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THE CONSEQUENCE OF FOOD QUALITY AND ATMOSPHERE IN FAST FOOD TOWARDS CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT: The study focuses on the relationship between food quality and atmosphere in fast-food restaurants and the role of both towards customer satisfaction. High competition among fast-food restaurants has created a robust and creative approach to keep customers. Five hundred questionnaires were distributed, but only 265 were valid for data processing. Data were collected using survey method customer was chosen based on a purposive approach. The survey used 7 point Likert scales where customers may need to select from 1= strongly disagree, and 7 = strongly agree. Data was then processed using Smart PLS. The results indicate that both variables play an essential role in customer satisfaction. The results hint that the service provider can never enjoy their current market situation as the competition is very tough, and customer behavior changes rapidly.

KEYWORDS : Customer satisfaction, Food quality, atmosphere, fast food

I. INTRODUCTION

A recent report published by the department of statistics Malaysia indicates that there are more than 170.000 food and beverage establishments in Malaysia. Such big numbers represent around 5% annual growth with a gross output of more than 65 billion a year. The food and beverage industry is critical in Malaysia as it involved in providing more than 550,000 paid full-time employees. The type of food and beverage industry divided into two major categories, which are commercial and non-commercial. For industrial, the players are fast food restaurants, full services, caterers, and drinking places. On the other side, non-commercial is related to food services offered by the accommodation type, such as hotel restaurants, bars, and room services, or institutional variables such as hospitals, universities, and airport food service. This paper is focusing on the area of fast-food restaurants as the scope of the study.

In Malaysia, there are more than 15 fast-food restaurants available competing among them in the same industry. A recent survey conducted by Statista (2018) revealed that KFC, McDonald, Pizza Hut, Domino's, and subway are among the top 5 of the most visited by local Malaysian. Such results indicate that there is a tough job by other service providers like Secret Recipe, The Chicken Rice Shop, Kenny Rogers Roaster, A&W Restaurants, and many more to compete over their market share and growth survive in the industry. Past research XXXXX claimed that KFC dominates the market share of fast-food restaurants in Malaysia with more than 45%, followed by McDonald's at 30%. Pizza Hut supports them at 13%. Those numbers represent a fierce market competition among the industry players to gain their market share over the limited number of customers.

Apart from the right market strategy, the service provider must ensure that it offers an acceptable food quality that may affect the satisfied customer. Past research highlighted the importance of providing good food quality. They face a different type of generation, which is more demanding with a different set of purchases and consumer behavior. The current customers are more concerned about their health and the details of ingredients they eat due to health concerns. As such, service providers need to focus on the food quality that may lead to customer satisfaction.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Customer Satisfaction

According to [1], customer satisfaction is the outcome of overall customer experience over the delivery of products or services, whether it meets or not their expectations. High expectations from customers may need a high service delivery or customer experience to achieve the satisfaction level. Customers can easily get satisfied if the service level is beyond their expectations. Customer satisfaction is basically about how the service provider managed to meet customer expectations by providing a positive customer experience [2]. To meet the objectives, service providers must first understand the actual customer needs and wants. Service providers must know precisely what the customer needs and wants primarily related to fast food services[1]. There are many options available in the market and how each service provider can compete by satisfying customers' needs. The

competition in the market allows the customer to choose the best out of many service providers that can meet their needs. Such a game is crucial not only to the one at the bottom list but also as a challenge for the top players to maintain and sustain[2].

