

## Rhetoric of Food Authenticity and National Identity in the New Media

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### ABSTRACT

The global discourse on food often pivots around the issue of food security. With the new media, the discourse of food as a signifier of a national identity is constantly renewed and contested. This constant renewal and perpetual debate about food authenticity as the nexus of national identity from the Cultural Studies perspective is both the significance and the problem that the present study acknowledges and addresses. The aim of this paper is to identify, analyze and interpret the rhetorical strategies used by the media audience to reveal their attitude towards the issue. Using convenience sampling technique, a set of discourse samples is selected from the comment sections of articles on food authenticity across the new media. The corpus is analyzed using key concepts or canons in rhetoric, which are Logos, Ethos and Pathos. In addition, three rhetorical canons, invention, arrangement and style, are also used as units of analysis. The study finds that rhetors did not use the Logos (logic and fact) as one of their strategies to persuade readers to be on their side. Instead, they appealed to ethos (character and credibility) and Pathos (emotion). This evinces the idea that the media audience writing in a comment section in the new media are not basing their writing on the need to appeal to logic and fact (Logos), or proactively, but instead they are more reactionary (personal and emotive). This finding contributes towards the understanding of the media audience's rhetorical strategies in the new media.

**Keywords:** food; authenticity; nationhood; rhetoric; new media

### INTRODUCTION

Food, in Cultural Studies, is treated beyond the realm of mere existence to the realm of symbol. For instance, in the introduction of their book *Eating Together: Food, Space and Identity in Malaysia and Singapore*, Jean Duruz and Gaik Cheng Khoo evoke the sense of place with that of food: "The air is heavy with the sounds and aromas of cooking: the hiss of the grill, the scrape of the wok, and the pungent, fishy smells of cuttlefish and squid" (2015, p. 1). This connection reaffirms that Penang is not only a food destination but it also apotheosizes the way the memory of a place is formed and remembered (or in Duruz's and Cheng Khoo's case, 'imagine'). Penang, also known as the Pearl of the Orient, has been promoting its food as its salient cultural heritage, an indication that food means a lot more than what it is; it indeed stands for national memory and identity. To some extent, food, being a type of material culture,

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is seen as a quantifiable asset to the state that it manages not only to inveigle both local and international tourists to the island but also to expand Penang beyond its physical situatedness. Enjoying its gastronomic offerings is synonymous with journeying inside Penang and its metonymic extension. In short, it is clear that Cultural Studies modulates the status of food from a mere physical existence to a symbolic subject.

Conterminous with that, the idea of food having a symbolic function is often played out in the media especially concerning the notion of food authenticity and its link with national identity. For example, the year 2021 sees the debates among Malaysians on Facebook about which recipe of Laksa is considered authentic (Dass, 2021). In fact, high profile issues of food authenticity have always been alive in the media. For instance, in Malaysia, in 2014, the Chief Minister of Penang, Lee Guan Eng, proposed that food hawkers in Penang who employ foreign workers had to be banned from operating in the state. In an article in *Malaysian Insider* (3 August 2014), Guan Eng is cited as saying: “It will not be the same. I think locals must be proud that their food has made Penang famous. I hope the younger generation will also take an interest in preserving the original flavours of the local cuisine. You cannot just let foreigners take over”. Central to Guan Eng’s argument is that ‘original flavours’ is directly linked to a spatial location, that is, Penang itself. Importantly, this ‘original flavour’ is seen as able to transcend time and therefore transferable to the next generation only via local cooks. Guan Eng’s idea garnered a lot of support from Penangites. On October 24, 2014, Cavina Lim reported the result of a survey done by Penang State Local Government, revealing that “86 per cent agreed with the Penang Municipal Council’s withdrawing the licenses of hawkers who employed foreign cooks, and only 13.98 per cent rejected the idea” (*The Star*). This survey is an important indication of Penangites’ attitude towards their heritage as presented by their “claim for” authentic delicacies. In short, the issue of food and its affinity with the notion of authenticity has always been alive in the media, especially in the new media.

Another example of how the issue of food authenticity is played out in the media took place during a popular cooking competition program in 2018 in the United Kingdom, MasterChef. Due to one episode in which one celebrity chef judge, Gregg Wallace, commented: “I like your *rendang* flavour, however, the chicken isn’t crispy, it can’t be eaten”, Wallace was criticized badly by furious social media users from Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore where *Chicken Rendang* is considered a traditional and ‘staple’ dish. The program consequently had to take a flak from the media audience, claiming that the judges of the program lacked sufficient knowledge of other ‘ethnic’ cuisines (Kusaeni, 2018). The subsequent elimination of the Malaysian-born British contestant because of her non-crispy *rendang* was regarded as unfair by the media audience from this region as the traditional chicken *rendang* must be soft as a result of painstakingly long hours of cooking. Malaysian journalists and food writers condemned the judges as being ignorant and ought not be called celebrity chefs when they only knew food from their own culture (Chen, 2018). In conclusion, it is now apparent that the way the issue of food authenticity is often played out in the media highlights the symbolic function of food as providing an epistemic association with the national identity.

