

Service Quality Measurement in Kopitiam Seberang Jaya, Pulau Pinang

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ABSTRACT

Kopitiam is known as Chinese coffee shop and has been established since pre independence era. Resurrection of kopitiam has affected the food service industry especially in Malaysia. Modern concept and hygienic setting have been introduced by offering Malaysian Chinese cuisine. Local Malaysian Chinese cuisine, good facilities and well service offered tremendously emerged the kopitiam business to expand. This study was conducted to measure the service delivery in kopitiam. Furthermore, the study also aims to identify the customer perception towards the service delivery and their revisit intention. The famous service quality (SERVQUAL) variables such as tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy were adopted to measure the service quality delivery. Through series of analyses, some useful insights or predictors on the issues of interest were obtained. The majority of the respondents agreed the service delivery in kopitiam is meeting their expectation and show their intention to revisit the kopitiam.

KEYWORDS: Kopitiam Restaurant, Service Delivery, Service Quality (SERVQUAL), Customer Perception, Revisit Intention.

INTRODUCTION

Urbanisation and busy lifestyles is said to be the reason contributed to the raise of coffee consumption in Malaysia. This is evident as coffee industry in Malaysia reported experiencing a rise of total volume despite the economy slowdown recently [1]. Before coffee shops became a trendy and popular culture among modern working adults, kopitiam among Malaysians was associated with the male older generation. Kopitiam derived its name from the Malay word 'kopi', which obviously means coffee and the Hokkien word 'tiam' which means shop. They typically served coffee, tea, soft drinks and other beverages, as well as breakfast items like 'kaya' toast, soft-boiled eggs, snacks and simple dishes. It was their prevalent meeting place for the generation for their daily exchange of 'coffee shop talk' on issues like politics, sports and so on. However, over the years, Malaysian coffee shops have evolved and taken different forms. Western coffee joints are mushrooming in great numbers in the country. Chic coffee shops with comfy sofas, air conditioning and free Wi-Fi can be seen all over places especially in urban areas. It seems that the days of typical old-fashioned of kopitiam in hot and humid shop lots with wooden floors, marble table top and wooden stools is no longer existent. Name like Starbucks is becoming popular thus kopitiam have increasingly less popular and less common in urban areas. Changes in customers' tastes and drinking habits probably have contributed to the growth. Yet, these higher-ends cafes are not cheap. Hence, some enterprising Malaysians have come up with an alternative to these coffee joints. Home-grown kopitiam joints like Old Town White Coffee, Alicafé, Pak Hainan Lao, PappaRich, Hailam Kopitiam and Uncle's Lim starts enliven the Malaysia coffee-drinking scene. Unlike the old-fashioned Chinese coffee shops which located in the traditional rows of shop houses, these new kopitiam outlets revamped and repackaged its décor to reminiscent the Chinese traditional shops. They have antique-looking signboards, attractive white marble table tops and charming old-fashioned furniture. The mix of the old and the modern seems to appeal to modern city folks. These kopitiam joints are mushrooming in major cities and towns. Nevertheless, it is gaining popularity among the younger people as it provides cheaper alternative. One cup of coffee that available for around RM3 which cheaper to western coffee joints. They can still socializing and drink coffee while chatting in coffee shops in current economy slowdown period.

Many of these kopitiam specialize in providing local food and beverages such as local white coffee as well as milk tea, which differs from western-style coffee and tea. White coffee is a blend of Liberica, Arabica and Robusta beans. It is roasted coffee prepared by using an unusual method that combines modern elements of roasting with traditional Malaysia brewing practices. Additionally, these joints gained high status and popularity within Malaysia due to the traditional taste buds of consumers. Local comfort food Nasi Lemak, kaya toast and half-boiled eggs are the 'stars' of their menu. Likewise, the Old Town White Coffee emphasize to evoke on the taste of the "good old-days" or "childhood memories" among customers in their advertising activities. With innovative locals' offerings new takes on traditional fare, the development intensifies the competition among the coffee shops industry in Malaysia. The industry reported as the fastest growing with its value worth close to RM4 million [1]. Both local and foreign chains are aggressively competing and expanding by opening of new chains, developing new menu, offering new drinks, providing on-the-go breakfast, offering drive through services and extending the operation hours. Operators are focusing customers' intensifying demand and satisfaction.

