Research Article

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What makes customer satisfied? Investigating the role of restaurant attributes at Malay food restaurants

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Abstract

Undoubtedly, promoting business retention through customer satisfaction is crucial, especially in the highly demanding restaurant sectors. Therefore, restaurateurs must address the significant factors that may increase customer satisfaction to assure the success of a restaurant, including Malay food restaurants, without exception. Therefore, this research aims to determine the relationship between restaurant attributes and its dimensions of food quality, restaurant atmospheric, and service quality that potentially influences customer satisfaction at Malay food restaurants in Malaysia. The primary data was obtained using a survey questionnaire, with 384 sets of questionnaires have been distributed to individuals who have visited Malay food restaurants. Data were analysed, and the study's key findings were reviewed to understand the relationship between restaurant attributes of food quality, restaurant atmospheric, and service quality with customer satisfaction. From the results, all these elements play a pivotal role in determining customer satisfaction. This study found that key aspects of the restaurant attributes, namely the food quality, restaurant atmosphere, and service quality, have significant relationships with customer satisfaction, with different strengths of correlation between them.

Keywords:

Customer satisfaction, restaurant attributes; food quality; restaurant atmosphere; service quality; malay restaurant

1 Introduction

Besides manufacturing, business, and tourism, the foodservice industry is considered one of Malaysia's fastest-growing sectors (DOSM, 2020; HRDF, 2019). Malaysian foodservice industry, which includes restaurants, has experienced an enormous change with the establishment of different styles over the past years, including fine dining, fast food, casual, theme, and ethnic restaurants not to be excluded (Majid et al., 2016; Othman et al., 2013; Ali & Abdullah, 2012). The three primary ethnicities, namely the Malay, Chinese, and Indian, formed a unique combination of cultures that have contributed to the growth of the ethnic restaurants. Similar to Chinese and Indian, Malay restaurants offer a variety of menu options to their customers. Jalis et al. (2009) and Othman et al. (2013) deduced that Malay food is aromatic, delicious, rich, and spicy due to the combination of fresh herbs, coconut milk, and dried spices. This uniqueness and characteristics of the Malay foods have elevated its reputation towards attracting local customers and tourists worldwide to try the food. The mouth-watering Malay foods coupled with warm hospitality established the perfect ingredient to produce a positive image for locals and tourists (Quee Ling et al., 2010). Therefore, as it becomes an attraction towards the tourism industry, restaurateurs need to ensure that the customers are satisfied by meeting their expectations.

In line with the notion of meeting customer expectations, restaurateurs should not overlook the importance of understanding the customers' attitudes and behaviours. Rashid et al. (2019) eloquently stated that customer attitudes and behaviour are rapidly changing due to the growing number of restaurants, including Malay restaurants. Hence, restaurateurs must pay special attention to customer attitudinal and behavioural changes since retaining existing customers is more important than acquiring a new one (Zuratulraha et al., 2016). Restaurateurs started to note the need for customer satisfaction because the customers are the real drivers or investors in influencing the success in their business sustainability (Sabir et al., 2014). Satisfying the customers amid the dynamic growth of the restaurant industry should be the vital mean of every business that hopes to build repeat purchases (Sulek & Hensley, 2004; Kivela et al., 2000; Johns & Pine, 2002).

In surviving throughout the competition of today's market, restaurateurs have made efforts by fulfilling customer satisfaction by offering good value for their food and providing customers with a good ambience (Soriano, 2002). Therefore, the search for attributes that customers are looking for can help restaurateurs reduce the chances of failure in the foodservice business. Moreover, it will guarantee a continuous demand if the product's value exceeds the customer's expectation and satisfaction (Shaharudin et al., 2011). Regarding customer satisfaction, Chow et al. (2013) asserted that restaurant attributes, namely the food quality, service quality, and restaurant atmosphere, could influence it.

From the notions above regarding the matters, this study aims to determine the relationship between restaurant attributes and customer satisfaction of Malay restaurants in Malaysia. In particular, the empirical investigation on restaurant

attributes, including food quality, restaurant atmospheric, and service quality that affect customer satisfaction towards the dining experience of Malay food restaurants in Malaysia, is of utmost importance.

