

THE INFLUENCE OF SERVICE AND FOOD QUALITY AND PERCEIVED VALUE ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION OF THAI CASUAL DINING RESTAURANTS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Piyathida Praditbatuga¹, Santhiti Treetipbut^{2,*}, and Suppalak Chantarak³

Abstract

An online survey was conducted at Thai Casual Dining Restaurants located in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi to investigate the influence of service quality, food quality, and perceived value, on customer satisfaction. Convenience and snowball sampling techniques were used to gather data from non-Thai members of the population, with a total of 391 responses being deemed complete and usable for analysis. The adjusted SERVPERF with a “recoverability” dimension was selected as the scale for measuring service quality. Applying the SPSS program, Multiple Linear Regression analysis was used to identify the influence of service quality and its various dimensions on customer satisfaction. The findings reaffirmed the results from previous research which suggested that *recovery* was one of the most influential factors among the various service quality dimensions with the highest standardized coefficient value, showing a significant influence on customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.182, p < 0.05$). Additionally, food quality and perceived value showed a significant influence on customer satisfaction ($p < 0.05$). These findings contribute to the pool of knowledge for future research, while the results from this study are expected to provide guidelines for restaurant operators in the UAE’s highly competitive market.

Keywords: Customer Satisfaction, Food Quality, Perceived Value, Service Quality, SERVPERF.

¹Dr. Piyathida Praditbatuga is currently working as a Member of National Strategy Drafting Committee (NSDC) tasked with drafting a strategy for human capital development and strengthening in Thailand. She obtained a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) from University of South Australia, Australia.

^{2,*}Dr. Santhiti Treetipbut (corresponding author) is currently working as a faculty member in the Graduate School of Business and Advanced Technology Management, Assumption University, Thailand. He obtained a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) from University of South Australia, Australia. Email: ezprezzthailand@gmail.com

³Suppalak Chantarak obtained a Master of Science in Management from Assumption University, Thailand.

1. INTRODUCTION

The restaurant industry is one of the fastest growing industries in the United Arab Emirates (KPMG, 2019). Due to the country's open economy, its growing population, diversification, tourism, and promising future investments, the UAE's restaurant market has become crowded with many competitors. The number of restaurants per a million residents in Dubai is 2,935 while this number is even bigger than the same figure for New York (2,911) or London (2,772). In 2015, the UAE recorded 16,234 restaurants with a market value of 52,399 billion UAE Dirham. The number of restaurants is expected to increase to 19,053 by the end of 2020 with the market value expected to increase to 81,960 billion UAE Dirham (KPMG, 2016). Alongside the rapid increase in the number of restaurants in the UAE by 2020, 40% of these businesses are chain operators with a growth rate 2.3 times higher than independent restaurants (Aaron Allen & Associates, 2018). This rapid increase of players in the restaurant market has resulted in an oversupply of food eateries. In such a challenging situation, fierce competition among the existing operators is inevitable, as demonstrated by the associated decline in sales, with an almost 50% decline in sales from restaurants across the UAE reported by Clowes (2017).

To enable the sustainment of a business during such intense competition, the focus of this study

was on the assessment of restaurants' customer satisfaction as it has been recognized as one of the most important marketing tools for a restaurant's sustainability and continued success (Qin & Prybutok, 2009). In the restaurant context, food and services are seen as the primary determinants of customer satisfaction. Additionally, customers compare the value of the products and services they receive with the price they pay to receive them. Therefore, value is often associated with food and beverage pricing and the fairness of the experience. Consequently, the objectives of this study aimed at identifying whether or not customer satisfaction of Thai Casual Dining Restaurants was influenced by service quality, food quality, and perceived value.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order for businesses to sustain themselves and continue generating profits during a period of competitive challenge, customer satisfaction has been identified as the key marketing leverage to hold repeat customers (Qin & Prybutok, 2009). *Customer Satisfaction* is "defined as a customer's evaluation of products and services in terms of whether they meet the customers' needs and expectations" (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, 2013, p. 80). In a business setting, customer satisfaction is described as the evaluation made by consumers during the service exchange (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Many studies have posited that in the

restaurant context, the main predictors of customer satisfaction are service quality, food quality, and perceived value (Qin & Prybutok, 2009; Qin et al., 2009, Qin et al., 2010; Namin, 2017; Rana, Lodhi, Butt & Dar, 2017; Sergin & Göde, 2017).

