



Consumer Acceptance and Sustainability of Malatang in the Philippines

Ace N. Bombaes¹ , Jesielitlyn B. Gloria² , Ana Celine G. Esquiedo³ , Jeferson C. Mojica⁴ , Jemima Noree S. David⁵ , Carl Ericson D. Arangusti⁶ , Laila D. Malabanan⁷ , Miguel Angelo Perez⁸

Author Information:

¹⁻⁷National University Dasmariñas
National University Philippines
School of Business, Management, and
Accountancy, Dasmariñas City, Cavite,
Philippines

⁸National University Philippines
School of Business, Management, and
Accountancy, Sampaloc, Manila, Philippines

Correspondence:

bombaes_21@yahoo.com

Article History:

Date Received: June 29, 2026
Date Revised: August 5, 2026
Date Accepted: August 7, 2026
Date Published: August 25, 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.67903/ijroms0243>

Document ID: 2026IJROMS0243

Recommended Citation:

Bombaes, A. N., Gloria, J. B., Esquiedo, A. C. G., Mojica, J. C., David, J. N. S., Arangusti, C. E. D., Malabanan, L. D., & Perez, M. A. (2026). Consumer Acceptance and Sustainability of Malatang in the Philippines. *International Journal of Research on Multidisciplinary Studies*, 1(7), 263–273. <https://doi.org/10.67903/ijroms0243>

Abstract. This study investigates consumer acceptance of Malatang in the Philippines, focusing on behavioral intentions and implications for sustainable consumption. Malatang, a customizable Chinese street food, has gained popularity because of its affordability, convenience, and health-oriented meal options. Despite its growing presence, research on consumer perceptions of this food concept in developing-country contexts remains limited. Using a qualitative design, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten consumers who had previously consumed Malatang. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), examining attitudes, motivations, perceived value, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and perceptions of taste, health benefits, affordability, and cultural relevance. The study also explored how customization supports SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) through waste reduction and resource efficiency. Findings revealed that curiosity, novelty, and meal customization drive initial acceptance, while taste, quality, and affordability are key determinants of repeat consumption. Peer recommendations and social influence positively affect purchasing intentions. Customization enhances perceived behavioral control by allowing consumers to select preferred ingredients and portion sizes, helping reduce food waste. However, an attitude–behavior gap persists. Although participants recognized Malatang’s sustainability benefits, purchasing decisions remained largely influenced by price sensitivity and preferences for traditional Filipino cuisine. Sustainability considerations were secondary to sensory appeal and health benefits. The study concludes that emphasizing taste, health value, affordability, and authentic sustainability practices can strengthen consumer acceptance. Future research should use larger and more diverse samples to validate these findings.

Keywords: Consumer Acceptance; Food Waste; Malatang; SDG 12; Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Introduction

Malatang, a Chinese street food known for its customizable ingredients and spicy broth, is gaining popularity among Filipino consumers. Its growing appeal reflects the increasing acceptance of international cuisines in the Philippines, where Japanese, Korean, and other Asian food concepts have become well integrated into local dining culture (Ahmed et al., 2023; Fan et al., 2024; Wang & Theerakittikul, 2022). Affordability, convenience, and meal customization further contribute to its attractiveness among young consumers. Beyond its culinary appeal, Malatang presents potential sustainability benefits. Its customizable format allows consumers to select preferred ingredients and portion sizes, which may help reduce food waste and improve resource efficiency, supporting Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12: Responsible Consumption and Production (Baviskar et al., 2024; Chwialkowska et al., 2024). As consumers become increasingly conscious of health and sustainability, understanding the factors influencing acceptance of customizable food products has become more important.

The global demand for healthier and more sustainable diets has accelerated interest in novel and unconventional foods. Such innovations are viewed as potential solutions to concerns related to food security, environmental sustainability, and changing consumer preferences (Costa et al., 2023). However, research on consumer acceptance of these products remains fragmented, particularly in developing countries where cultural, economic, and social factors may shape adoption differently (Paul & Criado, 2020). As a customizable food concept that accommodates diverse ingredients, including plant-based options, Malatang aligns with emerging trends toward healthier and more sustainable eating practices (Del Castillo, 2024). Despite its



growing popularity, limited research has examined consumer perceptions and behavioral intentions toward Malatang in the Philippine context. Investigating its acceptance among NU students provides an opportunity to explore how attitudes, perceived value, social influence, and behavioral control shape purchasing decisions and sustainable consumption behaviors (Custódio et al., 2021; Gençer Bingöl & Ağagündüz, 2025). Consumer acceptance refers to the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors that influence an individual's willingness to try and consume a food product. Existing literature suggests that although food innovations are often viewed favorably, consumers remain cautious toward novel foods because of food neophobia, unfamiliarity, and negative emotional responses (Costa et al., 2023; Custódio et al., 2021). Emotional arousal has been identified as a key factor mediating the relationship between food neophobia and acceptance of unfamiliar foods (Costa et al., 2023). Furthermore, studies consistently highlight a sensory-first perspective, wherein taste, aroma, and texture exert greater influence on purchase decisions than health or nutritional benefits (Khan & Pandey, 2023). While positive attitudes toward healthier eating can enhance acceptance of unconventional foods, affordability remains a critical consideration, particularly among students who expect sustainable food options to be competitively priced with conventional alternatives (Monastiridou, 2025; Kumar et al., 2024).