2   Literature Review

2.1   Restaurant Attributes

Several scholars have recorded lists of restaurant attributes, suggesting food, atmosphere, and service are three major components of the restaurant experience (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006; Harrington et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2006; Namkung & Jang, 2008; Ribeiro-Soriano, 2002). Four main restaurant attributes, namely food, service, cost, and place, have been investigated by Ribeiro-Soriano (2002). Kim et al. (2006) used the following classification for restaurant attributes dimension: physical environment, customer orientation (service), communication, relationship benefits, price fairness, and relationship quality. Harrington et al. (2010) indicated the general importance of the following restaurant attributes: (a) food safety, (b) cleanliness, (c) food quality, (d) speed of service, (e) perceived value of the food and drink items, (f) quality of service, (g) staff friendliness, (h) price, (i) variety of menu, and (j) close travel distance. To satisfy customer expectations, Andaleeb and Conway (2006) suggested that restaurateurs ought to focus their efforts on service quality, price, and food quality, in that order. In another study of restaurant attributes, Namkung and Jang (2008) ranked food first, followed by the physical environment and service.

Among various restaurant attributes identified and validated from extant research, three attributes (i.e., food quality, restaurant atmospheric, and service quality) were employed by the researcher in the study.

2.2   Food Quality

Bashir et al. (2013) and Chun and Nyam-Ochir (2020) mentioned that food quality is a significant component and has been a key value that consumers consistently consider when choosing a restaurant to dine in. Food quality is the value aspect of food that is acceptable to consumer preferences. According to Chow et al. (2013), the overall nutritional and food quality, taste of food, freshness of the food, dietary and nutritious aspects, and portion size are also classified under the food quality component. Namin (2017) stated that food and beverage quality had been given high significance as a core product of a food service operation involving few aspects: temperature, texture, taste, and aroma. Previous studies have indicated that the significance of food quality in restaurant settings empirically. For example, Clark and Wood (1999) reported that food quality is a primary factor affecting consumer satisfaction in restaurant choice, while Susskind and Chan (2000) insisted that food quality is a significant element for visiting a restaurant from the customer's point of view. Mattila (2001) considered food quality a primary indicator of customer experience in casual-dining restaurants. Sulek and Hensley (2004) found that food quality is the most significant factor of customer

satisfaction compared with other restaurant elements, such as environmental components and quality of service.

2.3 Restaurant Atmospheric

People tend to dine in at restaurants a lot more often nowadays. As a result, customers are more aware of the environment where they dine than before, thus allowing restaurateurs to invest more time into designing and offering their customers a very pleasant environment. Chow et al. (2013), Reimer & Kuehn (2005), and Rahim (2016) found that making the environment more pleasant and artistic is necessary for the performance of a restaurant business, which is important as well food. They stated that customers consider the atmosphere of a restaurant as the most critical factor that influences customer satisfaction compared to food quality. The three main dimensions of a restaurant atmosphere outlined by Rahim (2016) is the ambience, with the first dimension consisting of components such as level of noise, temperature, and odour. The second dimension is the space or function of the service landscape's layout and design. While signs, images, and artefacts are the final dimension, including the design of décor and theme (Moon, & Armstrong, 2019).

2.4 Service Quality

In a competitive environment, many restaurateurs seek to maintain their sustainability and attract customers by offering a high quality of service that satisfies customer requirements (Othman et al., 2018; Chow et al., 2013). To position themselves in a dynamic marketplace, restaurateurs need to offer their clients a higher standard of service. The restaurateur who supplies their customers with comprehensive service quality has a significant benefit over those operators who do not (Kim et al., 2016; Nasir et al., 2014). Serhan and Serhan (2019) defined service quality as the ability of the company to satisfy customers in deciding service characteristics, functionality, and requirements that satisfy customers' preferences and needs that can surpass their expectations. Sengupta and Pillai (2017) mentioned that the interpersonal quality of service construct consists of employee-customer experiences, such as personal attention to customers and customers being handled well. Izogo and Ogba (2015) concluded that the service quality constructs with its dimensions such as reliability of service, responsiveness, assurance of service, and empathy contribute to increased customer satisfaction. According to Parasuraman et al. (1985), service tangibility refers to the presence of service dimensions such as physical facilities, equipment, workers, and communication materials in terms of measurements.

