

Perceived Quality, Customers' Satisfaction and Post-Purchase Action in Off-Premise Catering

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of off-premise catering makes it essential that caterer obtains customers satisfaction for a long-term survival. Repeating the service experience and disseminating the positive information to others are highly likely taking place if the customers are satisfied with the service quality. Based on the above notion, this study attempts to identify how perceived quality affects customers' satisfaction and post-purchase action in off-premise catering. Questionnaires were distributed to 250 customers from 10 selected off-premises catering in Shah Alam. The questionnaire consists of close-ended questions and is divided into 4 major sections which are Section A (Respondents' demographic profiles), Section B (Consumers' evaluations of the importance of perceived quality), Section C (Respondents rate for their overall satisfaction towards perceived quality) and Section D (Post-purchase action) in off-premise catering. A series of analyses using descriptive and inferential methods were used to analyse the data. The results indicate that the perceived quality has positive effects on customers' satisfaction and post-purchase action.

KEYWORDS: Off-Premise, Catering, Perceived Quality, Satisfaction, Post-Purchase Action.

INTRODUCTION

Based on the Malaysian Household Expenditure Survey [11], Malaysian spent the highest amount of their household expenditures on food consumption [20-20]. This is supported by a 5.1% or a total accumulation of \$26, 5897 of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) spent on food and related goods [12]. The above notion and the increase in society's disposable income have led to the prosperity of foodservice businesses [32]. Moreover, the changing of lifestyle [33] and the enhancement in the standard of living also boosted this business [12]. In [11] reported that there was an increasing number of registered food and beverage establishments from 82,325 in 2001 to 145,320 in 2010. Among the registered foodservice establishments, catering made a significant contribution to the sector and influenced many foodservice providers to involve in this industry. Statistics on Registered Food Premises provided by [28] revealed that there was an increasing number of registered caterers from 426 in 2010 to 678 in 2011. This had resulted in a new surge of demand for catering in Malaysia and the development of this business. Generally, there are two main types of catering which are on premise and off-premise catering. According to [37], on premise catering is known as food that is cooked and served in the same place. Meanwhile, off-premise catering refers to food that is prepared, cooked in a kitchen and transported to the location requested by the customers. In order to meet the recent changes in consumer demand, both catering are not only strictly focusing on food but also offering a complete service which includes wedding packages, decorations, canopies, photographers and audio-visual equipment. However, off-premise catering has undeniably become an option for customers compared to on premise in holding events. This is due to this type of catering can fulfil the needs of all market segments ranging from low-income customers who look for a large quantity and quality at an affordable price, to the high-income customers who want the premium service and excellent quality of food [8]. This can be seen through an array of foodservice establishments such as hotels and restaurants which started off with on premise services and later extended into off-premise services such as weddings, business conferences, private and holiday parties. As reported by anecdote evidence, thousands of independent and corporate caterers have emerged in the recent years. This scenario is not only providing more alternatives but also creating demand for quality of services by the customers. In this regard,

the customers' perceived quality is an important factor that can be associated with their satisfaction. Similarly, it is crucial for every caterer to understand the customers' insight or needs to further increase their revenues. Therefore, the most critical marketing concern is customers' satisfaction because dissatisfied customers can cause negative word-of-mouth, sabotage the reputation and discourage other customers from engaging foodservice provider [2]. Knowing customers' needs and what satisfy them is beneficial to caterers as they can retain existing customers and at the same time attract new ones. As mentioned by [8], to keep and satisfy an existing customer is easier than to attract new ones.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. Examine the importance of perceived quality attribute in off-premise catering.
2. Analyze the effect of the perceived quality attribute towards customer satisfaction.
3. Determine the effect of customer satisfaction on post purchase action.

