Price, Service Quality and Food Quality: Which has the most Influence on Malaysian Customers Purchase Behaviour of Fast Food?

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Abstract
This paper empirically investigates the most influential attribute between price, service and food quality that influences Malaysian consumers' purchase behaviour of fast food. Using a quantitative approach, the experience of Malaysian young generation was tapped and by using a self-administered survey, 385 questionnaires were successfully collected. Through a series of analyses; frequency, descriptive and linear regression, some useful insights were obtained. The findings clearly revealed that despite support from other previous studies, price, service quality and food quality influence customers purchase behaviour but price is the prominent element that influences young Malaysian customers' purchase behaviour of fast food. Besides enhancing the body of literature, the findings have undoubtedly drawn several practical implications.
Keywords: Price, Service Quality, Food Quality, Malaysian Consumers, Purchase Behaviour, Fast Food

Introduction
It has been generally accepted that purchase behaviour is the extent to which customers are willing to buy a product or service or a process of decision making and consumer to engage in purchasing the products (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007). From marketing aspect, Schiffman, Kanuk and Wisenblit (2010) classified consumer purchase behaviour as behaviour displayed in searching of purchasing, using, evaluating and disposing of products and services that they expect will satisfy their needs. In consumer perspective, Sarker et al (2013) stated that consumer purchase behaviour is consumer who displays his/her behaviour or acts on purchasing the products and services. As a central focus of this study, consumer purchase behaviour looks into price, service quality and food quality of the fast food. Price is considered one of the most important attributes in a consumer's choice. On the other hand, consumer's knowledge about price tends to be imprecise. Price, in addition to others, is one of the most

influential factors in the perceptions of products on the market. Beneke et al (2015) deduced that price is a real clue that consumers use in their purchasing decisions. The price variable is always present in the daily purchase and represents the value of the economic expenditure (Zeithmal, 1988; Levrin et al., 2021). Kara et al (2009) explained that consumers do not always see the price in a negative way, which represents economic expenses, instead it is a complex variable in a purchase decision. They suggest that price could be a signal of product quality that represents elegance and status.

Besides prices, service quality and customers cannot be separated. Service quality as the extent of discrepancy between customers' expectations and their perceptions of the products or services. It has been vastly acknowledged that Parasuraman et al (1985) pioneered the concept of service quality. With regard to operationalising service quality, SERVQUAL is still the most widely used instrument. Not only has research on this instrument been widely cited in the marketing literature, it has been used across the industries (Teas, 1994; Lasser et al., 2000; Cox & Dale, 2001, 2002; Newman, 2001; Sureshchander et al., 2002; Zhu et al., 2015; Cunningham et al., 2004; Allan, 2009; Sharma & Mehta, 2004; Akbaba, 2006; Van et al., 2003; Choudhury, 2008). Research offers evidence that service quality perceptions positively affect the mentioned behavioural intentions.

Another important variable is food quality which relates the characteristics of food that are acceptable to consumers. Food quality is one of the major factors apart from waiting time, fairness of the order, comfortable waiting area, crowding in the waiting area, politeness of host area staff, server attentiveness, atmosphere of dining area and seating comfort that have significant effect on the customers' intent to dine and return to the restaurant (Sulek & Hensley, 2004; Nield et al., 2000; Soriano, 2002). In contrast, few researchers addressed the effect of providing an inconsistent quality of food to the customers (Maclaurin & Maclaurin, 2000; Edwards & Mieselman, 2005). Positive and negative cues on restaurant food choice and acceptance highlighted that customers' dining experiences are tarnished due to restaurant operators providing a lack of quality food.

