



**EXPLORING AUTHENTIC *DODOL* AS SUSTAINABLE MALAY HERITAGE
FOOD IN THE SOUTHERN STATES OF PENINSULAR MALAYSIA**

By

NORSYAHIDAH BINTI ISMAIL

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

April 2023

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The issue of food negligence and modernisation have the potential to threaten the sustainability of the traditional food existence. Reports on the issue increased and there is even an official list of endangered traditional food products in Malaysia. *Dodol*, despite being one of the popular traditional Malay foods in Malaysia, is listed as one of the foods. This research aimed to explore the sustainability of authentic *dodol* production in southern states of Peninsular Malaysia namely Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, and Johor. Accordingly, four research questions were set to understand the phenomenon in stated settings which are: 1) what is the meaning of *dodol* in Malay culture?, 2) what makes *dodol* authentic?, 3) what are the current practices in preparing *dodol*?, and 4) how is *dodol* sustained as a Malaysian heritage food?

Qualitative research method was used in this study through the phenomenological case study approach. Theorized by the combination of authenticity model and sustainability theory, the primary data for this study gained from in-depth interviews with experts and consumers where data saturation point reached by the 10th informant. Participant observation, document analysis and audio-visual materials triangulate the primary data. Thematic analysis and constant comparative technique were performed using NVivo 12 software to generate themes from the data set to answer the research questions. Accordingly, the meaning of *dodol* in Malay culture depicted as: 1) a sweet treat served during Islamic festivals and celebrations, 2) a gourmet that symbolising prosperity, 3) a classic confectionery in the Malay heritage, and 4) a manifestation of the Malay culture. Meanwhile, the etiquettes of authentic *dodol* production are through: 1) the use of natural ingredients in the recipe and the traditional equipment used in the making of traditional *dodol*, 2) the desired original colour and its aroma, 3) the origin of the recipe (traditionally passed down from the southern states), and 4) the different types of leaves used as

dodol wrappers. As the essence of the phenomenon, the structural meaning of authentic *dodol* current practices revealed the sustainability elements via the combinations of environmental and social through: 1) various innovations in the flavours and technology of *dodol* industry at present, 2) the origin of the current recipe used, 3) *dodol* cooking durations, and 4) preserving the traditional methods, original ingredients, tips, and skills when processing *dodol*. Lastly, the actual practices of the sustainability efforts were picturized by: 1) preserving the *dodol*-making skills in generations of family, 2) aggressive promotion of authentic *dodol*, 3) continuous production of authentic *dodol*, 4) comprehensive and integrated marketing strategies, and 5) challenges to preserve *dodol*.

This study documented an in-depth comprehension to the phenomenon of the authentic *dodol* sustainability in southern states as one of the Malay traditions in food heritage. The use of authenticity within the traditional food concept were expanded with the combination of sustainability theory within this study's heritage food context. This research provides insights to the persistence of authentic *dodol* that the current and future *dodol* entrepreneurs can benefits. Furthermore, the sustainability framework developed in this study can be used for similar subjects where authenticity is issued on its existence sustainability.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

MENEROKA *DODOL* ASLI SEBAGAI MAKANAN WARISAN MELAYU LESTARI DI NEGERI SELATAN SEMENANJUNG MALAYSIA

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Isu pengabaian dan pemodenan makanan berpotensi menggugat kelestarian kewujudan makanan tradisional. Laporan mengenai isu tersebut meningkat malah terdapat senarai rasmi produk makanan tradisional yang terancam di Malaysia. *Dodol*, walaupun merupakan antara makanan tradisional Melayu yang popular di Malaysia, tersenarai sebagai salah satu makanan tradisional terancam dan dilaporkan menghadapi masalah mengekalkan kelestarian di Malaysia. Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk meneroka kelestarian pengeluaran *dodol* asli di negeri-negeri selatan Semenanjung Malaysia iaitu Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, dan Johor. Sehubungan itu, empat persoalan kajian telah ditetapkan untuk memahami fenomena dalam tetapan yang dinyatakan iaitu: 1) apakah maksud *dodol* dalam budaya Melayu?, 2) apakah yang menjadikan *dodol* itu asli?, 3) apakah amalan semasa dalam penyediaan *dodol*?, dan 4) bagaimanakah *dodol* dikekalkan sebagai makanan warisan Melayu?