What media discourse on food and its intersection with the notion of authenticity and national identity do is that it reaffirms the idea that the concept of authenticity itself is not natural or inherent; indeed, it is a social construct. This means, as a social construct, new meanings are consistently constructed and debated, making it crucial for such discourse to be continuously investigated. Past studies point to the tendency to use discourse analysis (Zahra & Ho-Abdullah, 2012; Zahra, Ho-Abdullah, & Tan, 2014; Perry, 2017) and critical cultural and media theories (Moores, 2005; Counihan & Van Esterik, 2008; Duruz & Cheng Khoo, 2015) in such endeavours. These studies generally reveal what McMichael (2008, p. 5) succinctly asserts: “Much of what we consume today has global origins”. As an instance, one

conception in which there lies the idea that the value of authenticity grows as a “rhizome” - an idea proposed by Deleuze and Guattari - in which “the rhizome expands endlessly in any number of directions, without center” (in Mansfield, 2000, p. 143). This loss of center is a postmodernist idea of deconstructing authenticity as having a core, especially when each growth will eventually take its flight of fancy. This theorization also resonates well with David C. Chaney’s idea of culture as ideology and sensibility. Indeed, Chaney argues that “a key element in the traditional discourse of culture, the value of authenticity, is now being understood less as an inherent quality of objects or actions and more as something produced in life-styling” (2001, p. 75). This reflects the idea that life-styling divorces the signifier authenticity from its signification. Moores (2005) also stresses a similar idea by discussing the concept like cyclicity in discussing the discursiveness of the process of signification in the media in producing meanings of authenticity and identity. In short, this shows that the food can function as a nexus of authenticity and national identity.

Previous studies such as the one carried out by De Xuan Xiong and Ian A. Brownlee (2018) reveal that the global discourse on food often pivots around the issue of security and national identity. With the new media, the discourse of food as a signifier of a national identity is constantly renewed and contested. One reason for this is the inextricable link made between food authenticity and national identity and heritage debate. Nonetheless, the notion of authenticity has been problematized especially after the industrial revolution that was marked by mass production. Compounded by the digital era, consequently, the ontological shift from user to producer of media complicates the idea of authenticity further, with the claims of authenticity equating national boundary markers. This constant renewal and perpetual debate about food authenticity as the nexus of national identity from the Cultural Studies perspective is both the significance and the problem that the present study acknowledges and addresses.

With this understanding of authenticity as a social construction, this paper, however, does not concern itself with the *raison d’être* of food authenticity itself; rather, it examines how the media audience argue for food authenticity and their efforts to link it with national identity. While media audience participations have been largely studied, Englke (2019, p. 1) argues that “user comments in particular are frequently examined regarding their deliberative nature [...] But the picture so far has been inconclusive”. This inconclusiveness is the gap we have identified for this study. To examine the media audience’s argument, rhetoric as an analytical tool is used to identify the ways the media audience/rhetor argue about food authenticity. In addition, this paper borrows the salient idea of food as a material culture from Parasecoli who argues that “[F]ood influences our lives as a relevant marker of power, cultural capital, class, gender, ethnic, and religious identities (2008, p. 2). This idea of food as embodying cultural markers is important in ensuring that food is not seen as mere gastronomy; but it carries some symbolic freights. In that vein, this paper therefore seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What rhetorical strategies are used by the media audience?
- 2) What themes can be derived from the rhetorical analysis of the discourse produced by the media audience?
- 3) How useful is rhetoric as an analytical tool in understanding the claim for food authenticity and its link with national identity?

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Food has always been a part of human cultural development. The study of food or better known as food studies, traditionally, focused on its production, delivery and consumption. This is because food is seen as a biological need that has both functional and economic values to

society. Therefore, not until quite recently has more effort been made in understanding cultural meanings of food. This literature review covers past studies of food as a material culture and is thematically organized so that the problem and gap of the study can be identified.

The first theme identified in the study of food as a material culture is its historical legitimization. One of the historical markers of the study of food as culture is traceable in the development in Cultural Studies in 1964 at the University of Birmingham, Britain (Sardar and Van Loon, 2010, p. 24)) whereby food is seen as significant in understanding a culture. According to Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik in a preface of their book, that is, the second edition of *Food and Culture: A Reader*, that “*When Food and Culture: A Reader* was first published in 1997, it helped define and legitimize the field of food and cultural studies” (2008, p. xii). Over 15 years since then, the interest in understanding the relationship between food and culture is still curiously expanding. Another research that tries to legitimize food authenticity with that of historical references is done by Humairah Hamzah et al. (2013). Though the study focuses on taste and authenticity, it relies on historical knowledge to define taste itself.

The second theme is the political nature of food studies in a cultural context. The curiosity of the relationship between food and culture can be explained in the steady development of the study of food within the paradigm of Cultural Studies in which food is made incontrovertibly political. Framed within the meta-theory, i.e., Marxist concept of commodification, food studies may still focus on production, distribution and consumption, but its political dimensions are now in the foreground. Fabio Parasecoli succinctly declares that “food studies are intrinsically interdisciplinary” (2008, p. 11), highlighting the various ways food has affected culture. For instance, the study of food and its political connection is carried out by Arjun Appadurai who looks at the ideological imperative of cookbooks in the context of India. Appadurai in “How to make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India” writes:

“Insofar as cookbooks reflect the kind of technical and cultural elaboration, we grace with the term *cuisine*, they are likely, as Jack Goody has recently argued, to be representations not only of structures of production and distribution and of social and cosmological schemes, but of class and hierarchy (1978)”

(in Counihan and Van Esterik, 2008, p. 279)

Appadurai’s concern may be culturally specific to India; however, it alludes to the power of food studies in understanding power relations in human society. By the same token, as indicated in Zahra, Ho-Abdullah and Tan (2014, p. 33), “investigating what and how a nation eats, as well as the choice of their food ingredients, qualities, production and the process of ingestion can provide us with a valuable perspective into different aspects of their personal and cultural identities”. This perspective panders to the Foucauldian maxim of knowledge/power.