2.1 Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Service Quality refers to the customer's overall assessment of service performance towards a firm (Cronin & Taylor, 1992) and has been seen as a powerful weapon that a firm can possess to rival its competitors (Kandampully, 2014).

With no absolute measurement to assess service quality, many researchers have hypothesized and attempted to define what service quality is and to identify how to measure it. The perception of service quality is subjective from one person to another (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988). Due to the intangibility of service by nature, the quality associated with it is seen as troublesome to quantify (Parasuraman et al., 1988). One of the most reviewed measurements of service quality was SERVQUAL which was based on gap theory, equating service expectations with service perceptions. Five dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) were identified as the components of service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The scale has been frequently used in relation to many industries, yet, many sceptics have criticized its unclear definitions

and overlapping of the items (Jain & Gupta, 2004). Instead of using gap theory, Cronin and Taylor (1992) developed SERVPERF, proposing that service quality with its five dimensions, could be assessed using service performance alone discarding the expectation criteria of the previously posited scale (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). According to Nguyen, Nisar, Knox & Prabhakar (2018), the five aforementioned aspects of service quality and customer satisfaction were related, *tangibles* were observed as the most influential factor on customer satisfaction. However, a more comprehensive approach was posited by Olorunniwo, Hsu & Udo (2006), who suggested that *recovery* was another element of service quality and was worthy to be added into the SERVPERF scale for a more comprehensive result. Qin et al., (2010) also found that *recoverability* was a significant dimension of service quality and was substantial for modifying the SERVPERF scale to match with a particular market setting.

In the study of Qin and Prybutok (2009), the *recovery* dimension was incorporated as an additional dimension into the SERVPERF scale. Service quality, food quality, and perceived value were other variables in question regarding customer satisfaction and customers' behavioral intentions. Based on the study of Rana et al., (2017), the significant impact of service quality on customer satisfaction would result in negative or positive behavioral intentions and brand image. The study of Namin (2017) showed that the

impact of service quality and its dimensions did not present a direct relationship with behavioral intentions, but rather, could be anticipated through positive customer satisfaction as a mediator, to generate the desirable result of behavioral intentions. In addition to behavioral intentions and brand image, when the customers are satisfied with various restaurant elements, such as tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness, and empathy, they would have intentions to recommend (Ramseook-munhurrin, 2012).

Several studies have shown the significant influence of service quality and its dimensions on customer satisfaction (Olorunniwo et al., 2006; Qin & Prybutok, 2009; Qin et al., 2009; Qin et al., 2010; Tat et al., 2011; Ramseook-Munhurrin, 2012; Ibarra Morales et al., 2015; Namin, 2017; Rana et al., 2017; Sezgin & Göde, 2017 and Nguyen et al., 2018), in line with the first hypothesis, which is proposed as follows:

H1: Service quality (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and recovery) influences customer satisfaction.

