

Supporting Attributes and Muslim Customer Purchase Behaviour of Ramadhan Iftar Buffet at Five-Star and Four-Star Hotels Restaurants

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Abstract

This paper reports an empirical investigation on the influence of supporting attributes toward Muslims customers purchase behaviour of the Ramadhan Iftar buffet at the four and five-star hotel restaurants. Using causal research design through a quantitative method and self-administered questionnaire, this research surveyed the individual Muslim customers who break their Iftar Ramadhan at the selected four and five-star hotel restaurants in the city of Kuala Lumpur. Through descriptive and inferential statistics, hotel supporting attributes are recognized as contributory factors that influence customer inclinations or decisions. Location, entertainment, availability of comfort prayers room and parking clearly influenced Muslim customers in breaking their Iftar Ramadhan at the four and five-star hotels. This indicates a manifest sign for hotel management of the four and five-star hotels that in addition to menu and service attributes, the supporting attributes dealing with location, entertainment, prayers room and parking should be given attention. All those mentioned attributes not influence the customers dining propensity but determine the restaurant survival.

Keywords: Iftar Ramadhan; Supporting Attributes; Muslim Customers; Purchase Behaviour

Introduction

Owing to the fast changing in the economy, increase people disposable income, busy lifestyle and sophisticated education, eating out from home is growing steadily and become a new phenomenon (Othman & Zahari, 2007). The eating out pattern not only relevant in the normal days for daily consumption, leisure dining but it goes beyond that which is also occurring during the Ramadhan month. Regarding Muslim eating out in the Ramadhan month or known as Iftar, a substantial number of foodservice establishments including the star rating hotel restaurants are competing to each other in offering an attractive Iftar Ramadhan buffet (Ramadhan Zone, 2008). Huge promotion is normally made especially by the various star rating hotels in attracting not only among the Muslim but none Muslim customers as well. The promotion is typically done through competitive pricing, a variety of menus ranging from

the traditional to modern food, entertainment and other facilities such as the prayer hall. One of the reasons for the massive promotion made is because most of the hotel restaurants are getting fewer consumers during the daytime. Thus, to generate revenue or breakeven cost during the fasting month, they need to use strategies as much as possible during the night. With that, most of the hotel restaurants never miss the golden opportunity of providing the Iftar buffet during the Ramadhan month.

As a Muslim country, eating out or having Iftar Ramadhan at a various food establishment or outlets have become common among Malaysian especially from the second week to the final week of the fasting month. Most of the four and five star rated hotels in the large cities in the country are offering Iftar Ramadhan at their hotel restaurant. An emerging pattern of customers patronizing at the four and five hotel restaurants' for Iftar Ramadhan buffet is steadily increasing despite slightly expensive, and the trend has never declined (Ahmad, 2008). In restaurant setting, scholars like Sulek and Hensley (2004); Maclaurin and Maclaurin (2000); Edwards and Mieselman (2005); Heung, Wong and Qu (2000); and Juwaheer (2004) found that food, service and other related attributes strongly influence customers patronizing the restaurant. Besides these, according to Malik et al. (2011) brand or image is also part of the criteria for a customer in deciding to choose the restaurant.

About Iftar Ramadhan, the result of the current study revealed that menu attributes consist of food quality, menu variety and food presentation able to create a positive inclination among the Muslim customers of having Iftar Ramadhan at the four and five-star hotel restaurants. In other words, these attributes have a significant impact on Muslim customers purchase behaviour. Ramadhan Iftar buffet menu attributes at the four and five-star hotel restaurants although slightly expensive successfully attracted interest among the middle and young age group of Muslim customers (Fatah et al. (2017). Also, hotel brands are fully moderated the relationship between Iftar Ramadhan menu attributes (food quality, price, menu variety and food presentation) and Muslim customers purchase or dining at the four and five-star hotel restaurants.

Besides restaurant menu attributes, it is envisaged that hotel operating attributes like location, entertainment, prayer room, parking space, and promotion are believed to play a significant role in influencing Muslim customers to dine or having their Iftar Ramadhan at the four and five-star hotel restaurants. In line with this, few questions could be probed. To what extent that hotel operating attributes cause the causation? Owing to the arising questions and lack of studies within the context of Iftar Ramadhan and customers dining experience, thus this paper is empirically examining the influence of hotel operating attributes toward the Muslims purchase behaviour on the Ramadhan Iftar buffet at the four and five-star hotel restaurants. This main objective is supported by one hypothesis.