The third theme identified that is linked to Appadurai’s conception is the correlation between food taste and social class. Appadurai’s concern is built upon the direct correlation of food with class, a point reminiscent of Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of taste and class (in Sturken and Cartwright, 2009). They state that Bourdieu argues that “taste is informed by experiences relating to one’s class, cultural background, education, and other aspects of identity [...] [and the] understanding of taste as something that is always connected to social identity and class status” (in Sturken and Cartwright, 2009, p. 56). Importantly, Sturken and Cartwright also argue that “taste can be exercised and displayed through patterns of consumption and display” (ibid. p. 57); this is the point that we think resonates well with Appadurai’s idea of class and hierarchy. A study by Zlatevska reasons that we are instinctively driven to eat meat because it is associated with a higher social status (Noone, 2018). He goes on to say that all humans are instinctively wired to associate meat eating with socio-economic position and it would be odd

to only have vegetable-based dishes at a dinner party unless you were a vegan or vegetarian. He concluded that eating meat is a symbol of power and status. Likewise, Sturken and Cartwright establish the link between institution and power in the context of Foucault's writings about the function of institutions by stating that "institutions historically have provided structures through which power could be enacted without force or explicit directives, but rather through more passive techniques such as education, the cultivation of taste, and the cultivation of daily routines" (2009, p. 66).

The fourth theme is related to the practice of food reviewing and criticism. Similarly, drawing from Foucault's theory, this value/power relationship is akin to that of the debates surrounding authorship, as Kay Ferres observes that "Power flows from and through this designation of value, via the practices of reviewing and criticism" (in Janes Crisp, Kay Ferres and Gillian Swanson, 2000, p. 54). Embedded within "the practices of reviewing and criticism" is the concern of globalization and its homogenous force on food "standard" as a norm itself. Food criticism and review are the logical expression of that power to regulate, resulting in what Nick Stevenson aptly calls, "the progressive criminalization of the poor" (2007, p. 259).

The fifth theme concerns the way food is related to memory of a place. According to Perry (2017) in her study, *Feasting on Culture and Identity*, food triggers nostalgia and memories of people, places and events. The study analyses a novel, *This End of a Rainbow* where meals and dining are elaborately described in a girl's nostalgic recollection of her memories of her home, family, childhood and adolescent memories (2017, p. 190). Another study is done by De Xuan Xiong and Ian A (2018) whose study on the memories of food culture in Singapore is also an effort to preserve and relate food identity with that of the national identity. In this study, De Xuan Xiong and Ian A. Brownlee argue that "exploring memories of *kampong* food culture is timely because of the current focus on social cohesion in Singapore" (2018, p. 138). What is interesting about this research is the glossary provided at the end of the article that defines the traditional food based on its racial or country of origin as certain food is associated with who normally sold them during that time. This can be seen as a common practice in multicultural and multi-ethnic countries like Singapore and Malaysia.

This literature review that pivots on the study of food as a material culture reveals some important themes. They are historical legitimization of the field of study itself, the political nature of food study itself, the relationship between taste and class, the practice of food reviewing and criticism, and food and the memory of place. These themes also point to a dearth in the study of food as material culture in the context of rhetoric and the new media. As the present era is defined by its digital technology, globalization and movements of people, the significance of this study is it attempts to make sense of what rhetorical devices are used to construct the idea of food authenticity and its relationship with national identity among the media audience.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a qualitative research approach, with textual analysis as its main methodology. Textual analysis is a research method that requires the researcher to closely analyze the textual content of communication and is often used to examine a wide range of cultural texts such as historical documents, media texts and literary works. A textual analysis is valuable in research because it allows researchers to construct meanings and ideas expressed through written words and visual representation more intimately as compared to the coding method in the quantitative research approach. The advantage of using textual analysis, according to Frey and Krepps (1999), is that examining word choices through textual analysis can provide insights into people's characters, and we are able to understand how people think, and consequently act, by studying patterns displayed in their discourse. McKee (2003, p. 1)



also states that “textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world”. This is in line with the research questions that this paper addresses.

Convenience sampling is used in this study to ensure that it can achieve its aim. When referring to this sampling technique, Neuman argues that the “primary criteria for selecting cases are that they are easy to reach, convenient, or readily available” (2014, p. 248). Therefore, the corpus for this paper is conveniently collected from some online news portals such as *The Star Online* and *Kompasiana.com*. These news portals are both independent as well as government owned. Some are Malaysian news portals and others are from elsewhere. The reason for this dispersion of data samples is because this paper is focusing not on the question of the constitution of authenticity itself, and it disregards spatial specificity of the data; rather it attempts to reveal the rhetorical strategies and the attitudes of media audience towards the issue of food authenticity.

The data collection procedure involves collecting media audience’s responses to the main article rather than the content of the article about food itself. This is because the more interestingly rich discourse resides in the discursive nature of the media audiences’ responses as an online community. Mohd Sufiean, Maizatul Haizan and Siti Nurshahidah argue that “the new media has access features and direct communication between the owner of information with the media audience, in which feedbacks and responses are more efficiently delivered” (2020, p.145) Indeed, the responses given by these users are useful in thinking about authenticity as a lived experience (the pragmatics) rather than the product of pure discourse, or sheer theoretical, and top-down as often the case with the main articles. Through semi-systematic internet search based on keywords such as “authenticity”, “food culture” and “local cuisine”, the data is then analyzed. We decide to retain the original texts in English (marked “verbatim”) and in the original languages that they appear, including grammatical inaccuracies for the purpose of authenticity. However, we take the liberty in the translation itself to ensure clarity and precision (marked “our translation”).

The responses are then textually analyzed using rhetoric as its analytical tool, focusing on both lexical (for example noun and noun phrases) and syntactic levels. From this analysis, the data is then categorized based on themes. With the aim of this paper is to identify, analyze and interpret the rhetorical strategies used by the media audience to reveal their attitude towards the issue, the analysis and discussion of the data is established, and the data is then placed under their respective themes.