2.2 Food Quality and Customer Satisfaction

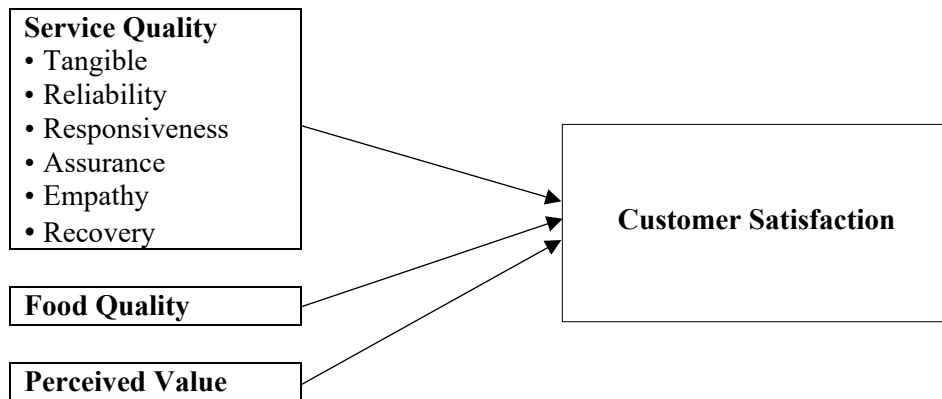
Food quality was the second key element identified for this study. Especially in food businesses, the quality of food is constantly being observed for suitability via characteristics such as taste, freshness, temperature, presentation, and preparation. The main product of

restaurants is food; customers come to a restaurant for the purpose of food consumption, consequently food is the main element to attract and sustain customers (Namin, 2017). Food quality has also been extended to include the variety of cuisine choices being offered by the restaurant. Qin & Prybutok's (2009) findings suggested that improvement of cuisine quality can result in higher client satisfaction. Therefore, the construct of quality of food is treated as a predictor variable in this study, according to the hypothesis:

H2: Food quality influences customer satisfaction.

2.3 Perceived Value and Customer Satisfaction

Perceived value is described as the overall evaluation by customers of what they have received against what they have given up to receive it (Zeithaml et al., 2013). Pricing is often associated with the value received. Customers comparatively evaluate whether or not what they have paid for food and beverages is fair and brought about enjoyment in their visit (Qin & Prybutok, 2009, Qin et al, 2009, Qin et al., 2010). Because value is subjective, it can be perceived differently by different people of different cultures, or from different locations (Qin & Prybutok, 2009). Namin (2017) found that there was a direct significant relationship between perceived value and customer satisfaction, but an indirect relationship between perceived value and customer satisfaction.



Note: This model was adapted from Nguyen et al., (2018) and Qin & Prybutok (2009)

Figure 1 The proposed Research Model for This Study

Accordingly, the third hypothesis is:

H3: Perceived value influences customer satisfaction.

2.4 The Research Model

This study aims to investigate three hypotheses, testing 1. The influence of service quality on customer satisfaction; 2. The influence of food quality on customer satisfaction; and 3. The influence of perceived value on customer satisfaction. The conceptual framework illustrates the influence of the three main independent variables (service quality, food quality and perceived value) on the dependent variable (customer satisfaction). Based on the literature review, the additional aspect of “recovery” was added to the service quality variable. Therefore, 6 service quality aspects were studied in this research. The research model for this study is displayed in Figure 1.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

A quantitative approach was used to answer the research questions and test the aforementioned hypotheses.

3.1 Target Population and Sample Size

The sample of this study was drawn from the non-Thai customers of a Thai Casual Dining Restaurant Chain (Desert Lotus Restaurants) who had visited the restaurant premise at least once. According to the UAE government portal (2020), the overall population in UAE is composed of over 200 nationalities with high diversity, with this population being accustomed to various international cuisines (Gulfood, 2018). Due to the difference in perceptions of quality, which may vary among cultures, it is expected that a difference will exist in the perceptions of food quality, service, and value, between consumers from Thailand and those

from other nationalities (Qin et al., 2010). In order to avoid a possible bias, the sample of this study was concentrated to only non-Thai nationals living in the UAE. With the anticipated level of confidence of 95%, permitting a 5% random sampling error, the required sample size was calculated to be 384 (Cochran, 1963).

3.2 Sampling Procedure

An online questionnaire weblink was created using the “SurveyMonkey” platform. A non-probability sampling technique, with convenience and snowball sampling methods was used.

According to the convenience method, customers were approached at the restaurant and asked to use their phone to participate in the survey by scanning a QR code placed at the tables and in the cover of the billing file. The restaurant also shared the weblink on their FB page.

The snowball sampling method was carried out by asking customers to recommend the survey to other customers that had visited the restaurant by simply sharing the weblink address in their WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger.