Top marketing scholars and researchers have been emphasized the importance of customer satisfaction. The topic of customer satisfaction was discussed over a few decades ago. Still, it remains relevant as there are so many changes in consumer behavior related to consumer behaviors, patterns, trends, and lifestyles [3]. One of the positive effects of having satisfied customers according to [4] is the increasing number of customers. A customer who is satisfied with or experienced happiness from the service delivery will share their experiences with their social circles[5]. In the past, word of mouth is limited to closed networking as it may need a lot of effort in communication with a large number of people[6]. Customers today used social media platforms to communicate, posting, or even sharing their moments live with unlimited numbers. Such actions may bring two types of impact on service providers. A kind word of mouth will create a positive brand image and promoting the services offered by the provider[7]. A negative word of mouth will indirectly have burdened the service provider in answering and defending the statements made by customers[8]. Negative word of mouth can be very costly as it may tarnish the excellent brand name and reduce customer trust. In a nutshell, having customers with positive customer experiences will indirectly help promote services based on past customer experiences.

Past researchers [2] also claimed that satisfied customers would tend to repeat purchases; happy customers, according to [3], will stay in the customer lifecycle and supporting the service providers. Customers will return to the service provider for repeat purchase[1]. The customer could even come with additional members or additional orders. Customer satisfaction not only encourages repeat visits but may increase the amount of purchase[9]. A satisfied customer will explore more potential menu, for example, that can suit their taste and favorites. Such a scenario will enable the service providers to gain more revenue than later parts can be translated into profit[10].

Satisfied customers have been reported as very supportive of the new product or services based on innovation or creativity. The high competition in the industry led to more creative activities, such as introducing new menus to attract more customers[11]. There are also service providers that added a new list based on localization to meet and attract a new customer. Competition is all about attracting customers to stay supportive or being retained in the life cycle. According to [12], satisfied customers are very supportive of introducing a new menu or creativity. A happy customer will be the one who will support the latest changes and give feedback. Their feedback is critical as they are representing the voice of the customer.

Recent research [13], [14] highlighted that satisfied customer is insensitive towards the price. There could be a situation where the service provider might need to increase the rate either due to external factors such as taxes, competitors, or internal factors. Satisfied customers have been proven to remain supportive despite increasing the price [11]. The happy customer tends to be more comfortable and tolerates the price increase against their satisfaction and the best moments enjoyed at the restaurants. A small increase in the price will make no difference as they value the experience more than the price[12].

It is also recorded that a satisfied customer will buy more from the service providers beyond their earlier behavior[15]. A customer who satisfied with a service provider may spend more on their budget by extending their transactions from only once a week to more frequent. Customer will also continue their menu from day time to breakfast and dinner. Such actions will benefit the service providers over the long term[11]. It was also recorded that satisfied customers will buy from their favorite service provider many other things or products as a one-stop center. There are many kinds of literature related to customer satisfaction recorded based on empirical studies. It can be concluded that customer satisfaction leads to market growth and eventually promotes a positive profit. The increasing number of customers will guarantee a steady amount of customer and revenue to the service providers. A satisfied customer will not get easily influenced by any attempt by competitors to attract them away. According to [11], [12], [15], satisfied customers will put competitors away from them. Such situations indirectly increased market share and growth. The steady incomes at the same time promote high profit to the service providers. It is also at the same time cultivate happiness among staff that will work hard to maintain high-quality service delivery to ensure that customers satisfied[5], [16].

2.2 Food Quality

The customer today is well concerned about what they consume primarily related to food. Awareness of the level of food quality increased as the consumer behavior changed due to their level of education, level of income, and mostly is because of a rapid campaign about health and food quality disseminated by public awareness. The definition of quality [17] is "the extent to which all the established requirements relating to the characteristics of a food are were met." It means the food must meet all the elements that have been set, such as

appearance, texture, aroma, packaging, and even labeling meets the standards as required and governed by the authorized body[18].

Recent research indicates that among the characteristics of food quality are the identity of the food itself concerning the standard[19]. The rule refers to the compositional standard within a regulated diet that must contain specific ingredients such as the level of food additive, coloring, and flavoring. Standard is also referring to the level of fortification in terms of added vitamins or milk. Recent research [17] highlighted that the importance of looking the food safety elements such as the elements of microbiological or chemical[20]. Food quality is also related to quantity and weight. Manufacturers or producers may need to declare the gross weight or net quantity per unit of food or net weight per container or packaging[19]. At the same time, standard food must meet specify the components of one or more ingredients in food. Food quality is subject to specific standards, and government agencies regulate it.