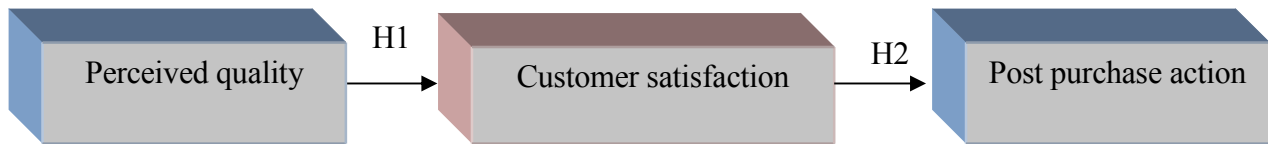


Figure 1: Study framework

The study framework in Figure 1 explains the relationship between variables. In this study, the framework is adapted from [38] who developed SERV-PERVAL multidimensional scale. This study also adopts a transaction-specific model developed by [8] and later expanded by [36]. This is due to the fact that this model explains the overall customers' satisfaction of product and service quality. Furthermore, this model also helps the researcher to accentuate the off-premise catering industry offers both service and product features. Therefore, customers need to ponder specific attributes of the deal such as product features (food quality) and service features (server, equipment and hygiene) in order to be satisfied with their overall catering experience.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

An increasing number of customer retention can lead to increasing profitability for organizations [8]. Apart from that, it is crucial to study the customers' satisfaction. Recent studies showed that there is a need to understand the customers' satisfaction because it gives a better picture for the caterer to develop more suitable marketing efforts that can promote their products or services to attract new customers. Furthermore, they can maintain existing customers and increase the company profits [1, 5-6]. Therefore, caterers will promote the service quality, satisfaction and value the customers will perceive upon using their products or services [8]. With the above notion, most of the service providers would admit that they are competing with each other to offer quality, satisfactory and significant experiences to their customers so that they will be attracted to repurchase the experience [4, 10, 38, 24, 27]. This could be achieved by attracting repurchase from repeating customers. Furthermore, caterers also have to continuously look for new ways to enhance their services as well as to work out new strategies to provide memorable values to their customers. Moreover, they also need to create unique and distinctive service elements to exceed the customers' expectations and thus enhancing customers' satisfaction. This is due to the fact that customers nowadays are not only looking for food but also taking into account the taste, food preparation, higher quality customer service, better physical eating conditions, healthier food selections and more value for money [41]. This leads to the need of off-premise caterers to be able to incorporate better quality and memorable experiences that customers perceive to be the best value in order to enhance customer's positive behavioural intentions [28]. In today's competitive off-premise catering industry, customers have a diversity of options in selecting the best caterers. Thus, perceived quality has become an important element in marketing strategies. This is supported by [21] who said that perceived quality is increasingly known as the basis of competitive advantage. Customers are looking for quality as their first evaluation for satisfaction [12]. Therefore, examining this precursor to Malaysian customers' satisfaction concerning off-premise catering is considered worthwhile. However, to what extent perceived quality can affect customers' satisfaction and post-purchase action in the context of off-premise catering in Malaysia? Several studies have been conducted on quality as the primary determinant of customers' satisfaction

in foodservice industry [25-26, 31, 1, 5-6, 3, 40, 15-16, 9, 43, 33]. However, there has been very limited studies addressing or striving for perceived quality as the antecedent factor. Furthermore, factors that influence customers' satisfaction in off-premise caterings have not yet been widely researched. In fact, published literature does not even refer to any Malaysian study focusing on the perceived quality.