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There is no doubt about the importance of achieving high customer satisfaction as the ultimate goals of coffee shops operators. They are competing to provide the best service for customers thus has created greater competitive edge. The rationale of the coffee shops industry is quite straightforward; the more customers are satisfied, the more they will return and recommend to their friends. In addition, the industry deals with complex labour-intensive compared to other industries as it involves human performance in delivering the quality of services to the customers that have different needs. In line with the notion, in [2] contends that customers are evaluating the quality of services even before and after their purchase decisions. The issue of customer satisfaction is often highlighted in the restaurant industry. In line with the notion, the study aims to identify the attributes of service quality in the context of kopitiam customers. Moreover, the study examine to what extent service quality attribution influence customer revisit intention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service Quality (SERVQUAL)

Before reviewing the key issues of past studies, it is worth first to review on the service as it closely related to service quality. The word “service” has a vast and diversity of meanings. This leads to considerable ambiguity when the concept is used in the management literature. It is a most basic sense where it can mean an industry, an output, offering or a process [3]. Service quality has been considered a key element in the relationship between service providers and their customers. The literatures on service quality are related to customers as the end user, and the operators as provider perspectives have indeed swelled enormously over the past 2 decades [4-7]. As such, in [8] viewed that service quality is produced through the interaction between the customers and elements of the service organization. In other words, it arises from the interaction between the service provider and service receiver.

Other researchers [8-9] noted that the evaluation of service quality should be based on the manner the service is delivered. It can be measured by comparing the service expectations of customers with their perceptions of actual performance which provided by the provider. Overall service quality can be defined as an attitude or global judgement about the superiority of a service. It determines an organizations success or failure and also a customer’s satisfaction. Food service providers based industries such as hotels, restaurants, canteens and cafeterias are spending a tremendous effort to measure and improve the service quality of their businesses [10]. According to [11], customer are expecting to have good quality, variety and taste of foods at any restaurant they dine. It is argued that their expectation is also goes to service attributes. This is particularly related to efficiency of service, reliability of service and friendliness of the employees and many more. In line with the above notion, it might not be wronged to say that every customer is expecting to be treated well in the restaurants.

Attempts to measure service quality, it has led to the recognition that consists of multiple underlying dimensions [12]. Service quality could neither be conceptualized nor evaluated by traditional methods, as services possess 5 characteristics such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance. The tangibles include the physical appearance of the facilities, equipment, personnel and materials used to communicate with customers [10]. Elements within the tangibles dimension are cleanliness, space, atmosphere, appearance of server and location. Others elements such as responsibility and reliability were related with are speed, willingness to respond, accuracy and dependability. The dimensions of assurance and empathy may be measured using elements of knowledge, trained professional, communications and caring. Conversely, in [13] conceptualized service quality as a form of attitude which results from a comparison of customers’ expectations with perceptions of performance that given by the service provider. Through that, it conjectures and developed the most popular and acceptable instrument called SERVQUAL to measure the service quality. In the restaurant industry, customer generally uses food, physical environment and employee services as key components of restaurant experience in evaluating the restaurant service quality [14-16]. A proper combination of these vital attributes should result in customers’ perceptions of high restaurant service quality, which in turn should enhance customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in the restaurant industry.