Based on the literature, much of the available studies on consumer purchase behaviour in various fields (Iyer et al., 2020; Levrini et al., 2021; Febert et al., 2018) were undertaken at overseas. There are still limited studies that focused on the most influential attribute between price, service and food quality which influence Malaysian consumers purchase behaviour of fast food as compared to customer satisfaction (Nurfatihah et al., 2019), price (Albar, 2020), brand image Zhang (2015), product quality Ismail (2016) and service quality (Shafiqah et al., 2018). Based on the identified gaps either from practical, research and literature, it is conclusively justifiable to postulate that there exists a paucity of empirical research or studies on price, service quality and food quality of fast food. Thus, this study empirically investigates the most influential attribute between price, service and food quality that influences Malaysian customers purchase behaviour of fast food. The framework of the study is illustrated in Figure 1.
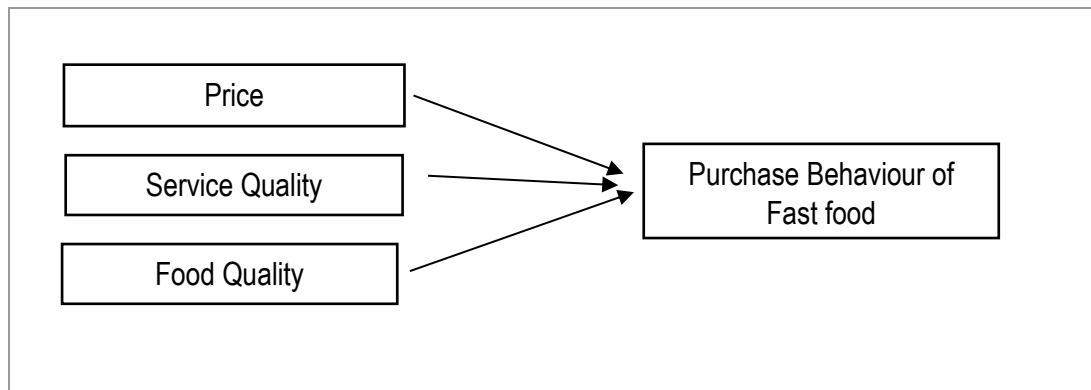
Figure 1: Framework of the Study

The relationship between the variables of interest (independent variables against dependent variable) are conjectured through three hypotheses.

H1: Price significantly influences consumer purchase intention.
H2: Service quality significantly influences consumer purchase intention.
H3: Food quality significantly influences consumer purchase intention.

Literature Review
Importance of Price
There are several pricing functions. The most essential factor in determining whether to acquire products and services is price. What we can observe now in Malaysia's fast-food sector is that most customers are more concerned with the brand's pricing, which encourages them to purchase a meal. For a similar item, the product brand sets pricing which further establishes the brand standard. Moreover, price influences customer purchase intentions considerably, because production changes have substantial influences on the customers (Liew, 2015). Apart from that, consumers always believe that price is an indicator of quality, and commercial enterprises may reduce product quality to reduce costs. As a result, price-conscious customers can easily compare the various options on the market to influence their decision-making processes and purchasing behaviours.

Perspective of Service Quality
Service quality is seen as a perspective that represents a long-term comprehensive evaluation and is the most essential aspect in deciding how much money a firm generates. To ensure the quality of service in the fast-food restaurants, the company must establish a standard for its employees to provide high-quality service. According to Kotler (2004) customer experience develops from individuals' senses of satisfaction and discontent when comparing the things, they use. Success of fast-food restaurant is based on providing a good operating capacity for consumers so that they are satisfied and create a positive perception of the restaurants. According to Lai (2015), restaurant service quality improves customer eating experiences since it creates a first impression and influences consumers' perceptions of quality. Price, friendliness, cleanliness, care, diversity, service speed, and menu consistency, on the other hand, all contribute to service quality. For organisations seeking long-term prosperity in the hearts of their customers, maintaining, and improving service quality must be a lifelong endeavour. Gronroos (1984) defined service quality as the difference between consumers' expectations of "what they want" and their perceptions of "what they got." Because service

is intangible (it cannot be felt), it is difficult to compare the quality of service to the quality of products. Consumers who have paid for the service, on the other hand, can use it.

Food Quality

Food quality is seen as a critical determinant for fast food businesses in ensuring customer loyalty and meeting the expectations of consumers. Similarly, Peri (2006) stated that food quality is a key aspect in satisfying consumer requests and expectations. A consumer will be pleased if the things they receive are of high food quality (Lin, 2018). Furthermore, food quality is the most crucial thing to consider when selecting a restaurant, and it is directly related to customer satisfaction. Food will be prepared in a similar manner to meet the customer's need for higher quality. Food quality influences consumers' decisions to return to a restaurant in general. Meal characteristics such as flavour, nutrition, and diversity are used to assess the influence of customers' food experiences on their satisfaction and desire to return to the restaurant (Ha & Jang, 2010). According to Jin et al., 2012, food quality included food flavour, good presentation, a relatable temperature, and freshness of food, contain nutrition, and menu variety. The menu, presentation, size, and diversity are all used to indicators of restaurant cuisine quality (Liu et al., 2012). Meanwhile, Sulek and Hensley (2004) stated that purchasers utilise attraction, safety, and dietary component to determine the quality of food. Other researchers suggest assessing meal quality based on menu variety, food presentation, healthiness, flavour, freshness, and food temperature (Namkung & Jang, 2007).

