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## DIAGNOSING FACTORS INFLUENCING CUSTOMERS PATRONIZING IN QUICK-CASUAL RESTAURANT

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### ABSTRACT

*The importance of the quick-casual sector in the restaurant industry has been dramatically increased over the years. However, the attention and information in this area are still limited. With that view, this study attempts to diagnose the relationship of foodservice quality dimensions specifically food, service and ambience with the propensity and intention of customer to patronize the quick-casual restaurant in Malaysia. A total of 120 customer's responses was gathered for further analysis via self-administered questionnaires during the period of two weekends at various quick-casual restaurants in Seberang Jaya, Penang. Information gathered is analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha for reliability test, together with descriptive statistics of frequency, percentage, correlation analysis and standard multiple regression. Findings revealed that all foodservice quality dimensions (food, service and ambience) have significant relationships with the propensity and the intention of the customer in patronizing the quick-casual restaurant. The results also indicate that ambience dimension is the most influential dimension determining patronization of customers. Altogether, this study not only revealed the factors affecting propensity and intention of customer to patronize the restaurant, but probably creating a new body of literature in Malaysia and definitely continuing the existing literature in hospitality research. Furthermore, this study could assist the owner or management of restaurant organizations to improve their business and generate greater revenues in the future.*

**KEYWORDS:** Foodservice quality dimension, Food, Service, Ambience, Propensity and intention, Quick-casual restaurant

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Nowadays, people are eating out of home more frequently and this has become a trend. People tend to eat-out because of many reasons. They tend to dine in at a variety of restaurants namely fast food, fine dining, cafeteria, food court, casual and also a quick-casual restaurant. The quick-casual restaurants have many special characteristics that can attract more people to have their meal there. A quick-casual restaurant is a type of restaurant that does not give full table service, but promises a higher quality of food and ambience than a fast food restaurant. In other words, a quick-casual restaurant may still take orders at the counter, but offers table-side food delivery and pick-up service. The food is made to order, not pre-assembled. The restaurant is comfortable and well-decorated, and the price are more affordable than a casual dining restaurant. Quick-casual restaurants offer options that retain the concept of fast food, but encourage the comfort and atmosphere of casual dining and quality items that met the consumers' satisfaction.

Although the importance of a quick-casual sector in the restaurant industry has been dramatically increased, it has not yet achieved much attention in research. Despite the managerial importance of physical environment, empirical research on the consequences of the physical environment in concurrence with food and service on quality perception is still insufficient in the hospitality literature. Even though some previous studies have been conducted on the separate influences of these three effects on the customer's perception of restaurant service quality, no studies addressed their combined impact (Han and Ryu, 2009). The combined effects of food, service, and ambience, such as customer satisfaction also has been ignored.

To fill the research gap, this study focus

on factors influencing customers in patronizing the quick-casual restaurant in Malaysia context. In line with the present lifestyle of Malaysian that often eating out, therefore it is needed to understand about the factors that can contribute to customer satisfaction, loyalty, as well as behavioral intention. Indeed, there are a lot of research about this topic area around the world. However, there is a lack of study concerning related topic in Malaysia. With that notion, this research will examine and identify the exact factors that can influence the propensity and intention of Malaysian customers to patronize in the quick-casual restaurant.

## **2. PROPENSITY AND INTENTION OF CUSTOMER TO PATRONIZE IN QUICK-CASUAL RESTAURANT**

Product (food), performance (service personnel), and setting (ambience), together or separately, were three important factors that give to overall satisfaction with the dining experience and return patronage (Han & Ryu, 2009; Soriano, 2002; Sulek & Hensley, 2004). Han and Ryu (2009) also noted in their research, quality of food, quality of service and quality of the physical environment has a positive influence on customer satisfaction. Their study findings recommended that the food quality was the most powerful predictor of consumer loyalty in restaurant choice.

According to Peri (2006), food quality is an essential matter to satisfy the needs and expectations of consumers. Soriano (2002) mentioned that the quality of service is considered to be an important factor for restaurant customer. Chang (2000) suggested that perceived physical environment was a direct indicator of a customer's satisfaction. While, Ryu and Han (2009) stated in their

research, satisfying physical surroundings for instance, music may identify to a large extent the degree of overall satisfaction and following behavior in the restaurant industry. All of this show that, there are relationship between food dimension, service dimension and ambience dimension with the propensity and intention of customer to patronize in the quick-casual restaurant.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a descriptive research design with quantitative approach. A survey consisting of self-completed questionnaires were distributed to some quick-casual restaurants in SeberangJaya, Penang. Shopping complex and hypermarkets such as Sunway Carnival, Tesco, Aeon Big, and Giant provide several quick-casual restaurants like Pizza Hut, Nandos, and Kenny Rogers Roasters.

From a total of 135 questionnaires collected in a period of two weeks, only 120 responses were fully completed and used for data analyses. The questionnaires were adapted from Rahman *et al.* (2012), which divided into three main sections. Section A dealing with the respondents' demographic profiles. The instruments in Section B (independent variables) were developed to assess respondents' agreeable level based on their experience having the meal at quick-casual restaurants that related to food (8 items), service (4 items), and ambience (6 items).

The propensity and intention of customers to patronize in the quick-casual restaurant (dependent variable) in Section C was constructed with 5 items. Five-point Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly Disagree'(1) to 'Strongly Agree'(5) were used to indicate the respondent's level of agreement. A pilot test of the research instrument was conducted prior to the actual data gathering in order to verify whether each question is well constructed

(Bryman & Bell, 2007). Information gathered is analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha for reliability. From the reliability analysis, all factors including independent and dependent variables were found to have high reliability with Cronbach's Alpha above 0.7. The results are shown in Table 1.

