

1.1 Introduction

Eating out is a part of Malaysian culture. Malaysia is a well known for a food heaven not only for locals but also for tourist. Kuala Lumpur is one place where the patrons can eat any types of local food all over Malaysia without going to the origin destination such as “Nasi Kerabu” in Kelantan, “Laksa Utara” in Kedah, “Asam Pedas” in Melaka and “Beriyani Gam” that is very popular in Johor. Another popular food among the Malaysians is “Mamak” food.

In Malaysia, the term “Mamak” refers to Tamil Muslims who generally the owners and also the operators of such restaurant.

Traditionally, these food operators will sell their food at the road side stalls but due to the demand from the locals and tourist many of the owners has changed from stalls to bistro or café concept for their restaurants. “Mamak” restaurants are popular due to variety food and beverages they serve. The restaurants usually operate 24 hours a day.

People of all races, religious and ages will frequently dining at “Mamak” restaurants to meet up friends, family gathering or just to watch a football games in a big flat screen television with colleagues while enjoying the very popular a glass of “Teh Tarik” and “Roti Canai”.

1.2 Background of the study

The Malaysian “Mamak” are actually the Tamil Muslims whose forefathers migrated from South India to the various locations in Malay Peninsula centuries ago. They are regarded as part of the Malaysian Indian community. The word “Mamak” is from the Tamil term for maternal uncle or “maa-ma”. In Malaysia the usage of uncle or aunty towards the elderly strangers is very common as it shows the respect to them. Hence, when the patrons dining in “Mamak” restaurants they will addressing “Mamak” when interacting in the restaurant.

Lately, “Mamak” stalls have more of a café and bistro concept where the surrounding is being well lit and furnished in contemporary style. Some are not only outfitted with a large flat screen televisions, or even projectors to allow the patrons football fans watch their favorite team playing live as they dine.

As internet is part of today’s life style so some of the “Mamak” restaurants taking a proactive action by providing a free Wi-Fi service to their patrons. It is a norm now to see many patrons usually youngsters online while enjoying the “Teh Tarik” and “Mee Goreng Mamak”.

As Malaysia has a humid weather many patrons prefer to sits outside the restaurants such as shop lot’s walkway or even on the road side in order to enjoy open air dining experience.

1.2.1 Problem Statement

The restaurant industry is a highly competitive business environment. This can be seen where many food operators will compete among each other in pulling existing or future customers to dining in their restaurant. This can be seen where most of the “Mamak” food operators will open their branch or outlet in a new shop houses or restaurants selling all types of food to cater their target market. In this robust market many “Mamak” food operators will create their competitive advantage in order to sustain in this challenging business world. The restaurant industry is a highly competitive and to attract and retain customers, restaurant operators have to have a deep understanding of the wants, needs, and perceptions of customers who will be most likely to choose their establishment (Gregoire et al., 1995)

Most of “Mamak” restaurants will operating their restaurants 24 hours a day, hence the restaurant cleanliness is at the minimum level where the basic facilities such as the wash basin, wash room and the restaurant floor are not at a poor condition such as floor is dirty and the wash basin stuck with a leftover food. Is the patrons are not concern or are not aware about this matter when dining in “Mamak” restaurant.

Eating out is already a part of Malaysian culture. The trend of eating out with no specific time give an advantage to “Mamak” restaurants as they provide variety of food that is available from breakfast to supper hence are the food serve to the patrons whom are multi races and religion fulfilled their need.

There have been a number of published papers analyzing the hotels and other service organizations which only focus in service quality. The study on the impact of service quality and food attributes towards the themed restaurant success such as “Mamak” restaurant has been hardly measured by researchers except by Josiam, Sohail & Monteiro, 2007 who examined Curry Cuisine: Perceptions of Indian Restaurants in Malaysia.

1.2.2 Purpose of the Study

This research project is undertaken realizing the need to examine closely the aspects of service quality and food attributes towards the dining intention to “Mamak” restaurant. This is because food service industry in Malaysia is a part of the tourism tool as tourists are expected to spend RM10.13 billion on food and beverages this year alone. Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ng Yen Yen said food had always been taken for granted as a tourism product. (New Straits Times 16 September 2010) Hence, “Mamak” food has become one of Malaysia popular food among Malaysian and tourist visit to this country.

This study intends to determine the relationship of service quality and food attributes towards customers’ dining intention in “Mamak” restaurant. By identifying all the factors involved allows insight to the areas of strength and weaknesses of food service industry in Malaysia specifically “Mamak” restaurant. As the government is working actively towards promoting food service for the country, this paper will identify the underlying factors that influence the customers’ dining intention which could shape the future of food service industry as a whole.