3.3 Research Instrument

The survey questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section contained 2 screening questions, which asked 1. If the respondents were non-Thai nationals and 2. That the respondents had not

completed the survey before. The second section enquired about the respondent’s demographic details (5 questions). The third section covered the respondent’s visit profile (2 questions). The final section assessed the customer’s experience at the restaurant, including an evaluation of service quality (26 items), food quality (4 items), perceived value (3 items), and customer satisfaction (4 items). In this section, all the original constructs from Qin & Prybutok (2009) were adopted and measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.

3.4 Pre-test

The pre-testing was conducted on June 4 - June 6, 2020. The survey’s weblink was shared among the first 30 non-Thai respondents. Through the SPSS program, Cronbach’s alpha was calculated to test the scale’s internal consistency (Sekaran, 2006). The minimum acceptable value for each construct was expected at 0.7 (Christensen et al., 2015). As shown in Table 1 the dimensions of service quality of tangible, reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy, and recovery, respectively produced alpha coefficient values of 0.786, 0.830, 0.786, 0.766, 0.787, 0.844 respectively. While food quality, perceived value, and customer satisfaction showed alpha coefficients’ of 0.740, 0.823 and 0.874 respectively.

In terms of validity, it is common to use previously developed scales when they are well reputed.

Nonetheless, the source must be clarified and accredited (Sekaran, 2006). Therefore, a previously accredited instrument from the paper of Qin & Prybutok (2009) was utilized in the present study as it was evidenced that the variables of interest in this instrument have been developed and examined repeatedly in previous research studies (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Johns & Howard 1998; Kara et al., 1995; Kivela et al., 1999; Kim & Kim, 2004; Oloruniwo et al., 2006; Qin et al., 2009; Qin et al., 2010; Ramseook-Munhurran, 2012, Namin, 2017 and Nguyen et al., 2018). Consequently, a validity test for this study was not required.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

The online survey was enabled to reach respondents in three ways; 1. An online web form, 2. A facebook link and 3. A QR code. The researcher approached the restaurant owner to retrieve the permission to conduct the survey prior to the commencement of

the actual research. The survey link was shared among customers of Desert Lotus via the restaurant's Facebook, WhatsApp contacts and Messenger. QR code printouts were also placed on the restaurant's tables, in the billing folders and inside takeaway bags. Data collection commenced on June 9 and continued until August 10, 2020.

The results showed that out of a total of 468 responses, 48 were from Thai nationals while 2 stated that they had previously completed the survey. Hence, these responses did not qualify to be used in the analysis. Additionally, 27 incomplete responses were also discarded. Finally, a total sample of 391 complete responses were deemed acceptable, and were ultimately used in the data analysis.

The data from survey section 2 (demographic questions) and section 3 (customer service profile) were analyzed for descriptive statistics (percentage and frequency). The analytical statistics procedure of

Table 1 Reliability Test

Subscale	No. Items	Cronbach's alpha	Decision
Tangibles	5	0.786	Acceptable
Reliability	5	0.830	Acceptable
Assurance	4	0.786	Acceptable
Responsiveness	4	0.766	Acceptable
Empathy	4	0.787	Acceptable
Recovery	4	0.844	Acceptable
Food quality	4	0.740	Acceptable
Perceived value	3	0.823	Acceptable
Customer satisfaction	4	0.874	Acceptable

Table 2 Summary of Respondent's Demographics

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	229	58.6
	Female	162	41.4
	Total	391	100
Age	Below 25	16	4.1
	26-35	50	12.8
	36-45	178	45.5
	46-55	120	30.7
	Above 56	27	6.9
	Total	391	100
Nationality	Emiratis	31	7.9
	Others	360	92.1
	Total	391	100
Education	Below Bachelor's degree	58	14.8
	Bachelor's degree	221	56.5
	Master's degree	85	21.7
	Doctorate degree	12	3.1
	Others	15	3.9
	Total	391	100
Income	Below 2,000 AED / Below 550 USD	26	6.6
	2,001 – 4,000 AED / 551-1,095 USD	15	3.8
	4,001 – 6,000 AED / 1,096 – 1,645 USD	27	6.9
	6,001 – 8,000 AED / 1,646 – 2,190 USD	65	16.6
	From 8,001 AED or 2,191 USD and above	258	66.0
	Total	391	100