Malatang differs from many novel food options through its highly customizable dining format, which serves as a strong facilitator of consumer acceptance. Consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior, customization enhances Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) by allowing consumers to select ingredients and portion sizes according to their preferences, thereby increasing their sense of autonomy and control over food choices (Ajzen, 1991; Ariffin, 2025). This feature also aligns with SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, as customization can help reduce food waste and improve resource efficiency by enabling consumers to choose only what they intend to consume (Chwialkowska et al., 2024; Hocquette et al., 2025). In the Philippine context, Malatang's appeal is further strengthened by its affordability, convenience, rapid service, and health-oriented meal options, including plant-based ingredients that support evolving consumer preferences for healthier and more sustainable diets (Del Castillo, 2024; Wang & Theerakittikul, 2022).

Despite increasing interest in innovative food products, several research gaps remain. First, studies on consumer acceptance of novel foods have predominantly focused on developed countries, leaving limited evidence from developing economies such as the Philippines (Paul & Criado, 2020; Custódio et al., 2021). Second, scholars have emphasized the need for qualitative and multi-method approaches capable of capturing the deeper psychological, emotional, and cultural dimensions of food acceptance that may not be adequately explained through quantitative methods alone (Paul & Criado, 2020; Khan & Pandey, 2023). Third, the persistence of the attitude-behavior gap suggests that favorable attitudes toward sustainability do not always translate into actual purchasing behavior, highlighting the need to examine how factors such as customization, affordability, and perceived value influence responsible consumption (Kumar et al., 2024; Ilagan et al., 2024). Finally, limited research has explored Malatang consumption among NU students, creating an opportunity to investigate the unique consumer experiences, cultural influences, and behavioral intentions of this specific demographic group (Gençer Bingöl & Ağagündüz, 2025; Ilagan et al., 2024).

Malatang is becoming increasingly popular in the Philippines, emerging as a favored choice due to its affordability, rapid service, and health-oriented customization. While the dining habits of Filipinos have historically embraced international cuisines like Japanese shabu-shabu and Korean hot pot, the acceptance of Malatang is contingent upon specific critical factors affecting preference and satisfaction. This study aligns with SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production by exploring how Malatang's customizable nature allows consumers to select only what they intend to consume, thereby reducing food waste and enhancing resource efficiency. Although the demand for sustainable food sources is rising globally to tackle climate change and food security, existing literature reveals a fragmented understanding of consumer acceptance regarding these innovations. This study uniquely strengthens the existing research gap by diverging from traditional Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) research in three distinct ways: first, it addresses the significant geographic scarcity of research in developing regions like the Philippines, as most novel food studies focus on developed nations; second, it provides methodological depth by employing qualitative in-depth interviews to uncover the "intricate mechanisms" and emotional responses such as food neophobia and cultural hesitation—that standard quantitative TPB data often overlooks; and third, it establishes a direct sustainability linkage by investigating how product-related factors like customization can bridge the persistent "attitude-behavior gap" to foster tangible resource-efficient behaviors.

Research Questions

Although Malatang offers opportunities for healthier and more sustainable dietary choices, consumer acceptance of novel foods remains insufficiently understood in developing countries such as the Philippines. Food neophobia, unfamiliarity, cultural preferences, and economic considerations may limit adoption despite growing interest in innovative food products (Costa et al., 2023). Existing studies have largely focused on developed economies, creating a need for context-specific research that examines consumer acceptance within



emerging markets (Paul & Criado, 2020). Furthermore, recent studies emphasize the importance of understanding how psychological, product-related, and situational factors influence sustainable purchasing behavior (Ilagan et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2024). Limited evidence exists regarding how these factors affect acceptance of Malatang and whether favorable attitudes translate into actual consumption behavior. Addressing this gap is essential for understanding the adoption of novel foods and their potential contribution to responsible consumption. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following questions;

1. How do attitudes, motivations, and perceived value influence consumer acceptance of Malatang?
2. How do consumers perceive Malatang's taste, health benefits, pricing, and cultural relevance?
3. How do social norms and subjective influences shape behavioral intentions toward Malatang?
4. How do accessibility, affordability, and customization affect perceived behavioral control?
5. What behavioral intentions and consumption patterns emerge from consumer experiences with Malatang?
6. How do consumers perceive Malatang's contribution to sustainable consumption and resource efficiency?