METHODOLOGY

As this study involves a descriptive and correlational research design, thus a quantitative approach is found to be the most suitable method of obtaining information for this study. Data were collected in Shah Alam, Selangor. The target population for the study was Shah Alam residents who had at least one experience using listed Shah Alam caterers during events such as weddings, corporate events, product launches, parties, birthdays and festival events within 3 months from the distribution of the questionnaire. The sampling frame for this research is the customers who were selected from the caterers' internal database. Based on the data obtained, there were about 124 caterers in Shah Alam. The catering establishments were profiled with certain criteria such as registered with Companies Commission of Malaysia (SSM) and Ministry of Finance (MOF), the number of employees, type of catering and services offered, the number of seating capacity, price range and the availability of websites. The manager or owner of each catering establishment was contacted via telephone and email to obtain the information regarding their company's profiles. However, some catering establishments did not meet the requirement and could not be contacted via telephone. Apart from that, researcher managed to get 20 caterers who responded via email and telephone. After profiling the caterers, 10 of the caterers were dropped from the list due to non-compliance to the criteria. Thus, the final listed off-premise catering was 10. In order to ensure the findings are based on the actual experience, customers who have the experience engaging caterers were chosen. They were contacted via telephone and email to seek their permission before conducting the surveys. 250 samples were obtained. The data required for this study were obtained through a self-administrated questionnaire. There were 4 major sections being developed for the questionnaire. The first section (Section A) was designed to assess the respondents' demographic profiles. Section B was designed to understand consumers' evaluations of the importance of perceived quality (12 items) in off-premise catering. Respondents were asked to evaluate using five point Likert scales ranging from 1 that represents very important to 5 that represents least important. In planning the style and type of the questionnaire, close-ended questions using a Likert scale was chosen for this study. The rationale behind this design because it is easier for respondents to understand and they usually enjoy filling in [30]. Section C requested the respondents to rate their overall satisfaction towards the attributes of perceived quality (12 items) in off-premise catering. The last part was Section D which measured the post-behavioural action (7 items). Items were adapted from previous researchers. There were two ways of obtaining data from the respondents as some of them could be accessed from caterers' database and for caterers who did not give the access to their database, sessions were arranged based on the convenience of the managers for the researcher to share the questionnaire. The questionnaire was not only distributed by hand but also through the manager's mail. The managers agreed to share the questionnaire with their existing customers. The managers or owners who agreed to participate were briefed about the study using the information sheet attached to the questionnaire before they distributed the questionnaire to their customers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 250 questionnaires were successfully distributed. 241 (96.4%) were returned within two month response period. Nine questionnaires were incomplete or not suitable for use due to inconsistencies in answering questions resulting in 232 usable responses with a 96.3% usable response rate. A series of analyses using descriptive (frequency and mean score) and inferential (Pearson's Correlation and Multiple Regressions) methods were employed in response to the objectives, research questions and the hypotheses of the study.

Respondents' Profile

There were 9 items listed and analysed in the demographic profile using the descriptive statistics. Out of 232 respondents, 59.9% (n=139) were female respondents as opposed to 49.1% 93 (n= 93) male respondents. This is most probably because in both emerging markets and developing nations such as Malaysia, women's authority of influence extends well beyond the traditional roles of family and education in business, government and the environment. In terms of age, the majority of respondents' ages were less than 30 years and married. The largest percentage of the respondents' education level was from Degree holders. In view of employment status, most of the respondents were full-time employees. The monthly incomes of most respondents were between RM2000 to

RM3000 per month. As for the response of how often they used the catering, 47.40% of the respondents indicated that they used it for three to four times. Based on the purpose of using the catering services, 92.70% out of the total respondents used catering for wedding reception purposes and 40.90% respondents invited 1000 to 2000 guests for their events. From the information gathered from the caterers, customers are required to order for a minimum of 1000 guests in order to be entitled for the lowest price of the catering package. In terms of how they source for caterers, most of the respondents (98.70%) said that they have been recommended by their friends and relatives.

Procedures of Analyses

The analyses were divided into 3 separate sections. The first section analyses the overall items in Section B of the questionnaire that comprises of the attributes of customers' perceived quality in off-premise catering. Section C evaluated the level of customers' satisfaction towards perceived quality and Section D measured the level of customers' satisfaction towards post-purchase action.

Importance of Perceived quality in Off-Premise Catering

Food quality items such as consistency of taste ($M=4.71$, $SD = 0.454$), freshness ($M=4.65$, $SD = 0.478$), taste and flavour ($M=4.52$, $SD = 0.501$), presentation ($M=4.48$, $SD = 0.501$), variety ($M=4.28$, $SD = 0.452$), portion size ($M=4.44$, $SD = 0.497$) and healthy food ($M= 4.46$, $SD = 0.500$) were perceived as important by customers before selecting caterers. However, it is interesting to note that among the quality attributes, service quality items such as cleanliness of the equipment ($M = 4.77$, $SD =0.424$), time and attention given to food safety ($M=4.35$, $SD = 0.479$) and the appropriate temperature to serve food ($M=4.54$, $SD = 0.500$), neat and clean servers ($M=4.74$, $SD = 0.439$), an appropriate seating and table arrangement ($M=4.48$, $SD = 0.501$) were given the highest ratings for the importance in selecting caterers. It can be said that, from this analysis, customers' satisfaction in off-premise catering is above satisfactory level with a mean value of 4.13 on a 5-point Likert scale. As far as the mean values are concerned, customers were satisfied with the perceived quality. The satisfaction comes from the accuracy of food quality and service provided by the caterers.