Kaedah kajian kualitatif digunakan dalam kajian ini melalui pendekatan kajian kes fenomenologi. Berteori dengan gabungan model keaslian dan teori kelestarian, data utama untuk kajian ini diperoleh daripada temu bual mendalam dengan pakar dan pengguna di mana titik tepu data dicapai oleh informan ke-10. Pemerhatian peserta, analisis dokumen dan bahan audio-visual menyeyigitiga data primer. Analisis tematik dan teknik perbandingan berterusan dilakukan menggunakan perisian NVivo 12 untuk menjana tema daripada set data untuk menjawab persoalan kajian. Sehubungan itu, makna *dodol* dalam budaya Melayu digambarkan sebagai: 1) hidangan manis yang disajikan semasa perayaan dan perayaan Islam, 2) gourmet yang melambangkan kemakmuran, 3) kuih-muih klasik dalam warisan Melayu, dan 4) manifestasi budaya orang Melayu. Manakala adab-adab penghasilan *dodol* asli adalah melalui: 1) penggunaan bahan semulajadi dalam resipi dan peralatan tradisional yang digunakan dalam pembuatan *dodol* tradisional, 2) warna asli yang dikehendaki

dan aromanya, 3) asal usul resipi. (secara tradisinya diturunkan dari negeri-negeri selatan), dan 4) pelbagai jenis daun yang digunakan sebagai pembalut *dodol*. Sebagai intipati fenomena tersebut, makna struktur amalan semasa *dodol* tulen mendedahkan elemen kelestarian melalui gabungan alam sekitar dan sosial melalui: 1) pelbagai inovasi dalam perisa dan teknologi industri *dodol* pada masa kini, 2) asal usul resipi semasa yang digunakan, 3) tempoh memasak *dodol*, dan 4) mengekalkan kaedah tradisional, bahan asli, petua, dan kemahiran semasa memproses *dodol*. Akhir sekali, amalan sebenar usaha kelestarian digambarkan dengan: 1) memelihara kemahiran membuat *dodol* dalam generasi keluarga, 2) promosi agresif *dodol* asli, 3) pengeluaran *dodol* asli yang berterusan, 4) strategi pemasaran yang komprehensif dan bersepadu, dan 5) cabaran untuk memelihara *dodol*.

Kajian ini mendokumentasikan pemahaman yang mendalam terhadap fenomena kelestarian *dodol* asli di negeri-negeri selatan sebagai salah satu tradisi Melayu dalam warisan makanan. Penggunaan keaslian dalam konsep makanan tradisional telah diperluaskan dengan gabungan teori kelestarian dalam konteks makanan warisan kajian ini. Penyelidikan ini memberi gambaran tentang peranan *dodol* asli yang boleh dimanfaatkan oleh pengusaha *dodol* semasa dan akan datang. Tambahan pula, rangka kerja kelestarian yang dibangunkan dalam kajian ini boleh digunakan untuk subjek yang serupa di mana keaslian dikekalkan pada kewujudan kelestariannya.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Alhamdulillah, at last, this thesis has been completed. I would like to thank Allah S.W.T for giving me the opportunity, strength and patience to complete my doctorate degree successfully. This level has been a tough journey, colours by challenge, disappointment and excitement. There have been many people who have walked alongside me for the last six years, and this thesis becomes reality with the kind support and help of many individuals. I would like to extend sincere thanks to all of them.

Special thanks to my Main Supervisor, Professor Dr. Muhammad Shahrin Ab. Karim for the continuous support of my doctorate study, for his patience, motivation, and immense knowledge. His guidance helped me in all the time of research and writing of this thesis. I place on record, my sincere thank you for my co-supervisors, Dr. Farah Adibah Che Ishak, and Associate Professor Dr. Mohd Mursyid Arshad who have been sharing their knowledge, expertise and patience for this entire PhD period and towards the completion of this research.

I thanked my father, Hj Ismail Md Jalis for his unconditional love, patience, and continuously motivate me along this tough journey. Also for my siblings, my elder brothers, Izuan, and Safizan, my younger sister, Aina, sister-in law, Norzaimah, brother-in law, Ahmad Shahriza and lovely nephews; Afiq, Irfan, and nieces, Safiyyah and Zara. They always have been there for me as an unweaving support. My most profound appreciation is extended to my colleague especially everyone in the Postgraduate Office in Food 4 room, FSTM, UPM. Dr. Raihan Che Nawati, Dr. Mohd Nazri Ab. Raji, Yusof Kamaruzaman, Suhailah Abdul Ghafar Rahman, and Nur Atiqah Lokman. Not forgotten, my best friends whom I have shared moments of joy and pain. There is so many things I want to thank you. I appreciate all of their help, good humour and friendship throughout my PhD journey. I would never have been able to achieve what I have without their support and guidance from Dr. Nurul Ashikin Ismail, Dr. Nur Hafizah Muhammad, Dr. Nurul Hanisah Juhari, my best friends; Asmaa' Awang, Raihana Abd Razak, Dr. Amalina Azam, Faridah Ahmad, Wan Asliza Wan Zain, and Anis Aqilah Kamal that helped me a lot in completing this research. Also, new friends to be at my side at the end of my journey, Sriizzati Fatin Zainalabidin and Noor Fazleena Mohd Aris. They deserve my deepest gratitude. Thank you to those who shall remain unnamed but remembered.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my beloved mother, Habibah Bte Mohd Ali who passed away in June, 2010. Surely, I missed her a lot. Ameen.