#### RHETORIC AS AN ANALYTICAL TOOL

“Rhetoric may be defined as a faculty of discovering all the possible means of persuasion in any subject” Aristotle (in Donald Lemen Clerk, 1922 (2003))

Rhetoric as a practice has its origin in the classical criticism tradition that harks back to the Greek and Roman classical oratory tradition of persuasion. In literary studies, it is used as part of literary technique of criticism. According to Covino and David (1995, p. 4), rhetoric is often comprehended as “the study and practice of shaping content”. They further state that “the rhetoric of a text is the selection and organization of language it uses to move potential readers and listeners to consider its ideas and conclusions” (1995, p. 8). This means, rhetoric is used to help create persuasion especially in speech. Nonetheless, rhetoric can also be used almost forensically, to understand how certain communication works in appealing to the audience.

Rhetoric can be divided into several units of analysis, often known as departments or canons. The canons in rhetoric are invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery. The term invention refers to the effort of finding ways to persuade or the development of ideas

itself. Arrangement involves putting together a coherent and engaging argument. The department style refers to the personal presentation of arguments to stir emotion, usually taking into consideration the audience, appropriateness and situation. Personal presentation involves personalized use of language. Memory involves giving a speech without having to memorize each word. Lastly, delivery involves making use of voice and gesture. For the purpose of this research, only invention, arrangement and style will be used. This is because memory and delivery are often used when studying speech.

Meanwhile, the well-known three-rhetorical-triangle are logos, ethos and pathos. They are also known as the types of appeals used by the producer of discourse to support ideas and claims. Logos, ethos and pathos are the three main concepts that will be used in this study. Ethos refers to the appeal to character or ethics. Logos deals with the appeals to logic and reason. Pathos appeals to feeling and emotion. Table 1 below shows the concepts used for the analysis of the discourse about food, authenticity and national identity.

TABLE 1. Three key rhetorical concepts

<b>Logos</b>	Appeals to logic and reason
<b>Ethos</b>	Appeals to character credibility and ethics
<b>Pathos</b>	Appeals to feelings and emotions

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The data for this research is collected from online discussions, including from online news portals. The reason for doing this is because the online versions of the newspaper or news portals provide immediate and direct response opportunities for the readers. The interactive nature of online data, albeit discussions that are sometimes moderated, permits continual discourse about food authenticity to take place. The data is collected and then content analyzed, focusing on possible emerging themes that pivot around the rhetorical devices present in the discourse about food authenticity and national identity in the new media. The discussion of the analysis is structured around the themes constructed through the analysis.

The first theme found is the **question of origin**. The notion of space and time usually centers on the question of origin, as it points to the idea of originality. The data reveals that authenticity is often discussed by bringing up the idea of the origin of the food. Nonetheless, origin itself is insurmountably difficult to be used as a way of knowing especially in the context of cultural migrations, globalization, and diaspora. Indeed, the notion of origin also does not make the understanding of identity easy as culture is often transported with people to another geographical location. This is because the host location will affect the “original” culture of the immigrants, resulting in the marriage between the old and new cultures. In short, origin in this case cannot be used as a defining feature of authenticity as it takes away the focus from the object of authenticity to the practice of authenticity itself.

One such example of the problematics in using origin as a criterion of authenticity can be seen in the issue of *lumpia* or spring rolls. On the issue of “spring rolls” or *lumpia* as it is known in Indonesia, Indonesian demonstrators have been condemned for claiming the spring rolls as theirs. The argument used against the demonstrator is that a new geographical location affects the original recipe that is brought to the new land. For example, the migrants will have to improvise original recipes with local ingredients. Consequently, the name of the food, the recipe, the ingredient and the preparation procedure have to go through some changes to reflect the new location. The issue of the origin of *lumpia* (spring-rolls) was also picked up by Wan

Ismail or better known as Chef Wan, a prominent Malaysian celebrity chef, in his tweet. He tweets:

*Susah apabila manusia berfikiran cetek dan pendek akal mereka. Dah la kebanyakan mereka itu keluar negara sendiri pun tak pernah dan melihat popia atau Spring Roll ni di serata dunia orang dan reka berzaman zaman lagi mengguna pelbagai nama. From negara China to Filipina yg mereka panggil Lumpia sehingga la ke Mexico yg diberi nama Chimichanga dan mcm2 lagi la.*

It's difficult when people are short sighted and shallow minded. Not only that most of them have never been abroad themselves and have never seen *popia* or spring roll, and that people have created different types of spring roll and called them different names. From China to the Philippines (which they now call *lumpia*) to Mexico (and they call it *Chimichanga*) and others. (Our translation)

(Taken from *Beautifulnara.com*)

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>Logos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• N/A</li></ul>   |
| <b>Ethos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not only that most of them have never been abroad themselves and have never seen <i>popia</i> or spring roll, and that people have created different types of spring roll and called them different names</li><li>• From the Philippines (which they now call <i>lumpia</i>) to Mexico (and they call it <i>Chimichanga</i>) and others</li></ul> |
| <b>Pathos</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It's difficult when people are short-sighted and shallow minded</li></ul>   |

Here, Chef Wan stresses on the idea that thinking or debating about the origin of a certain dish is tricky and perhaps obsolescence, especially due to the fact that while the basic form of the food is retained, local ingredients and names are also added to the complexity of the issue. Here, in an effort to convince, he makes arrangements by using ethos and pathos, or his own credibility as a popular Malaysian chef to give his opinion. What is crucial to be observed here is that the inability to accept changes due to globalization renders “origin” obsolete, as the conflict between local and global is perpetual and necessary in preserving local identities.