Literature Review

Consumer Acceptance of Novel and Unconventional Foods

Novel foods and beverages (NFB) encompass newly developed innovative foods and whole foods that are new to a particular world region. Malatang, while a traditional Chinese dish, is positioned as an unconventional food choice in the Philippines due to its rising popularity in new regions and its highly customizable nature. Consumer acceptance in this context is defined as the perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes indicating a willingness to try and consume a product. Literature indicates that while technological advancements are often viewed positively, consumers are generally hesitant toward novel foods due to food neophobia (fear of the new), disgust, and unfamiliarity. Specifically, Costa et al. (2023) indicate that the relationship between food neophobia and the acceptance of novel foods is often mediated by emotional arousal.

Consumer-Related Factors: Attitudes, Motivation, and Perceived Value

The theoretical foundation for understanding consumer behavior in this study is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) developed by Ajzen (1991), posits that attitudes, the favorable or unfavorable evaluation of a behavior, are foundational to behavioral intentions. Research suggests that positive attitudes toward healthier eating significantly increase acceptance of unconventional foods. For Malatang, motivations for consumption include novelty, convenience, and the ability to customize meals. Furthermore, customer perceived value is a critical determinant of purchase intention, involving a balance between perceived gains (e.g., health, variety) and perceived risks (e.g., food safety concerns) according to Khan and Pandey (2023). Most consumers find that Malatang's benefits, such as spice control and fresh vegetable options, effectively outweigh perceived risks.

Perceived Product Characteristics: Taste, Health, and Pricing

Sensory quality is a paramount factor in food acceptance because consumers seek specific sensory characteristics. In the case of novel protein sources and ethnic soups, taste and texture are often more influential than health benefits. Findings regarding Malatang confirm this "sensory-first" approach, with students rating its bold flavors and ingredient variety as equal or superior to traditional Filipino hot pots. While health and nutrition are valued, they often remain secondary to sensory appeal during the actual purchase decision. Additionally, pricing and affordability are significant barriers; products aligned with sustainability must remain competitively priced, especially for student demographics who are highly price-sensitive. Monastiridou (2025) supports the idea that consumers expect sustainable products not to exceed the cost of conventional alternatives.

Social Norms and Subjective Influences

Subjective norms refer to the perceived social pressure from important referents, such as family and friends, to perform a behavior. In the Filipino consumer landscape, peer influence is a pivotal factor in shaping eco-friendly purchase intentions. Students often rely on social media recommendations and peer choices before trying novel foods like Malatang. Furthermore, trust in service quality and establishment hygiene is essential to alleviate concerns regarding unfamiliar ethnic cuisines. Service innovations, such as those seen in popular hot pot brands like Haidilao, demonstrate that high-quality service and unique dining experiences significantly bolster consumer satisfaction and loyalty. In the Philippine context, peer recommendations and social media are pivotal in shaping intentions to try novel foods. Ilagan et al. (2024) emphasize that holistic



antecedent analysis is necessary to understand how green consumers in the Philippines form behavioral intentions.

Perceived Behavioral Control and Customization

Perceived behavioral control (PBC) reflects an individual's assessment of how easy or difficult it is to perform a behavior, including access to resources. In the context of Malatang, the dining experience's customizable nature serves as a mechanism that enhances PBC. By allowing consumers to select their own ingredients and portion sizes, the process empowers them and provides a sense of agency over their choices. The integration of self-service technologies, such as tablets or kiosks often used in hot pot restaurants, further streamlines this process, though its acceptance can vary by generation and internet reliability. Ariffin (2025) highlights that PBC plays a crucial role in shaping purchase intentions, especially in sustainable consumption contexts.

Behavioral Intentions and the Attitude-Behavior Gap

While positive attitudes are strong predictors of behavioral intentions (willingness to try or purchase), they do not always translate into actual behavior a phenomenon known as the attitude-behavior gap. For Malatang, situational factors like budget constraints and a strong cultural attachment to traditional Filipino foods can hinder the full replacement of conventional meals with this novel alternative. Repeated consumption is less dependent on novelty and more on consistent quality, taste, and value. Kumar et al. (2024) explain that long-term behavioral change depends on ongoing satisfaction with taste, quality, and accessibility.

