

The Factors That Influence Students' Choice of Dining-Out

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i4/16789> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i4/16789

Published Date: 14 April 2023

Abstract

The majority of students on campus get their sustenance from nearby food establishments. While picking a restaurant, they often take a number of aspects into account. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to investigate the elements that contribute to UiTM Dungun students' preference for dining off campus. In order to obtain data for this study, a questionnaire-based survey was done. Using convenience sampling, 205 students from UiTM Dungun were selected as responders, and all data was analysed using SPSS software. This research highlights six factors that influence dining out: price, food quality, meal variation, eating habits, ambiance, and technology or digital service. As a result, food quality was the most important factor that they considered, and the majority of participants chose to dine off campus because the food services off campus offered a greater variety of foods. Nevertheless, the most favoured meal service among students was hawkers. Restaurant operators should comprehend and be more aware of the aspects that influence students' restaurant choices and preferences in order to boost their sales and marketing efforts. Food service providers may want to consider enhancing their meal quality and expanding their menu selections.

Keywords: Factor Analysis, Restaurant, Dining Out, Student, Food Choice, Food Quality, Hawker

Introduction

The restaurant industry is one of the highest-growing sectors, especially in the cities and towns. The increasing profits of this industry and the widespread habit of dining out among Malaysians led to the massive growth of restaurants in Malaysia (Abd Rashid et al., 2019). In traditional practices, food is cooked and eaten at home, but the pattern of eating has changed with social transformation. Eating-out is one of the manifestations of the changes. Individuals entering college or university are beginning to live independently. During these years, students' physical activity and eating habits are often formed or altered. It is crucial to

establish excellent eating habits throughout this period, since these practices frequently persist throughout adulthood and can be difficult to reverse once established. Traditional on-campus students eat their meals in college dining halls. Same as in Universiti Teknologi MARA Dungun Campus (UiTM Dungun), students who stay at a hostel need to follow the rules set by the hostel management whereby they are not allowed to cook. All students are free to choose the places to buy and enjoy their food, either at a cafeteria which is located inside the campus or at any food service outlets that are located outside the campus.

In the campus area of UiTM Dungun, there are 7 cafeterias and food stalls provided. The first choice that was expected to be chosen by the university students to dine in was the on-campus food services. Even so, these captive customers have preferred off-campus food services (Smith et al., 2020) Students are a more vibrant and rising group of restaurant customers. Chandra Verma (2018) stated that in recent times, there has been a massive growth in the dining out trend as people from urban areas have discovered numerous motives to eat outside their homes. For example, spending some family time, hanging out with buddies, and celebrating achievements such as when results or other purposes are to be shared during dinner. This trend also entails university and college students. In that case, the cafeterias' owners can not predict and estimate the right amount of food to prepare for the students because of the unstable choices pattern of students whether to eat outside or inside of the campus. The unstable choices pattern has caused the cafeteria to struggle with handling the wastage of food that they prepared for the students. According to Ozcicek-Dolekoglu & Var, (2019), a college campus cafeteria can't accurately estimate the amount of food to be prepared for the students. That causes a huge amount of daily food waste. Overall, college campus dining leads to 9.9 million kg of food waste yearly. University foodservice operators have the most challenging task of serving a community of people that is typically diverse, dynamic, and confined to universities. To fulfill their normal dietary needs, the majority of university campus groups are at least temporarily limited to on-campus food sources. Even if tempted by the accessibility of on-campus dining facilities, dissatisfaction with the quality level of on-campus food and service can enable students to search for alternative off-campus dining experiences (Imran, 2018). University foodservice units are thus faced with the constant task of meeting the specific needs and expectations of these customers (Smith et al., 2020). So, the objective of this study is:

- To investigate the factors that make students choose to eat outside of campus and
- To study the main factor that influences students in the selection of the restaurant.

The Factors That Influence Customer Selection Of The Restaurant

Choices to eat outside the campus that are made by the students may result from many factors. Food-related factors are important in assessing consumer behavior (Bartkiene et al., 2019). According to Hanaysha (2016), food quality typically refers to many factors, such as the appearance of food, taste, variation of menu, health, and freshness. A consistent level of food quality is a crucial marketing technique that can satisfy consumers and provide them with a satisfying customer experience. The quality of food may have a huge influence on customer gratification and constancy (Gopi & Samat, 2020). Besides, the staff plays a vital role in the success of food service outlets, especially regarding the quality of service. Personality traits and the use of social networks influence employees' pleasure in the job (Kim, 2019).