Food quality, according to [17], [21], is a degree of excellence that may contribute to the value of products and fit for consumption. It means the food that meets the standard is safe to consume since it already follows the specific requirements that have been set by the regulators[21]. Bear in mind the service provider in the food-related industry must ensure that the requirements are vital to achieving the needs and wants of their customer[17]. On top of that, it is also essential for the service provider to ensure that the food supplied must meet the conform to the expectations performance such as textures, appearance, sweetness, acidity, and size[19]. At the same time, the features must always meet the standards, such as labeling and information on how to us as well as the packaging. There are many other conformances related to the quality that has been highlighted by [22]–[24] such as reliability, durability, and aesthetics. A combination of all characteristics makes the food meet the elements of quality to be served for consumption by consumers.

The high awareness and demand for food quality, especially related to fast food services, have forced the service provider to enhance their research and development in food to meet current needs and wants[22]. The service provider is getting aware that their customer is very much concern about the food they consume despite the generation before this claimed that all type of fast food is not healthy and lead to obesity. The current generation has a different view, but they demand specifically what they want to avoid getting trapped in a poor diet. Recent research [23] recently divided the food quality into two sections, which are intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic is more towards internal factors such as taste, flavor, shape, nutritional, shelf life, microbiology, chemical, and packaging[24]. Extrinsic, at the same time, is focusing on external factors such as emotions, availability, regulations, convenience, and price. Both internal and external factors play an essential role in keeping as a guideline to the producer, manufacturer, and service provider in food quality delivery[23].

According to recent research [22], [23], intrinsic factors are influenced by a few factors, such as the quality of raw materials. The input from quality raw materials will help the producer produce a better grade or quality of food[19]. The standard of raw materials must be taken care of and observed in terms of quality, size, grade, and safety. In Malaysia, additional requirements that comply with the Halal standards must be followed to meet the qualifying criteria[17]. Besides that, it was also reported that the food composition must give according to specific criteria. The nutrient of the food can provide energy and other nutrients such as carbohydrates, protein, or minerals. On top of that, it was highlighted that the intrinsic also concerns the processing procedures and the storage method. Both elements are essential to meet the intrinsic requirements in producing quality food[21].

Excellent food quality is essential in the fast-food industry as it will conform to customer requirements. Much research [25], [26] emphasizes that the customer in the 21st century is well informed and knowledgeable. Failing to meet their expectations will result in reduced sales and left behind in the industry[26]. The food quality is essential to be monitored during the production process. The production process must include conformance to the specific requirements, whether it was set internally through service provider policy and cultures or set by the regulators[25]. It is also essential that the products meet the fitness for consumption. The end products are not only attractive in terms of the taste, aroma, and size, but it should pass the quality checking in terms of fitness for use or eat. It was reported that service providers that managed to follow the requirements according may meet customer satisfaction and thus satisfied them[26].

2.3 Atmosphere

Past research [27] claimed that the customer had at least three most noticeable items when they first had a chance to visit. Among the three elements are the atmosphere besides services and cuisine. It means that the atmosphere plays a specific role in influencing customer whether they may come or not for the second time. Past research [28], [29] warned that every restaurant's goal and objectives should be to give the best customer experiences while dining. Based on that, creating the right atmosphere that meets the target market's

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expectations is very important to keep customers over a long time. The definition of atmosphere, as stated by [30], [31], "is the feel of a restaurant that enhances the entire experience of a meal."

The atmosphere in restaurants includes the use of decorations and furnishings of the eating place. It is also related to lighting, music, and food presentation—each type of categoriescombinedto provide customer experiences[29]. Recent research also highlighted that the staff uniforms and the color used as their backdrop play roles in providing customer experiences.

