Confirming the Factors that Influence Customer Satisfaction of Fast Food Restaurants

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Abstract. Costs of living, especially in urban areas, have been increasing continually. This requires both parents to have dual incomes to support their family. As a result, they do not have much time to cook at home. Due to changing lifestyles, especially among urban dwellers, fast food has become the first choice. There is a variety of fast food offered by many famous brands. However, unwittingly, some brands are preferred over other brands. Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate the factors that determine customer satisfaction and, subsequently, customer choice for selecting the preferred brand. Based on 120 responses gathered using a survey method, a multiple regression analysis results show that service quality, price and waiting time are why customers choose certain fast-food restaurants. The study's findings are beneficial to the management of fast food restaurants to focus on these factors for greater customer satisfaction. The findings also contribute to the body of knowledge in terms of confirming the earlier satisfaction model, especially in the context of the fast food industry.

Keywords: fast food restaurant, customer satisfaction, service quality, food quality, price, waiting time, physical environment.

1 Introduction

Customer satisfaction has been researched extensively over the last few decades due to its importance. Customer satisfaction is the emotional outcome of customers after they have consumed the service [1] [2] [3]. Previous authors have asserted that satisfaction exists when customer expectation is met during service delivery [4]. The popular theory of customer satisfaction is the confirmation or dis-confirmation theory, as proposed by [5]. The authors also said that customer satisfaction should be assessed differently according to the specific organisation and industry.

In Malaysia, the fast food industry has grown exponentially since its inception in 1963, with the opening of the first A&W outlet in Kuala Lumpur. Many local and international fast-food restaurants offer various types of food to customers in the country. Several fast-food

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restaurants are doing very well, but others are facing problems attracting customers. This issue has triggered the motivation to conduct this research to investigate the factors that influence customer satisfaction in choosing fast-food restaurants in Malaysia.

The identification of the factors is based on the findings of the previous studies in understanding a similar phenomenon of interest: customer satisfaction with fast food restaurants. Past studies have established that customer satisfaction will lead to customer repurchase intention [1], [6], [3]. The first factor to consider is service quality. Previous researchers have confirmed that service quality plays a significant role in ensuring customer satisfaction [7], [8], [9], [10], [11]. When customers perceive that the service offered by the employee is of high quality, such as giving personalised attention, being courteous, having a professional demeanour and being prompt in actions. As a result, customers will become satisfied. Thus, the discussion leads to the development of the following hypothesis; *service quality influences customer satisfaction of patronising fast food restaurants.*

Price is another crucial factor that makes customers satisfied with their choice to patronage fast food restaurants [9]. Most people attach a price to the value of the money they spend to purchase food. Knowing the psychology of the consumer, marketers of fast food restaurants have come out with various advertising strategies to attract consumers to choose their restaurants [12]. Most strategies revolve around the value that customers will obtain from each purchase. Studies have proven that product or service price is a significant predictor of purchase intention, with customer satisfaction as a mediator [7], [12], [9], [3]. Thus, the discussion leads to the development of the following hypothesis; *price influences customer satisfaction of patronising fast food restaurants.*

The physical environment or servicescape relates to the ambience surrounding the service provision, including layout, decoration, furniture arrangement, temperature, music and others [13], [14]. The right physical environment will create stable consumer" emotional state (satisfaction) that will direct them to make purchase decisions. In the case of fast food restaurants, the physical environment is unique as it reflects the concept of the restaurant; modern looking, customer orientation, fast and quality service, including hygiene. Studies have found that the physical environment influences customer satisfaction [7], [8], [9], [15]. Thus, the discussion leads to the development of the following hypothesis; *physical environment influences customer satisfaction of patronising fast food restaurants.*

Waiting time is expected to influence customer satisfaction when patronising fast-food restaurants [16], [17], [18]. Waiting without doing anything feels longer than occupied waiting. Some service outlets are experts in filling up consumer time by offering some other tasks to customers to do such as reading and solving puzzles, or offering side dishes to customers such as drinks, soup, titbits and others. Fast-food restaurants are good at ensuring minimal waiting time. Pizza Hut, for example, promises customers to get their orders within 20 minutes. Therefore, it can be summed up that waiting time influences customer satisfaction in fast-food restaurants [19], [20], [21]. Thus, the discussion leads to the development of the following hypothesis; *waiting time influences customer satisfaction of patronising fast food restaurants.*

Food quality refers to the consistency of the food features including the physical appearance, taste and food presentation [22]. Since most fast-food restaurants operate using standard operating procedures throughout their outlets, the quality of food can be ascertained. The same quality of food is offered regardless of the location. Customers choose fast-food restaurants because of this factor. Quality of food has become the top priority of fast food restaurants worldwide. Studies have established that food quality is one of the significant predictors of customer satisfaction when patronising fast-food restaurants [23], [9], [6], [24].