- H₁: There is a significant relationship between hotel supporting attributes and Muslim customer purchase behaviour

Literature Review

Supporting Attributes

The hotel supporting attributes associated with this study are mainly dealing with location, entertainment, prayer room, parking space, and promotion.

Location

No doubt that the businesses must make location decisions when starting-up, expanding and redistributing their operations. These decisions are normally based on a wide range of factors ranging from cost, demand to other factors that directly related to profits. The complexity involved location decisions can be staggering (Daddino, 2000) and according to Brandow (2000) the demographics of the market, the buying behaviour and potential of attracting clients or customers are the primary attributes influencing the location decision making. The right location can make a huge difference in the marketplace and affect the profitability of a company. It may ultimately determine the success of a small business (White, 2008). He further argued that selecting the right city, state, and location can determine the financial viability of a successful small enterprise. Large and small companies use a business model to achieve success by doing their homework to establish a location to do business.

One many such companies that take advantage of the location to establish a new store is Fuddruckers Restaurants by using demographics data. To establish their casual sit-down concept for a client they locate themselves in the communities that have a population of 50,000 or more with an average household income of \$55,000 and higher. Fuddruckers aim is capture middle class residential, commercial and corporate clients in a convenient location. This business model is used to maximize the chance of success for each restaurant within the Fuddruckers chain (White, 2008). In sum, many scholars posited that the right location is determined by a combination of restaurant concept and ideal customer thus meeting these criteria for choosing a restaurant location that sets your business up for success.

Entertainment

Ones cannot deny the role of entertainment in human life as it brings happiness, joyful, pleasure and gladness. Some argue that entertainment is a fundamental and powerful medicine that aids health and wellbeing and most people in fact believed that entertainment through happiness can even reduce stress and tension and with these reasons people keep entertain themselves to derive pleasure as well as to socialize with others. This is without an exception about the entertainment in the hospitality and tourism including the restaurant sector. According to Williams (1996), the alteration of the lifestyles and the changing in the demographics make peoples seek for new entertainment or experiences. He reported that British pubs besides diversified heavily into food and becoming increasingly retail-oriented have given emphasized on the new experience and entertainment such type of music, games, indoor sports and leisure facilities. In fact, the modern British pubs in addition to the quality of services, and value the entertainment can attract the over-55 age group that has more time and money than the other age groups.

Kochak (1998) posited that integrating food and entertainment together will other restaurants features can draw repeat business. Johnny Rockets, a Los Angeles based family restaurant chain have built a loyal customer by adhering to an entertainment concept in the dining experience (Mackey, 2004). According to Lashley et al. (2005) restaurants can enhance customer physical and psychological comfort while entertainment can stimulate hedonic and enjoyable emotions (Sit et al., 2003). These factors can facilitate interpersonal interactions with host employees and other customers (Hemmington, 2007). The level of social and emotional benefits induced by the employee and the entertainment can help enhance the

effects of perceived employee task performance and food quality on customer affective responses (Levy & Weitz, 2012). Teng and Chang (2013) revealed that strong entertainment cues positively reinforce the relationship between an employee's task performance (food quality) and affective responses.

Prayer Room

Hotel operating attributes that are important to travellers have been extensively researched (Callan, 1995, 1998; Chu & Choi, 2000; and Dolnicar & Otter, 2003). The operating environment such as the concept and setup, pleasant ambiance and an attractive interior positively influence customer intention. These factors are believed to act as a marketing tool and indirectly portray a positive impression to the customers of the nature of the service they may experience. The physical appearance and pleasant ambiance which is dealing with layout, colour, furnishings, lighting, noise levels, aromas, and other sensory aspects are also important (Othman & Zahari, 2009).

After reviewing 21 studies related to hotel attributes, Dolnicar and Otter (2003) categorized the attributes into the following areas of the hotel: (1) image, (2) price/value, (3) hotel, (4) room, (5) services, (6) marketing, (7) food and beverage, (8) others, (9) security, and (10) location. They found that some attributes were included in nearly every study and that cleanliness was the top priority, followed by hotel location. Service items were the most frequently studied hotel attributes and marketing was the least studied area. Service was also the strongest factor in research by Cobanoglu et al. (2003), followed by price and value, security, extra amenities and facilities such as the inclusion of prayer hall facility, technology, room comfort, and food and beverage. In line with this notion, with the large growing number of Muslim travellers globally and the current tourism trends, the demand for and the supply of the Islamic hospitality services are gradually emerging (Stephenson, Russell, & Edgar, 2010). In this sense, the concept Islamic hospitality services not just about offering the halal food but goes beyond which also dealing with the appropriate facilities and amenities including the dress code, full-time imam or religious teachers and the prayer room. Due to the continuous demand, many non-Muslim countries are providing a halal food and prayer room in their popular tourists' spot (Anonymous, 2008).

