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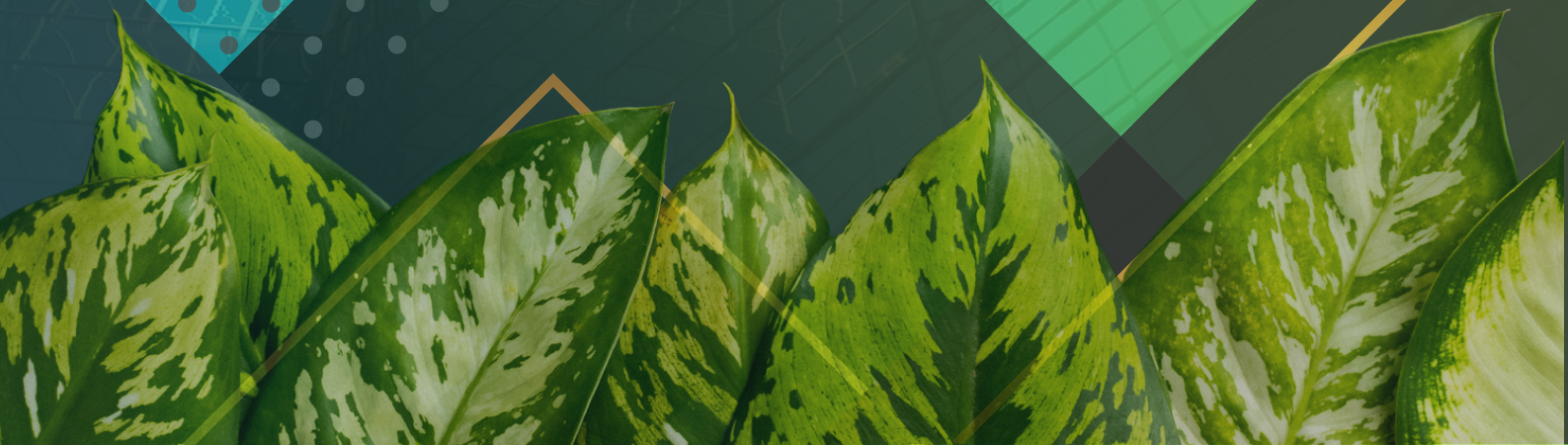
SUSTAINABLY NURTURING TOURISM, HOSPITALITY AND WELLNESS INDUSTRY FOR A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA KELANTAN

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SUSTAINABLY NURTURING TOURISM, HOSPITALITY AND WELLNESS INDUSTRY FOR A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

Consumer Perception of Food Safety at Restaurant in Kota Bharu, Kelantan

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ABSTRACT

Food safety is a great concern to consumers in terms of the nature of the food that allows consumers to have negative health effects. There are many cases related to food poisoning that happen due to poor hygiene practice and lack of understanding about food safety. The goal of this study is to examine the relationship between the food quality, service quality and restaurant ambience among consumer perception of food safety. The questionnaire is distributed to the 384 respondents at Kota Bharu, Kelantan. The analysis for this study is using SPSS software version 2.4. This study analyzed the descriptive analysis, reliability test, and Pearson's correlation analysis. This empirically finding service quality and consumer perception is good to support the hypotheses for this study. Therefore, food quality, service quality, and restaurant ambiance can influence the customer perception of the casual dining restaurant.

Keywords: Food Safety, Consumer Perception, Food Quality, Service Quality, Restaurant Ambience, Kota Bharu, Casual Dining Restaurant

INTRODUCTION

Food safety is of great concern to consumers in terms of the nature of the food that allows consumers to have negative health effects. Therefore, food safety is an important consideration while handling it, especially in settings where it is served, such as street food. To avoid exposing consumers to foodborne pathogens that can cause food poisoning and negatively impact human health, food safety is a crucial issue that must be treated carefully (Fatin et al,2021). This study intends to investigate the consumers' perception of food safety at restaurants in Kota Bharu, Kelantan. In addition, consumers care about how well they grasp hygienic procedures and food safety. Furthermore, food safety not practiced correctly when food handlers do not comply with personal hygiene such as washing hands before preparing food will cause-contamination through direct contact between raw materials and cooked food, and unsanitary food preparations place (Chang et al., 2014). During the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of incidents of food poisoning decreased by 31.6%, from 288 cases in 2020 to 197 cases in 2021. But the number of food poisoning cases during Ramadan increased from 22 cases in 2020 to 39 cases in 2021 because them not washing their hands before and after preparing food, using the same utensils for raw food, and not following standard operating procedures and adopt a new norm in the bazaar (Abdullah, 2022).

There are three objectives of this research:

1. To examine the relationship between food quality and the consumer perception of food   safety.

2. To examine the relationship between service quality and consumer perception of food safety.

3. To examine the relationship between restaurant ambience and consumer perception of food safety.

Significant of the Study

Community

Information on consumer perception about food safety can bring benefits for the surrounding community and will continue to be aware of food safety in the future.

Restaurant Industry

The benefits and disadvantages of the emerging industry must be evaluated against potential difficulties, one of which is identifying potential food safety issues that can affect consumer health.

Food Handling Practice

The cleanliness of the food prepared in restaurants nowadays and how to handle the food is important. Poor personal cleanliness among food handlers, incorrect refrigerator temperatures, lack of understanding about food safety, and faulty cooking all increase the risk of foodborne illness in restaurants (Collins, 1997).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Food Quality

Food quality must be consistent and reliable when providing to consumers in terms of freshness, temperature, taste, and presentation (Namkung & Jang, 2007). When choosing a restaurant to eat, consumers are more likely to think about the food's quality because it will help them form a favorable impression.