Effects of Perceived Quality towards Customers' Satisfaction

This analysis was undertaken in respond to the second objective and research question which examined the effect of the perceived quality towards customers' satisfaction. Results showed that the customers were satisfied with the quality provided by the caterers. This is supported by the findings that respondents were generally satisfied with all 12 items related to food quality and service. They were satisfied with the food quality in terms of the taste ($M= 4.45$, $SD = 0.499$), presentation ($M= 4.18$, $SD = 0.382$), healthy options ($M=4.18$, $SD = 0.4.18$), variety ($M= 4.09$, $SD = 0.288$), freshness ($M= 4.19$, $SD = 0.389$), temperature ($M= 4.16$, $SD = 0.363$), consistency of taste ($M= 4.14$, $SD = 0.434$) and portion size ($M= 4.14$, $SD = 0.350$). Customers were not only satisfied with the food quality but they were also satisfied with the quality of service. This can be seen through servers wearing a neat and clean uniform ($M= 4.66$, $SD = 0.4758$), equipment ($M=4.52$, $SD = 0.501$), food safety ($M= 4.14$, $SD = 0.424$), seating and table arrangement ($M=4.14$, $SD = 0.350$). It can be said that, from this analysis customers' satisfaction concerning off-premise catering is above satisfactory level with a mean value of 4.13 on a 5- point Likert scale. As far as the mean values are concerned, customers were satisfied with the perceived quality. The satisfaction comes from the accuracy of food quality and service provided by the caterers.

Hypotheses Testing

A hypothesis testing was performed to strengthen the descriptive results. In respond to below hypotheses, the Pearson's Correlation and standard Multiple Regressions were used. This analysis is appropriate to confirm the earlier sections related to perceived quality, satisfaction and post-purchase action. To justify, Pearson's Correlation was performed in order to find out the strength of a relationship. However, to estimate whether the relationship statistically significance, multiple regression was applied.

H1: There is a relationship between perceived quality and customers' satisfaction.

H2: There is a relationship between customers' satisfaction and post-purchase action.

Since the researcher is using an interval or ordinal measurement of scale, in [42] suggested that it would be appropriate to use Pearson's correlation matrix depending on the normality. Variables were significantly having positive correlations. There was a significant correlation between customers' satisfaction and perceived quality ($r= 0.648$, $p< 0.01$), customers' satisfaction and post-behavioural action ($r= 0.553$, $p< 0.01$). In general, it was identified that the correlations among the variables were significant and the strength of the correlation was below ($r< 0.9$).

However, there was no presence of multicollinearity among these variables. Multicollinearity occurs when independent variables are highly correlated, which is the case of Pearson's correlation coefficients = 0.9 and above [35]. Regression analysis is the next step after correlation [44]. It is used to address how well a set of variables can predict a particular outcome and which variable in a set of variables is the best predictor of an outcome [35].

The Relationship between Perceived Quality and Customers' Satisfaction

A single-step multiple regression was conducted with the predictors comprised of perceived quality dimensions while the dependent variable refers to customers' satisfaction. To be precise, this study aimed to evaluate how well perceived quality influence customers' satisfaction. The independent variables were entered into the equation at once. In [17] stated that the higher the value of R^2 , the greater the explanatory power of the regression equation and, thus, enhance the prophecy of the dependent variables. In this result, the perceived quality elements were able to clarify 49.2% ($R^2 = 0.492$, $F\text{-change} = 166.589$, $p < 0.001$) of the variance in the customers' satisfaction. The outcomes demonstrated that perceived quality elements have significantly contributed to customers' satisfaction. In determining the contribution of independent variables; it is essential to use the beta (β) values by ignoring any negative signs out the front [35]. As the perceived quality elements were found to significantly and positively influence customers' satisfaction ($\beta = 0.648$, $p < 0.001$), it can be said that the hypothesis H1 is strongly supported.

The Relationship between Customers' Satisfaction and Post-Purchase Action

The result indicated that customers' satisfaction is able to explain the 30.6% ($R^2 = 0.306$, $F\text{-change} = 101.485$, $p < 0.001$) towards post-purchase action. The value of $\beta = 0.553$, $p < 0.000$ demonstrated that satisfied customers led to post-purchase action. This result was consistent with those from previous studies, which showed that customers' satisfaction is a significant predictor of post-purchase action [18-19, 40]. Therefore, hypothesis H2 is also supported.