Based on past research [30], the restaurant concept is vital to determine from the beginning of operations. The service provider needs to decide the idea that suitable for their overall services. Is it for family, or is it for kids? The concept is part of the service provider marketing strategy[31]. It was also recommended that the décor and furnishings be consistent with the restaurant concept and theme. The combinations of that should lead to a memorable experience that will, for sure, invite them for repeat purchase[32].

The atmosphere also related to restaurant lighting. Lighting plays a massive role in creating the right ambiance in restaurant environments. The color should be able to be used to create exciting and moods of happiness among the visitors[28]. Another additional element that can influence the customer mood is the music. The music that they played should be conducive to a control volume[31]. A combination of lighting and music may result in beautiful customer experiences. Although it is still new, research on the atmosphere has been able to come out with a few more alternatives to support the positive atmosphere. Recently [28] claimed that a clean environment is essential to the customer. Customers may come to the fast-food restaurant for various reasons. Some may come to the restaurant for a quick meal, but some because too busy to cook. Both examples are given to carry a different customer's objective, but a good and right atmosphere should meet both expectations overall. Some people come to the restaurant for socializing with friends, and the rest could because of having family times[28], [29], [33]. Therefore, the restaurant needs to pay attention to the atmosphere as it may contribute to the overall customer experience.

Past research [28], [33] on the atmosphere indicates various findings towards the customer experiences. The overall experiences could be different based on the type of restaurants itself. Service providers must carefully understand customers' needs based on experiences, psychological factors, and feedback from customers. It was agreed that most customers focused on service quality [29]. Still, the additional environmental factors may contribute to influencing the overall positive experiences [34].

III. METHODOLOGY

The population of this research is the customer of fast-food restaurants. Overall research took more than three months in collecting the data. The method of collecting data used was purposive sampling. Five hundred questionnaires were distributed in at least ten popular spots of fast-food restaurants in Kuala Lumpur. The selection of the top ten spots was based on recommendations from the food BlogSpot. Areas chose based on the numbers of visitors and word of mouth. At the end of the data collection period, only 265 were valid o be used and process for the next step of action. There are altogether 13 questions, not including demographic questions. The most time take is 2 minutes. On average most customers will complete the survey within 50 seconds. 7 Likert scale was used to provide more choices to customers in selecting their answer. Besides that, the 7 Likert points will enable the research to gather more accurate answers.

IV. RESULTS

Table 1: Summary of statistics of the questionnaire survey

Constructs	No. of items	Mean	SD	α
Food quality	5	5.25	1.011	0.801
Atmosphere	4	5.00	1.029	0.811
Customer satisfaction	4	4.75	1.501	0.899
Notes: SD, standard deviation; α, Cronbach's α; overall α = 0.827				

Based on table 1, the mean for food quality indicates the highest compared to atmosphere and customer satisfaction. All alpha values are above the acceptable value, and the standard deviation is within reasonable results. Table 2 below is the PCA results, where it explains the amount of variance of each variable. Value more than 0.5 is recognized as acceptable. The purpose of the test is to ensure the questionnaire's reliability before the next steps of analysis.

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Table 2: Result of principal component analysis

No	Food quality	Atmosphere	Customer satisfaction
FQ 1	0.854		
FQ 2	0.752		
FQ 3	0.822		
FQ 4	0.893		
FQ 5	0.754		
AT 1		0.878	
AT 2		0.865	
AT 3		0.877	
AT 4		0.787	
CS 1			0.866
CS 2			0.814
CS 3			0.697
CS 4			0.811
Eigenvalue	8.022	4.026	2.552
Variance explained (%)	31.501	14.114	12.34

