

IMPACT OF INDIAN MUSLIM RESTAURANTS' HYGIENIC ATMOSPHERE ON DINERS' SATISFACTION: EXTENDING THE EXPECTATION DISCONFIRMATION THEORY

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ABSTRACT. Foodborne illness, as reported in the news, is a persistent public health problem in Malaysia. Reports have suggested that workers in Indian Muslim food eateries in the country were observed to be unhygienic during meal preparation – raising concerns on the consequence of such exposure to diners' overall health and well-being. Therefore, this study hopes to emphasize the determinants of diners' satisfaction towards Indian Muslim restaurants based on their experience and expectation. The Expectation Disconfirmation Theory primarily employed in this study with an interest in developing a good understanding of issues concerning hygienic foodservices. This study also helps to highlight the priority restaurant operators should put on both food and dining satisfaction. Food marketers who are interested in customer happiness and hygiene compliance at work should benefit from this body of knowledge on diners' satisfaction based on experience and expectation with restaurant atmospherics.

Keywords: *Restaurants, customer satisfaction, well-being, quality of life*

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Introduction

As food outlets become accessible to everyone amidst a growing foodservice culture, researchers estimated about 64.1% of Malaysians to eat out eventually (Poulain, Tibère, Laporte, & Mognard, 2014). This is complemented by 24-hour restaurants, such as those owned by Muslims of Indian descent, known locally as “the mamak”, that offer a varied range of dishes. At present, there are about 10,000 mamak restaurants in Malaysia (Joibi & Zainal, 2017), after growing 33% from 7,500 in 2012, with an annual contribution of RM8 billion to Malaysia’s economy (Aziz, Musa, & Rahman, 2016). Mamak restaurants have been well recognised as the quintessential Malaysian foodservice, from the perspective of tourists.

Nevertheless, dirty premises go against the principle of value-based foodservice. In Malaysia, at least one violation was found during the inspection of 6,876 food premises in 2013, and 4,080 in 2014 (Rajendra, 2014). The common hygiene offences in Malaysia can be witnessed from the closure of food premises. For instance, about 124 food premises in Negeri Sembilan were forced to close down in 2016, while 737 notices under Section 32B of the Food Act 1983 was issued to outlet operators on various offences (Azizi, 2017). Also, food poisoning episode reported 51.6% surge in 2016, especially during festival season (Kannan, 2017). The National Consumer Complaints Centre (NCCC) reported that since 2006 (441 complaints received) to 2013 (821 complaints received), a total of 5,115 food safety-related complaints were launched. The volume of complaints rose 84% from the baseline of 441 complaints in 2006, to 812 in 2013. Additionally, a total of 1,230 complaints were lodged by consumer in 2014, with the increase of 51.5% from a total of 812 complaints received in 2013 (Yuen, 2016). Despite the growing number of formal complaints, there has been no dramatic decrease in public

complaints. The Indian Muslim restaurants have come under limelight amid public uproar over unsanitary conditions of dining facilities, where statistics confirmed that 50% of food mishandling incidents took place in their restaurant chains (Masyita, Amalina, Saudi, Samsudin, & Rizman, 2017), the utmost concerns of sustainable development is an important concern, for business and society specifically people health sustainability is lacking (Salleh, Yusof, & Othman, 2017).

At this point of time, food safety within the Malaysian foodservice industry is at a level considered to be of concern and can severely affect the welfare of the country. Foodborne illnesses and closure of premises indicate that the threat of eating out may be looming among those with higher health risks. Recent findings further revealed improper storage of utensils and raw foods, unhygienic kitchen environment and poor food handling as the critical causes of foodborne outbreak in Malaysia (Ab Karim, Latip, Shukor, Rashid, Mohd, & Kamaludin, 2017).

The clean atmosphere of a food premise reflects its operator's commitment in complying with food safety standards (Fatimah, Boo, Sambasivan, & Salleh, 2011). Inappropriate and unhygienic handling of food could influence the overall ambiance of the restaurant and bring potential health hazards, which in turn directly affect diners' satisfaction. According to Worsfold (2006), diners are relying on the atmospherics to judge the hygiene standards of premises.