Thus, the discussion leads to the development of the following hypothesis*; food quality influences customer satisfaction of patronising fast food restaurants.*

2 Research Methodology

The research design used for this study is correlational since this study is meant to confirm or disconfirm the hypotheses developed prior to the execution of the data collection process. The population of the present study constitutes customers of popular fast food restaurants in Malaysia including Burger King, Domino's Pizza, KFC, Marry Brown, McDonald, and Pizza Hut. The sample size for this study is 120 respondents selected using purposive sampling. Those who had purchased fast food from popular fast-food restaurants were chosen. This sample size was determined based on the suggestion given by [25].

The research instrument was created by referring to the existing instrument developed by the previous researchers. This instrument was carefully selected to ensure that it is able to measure the variables of interest in the study. Data were collected using an online survey that was distributed using social media platforms such as WhatsApp. Data were successfully collected within two weeks. The collected data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics include factor analysis, mean and standard deviation while inferential statistics include correlation and multiple regression analyses.

3 Data Analysis and Findings

Table 1. Demographic Profile

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Types of Restaurant	Burger King	1	.8
	Domino's Pizza	11	9.2
	KFC	28	23.3
	Marry Brown	1	.8
	McDonald	70	58.3
	Pizza Hut	9	7.5
Gender	Female	77	64.2
	Male	43	35.8
Age	19 – 28 years	88	73.3
	29 – 38 years	18	15.0
	38 – 48 years	10	8.3
	49 years and above	4	3.3
Employment Status	Employed	33	27.5
	Self-employed	19	15.8
	Student	61	50.8
	Unemployed	7	5.8
Income	Below RM1,000	13	10.8
	No income	57	47.5
	RM1,000 -	22	18.3

	RM2,000		
	RM2,000 - RM3,000	13	10.8
	RM3,000 & above	15	12.5

Data that had been collected were first analysed using descriptive statistics; frequencies and percentages. **Table 1** shows the results of the analysis. With regard to types of restaurants the respondents had recently visited, McDonald was the first choice with 70 respondents or 58.3%, followed by KFC with 28 respondents or 23.3%. The third popular fast food restaurant was Domino's Pizza with 11 respondents or 9.2%. Burger King and Marry Brown were the least popular fast food restaurants among the respondents.

Looking at gender distribution of the respondents, 77 of them or 64.2% were female while 43 of them 35.8% were male. With regard to age, most respondents or 88 of them (73.3%) aged between 19 and 28 years old, followed by those aged between 29 and 38 years old 18 respondents or 15%). The next group constitutes 10 respondents aged between 38 and 48 years old. Moreover, most of the frequent visitors (61 respondents or 50.8%) were students, followed by those who were employed in the public and private sectors (33 respondents or 27.5%). A total of 19 of them were self-employed (15.8%) and seven of them were unemployed (5.8%).

Lastly, regarding the respondents' income, 57 respondents or 47.5% had no income since they were students. It is followed by those with income ranging from RM1,000 to RM2,000 (22 respondents or 18.3%). 15 respondents or 12.5% had more than RM3,000 as their monthly income, followed by those earning between RM2,000 and RM3,000 and those who had below RM1,000 (13 respondents or 10.8%). The distribution of respondents shows that fast food restaurants are popular among the female group and younger generations with minimum monthly income, which is consistent with the findings of [26].

Table 2. Results of Factor Analysis of the Independent Variables

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
Service Quality					
Employees give personal attention to customers.	.810				
When a customer has a problem, the restaurant shows a sincere interest in solving it.	.745				
Employees are consistently courteous.	.736				
Employees' appearance is neat and professional.	.667				
The restaurant provides a prompt and quick service.	.644				
Price					
The food price charged by the restaurant is reasonable.		.851			
This restaurant offers the best possible price plan that fulfils my needs.		.841			
The costs of food in this restaurant match with what I got.		.720			
Overall, this restaurant provides superior pricing options compared to other fast-food restaurants.		.615			
Physical Environment					
The music and sound give a pleasant feeling.			.774		
The restaurant has pleasant smell or odor.			.758		
The interior design and decorations of the restaurant are visually appealing.			.655		