Implications for Sustainable Consumption (SDG 12)

Sustainable consumption emphasizes efficient resource use to minimize waste. Malatang's customizable model directly advances SDG 12 by promoting resource efficiency and curbing food waste customers select only what they intend to eat. Enterprises embracing the Triple Bottom Line (economic, environmental, and social pillars) gain favor with consumers who prioritize authentic sustainability efforts, such as eco-friendly packaging. Yet for sustainability to boost purchase frequency, businesses must clearly communicate it through marketing that spotlights tangible benefits like waste reduction and local sourcing. As Baviskar et al. (2024) observe, this shift reflects a growing visual trend in consumer behavior toward sustainable choices, further supported by Hamisi (2024). This study supports SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production by examining how the acceptance of a customizable food product may encourage resource-efficient consumption and waste reduction. By allowing consumers to select ingredients according to their preferences and needs, Malatang may contribute to more sustainable food consumption patterns (Hocquette et al., 2025).

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying consumer acceptance of Malatang among students of National University (NU) Dasmariñas. Specifically, the study aimed to investigate how perceptions, emotions, motivations, cultural influences, and personal experiences shape students' preferences and purchasing decisions regarding Malatang. Through a qualitative approach, the researchers were able to obtain rich, detailed insights into participants lived experiences and viewpoints, allowing for a comprehensive examination of the factors influencing consumer acceptance and behavior.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at National University (NU) Dasmariñas, where the participants were enrolled as students. The locale was selected because of the growing popularity of Malatang among students and the accessibility of participants who could provide meaningful insights into the factors influencing consumer acceptance of the food product. The university setting provided an appropriate context for examining students' perceptions, attitudes, and consumption behaviors related to Malatang.

Research Technique

Guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), the study utilized purposive sampling to recruit participants with prior Malatang consumption experience. This sampling technique was selected to ensure that participants possessed relevant knowledge and firsthand experience regarding the phenomenon under investigation, enabling the collection of rich and in-depth insights into their perceptions, motivations, and behaviors. This approach is consistent with recommendations emphasizing the value of qualitative

methods in exploring complex consumer attitudes and experiences beyond statistical representation (Paul & Criado, 2020; Khan & Pandey, 2023).

Research Participants

The study involved ten (10) NU Dasmariñas students who had prior experience consuming Malatang. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that they could provide relevant and information-rich responses concerning their consumer experiences. The recurrence of key themes and the high level of agreement among participants suggest sufficient depth and thematic consistency to address the study objectives, despite data saturation not being explicitly stated.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was a researcher-developed interview guide based on the Theory of Planned Behavior and aligned with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12: Responsible Consumption and Production (Ajzen, 1991; Hocquette et al., 2025). The interview guide consisted of six Qualitative Guide Questions (QGs) designed to explore consumer-related factors, product characteristics, social norms, perceived behavioral control, behavioral intentions, and sustainability perceptions.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, allowing participants to express their experiences, opinions, and motivations regarding Malatang consumption. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and generate meaningful insights into consumer acceptance and purchasing behavior (Paul & Criado, 2020).

Results and Discussions

Themes were organized according to the six themes to ensure a systematic interpretation of participant responses. The frequency of responses was used to identify dominant themes, including customization, taste, affordability, social influence, and sustainability awareness. The prominence of customization as a driver of acceptance is consistent with the role of perceived behavioral control in shaping consumer intentions and behaviors (Ariffin, 2025; Ajzen, 1991). To enhance trustworthiness, the study established a clear link between participant responses and thematic findings, supporting credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Transferability was strengthened through detailed descriptions of the study context and participant characteristics. Ethical standards were upheld through informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw without consequence. Particular attention was given to protecting responses related to food neophobia, personal preferences, and cultural attachments (Costa et al., 2023).

Problem 1: How do attitudes, motivations, and perceived value influence consumer acceptance of Malatang?

Table 1. Understanding Consumer-Related Factors (Attitudes, Motivation, and Perceived Value)

Category/ Thematic Factor	Frequency /Count
Consumer-Related Factors (Theme 1)	
1. Initial curiosity and desire to explore new experiences	7
2. Initial hesitation or mild food neophobia	3
3. Motivation: Novelty and opportunity to personalize meals	9
4. Motivation: Diverse flavors and excitement	8
5. Motivation: Convenience	7
6. Motivation: Health considerations (as a secondary driver)	5



Table 1 shows Attitudes, Motivation, and Perceived Value which explains that respondents (7 out of 10) expressed curiosity and a willingness to explore new food experiences, although a smaller group (3 out of 10) reported mild hesitation due to unfamiliar ingredients and the spicy broth; however, none expressed outright rejection or disgust. Acceptance was primarily driven by novelty and meal customization (9 out of 10), followed by diverse flavors and the excitement of a unique dining experience (8 out of 10), while convenience served as an additional motivator (7 out of 10) and health considerations played a secondary role (5 out of 10). Respondents also perceived the benefits of customization, ingredient variety, and health-related features to outweigh concerns regarding food safety and unfamiliarity, suggesting that although food neophobia may initially hinder acceptance, curiosity and perceived value ultimately encourage trial and adoption. These findings support Khan and Pandey (2023), who argued that consumers are more likely to develop favorable purchase intentions when perceived benefits exceed perceived risks. This implies that acceptance is a psychological negotiation between curiosity and caution. Participants predominantly described their initial trial as a "desire to explore new experiences." However, for a segment of consumers, "mild food neophobia" served as a barrier, with participants expressing "hesitation primarily due to the presence of unfamiliar ingredients and the spicy broth." This supports the work of Costa et al. (2023), suggesting that emotional arousal specifically the tension between excitement and unfamiliarity dictates the gatekeeping phase of novel food acceptance. The "opportunity to personalize meals" was the leading motivation, acting as a psychological incentive that outweighs the perceived risks of a new cuisine. Therefore, consumer acceptance of Malatang was primarily driven by curiosity, novelty, and perceived value. This is supported by a statement given by one of the participants:

"My decision to try Malatang was largely driven by a desire to explore new experiences and the excitement of a unique dining experience. While I am always looking for diverse flavors, the opportunity to personalize meals was my primary motivation; it acts as a major incentive because I feel a 'sense of agency' over exactly what goes into my bowl. For me, the value of having a meal tailored to my specific preferences far outweighed any concerns about trying a foreign cuisine."

Problem 2: How do consumers perceive Malatang's taste, health benefits, pricing, and cultural relevance?

Table 2. Consumers' Perceptions of Malatang's Taste, Health Benefits, Pricing, and Cultural Relevance

Category/ Thematic Factor	Frequency /Count
Product Characteristics (Theme 2)	
1. Taste/Texture rated superior or equal to traditional Filipino hot pots	6
2. Perception of Malatang as a novel/foreign cuisine	7
3. Prioritize sensory appeal (taste/aroma) over health benefits	7
4. Perception of Malatang as affordable for student budgets	8
5. Discouraged from purchase if price increases	6

Table 2 shows that six out of ten respondents rated Malatang's taste and texture as comparable to or better than traditional Filipino hot pots because of its rich flavors and ingredient variety, although four considered it less familiar than traditional soups. Sensory appeal, particularly taste and aroma, was prioritized over health benefits by most respondents (7 out of 10), even though health considerations remained moderately important (5 out of 10). Moreover, while Malatang was perceived as affordable by 8 out of 10 respondents, 6 indicated that price increases would discourage future purchases. Although seven respondents still viewed Malatang as a foreign cuisine, three reported incorporating it into their regular food choices. These findings suggest that taste, affordability, and familiarity are key determinants of acceptance, whereas health and sustainability serve as secondary considerations; thus, continued consumption depends largely on sensory

satisfaction and competitive pricing, supporting Kumar et al. (2024), who emphasized the influence of consumer beliefs and perceived value on product adoption intentions.

Despite the health-oriented appeal of Malatang, a "sensory-first" perspective dominates the actual purchase decision. Participants consistently "prioritized sensory appeal, particularly taste and aroma, over health benefits." While they valued the "robust flavors" and "diverse ingredients," their repeat consumption was contingent on these factors. This aligns with Khan and Pandey (2023), who argue that while consumers value nutrition, sensory attributes remain the primary arbiter for novel protein sources and ethnic soups. For the Filipino student demographic, "pricing remains a significant obstacle," as participants indicated they would be "discouraged from purchase if price increases," regardless of the food's sustainability. Therefore, product attributes significantly influenced both acceptance and continued consumption. This is supported by a statement given by one of the participants:

"For me, Malatang's rich flavors and ingredient variety make the experience comparable to or even better than traditional Filipino hot pots. While I appreciate that it's a healthier choice, I definitely prioritized sensory appeal, particularly taste and aroma, over health benefits I value the robust flavors so much that they are the primary reason for my repeat visits; if the taste wasn't there, the nutritional value wouldn't be enough to keep me coming back."

Problem 3: How do social norms and subjective influences shape behavioral intentions toward Malatang?

Table 3. Social Norms and Subjective Influences Shaping Behavioral Intentions Toward Malatang

Category/ Thematic Factor	Frequency /Count
Social Norms and Influences (Theme 3)	
1. Willingness to purchase influenced by social/fast-casual environment	8
2. Decision-making influenced by peer and social media recommendations	7
3. Overall satisfaction linked to cleanliness, ambiance, and staff	7
4. Influence of trust in authoritative/government endorsements	3

Table 3 shows that the availability of Malatang in food courts, fast-casual establishments, and delivery platforms increased purchase willingness among most respondents (8 out of 10), with delivery services particularly valued for their convenience and suitability for group consumption (5 out of 10). Moreover, peer recommendations from friends, acquaintances, and social media influenced the decisions of 7 out of 10 respondents, while satisfaction was strongly associated with restaurant cleanliness, ambiance, and staff friendliness (7 out of 10); in contrast, endorsements from government agencies and other authoritative institutions exerted relatively little influence (3 out of 10). These findings align with the Theory of Planned Behavior's concept of subjective norms, suggesting that social approval, peer influence, and trust in food safety and service quality play important roles in shaping behavioral intentions and encouraging the acceptance of unfamiliar foods. Consistent with Sharma and Silal (2022), social and marketing influences significantly affect consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviors.

