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The Influence of Food Quality on Customer Satisfaction in Fine Dining Restaurant: Case in Penang

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Article Information

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Abstract

Nowadays, people emphasized on food quality as a fundamental component to satisfy restaurant customers. However, there is a lack of studies on the influence of food quality in fine dining restaurants. With that notion, the primary purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of food quality toward customer satisfaction in fine dining restaurants. The study also attempts to explore the relationship between food quality and customer satisfaction. The result showed that overall food quality attributes affect significantly towards customer satisfaction. Subsequent regression analyses demonstrated that freshness and variety of foods are the two most influencing attributes that influence customer satisfaction in fine dining restaurant which be remarkably important for restaurateurs. Hence, restaurant managers should pay more attention to the food quality attributes that elicit customer satisfaction and enhance return patronage in the restaurant business.

INTRODUCTION

As preferred by the rapid growth of the high income population in the urban area as well as time constraints for food preparation, has contributed to the successfulness of the food-based service industry in Malaysia. Due to hectic agendas in urban areas and income increases in the majority of Malaysian households, consumers continued to dine out instead of dining at home during weekdays or even weekends and public holidays (Euromonitor, 2015). Although slightly affected by the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2015, consumers in the middle- to high-income level never borders and still choose to dine out to enjoy good food and good ambiance where they can relax and release stress in their daily life. The decision to dine out depends on the level of income, whether to dine for well priced meals, such as mamak stalls, Kopitiam and food courts or fine dining and hotel restaurants.

A fine dining restaurant, especially is increasing upgrades and improves in term of decoration, ambiance and interior design to attract customers and to distinguish itself from its competitors like quick-casual restaurants. Fine dining generally is under table service or full service that usually for people who seeks high quality, extravagant menu, affordable food and unique ambiance. Fortunately, customers with higher income level may become a loyal customer to fine dining or a theme restaurant because of the image and meaning that contribute social value to them. They assume it as an influence to their social status (Eliwa, 2006). In other words, fine

dining restaurants are full service restaurants where customers pay a premium for fine food and impeccable service (Talib et. al, 2009).

Rush (2006) stated that fine dining is correlated to traditional classic French dining influenced with menu and service. According to Har (2008), the definition of fine dining restaurant is the excellent food with emphasis prominence with visual presentation, the outstanding taste of food and the quality of ingredients used for preparation, also special culinary skills required during food preparation such as carving in front of consumer and table-side preparation such as flambé. Tableware and cutlery used are good quality, with perfect starched napkins, linen and tablecloths. Besides that, staff and diners are proper dress code and observe with proper dining etiquette and service procedure. Service provided in fine dining is precise, perfect and immaculate. The decor of fine dining restaurants is elegant, exclusively designed and refined atmosphere.

In the food service industry, there are high in competition among fine dining restaurant and other food service categories. To achieve loyal customer and repeat purchases, customer satisfaction should be the important objective to be achievers in business (Sulek & Hensley, 2004). According to investigate of Sulek and Hensley (2004), instead of physical setting and service quality, food quality is the one of important significant predictors of customer satisfaction even though repeat intention shows only 17%. This is due that food becomes one of the basic factors of the restaurant experience, and there is no hesitate that the food at least has a major impact on customer satisfaction as well as return patronage (Namkung and Jang, 2007). With that, restaurant industries today was facing a critical challenge to provide quality food which is not only captivating the customers but also can be greater to business competitors.

Customer perception about the restaurant must be aware of the service dimension of food quality which has a causal relationship to customer satisfaction. In a fine dining restaurant, high level of service quality is one of the features that can create extra customer satisfaction (Hanefors and Mossberg, 2003). To create repeat customer, customer satisfaction is one of the business objectives that should be critically performing (Johns and Tyas, 1996; Kivela et.al, 1999; Sulek and Hensley, 2004).

Food is a major impact on loyal customer and customer satisfaction. Regardless the importance of food quality, most previous study focused on other attributes to influence restaurant satisfaction such as physical environments and service quality. It is supported by Stevens' et.al (1995) studies that created a service quality measure, DINESERV, focusing on assessing the level of restaurant atmosphere and employee service. Meanwhile, according to Kivela et.al (1999), food is one of the major attributes which explaining dining satisfaction and predicting repeat customer at the restaurant. Unfortunately, the food quality was not one of the major of interest in their study.