### **4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

The descriptive statistic is used to analyze the respondents' demographic profiles focusing on the customers' personal information, including their awareness on quick-casual restaurants.

#### **4.1 Respondents' Profile:-**

From the descriptive statistics, the gender distribution of the respondents was slightly higher for males (53.3%). Malays constituted almost 88.3% of the sample. In terms of age, the majority of the respondents were in the age group of 21-30 (77.5%). Regarding education, 56.7% of the sample were bachelor degree holders and almost 84% of the respondents already recognized what is a quick-casual restaurant.

#### **4.2 Hypothesis Testing:-**

Correlation analysis was conducted to test the relationship between the foodservice quality dimensions and their behavioral intention. The sample for this study had been collected at several quick-casual restaurants in the area of Seberang Jaya, Penang. Based on the result in Table 2, the statistic indicates a variety of relationships among the variables. The result shows that there is a significant correlation between food dimension and behavioral intention (sig. value = 0.000 < 0.01). The result also shows that food dimension has a medium positive coefficient of correlation with the *r* value 0.437. Similarly, the result also demonstrates that there is a significant relationship between service dimension and

behavioral intention (sig. value = 0.000 < 0.01) with a medium positive correlation coefficient value ( $r = .491$ ). While the correlation analysis for ambience dimension and behavioral intention indicates that there is a strong positive correlation between the two variables ( $r = .650$ , sig. value = 0.000 < 0.01).

Then, multiple regression analysis was used to further assess the relationship between foodservice quality dimensions and behavioral intention. The three dimensions in foodservice quality dimension were regressed on the behavioral intention. Result in Table 3 indicates that foodservice dimension is positively correlated at a high level ( $r = .668$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The dimensions in independent variables explained 44.6% of the variance in the dependent variable. All dimensions of independent variables; food, service and ambience are significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The standardized beta coefficient was referred to evaluate the tendency of dimensions in the independent variables toward dependent variable. The most influential dimension in independent variables is the ambience dimension ( $\beta = .517$ ), followed by food dimension ( $\beta = .138$ ) and service dimension ( $\beta = .101$ ). The beta coefficient explained that, when all other dimensions were held constant, every unit increased in foodservice quality dimension; behavioral intention will increase by 0.416, 0.093 and 0.116 units respectively.

## 5. DISCUSSIONS

Based on the findings earlier, all three dimensions are proven to have a significant relationship with the behavioral intention. Food dimension, especially the taste of food is one of the factors that attract respondents to patronize in the quick-casual restaurant. Food quality is also the most important factor affecting customer trust (Haghighi *et al.*, 2012). Respondents also agreed that the attractiveness

of food presentation, freshness, price of the food, and variety of menu items also influence them to patronize in the quick-casual restaurant.

Service dimension such as speed of service is the factor that draws respondents to patronize in the quick-casual restaurants. According to Haghighi *et al.* (2012), service quality has a positive impact on customer satisfaction. The restaurant staff behavior, product, and service quality fairness affect the consumers' intention to patronize in the quick-casual restaurant.

Restaurant ambience is an important factor in predicting customer satisfaction and behavior. In the restaurant environment, customers are directly in contact with restaurant services (Haghighi *et al.*, 2012). The cleanliness of the restaurant, lighting, music, spatial layout, aesthetic appeal, and pleasant aroma are among the elements in influencing restaurant customers' behavioral intention. It is also worth noted that ambience dimension is the most influential factor for customers to patronize the quick-casual restaurants. Majority respondents found the quick-casual restaurants' bright lightings, comfortable furnishings, and pleasant physical surroundings are the main reasons to patronize in the quick-casual restaurant.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The importance of customer satisfaction is undeniable in maintaining customer loyalty and intention to patronize in the quick-casual restaurant. This is stressed by Lin and Mattila (2006), where customer loyalty is the key to long-term success for service businesses, including trendy restaurants. At the moment, the quick-casual restaurant is the popular place among customers for their conveniences. Hence, the management of quick-casual restaurants need to observe and

identify the factors that could improve and fulfill customer satisfaction. For the restaurant industry, it is important to understand the attributes which influence customers' decisions to return to a restaurant for another meal (Soriano, 2002). Based on the results obtained in this study, Malaysian consumers, especially

in Penang, patronize in the quick-casual restaurant because of three factors: ambience, food, and service. Their satisfactions are increased if the restaurant offers the best elements of those three factors that eventually will assure their intention and loyalty in patronizing quick-casual restaurants.

## APPENDIX

**Table 1: Reliability Test**

Items	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
<b>Food Dimension</b>	.833	8
<b>Service Dimension</b>	.714	4
<b>Ambience Dimension</b>	.769	6
<b>Behavioral Intention</b>	.823	4

**Table 2: Correlation of All Variables**

Measure	1	2	3	4
<b>1</b> Food Dimension	-	-	-	.437**
<b>2</b> Service Dimension		-	-	.491**
<b>3</b> Ambience Dimension			-	.650**
<b>4</b> Behavioral Intention				-

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N= 120

**Table 3: Regression Analysis of Foodservice Quality Dimensions and Behavioral Intention**

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
<b>1</b>	.668	.446	.432	2.41921		
<b>a.Predictors: (Constant), Ambience, Food and Service Dimension</b>						
Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Std. Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
<b>1</b>	<b>(Constant)</b>	.968	1.560		.621	.536
	<b>Food</b>	.093	.054	.138	1.707	.091
	<b>Service</b>	.116	.105	.101	1.108	.270
	<b>Ambience</b>	.416	.076	.517	5.482	.000
<b>a.Dependent Variable: Behavioral Intention/ Propensity Intention</b>						

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