Past studies on food safety were found to confine the term "hygiene" merely to the food (Chan, Hassan, & Boo, 2014). Diners fundamentally interact with the various atmospheric clues of the premise, not only with the meals. Such multiple clues are deemed to possibly cause hygiene issues, which then expose the diners to health risks. Accordingly, restaurant hygiene assessment merely based on food factor is not comprehensive, as foodservice covers a complex restaurant operation that involves the combination of hardware and software atmospheric values in delivering the dining experience (Lim, Chye, Sulaiman, Suki, & Lee, 2016). It strongly signals that the atmospheric concept is related to diners' hygiene perception and expectation. Hence, all these sensible clues are important in foodservice industry the understanding to improve the situation toward people suitability will allow future improvements.

To date, little is known about the role of atmospheric food safety in Malaysia (Abdullahi et al., 2016). A distinct classification on the hygiene assessment and hence, the expectation by bringing various atmospheric attributes into account is a must, in order to resolve consumers' subjective or diverse expectations towards food safety issues. Understanding the role of atmospheric qualities would then be pre-requisite to influence the diners' satisfaction and eating experience. Therefore, within the pragmatism perspective of Indian Muslim restaurants in Malaysia, this study needs in some way to generate multiple rationalisations for diners' expectations and experiences triggered by ambiance, facility aesthetics, food quality and service staff.

Underlying Theories

Service Quality

DINESERVE, proposed by Stevens et al. (1995), adapted the SERVQUAL model with the aim to assess service quality attributes that were related to consumers' perceptions and expectations. Most findings revealed that DINESERVE addressed five major factors – food quality, service quality, atmosphere, convenience and price – to gain the positive support of customers (Kim, Ng, & Kim, 2009). While both the DINESCAPE model (Ryu & Jang, 2008) and TANGSERV model (Raajpoot, 2002) were suitable for measuring upscale restaurant settings, they address some of the toughest consumer perceptions of food premises, without primary concern for service quality.

To close the literature gap on models, researchers seek to relate consumer satisfaction with evaluation of service quality attributes (what consumers expect) by comparing the services received against their expectations, instead of their overall predispositions. This concept provides a logical reference point to further extend the Expectation Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) by including the experience element.

Expectation Disconfirmation Theory

EDT is a popular theory frequently found in consumer satisfaction literature. It has been empirically examined and commonly applied in several research streams such as business management, hospitality and

tourism, consumer research, marketing and retailing (Oh, Oh, Kim, & Kim, 2017) in order to study consumer satisfaction and repurchase intention (Ali, Kim, Li, & Jeon, 2016). EDT asserts that consumer satisfaction is driven from the perceived performance of goods or services and expectation, where satisfaction is an outcome that is formed after comparing perceived performance and pre-consumption expectation (Oliver, 1980). Additionally, EDT attributes consumer satisfaction by scale where the variation between post-purchase and pre-purchase expectation is calculated to measure the extent of disconfirmation and hence, it is treated as an indication of consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Lewin, Biemans, & Ulaga, 2010). The concept of expectation disconfirmation is capable of highlighting the predictive expectation of consumers towards service quality attributes.

Expectation

Expectation has been defined as the individual belief about a product attribute performance (Spreng & Page, 2001), besides focusing on the comparison standard that is formed by the consumers themselves. These anticipated comparative standards functioned as the underlying baseline of reference where consumers compare the actual consumption experience (Szymanski & Henard, 2001).

Perceived Performance

Perceived performance is defined as the consumers' perception of how a product or service performance meets their needs, wants and desires. This would also mean it focuses on the consumers' overall estimated judgment and evaluation of the performance of service providers (Schmitt, 2010).

Experience

Satisfaction assessment seeks to understand the reason why consumers seek good experiences (Yu, Li, & Jai, 2017). It is important to be precise about how consumer experience begins before the consumer engagement journey kick-off. Consumer experiences could be (1) interactive in nature, (2) subject to individual, (3) input of touchpoints, and (4) influenced by human five senses.

Consumer experience looks into the consumer journey and the impact of each touchpoint that consumers are experiencing. Scholars (Kranzbühler, Kleijnen, Morgan, & Teerling, 2017) argued that consumer satisfaction is affected by post-consumption experience, whereby consumers are influenced by stimulus during the interaction. According to Lemke, Clark, and Wilson (2010), the study of consumer experience should be highly context specific. Several scholars agreed with the direction of context specific to understand consumer experience (Calder, Isaac, & Malthouse, 2015).