Fast Food in Malaysia context

In general, fast food is any food that is prepared and served quickly for immediate consumption. One of the key elements of fast food is that it is readily available on the go. It is typically less expensive than eating in a traditional sit-down restaurant. It often includes food that is fried or prepared from frozen (not fresh) ingredients. The rapid economic development and urbanization over the last three decades with business globalization has drastically increased the number of foreign restaurants in Malaysia, besides the local ethnic restaurants. Kim et al (2003) asserted that the penetration of the foreign restaurant and cuisines as well as the acceptance of the foreign food culture by the other ethnics or nationalities could clearly be observed from the internationalization or globalization of the fast food restaurants originating from the United States. The well-known brand names such McDonald's, Burger King, Subways, Wendy's and KFC have established themselves all over the world, penetrating the majority of the world's fast food restaurant market, Malaysia without exception (Kim et al., 2003; Kim & Kim, 2004). As of 2020, there are 6000 fast-food restaurants in Malaysia (Xiao, 2018). Fast food restaurants are popular due its price, quick service, ease of access and promotional strategies that influence customers perceptions. The Malaysian Ministry of Health has introduced a healthy eating plan for fast-food and subsequently many fast-food restaurants are producing food with lower fat, salt and sugar content that can be widely consumed by all generations (Ministry of Health, 2019).

Methodology

Sample and Population

A quantitative approach through a cross sectional study with a self-reported survey questionnaire is applied for information gathering. Based on the population, the unit of analysis and sample are selected among the young generation aged between 18- 40 years old

as this age group is evidently prone towards fast food. The data collection setting was in Klang Valley as this area has the highest number of fast food restaurants in the country.

Research Instrument
The survey instrument consisted of three sections with Section A dealing with respondents' demographic profile. Section B is used to measure respondents' evaluation of the price, service quality and food quality while Section C is concerned with the customer purchase behaviour. Most items for price, service quality and food quality were adapted from Xiao et al (2018); Lavrakas (2008); Sharma (2018) while consumer dining behaviour was adapted from Xiao et al (2018) with minor modifications made in terms of wording to address the specific needs of the study. Respondents were required to respond their views on a five -type Likert scale ranging from 1 with "strongly disagree" to 5 with "strongly agree. The survey items used simple words and language to reduce potential ambiguities. Pilot study was conducted to verify and confirm the reliability and validity of the items used. Cronbach's alpha reliability test was operationalized, and the instruments were confirmed as valid and reliable for actual data collection.

Procedure for Data Collection
As previously mentioned, the respondents were among the young generation aged between 18- 40 years old. The respondents were identified through the social media. They were then contacted via telephone to obtain permission and agreement to be the sample of the study. Around 385 respondents who had experience purchasing at various fast food restaurants agreed to be part of the study. They were explained that their participation is voluntary, all the information provided is strictly confidential and their names will not be revealed**.** The data were collected via social media such as WhatsApp, Telegram and Facebook. The data were then coded and keyed in using Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS).

Analysis and Results
Respondent Profiles
A total of three hundred eighty-five (385) completed questionnaires were successfully computed. The number of females exceeded the male respondents with 62.1 percent (n=239) against 37.9 percent (n=146). The highest percentage of respondents age was between 18 – 25 years, which made up 68.1 percent (n =262) followed by 26 – 34 years old which represented 19.2 percent (n =74) and 35-40 years old which represented 12.7 percent (n=49). About 60.8 percent (n=234) of the total respondents preferred McDonalds' fast food, 32.5 percent (n=125) favoured KFC and 6.8 percent preferred Pizza Hut.

Descriptive Statistics
Descriptive statistics was undertaken to analyse the independent and dependent variable. For the price items, the magnitude of the mean scores was from 3.59 to 4.03 which indicated that most of the respondents agreed that price offered at fast food restaurant is affordable and reasonable, provides value for money, and meets their budget. With the mean scores ranging from 3.80 to 4.03, it manifestly signified that the respondents agreed with items measuring service quality. Respondents believed that fast food restaurant provides fast and efficient service, well-trained staff and maintains customer attentiveness. With regard to quality of food, majority of the respondents agreed with all the items since the mean scores ranged from 3.86 to 4.07. Lastly, the five items measuring consumer purchase behaviour of the fast food

produced the mean scores ranging from 3.35 to 4.02 which indicated that the respondents agreed with the items.

Hypotheses Testing
Price and Customer Purchase Behaviour
To test the hypotheses, regression analysis was utilized which investigated and modelled the relationship between the variables. With regard to the relationship between price and consumer purchase behaviour, one hypothesis was tested. Table 1 below shows the analysis output.