One of the key components that a restaurant management should consider in acquiring new customers to come is the ambience. Nowadays, it is a trend that people pick a restaurant they want to dine in based on environmental concerns. There will be recurring customers who

enjoy getting a meal at a restaurant when there is something different there. This allows the restaurant to be compliant with the expectations of Generation Y, that is currently our generation (Nawawi et al., 2018). According to Hanaysha (2016), the definition of physical environment encompasses both direct and indirect aspects inside and outside a restaurant, including heat, lighting, smell, noise, atmosphere, and music. Furthermore, the restaurant atmosphere encourages customers to make positive purchase decisions due to convenient interiors, delightful aromas and nice utensils that allow customers to have more favorable perceptions. The suitable ambiance can make the food, quality of service and the whole dining experience seem better (Karki & Panthi, 2018).

Wellem et al (2012) indicated that current mobile apps cover a wide variety of features, including details about hotels, restaurants, bars, transportation activities and tourist attractions that can be accessed by enabling location or map instructions and associating the distribution of images and videos by email and social media apps. As eloquently stated by Chornewkar (2014), online food ordering services are platforms with interactive menus that enable local restaurants and food cooperatives to receive orders from customers. It is a rising trend, particularly in urban areas and among college communities, which enables people to use their internet access to order food and beverages from restaurants with interactive menus. **Technological** innovations among the youth of today have also contributed to the purchase or choice of restaurant food. Technology advances can be perceived in the use of components for conveniences, modern food cookware, and innovative kitchen utensils (Muhammad et al., 2013).

A consumer's affordability varies from others, and there is a limit to one's discretionary income allocated for food. **Price**, however, depends on the sense in which the potential for meals is drawn up. It is an obstacle to people's experimental instincts (Sharif et al., 2017). As stated by Abdullah et al (2018), the charge perception controls the connection between the aspects of performance (quality of food, quality of service, and quality of physical setting) and fulfilment, which means that if the supposed price is rational, this can boost the level of customer satisfaction with the food, service and surrounding environmental quality. Meanwhile, Smith et al., 2020 stated that by reconsidering their pricing and thereby ensuring that consumers use the university cafeteria, food service operators should boost their menus. Wali and Nwokah (2018) found that the quality of consumer expectations is influenced by the amount of money the operators spend on providing the service and that the customers' quality expectations will rise accordingly as the price increases.

Eating behavior is defined as a complex cycle of behaviors comprising food selections, meal patterns (arrangement of food into meals), and moments during and after the consumption. Currently, the eating habit among young people in Malaysia has transformed from eating home-made food to outdoor dining (Ab et al., 2018). According to Sogari et al (2018), eating habits are extremely complicated, individual, and swayed by a wide range of variables, particularly physiological variables. When choosing food, even if health seems to be important to all, students do not take it into account as the most crucial element, but they consider enjoyment and taste of the food instead. Sogari et al (2018) in his study revealed that college students ate in a variety of environments, particularly whenever they stayed with their parents, there was a substantial increment in the number of times they ate. In regard to that, home food consumption was generally associated with fruit and vegetable intake. When they undergo the transition to college life, students are likely to encounter a new world where they need to prepare food for them to eat. While many college-aged students are aware of the

importance of nutritional values, their understanding and approach have kept them from changing their behaviors (Abraham et al., 2018).

Menus with various themes provide holistic and balanced nutrients ranging from the traditional local menu based on ethnics and communities, different regular themed menus, a la carte menu, international menu such as pasta, salad, sandwiches, bread, fresh fruit, stew, dairy products, and soup, and menu for special needs such as vegetarian where different groups of main components only appear. Students can consume a variety of nutrients for their bodies to function properly through a variety of menu options, and they can choose based on their preferences. Customers will be happier if their desires and aspirations are met, and they will be more likely to return for more purchases if they return frequently. (Ismail et al., 2019).

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework which states the factors that influence dining out among UiTM Dungun students have a connection with five independent variables, which are food and service quality, ambiance, technology innovation or digital service, price, and food habit.