2.5 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is an essential focus for both researchers and managers, according to Yuksel and Yuksel (2002), because a high level of customer satisfaction leads to a higher number of repeat consumers. The opportunity to review customer satisfaction levels and utilise that knowledge are essential first steps in ensuring and sustaining long-term customer retention and competitiveness. Furthermore, according to Yuksel and Yuksel (2002), most satisfaction theories indicated that satisfaction is a

relative term that is always measured against a standard. There are two major conceptualisations of satisfaction in the literature for modelling satisfaction: transaction-specific satisfaction and cumulative satisfaction (Anderson et al., 1994; Boulding et al., 1993). In the context of transaction-specific, customer satisfaction is temporary and short-term: how satisfied is a consumer with a product or service at a given time? (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). On the flip side, Johnson & Fornell (1991) indicated that cumulative satisfaction is a customer's evaluation of the total consumption experience with a product or service to date, directly affecting post-purchase phenomena such as attitudinal change, repeat purchase, and brand loyalty.

2.6 Malay Restaurant

Ethnic restaurants were divided into two groups by Zhou (2004). Restaurants related to the country's native or aboriginal population fall under the first group. The second group is the restaurants that are operated by immigrants from other countries (Zahari et al., 2019). On the other hand, Kroll (1994) looked at ethnic restaurants through the lens of cuisine, stating that ethnic restaurants serve cuisine from a certain nation, state, or ethnic group and food from another country brought in by the immigrant. Based on these notions, therefore, Malay restaurants could be categorised under ethnic restaurants. According to Othman (2013), Malay restaurants are known for offering spicy and delicious meals such as 'Nasi Lemak,' 'Rendang,' 'Masak Lemak,' 'Masak Asam Pedas,' 'Masak Cili,' and a variety of noodle dishes.

3 Methodology

3.1 The Sample

Cross-sectional data were collected through the distribution of online questionnaires using Google Form among individuals who have experienced visiting Malay restaurants in Malaysia. Since the number of people who dine at Malay restaurants is absent and unrecorded, this study collected 384 samples as suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and considered enough for further empirical study and data analysis. Given that this study has no sampling frame, convenient sampling is therefore used as the sampling design as this approach is the most appropriate and suits this analysis.

3.2 Measures

Five sections were constructed according to the variables and in response to every research objective and research question. Section A comprised of construct measurement for the demographic profile. This section used a nominal scale that addressed gender, age, income level, and education level. For sections B, C, D, and E, a five-point Likert scale is used to obtain a response from the respondents pertaining to the independent and dependent variable, ranging from 1 indicating strongly disagree to 5 indicating strongly agree. Section B consisted of measurement about food quality, which tested the taste of food, the freshness of food, and presentation of food. Section

C derived from the aspect of cleanliness, ambience, and restaurant decor, design, and layout to measure the restaurant atmospheric. Section D encompassed reliability of service, the responsiveness of service, and employee's professionalism to measure service quality. Lastly, section E covered transaction-specific and cumulative satisfaction to measure customer satisfaction who visit Malay food restaurants.

4 Findings

4.1 Demographic Profile

Table 1 showed the frequency statistic of the current study respondents' demographic profiles for a clearer picture of their characteristics and backgrounds.

Table 1: Respondents' Demographic Profile

Characteristic	*n*	%
Gender		
Male	153	39.84
Female	231	60.16
Age		
Younger than age 20 years	19	4.95
20 – 29 years	238	61.98
30 – 39 years	41	10.68
40 – 49 years	54	14.06
50 – 59 years	28	7.29
60 years and above	4	1.04
Monthly income		
RM1,000 and below	214	55.73
RM1,001 – RM2,000	44	11.46
RM2,001 – RM3,000	30	7.81
RM3,001 – RM4,000	23	5.99
RM4,001 – RM5,000	12	3.13
RM5,000 and above	61	15.89
Education level		
No formal education	2	0.52
Primary School	6	1.56
Secondary School	28	7.29
College/University	329	85.68
Other	19	4.95

Note: No. of respondents = 384

Results illustrated that among the respondents, females have a higher percentage of 60.16% instead of males. Regarding age, the highest proportion indicated a range of 20 – 29 years old, which showed 61.98%. For reported monthly income, respondents with an income of RM 1,000 and below revealed the highest percentage of 55.73%.