In relation to Chef Wan's statement, a few readers from different countries such as Singapore provide examples by narrating their own experience of the uncertainty of the origin. This time it is linked with the notion of heritage:

One media audience adds:

*indon dekat Spore pun sama, hari tu Amy pergi lunch makan ikan goreng, lepas tu ada indon cakap2....” bangga warisan kita ikan goreng udah sampai di Spore”. Amy dalam hati just be like....since when ikan goreng tu warisan indon?*

Most Indonesians in Singapore are also the same (in claiming theirs). The other day when I was out for lunch, I heard them say “we should be proud that our heritage, the fried fish, has reached Singapore.” I was befuddled by the remark and asked myself: “since when is fried fish a heritage of Indonesia? (Our translation)

(Taken from *Beautifulnara.com*)



- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>Logos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• N/A</li></ul>   |
| <b>Ethos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Most Indonesians in Singapore are also the same (in claiming theirs). The other day when I was out for lunch, I heard them say “we should be proud that our heritage, the fried fish, has reached Singapore.”</li><li>• I was befuddled by the remark and asked myself: “since when is fried fish a heritage of Indonesia?”</li></ul> |
| <b>Pathos</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• N/A</li></ul>   |

In this case, the media audience invents his idea by appealing to his or her own credibility (ethos) by using personal anecdotes as the rhetorical style to persuade people to understand his argument. However, this is a cause for concern as modernization and globalization have caused the young generation to forget their heritage.

The idea that the origin is “fixed” can also be found. In the quotation below, the word “handsome” is determined by the origin, that is, the home cooking, corner stalls and restaurant. The situatedness of “origin” is then enforced by “food back at home”. In an article entitled “living away from Malaysia can trigger a lot of different longings” (*The Star Online*, 27.03.2015), the issue of “genuine” or authenticity is intertwined with that of food:

One reader by the name Kysee Wong says:

Living abroad, working or studying, agreed on one thing ... food choice. That handsome home cooking dishes at home or around the corner in stalls or restaurants. Nothing beats genuine foods that Malaysia country can offer ... Those working abroad should only think about making money... Why took part in the home country election? ... For those studying abroad, you are technically a Malaysian by right and not yet bound to the foreign country. Let me emphasize this again ... nothing beat Malaysia food back at home!!! (Verbatim)

(Taken from *The Star Online*)

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>Logos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• N/A</li></ul>   |
| <b>Ethos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For those studying abroad, you are technically a Malaysian by right and not yet bound to the foreign country.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Pathos</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Living abroad, working or studying, agreed on one thing ... food choice. That handsome home cooking dishes at home or around the corner in stalls or restaurants.</li><li>• Nothing beats genuine foods that Malaysia country can offer ... Those working abroad should only think about making money... Why took part in the home country election?</li><li>• Let me emphasize this again ... nothing beat Malaysia food back at home!!!</li></ul> |

The media audience seems to be more comfortable to hover around ethos and pathos in his or her argument. The reaction, the rhetorical style he chooses to express himself, is rather emotional than matter-of-fact. This reflects his over-romanticized idea of home. Food memories can be so powerful and can be one of the causes of homesickness for almost everyone living abroad.

Another reader by the name ExBumi comments:

I'm Malay born in KL but I have lived in Australia [for] over 3 decades. About the only thing I miss is the food. Other than that, I hate the racial-religious based politics, the widespread corruption, the emerging Mullahs who want to turn the once secular nation into another Saudi or IS etc etc Give me Malaysian food anytime. Give me Malaysia? Sorry you can have it and keep it, I'm happy & more comfortable looking in from a distance. (Verbatim)

(Taken from *The Star Online*)

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>Logos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• N/A</li></ul>  |
| <b>Ethos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I'm Malay born in KL but I have lived in Australia over 3 decades. About the only thing I miss is the food.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Pathos</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Other than that I hate the racial-religious based politics, the widespread corruption, the emerging Mullahs who want to turn the once secular nation into another Saudi or IS etc etc Give me Malaysian food anytime</li><li>• Give me Malaysia? Sorry you can have it and keep it, I'm happy &amp; more comfortable looking in from a distance.</li></ul> |

The media audience here seems to use ethos and pathos in putting forth to invent his argument. He or she uses a personal narrative of “I” to create credibility to show that this is a real case scenario. However, as the writing does not contain an element of logos, his argument is arranged in such a way that it foregrounds emotion and this style can only be seen as an emotional statement. Indeed, he seems to be missing the home country (comforts of favourite food) even though he has indirectly claimed that he is at a better place that probably offers more hope and opportunities.

A reader by the name Man, then, responded to ExBumi's comment in apprehension:

“widespread or not, now or before it happened and happens in every government and although I agree Malaysia is not spared but it is not something exclusive to condemn this country. I suppose Australia is a perfect spot for you. Stay there and don't ever come back, see whether any of us Malaysia ever care! You should not be selective about the food either, don't eat it as it is prepared and cooked by Malaysians. Shame on you Ex-bumi! (Verbatim)

(Taken from *The Star Online*)

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>Logos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• N/A</li></ul>   |
| <b>Ethos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I suppose Australia is a perfect spot for you. Stay there and don't ever come back, see whether any of us Malaysia ever cares!</li></ul>  |
| <b>Pathos</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• widespread or not, now or before it happened and happens in every government and although I agree Malaysia is not spared but it is not something exclusive to condemn this country.</li><li>• You should not be selective about the food either, don't eat it as it is prepared and cooked by Malaysians. Shame on you Ex-bumi!</li></ul> |

The media audience also appeals to ethos and pathos in responding to the statement made earlier. This shows that an emotionally charged statement made by a previous writer only results in a personal outburst. The response given moves from a logical arrangement around his personal rhetoric and to a direct attack on another person's sentiment. The rhetorical style employed in effect exposes his strong feelings towards his home country and his sense of attachment to his homeland.