Parking

One of the fundamental bases of any restaurant business is accessibility and parking for its customers. The physical location and parking space of a restaurant in the competitive landscape of the city have long been known as a major factor in its likely success or failure. Susskind & Chan, (2000) noted that the availability of parking facility on site or nearby are likely to help a restaurant attract guests, particularly those who would drive in from the suburbs or from out of town. Also, patrons who are not familiar with or do not have direct access to public transportation in the city will be most likely to appreciate the convenience brought by the access to the ample parking space (Burke & Brown, 2007). Susskind and Chan (2000) found that offering parking was noted as having a significantly positive relationship on the average check, indicating that providing parking to guests may improve check averages. It is especially important to note that this finding must be interpreted in light with the difficulty of getting parking in large cities or crowded area. Operators who either provide parking directly themselves or contract for parking services can command a higher average check

which in turn increased the potential profit while this effect might not hold in suburban locations where all players usually offer adequate parking. It is suggested that metropolitan operators should not overlook on this amenity.

Customer Purchase Behaviour

Consumer purchase behaviour from the marketing perspective relates to behavior that consumer display in searching for, purchasing, using, evaluating and disposing of products and services that they expect will satisfy their needs (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000). It is the process of gathering the information before buying and the activities in purchasing (Tieman & Ghazali, 2013). In this sense, consumer purchase behaviour reflects many inquiries that refer to why consumers make purchases; factors influenced their purchases and changes in community factors (Loudon & Bitta, 1993). It covers various aspects such as recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives, the building of purchase intention, and the act of purchasing, consumption and final disposal (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000).

Kotler and Keller (2015) contended that consumer needs to go through five stages before making decisions accurately in the purchasing of the products and that is; 1). Recognition – the reason to purchase that stimulated by internal (such as hunger) or external (such as word of mouth); 2). Information search – is a consumer effort to search, identify and evaluate the information obtaining from many sources such as online media, visual, print and word of mouth for their judgment; 3). Evaluation of effectiveness – the consumer will be comparing and evaluates some of the different product in the same categories on the attributes that ability to deliver the benefit to the consumer needs; 4) Purchase decision – consumer made the decision to purchase and choose the products that meet their needs and, 5) Post-purchase behavior – consumer will compare the new purchase products with the previous ones whether the new product is making them satisfied or dissatisfied. If the consumer satisfied, this will result to brand loyalty but if dissatisfied the process will start all over again until they are satisfied.

Consumer purchase decision is also influenced by a social characteristic which covers consumer groups, family, social roles and status (Kotler & Armstrong, 2004). The social factor is recognized as a homogenous group and the member's status in the hierarchy that is different from each other. It is a situation where the outsiders are influencing the consumer purchase decisions either directly or indirectly. The selections in decision making are determined by the consumer interests, the opinions of others, activities and consumer lifestyle who constantly interact socially with their daily life. Another characteristic is related to the influenced of personal factors such as age, life cycle, self-concept, economic situation, personality, occupation and lifestyle (Kotler, Donald & Irving, 2002). These factors explained why consumers are often changing their decisions based on the actual consumer characteristics.

The changes of the consumer characteristics in a present situation will result in changes to the needs, desire, and satisfaction (Palani & Sohrabi, 2013). For example, the age factor influenced consumer diets that caused a change in the selection of healthier food rather than giving priority to the taste. The last characteristic is the impact on psychological factors that involved consumer perception, motivation, learning and trust. The consumer will

use references from a variety of sources to influence their decision, such as searching the information and gathering information from other experts (Palani & Sohrabi, 2013). They will digest the information and conclude to build their trust, which would eliminate their doubts and increase confidence in purchasing the products.