Note: (n = 391)

Multiple Linear Regression was applied to test Hypothesis 1. Meanwhile, Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 were tested with Simple Linear Regression. The SPSS statistical package was used to process the data.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Demographic Features

As shown in Table 2, 58.6% of the total 391 respondents were male, while 41.4% were female. The

majority of respondents were from the age group of 36-45 years old (45.5%), followed by the 46-55 age group (30.7%). The smallest proportion of respondents were below the age of 25 (4.1%). It was observed that customers of elder age (above 56) were less likely to visit the restaurant. Among the total group of respondents, all of whom were non-Thai, the great majority were from various nationalities (92.1%), while Emirati citizens were in the minority (7.9%). In terms of educational level, the majority of the participants had acquired a bachelor's degree (56.5%), while 21.7% had also attained a master's degree. Respondents holding a doctorate level degree accounted for the minority (3.1%). The second smallest proportion (3.9%) represented those who had attained other types of educational classification. More than half of the individuals earned a monthly income of more than 8,001 AED or above, equivalent to USD 2,191 (66%), while the smallest proportion of respondents (3.8%) belonged to the income category of

2,001 – 4,000 AED per month, equivalent to USD 551 – 1,095.

4.2 Customer's Service Profile

The great majority (97.7%) of the respondents had engaged in dine-in service, while some of these individuals had tried self-pick-up of orders from the restaurant (2.3%). Also, more than half (54.7%) had patronized the premise within the last three months. 32% had last visited the restaurant within the last six months and 10.2% of customers had dined at the restaurant earlier than 6 months prior to the data collection (Table 3).

4.3 Descriptive Statistics of Variables and Interpretation

In section 4 of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to rate each item using a 5-point Likert's type rating scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Each of these statements of agreement was decoded by arbitrary rating levels. Yamane (1999) provided the

Table 3 Summary of Customer's Visit Profile

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Service Types	Dine-In	382	97.7
	Pick-up	9	2.3
	Total	391	100
Last Visit	Last 3 months	214	54.7
	Last 6 months	125	32.0
	Before last 6 months	40	10.2
	Others	12	3.1
	Total	391	100

Note: (n=391)

descriptive rating scores to match the agreeableness of each statement (Table 4).

As shown in Table 5, from the descriptive data standpoint, the respondents strongly agreed with all the dimensions of restaurant's service quality. The highest mean score (4.61) was for *reliability*, while the lowest (4.49) was for *recovery*. Additionally, all dimensions showed a small difference among the mean scores, from which it can be interpreted that the surveyed customers favored all aspects of the restaurant's service quality. Since the *recovery* item earned the least favor among all aspects, the assessment of this aspect

provides a clue to what could be done better in terms of providing recovery assistance when service mistakes have happened. It can be implied that the customers expected or wanted to feel ensured to see that the staff in charge has been authorized to reimburse or compensate fairly regarding what has gone wrong.

The *food quality* determinant also produced a favorable result with the reported average mean score of 4.66. The respondents strongly agreed that the food was well-cooked, well-prepared and fresh. The respondents also strongly agreed that the restaurant offered various menu items.