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with an overview of a Malaysian traditional food known as *dodol*. Then, the researcher discusses the issues related to the topic of the study, its research aims, and the research questions. This chapter also explains the scope of the research and its significance plus the definitions of key terms used. Finally, this chapter ends with its summary.

1.2 Background of Study

The multi-culture of ethnicities in Malaysia has spread various, unique choices of food to represent Malaysian cuisine, especially traditional cuisines. Heritage food reflects ethnic identity (Che Lah, 2019). Thus, tremendous varieties and availability of traditional foods and *kueh* in Malaysia are derived from numerous ethnicities and mixed cultures such as Malays, Chinese, Indians, and others. Many popular heritage foods in Malaysia have been chosen to attract both local and international tourists to visit Malaysia, by offering its various identical trademarks and tastes, from appetisers to dessert courses, especially *kueh* (Abdul Raji et al., 2017; Jalis et al., 2014; Omar & Omar, 2018; Zakariah et al., 2012).

The varieties of *kueh* in Malaysia as one of the substances in tourism products, necessarily need to be preserved to stay in the market (Kamaruzaman et al., 2020). The preservation processes include the understanding of the history and preparation methods of the *kueh*, as well as its market (Kamaruzaman et al., 2023). However, current situations reveal that Malaysians simply “do not care” about the origin or history of the food they eat (Elis, 2009a). Other than that, a list of endangered traditional foods in Malaysia was declared, and there were about 203 authentic food items identified (Jabatan Warisan Negara, 2019), causing a big problem where the names, identical sources, and unique preparing methods of the traditional foods disappeared over time. Furthermore, a quote by a popular Malaysian celebrity chef, Chef Redzuwan also known as Chef Wan, is highly considered, saying that “*foods are just like culture and people, they deserve to be respected*”. His belief has always been to retain the old-style, traditional recipes and cooking methods to respect and preserve our heritage. He dislikes the idea of simply altering them to “trade in” with other cultures and adapt to modernity. These are the important aspects that require our consideration to sustain authentic Malay food as they represent our unique food culture. Moreover, the failure to preserve authentic food might cause Malay culture, food, and identities to be lost over time (Rafidi, 2019).

Despite the tremendous varieties and availability in the mainstream market, it denies the functions and appreciation of heritage food are increasingly marginalised by the current modernisation (Che Lah, 2019). Hamzah et al. (2015) highlighted that the sustainability of Malay traditional food production is in a critical state and gradually diminished due to modernisation and commercialisation. Thus, this tradition is now relied on by the current and the young generation to continue the legacy of traditional food. However, sustaining Malay traditional kueh seems to be precarious when the young generations seem unconcerned about taking part in preserving the Malay traditional kueh in Malaysia, due to various factors such as reluctant to learn traditional skills, lack of knowledge about Malay food and family support to continue the tradition time to time although they are celebrating important festive seasons, but prefer buying the foods from market (Md. Sharif et al., 2013; Md. Sharif et al., 2015). This situation implies the Malay festive traditional foods, such as *bahulu* and *dodol*. In fact, among these two delicacies, *dodol* was listed as one of the endangered foods to be extinction (Malaysia Heritage Department, 2019).

Previous studies have discovered that *dodol* is a Malay traditional sweet or traditional kueh, known as a sweet, gooey, and sticky sweet made from glutinous rice flour, palm sugar, and coconut milk (Ahmad, 2012; Seow et al., 2021). *Dodol* is a famous sweet during the Malay festive season, Hari Raya (Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr) in Malaysia (Ahmad, 2012). Similarly, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines call it *dodol*. *Dodol* is known as 'Mont Kalama' in the Myanmar region, while the Thais would call it 'kalamea'. In contrast, in India and East Africa, *dodol* is known as 'halwa' or candy (Aziz, 2017). 'Jenang' is the name of this sweet among people in Central Java and East Java (Ningrum, 2017).