Meanwhile, a reader by the name Raoul D. responded to the article by saying:

Most people use the word "authentic" to indicate that a meal is prepared similarly to where it would be prepared where the recipe originated. But it also drives me crazy to hear people always demanding that everything be made authentic. I'll take delicious and non-authentic over authentic-just-for-the-sake--of-being-authentic food any day. What's the point?" (Verbatim)

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>Logos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• N/A</li></ul>   |
| <b>Ethos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Most people use the word "authentic" to indicate that a meal is prepared similarly to where it would be prepared where the recipe originated.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Pathos</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• But it also drives me crazy to hear people always demanding that everything be made authentic.</li><li>• I'll take delicious and non-authentic over authentic-just-for-the-sake--of-being-authentic food any day. What's the point?</li></ul> |

In this case, the media audience uses ethos and pathos to invent a more generalized statement to disguise an opinion as a fact especially in the use of the word "Most people." He is against the idea of seeking authenticity just for authenticity's sake. However, the media audience only appeals to the emotion of the reader by using his or her own personal decision as a style of his argument.

Another media audience, Omit. T, from Paris France, opines that:

If I'm looking for an ethnic food place, particularly from a country I have familiarity with, I want the food to smell and taste like what I've had on my travels. If a crepe reminds me of France, if a crawfish reminds me of Louisiana, if a bowl of ramen reminds me of Japan - then it makes the meal that much better. (Verbatim)

(Taken from *The Star Online*)

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>Logos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• N/A</li></ul>   |
| <b>Ethos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If I'm looking for an ethnic food place, particularly from a country I have familiarity with, I want the food to smell and taste like what I've had on my travels.</li><li>• a crepe reminds me of France, if a crawfish reminds me of Louisiana, if a bowl of ramen reminds me of Japan - then it makes the meal that much better.</li></ul> |
| <b>Pathos</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• N/A</li></ul>   |

The media audience here also appeals to only his own character and credibility as the person who has experienced it personally. This is an ethos, as he uses a personal anecdote to make his point. This rhetorical style of self-validation reveals that one's taste indeed relies on one's own imagination and memory.

In another response, the idea of origin seems to recreate itself. For example, US Chinese is the new origin, in a continuum.

Jen A from San Francisco commented:

I went to China last year and I'm sad to say that I preferred the Chinese food I had here in the US. I went to some places in China that were kind of 'strip mall' type places or smaller diners/eateries in Beijing and it was definitely not my favorite. (Verbatim)

(Taken from: *The Star Online*)

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>Logos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• N/A</li></ul>  |
| <b>Ethos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• N/A</li></ul>  |
| <b>Pathos</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I went to China last year and I'm sad to say that I preferred the Chinese food I had here in the US.</li><li>• I went to some places in China that were kind of 'strip mall' type places or smaller diners/eateries in Beijing and it was definitely not my favorite.”</li></ul> |

However, when I had the local 'special/district' type foods, like Schezuan, or Hunanese or Peking duck, that stuff was the bomb. Also, the Muslim/Chinese food that I had in Xian province was fantastic!!! So wonderful and tasty. I definitely think you could call that authentic. (Verbatim)

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>Logos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• N/A</li></ul>  |
| <b>Ethos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• However, when I had the local 'special/district' type foods, like Schezuan, or Hunanese or Peking duck, that stuff was the bomb. Also, the Muslim/Chinese food that I had in Xian province was fantastic!!! So wonderful and tasty.</li><li>• I definitely think you could call that authentic</li></ul> |
| <b>Pathos</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• N/A</li></ul>  |

In the samples above, the media audience arranges his/her argument around ethos and pathos that is, the emotional appeal of the readers and his or her own credibility as someone who personally experiences it. The personal experience he had is shared with the readers to show that he is someone worth trusting on the subject as he has experienced it firsthand. The ethos is revealed through the personal narrative used.

Fallopian Swimming Team D responded to Jen A by saying:

'Authentic' and 'good' are not the same. Plenty of bad meals are 'authentic.' There are bad cooks in every country. I tend to connect 'authentic' with being prepared by a first generation (native) cook, or a cook that has spent time in the particular country and has a deep understanding of the cuisine, culture, and language. Otherwise, to me, it is just a prepared recipe.

I have had 'good' French food cooked by Vietnamese, 'good' Italian food cooked by Mexicans, and 'good' Southern food prepared by a New England yankee. (Verbatim)

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>Logos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• N/A</li></ul>  |
| <b>Ethos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'Authentic' and 'good' are not the same. Plenty of bad meals are 'authentic.'</li><li>• There are bad cooks in every country.</li><li>• I tend to connect 'authentic' with being prepared by a first generation (native) cook, or a cook that has spent time in the particular country and has a deep understanding of the cuisine, culture, and language.</li><li>• Otherwise, to me, it is just a prepared recipe.</li></ul> |
| <b>Pathos</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I have had 'good' French food cooked by Vietnamese, 'good' Italian food cooked by Mexicans, and 'good' Southern food prepared by a New England yankee.</li></ul>   |

The media audience uses ethos and pathos to appeal to his or her audience. Using a personal anecdote and emotional link with the food and its place of origin, the writer does not



provide factual information that would have strengthened his or her argument. Instead, he uses his own personal rhetorical style of self-validation.

The second theme found is **the conflict of globalization**. A claim for authenticity is also befuddled by globalization. In the issue of *lumpia* (spring-rolls) as published by Kompasiana.com entitled “Save *Lumpia* Semarang in Malaysia”, one of the readers responded by relating the issue of authenticity with the process and effect of globalization. The respondent writes:

*Dalam dunia yg globalisasi skrg kaya nya negara kita aja yg ngeributin soal klaim makanan dan budaya ini seperti ga ada kerjaan aja. Budaya dan makanan itu milik bangsa tong bukan milik negara. Lumpia itu ada sebelum ada nya Indonesia. Kalau loe bilang lumpia itu milik org tioghoa di msia, spore, thailand dan lain belahan dunia juga ada org tionghoa. Pls tong jgn biaren org ketawain kita lah. Kalau loe mau patern ya patern aja ga usah nyalahin org laen. Remember tong, kalau kita smart org akan respect kita. Be smart*

Have you seen how Malaysian *lumpia* (spring rolls) actually look? In a globalized world, it's only our country that makes such a claim as if we have nothing better to do. Culture and food belong to a nation and not to a country. The spring rolls were there before (there was) Indonesia. If you said that *lumpia* belongs to the Chinese in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and other parts of the world too have Chinese.

