine out (**Cavus et al., 2024; Yuan et al., 2023**). Further, perceived hygiene quality emerged as a critical post-pandemic factor, functioning as a psychological safety mechanism, that significantly influenced dining decisions (**Al-Zyoud, 2024; Ghorpade & Dasgupta, 2022**). On the basis of these

relationships, a comprehensive framework (**Figure 1**), was formulated, for understanding consumer behaviour in foodservice contexts, by testing the following hypotheses:

H1: Price consciousness has a positive effect on dining out intention.

H2: Food variety-seeking has a positive effect on dining out intention.

H3: Physical environment has a positive effect on dining out intention.

H4: Perceived hygiene quality has a positive effect on dining out intention.

7. Research Methodology

Adopting a quantitative research design, this study utilised survey-based methods through the administration of structured questionnaire. By implementing statistical techniques, it examined the relationships between price consciousness, food variety-seeking, physical environment and perceived hygiene quality on dining out intention. This methodological framework relied on empirical data collection and numerical analysis, enabling systematic examination of how these economic, psychological and environmental factors would influence consumers' dining behavioural intention. Through quantitative analysis, the study rigorously investigated direct relationships, providing robust insights into the determinants of dining out behaviour.

7.1 Sample Selection

The target population comprised of adult Malaysian consumers, aged 18 years and above, who regularly dine out, at least once a month. This population was selected to ensure participants possess regular dining experience and provide informed responses, regarding their dining intentions.

The study employed a multi-channel recruitment approach, to ensure broad representation across Malaysian demographics.

First, the questionnaire link was distributed through social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp groups), targeting diverse Malaysian consumer groups. Second, respondents were encouraged to forward the survey to their networks, using snowball distribution, expanding reach across different socioeconomic and geographic segments. Screening questions, at the beginning of the survey, ensured respondents meeting the criteria (Malaysian consumers aged 18 years and above with monthly dining out frequency).

The minimum sample size was determined, using G*Power software (**Faul et al., 2007**), with a minimum effect size of 0.15, alpha level of 0.05, and statistical power of 0.95, resulting in a minimum required sample of 129 respondents for four predictors. However, to enhance statistical power and robustness of findings, the study collected responses from 560 participants, yielding 548 valid responses for analysis, after data cleaning. This sample size substantially exceeded the minimum requirement, providing greater statistical power and reliability for the research findings.

7.2 Sources of Data

The primary source of data, for this study, comprised responses obtained from a structured questionnaire, administered to the target population. Data collection was facilitated through Google Forms. The online distribution method was selected for its cost-effectiveness and ability to collect data efficiently while maintaining participant anonymity.

7.3 Period of Study

Data collection for this research was conducted, over a three-month period, between January and March 2025. This timeframe allowed for adequate response collection while ensuring the relevance of consumer dining intentions in the current context.

7.4 Tools Used in the Study

By using a quantitative approach, the research tool was a structured survey, designed to measure key consumer variables. The survey contained measurement items for price consciousness, food variety-seeking, physical environment, perceived hygiene quality and dining out intention, with responses captured by using a five-point Likert format, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Data analysis was conducted, using Smart PLS 4.0 software (Ringle et al., 2024), for structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), which facilitated the examination of hypothesised relationships between variables while assessing model validity and reliability.

8. Data Analysis

Data analysis comprised demographic assessment of respondents, measurement model evaluation and structural equation modelling, for hypothesis testing.

8.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile of 548 valid respondents is presented in **Table 1**. The sample consisted predominantly of female participants (n = 341, 62%), with male participants comprising 38% (n = 207) of the sample.

Regarding age distribution, the largest proportion of respondents was within the 26-35 years age bracket (38%, n = 209), followed by the 18-25 years age group (33%, n = 182). Participants, aged 36-45 years, represented 19% (n = 104) of the sample while those aged 46-55 years comprised 7% (n = 38). The smallest representation was from respondents aged 56 years and above, accounting for 3% (n = 15) of the sample.

The income distribution revealed that 43% of respondents earned less than RM 4000 per month, with 25% in the RM 2000-RM 3999

bracket, representing the single largest income group. Middle-income earners (RM 4000-RM 7999) comprised 34% of the sample, while higher-income earners (RM 8000 and above) constituted 23% of participants.

8.2 Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model was evaluated, to ensure reliability and validity, before testing the structural model. **Table 2** presents the results of convergent validity and internal consistency reliability evaluations.