In Malaysia, it is reported that the *dodol* manufacturers have been producing 13 different flavours of *dodol* (Nasbah, 2009). However, the various types of *dodol* that exist in Malaysia could pose some risks to the survival of traditional *dodol*. For example, the different types of flavoured *dodol* such as strawberry, corn, screw pine (pandan leaves), mango, durian, cappuccino, chocolate, apple, soursop, cashew, dates, almond, and raisin are widely sold in the Malaysia market and have also been exported to other countries like Brunei, Singapore, and China (Nasbah, 2009). Although *dodol* seems to successfully breach the international market, the issues sustaining the traditional *dodol* flavour need to be pondered. Despite having variety with the loose identification, research to focus on authentic *dodol* is needed to prevent the loss and neglect of people (Malaysia Heritage Department, 2019), and its preservation is necessary for future generations. Besides, it is a good reminder to study the *dodol*, as other Malay foods such as *pulut kuning* (Usman et al., 2022) and *serunding* (Ismail et al., 2022) were also proven to maintain and preserve their original identity and recipe intact, although they have undergone modernisation and commercialisation. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the way of sustaining *dodol* as a traditional food and making it preserved and relevant over time in Malaysia. Indeed, research attention on *dodol* is needed, particularly focusing on experiences in *dodol* production, the history of *dodol* in the past, and how the older generation has passed the experience to the younger generation to ensure that authenticity is sustained in the future (Trichopoulou et al., 2006).

1.3 Background of Research Problems

Past research found that local, traditional food is the main element that helps a country's business flourish (Jaafar et al., 2014). Undoubtedly, it also offers an experience for tourists as an encouragement to visit that particular destination (Sims, 2009). Traditional foods play an essential role in the development of local identity, and consumers' behaviour, and act as a transfer tool of cultural heritage for future generations to connect to their history and share it with the rest of the world. Besides, it also brings attention to a country's potential resources to create a difference as well as to make the product significant in the market (Albayrak & Gunes, 2010).

Recently, plenty of research related to the traditional food business for tourism purposes has been conducted around the world. For example, the research regarding the importance of food, especially in the tourism sector. Henderson (2009) revealed that the tourism sector is always synonymous with popular food as a primary or supporting role that has a good prospect and varies with location (Renko & Bucar, 2014). Abdul Wahid (2015) stated that in local or traditional food tourism, food is one of the items that represent the tourist fantasy, a marker of a lifestyle, communication, as well as an emblem of a community's heritage. Thus, tourists feel close to the community's roots, making their travel more meaningful, especially in how they are exposed to experiencing their past childhood memories of the traditional food in that specific place, and recreate their recent behaviour based on the memories in the past which are related to food. Giampiccoli and Kalis (2012) also agreed that food is one of the elements to be a potential local cultural resource and could increase the number of community benefits. Therefore, this shows that studying traditional food is relevant and might be one of the options that help increase the value of its authenticity, and identity of a country, and helps tourism in the future.

Albayrak and Gunes (2010), Leong et al., (2012), Abdul Wahid (2015), Renko & Bucar (2014) as well as Okech (2014) stated that presently, these traditional foods businesses merely focus on their origin and development, and evoke on nostalgia. Previous research has also shown that the lasting ability of traditional food products depends on their sustainability in the market (Cerjak et al., 2014), market competitiveness (Shamsudin et al., 2011), marketing management capabilities (Banterle et al., 2010), online promotions (Chhabra et al., 2013), food analysis (Abdiani, 2013; Mustaniroh et al., 2018; Ohiokpehai, 2003) and customers' perspectives (Abdul Wahid & Mudor, 2016; Cerjak et al., 2014; Żakowska-Biemans, 2012). Few studies in Malaysia have focused on Malay local food or traditional foods, but they only explored a few items of local Malay food from Peninsular Malaysia. For example, research extracted from northern Malaysia (Kedah) (Abdul Wahid & Mudor, 2016) and the east peninsular (Terengganu) (Ab. Rahman, Wan Ahmad, Mohamad, & Ismail, 2011). Several studies conducted in Malaysia focus on traditional food need to fulfil the customers' satisfaction if they were used as tourism product (Abdul Wahid & Mudor, 2016). For example, in the case of kueh *Bahulu* as tourism attractions to Malaysia were conducted, but only picks on the customers perspectives and

omit the producers' efforts. For the *dodol* case, only two research found in Malaysia, but it is merely too backdated and focused only on the problems while in the processing stage, replacing the main flour as the main ingredient, but omitting the history's part, and traditional production methods. This loop are consistent with the efforts by the Malaysian Heritage Department listing the *dodol* as one of the 203 types of endangered Malaysian traditional food due to modernisation challenge. Thus, this study seeks to highlight the *dodol* issues from all aspects of understanding namely the meaning of *dodol* in society, and its authentic etiquettes and how to sustain them as authentic food in the market in Malaysia, with the hope to preserve its information for future reference. Therefore, to protect the authenticity of the *dodol*, it is important to pursue information from reliable experts since they can provide empirical data to support how the sustainability of *dodol* can be achieved.