Please do not let people laugh at us. If you want to apply for a patent, just do it and don't blame others. Please remember, people will respect us if we are smart. Be smart. (Our translation)

(Taken from *Kompasiana*: 23 February 2015)

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|---------------|--|
| <b>Logos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• N/A</li></ul>  |
| <b>Ethos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Culture and food belong to a nation and not to a country.</li><li>• The spring rolls were there before there was Indonesia</li><li>• If you said that <i>lumpia</i> belongs to the Chinese in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and other parts of the world too, have Chinese.</li></ul>                      |
| <b>Pathos</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In a globalized world, it's only our country that makes such a claim as if we have nothing better to do.</li><li>• Please do not let people laugh at us. If you want to apply for a patent, just do it and don't blame others. Please remember, people will respect us if we are smart. Be smart</li></ul> |

The response given by the media audience as stated above points to the idea that globalization blurs the notion of origin as diaspora communities exist everywhere; making it impossible to determine the origin of certain dishes. Hence, in this case, ownership is not seen as central to the idea of authenticity. This, in short, means that no particular one nation can claim for authenticity in the context of a globalized world. In the data above, it is apparent that the media audience only responded by employing ethos and pathos in arguing his or her case, not inventing a new idea, rather arrange it to appeal to ethos and pathos. No factual information for example in the form of statistics is provided to support his argument.

The third theme is **transgenerational values**. The issue of transgenerational values can be found in relation to the claim for authenticity. For example, in an article entitled “Save

*lumpia* Semarang dari Malaysia " that was published on 20 February 2015 in Kompasiana.com, a media audience responded with a claim that *lumpia* or spring-rolls actually originated from Semarang, a province in Indonesia. The media audience accuses Malaysia for "stealing" their national food and other cultural heritage. Nonetheless, another media audience, Sha Shamsuddin, from Malaysia disagrees with the writer.

Shaa Shamsuddin remarks:

*entah kenapa aku rasa kebanyakan orang indon cetek akalnya, kebanyakan orang malaysia tu keturunan indon juga, nenek moyang kami dari indon ajarkan kami budaya dari indon, kami tak curi, kami klaim sebagai budaya kami juga , sebab memang kami keturunan dari kalian juga.. kenapa perlu bergaduh tentang budaya? sedangkan bangsa lain tak ada pun nak gaduh pasal budaya mereka ditiru, sepatutnya kalian bangga kami melestarikan budaya kalian dalam negara kami, aku juga keturunan jawa... jadi memang ada budaya indon , pakaian, makanan yang sama seperti kalian... negara china pun tak marah bila orang cina dekat sini guna budaya mereka, sebab dah memang keturunan mereka.. tolong la ubah wahai pemikiran cetek, tak boleh berfikir dengan lebih meluas? jangan la melulu protes. lumpia / popia bukan dekat malaysia je ada, dekat thailand, vietnam pun ada, and untuk pengetahuan kalian, lumpia berasal dari negara china, bukan indonesia, malu betul tak buat research terus protes*

Somehow, I think most Indonesians are shallow-minded, though most of our ancestors are from Indonesia, we never steal, we claim some .... as our culture too, because we are the descendants of you too .. Why squabble about culture ? while other nations do not bother if their culture is imitated, you should be proud of us for preserving the culture of your country , I am also a Javanese, thus I carry Indonesian culture, clothes , food just like you ... even China was not angry when the Chinese here used their culture, as their descendants are from mainland China.. .. please change, can't you think more wisely? you should not merely protest. *lumpia / popia* is not only available in Malaysia, we also have it in Thailand, Vietnam and for your information, *lumpia* is from China, not Indonesia, it is really a shame that you protest without doing any research.... (Our translation)

(Taken from *Kompasiana*: 25 February 2015)

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|---------------|--|
| <b>Logos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• N/A</li></ul>  |
| <b>Ethos</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Somehow, I think most Indonesians are shallow-minded, though most of our ancestors are from Indonesia, we never steal, we claim some .... as our culture too, because we are the descendants of you too</li><li>• Why squabble about culture? While other nations do not bother if their culture is imitated, you should be proud of us for preserving the culture of your country. I am also a Javanese; thus, I carry Indonesian culture, clothes, food just like you.</li></ul> |
| <b>Pathos</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• only available in Malaysia, we also have it in Thailand, Vietnam and for your information, <i>lumpia</i> is from China, not Indonesia, it is really a shame that you protest without doing any research</li><li>• even China was not angry when the Chinese here used their culture, as their descendants are from mainland China. ... please change, can't you think more wisely?</li></ul>   |

Shaa Shamsuddin's remark also foregrounds the idea that a diasporic community tends to claim their rights in the ownership of their culture. However, his remarks illustrate the idea that his rhetorical style in the form of a claim presents a conflict in any diasporic identity, which is, the debate around multiple birth rights. In this case, the motherland refuses to acknowledge the rights of the diasporic community; whereas, the diasporic community still has that "maternal bond" with the motherland. Shantini Pillai (2010, p.13) observes this kind of anxiety in her study, arguing "that diasporic memory is no longer reality, but history and history is inextricably intertwined with elements of the fictive". Shaa Shamsuddin's claim of being a Malaysian Javanese is an example of this.

Moreover, the "maternal bond" between the diasporic community and the motherland is also reflected in the way the first encourages the celebration of differences. What this suggests is that the term origin exists in a continuum, or what we shall call the continuum of origin/authenticity. The idea that "origin" exists in a continuum and not at a specific point in time or space points to its epistemological and not existential nature. For that reason, the "origin" always renews itself as "new knowledge" - for instance, Indonesia as its origin and Malaysia as its new origin. In semiotics, the term ancestor is a sign that precedes a newer sign, the descendent. They, nonetheless, exist in different locations within the continuum. In the argument, the media audience only appeals to ethos and pathos, without providing any solid fact. By using personal narrative with the use of the pronoun I, the writer appeals to his or her own credibility to attempt at providing convincing arguments.