Perceived service quality results from a consumer comparing their perception of the service encounter to what they expected to have happen during the encounter [17]. It represents the stimuli each consumer perceives in the service encounter. The consumer then evaluates the service encounter by comparing the perceived stimuli (i.e. perceived performance) to the stimuli they expected to perceive (i.e. perceived expectations). Recently, few studies indicated that food, physical environment and employee services should be functioned as vital components of restaurant experience in forming the perceptions of the restaurant service quality in the restaurant industry [16]. The relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction and frequency of patronage in the context of full-service restaurant were investigated by [14]. They captured 3 dimensions of service quality (i.e. interaction quality, physical quality and outcome quality). In [15] also conducted a study to identify key quality attributes that significantly distinguish highly satisfied diners from non-highly satisfied diners by using the context of mid-to-upper scale restaurants. They used 3 quality factors (food, atmospherics and service) to measure diners’ perceived quality in relation to restaurant experience. Model by [15] also incorporating restaurant-specific stimuli and restaurant-specific measure of emotions. In order to address a lack of comprehensive evaluation of restaurant service quality, the study used 3 dimensions of restaurant quality such as product, atmospherics and service. Similarly, the study also attempted to understand the effects of 3 dimensions of food service quality (food, service and physical environment) on customer response in the kopitiam.

Many researchers stated that food quality impact the customer satisfaction. In [6] stated that the efficiency in the restaurant industry is dependent primarily on the employees, but the employees do not necessarily support changes [19]. The inefficient and poor service staff such as poor staff interaction with customers, delivery of the wrong order, poor attitude, incorrect billing, untidy staff, reservation missing, carelessness, or slow service could be perceived as a major cause for poor service delivery [20]. These factors are believed to act as a tool to attract or portray a negative impression to the customers of the nature of service they may experience. It also contributes to the negative view of customer intention of eating at particular restaurant. In

the study perspective, inefficient and poor service staff may refer to waiter or waitress at the kopitiam that may have failed to serve what a customer wanted. Consequently it may lead to the frustration to the customers which switch them to other kopitiam. In the research conducted by [18] in China, they included place or ambience in service quality. Nevertheless, the results indicated that it had an influence on customer satisfaction. They mentioned in their research that cleanliness, space and atmosphere are critical factors for many people. This implied that in order for customers to be satisfied, these factors have to be well managed and gain a positive perception from customers. Customers may use the physical environment and other visible components (i.e. neatness of workspace, appearance of contact personnel, proper lighting, temperature and comfortable furnishings) to help interpret the quality of the service offered. It can play a critical role in influencing a customer's perceptions of the service [21]. Overall, customers will judge the quality of services which based on their perceptions of the technical quality provided, the interaction between the service provider and the customer and the quality of the physical surroundings where the service is delivered [22].

METHODOLOGY

The study aims to measure service quality in the context of kopitiam customers and observe the extent service quality attribution influence customer revisit intention. Around 500 questionnaires were distributed in 10 kopitiam restaurants operating in Seberang Jaya districts of Pulau Pinang, 50 questionnaires in each restaurant by using convenience-sampling approach. Feedback of 457 respondents was received. A final sample of 433 respondents was used for data analyses after deleting incomplete questionnaires which representing ineffective response. The survey questionnaire consisted of 3 sections. Each section contained questions which addressing the variables suit to the research objectives. Section A using nominal scale and focused the demographic profile, section B (14 items) designed to assess the attributes of service quality in the context of kopitiam customers and section C (10 items) was created to examine the customers influencing factors of revisit intention to kopitiam. Respondents were asked to give a score to each attribute (1 = totally disagree and 5 = totally agree) for section B and C which based on 5-point Likert scale.

Study was of cross sectional nature and data was collected from frequent visits to each restaurant in different time slots (during lunch and dinner). For data collection, a formal permission was sought from the restaurant management where they provided the questionnaires in envelopes. Management distributed and received filled questionnaires from respondents themselves. Feedback was purely on voluntary basis and was sought when customers were given their bills after complete serving. Questionnaire was bilingual in nature (Malay and English) keeping into consideration the lingual convenience of respondents. Each questionnaire carried statement expressing the purpose of the study, guaranteeing confidentiality and emphasizing the voluntary nature of the study.