Dodol is popular in the southern states of Malaysia and can be easily found in Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, and Johor (Ahmad, 2012). The current scenario shows that *dodol* is also available in the market in those states, however, the statistical record shows a different side of view. Surprisingly, the registered number of *dodol* entrepreneurs in Malaysia is extremely small compared to other traditional businesses such as fermented food, dried traditional food, frozen food, woodcraft, and textiles. The statistic shows that there were only 0.64% (4 companies) of *dodol* business registered compared to 625 other businesses (Ministry of Rural Development, 2015). The small percentage of registered *dodol* business in Malaysia has indicated the critical number of *dodol* entrepreneurs at present. This may imply that *dodol* can slowly disappear from the mainstream market soon.

Based on Table 1.1 below, it suggests the number of active *dodol* factories in the southern states of Malaysia may increase. It is believed that the government has limited resources in acquiring the updated list of *dodol* entrepreneurs due to unregistered small-scale businesses thus, it has led to a situation where there is no proper record of the number of *dodol* premises. The updated lists of *dodol* factories or businesses can help the government trace the *dodol* activities as one way to sustain them in the market as a traditional Malay sweet. The idea of investigating the real situations of the current *dodol* factories in the list will help to provide ideas on how they survive and sustain the *dodol* for future generations although the number of them is slightly low. The *dodol* factories that were selected in the southern states' regions are based on the registered list from the Ministry of Rural Development source in the year 2015 and published in the Malaysian newspaper from 2016 to 2018.

Table 1.1 : *Dodol* Factories in the Southern States of Malaysia (Malacca, Negeri Sembilan Johor)

State	No of factory	Brand	Experience	Export
Malacca	4	<i>Dodol</i> Ideris	20 years	Brunei, Singapore, China, Middle East
		Hamidah Food Industries (<i>Dodol</i> Mama)	20 years	Throughout Malaysia, China, Singapore, Brunei
		<i>Dodol</i> Fauziah Karim	18 years	Malaysia (Malacca, Johor)
Johore	3	<i>Dodol</i> Ramlah	18 years	Malacca, Malaysia
		<i>Dodol</i> Warisan Asli, Benut	15 years	(Mersing, Johor Kuala Terengganu, Putrajaya)
		<i>Dodol</i> Muar	20 years	Malaysia (Malacca, Johor, Putrajaya)
		<i>Dodol</i> Pahat	15 years	Putrajaya, Batu Pahat
Negeri Sembilan	4	RLL Services & Enterprise	10 years	Rembau, Tampin,
		<i>Dodol</i> Tok Mak	20 years	Negeri Sembilan
		<i>Dodol</i> Young	10 years	Seremban, Negeri Sembilan
Total	11			

(Source : Utusan Malaysia, 2016-2018)

1.4 Problem Statement

Traditional food represents a particular culture, ethnicity, place and nation (Contini et al., 2016; Yoshino, 2010), and has long been part of a country's lifestyle. The potential of traditional delicacies to survive seems imaginable due to the norm of general consumption and higher demand during specific occasions. For example, traditional kueh can be easily found at gourmet restaurant, luxury hotel, café, night market (*pasar malam*) and hawker stall on a daily basis (Abdul Raji et al., 2017). At the same time, traditional kueh are still relevant to be served at specific cultural occasions like wedding and Eid (Shin, 2016).

The abundant heritage of Malay antiques enlist varieties of kueh that hold specialties to be enjoyed, shared and appreciated, for example *koci*, *kari pap*, and *keria* (Kamaruzaman et al., 2020). As part of the Malay culture and tradition, some kueh like *bahulu* and *dodol* are among the popular options during the festive seasons (Abdul Raji et al., 2017). Nevertheless, despite the popularity of

these kueh, they are still facing problems and challenges especially in terms of production, promotion and sustainability in the future (Shazali et al, 2013; 2016; Ahmad, 2010; Zahid et al., 2012). It is undeniable that a nation is dependable on its traditional food as an icon that symbolises its identity, culture and ethnicity (Jalis et al., 2014; Pflieger et al., 2013). This can help to unite people and boost the economy through tourism activities (Pivarski et al., 2023; Perry, 2017). In the case of *dodol*, it will be great if people know more about *dodol* especially its consistency in terms of quality ingredients, effective production and continuous promotion. However, currently, *dodol* is no longer a popular choice as a snack or dessert especially in big cities. The current generation also does not experience much of traditional *dodol*'s quality and authenticity. Recently, a total of 203 traditional foods in Malaysia are listed as the "endangered traditional foods" by the Malaysian Food Heritage Department. This list has raised a genuine concern to protect the Malaysian traditional foods from extinction in the future, and specifically to remain *dodol*, which is placed at 75th, as a distinct and iconic food in the country (Abdul Wahid, 2009; Yoshino, 2010). However, zooming into the latest research about the Malay *dodol*, the scarcity of documents also find gap that this research is intended to embark on. Little documentation about the food's origin and history, the current changes and in-depth discussion on the Malay *dodol* had been reported. Scholarly articles focusing on the Malay *dodol* are limitedly discussed in simple paragraphs under the topic of heritage food. Thus, this implies a gap for academics to solely define and elaborate on the term or the product itself. On top of that, no research has been found so far to explain the product as a whole or only explain the scientific aspect of it. Therefore, this research focuses on *dodol* in the southern states of Malaysia as there are other versions of *dodol* originated from other states too. In order to identify the meaning of *dodol* and its characteristics, this research highlights the perspectives of the Malay community and its experts in Malaysia to prevent confusion or debate over the ownership of this sweet delicacy (Ismail et al., 2021).