Table 4 Arbitrary Level of Agreement Ratings

Descriptive Ratings	Arbitrary Level
Strongly Disagree	1.00-1.80
Disagree	1.81-2.60
Neutral	2.61-3.40
Agree	3.41-4.20
Strongly Agree	4.21-5.00

Note: Adapted from Yamane (1999)

Table 5 Summary of Means and SD for Service Quality

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Tangible	4.54	.49	Strongly Agree
Reliability	4.61	.45	Strongly Agree
Assurance	4.60	.45	Strongly Agree
Responsiveness	4.54	.47	Strongly Agree
Empathy	4.55	.43	Strongly Agree
Recovery	4.49	.51	Strongly Agree
<i>Food Quality</i>	4.66	.42	Strongly Agree
<i>Perceived Value</i>	4.24	.65	Strongly Agree
<i>Customer Satisfaction</i>	4.59	.48	Strongly Agree

Perceived value gained the least mean average of 4.24. Nonetheless, the score rating still fell in the “strongly agree” classification. While perceived value was the least favorable among all the respondents, they still showed strong agreement that they had received good value for money, and the restaurant offered a competitive price for beverages.

4.4 Inferential Statistics

The value of the dependent variables can be predicted or described by linear regression analysis based on the value of one independent variable or more (Christensen, Johnson & Turner, 2015). When there is one independent variable, simple linear regression is used to explain the influence of an independent variable on the dependent variable (Kumar et al., 2013). Similarly, multiple linear regression is used when there is more than one predictor variable (Cooper & Schindler, 2008). Therefore, the analytical statistics procedures of

Multiple Linear Regression were applied to test Hypothesis 1, while hypothesis 2 and 3 were tested by Simple Linear Regression.

The Multiple Linear Regression analysis was performed to investigate whether service quality and its 6 dimensions could significantly influence customer satisfaction (H_1). Later, Simple Linear Regression was used to test the influence of food quality and perceived value on customer satisfaction (H_2 & H_3). It was found that there are statistically significant relationships between the independent and dependent variables, and the regression analysis can be tested.

First, hypothesis 1 shows a significant R^2 value at 0.479, indicating that the overall service quality explains 47.9% of the variance in customer satisfaction. Also, the model was a significant predictor of customer satisfaction, $F(6,381) = 58.279, p = .000$. Therefore, there is a relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction (Table 6). While most of the service dimensions

Table 6 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses	Model Summary	ANOVA ^a		Results
	R Square	F	Sig.	
H1: Service quality (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and recovery) influences customer satisfaction.	.479	58.279	.000 ^{b**}	Accepted
H2: Food quality influences customer satisfaction.	.409	268.267	.000 ^{b**}	Accepted
H3: Perceived value influences customer satisfaction.	.339	198.970	.000 ^{b**}	Accepted

a. Predictors Variables

b. Customer Satisfaction

** $p < 0.05$

Table 7 Coefficients

		Coefficients ^a					
Variables		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Predictor Interpretation
		B	Std. Error	Beta (β)			
Service Quality	(constant)	.490	.223		2.198	.029	Significant
	Tangible	.129	.046	.132	2.800	.005	Significant
	Reliability	.169	.065	.158	2.581	.010	Significant
	Assurance	.151	.058	.140	2.581	.010	Significant
	Responsiveness	.088	.056	.085	1.571	** .117	Not Significant
	Empathy	.193	.056	.173	3.446	.001	Significant
	Recovery	.170	.046	.182	3.675	.000	Significant
Food Quality	(Constant)	1.202	.208		5.791	.000	Significant
		.727	.044	.639	16.379	.000	Significant
Perceived Value	(Constant)	2.762	.131		21.085	.000	Significant
		.431	.031	.582	14.106	.000	Significant

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

significantly contributed to the model, *responsiveness* was the only variable which did not relate to customer satisfaction (Refer to table 6 and 7).

Second, for hypothesis 2, food quality provided a significant R^2 of 0.409 indicating that food quality explained 40.9% of the variance in customer satisfaction, and that it is a significant predictor of customer satisfaction in the model, $F(1,388) = 268.267$, $p < .05$. Hence, food quality relates to customer satisfaction, statistically (See Table 6).

Lastly, regarding hypothesis 3 perceived value displayed an R^2 of 0.339, indicating that perceived value explained 33.9% of the variance in

customer satisfaction. This relationship was also a significant predictor of customer satisfaction in the model $F(1,388) = 198.970$, $p < .05$. Therefore, perceived value statistically relates to customer satisfaction (See Table 6).

5. CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study set out to investigate the influence of service quality, food quality, and perceived value on customer satisfaction among Thai restaurants in the UAE. The findings contribute to the theoretical foundation of service quality and

understanding of service features, as well as other additional important contributors, such as food quality and perceived value, to the satisfaction of the restaurant's clients. From the service quality perspective, a modified SERFPERV model with the additional dimension of recovery was used to measure the impact of service attributes on customer satisfaction. These findings are exceptionally helpful to the restaurant business as they address the shortcomings of service aspects which require improvement through staff training and business strategies. The discussion below, covers the characteristics of the demographic information, results of the hypotheses of the study, and the interpretation of the results.

From the respondent demographics standpoint, the majority of customers of the Thai Desert Lotus restaurant were male, between the ages of 36 and 45 years old. The statistical information of the UAE population supports that more than half of the UAE expatriate population (65.90%) are from the working age group. This is because the majority of the UAE population is composed mostly of working immigrants who live and work in the UAE (GMI, 2020). For this study, a minority of the customers were identified as those who were younger than 25 (4.1%). The customer profile consisted of various nationalities (92.1%), while a much smaller group of the respondents were local Emiratis (7.9%). It was also noticed that the great majority of the customers had

attained at least a bachelor's degree and earned over 8,001 AED per month (USD 2,191) which is considered as upper middle class income earners in the UAE (Arabian Business, 2018).

The first hypothesis, stating that service quality influences customer satisfaction, was supported. Among all service quality constructs, the least favored, was *recovery*. *Recovery* was measured as the ability of the restaurant employees to quickly apologize when mistakes happen, and that they are able to show that they care about the customer's inconvenience and complaints. This also involves fixing the problems by providing compensation to customers.

While *recovery* obtained the lowest mean average among all the service quality aspects, it was also ranked as the most significant predictor in the model and was an additional attribute to the original SERVPERF measurement explored by Olorunniwo et al., (2006). In line with the previous research of Olorunniwo et al., (2006) and Qin & Prybutok (2009), *recoverability* showed a significant impact on customer satisfaction. For this reason, it is recommended that it be added to the traditional SERVPERF measurement in future studies. Especially in the restaurant context, *recoverability* cannot be overlooked as it is a strong predictor of customer satisfaction (Olorunniwo et al., 2006; Qin & Prybutok, 2009 and Qin et al., 2010).

The second most important predictor in this study is *empathy*. Here, restaurant staff were assessed

on their ability to provide the necessary utensils and prepare food orders completely. The restaurant's location and operating hours were deemed convenient. On the contrary, this aspect was ranked as the least significant contributor to customer satisfaction (Olorunniwo et al., 2006).

Other than recoverability, responsiveness has previously been found to be one of the most influential antecedents of customer satisfaction (Qin et al., 2010). In contrast, responsiveness did not show a significant contribution to customer satisfaction in this study. Responsiveness in the restaurant context emphasizes the speed and promptness of food and service delivery; the more customers are required to wait, the weaker their perception of responsiveness becomes (Zeithaml et al., 2013). Based on the findings of this study, recoverability was found to be a significant predictor of customer satisfaction, but responsiveness was not. Based on this finding, operators of Thai restaurants in the UAE should pay more attention on the performance of service recovery when any service mistakes or mishaps occur. In response to the service failure, staff should be prepared to handle such circumstances, and be given the authority to do so. To avoid dissatisfaction, and reduce its impact, restaurants should have strategies set in place to allow staff to immediately take action to solve any problems; to communicate with customers showing understanding, respect, and courtesy; and to provide a just

outcome which appropriately matches the level of dissatisfaction or inconvenience that the incident has caused. In some cases, return of money may be appropriate. However, there are also other forms of conduct which can provide fair service recovery, which do not entail monetary compensation, such as a sincere apology, future discounts, free service, a free product, or a product replacement. While the responsiveness dimension of service quality for Thai restaurants in the UAE did not show any significance in this study, it should be noted that in a normal restaurant setting, the food temperature when served is affected by the wait time, therefore the customer's perception of food quality will be influenced by a lengthy delay of time for serving the food. On a similar note, when staff are responsive, they will commonly inform customers of when they will be attended to and when the food and service are likely to be served. As a result, when responsiveness is high customers will not feel that they are neglected, and restaurant staff may be able to avoid dissatisfaction all together.