The data were coded and keyed in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. The reliability test was undertaken where the result showed the instrument and items used was reliable with coefficient alpha value at 0.664 for section B, 0.941 for section C and 0.788 for section D. To determine the adequacy of each section of the instrument, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was also used. The Bartlett Test of Sphericity was also applied to test the data interrelatedness between each section of the instruments. The data result in section B was 0.788, 0.935 for section C and 0.817 for section D.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent's Profiles

Demographic characteristics such as age, gender and education influenced the customer complaint behaviour. From the descriptive statistics, 57.5% (n = 249) of respondents were females compared to 42.5% of males (n = 184). Majority of the respondents were between 25 years old and below which made up 53.3% of the total sample (n = 231). These groups are believed to have a greater interest in dining out compared to others [11]. It followed by 23.8% (n = 103) were between 26-35 years old, 12% (n = 52) represented 46-55 years, 6.0% (n = 26) were between 36-45 years and 4.8% (n = 21) were 56 years and above. Compositions of the respondents which based on education background are made up of diploma 43.9% (n = 190), high school 32.1% (n = 139), bachelor's degree 14.3% (n = 62) and master's degree or higher 9.7% (n = 42). Moreover, based on respondent income, below RM1000 with 61.2% (n = 265), RM1001-RM3000 represents 26.8% (n = 116) and RM3001-RM5000 contribute 12% (n = 52).

Analyses and Results

Identify Attributes of Service Quality in Context of Kopitiam Customers

Magnitudes of mean scores are shown in Table 1. Based on the analysis result, majority of customers agreed that restaurant concept and set up (M = 3.21, SD = 1.07) with efficient counter and table cashier service (M = 3.37, SD = 2.46) are major attributes of service quality at kopitiam. The overall findings indicate that kopitiam provides friendly service (M = 3.18, SD = 1.16) and attentive (M = 3.18, SD = 1.11) to fulfil need of dissatisfied guest. To date, the performances of staff are predictable to have the encouraging and also important influences on the quality of service.

Table 1: Mean score of attributes of service quality in context of kopitiam customers

No.	Items	n	Mean (M)	S.D.
1.	Food provides suits my taste	433	3.16	1.08
2.	Presentation food is acceptable	433	3.17	1.11
3.	Serves freshly prepared food	433	3.06	1.10
4.	Offers variety of beverages	433	3.12	1.08
5.	Provides fast ala carte service	433	3.15	1.07
6.	Provides consistent service	433	3.12	1.08
7.	Provides friendly service	433	3.18	1.16
8.	Provides efficient counter and table cashier service	433	3.37	2.46
9.	Employee very attentive	433	3.18	1.11
10.	Staff deliver food correctly	433	3.06	1.17
11.	Concept and set up more attractive	433	3.21	1.07
12.	Restaurant ventilated with a conducive dining environment	433	2.89	1.08
13.	Atmosphere attracts customers	433	3.15	1.16
14.	Provides big screen TV	433	3.05	1.10

Overall of the result strengthened the result revealed by [23] stated that when looking in the aspect of staff behaviour, the customers was positioned more importance on the politeness and followed with effectiveness and the kindness of the restaurants' staff. But, when looking in the atmosphere side, the decoration of the internal design is more helps to catch the attention of more customers to eat in the restaurant.

Examine to What Extent Service Quality Attribution Influence Customer Revisit Intention

Service experience is defined as customer's interaction with the entire service organization and environment where these interactions build customer's behavioural intention [24]. Behavioural intention includes revisit and word-of-mouth intentions [25]. Once the customer satisfied with the service experience, it might create positive behavioural intention such as repurchase and return patronage [26]. From Table 2, majority of customer argue that they patronized kopitiam due to the food ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.12$), good service ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.12$) and ambience ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.15$). Majority of customer stated that they willing to be loyal customer at certain kopitiam if the service quality that they receive satisfied their needs and expectations.