Currently, there are limited documentations found on *dodol* and its authenticity including the history, experience in preparation and current practices. The rationale behind identifying the authenticity of *dodol* in Malay culture is to maintain its original taste, characteristics and sustainability. Authentic technique application during production is vital to ensure soft texture and long-lasting *dodol* (Meor Rozman, 2015). However, past research in Malaysia only revolved around the issues of maintaining *dodol*'s authentic taste i.e., quality of ingredients (Ahmad, 2017; Meor Rozman, 2015) and proper cooking preparation and methods (Md. Zain, 2013). In the past, of the many studies on *dodol*'s preservation, most of them have focused on the nutritional content (Ahmad et al., 2010), panels' acceptance level (Abdiani, 2013; Kusumawati & Basmal, 2015), processing (Mustaniroh et al., 2018), packaging, quality i.e., shelf life and characteristics (Breemer et al. 2010; Selfiyana et al. 2015), exploring new sources of ingredients (Bayu, 2015; Nusa et al. 2015), marketing i.e., business model (Hamid, 2017; Wendrawan, 2013; Yuliasih & Tri Wendrawan, 2013) as well as business development and strategy (Halit et al., 2017; Palit et al. 2017; Priyani & Ikhwana, 2016).

On the other hand, there was also research concerning the ways of sustaining *dodol* in Indonesia, focusing on Mandailing ethnics (Setiavani et al., 2021). Meanwhile, in Malaysia, past research was conducted to investigate and solve the problems of *dodol* which mainly related to *dodol*'s new development (Ahmad, 2012) and processing (Ahmad et al., 2010; Zahid et al., 2012). In comparison between Indonesia and Malaysia, particularly on how their studies were conducted on *dodol*, Malaysia is seen as one step behind in the issue of crafting and promising authentic *dodol*'s presence in the future market. There is limited documentation on the authenticity of *dodol* that discusses the meaning, ways to preserve the original recipe and the methods of producing good and authentic *dodol* in Malaysia. Therefore, the exploration of authenticity elements of *dodol* namely the meaning, its preparation process and how *dodol* is sustained in the Malaysian market can help future generations to appreciate *dodol* as one of their heritage foods.

In addition, other issues due to modernisation have been raised by scholars. Modernisation has affected the originality of *dodol* in the market, in terms of varieties of flavour, taste and variation of *dodol* (Meor Rozman, 2015). Modernisation factor using technology, especially in the *dodol* cooking stages is proper with good hygiene practices and it saves human energy and time (Ismail et al., 2021) as well as help the producers to invent more flavours of *dodol*. However, through modernisation, the originality element of the *dodol* has progressively deteriorated, thus making *dodol* to be less favourable (Chuah et al., 2007; Nasaruddin et al., 2012). These new inventions of *dodol* have affected its authenticity and could bring some consequences, for example, the next generation will not be able to identify between authentic *dodol* and innovated *dodol* in the market. Therefore, it is necessary to sustain the production of authentic *dodol* in the market to value it as an authentic food product. A study also revealed that there is a gap or different perception about this traditional food between producers and customers' demand (Abd. Wahid et al., 2009) and marketing challenges (Rivza et al., 2017). Indeed, the different perceptions between producers and consumers imply that both are having conflicts with one another. In this case, the producers prioritise the quality of product like freshness and aroma, whereas the consumers prefer more than that, especially in the aspect of cleanliness from the beginning of production until the selling process (Abdul Wahid & Mudor, 2016). Therefore, a study needs to be conducted to address the gap between what is offered by producers and the demands requested by consumers in this traditional food production.

From the theoretical perspective, this study has combined two theories. According to the problems identified, the main issue of this research is how to sustain the authenticity of *dodol* in the market. Therefore, the theory of sustainability as discussed through the simple Venn diagram of sustainable development theory (Agyeman & Evans, 2003) is used as the fundamental of this research in order to discuss the elements of economy, social and environment, and how these elements work hand in hand to sustain *dodol*'s authenticity in the market. Additional authentic models have also been added to guide this research to explore the authentic meaning so that the philosophy of *dodol* can be preserved as an authentic, Malay heritage food. In related to this,

it is clear that discussion on *dodol*'s authenticity is the focus and concern of this research.