Satisfaction

Debate of whether satisfaction is a process (cognitive evaluation) or an outcome (conative and emotion) exists in literature. Some researchers even argued that both cognitive and affective mechanisms are components of satisfaction (Ali, Ryu, & Hussain, 2016). Consumers will try to map their experience with their own belief or knowledge that has been embedded in their minds in determining their level of satisfaction. After that, the consumer will become committed and respond towards a goal in an explicitly way. As such, satisfaction is associated with the feelings developed by cognitive and emotional aspects of goods and services (Song & Qu, 2017). Without a doubt, consumer satisfaction will impact business profitability in the long term and has a role that is just as vital in ensuring customer retention (Pizam, Pizam, Shapoval, Shapoval, Ellis, & Ellis, 2016).

Disconfirmation

Definitions of 'disconfirmation' abound and one definition offered by Oliver (1980) is the discrepancy between expectations and performance. These two important variables – expectations and performance – posit greater influencing power in consumer judgments (Huang, 2015).

Operationalisation of Research Variable

Diners' satisfaction

Satisfaction is transaction specific, and it requires the assessment of consumer experience to arrive at satisfaction (Saad Andaleeb & Conway, 2006). Besides, satisfaction reflects a consumer's experience and service

evaluation (Ramanathan et al., 2016). And therefore, it could be manifested, which consumers have made explicit in their comparison between expectations and performance. The consumer is likely to be aware of the outcome of this evaluation, or latent satisfaction with no explicit comparison. Thus, the consumer may not likely be fully aware of his satisfaction. That said, this study measures satisfaction in a pragmatic way or a manifest satisfaction approach.

Hygiene in Foodservice

Hygiene is defined as an action-oriented, systematic control principle to preserve health (Saad, Toh and Adil, 2013). Park, Almanza, Miao, Sydnor and Jang (2016) found that the sanitation aspect of food handling, dining room experience, the exterior, wash room and employees provoked 69 negative emotion responses in a full-service restaurant, if they were not handled appropriately. While Lianou and Sofos (2007) argued that physical environment is the potential channel that transmits diseases to consumers, the new classification of restaurant attributes considered cleanliness and hygiene only as part of the restaurant facilities, instead of across all other attributes in the premises (Longart, Wickens & Bakir, 2018).

Hygiene Experience

Chen and Chen (2010) defined consumer experience as the psychological consequence from consumer participation in tourism activities. Yoo, McKercher and Mena, (2004) studied consumer experience in business management perspective and had defined it as the perceived judgment about the excellence or superiority of the consumer experience within the scope of restaurant atmosphere. Turley and Milliman (2000) on the other hand, defined consumer experience as the post-dining evaluation influenced by the physical environment factors, otherwise known as the atmospherics. These definitions tie in to the discovery of touch points that stimulate consumers to form their overall experience through elements within and outside the control of food operators.

This study seeks to understand diners' satisfaction by bridging the gap between satisfaction that solely depends on general expectation and expectation disconfirmation paradigm. It is believed that the findings will be more convincing and coherent through the consideration of hygiene

experience that is also characterised as the dining satisfaction. Experience in this study is therefore about the ongoing perceptions and feelings resulting in direct observation from restaurant dining environment; which will lead to pragmatic and learned experiences. Gentile et al. (2007) regarded pragmatic experience as the participation of doing something (experience gained through physical interactions).

As consumer experience is pragmatic in nature, hygiene experience will be the factor in making dine-out decisions and selection of restaurants (Aksoydan, 2007), which likewise contributed to diners' satisfaction (Almohaimmeed, 2017). Therefore, hygiene experience is beyond service quality and also a factor that contributes to dissatisfaction over the absence of proper hygiene experience in the food premises. In this aspect, cautious attention is needed to avoid consumer dissatisfaction.

Hygiene Expectation

Park, Almanza, Miao, Sydnor and Jang (2016), who found that the sanitation aspect in a full-service restaurant could invoke emotional responses, provided the foodservice industry with a unique insight into diners' hygiene expectation of all the touch points in a restaurant. Much of the term 'expectation' is defined as the individual belief about a product attribute performance, coupled with the summation of belief (Spreng & Page, 2001). Another definition focuses on the comparison standard that is formed by the consumers' themselves. Devlin, Gwynne, and Ennew (2002) defined expectation as what consumers feel they should be receiving.