Table 2: mean score of attributes of service quality in context of kopitiam customers

No.	Items	n	Mean (M)	S.D.
1.	Large crowds influence decision to dine	433	3.08	1.11
2.	Patronized restaurant because of food	433	3.22	1.12
3.	Good service makes me patronize	433	3.19	1.13
4.	Good ambience makes me come	433	3.13	1.15
5.	Offer good value for price	433	3.00	1.05
6.	Restaurant experience worth the money	433	3.03	1.08
7.	Food prices are reasonable	433	2.99	10.3
8.	Love eating at this restaurant	433	2.98	1.06
9.	Like to come back	433	3.11	1.06
10.	Consider as first choice	433	2.88	1.14

CONCLUSION

From the data gathered in findings show that the services cape has positive relationship towards the customer loyalty intention. Loyalty intention is an important element in marketing research. It provides significant benefits to organization [27] that affects the revenues in the industry. It has become a main objective for most businesses particularly in service sector [28]. There is strong evidence that the majority of customers explicitly perceived that the effective services cape variable practices significantly contribute and positively influences to the customer loyalty intention in restaurant. The study also clearly indicates that staff behaviour has a significant impact on customer reaction on customer loyalty intention. Thus, the way that the customers perceive employees is critical and communication skills of serving staff with the customers should be improved in priority basis. From the findings, restaurant managers need to recognize and improve elements in the services cape and adapt it in the restaurant in order to attract more customers. It will help to gain customer loyalty intention once the customer satisfied with the service provided. Servicescape play an important role in service industries which it also reflects the image of the organization [29]. Servicescape offers a lot of benefits to the service provider that may help in the revenue and also profit. Other than that, the service manager also should take all consideration on designing and implementing an effective services cape to achieve ultimate goal such as creating memorable and satisfying experiences for their customers [30] within the environment. The study has implications for the food service providers or practitioners who seeking to improve the physical environment aspects in their restaurant.

However, the failure of services cape leads to the customer complaint and also decreasing the rates of customer loyalty intention [31]. A service provider can learn from complaints on how to prevent similar service failures in the future. To encounter customer complaints, restaurant operators should improve the level of service and staff attitudes to an acceptable level through improving their service by delivering more prompt and efficient service consistently to the customers. This could be achieved by properly training the staff and educate them to be more sensitive on the aspects. Employee expertise is one of the important component of overall service quality [32]. It is importance for the service providers of kopitiam restaurants to

improve their assurance by becoming more welcoming, courteous, knowledgeable, trustworthiness during the servings or transactions and improve employee performance during their person-to-person encounters with customers. Even though this kind of approach may add a cost in both resources and money, but it would help the staff to gain better understanding about the importance of service delivery in restaurant business operation. In fact, the restaurant customers' complaint behaviour in restaurant would also provide restaurants operators with valuable information to be more sensitive and effective toward operation management techniques by improving customer satisfaction and repeat patronization.

In conclusion, it is hope that the information result from the study could facilitate restaurant operators to increase their level of service quality on customer needs. Therefore, it can well positioning themselves and be more competitive in the fast growing trend of restaurant businesses in Malaysia. In addition, service quality and satisfaction could affect consumers' likelihood to recommend the kopitiam to others. This is known as word of mouth advertising. Thus, managers should design programs that increase consumer likelihood of recommending the restaurant to others. Although the research has highlighted a range of interesting and significantly meaningful results, attention should also be given to its limitations that give guide and direction for future research. Due to the several constraints, the information for the study which relied on the previous study where some of the specific issues that particularly related to services cape in Malaysia are not strongly supported. It just provides slight information that related to services cape in restaurant particularly in Malaysia. Finally, managing services cape variable is becoming an important and critical as the world economy progressively turn into service orientation.

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