Each element is related to each other, and they are reliable to be used as reference factors for the sustainability of *dodol* as a heritage food in Malaysia. Nevertheless, the authenticity and sustainability topic have relatively been neglected in cultural studies only until recently (Muhammad et al., 2016). Few studies on authenticity have been conducted, whereby they only focused on the tourism perspectives (Hughes, 1995). Nevertheless, a few kinds of research were also conducted on food or cuisine's authenticity, but from a broader and general perspectives. Furthermore, authenticity topic has been widely discussed in past research whereby they have covered on the analysis of antiques, art objects and certain kinds of tourism, but not in the discussion of ethnic foods (Muhammad et al., 2016). Indeed, there is no research so far that has used or discussed the two elements together, focusing on the Malay traditional food, *dodol*. Therefore, this theory and model are used to discuss *dodol*'s authenticity and how it is supposed to be sustained in Malaysia. Overall, based on the gap discussed i.e., practice, research gap and theoretical gap, these are going to be considered as the main purpose of this study.

Finally, this research explains how *dodol* is sustained as one of the endangered traditional foods in Malaysia. This includes the meaning of *dodol*, its unique authentic characteristics, the current practice of *dodol* production, and the ways it is sustained particularly in the southern states of Malaysia.

1.5 Research Objectives

This research explores the sustainability of *dodol* authenticity in the southern states of peninsular Malaysia. This research assists to set aim:

1. To define the meaning of *dodol* in Malay culture
2. To explore the *dodol* authenticity characteristics
3. To investigate the current practice in preparing *dodol*
4. To explore the efforts regarding authentic *dodol* sustainability as Malay heritage food

1.6 Research Questions

The main purpose of this study is to explore the authenticity of Malaysia's traditional food heritage, *dodol* in the southern states of Malaysia. Based on the introduced issue and problem statements discussed earlier, these are the research questions for this study:

1. What is the meaning of *dodol* in Malay culture?

2. What makes *dodol* authentic?
3. What are the current practices in preparing *dodol*?
4. How is authentic *dodol* sustained as a Malay heritage food?

1.7 Significant of Study

Previous studies have discovered that local food products originally prepared by local entrepreneurs have the potential to help improve the momentum of a country's tourism sector, either to flourish or to sustain its momentum (Jaafar et al., 2014; Jalis et al., 2014). Based on the perspectives of some past research, it is fair to say that *dodol* has the potential to sustain its existence in Malaysia over time. However, the argument is mainly based on the scientific approach perspectives such as its quality and the processing part to preserve the shelf-life of *dodol* (Ahmad, 2012; Zahid et al., 2012). Empirical studies on the meaning, tradition, and practice context seem limited, particularly in the *dodol* subject. Hence, this study fills the gap in issues of endangered traditional foods in Malaysia, particularly highlighting the context of Malay traditional food, *dodol*, and focusing on the phenomenology case study in the southern states of Malaysia. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge of the authenticity of food and how it sustains itself in the food market, hence exploring the link between the authenticity of traditional food and sustainability theory.

Previously, research using the authenticity relationship model and sustainability theory was found to be limited in traditional food studies, particularly in Malaysia. The purpose of this study is to explore how *dodol* is sustained and preserved as one of the traditional foods in the southern states of Malaysia using the authentic relationship model coined by Beer (2008) and sustainability theory (Simple Venn Diagram of Sustainable Development Theory) initiated by (Agyeman and Evans (2003) as the main guideline. The authenticity relationship model highlights the product's originality based on its preparation, production, and packaging, whereas sustainability theory focuses on the external factors affecting the product's longevity in the market (economic, environmental, and social). Additionally, this study also contributes to the development of a framework for the sustainability of authentic traditional food products based on the case of the Malay traditional product, *dodol* in the Malaysian southern states market.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the new body of knowledge in the field of Malay traditional food, specifically exploring the link between the theory of sustainability and product authenticity among Malay entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, the practical contribution of this research is solely generated to accommodate the previous research in terms of planning the development and strategies to help the local entrepreneurs and the relevant authorities. Other than that, it is to sustain the traditional business and maintain heritage food in the market. Thus, this study provides essential information related to the sustainability of traditional food in the Malaysian context and could specifically assist the authorities in the

government or the private sector, especially at the local levels of the traditional food industry. It is necessary to understand the traditional food markets' sustainability and their items while helping the business of local communities and boosting the country's economy.