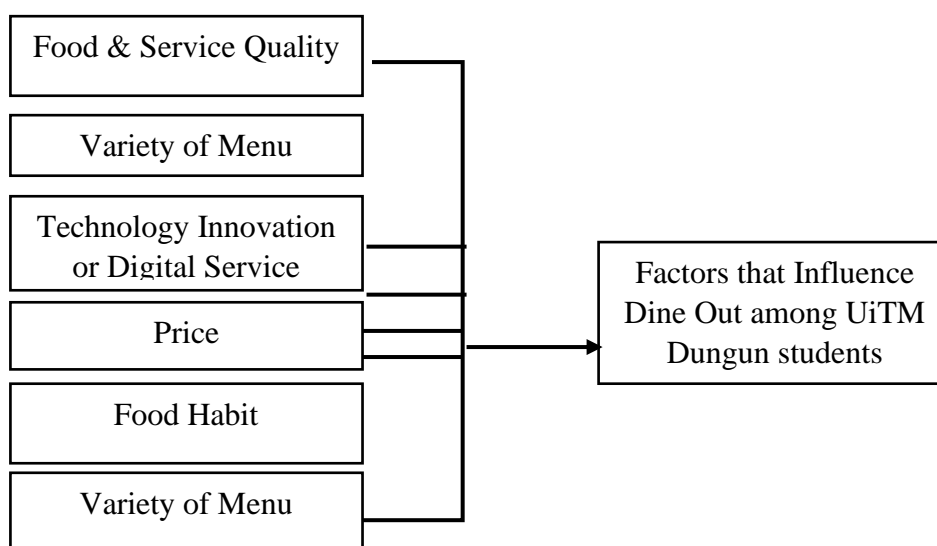


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework: The Factors that Influence Dine Out among UiTM Dungun students

Methodology

This study aims to investigate the factors that make students choose to eat outside of campus and to study the main factors that influence students in the selection of the restaurant. The methodology is illustrated in Figure 2.

The method designed for this research is based on a quantitative approach. Primary and secondary studies are used for this study. For primary study, surveys are conducted by using a questionnaire. A self-administered questionnaire was designed to measure the reason they dine out, key factors of dining out, and demographics. The first section of the questionnaire measured the respondents' demographic. The second section investigates the reason they dine out. The third section comprised of key factors in restaurant selection. The respondent was asked to rank the 5-point Likert scale when he/she chooses a restaurant. The rating scale comprises five standards which are strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. This questionnaire was distributed using both English and Malay language.

To evaluate the feasibility, error, and performance of the research questions, the pilot test was conducted. The Cronbach's Alpha for the reliability test for 30 respondents is 0.902. The general rule of thumb for understanding these questionnaires is that a negative number means something is wrong with the data, 0.6-0.7 indicates a standard level of reliability, and 0.8 or more is a decent level of reliability. Thus, the questionnaire is accepted.

The survey was conducted in UiTM Dungun. The population was all students who either took a diploma or degree and stayed in the residential college at UiTM Dungun. The population sample (the respondents) was selected using a non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique using convenience sampling because it is cost-effective, transparent and the subjects are easily accessible (Etikan et al., 2015). Using Krejcie & Morgan (1970) as the sample size calculation formula, the minimum respondents is 205 students from the total of 440 students who stayed in the residential college at UiTM Dungun. This questionnaire is distributed to respondents through online platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram, e-mail in Google Form survey administration software.