This implies that social environment and peer influence are critical facilitators for Malatang. Participants highlighted that their "decision-making was influenced by peer and social media recommendations." The fast-casual environment of food courts and the convenience of delivery services further increased their willingness to purchase. Social validation acts as a subjective norm in the TPB framework, effectively mitigating concerns related to hygiene or unfamiliar tastes. The trust in authoritative sources (e.g., government) was found to be minor compared to the weight of personal acquaintances and social media trends. Therefore, social influences and environmental factors played a significant role in shaping behavioral intentions. This is supported by a statement given by one of the participants:

"To be honest, my decision-making was influenced by peer and social media recommendations far more than anything else. Seeing my friends enjoy it provided a sense of social validation that acted as a subjective norm, which effectively helped me get past my initial hesitation regarding unfamiliar tastes. For me, the trust in authoritative sources like government endorsements is relatively minor compared to the influence of my own social circle."

Problem 4: How do accessibility, affordability, and customization affect perceived behavioral control?

Table 4. Accessibility, Affordability, and Customization Factors Affecting Perceived Behavioral Control

<i>Category/ Thematic Factor</i>	<i>Frequency /Count</i>
Customization and Behavioral Control (Theme 4)	
1. Customization cited as a primary motivation/major advantage	9
2. Belief that customization helps minimize food waste	8

Table 4 shows that ingredient customization was identified as a major advantage by 9 out of 10 respondents, who valued the ability to tailor meals according to their personal preferences, dietary needs, and portion requirements. Moreover, 8 respondents believed that customization helped reduce food waste compared with fixed-portion meals, while several suggested incorporating healthier ingredient prompts and environmental information to support more informed food choices. These findings indicate that customization enhances perceived behavioral control by providing consumers with greater autonomy over their dining decisions while simultaneously encouraging responsible consumption practices, consistent with the role of perceived behavioral control in shaping behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991; Ariffin, 2025). These findings indicate that customization enhances perceived behavioral control by giving consumers greater autonomy over food choices. Such control increases the attractiveness of Malatang while supporting sustainable consumption practices. Ariffin (2025) similarly highlights the importance of perceived behavioral control in shaping purchase intentions and sustainable behavior.

Furthermore, The ability to tailor ingredients was cited as the “primary motivation” and a “major advantage.” Participants felt a “sense of agency” over their food selections, which significantly boosted their Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC). Crucially, this empowerment directly supports SDG 12. Participants believed the “customizable ordering system allowed them to minimize food waste” compared to standard portioned meal. As noted by Ariffin (2025), a high level of PBC enhances the probability of adopting innovative products by making the experience feel more accessible and controllable. Therefore, customization emerged as one of the strongest determinants of consumer acceptance. This is supported by a statement given by one of the participants:

“I strongly believe that the customizable ordering system is what allows me to minimize food waste because I only pick the exact 'portion requirements I know I can finish. It feels like a more responsible consumption practice than being served a set meal where half the ingredients might go to waste. I'd even love to see the restaurants incorporate healthier ingredient prompts and environmental information so I could make even more informed food choices while I'm customizing my bowl.”

Problem 5: What behavioral intentions and consumption patterns emerge from consumer experiences with Malatang?

Table 5. Behavioral Intentions and Consumption Patterns Emerging from Consumer Experiences with Malatang

<i>Category/ Thematic Factor</i>	<i>Frequency /Count</i>
Behavioral Intentions (Theme 5)	
1. Expressed a favorable overall perception of Malatang	8
2. Hesitation to completely substitute traditional Filipino dishes	7
3. Repeat consumption driven by consistent quality, flavor, and pricing	6

Problem 6: How do consumers perceive Malatang's contribution to sustainable consumption and resource efficiency?

Table 6. Consumers' Perceptions of Malatang's Contribution to Sustainable Consumption and Resource Efficiency

<i>Category/ Thematic Factor</i>	<i>Frequency /Count</i>
Sustainability (Theme 6)	
1. Awareness of waste reduction benefits from customization	8
2. Customization choices driven primarily by personal taste/preference	9
3. Intentional selection of plant-based/resource-efficient options	3
4. Increased purchase frequency if marketing highlights environmental benefits	8

Table 6 shows that eight participants recognized that Malatang's customizable ordering system could reduce food waste by allowing consumers to select only the ingredients they intended to consume. However, ingredient choices were driven primarily by taste and personal preference (9 out of 10), with only three respondents intentionally selecting plant-based or resource-efficient options based on environmental considerations. Despite this, five respondents reported that environmentally responsible practices, such as sustainable packaging and waste reduction initiatives, positively influenced their support for a business, while 80% indicated that marketing emphasizing waste reduction, local sourcing, and sustainable packaging would encourage more frequent purchases. These findings suggest that sustainability enhances consumer perceptions and brand attractiveness but seldom serves as the primary driver of purchasing decisions, instead complementing more influential factors such as taste, health, and affordability.