Physical Environment of Restaurant

The physical environment is an essential service attribute, as it made up of various atmospherics. Patrons are stimulated upon entering the premises and will start to sort, judge and decipher all the information that's there. Scholars agreed that properly planned atmospherics can foster a pleasant consumer experience (Jain, Aagja, & Bagdare, 2017) because the objective physical factors are easy to control. Therefore, diners' satisfaction is based on how well the food operators can rise to meet their expectations. Today's foodservice sector is forced to rise up to the challenge of managing diners' expectations successfully. These challenges

include the common staging of positive engagement by manipulating the restaurant physical environment and assessing diners' expectations before, during and after the consumption process. Undeniably, the combined components of expectation and experience will ultimately determine diners' satisfaction.

Restaurant Ambiance

Kotler (1973) said ambiance is the conscious development of space that stimulates human emotion and improves purchase probability. Generally, ambiance is described as the environment that impacts behavioral intention and developed by lighting, music, colors, visual communication and others to influence customer's perceptions and emotions (Gowrishankkar, 2017). Researchers have agreed to define ambiance as the controllable tangible factor that influences people's cognitive and affective mechanisms. Given the above definitions, ambiance is directly observable from the arrangement of space and the manipulation of various less tangible atmospheric characteristics like the background characteristics of the food premises (Baker, 1986).

Basic expectations associated with different types of food premises are underlying, often determinants that significantly influence customer expectation. For instance, fine dining restaurants equipped with dim lights and soft music are expected to be relaxing versus fast food joints (Wansink & van Ittersum, 2012). These assumptions are central to the foodservice culture and so ingrained that companies use different ambient properties (music, fragrance, temperature, and lighting) to create a restaurant concept based on consumers' hygiene expectation.

Arora and Singer (2006) found that coffee drinkers would stay longer in Starbucks if the outlet provides a comfortable and relaxing ambiance. Consumers are motivated to sit at bars under a conviviality and festivity ambiance (Jacob, 2006). These principles describe that consumers expect a hygienic environment that generates a relaxing and comfortable experience. Also, an interesting study reported that people form flavour expectations through sniffing (Spence, 2017) and therefore, foodservice providers must take the initiative to go above and beyond their job scope to eliminate bad smells on the premises. In many ways, consumer expectation allows companies the freedom to own their work and shine.

Hygiene experience is created when a customer interacts with different elements created by the service provider in a service environment. For instance, it is important to have the right balance of lighting and temperature in a service. Gowrishankar (2017) reinforced this proposition by examining shopping ambience attributes. He found that music, odor, cleanliness, lighting, temperature, layout and store displays could enhance customer's shopping experience. Kim and Shin (2017) claimed that the human olfactory area responds to ambient aroma, after discovering that a scented environment did impact consumers' emotional state and experience.

Hypothesis1a: Restaurant ambience positively affects diners' satisfaction.

Hypothesis1b: Restaurant ambience positively affects diners' hygiene expectation.

Hypothesis1c: Restaurant ambience positively affects diners' hygiene experience.

Hypothesis1d: Restaurant ambience affects diners' satisfaction through a positive hygiene experience and expectation.

Facility Aesthetics

Facility aesthetics refer to the purpose of architectural and interior design and also décor, which contribute to the pleasant appearance of the servicescape (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1999). Internal items such as room colors and decorations on restaurant walls can impact people's decision to dine out (Josiam & Monteiro, 2004). In most of today's restaurants, furniture and table settings are part of the facility aesthetics (Heung & Gu, 2012). Unique facility aesthetics form a real competitive advantage for service providers to drive traffic and retain customers (Ryu & Han, 2011). Facility aesthetics can be achieved by structured design planning with the manipulation of color scheme, music type, and space.

Aesthetic quality of the environment can influence people's attitudes, behavior and well-being (Ariffin, Bibon, & Raja Abdullah, 2017). Salim (2017) revealed that more and more food court designs in shopping mall are increasingly drawing on attractive designs for customer satisfaction. The physical environment value, in other words the space design, fuels the desire for instant gratification (Lee, Wang, & Cai, 2015). As a result,

Ryu and Jang (2008) said facility aesthetics have become a significant antecedent of customers' pleasure, arousal and behavioral intention in an upscale restaurant.

Due to the high prices of their meals, customers expect comfort, with decoration and optimum cleanliness in luxurious restaurants (Seyed Alireza Mosavi, 2012). The use of stunning facility aesthetics also plays an integral role in behavioral change. For instance, authenticity seekers are expecting to dine in an atmosphere consisting of authentic décor (Lin, Ren, & Chen, 2017). More important is the consistent best-level maintenance of facility aesthetics to bolster customers' perceptions. That said, a stunningly designed chair that leaves a stain on the diner's suit has to be regularly checked upon.