For the practical contribution, the findings of this study can generate ideas to accommodate the previous research in terms of planning the development and strategies to help the local entrepreneurs, as well as the relevant authorities in sustaining the traditional business and maintaining heritage food in the market. This study will provide information on the knowledge, techniques, and tips to younger generations, specifically in the southern states. Furthermore, this research aims to share information with the relevant authorities in the government or the private sector, particularly at local levels in the traditional food industry. Therefore, the government and *dodol* producers in the southern states must learn and understand these matters in their effort to help preserve the *dodol*. The research integrating this traditional food could contribute to the sustainability of *dodol* in the southern states of Malaysia. It is vital to understand the perspectives of Malay traditional food, therefore the empirical findings of this study can be used to represent an image of the nation. It is important to understand the sustainability of traditional food markets and their items, at the same time helping the local communities to boost their businesses as well as the country's economy.

Specifically, the outcome of this study could be significantly applied to other potential traditional food in Malaysia that have a decreasing tendency in the future but people still have an interest to sustain them in the market. The empirical findings for this study can benefit current local producers and customers as well as a reference source for *dodol* producers and consumers from other states in Malaysia. Moreover, it will address the new generations of *dodol* entrepreneurs with valuable information on how previous entrepreneurs began and sustained the *dodol* throughout. The findings will give them some insights to start a new business of *dodol*.

1.8 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope and limitations of the research are important for the researchers to define the parameters of the phenomenon and help identify the strengths and weaknesses of the study. It helps the researchers to identify the standard criteria as well as the restrictions of the *dodol*-making process. The scope of this research is to understand the context of the roles of Malaysian traditional food; *dodol*, how it can be sustained as a national heritage food in the southern states of Malaysia (Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, and Johor) and focuses on the past and current situations of the local *dodol* experts and entrepreneurs, especially those with more than 20 years of experience in this industry. The data of this study was essential only from the year 2018-2022.

Other than entrepreneurs and experts, some local informants known as consumers who are knowledgeable about *dodol* have also participated in the study, especially the ones who have more than 20 years of experience with it. Their feedback is necessary to differentiate the producer and consumer's perspectives about this traditional food in the southern states. Their information helps the researchers to recognise the criteria of authentic *dodol* and ways to sustain it in traditional food market production.

This research aims to understand the roles of *dodol* in Malay culture and ways of preserving it in the southern states of Malaysia. This study focuses on the meaning of *dodol*, its production etiquettes with authentic criteria, current production, and current efforts to preserve *dodol* in the market. In this study, the data collection process involved multiple interviews between the researcher and informants. These data collection activities have allowed the researcher to build a rapport with the informants through observations and in-depth, semi-structured interviews.

1.9 Definition Keys of Term

Sustainability of Food

The sustainability of food discussed is the Malay heritage food, namely *dodol*. The broad discussion about the sustainability of food was narrowed down to the sustainability of heritage food, opined with interpreted theory highlighting the three pillars: economic development, social development, and environmental protection (Brons & Oosterveer, 2017).

Authenticity of Food

Authenticity refers to the state of something being authentic, or legitimate and true. It also represents a concept that is built around the notions of ethical, natural, honest, simple, beautiful, rooted, or human concepts (Yeoman et al., 2007). Food authenticity refers to the closest link to its place of origin, using the raw materials which it is produced, and to the production process itself (Cho, 2012; Carroll, 2015). Attributions about authenticity are usually made by individuals about other entities of all kinds: persons, places, products, things, experiences, organisations, and so on (Carroll, 2015). For this research, food authenticity was discussed by focusing on the real place of Malays' *dodol* origin (for southern states of Malaysia; namely Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, and Johor), discussing the raw or natural ingredients to produce the *dodol* in the past (focused on Malay *dodol* expert experience), and followed by the traditional practices and method of processing *dodol* in the past.

Traditional Food

Traditional foods comprises the culture, heritage, and identity of each country in the world (Hamzah et al., 2015). In this case, *dodol* was also known as the

traditional food that has existed since the early settlement of Malay ethnics in Malaysia. *Dodol* can symbolise a referral dish or food image that links the Malay ethnics in Malaysia.

Natural Ingredients

Refers to the food sources located around the local area that are used to produce dishes or recipes (Abdul Aziz et al., 2014). For this research, the natural ingredients are the locally grown coconut tree, glutinous rice plantation (for glutinous rice flour), and the source of *gula Melaka* from the *nipah* plant.

Traditional Cooking Method

It refers to the traditional methods of cooking with different kinds of equipment and utensils, cooking methods, and food preparations (Mohamad Abdullah et al., 2012). For this research, the traditional method of cooking *dodol* is using manual labour, the use of firewood, and traditional cooking utensils.

1.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the background of the study, the background of research problems, the problem statement, the research questions, the significance of the study and its scope, as well as the limitations of the study, and the definition of terms. This chapter also describes the justification for conducting the study.

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