This observation is consistent with Hamisi (2024), who argued that sustainability initiatives can strengthen brand appeal yet often remain secondary to core consumer preferences. Therefore, for the Filipino student demographic, sustainability acts as a "brand enhancer" rather than a primary motivator. The findings imply that for Malatang to foster truly responsible consumption, the environmental benefits must be seamlessly integrated with the consumer's primary desire for a high-quality, affordable sensory experience. By framing customization not just as a "convenience" but as a "contribution to waste reduction," businesses can leverage the high levels of awareness discovered in this study to drive consistent, sustainable behavioral change. Therefore, respondents generally recognized the sustainability benefits of Malatang, although these considerations were secondary to taste and affordability. This is supported by a statement given by one of the participants:

"For me, seeing environmentally responsible practices, such as sustainable packaging really positively influenced [my] support for a business. It makes the brand feel more modern and responsible, acting as a brand enhancer rather than the main reason I go there. If I saw marketing emphasizing waste reduction and local sourcing, it would certainly encourage more frequent purchases, but the meal still has to be a high-quality, affordable sensory experience first and foremost for me to keep coming back."

Conclusion

This study explored consumer acceptance of Malatang among NU Dasmariñas students using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as a framework. Findings reveal that curiosity, novelty, and meal customization are the primary drivers of initial acceptance. Sensory attributes, particularly taste and aroma, emerged as the most influential factors affecting both trial and repeat consumption, while health benefits served as secondary motivations. Social influences, including peer recommendations and social media exposure, positively shaped behavioral intentions, and trust in service quality contributed to overall satisfaction.

The results further indicate that customization enhances perceived behavioral control by allowing consumers to select preferred ingredients and portion sizes. Participants also recognized customization as a practical means of reducing food waste, supporting the principles of Sustainable Development Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). However, an attitude-behavior gap remains evident. Although respondents expressed favorable attitudes toward Malatang and acknowledged its sustainability benefits, actual purchasing decisions continued to be influenced primarily by affordability, taste preferences, and attachment to traditional Filipino cuisine.

Overall, the findings suggest that sustained acceptance of Malatang depends on maintaining product quality, affordability, and positive dining experiences while communicating tangible health and environmental benefits. Future studies should employ larger and more diverse samples and incorporate

quantitative methods to validate these findings and examine the determinants of sustainable food adoption in the Philippine context.

Recommendations

Based on qualitative insights from consumer perceptions of Malatang, the following practical and future research recommendations are proposed:

Practical and Managerial Recommendations

1. **Emphasize Health and Sensory Appeal in Marketing.** Marketing efforts should clearly communicate Malatang's health benefits, nutritional value, and sensory appeal to reduce food neophobia and increase willingness to try novel foods (Rondoni et al., 2021).
2. **Maintain Competitive Pricing and Accessibility.** Since affordability strongly influences purchase decisions, Malatang should remain competitively priced and accessible through restaurants, food courts, and delivery platforms. Sustainable food options should be offered without substantial price premiums (Monastiridou, 2025; Shamsudin, M. F., Leung, L., & Wen, J. (2024).
3. **Leverage Social Influence and Build Consumer Trust.** Businesses should utilize social media, customer testimonials, and peer recommendations to increase awareness and acceptance. Transparent communication regarding food safety, hygiene, and service quality can strengthen consumer trust and encourage repeat purchases (Shamsudin et al., 2024; Loh et al., 2024).
4. **Promote Customization as a Sustainability Feature.** Marketing should emphasize customization as a means of enhancing consumer control, reducing food waste, and encouraging healthier ingredient selections. Highlighting plant-based and resource-efficient options may further support sustainable consumption behaviors (Shin & Bull, 2019).