Restaurants need to adopt more stringent basic checks on cleanliness as a vital element in preserving style and identity (Alonso & Oneill, 2010). Early identification of detracts and dust forming on furniture and fixtures may prevent diners from being exposed to allergens and feeling emotionally turned off by the facilities surrounding them. There is also a greater need to understand that tableware such as plates and cups can influence customer food experience. Researchers found that the difference in plate colors will enhance perceived flavor intensity for the same meal. However, it was found that the shape of the plate does not have an impact on flavor intensity (Pecotić, Bazdan, & Samardžija, 2014).

Despite being educated on quality food servicing; operators might view facility aesthetics as innocuous to diners' hygiene experience. When it reality, they do play a role in creating a positive hygiene experience and expectation. Interior designer Godwin (1833-1886) advocated the awareness by incorporating hygiene in his designs to foster a healthy life (Hayes, 2017). History has proven that aesthetic factors could infuse elements of well-being in a humanistic sense. For instance, hygiene and sterility are emphasized through white color schemes (ivory, oyster, cream, and pure white) and highlighted by the use of the color in kitchens and restrooms (Haller, 2017). Wardono, Hibino, and Koyama (2017) revealed that consumers' social behavior are influenced by the restaurant's wide-ranging decorations. Along with satisfied taste buds, diners' ultimate expectation hinges on the color schemes and lightings as well.

Hypothesis2a: Restaurant facility aesthetics positively affect diners' satisfaction.

Hypothesis2b: Restaurant facility aesthetics positively affect diners' hygiene expectation.

Hypothesis2c: Restaurant facility aesthetics positively affect diners' hygiene experience.

Hypothesis2d: Restaurant facility aesthetics positively affect diners' satisfaction through hygiene experience and expectation.

Food quality

The key to quality food and beverages is taste, freshness and temperature (Wall & Berry, 2007), which can all influence consumers' perceived service quality and satisfaction (Garg & Amelia, 2016). Lim (2010) pointed out that better taste does not necessarily equal to better quality. Quality food actually depends on preferences. Consumers are in a time where they are willing to pay for quality foods that not only provide nutrition to the body but high satisfaction. Nevertheless, food quality attributes are being used in different segments as an indication of excellence. For instance, Boo (2017) exposed reliable criteria that covered fine dining, fast food and food court, whereas Line, Hanks and Kim's (2016) study focused on full-service restaurants that comprised additional attributes such as food temperature and food presentation. A study by Lin, Liu, Chang and Cheng (2015) on the quality of food being served in casual restaurants encompassed visual appeal, taste, cooking and hygiene attributes. Note that quality is more impactful than quantity in making sure consumers are served well, as they are willing to pay more for quality.

Food providers must get the message that quality is the basic criteria in a food-related business, and understand its importance as the most influential factor (Bufquin, DiPietro, & Partlow, 2016) towards customer satisfaction and behavioral intention. Consumers essentially want original or local ingredients to be used in an authentic restaurant, likewise expecting higher quality ingredients and better food presentation in an upscale restaurant to conclude their dining satisfaction (de Vries & Go, 2017).

Food has a significant and positive influence on consumer satisfaction (Almohaimmed, 2017). For those who love to dine in a full-service restaurant, food quality influences their satisfaction levels among the physical setting and the services provided in the restaurant (Sulek & Hensley, 2004). Likewise, a study by Estepa, Shanklin and Back (2005) revealed that cleanliness significantly affects the perception of food quality and satisfaction. Grunert (2005) on the other hand, found that consumers posit expectation on both food quality and safety. The relevance of food quality expectation is supported by Baltescu and Boscor (2016) who discovered that the need for quality accounted for 36%; variety of the menu - 23%; atmosphere - 21%; location - 11% and following prices - 9%. These striking results were from the study of ethnic restaurant selection criteria, while more prior studies have noted the importance of food premises setting. The acceptability of food quality is a precise mechanism that stimulates through premises environment as expectation in food quality (Cardello, 1995). Thereby, the expectation on the food quality varies according to the type of food premises, for example, family restaurant, fast food, fine-dining restaurant, thematic restaurant and a few others. Consequently, food quality accounted for higher proportion of expectation in the dining journey. Yu, Luo, and Zhu (2018) confirmed the impact that food presentation, variety and freshness have on the expectation of food quality.