Regarding the assessment of the hypothesis on food quality's influence on customer satisfaction, the results revealed that food quality was a significant predictor of customer satisfaction ($p < .001$). The significant impact of food quality on customer satisfaction has also been witnessed in previous research (Qin & Prybutok, 2009; Qin et al., 2009, Qin et al., 2010; Namin, 2017; Rana et al., 2017;

Sezgin & Göde, 2017). As food is the key product of a restaurant business, food quality has a great influence on customers' perceptions of restaurants. In this study, food quality was described as the food being served fresh, well-presented, and well-cooked. Additionally, having a wide variety of food items is also considered as an element of the food quality criteria. The customer's view of food quality is certainly evidenced in the ingredients' freshness, nutritional value, appearance, and cleanliness. Also, preparation of the food includes selection of the correct ingredients for the menu item, as well as plating and presentation that is pleasing to the eyes, and the correct serving temperature (Rana et al., 2017). Thai food is known for its use of fresh ingredients, and the combination of strong flavors derived from sauces and spices, fresh ingredients, and the unique methods of preparation. Thus, operators of Thai restaurants in the UAE should pay close attention to various factors of food quality, such as the freshness of ingredients and the proper serving temperature. The Thai table culture is unique to others, as individuals often share the meals that are on the table. This implies that a greater choice of foods or variety of dishes can positively support the restaurant's future menu development.

Finally, the significant impact of perceived value on customer satisfaction was witnessed in this study ($p < .05$). Perceived value was itemized as "restaurant offers a competitive price for food",

"restaurant offers a competitive price for beverages" and "you receive good value for the price you pay at this restaurant". Value is often associated with the price paid for foods and services. Thus, customers are constantly evaluating to what extent the money they spend is worth the products and services received. Therefore, higher pricing might affect an individual's dining decisions. During the summer months in the UAE, expatriates often leave the country for their annual vacation. The restaurant's revenue is usually lower during this time than at any other period of the year. To cope with this, offering competitive pricing or promotions may be an appropriate method to entice customers during this specific time period (Zeithaml et al., 2013). Kotler & Keller (2006) identified that the value perceived by customers is made up of several elements, such as product and service qualities. The priority that a specific customer places towards each of these elements may be different. The crucial idea of the perceived value of pricing is that a restaurant must be able to deliver greater value to customers, when compared to its competitors (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Thai restaurants in the UAE may consider adding value to the food aspect in several ways, such as implementing promotions on set meals or advertisement of the products' superiority in term of freshness, healthiness, and the premium ingredients used to differentiate itself from competitors.

5.1 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There were a few limitations relevant to this research which should be mentioned. First, the Desert Lotus restaurant offers ethnic food with a casual dining experience; the outcomes of this study cannot be generalized to other types of restaurant businesses. However, to include more Thai restaurants in other Emirates or areas is recommended, to broaden knowledge on the topic of restaurants' customer satisfaction and its drivers, and to increase the generalizability of the results.

Second, the survey was conducted in the UAE Emirate of Abu Dhabi. Due to the uniqueness of the UAE population characteristics, such as race diversity, income, and lifestyle, generalization from the findings of this study is not intended for other locations. Hence, the extension of this work into other areas is recommended.

Third, Thai cuisine is unique and considered as an ethnic food. For this reason, the consideration to incorporate food authenticity into the food construct is recommended, as it may affect customer satisfaction. Lastly, the sample group of the present study consisted of non-Thai nationals. It will be helpful to also replicate this study for Thai nationals, or local Emirati citizens, to discover more about the factors which affect their satisfaction in Thai restaurants.

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