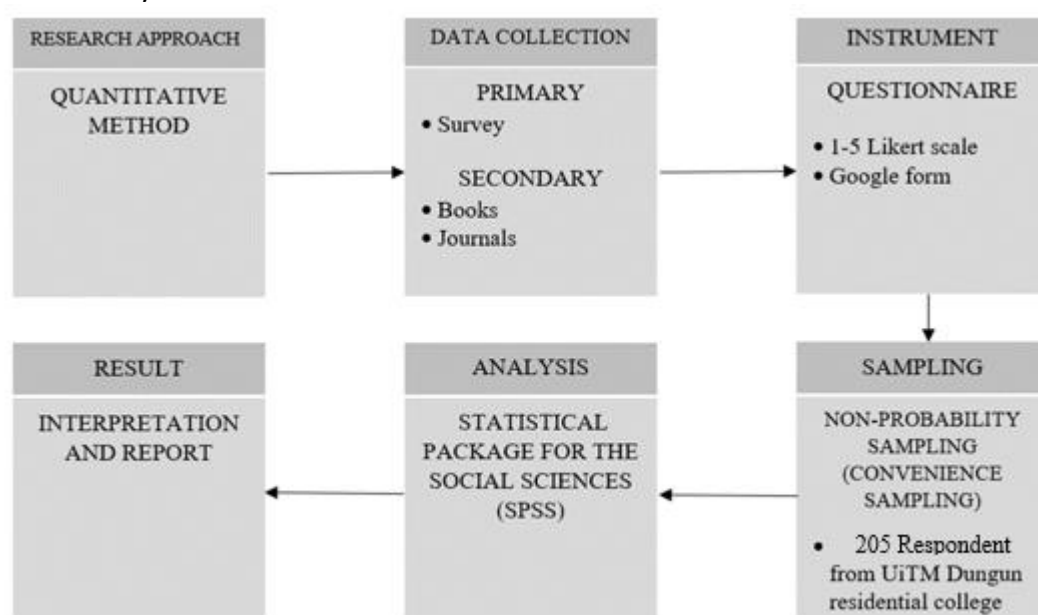


Figure 2: Methodology process

After identifying the data and information from the quantitative surveys, a descriptive analysis was conducted to discover the results by using Statistical Package for The Social Sciences (SPSS) software and the data will be interpreted into a report.

Results & Discussion

The analysis comprises the results of the survey questions answered by the respondents that are exported using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The result was explained by using frequency analysis and descriptive analysis. Frequency analysis was used to calculate the demographic profile of the respondents, which was then explained in the form of frequency and percentage. Meanwhile, descriptive analysis was used to analyse the respondents' answers to the Likert scale questions, which then revealed the meaning to describe the scale. Below is the demographic profile of all respondents.

From the demographic profile, 55% of the respondents are male and the rest 45% are female. According to the level of education, 47.5% of diploma students and 41.9% of degree students respond to this questionnaire. All that, the highest number of respondents is from semester 5 with 58 respondents and the lowest is from semester 2 with only 4 respondents.

Regarding monthly allowance, the highest rate of the respondents' monthly allowance was less than RM 250 with 68 respondents. 63 out of 205 respondents got a monthly allowance amounting to RM400, 57 respondents received RM300 while 17 respondents received more than RM500 as their monthly allowance. From this result, we can conclude most students like to eat out due to their extra allowance/income. Half of them received an income of more than RM300 and they can afford to spend more.

Table 1

Demographic Profile

| Profiles | | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------|------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Gender | Female | 126 | 55.0 |
| | Male | 79 | 34.5 |
| Level of education | Diploma | 109 | 47.6 |
| | Degree | 96 | 41.9 |
| Current semester | Semester 1 | 16 | 6.6 |
| | Semester 2 | 4 | 1.7 |
| | Semester 3 | 48 | 21.0 |
| | Semester 4 | 54 | 23.6 |
| | Semester 5 | 58 | 25.3 |
| | Semester 6 | 26 | 11.4 |
| Monthly allowance/income | RM 300 | 57 | 24.9 |
| | RM 400 | 63 | 27.5 |
| | Less than RM 250 | 68 | 29.7 |
| | More than RM 500 | 17 | 7.4 |

The first goal of this research is to investigate the factors that influence students' decisions to eat off campus. Based on the findings, a majority of the UiTM Dungun students agreed that they usually dine out because foodservice businesses outside of the campus offer a variety of foods. This shows that students choose to get a better experience with friends at their preferred restaurants. The result can be seen from table 2.