The Importance of Perceived Quality Attributes concerning Off-Premise Catering

Most of the customers agreed the quality of services is important in selecting caterers. The remarkable finding in this study was that customers perceived safety and hygiene attributes such as cleanliness of the equipment, time and attention given to food safety and appropriate temperature as the most important factors that should be highlighted by caterers. This is not in line with the previous studies in which food quality attributes such as taste, variety, portion size, freshness and temperature of the food were antecedents for customers in selecting a foodservice establishment [31, 40]. However, the result of this study was not surprising because previous studies focused on restaurants and it is undeniable that in off-premise catering setting, safety and hygiene are important because this type of catering is required to transport food from a central kitchen to the location in which food is served using a vehicle that consists of insulated coolers, refrigerated vehicle and portable warming units [14]. Therefore, those factors are important for caterers to focus as they will prevent from spoilage and food contamination. From the food quality aspects, the customers perceived the taste, presentation, variety, healthy options, taste, freshness, and temperature of food as important. These findings are consistent with the findings of several other researchers in which they also proposed the top two important factors in selecting foodservice establishments [22-23, 31, 40].

The Effect of Perceived Quality Attributes towards Customers' Satisfaction

With regards to the second research objective, the analysis revealed a high level of satisfaction perceived by customers, given that the mean score reached the value of 4.1314 out of a total possible score of 5 points. It is clearly shown that caterers are managing well concerning the quality and overall satisfaction.

The Effect of Customers' Satisfaction on Post-Purchase Action

The results provided evidence that customers' satisfaction influences their post-purchase action. This could be seen through the mean score, $M=4.363$ in which customers, who achieved high satisfaction, tend to repurchase, recommend and spread positive word-of-mouth. This result is in line with the findings of previous researchers in other sectors [18-19, 40] which determined that satisfaction will lead to the post-purchase action. Satisfied customers tend to spread positive comments to others about the caterers including through social media such as Facebook, Twitter or Blog. The mean score for this item is high due to the fact that nowadays people use social networking as a medium of communication. This is supported by [7] who said that people use social networking in searching information about services or products from past customers.

The Relationship of Perceived Quality Attributes towards Customers' Satisfaction and Post-Purchase Action

The results showed that perceived quality was found to have a positive relationship with customers' satisfaction that supports the hypothesis (H1) of this study. Therefore, it can be claimed that caterers need to maintain the quality of food and services to retain their customers. Besides that, they need to enhance the quality attributes such as food temperature, fresh, tasty and variation based on customers feedback and address the issues that arise. In the second hypothesis (H2) in explaining the relationship between the customers' satisfaction and post-purchase action, the results also revealed that customers' satisfaction has a positive relationship with post-purchase action. Therefore, it can be claimed that satisfied customers lead directly to favourable outcomes through repurchase and word-of-mouth. Overall, the findings support the hypothesized positive linkages between quality, price, satisfaction and post-purchase action similar to the results of a foodservice study by [22-23].

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results have numerous theoretical and managerial significant. From a theoretical implication, this study offers a huge significant to the hospitality and tourism literature pertaining perceived quality concerning off-premise catering. The study also not only focuses the importance of quality but also contributes an understanding of its influence on customers' satisfaction. With regards to managerial implication, satisfied customers are important for caterers if they want to survive in this competitive market. They will repeat their purchases, disseminate positive information and more loyal. Thus, caterers need to know the elements that affect customers' satisfaction. Perceived quality is the antecedent that determines the customers' satisfaction which should be highlight by caterers when applying policies aimed at producing the satisfaction of their customers. Besides that, in off-premise catering perspectives, it has been proven that the customers' perceived quality became as an important factor when generating satisfaction. Thus, achieving customers' satisfaction enables repurchase, loyalty and at the same time increases positive word-of-mouth among those within customers' immediate surroundings. The positive communications are vital, and it doesn't cost caterers anything. Pertinent to managerial perspectives, caterers can conduct customers' satisfaction surveys. Furthermore, the survey can help create an appreciation towards customers' interest and their importance to the company [47]. In [34] mentioned that when customers realize that a firm deals their perceived quality and satisfaction, those customers benefit that the firm is concern about their customer experience. In conclusion, the findings show that once a caterer has been selected, satisfaction automatically rely on the quality provided through its staffs, food and its material components. Existing caterers that do not concerned on retaining their customers' satisfaction, and then customers will go to a new competitor, which offers better quality and satisfaction.

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