

Rising demand for kombucha reflects shifting trends in beverage choices

05 Apr 2026 04:00pm



Kombucha is no longer just a "sour health drink" for the niche wellness crowd; it is a key player in a global functional beverage market. Photo by Bernama

BACK when I was in secondary school around 2013, kombucha wasn't yet a familiar beverage, unlike the coffee craze then.

When people heard the word "kombucha," most immediately thought of it as a health-boosting drink with a sour taste.

However, by 2015-2016, kombucha began appearing regularly in mainstream grocery stores, evolving into a billion-dollar industry.

According to recent industry reports, the global functional drinks market is projected to reach US\$248 billion (RM1.04 trillion) by 2030, while the kombucha segment alone is forecast to hit US\$9 billion in the same period.

It has since become a key player in the functional beverage market, celebrated for being low in sugar, rich in probiotics, and promoting gut wellness and healthy digestion.

For 26-year-old Aisyah Adrina Suhaimi, she first started drinking kombucha in her young adult years, influenced by her peers and what keeps her coming back, she said, are the health benefits.

Aisyah, who is a Master's degree student, said what she enjoys most about kombucha is its tangy sourness and fizzy feels, as well as its health benefits as she noticed an improvement in digestion for her weight loss journey.

"What kept me coming back to it is probably the health benefits especially how it is good for the gut and help with weight loss," she told Bernama.

She added that she would reach for kombucha whenever she wants a healthier alternative in her nutrition and would spend roughly RM10-15 per bottle.



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Healthier option

Joseph Poh, founder and chief executive officer of homegrown kombucha brand WonderBrew, described kombucha as a healthier alternative to soft drinks such as Coke and Pepsi.

He noted that the drink is especially popular among women, ranging from teenagers to adults.

"We position our drinks, kombucha or tea as products with mass-market appeal, for anyone on the go, busy, and looking to support gut health. The majority of our customers are women.

"Our target is the younger generation, roughly between 18 and 45. Most of our customers buy our products from grocery stores, so we're really aiming for the mass market," he said.

WonderBrew recently made a splash at the World Kombucha Awards 2025, emerging as one of the biggest winners with one gold, four silver, and one bronze awards across taste and design categories.

Poh said the brand's mission is to promote gut health among Malaysians.

"We hope that more Malaysian brands will make it onto the global stage. When people see that, it will give them more confidence to try local kombucha brands," he added.

Rising kombucha consumption

Senior lecturer of Food Science and Nutrition, Faculty of Food Science and Nutrition, Universiti Malaysia Sabah Dr Mohd Nazri Abdul Rahman told Bernama that the rising kombucha consumption reflects a shift in beverage preferences and broader wellness trends.

For a subset of consumers, he said an increased availability and visibility of kombucha appears to have displaced higher-sugar carbonated beverages or certain alcoholic drinks, particularly when low-sugar formulations are selected.

"Such substitution may contribute to modest improvements in dietary quality and aligns with public-health objectives aimed at reducing added sugar intake and alcohol exposure.

"The trend has also stimulated broader interest in fermented foods and microbiome-related nutrition, potentially expanding dietary diversity and awareness of non-traditional beverage options," he said.

However, Nazri cautioned that wellness-oriented marketing often exaggerates benefits.

"Product variability such as sugar content, acidity, microbial composition and residual ethanol makes it difficult for consumers to interpret health claims. Not all commercially available kombucha aligns with the healthy image presented in marketing," he said.

Consequently, while kombucha can support healthier beverage choices when low-sugar, regulated products are selected, it also risks perpetuating misinformation.

From a public-health perspective, Nazri said guidance should emphasise evidence-informed consumption, label literacy, and situating kombucha within a balanced diet rather than treating it as a therapeutic intervention.

Kombucha outlook in Malaysia

Nazri believes the kombucha industry in Malaysia is poised for growth, driven by rising consumer interest in functional, health-oriented and halal-compliant beverages.

He said future developments will likely focus on alcohol control, product innovation, functional enhancement and commercialisation.

"Compliance with halal certification, alcohol limits and food safety regulations is crucial for growth.

"Malaysia's focus on monitoring alcohol levels, quality assurance and third-party validation positions its kombucha industry to meet both domestic and regional demand, especially in Southeast Asia, where there is rising interest in halal and functional beverages," he said.

As such, he said the future of the Malaysian kombucha industry relies on scientific innovation, regulatory adherence, and consumer-oriented product development.

On that note, Tradeview Research senior analyst Tan Jia Hui said regulatory compliance, particularly around alcohol content thresholds and halal considerations, will shape the competitive landscape.

"Pricing may also remain a constraint given kombucha's premium positioning relative to mass-market beverages, especially in a cost-sensitive environment," she added.

Over the next three to five years, Malaysia's kombucha market is expected to register sustained double-digit growth as it transitions from a niche wellness beverage into a more established functional drink category.

Tan said this expansion will be underpinned by rising consumer awareness of gut health, increasing preference for low-sugar and naturally fermented beverages, and a broader shift away from traditional carbonated soft drinks. - BERNAMA