Besides, there is no concrete evidence in previous studies to verify the influence of food quality itself in the fine dining restaurant which really influences restaurant customer satisfaction. At that point there is a little attention has been yielded to the contribution of each individual food quality attribute to make satisfaction among customers. Thus, the study attempt to provide knowledge focuses on food quality attributes to help business operation getting closer to success. More specifically to better understand, this study will fill the gap by exploring to what extent the food quality attributes will influence customer satisfaction dining experience in the fine dining restaurant from Malaysian dining context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Food is the most crucial part of the overall restaurant experience (Sulek and Hensley, 2004). They lumped all food attributes into only one variable, food quality, whereas Kivela et.al (1999) who designed a model of dining satisfaction and return patronage, saw that food quality had many attributes. According to Peri (2006), food quality is an absolute requirement to satisfy the needs and expectations of restaurant customers. Knowing the importance of food quality in the restaurant business, previous studies have examined various food quality attributes. There are some of the review of the literature reveals that the general description of food quality among researchers emphasizes on presentation, menu variety, healthy options, taste, freshness and temperature. Temperature is also a sensory element of food quality (Kivela et al, 1999). According to Delwiche (2004), temperature influence how to get the flavor of food has provided; this will be interacting with other sensory properties such as taste, smell and sight. Then, the temperature could be considered as one determinant enchanting pleasure in the food experience (Kahkonen et.al, 1995). Taste is regarded as a key attribute in food in the dining experience (Kivela et al.,1999). Many customers have become food savvy, so the taste of food in restaurant has become increasingly important (Cortese, 2003). It is thus not surprising that a shabby restaurant with gourmet cooking is packed with customer. Also, the taste is usually believed to influence restaurant customer satisfaction and future behavior intention Kivela et al., (1999). The restaurant should offer a wide variety of menus to customer in food service because the customer is generally individuals from different

cultural, ethnic, and economic background, and mostly having their exact food preferences. Menu variety needed in order to serve varying dining preferences of the miscellaneous customer (Payne-Palacio and Theis, 2005). According to Namkung and Jang (2007), presentation refers to technique of plating food, decorated attractively to get an eye catching of customer in order to fulfill the customer perception of quality. Kivela et al., (1999) highlighted that the presentation of food is a one of the factors food feature in modelling dining satisfaction and return customer. Other than that, food presentation also as one of the product/service factors in the TANGSERV scales (Rajpoot, 2002). According to Johns and Tyas (1996), healthy food might have a significant effect on the customers' perceived evaluation of the restaurant experience. Sulek and Hensley (2004) mentioned many restaurant customers are concerned with their health, so the availability of nutritious food items has become increasingly essential as one of the core properties of dining satisfaction. The freshness usually refers to the fresh state of food related to its crisp, juicy and aroma (Peneau et al, 2006). Previous studies have illustrious freshness of food as a crucial intrinsic quality cue (Johns and Tyas, 1996; Kivela et al, 1999). Food is one of the factors that influencing customer satisfaction. Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) stated food related into factors to the customer and the context of eating. According to Brown (2004), factors that relate to the food are explicated in terms of the sensory characteristics of the food such as color, flavor (odor or taste), texture and temperature.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling and Instrument

This study was conducted using a quantitative research method where the empirical investigation was carried out to determine the relationship of food quality attributes and customer satisfaction in fine dining restaurant. The instrument developed through the self-administered questionnaire containing close-ended scale questions. The sample population was chosen to be diners who were dining at a fine dining restaurant in Seberang Jaya and Island of Penang, Malaysia. With that, the convenience sampling technique is carried out in the data collection process. The population identified to be estimated as 100 customers who dine in at the restaurant.