The facility arrangement is well-ordered.			.514		
Waiting Time					
Shorter waiting time of this fast-food restaurant makes me happy.			.735		
I like to visit this fast food restaurant because of shorter waiting time.			.678		
I am satisfied with the waiting time of this fast-food restaurant.			.550		
Food Quality					
Food is served hot and fresh.					.830
The food served is tasty and flavorful.					.652
The food presentation is visually appealing.					.545
% variance explained (70.89)	18.390	16.020	13.454	12.332	10.695
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.					.896
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square				1288.647
	df				171
	Sig.				.000
MSA					.847-.930

Notes: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

A principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed to examine the dimensionality of items measuring the independent variables. As shown in **Table 2**, the results of the factor analysis show that the factor correlation matrix as indicated by KMO value of .896 is sufficient to proceed with the analysis. The MSA values are in the range from .847 to .930 shows sampling adequacy. The results also reveal the existence of five factors or components to represent the independent variables with the 70.89% explanation of variance. The first factor contains five items intended to measure service quality factor loading ranging from .644 to .810.

The second factor contains four items with factor loading ranging from .615 to .851. This four item factor represents price. The third factor also contains four items that were used to measure physical environment. The factor loadings are in the range between .514 and .774. The next factor is represented by three items measuring waiting time with factor loadings ranging from .550 to .735. And, the last factor constitutes three items that were intended to measure food quality. The factor loadings range between .545 and .830. All factors emerge as originally conceptualised based on the existing theoretical models.

Table 3. Results of Factor Analysis of the Dependent Variable

		Component 1
Overall, I am satisfied with this restaurant.		.885
The restaurant performance fulfilled my expectations.		.870
I will return to the restaurant in the future.		.850
I will recommend the restaurant to others.		.831
Considering all my experiences with this restaurant, my decision to visit it was a wise one.		.809
% variance explained		72.14
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.891
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	351.029
	df	10
	Sig.	.000
MSA		.865-.918

Notes: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

A principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation was also performed to examine the dimensionality of items measuring customer satisfaction. As shown in **Table 3**, a unidimensional factor emerged with the KMO value of .891, indicating the suitability of factor analysis to be performed. The MSA values are ranging from .865 to .918, showing sampling adequacy. The five items explain 72% of the variance in the model, which is good enough to proceed with the analysis. The five item factor loaded on a single factor with values ranging from .809 to .885. The factor will be used in the subsequent analysis.

Table 4. Results of Reliability and Correlation Analysis

No		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Service Quality	4.01	.69	(.868)					
2	Price	3.74	.85	.530**	(.875)				
3	Physical Environment	4.04	.69	.611**	.531**	(.804)			
4	Waiting Time	3.92	.85	.594**	.620**	.557**	(.773)		
5	Food Quality	4.10	.67	.568**	.527**	.546**	.547**	(.717)	
6	Customer Satisfaction	4.03	.79	.649**	.617**	.499**	.677**	.578**	(.903)

Notes: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed); Cronbach's alphas are in the parentheses along the diagonal; N=120

Correlation analysis was used to test the convergent and concurrent validity of the variables. As shown in **Table 4**, factors measuring the independent variables have moderate to high correlation, indicating a convergent validity of the independent variables. The lowest correlation is found between price and food quality (r=.527; p<.01) whereas the highest correlation is established between price and waiting time (r=.620; p<.01). The results indicate the convergent validity among the independent variables used in the present study.

The concurrent validity can be established by examining the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. All independent variables show moderate to high correlation with the dependent variable. The lowest correlation is found between physical environment or servicescape and customer satisfaction (r=.499; p<.01) and the highest correlation is established between waiting time and customer satisfaction (r=.677; p<.01). The

results provide confirmation validation on the concurrent validity between the independent and the dependent variables in the present study.

Reliability analysis was also performed on the items measuring each factor and the results are also present in **Table 4** (in the parentheses along the diagonal). The results show that all items are highly reliable to measure each their intended constructs with the lowest Cronbach's alpha of .717 for food quality and the highest Cronbach's alpha of .903 for customer satisfaction. Since all the preliminary tests show that the data are good for the analysis, the subsequent analysis that is multiple regression analysis was carried out to confirm the relationship between the independent and the dependent variables.