Methodology

Sampling and Population

This study is designed to examine the influence of hotel restaurant menu attributes, brands and Muslims customer purchase behaviour of the Ramadhan Iftar buffet in the four and five-star hotel restaurants. A quantitative approach through a cross-sectional study with self-administered survey questionnaire opted. As the intention of this study to tap the experience of the Muslim customers regarding supporting attributes that are location, parking, prayer room and entertainment, the selected four and five-star rating hotels in the city of Kuala Lumpur were chosen. The four and five-star rating hotels are chosen to owe to its brand image while there are two reasons for choosing Kuala Lumpur as a venue for data collection. The first reason is dealing with time constraints. Due to the fasting month, the researcher is slightly unable to collect the data throughout the whole country. For the second reasons, reaching the targeted respondents is not an issue as there are more than 500 Muslims are breaking their fast at the various 4 and 5-star rating hotels every day in Kuala Lumpur in the fasting month.

Research Instrument

The survey instrument is consisting of four sections with Section A solicit the information about respondent demographic information. Section B is designed to measure the Muslim customers view toward supporting attributes that are that are location, parking, prayer room and entertainment. Section D is designed to examine the Muslim customer purchase behaviour. Respondents were required to translate their view on a five type Likert scale ranging from 1 with “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree. Most items in all dimensions were replicated from the previous related studies with a few minor modifications of wording made to address specific needs of the current research (Othman, 2007; Tieman & Ghazali, 2013) A pilot study was initially conducted to verify and confirm the reliability and validity of the items used.

Data Collection Process

As previously mentioned, it was intended to collect the data at four and five-star hotel around the city of Kuala Lumpur. Before conducting the survey, 40 hotels in category four and five-star rating were expected to take part in this study. All hotel management was contacted to obtain permission for undertaking the survey. The introduction and the consent letters along with the cover letter to conduct research was mailed to all 40 hotels. Follow up phone calls to all respective hotels were made by the researcher to confirm the receipt of the letters and to acquire their willingness to participate in the research study. At this point, a few problems regarding the agreement from the hotels’ management appeared. As this study requires the permission of the top management, it was found that most of them were too busy with business matters and they were barely available to take part in monitoring the research process. Also, owing to the company’s policy, most of the hotels’ managers were

reluctant to allow an outside party to conduct research and therefore refused to cooperate in this study.

Due to that, the final number of hotels that agree to participate in the study only left to eight hotels. The dates, times and venues for the survey to be conducted were then arranged based on the convenience and wishes of the managers, which required unlimited flexibility on the part of the researcher. Fortunately, all of the dates arranged with those eight hotels were within the time frame that had been planned by the researcher. Thus, the progress of the whole research process would not be interrupted. Owing to fast month, four research assistants were seeking to collect the data at multiple locations simultaneously. Participants or Muslim customers were approached at the lobby and within the hotel premise. Despite facing some issues in term of cooperation and commitment with some of the respondents, 215 questionnaires were successfully distributed. The data were then categorized and coded. The name and location of each hotel, however, was not revealed to preserve confidentiality and anonymity.

Results and Analysis

Respondent Profile

Through frequency tests, the middle age group (36-45 years) dominated the sample of the respondents which accounted 63.7 percent ($n=137$), followed by young age group (25-35 years old) and senior age group (46-60 years) which both represented around 17.7 percent ($n=38$) and only 0.9 percent ($n=2$) of those respondents above 60 years old. 55 percent ($n=119$) were female compared to 44.7 percent ($n=96$) of male respondents. 54 percent ($n=116$) of them were married while 46 percent ($n=99$) were single. Out of 215, 47 percent ($n=101$) of the respondents are having their Iftar break with friends, 42.7 percent ($n=95$) with family members and 8.8 percent ($n=19$) with clients.

Descriptive Statistic

Descriptive analysis was undertaken on the independent variable that hotel supporting attributes (location, entertainment, prayer room and parking) and customer purchase behaviour as the dependent variable after the reliability test (Alpha Coefficient) which were above 7.0 of alpha coefficient and validity test (Exploratory Factor Analysis) which most of the items cluster together.

Based on a 5-point Likert-scale, the magnitude of the mean scores which range from 3.53 to 4.58 manifested that the respondents were agreed on all items. Majority of them agreed that location of the hotel is one the important criteria for them to dine ($M=4.58$, $SD=0.514$), location influence their dining mood ($M=4.00$, $SD = 0.237$) and always choose hotels that are conveniently located ($M= 4.20$, $SD = 0.710$). Similar perception is given to the entertainment whereby they agreed that entertainment while dining is essential for them ($M=4.22$, $SD=0.708$), live entertainment make them choose four and five hotels ($M=4.11$, $SD=0.732$) and beside others, the available entertainment influences their dining mood ($M=4.00$, $SD=0.335$). In the prayer room, respondents believed that hotel operation nowadays is more sensitive to the religious issue thus providing the prayers room in their premise ($M=4.00$, $SD=0.800$).