The reasons that make students choose to eat outside of campus

Table 2

The reasons that make students choose to eat outside of campus.

| No | Reasons that make students choose to eat outside of campus | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|----|---|------|----------------|
| 1. | Willing to travel more than 3km to eat at a restaurant | 3.48 | 1.174 |
| 2. | Food services business outside of the campus provide healthier food choices | 3.62 | 0.799 |
| 3. | It is more fun to eat outside rather than in the cafeteria. | 4.07 | 0.757 |
| 4. | The quality of the food services business outside of the campus is better than cafeteria food. | 3.97 | 0.730 |
| 5. | Willing to eat outside when I want to celebrate something. | 4.33 | 0.778 |
| 6. | The services I got from the restaurant staff outside of campus is better than the staff at the cafeteria. | 3.71 | 0.792 |
| 7. | Feel more comfortable when eating outside of campus | 3.66 | 0.928 |
| 8. | Price at any food services business outside of campus is more affordable. | 3.43 | 0.945 |
| 9. | Food services business outside of the campus offers more variety of foods. | 4.42 | .671 |

As mentioned by Chua et al (2020), consumers can fulfil the need for variety in the consumption of restaurants by offering a variety of menu items. Consumers can choose one that offers a range of menu options when choosing restaurants (although all the menu options are not eventually purchased). In this regard, we suggest that for those seeking variety, a menu range is likely to be a key factor in their dining experiences. Then, UiTM Dungun students agreed that they usually dine outside of the campus because they wanted to celebrate something. This demonstrates that students have a better experience with their friends at their favourite restaurants, because there are various types of restaurants in Dungun, Terengganu, with a variety of menus, and the environment is ideal for them to go to celebrate anything, such as birthdays and achievements, or even just to hang out.

The second objective of this study is to evaluate the most significant factor that affects students' restaurant choices. For this, the Likert scale question was used as it would be easier for the researcher to measure the respondents' thoughts and opinions. Since food quality has a higher overall average than other factors like ambiance, service quality, and price, the result clearly shows that food quality is the most important factor that determines restaurant selection, as proved in the results below.

The main factor that influences the selection of the restaurant**Food Quality**

Table 3

The mean of the food quality

| No | Food Quality | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|----|--|------|----------------|
| 1. | The food needs to be tasty and flavorful | 4.40 | 0.752 |
| 2. | The food needs to be served hot and fresh | 4.14 | 0.807 |
| 3. | The food needs to be free from any contamination | 4.37 | 0.740 |
| 4. | The quality of food is very important for me | 4.31 | 0.791 |

This result was supported by a study that found that food quality had a great effect on the satisfaction of students towards the university cafeteria services by (Chang and Suki, 2018). Students would prefer university cafeterias if they were seen serving special meals and offering daily promotions, as well as outstanding food quality in terms of taste and presentation. Furthermore, Yi et al (2017) shows the quality of food as one of the key factors that drove the customers into choosing a restaurant. The act of providing delicious food to the customers will give them meaningful sensory experiences and pleasures while they eat. In addition to this, food quality has a great influence on customer satisfaction (Al-Tit, 2015).

Price

Table 4

The mean of the price

| No | Price | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|----|---|------|----------------|
| 1. | I look carefully to find a restaurant that offers the best value for money. | 4.29 | 0.762 |
| 2. | I do not mind about the quality of the food as long as the price is reasonable. | 3.15 | 1.217 |
| 3. | The cheaper restaurant is usually my choice. | 3.89 | 0.890 |
| 4. | I will not exceed the maximum limit of my daily money for the food that over my set budget. | 3.70 | 0.905 |

In terms of price, students prefer that the foods chosen must give the best value for what they spend, as shown in table 4 below. The value can be justified through overall experience, like the quality of food and service, the ambience and number of menus provided. This is parallel with the study conducted by (Ryu and Han, 2010). They said the level of customer satisfaction with the food, service and ambience quality can be boosted by rational price. Bell et al (1997) show that customers consider the price of an item relative to their overall perceived value of it, rather than only the price itself.

The result also shows that the quality of service they received is an important determinant in choosing a restaurant. Table 5 shows the mean and standard deviation results for service quality. From this table, service quality does have an impact on choosing a place to eat. Students will choose a place that that gives them satisfaction. As said by Namin (2017), service quality significantly and directly impacts consumer satisfaction. When the respondent

is satisfied with the service quality, it will increase their purchase probability (Kim and Lough, 2007).

Service Quality

Table 5

The mean of the service quality

| No | Service Quality | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|----|--|------|----------------|
| 1. | The employee needs to be friendly and courteous | 4.32 | 0.749 |
| 2. | The employee needs to be patient when serving | 4.17 | 0.781 |
| 3. | The employee needs to assist me when I am choosing the food | 3.40 | 0.908 |
| 4. | I am not fine with waiting for food for more than 20 minutes | 3.81 | 0.928 |

Ambience or physical environment is part of service quality (Dutta et al., 2014; Ryu et al., 2012). This means ambience plays a direct role in the satisfaction of service quality. The ambience result is in the table 6 below.