The survey was adapted from previous literatures and was divided into three sections. The first section (Part A) is focusing on the respondent's demographic profile with five variables includes gender, race/ethnicity, age, highest level of education and monthly income. Part B with 6-items measured food quality attributes was adapted from previous studies on the foodservice sector (Johns & Tyas, 1996; Kivela et.al, 1999; Raajpoot, 2002; Stevens et.al., 1995). The perceived quality of food attributes was measured using seven-point Likert scale on the level agreement from (1) "Extremely Disagree" to (7) "Extremely Agree". Meanwhile, Part C is measuring customer satisfaction in the fine dining restaurant with 4-items also by using seven-points Likert scale on the level of agreement from (1) "Extremely Disagree" to (7) "Extremely Agree" based on Oliver's (1997) study.

Data Collection

A pilot study was conducted in a sample of 30 respondents among researcher's friends and diners at a fine dining restaurant in order to ensure the reliability and effectiveness of the instrument. Several modifications were made based on the feedback from the pilot test. The survey was conveniently distributed and conducted within 4 weeks with the help of bachelor degree students. Out of the total, only 81 diners participated in this study. The reliability test was undertaken for Part B and Part C separately. The result showed that the instrument and items used were reliable for Part B with coefficient Alpha value at 0.810 and 0.854 for Part C.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Profile of Respondents

Out of 81 respondents, 42.0% were male and 58.0% female respondents. Malay constituted almost 60.5% of the sample. The majority of the respondents were between the ages of 31-40 years old (44.4%). Regarding status, 69.1% of the respondents were married. Approximately 37.0% of the respondents were in the private sectors. Almost 38.3% of the respondents incomes were between RM3001-RM4000. The results show that diners usually dine in at the restaurant two times a month (35.8%).

Food Quality attributes toward Customer Satisfaction in Fine Dining Restaurant

Descriptive statistics were employed to look at the mean scores to investigate the influence of attributes toward customer satisfaction. The magnitude of mean score for all items were shown in Table 1. Based on the result, the score ranging from 5.52 to 5.64 respectively, indicating that the customers were satisfied and agreed with the food presentation, variety, healthy options, tasty, fresh, flavorful, and temperature. In other words, the quality of food is there and accepted by the customers. For the customer satisfaction at Table 2, the magnitude of the mean score which 5.49 to 5.59 explained that most of the respondents agreed that they were satisfied and pleased with the service and good dining experience.

TABLE 1
MEAN SCORE OF FOOD QUALITY ATTRIBUTES TOWARD CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

	ITEMS	M	SD
1	Food presentation is visually attractive	5.57	1.139
2	The restaurant offers a variety of menu items	5.58	.864
3	The restaurant offers healthy options	5.52	1.001
4	The restaurant serves tasty food and flavorful	5.59	.818
5	The restaurant offers fresh food	5.65	.924
6	Food is served at the appropriate temperature	5.64	.940

(N=81)

TABLE 2
MEAN SCORE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

	ITEMS	M	SD
1	I am satisfied with the service at the fine dining restaurant	5.49	.896
2	I am pleased to have visited the fine dining restaurant	5.56	.949
3	I was happy with the dining experience in the fine dining restaurant	5.49	.882
4	The fine dining restaurant gives me overall satisfaction and good dining experience	5.59	.959

(N=81)

The Relationship between Food Quality Attributes and Customer Satisfaction

Multiple regression analysis was used to assess the relationship between food quality attributes and their overall satisfaction in fine dining restaurant. Results from the Table 3 shows that food quality attributes ($\beta=0.709$) were significantly affected customer satisfaction ($p=0.00$). This study shows that the value which is R Square for food quality attributes towards customer satisfaction 50.2%. This is presented as an acceptable result.

TABLE 3
MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF FOOD QUALITY ATTRIBUTES AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

R	R Square	Standard Coefficient Beta	t	Sig.
.709 ^a	.502	.709	8.932	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), FOODQUALITY

b. Dependent Variable: CustomerSatisfaction

Most Influences attribute towards Customer Satisfaction in Fine Dining Restaurant

A simple linear multiple regression was conducted to determine the most influences attribute towards customer satisfaction in fine dining restaurant. Result from the Table 4 shows the Beta coefficients indicated that freshness was the most variables influencing overall customer satisfaction ($\beta=.401$) and followed by food variety ($\beta=.234$). In other words, freshness of food has a great influence on their overall satisfaction in the fine dining restaurant. The results indicated that the regression model fits the data well. About 53.7% variance in overall customer satisfaction was explained by food quality attributes satisfaction.