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives of the Study

The purposes of the study mainly to determine the relationship between the service quality and food attributes towards customers' dining intention in "Mamak" restaurant.

The research questions of this study are:

1. Is service quality related to food attributes in "Mamak" restaurant?
2. Is service quality related to customers' dining intention in "Mamak" restaurant?
3. Does food attributes related to customers' dining intention in "Mamak" restaurant?
4. Which variables of service quality is the most important when dining in "Mamak" restaurant?
5. Which food attributes is the most important when dining in "Mamak" restaurant?

1.4 Objectives of the study

And the objectives are as follows:

1. To determine either service quality relates to food attributes in “Mamak” restaurant.
2. To determine whether service quality relates to customers’ dining in “Mamak” restaurant.
3. To determine whether food attributes relates to customers’ dining in “Mamak” restaurant.
4. To identify the most important variables of service quality when dining in “Mamak” restaurant.
5. To identify which food attributes is the most important by customers’ dining in “Mamak” restaurant.

1.5 Significance of the study

Several previous studies measured service quality in the hospitality industry (Bojanic & Rosen, 1994; Faouk & Ryan, 1991; Knutson, Stevens, Wullaert, Patton, & Yokohama, 1990; Stevens et al., 1995; Seidman, 2001).

There have also been studies that have addressed customer's behavioural intentions in hospitality (Alexandris, Dimitriadis, & Markata 2002; Baker & Crampton, 2002), but no research has specifically examined the restaurant industry.

This research paper can unearth invaluable information to assist the restaurants industry specifically "Mamak" restaurants, to predicts the attitude, behaviour and needs of their consumers and at the same time the result of this study will could be used to develop a successful marketing strategies that further promote Malaysia as a desirable tourist destination.

It is hope that this study will add the body of knowledge that exists regarding the following constructs: service quality, food attributes and dining intentions. By conducting this study, in casual dining restaurants such as the "Mamak" restaurants in Malaysia it will ignite for other researchers to conduct this study with other types of restaurants as Malaysia are rich in multi ethnic of people.

1.6 Scope of the study

This research project is focused on different levels of demographic profile of consumer in the Klang Valley attitudes towards “Mamak” restaurant only. This is because most of the time the issues being raised on “Mamak” restaurant is just on shortage of workers and the expensive levi charges for their foreign worker which most of them are from India. The problem of cleanliness, service quality and food served to the consumer has never been discussed and study.

1.7 Limitations of the study

Limited academic research is available relating to the ethnic casual dining intentions in Malaysia. Therefore, very few local academic references could be found on the subject.

The study was conducted in Klang Valley using non probability and convenience sampling. The Klang Valley was chosen due to the number and large variety of choices “Mamak” restaurants concepts and also its highly dense population (Euromonitor 2010). Kuala Lumpur is not only a heaven to the investors all around the world but also as the melting pot for all types of people from all parts of Malaysia.

1.8 Organisation of the study

This report is consisting of five chapters. It is organized as follows:

Chapter 1: The introduction brings an interest to the subject of the research by starting with issues on the back ground information. The definition of a research problem and the purpose of the study are also presented in this chapter. In addition, the significance and the scope of the study is also discussed. Finally, the disposition is presented to give a reader an overview of the research.

Chapter 2: The chapter covers on the restaurant industry and the casual dining experienced. This chapter starts an overview of the service industry. The definition of various types of restaurant channel is also presented here. It is then followed by the discussion on the restaurant service in Malaysia. In this chapter also, the reader will review on the literature that is related to the study. The chapter starts on the introduction about service quality, food attributes and patrons dining intention to “Mamak” restaurant.

Chapter 3: This chapter outlines the methodology employed in the study. It shows the research framework. Thereafter, the design of the research instrument and measurement instruments will be discussed. Finally, the data analysis techniques used are also presented.

Chapter 4: This chapter presents the findings of the survey. It begins with a description of the general characteristics of the respondents. This is followed by an analysis on the respondents dining behaviour. The results of the validity test and reliability test are also discussed. After that, the effect on service quality, food attributes and dining intention will also be discussed. Finally, the consumer preference structure of the “Mamak” restaurant is presented.

Chapter 5: The final chapter will provide the conclusion of the research and contributions of the study are presented. Lastly, the chapter ends with the concluding remarks of the study.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter discusses the introduction of the study, which includes the research problem, purpose of the study, importance of the study, research scope and the dissertation organization.