Table 1
Regression Analysis for Price and Customer Purchase Behaviour

Predictor	Price
Dependent variable: **Consumer Purchase Behaviour**	**.957***
R^2	.651
Adj. R^2	.650
F – Change	410.527***

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

As the main hypothesis (H1), price is able to explain 65.1 percent (R^2 =. 651, *F*-change = 410.527, *p* <.001) of the observed variance in consumer dining behaviour. The Beta value (β =. 957, p < 0.001) demonstrated that health consciousness through knowledge of organic food and belief in food patterns significantly contributed to the prediction of consumers' dining behaviour at organic restaurant. In this sense, health consciousness significantly and positively contributes to the consumer dining behaviour of organic food restaurants. This finding corroborated well with other previous findings that price is not only considered as one of the influential factors in the perceptions of products on the market but it is the most important attribute in consumer's choice (Beneke et al., 2015; Walsh, 2010; Kara et al., 2009).

Service Quality and Customer Purchase Behaviour
Table 2 below shows the analysis output on the influence of service quality towards customer purchase behaviour of fast food. This is in response to H2 of the study.

Table 2
Regression Analysis for Service Quality and Customer Purchase Behaviour

Predictor	Service Quality
Dependent variable: **Consumer Purchase Behaviour**	**.941***
R^2	.510
Adj. R^2	.508
F – Change	210.237***

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

The result shows that service quality is able to explain 51.0 percent (R^2=0.510, F-change=210.237, $p <. 001$***) of the variance in consumer purchase behaviour. The value (β=0.941, $p <. 001$***) demonstrated that service quality significantly influences consumer purchase behaviour of fast food. This finding strengthens the notion that service quality is a significant determinant of customer perceived value and purchase behaviour (Singh et al., 2020; Uzir, 2021). In fact, perceived value of service quality significantly influences consumer post-purchase behaviour (Tam, 2010; TRAN, 2020).

Food Quality and Customer Purchase Behaviour
The hypothesis H3 examines the influence of food quality towards consumer purchase intention. Table 3 below shows the analysis output.

Table 3
Regression Analysis for Food Quality and Consumer Purchase Behaviour

Predictor	Food quality
Dependent variable: **Consumer Purchase Behaviour**	**.769***
R^2	.632
Adj. R^2	.630
F – Change	370.139***

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

The result shows that belief in food quality produced 63.2 percent (R^2=0.632, F-change=370.139, $p <. 001$***) of the variance in consumer purchase behaviour. The value (β=0.769, $p<. 001$***) demonstrated that food quality significantly contributes towards customers' purchase behaviour of fast food. This finding is similar to other previous findings that food quality not only would have a positive influence on customer purchase behaviour and satisfaction, but it would positively affect customer retention (Adnan et al., 2021; Namkung, 2005; Rozekhi, 2016).

Implication and Conclusion
The implications drawn from this study can be observed from two perspectives. On the academic perspective, the obvious contributions deal with an understanding of how Malaysians perceive price, service quality and food quality towards customer purchase behaviour of fast food. Despite the support from other previous studies that price, service quality and food quality influence customers purchase behaviour, the remarkable finding of this study is that price stands out to be the most important attribute that influences Malaysian young customers to purchase fast food. Due to lack of the available studies on consumer and fast food in Malaysia, the result enhances the body of literature and creates a path and platform for other researchers to look and expand similar study in a much broader scope in the future.

From practical perspective, the penetration and development of fast food restaurant around the world including Malaysia is unstoppable. This positive development continually creates great competition of getting all ages of customer among the fast food restaurants. From this study, it is evident that food price, service quality and food quality are important determinants in influencing young customers' purchase behaviour of fast food. This strengthens the result

of the past related studies. Despite this, a very clear picture emerged that price is the major significant reason for young customers to purchase fast food compared to service and food quality. Thus, besides maintaining or upgrading service quality and food quality, the fast food operators therefore should give more emphasis on price to attract more young customers as this group of customers and children are prone to fast food. In many situations, price creates the first impression and may influence the customers to purchase the brand; thus, having an ideal price convinces consumers to choose the product over the competitors. Price is the most adjustable aspect of the marketing mix and can be changed rapidly, as compared to other elements like product, place or promotion. The question that arises here is price has become a main strategy of the fast food restaurants in attracting the customers. Thus, this question needs to be answered through a future research.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the recommendations and information from this study will facilitate either the new or established fast food operators to better understand customer perceptions and needs. Therefore, they can position themselves well and be more competitive in the hastily growing of fast food business. In fact, a better understanding of customers' expectations would also provide fast food operators with valuable information so they can be more sensitive and effective in operation management techniques and improve customer satisfaction and repeat patronization. Finally, managing customers' needs has become an important and critical area as the world's economy has progressively turned into service orientation.

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