The fourth theme centers on **the idea of doing it right**. Conterminous with the idea of "new origin" is the notion of "doing it right", and this is directly linked to one's sense of power. Here lies the dynamic of power and taste, as "doing it right" connotes the idea of power determining what is the right taste. Here, "doing it right" may refer to correct procedure, correct taste, correct presentation, correct ingredient, correct association with the cook, correct utensil, correct smell, correct texture and the correct environment (in this case hawker's environment). Inherent in this notion of correctness are the issues of class and racial discrimination. One respondent comments:

I don't care if a Bangladeshi cooks laksa or a Burmese cook char koay teow as long as they can do it right. Being a hawker isn't exactly an aspirational job, a lot of the " for older generation want "better things for their kids. So how? What's your alternative solution? Make a law that the children of hawkers have to become slaves to their parents' business? Gila ke? I am a Penangite who loves a good bowl of laksa. My concern is more as to whether the shop uses good fish and fresh pineapple in the dish. My concern is whether the kitchen is clean or not. I think that the MPPP should worry more about uplifting cleanliness and quality control rather than what skin colour is allowed in the kitchen. (Verbatim)

**Logos**

- N/A

**Ethos**

- So how? What's your alternative solution? Make a law that the children of hawkers have to become slaves to their parents' business? Gila ke? I am a Penangite who loves a good bowl of laksa
- My concern is more as to whether the shop uses good fish and fresh pineapple in the dish. My concern is whether the kitchen is clean or not. I think that the MPPP should worry more about uplifting cleanliness and quality control rather than what skin colour is allowed in the kitchen.

**Pathos**

- I don't care if a Bangladeshi cooks laksa or a Burmese cook char koay teow as long as they can do it right. Being a hawker isn't exactly an aspirational job, a lot of the" for older generation want "better things for their kids.

([www.poskod.my/street-notes/penang-bans-foreign-cooks-hawker-stalls/](http://www.poskod.my/street-notes/penang-bans-foreign-cooks-hawker-stalls/) Penang bans foreign cooks at hawker stalls (28/10/2014))

The media audience subconsciously evokes two third world nationalities, i.e. a Bangladeshi and a Burmese, as a way of imposing a certain class and racial superiority. This is rhetorical invention that determines his style. This rhetorical style is rather an emotional appeal (pathos) that is supported by personal narratives (ethos). Even though he seems not to be bothered with race, his suggestion that the local authority take care of the quality control and cleanliness, which is a relatively modern concern about food, carries a certain ironic freight; thus, functioning as palimpsest for his class superiority. Interestingly, race is now a new class issue. The inevitable intertwine of class/racial discrimination with the notion of authenticity, embedded in the discourse of correctness, reaffirms the idea of authenticity as being fluid, subjective, and performative. In a similar vein, the maxim “do it right” is also manifested in the narrative style of the media audience. In a news portal called Yelp Oakland, an individual by the name of Tony from Oakland posted a question: “What is authentic? Does food have to be "authentic" to be good?”

To this statement made by Tony, Fallopian Swimming Team D, responded by saying:

True story: I had 'good' sushi in Panama prepared by an ethnic Japanese, who was a second generation Peruvian national. (Verbatim)

**Logos**

- N/A

**Ethos**

- True story
- I had 'good' sushi in Panama prepared by an ethnic Japanese, who was a second generation Peruvian national.

**Pathos**

- N/A

There are two interesting points that can be derived from this narrative in reference to the idea of the origin as contestable and renewable. First, in narrating his experience, Fallopian Swimming Team D highlights the idea that his experience is a “true story” – a form of rhetorical invention. This, in effect, is the respondent’s strategy of validating his experience, changing narrative as fictional to narrative as factual. “True story” here is an aspect of ethos, that is, the use of personal credibility or personal truth rather than a declaration of general truth. By using a personal anecdote, he further confirms his own credibility as someone who understands food and its cultural origin.

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals that much research on food as material culture opens possibilities of contextualizing the discourse on food within the debate surrounding national identity. This study that focuses on new media users' responses to articles on food on the Internet, employs rhetoric as its theoretical framework. The analysis reveals some important themes related to food, authenticity, and national identity. The themes are the question of origin, the conflict of globalization, transgenerational values, and "doing it right". These themes are the result of the discursive nature or cyclicity of the media discourse as suggested by Moores (2005).

As a conclusion, the analysis indeed reveals that despite the reactionary attitude the media audience has towards the issue of food authenticity and national identity, the media audience does invent ideas, make a certain level of arrangement of the idea, and employ a certain style in an effort to present their argument more persuasively. The finding of this research indicates that all media audiences (rhetors) did not use Logos (appeal to logic and fact) as one of their strategies to persuade readers to be on their side. Instead, they appeal to Ethos (appeal to character and credibility) and Pathos (appeal to emotion). This can be explained by understanding the rhetorical context or situation in which the discourses take place, that is, as a response to an article written about food authenticity in the comment section that follows the article. This pattern seems globally relevant, evinces the idea that the media audience writing in a comment space in the new media are not basing their writing on the need to appeal to logic and fact (Logos), or proactively, but instead they are more reactionary (personal and emotive). This confirms the observation made by Engelke (2019, p. 1) that the media audience "comments can include a diversity of voices [...] [but] these high expectations may have been premature, since comment sections can also be of bad quality, feature only few voices or display incivility and therefore be non-deliberative". This brings to the fore the role of emotion as the more common mode of expression embedded within the rhetorical strategies in the new media community.

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