Ambience

Table 6

The mean of the ambience

| No | Ambience | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|----|--|------|----------------|
| 1. | The cleanliness of the restaurant is important | 4.43 | 0.768 |
| 2. | The lighting set up of a restaurant is important | 3.74 | 0.874 |
| 3. | The restaurant should look appealing and well decorated | 3.73 | 0.871 |
| 4. | A restaurant sound including music and noises should be pleasant | 3.66 | 0.934 |

In terms of technological innovation and digital service, food or eating habits and menu varieties, even if it does not have much impact on the decision making of choosing a restaurant, it does influence the decision making. Undeniably, consumers are increasingly relying on technology when making purchase decisions because of the conveniences (Muhammad et al., 2013). For eating habits, Sogari et al (2018) concluded that students will only eat more healthy food such as vegetables and fruit whenever they stay with their parents. In restaurant consumption, consumers' need for variety can be satisfied by the offering of a variety of menu items (Chua et al., 2020). When choosing restaurants, consumers may choose one that offers a variety of menu options. In these respects, it suggested that a variety of menu items is likely to be a crucial factor for those seeking variety in their dining experiences. The desire for variety is also influenced by an individual's previous purchase experiences, which influence his/her next purchase decision (Lu Lu et al., 2018).

Technology Innovation or Digital Service

Table 7

The mean of the Technology Innovation or Digital Service

| No | Technology Innovation or Digital Service | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|----|---|------|----------------|
| 1. | The self-service menu tablet/kiosk ordering system is faster than the traditional ordering system | 3.82 | 0.847 |
| 2. | The self-service menu tablet/kiosk ordering system provides effective services | 3.71 | 0.847 |
| 3. | I save time by ordering food from this system | 3.67 | 0.884 |
| 4. | I am likely to dine out because influenced by offers available on the food application/website | 3.62 | 0.934 |

Food Habit

Table 8

The mean of the Food Habit

| No | Food Habit | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|----|---|------|----------------|
| 1. | I will look carefully to choose foods with more healthy benefit | 3.79 | 0.859 |
| 2. | I don't care about the health benefit of the food as long as the food is good | 3.28 | 0.988 |
| 3. | I've always compared the nutritive values when choosing food | 3.39 | 1.002 |
| 4. | I need to eat healthy food | 3.77 | 0.910 |

Variety of Menu

Table 9

The mean of the Variety of Menu

| No | Variety of Menu | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|----|---|------|----------------|
| 1. | I like to eat a variety of food at one time | 3.59 | 0.917 |
| 2. | The restaurant needs to offer a variety of food | 3.97 | 0.769 |
| 3. | I am easily getting bored of eating the same food | 3.58 | 0.945 |
| 4. | The variety of food is very important for me | 3.77 | 0.920 |

Conclusions

The aim of the study was to examine the factors that influence dining out among UiTM students. This study shows that most of the respondents agreed that the quality of the food, price, ambience, and service quality are the most important values in selecting a food service provider. The information gathered in this study has practical implications for all foodservice providers, especially university foodservice operators. Based on the findings of this research, it is important for all service operators to improve the quality of food and services. They also need to improve the image of food hygiene because it relates to the restaurant ambience, and these factors that are more significant for customers. In addition, it is necessary to change the customer perception of the hygiene of university foodservice operator in UiTM Dungun. Food service operators should change their approach to doing business and use the values as a

competitive strategy and to attract and hold customers. This includes shifting the way they do business, the products that they deliver, and their manner of service, all to achieve customer satisfaction. It is believed that students are more likely to keep purchasing it if they are satisfied with the on-campus food service providers.

There are a number of limitations in the present study that are needed. First, the information in this research was obtained during the Covid 19 crisis. This could mean the survey could only be distributed by using the internet only. The questionnaire is distributed randomly and sometimes the respondent ignores the question. Second is the present research only focuses on students at UiTM Dungun only. Therefore, generalization of the results would require replication of similar studies in comparable destinations. Lastly, this research only gives a basic result. Recommendations for further study is to use regression analysis for the estimation of relationships between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables.

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