Table 3: Measurement model results

Constructs variables	Standardized loadings	t-statistics	CR	AVE
Food quality				
FQ 1	0.801	15.441**	0.80	0.67
FQ 2	0.922	16.242**		
FQ 3	0.702	12.407**		
FQ 4	0.699	11.214**		
FQ 5	0.691	11.635**		
Atmosphere				
AT 1	0.812	12.587**	0.91	0.77
AT 2	0.835	13.346**		
AT 3	0.930	14.240**		
AT 4	0.835	13.351**		
Customer satisfaction				
CS 1	0.931	18.224**	0.92	0.79
CS 2	0.943	11.378**		
CS 3	0.707	19.340**		
CS 4	0.802	10.214**		
Notes: CR = $(\sum \text{Standardized loadings})^2 / [(\sum \text{Standardized loadings})^2 + \sum \text{(measurement indicator error)}]$; AVE = $\sum (\text{Standardized loadings}^2) / [\sum (\text{Standardized loadings}^2) + \sum \text{(measurement indicator error)}]$. **Significant at $p < 0.01$ level				

Table 3 shows the results of the measurement model: the table display CR and AVE values for all the items used for this research. CR values are between 0.8 and 0.92, while the AVE is between 0.67 and 0.79.

Table 4 indicates the squared correlations between constructs, while table 5 is the path analysis for this research. The results show both positively associate towards customer satisfaction table 4: Squared correlations between constructs

	Food quality	Atmosphere	Customer satisfaction
Food quality	0.13		
Atmosphere	0.07	0.04	
Customer satisfaction	0.12	0.08	0.06

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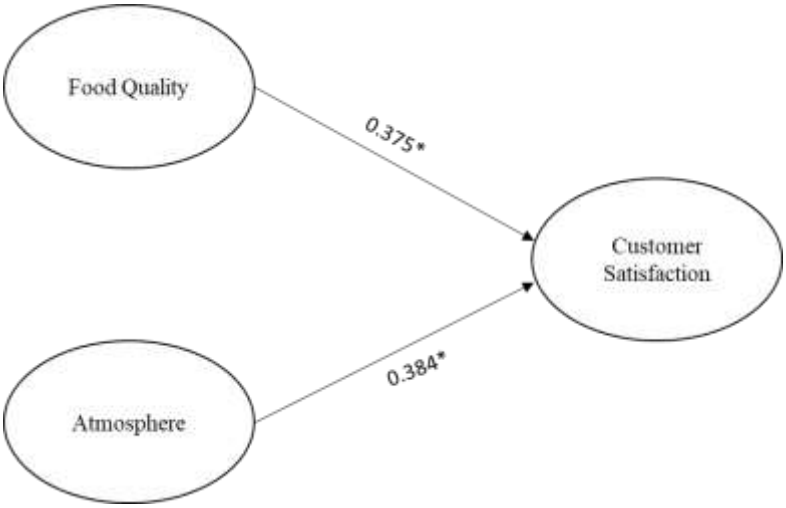
Table 5: Path analysis of the structural model

Casual path	Path coefficient	t-statistics	Results
Food quality → Customer satisfaction	0.375*	2.038	Supported
Atmosphere → Customer satisfaction	0.384*	2.508	Supported
Note: *,**Significant at $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$ levels, respectively			

Figure 1: Hypothesized relationship



V. DISCUSSIONS

The study is focused on two critical variables, which are food quality and atmosphere. The results indicate that both variables are vital to customer satisfaction. Businesses in the 21st century faced severe challenges, not only competing for survival but at the same time to meet the customer requirements and expectations. Food quality, as mentioned above, is becoming a priority among the young generations. They have more knowledge and concerns about the quality of food. Current generations, in fact, concern about the contents of what they eat and becoming more health-conscious.

There are many reasons why customers enjoyed repeating to a fast-food restaurant. The findings in this research indicate that atmosphere is equally important as the food quality. Customers would like to spend their time with family members or friends with a suitable atmosphere that they liked. Most fast-food restaurants have their theme, and almost all of them are interesting and well managed. Fast food restaurants are also clean and suitable for family and friends gathering.

Based on the research, industry players need to be more alert about their customer expectations. The results are also important for a fast-food restaurant's competitor to focus on their environments and menu to attract more customers.

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