TABLE 4
ANALYSIS OF THE MOST INFLUENCES ATTRIBUTES TOWARDS CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Model	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)		2.168	.033
Presentation	.085	.808	.422
Variety	.234	2.056	.043
Healthy	.024	.207	.836
Taste	.092	.852	.397
Freshness	.401	3.382	.001
Temperature	.064	.599	.551

R Square = 0.537

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

DISCUSSIONS

This study empirically examined the influence of food quality attributes towards customer satisfaction in fine dining restaurant. The findings clearly revealed and was found similar to the results of a tourism study by Baker and Crompton (2000), which is, food quality and satisfaction play an important part in determining customer satisfaction toward restaurants. Indeed, clearly from the results obtained, most of the respondents agreed a fine dining restaurant give them more satisfaction and good dining experience. Hence, restaurant managers must understand the importance of improvement in food quality and satisfaction, which contribute directly to favorable results through increased revisit to the restaurant.

From the analyses of multiple regressions, the relative importance of food attributes revealed that Malaysian consumers place relatively high importance on food freshness followed by a variety of foods. The result showed most of respondents agrees, offering fresh food is a crucial attributes. It is interesting to note that these two attributes contrasts with Namkung and Jang (2007) results, which revealed that presentation and taste were the most significant contributors. However, less importance is being placed on presentation, healthy options, taste and temperature that indirectly could have been a minimal effect on the customer satisfaction in fine dining restaurant. Undoubtedly, customers are looking for food that is served in a fresh manner which they think is beneficial for their wellness. In other word, to make customers satisfied, it is important to serve food with appropriate fresh ingredients and to maintain it in the proper fresh manner during consumption. Besides, to build long term profitable relationship with the customers, restaurants should assure the customers that they always produce a fresh product and utilize fresh ingredients. In addition, for consumers in search of a more wholesome flavor, taking fresh ingredients are about choosing foods that will lead to a healthier lifestyle and deliver on taste. Restaurants that switch to fresher ingredients will reap the rewards not only in doing the right thing for customers' health, but in the name of the flavor.

Apart from the freshness of the ingredients, the importance of menu variety should also be considered. This study found that menu variety directly influenced customer satisfaction in order for them to come and dine at a fine dining restaurant. Many fine dining restaurants provided a weekly rotating menu at a fixed price. This strategy allows the chefs to be more imaginative, creative and innovating in creating new dishes that will attract the customers. Furthermore, it allows restaurateur to purchase fresh ingredients during their peak of freshness (Mealey, 2013). With that notion, restaurants constantly develop new menus to entice diners and many proactive restaurateurs have created an assortment of food and beverage offerings. Kivela *et. al* (2000) in previous studies mentioned that menu item varieties were a crucial attribute of food quality in creating dining satisfaction. However, the less the importance of food quality attributes could vary across segments.

Conclusions

The outcomes of this study will help restaurant managers discover that customers are becoming more demanding in terms of the level of food quality. Thus, by understanding the food quality attributes allows restaurateurs to make improvements in areas that lead to a greater satisfactory to customers' restaurant experience. Moreover, this study also useful for the restaurant managers to reach a residual in their focus on the three sides of restaurant quality, and aim at highlighting limited business resources for improving more quality attributes that increase customer satisfaction. In sum, the food quality attributes in fine dining are expected to be important and at the same time could satisfy diners with the quality of its core value such as freshness, menu variety, presentation, temperature, healthy and tasteful.

In this study, the relationship of food quality attributes and customer satisfaction at a fine dining restaurant is found significant. Baker and Crompton (2000) stated that in determining behavioral customer intention for fine dining, food quality and satisfaction play an important role. However, this study somehow has some limitations that need to be underlined. The data collected was limited to only two fine dining restaurants in Penang and the results cannot be used to represent all the fine dining restaurants in Malaysia. To further certify the findings, it is suggested to collect data from a wider sample of diners from different fine dining restaurants. In addition, this study focused only on fine dining restaurants. Therefore, it could be better if conducted in other segments of restaurants to make comparisons. For restaurateurs, it is hoped that this study could influence them to implant more effective strategies in term of food quality by providing good quality foods, with the objective of emphasizing positive customer dining experience.

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