Finally, in terms of respondents' education level, a large proportion with 85.68% of total respondents embarked on college or university education.

4.2   Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pallant (2016) stated that the level and direction of a linear relationship between two variables could be analysed using correlation analysis. Therefore, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to determine the inter-correlations between the research constructs.

4.2.1   Pearson Correlation for Restaurant Attributes and Customer Satisfaction

Constructs		Customer Satisfaction
Restaurant Attributes	Pearson Correlation	.834**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	384

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix for Restaurant Attributes and Customer Satisfaction
Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As seen in the table above, the correlation between restaurant attributes and customer satisfaction was statistically significant, demonstrating a very strong positive relationship between restaurant attributes and customer satisfaction (r = .83).

4.2.2   Pearson Correlation for Food Quality, Restaurant Atmospheric, and Service Quality toward Customer Satisfaction

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Matrix for Food Quality, Restaurant Atmospheric, and Service Quality toward Customer Satisfaction

Constructs		Customer Satisfaction
Food Quality	Pearson Correlation	.635**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	384
Restaurant Atmospheric	Pearson Correlation	.809**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	384
Service Quality	Pearson Correlation	.759**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	384

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table above showed that the correlations between food quality, restaurant atmospheric, and service quality toward customer satisfaction are unanimously statistically significant, demonstrating strong positive relationships between them (Food Quality, r = .64; Restaurant Atmospheric, r = .81; Service Quality, r = .76).

5   Conclusion

This study indicated positive correlations among restaurant attributes, food quality, restaurant atmospheric, and service quality. The results are in line with previous studies by Baker and Crompton (2000), Chun and Nyam-Ochir (2020), Han et al. (2009), Zuratulraha et al. (2016), and Chow et al. (2013), emphasising that restaurant attributes play an important role in influencing customer satisfaction towards restaurants.

In line with the above notion, restaurant attributes such as food quality, restaurant atmospheric, and service quality influenced and affected the customer satisfaction of dining at the restaurants. Therefore, to meet customer expectations, elements of food quality need to be taken care of in every restaurant. Furthermore, since the essential product of a restaurant is food, it is deemed crucial to control the quality of food as it is one factor in maintaining the current customer and attracting new customers.

Besides, the restaurant atmosphere also plays an essential role in influencing customer satisfaction. This study indicated that restaurant atmospheric and customer satisfaction had a significant relationship. This relationship existed because a pleasant and comfortable environment could intrigue customer satisfaction when dining at the restaurant while enhancing their moods and emotions when enjoying food.

The last construct of restaurant attributes in this study, particularly service quality, had a significant and positive relationship with customer satisfaction. Even though food quality is the main factor influencing customer satisfaction, service quality also impacts customer satisfaction while dining at a restaurant. To reach customers' satisfaction towards restaurant service, the restaurateurs need to give reliable and accurate service. Besides, the restaurants must react fast, efficiently, and right towards customer needs. Treating customers with appropriate services and products will satisfy customer needs, which helps boost customer satisfaction. Therefore, maintaining a good service quality can nourish the level of customer satisfaction.

In a nutshell, as restaurant attributes appear to have a strong correlation with consumer satisfaction, it is strongly recommended that restaurateurs should deliver the highest degree of restaurant attributes. This is particularly related to the food quality, restaurant atmospheric, and service quality, for the reason that the customers are the central determinant in deciding the success in the restaurant business sustainability.

6   About the author

Muhammad 'Arif Aizat Bashir currently works as a senior lecturer at the Department of Food Service Management, Faculty of Hotel Management & Tourism, Universiti

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