All outer loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.708 (Hair et al., 2021), ranging from 0.726 to 0.951, indicating adequate indicator reliability. Cronbach's alpha (CA) values ranged from 0.797 to 0.921, all exceeding the minimum criterion of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2021), demonstrating satisfactory internal consistency. Composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.869 to 0.950, all surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2021), further confirming construct reliability. Average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.625 to 0.863, all exceeding the minimum requirement of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2021), thereby establishing convergent validity. Physical Environment demonstrated the highest AVE (0.863), while Price Consciousness had recorded the lowest AVE (0.625), though still above the acceptable threshold. Discriminant validity was assessed by using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) criterion (**Table 3**). All HTMT values were well below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). Thus all constructs were empirically distinct from one another.

8.3 Structural Model Assessment

Table-4 presents the results of hypothesis testing, including standardised path coefficients, significance levels, and the corresponding decisions.

All four hypotheses were supported by the data. Price consciousness demonstrated a significant positive effect on dining out intention ($\beta = 0.231$, $p < .001$), supporting H1. Food variety-seeking also showed a significant positive relationship with dining out intention ($\beta = 0.152$, $p = .001$), confirming H2. Physical environment reported the strongest direct effect on dining out intention ($\beta = 0.292$, $p < .001$), supporting H3. Finally, perceived hygiene quality demonstrated a significant positive influence on dining out intention ($\beta = 0.116$, $p = .021$), lending support to H4.

The model explained 21.2% of the variance in dining out intention ($R^2 = 0.212$), indicating a moderate level of explained variance (Cohen, 1988). Physical environment emerged as the most influential predictor, followed by price consciousness, food variety-seeking and perceived hygiene quality.

9. Findings of the Study

The findings of the study revealed that all four predictors like price consciousness, food variety-seeking, physical environment and perceived hygiene quality, were significantly associated positively with dining out intention, among Malaysian consumers. Physical environment emerged as the strongest predictor, directly affecting dining out decisions, concurring with previous findings by Hamid et al. (2024) and Jeong et al. (2022). Price consciousness also exerted substantial positive effect, reinforcing its role as a key economic determinant in dining out decisions, consistent with the results of Suttikun (2023). Also, this aligns with Ye (2024), who found that discount activities significantly influence consumer purchase intention in restaurants. Food variety-seeking demonstrated significant impact on dining out intention, influencing consumers' exploratory dining behaviour, supporting research

by Nanu et al. (2024b). Perceived hygiene quality, while statistically significant, showed relatively weaker influence compared to other factors, contrasting with some post-pandemic literature that emphasised hygiene as a primary concern (Ghorpade & Dasgupta, 2022; Kumar et al., 2024). These results revealed that while all four factors did contribute to dining out intention, physical environment and price consciousness took precedence over food variety-seeking and perceived hygiene quality in Malaysia, suggesting a nuanced understanding of post-pandemic consumer behaviour in an emerging market context.

10. Suggestions

Foodservice businesses like restaurants, should prioritise physical environment enhancements through strategic investments in ambience, decor and spatial layout, to leverage the strongest predictor of dining out intention. Implementing dynamic pricing strategies and discounted promotions can effectively address price consciousness, particularly through digital platforms and loyalty programs. Additionally, menu diversification strategies, incorporating seasonal offerings and fusion cuisines, can satisfy variety-seeking preferences while maintaining visible hygiene protocols and transparent sanitisation practices would build, consumer confidence. Foodservice businesses should develop integrated approaches, that address all four factors to create comprehensive dining experiences, that resonate with Malaysian consumers.

Policymakers should review existing industry guidelines, to better integrate aesthetic standards with cleanliness protocols. These regulatory frameworks should create synergy between experiential quality and hygiene considerations rather than treating them as competing priorities. Additionally, developing

more visible recognition systems for establishments, that excel in both areas, could elevate consumer awareness and incentivise foodservice businesses to invest in both dimensions simultaneously.

Industry associations should facilitate knowledge-sharing platforms where successful environmental designs and pricing innovations can be disseminated among members, promoting collaborative advancement in service delivery standards. Fostering a culture of consumer-centric service excellence, through best practice exchanges, can strengthen the overall competitiveness of Malaysia's foodservice industry.

11. Conclusion

This study empirically validated that price consciousness, food variety-seeking, physical environment and perceived hygiene quality, significantly influenced Malaysian consumers' dining out intention. Physical environment emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by price consciousness, food variety-seeking and perceived hygiene quality. These findings would contribute to the consumer behaviour literature, by establishing a comprehensive framework, integrating economic, psychological and environmental factors, within an emerging market context. The results could provide actionable insights for stakeholders like foodservice businesses, policymakers and industry associations, to develop strategies that address all four dimensions. Appropriate prioritisation of physical environment optimisation and discount-based pricing approaches, would maximise impact on dining out intention.

12. Limitations of the Study

This research was conducted within Malaysia, potentially limiting generalisability and applicabilities to other emerging markets or countries, with different cultural and economic

contexts. The cross-sectional design captured consumer perceptions at a single point in time, preventing observation of changing behaviours over extended periods. Additionally, while the model explained only a moderate amount of variance in dining out intention, several other potential factors and possible interactions between variables, remained unexplored.