Delwiche (2004) suggested that temperature could be the determinant that enhances pleasure in the food dining experience, as it enables people to interact with other sensory properties (taste, smell and sight). Undeniably, how people perceive flavour of food is largely driven by the visual display of food, which can significantly affect both a person's expectations and subsequent experience with a dish (Michel, Velasco, Fraemohs, & Spence, 2015). As things stand, scholars (Canny, 2014) revealed that dining experience attributes have influenced customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions over the years.

Jalilvand et al., (2017) who studied dining experience context, found that consumers were indeed satisfied with good food quality factors. Not surprisingly, nutritionally balanced meals, organic ingredients, healthy cooking methods, nutritional information have also influenced customer satisfaction (Kim, Park, Kim & Ryu, 2013). The emergence of dining experience is upmost influenced by the tangible attributes of quality food within the service environment (Bujisic, Hutchinson & Parsa, 2014).

Hypothesis3a: Restaurant food quality positively affects diners' satisfaction.

Hypothesis3b: Restaurant food quality positively affects diners' hygiene expectation.

Hypothesis3c: Restaurant food quality positively affects diners' hygiene experience.

Hypothesis3d: Restaurant food quality positively affects diners' satisfaction through hygiene experience and expectation.

Service Staff

Consumers will judge service quality based on the abilities, attitudes and behaviors of employees (Arroyo-López, Cárcamo-Solís, Álvarez-Castañón, & Guzmán-López, 2017). According to Voon (2011), human service is the key antecedent of customer satisfaction and loyalty in the restaurant. Findings by Scanlan and McPhail (2000) showed that within the hospitality industry, travellers enjoy conversation and interaction with familiar servers, with Grandey et al. (2005) proving that staffs' friendliness and smiling faces could affect patrons' first impression towards service quality (Andrzejewski & Mooney, 2016). Other human factors such as neatly dressed staffs that are equipped with sterile gloves and hair caps, as well as knowledge on food safety were found to be the determinants of satisfaction (Voon et al., 2013). Garg and Amelia (2016) elevated the human factor after discovering that the tone of voice and body language of staffs have a strong influence on consumers' first impressions. The human factor will most likely be responsible for the creation of a healthier environment as foodborne illnesses can be caused by employees' unhygienic practices (Todd, Greig, Bartleson, & Michaels, 2007). Perez and Manzano (2017) have recognized employees' contribution to restaurant food safety and sanitary practices, mainly for influencing consumer perceived hygiene quality and satisfaction.

A clean-looking service personnel is a powerful figure, and can be the reason people choose to dine out (Aksoydan, 2007). As much as consumers value a clean restaurant (Choi, Almanza, Nelson, Neal, & Sirsat, 2014), they are appreciative of the basic grooming skills of servers such as keeping nails, clothes, and hair in clean condition – more so than functional aspects like communication skills and knowledge about ingredients (Alhelalat et al.,

2017). Heuristically, the personal hygiene of service personnel fulfills diners' satisfaction. Hence, it is an important determinant of optimum satisfaction when expectation is being met. Besides, general uncleanliness distorts the consumer experience (d'Astous, 2000). Stein and Ramaseshan (2016) found that employees' interaction with customers is a touch-point that impacts the consumer experience. In optimising the co-creation of dining experience, service staff needs to embrace personal hygiene excellence and carefully monitor their interaction with diners at each touch-point.

Hypothesis4a: Restaurant service staff positively affects diners' satisfaction.

Hypothesis4b: Restaurant service staff positively affects diners' hygiene expectation.

Hypothesis4c: Restaurant service staff positively affects diners' hygiene experience.

Hypothesis4d: Restaurant service staff positively affects diners' satisfaction through hygiene experience and expectation.

Proposed Research Model

The conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) firstly examines the causal relationship between the atmospheric variables (ambience, facility aesthetics, food quality and service staff) and the influence of expectation, experience and satisfaction. Each atmospheric variable is assumed to influence hygiene expectation, hygiene experience and dining satisfaction. Meanwhile, the dining satisfaction is affected through hygiene expectation and hygiene experience. Delving further, a qualitative enquiry in the second phase aims to better understand dining satisfaction beyond its development via hygiene expectation and hygiene experience.