References

- Ahmed, S., Al Asheq, A., Ahmed, E., Chowdhury, U. Y., Sufi, T., & Mostofa, M. G. (2023). The intricate relationships of consumers' loyalty and their perceptions of service quality, price and satisfaction in restaurant service. *The TQM Journal*, 35(2), 519–539. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TQM-06-2021-0158>
- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-T](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T)
- Ariffin, N. A. (2025). The role of perceived behavioural control in shaping purchase intention: A mediating effect of consumer centrism. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences and International Studies*, 5(4), 2164–2174. <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.903SEDU0167>
- Baviskar, D., Chattaraj, A., & Patil, A. (2024). Consumer behaviour and sustainable product choices: Insights from visual trends. *E3S Web of Conferences*, 472, 02002. <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202447202002>
- Bingöl, F. G., & Ağagündüz, D. (2025). From tradition to the future: Analyzing the factors shaping consumer acceptance of cultured meat using structural equation modeling. *Food Science & Nutrition*, 13, e70435. <https://doi.org/10.1002/fsn3.70435>
- Chwialkowska, A., Bhatti, W. A., Bujac, A., & Abid, S. (2024). An interplay of the consumption values and green behavior in developed markets: A sustainable development viewpoint. *Sustainable Development*, 32(4), 3771–3785. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.2867>
- Costa, E., Niimi, J., & Collier, E. S. (2023). The relationship between food neophobia and hedonic ratings of novel foods may be mediated by emotional arousal. *Food Quality and Preference*, 109, Article 104931. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2023.104931>
- Custódio, M., Lillebø, A. I., Calado, R., & Villasante, S. (2021). Halophytes as novel marine products – A consumers' perspective in Portugal and policy implications. *Marine Policy*, 133, Article 104731. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2021.104731>
- Del Castillo, M. C. (2024). *Food service: Hotel, restaurant, institutional annual* (Report No. RP2025-0059). U.S. Department of Agriculture. <https://www.fas.usda.gov>
- Fan, H., Saengnoore, A., & Siripongdee, S. (2024). Antecedents to Haidilao Hot Pot Restaurant consumer loyalty in Bangkok. *Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences*, 22(2), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.57239/PJLSS-2024-22.2.00675>
- Hamisi, Y. (2024). Analysis of the impact of sustainable marketing strategies on consumer preferences. *Asian Journal of Management Analytics*, 3(4), 971–992. <https://doi.org/10.55927/ajma.v3i4.11630>



- Hocquette, J.-F., Chriki, S., Fournier, D., & Ellies-Oury, M.-P. (2025). Review: Will "cultured meat" transform our food system towards more sustainability? *Animal*, 19, Article 101145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.animal.2024.101145>
- Huang, L., Solangi, Y. A., Magazzino, C., & Solangi, S. A. (2024). Evaluating the efficiency of green innovation and marketing strategies for long-term sustainability in the context of environmental labeling. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 450, 141870. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2024.141870>
- Ilagan, S. M. C., Ong, A. K. S., German, J. D., Gumasing, M. J. J., & Pabalan, K. M. P. (2024). Holistic antecedent analysis of behavioral intention among green consumers in the Philippines: A sustainability theory of the planned behavior approach. *Sustainability*, 16(10), 3894. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16103894>
- Khan, A. W., & Pandey, J. (2023). Consumer psychology for food choices: A systematic review and research directions. *European Journal of Marketing*, 57(10), 2763–2798. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-07-2021-0566>
- Kumar, P., Yadav, P. M., Kumar, P., & Aggarwal, V. (2024). Predicting households' attitudes and product adoption intentions. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 42(3), 512–532. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-09-2023-0470>
- Loh, C. M., Perdana, A., & Lee, K. H. (2024). From hot pot to high tech: Haidilao's transformation through digital technologies for sustainable business in the restaurant industry. *Journal of Information Technology Teaching Cases*, 14(2), 20438869241240494. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20438869241240494>
- Monastiridou, A. (2025). *Consumer perceptions of dynamic pricing in restaurants* [Doctoral dissertation, Linnaeus University]. Linnaeus University DiVA Portal. <https://lnu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:1661382>
- Paul, J., & Criado, A. R. (2020). The art of writing literature review: What do we know and what do we need to know? *International Business Review*, 29(4), Article 101717. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2020.101717>
- Rondoni, A., Grebitus, C., Millan, E., & Asioli, D. (2021). Exploring consumers' perceptions of plant-based eggs using concept mapping and semantic network analysis. *Food Quality and Preference*, 94, Article 104327. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2021.104327>
- Shamsudin, M. F., Leung, L., & Wen, J. (2024). Managing customer trust and satisfaction on chatbots in the retail industry. *Journal of Information Technology Management*, 16(1), 217–236. <https://doi.org/10.22059/jitm.2024.96692>
- Sharma, Y., & Silal, P. (2022). Mapping the effect of healthy and unhealthy food and beverages marketing: Two decades of bibliometric analysis. *European Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 149–184. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-09-2021-0717>
- Shin, H. D., & Bull, R. (2019). Three dimensions of design for sustainable behaviour. *Sustainability*, 11(17), Article 4610. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11174610>
- Wang, Z., & Theerakittikul, S. (2022). Factors affecting customer satisfaction with Haidilao Hot Pot in Bangkok. In *2022 7th International Conference on Business and Industrial Research (ICBIR)* (pp. 101–105). IEEE. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICBIR54589.2022.9786405>