13. Scope for Further Research

Future research could explore additional predictors to further enhance the explanatory power of the current framework. Longitudinal studies could track how these relationships evolved in the post-pandemic era. Examining interaction effects between variables, such as whether physical environment influences the impact of perceived hygiene quality, would provide deeper insights into dining out behaviour. Extending the study to diverse cultural and geographical contexts, would test the framework's applicability, across various emerging market settings.

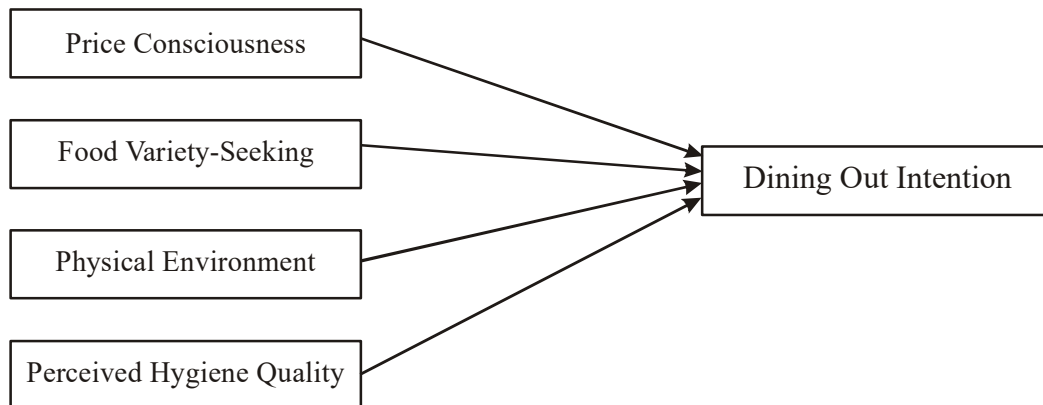
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Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Factors Influencing Dining Out Intention



Source: Authors' conceptual framework based on literature review

Table-1: Demographic Characteristics of Malaysian Dining Out Consumers (N=548)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	207	38
	Female	341	62
Age	18-25 years	182	33
	26-35 years	209	38
	36-45 years	104	19
	46-55 years	38	7
	56 years and above	15	3
Income	Less than RM 1000	46	8
	RM 1000 - RM 1999	57	10
	RM 2000 - RM 3999	135	25
	RM 4000 - RM 5999	102	19
	RM 6000 - RM 7999	83	15
	RM 8000 - RM 9999	36	7
	RM 10000 and above	89	16

Source: Primary data collected for this study

Table-2: Reliability and Convergent Validity Assessment of Dining Out Constructs

Construct	Indicators	Loadings	CA	CR	AVE
Perceived Hygiene Quality	PHQ1	0.861	0.797	0.903	0.823
	PHQ2	0.951			
Dining Out Intention	DI1	0.865	0.916	0.941	0.798
	DI2	0.910			
	DI3	0.912			
	DI4	0.887			
Food Variety-Seeking	FVS1	0.822	0.858	0.897	0.636
	FVS2	0.828			
	FVS3	0.786			
	FVS4	0.803			
	FVS5	0.743			
Price Consciousness	PC1	0.752	0.808	0.869	0.625
	PC3	0.726			
	PC4	0.825			
	PC5	0.854			
Physical Environment	PE1	0.931	0.921	0.950	0.863
	PE2	0.937			
	PE3	0.919			

Source: Primary data analysis using SmartPLS 4.0.

Table-3: HTMT Ratios for Discriminant Validity Assessment of Dining Out Constructs

	i	ii	iii	iv	v
i. Perceived Hygiene Quality					
ii. Dining Out Intention	0.062				
iii. Food Variety-Seeking	0.119	0.194			
iv. Price Consciousness	0.259	0.364	0.226		
v. Physical Environment	0.136	0.383	0.063	0.399	

Source: Primary data analysis using SmartPLS 4.0.

Table-4: Structural Model Results and Hypothesis Testing Outcomes for Dining Out Intention Predictors

	Description	Std. Beta	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Price Consciousness --> Dining Out Intention	0.231	0.049	4.754	p < 0.001	Supported
H2	Food Variety-Seeking --> Dining Out Intention	0.152	0.047	3.262	p = 0.001	Supported
H3	Physical Environment --> Dining Out Intention	0.292	0.045	6.430	p < 0.001	Supported
H4	Perceived Hygiene Quality --> Dining Out Intention	0.116	0.057	2.044	p = 0.021	Supported

Source: Primary data analysis using SmartPLS 4.0.