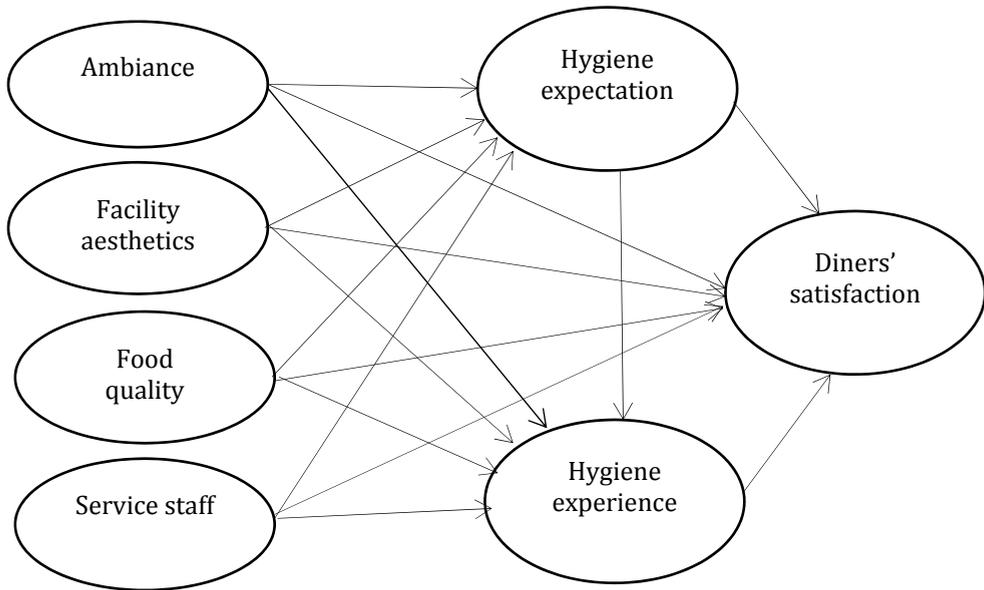


Figure: 1.1. Conceptual framework

Source: Authors' own study

Research Significance

Under the consumer expectancy disconfirmation model, the term “consumer expectation” seems to appear across varying perspectives, largely due to the lack of clear definitions. One is that consumers might use multiple types of expectations in post-service evaluations; hence the value perceived by them might deviate from the intended meaning. Satisfaction is often treated as a static variable where direct or indirect influence of satisfaction is taken on. To avoid any misinterpretations, this study focuses on defining expectation within the scope of hygiene experience. The study respondents were aware of this.

A precise definition of expectation is very important; in order to ascertain its association with consumer satisfaction. This study views satisfaction as a dynamic variable, while the combination of expectation and experience influence satisfaction. Another feature of this study is to shed the light on the term ‘diners’ hygiene expectation’, while documenting

that the originally perceived performance is superseded with actual consumer experience. The actual performance is unique and capable of providing insights into the whole consumer consumption experience.

Experiences are distinct from perceived performance, where the latter is based on the general evaluative judgments about a product or brand (i.e. "I like the restaurant", "I like this brand"). Experience on the other hand, extends to bordering aspects that include human sensations, feelings, cognitions and reactions towards a triggered environment (Schmitt, 2010). Thus, this study introduces and validates a new construct, which is "hygiene experience", in order to continue the exploration of consumer satisfaction with a mix-method approach based on underlying theories.

Significantly, this study also aims to contribute to halal food literacy by providing insights into the hygiene conditions of Indian Muslim restaurants. The mamak restaurant chains are reaping bountiful rewards for being a crucial halal foodservice providers in Malaysia, an Islamic country populated by more than 60% of local Muslims, besides hosting a massive number of inbound foreign Muslim tourists every year. What better way to capture that market space than to conduct studies that will help drive the mamak restaurants to the next level? This study may strengthen the efficiency of Indian Muslim restaurant operators and improve diners' satisfaction at the same time.

Conclusion

Foodservice providers must be reminded that foodborne illnesses can put diners' loyalty at risk. The quality of Indian Muslim restaurants has been below expectation, with repeated allegations of hygiene violations year after year. To add salt to the wound, news reports confirmed that the Indian Muslim restaurants in Malaysia are ranked rather poorly by patrons because of unhygienic dining environments, dirty utensils, unprofessional service staffs and improper handling of food. This means that the mamak food operators need to re-skill themselves; otherwise consumer involvements are required to improve the foodborne illness preventive system. In addition, a study to further look into the

importance of hygiene in determining diners' satisfaction using the expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm, could help alert restaurant operators of the impact diners' satisfaction has on their business.

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