Table 5: Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

Variable	Standardised Beta Coefficients
Service Quality	.293**
Price	.212**
Physical Environment	-.055
Waiting Time	.317**
Food Quality	.157
R	.774
R^2	.599
Adjusted R^2	.581
F value	34.007
Sig. F value	.000
Durbin Watson	1.544

The next analysis which is a multiple regression analysis is meant to confirm the influence of the five independent variables on customer satisfaction. From the summary of the regression model, the R^2 of .599 indicates that 59.9% of the variance in the model is explained by the five independent variables. The remaining 40.1% of the variance is the unexplained variance. This indicates that more factors should be considered when assessing customer satisfaction in the context of fast-food restaurants. The regression model is significant ($F(5,114)=34.007$; $p<.01$).

Table 5 shows that service quality ($\beta=.293$; $p<.01$), price ($\beta=.212$; $p<.01$) and waiting time ($\beta=.317$; $p<.01$) are the significant predictors of customer satisfaction. The other two independent variables; physical environment ($\beta=-.055$; $p>.05$) and food quality ($\beta=.157$; $p>.05$) are not significant in influencing customer satisfaction in the context of fast food restaurants. The findings show that customers perceived the three factors comprising service quality, price and waiting time as the crucial factors that will ensure their satisfaction when patronizing fast food restaurants.

However, the physical environment and food quality are perceived as less important in determining their satisfaction. As discussed earlier in the literature review section, fast food restaurants' physical environment and food quality are standardised across geographical locations. Customers do not expect much from these two factors as they know that they will experience the same restaurant's physical environment and food quality. However, the physical environment is potentially used as a satisfaction arousing factor by putting the "wow" element in the environment.

4 Discussion and Implications

The present study's findings indicate that waiting time is the strongest predictor of customer satisfaction when visiting fast-food restaurants. Naturally, people dislike waiting, especially when the waiting time is unknown. In certain fast food restaurants, customers are advised on the duration of waiting before they can get the service. In the case of fast food restaurants, the current Q system, where customers have to queue in the long line, should be improved [20], [18], [27]. Using a customer kiosk where customers can order their meals and wait at their chosen table before the fulfilment of their order is so far the best option available.

The second most vital factor that influences customer satisfaction is service quality. Certainly, service quality is imperative to customer satisfaction [8], [9], [10], [11] since it is closely related to human emotions. People love to be fairly treated, given immediate attention and provided with personalised service [28]. Therefore, customer-facing employees need to be courteous, sincere, and professional in delivering the service as requested by customers. They must also have high levels of emotional stability to successfully deal with varying types of customers, including demanding customers.

The third significant factor influencing customer satisfaction is price, which is consistent with past studies [8], [9], [3]. Price is a sensitive issue since an increase in price will definitely reduce demand. Customers will be satisfied if the price of the food they have to pay is "reasonable". The term "reasonable" is subjective and generally relates to the value attached to the food purchased. Customers would be satisfied if they perceived high value in the food purchased. On the other hand, if the customer thinks that they gain less from the money spent, dissatisfaction exists. Therefore, fast food restaurants must emphasise the value of food that the customers might enjoy when buying it.

In the present study, food quality and physical environment are found insignificant in influencing customer satisfaction. For fast food restaurants, employees prepare food by strictly adhering to the standard operating procedures. As a result, the food quality is consistent regardless of the locations and time purchased. Similarly, the fast food restaurant's physical environment is also the same irrespective of different outlets. Customers expect these two factors to be consistent all the time. Meeting this expectation will not necessarily lead to satisfaction, but failure to meet this expectation will lead to dissatisfaction. Therefore, fast food restaurants must ensure customer expectations are consistently met to make them satisfied and concurrently loyal towards their chosen fast food restaurants [29].

5 Conclusion

Fast food has become the first choice among the new generation defeating traditionally prepared food because of changing lifestyle brought by modernisation. Customers nowadays spend less time preparing food and allocate more time to earning a living. Some fast-food restaurants managed to attract many customers, but others failed to do so because of certain pertinent factors that urge the present study to be conducted. Using 120 samples that predominantly constitute the young generation, a carefully designed survey instrument was distributed to customers of popular fast-food restaurants in Malaysia. The study revealed that service quality, price and waiting time are significant predictors of customer satisfaction when patronising fast-food restaurants. However, the physical environment and food quality are

found not significant to influence customers' satisfaction. As such, managers of restaurants need to be aware of the significant factors to develop the right strategies to attract customers to their premises. Future research is recommended to replicate the study to confirm the current findings. A comparative study between fast food and non-fast food restaurants is also encouraged to determine the factors that differentiate these two types of restaurants. Furthermore, the antecedents of behavioural intention to use online food delivery services should also be explored further [30–32].

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