With that, they believed that four and five-star hotels offer comfort prayers room (M=4.24, SD=0.500) and agreed that Muslims are dining at the hotels that provide prayers room (M=4.00, SD=0.335). About parking, respondents agreed that four and five-star hotels provide an ample parking space (M=4.03, SD=0.781) and believed that these star rating hotels provide security in their parking area (M=3.53, SD=0.837) thus agreed that the availability of car parking catalyst their inclination to dine (M=4.04, SD=0.760).

Hypotheses testing

In response to the objective and the hypothesis of the study, a standard multiple regression was used to confirm the relationship between supporting attributes and Muslim customer purchase behaviour. The influence of the supporting attributes which comprises of location, entertainment, prayer room and parking on the customers purchase behaviour was explored and examined using the linear regression. To respond to the hypothesis, the supporting operating attributes were collapsed into one predictor variable to predict the overall relationship with the criterion variable (customer purchase behaviour).

The following table depicted that supporting attributes can uniquely account for about 21.7 percent ($R^2 = .217$, F-change = 58.960, $p < 0.001^{***}$) of the variance in customer purchase intention. Strengthening the result is the fact that the β -value is found to be positive and significant ($\beta = .466$, $p < 0.001^{***}$). This result indicates that the supporting attributes significantly and positively contribute to customer purchase behaviour. In another word, location, entertainment, availability of comfort prayers room and parking undoubtedly influence the Muslim customers of breaking their Iftar Ramadhan at the four and five-star hotels. Therefore, the hypothesis is supported.

Table 1
Relationship between Supporting Attributes and Muslim Customer Purchase Behaviour

Predictors	Model 1 Std. B
DV: Muslim Customer Purchase Behaviour	
IV: Supporting Attributes on Customer Purchase Behaviour	.466***
R^2	.217
Adj. R^2	.213
R^2 Change	.217
F-Change	58.960***

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Implications and Conclusion

To this end, although customer purchase behaviour has been widely studied in the restaurant and hotel business context, there are still limited studies focusing on the Muslim customers' behaviour. With that, this study besides achieved its overall goal explicitly fill the gaps and providing the understanding of the Muslim customers' behaviour toward having the Ramadhan Iftar at the higher rating star hotels. It is hoped that the information and finding presented will provide the empirical evidence and enhancing the existing body of knowledge in behavioural intention studies related to the service industry, food, hotel and restaurant dealing with Muslim customers in particular.

Besides academic perspectives, this study finding provides significant practical insights with varying consequences and implications. With that, it is undeniable that every restaurant is set up to win the customers regardless of ethnicities, ages, income, and religions. Either an ala carte, table d'hote or set menu, normal buffet or special events like Ramadan Iftar buffet, food or menu attributes like variety choices of food, taste of food, quality of food and few others evidently still rated by customers as far more important in attracting them to dine at the normal and the prestigious hotel restaurants. In fact, the level of customers' inclinations to patronize is directly related to these attributes. Despite this, it is interesting to note that hotel supporting attributes (location, entertainment, prayer room and parking) are also recognized as contributory factors that influence customer inclinations or decisions. This notion is supporting through the results of this study that location, entertainment, availability of comfort prayers room and parking influence the Muslim customers in breaking their Iftar Ramadhan at the four and five-star hotels.

With that, it is apparent that the level of sustainability of hotel restaurant regardless big or small is not only well depends on the ability of the hotel management to improve or maintain the food or menu attributes but relate to other supporting factors as well. In this sense, besides providing quality and variety of food and consistent on the overall services, the supporting attributes like strategic location, live entertainment, the availability of comfort prayers room, ample and secure parking need to be considered by the hotel management. In other words, able to maintain those mentioned attributes may make customers feel their expectations of the hotel restaurants are met, as well as being satisfied with their patronage. This may further influence their dining mood and subsequently increase their revisit intention. Finally, considering these issues, the investment of money along with the effort, time spent on the marketing and revenue obtained during the month of Ramadhan through the Iftar Ramadhan has been worthwhile. In other words, the supporting attributes dealing with location, entertainment, prayers room and parking in addition to food and menu attributes not only influence the customer dining inclination but determine the restaurant survival.

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