Based on a study conducted by (Sulek & Hensley, 2004), the most crucial element that might affect consumer impression and the reason why people choose a restaurant, they discovered is the food quality. Additionally, it is backed by (Ha & Jang, 2010), which found a connection between customer loyalty and food quality.

Service Quality

Service is an intangible or performance that one party offered to consumers. Service quality is a valuable characteristic and features which are important such as reliability, responsiveness, and empathy. For example, for tangibility it can provide a physical facility and facilitating goods. Consumers who always look in a product such as food to know how the service that will provide in restaurant.

Therefore, a restaurant who given a good service quality in terms of food safety will be able to maintain a loyal consumer. While poor service quality can lead the consumers to choose the other restaurant.

Restaurant Ambience

Restaurant ambience plays an important role in creating a restaurant's reputation and luring diners in. Customers will visit restaurants if the exterior and interior are appealing. (Omar et al., 2015). A clean and safe ambience will guarantee food safety in the restaurant.

Customers might not come to a restaurant just for the cuisine on their first visit, but additional elements like an appealing exterior design, favorable media coverage, or word-of-mouth recommendations. The customer's view of the eating experience must be influenced by the decor, atmosphere, and service standards. The environment affects how diners react and judge a restaurant (Lim, 2010).

Consumers Perception of Food Safety

Perception is a major psychological factor influencing people's purchase decision (Kotler & Armstrong, 2011). It is described as the act of seeing and understanding environmental information via the use of the four senses of vision, listening, tasting, and touching. Consumers' perception of food safety and their inclinations to purchase as well as their understanding of how high food hygiene standards affect the environment and society.

Research Hypothesis

In this study, there are three hypotheses that have been tested:

H1: There is a significant relationship between food quality and consumers perception of food safety at restaurants in Kota Bharu, Kelantan.

H2: There is a significant relationship between service quality and consumers perception of food safety at restaurants in Kota Bharu, Kelantan.

H3: There is a significant relationship between restaurant ambience and consumers perception of food safety at restaurants in Kota Bharu, Kelantan.

Research Framework

The relationship between the study's variables has been investigated using a research framework. The independent variables that have been proposed

consist of three which are food quality (Huang et al., 2004; Mohi, 2012; Shaharudin et al., 2011), service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985 & 1988), and restaurant ambience (Heung & Gu, 2012; Jalil et al., 2016; Kement et al., 2021; Stroebele & De Castro, 2004; Wu & Mohi, 2015). On the other hand, a dependent variable is consumer perception of food safety.
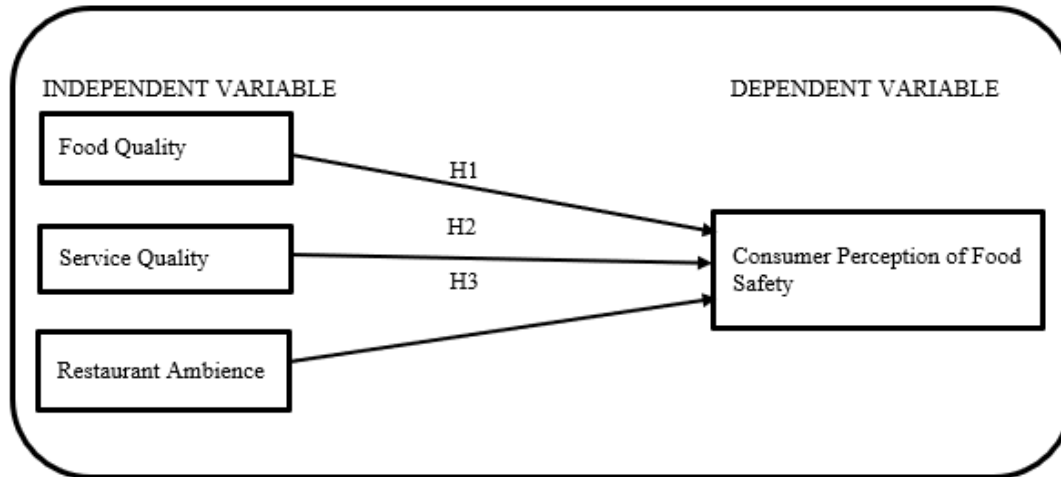

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Consumer Perception of Food Safety at Restaurant in Kota Bharu, Kelantan

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The quantitative research method will be used in this study. This research utilized a questionnaire to perform the survey. The questionnaire was created to elicit all data relevant to the objectives of the study. The survey was divided into six sections: section A covered demographic background; section B covered frequency and reasons for dining at casual dining establishments; section C covered food quality; section D covered service quality; section E covered restaurant ambiance; and section F covered consumer perceptions of food safety. In the section, the Likert Scale was used to calculated on a 5-point scale (1 strongly disagreed to 5 strongly agreed).

Data Collection

Primary data is the use for this research. Primary data are those gathered by the researcher directly from sources like questionnaires. The questionnaire will be conducted online for respondents. In addition, this research provides 20 questionnaires. The pilot study was also used for testing the questionnaire to get useful feedback from respondents and the researcher can revise and improve the questions before publication.

Sampling

In this study, convenience sampling was used. Because not everyone has an equal chance of getting chosen, it will be chosen using non-random criteria in a convenience sample. The targeted population are the consumers who eat at casual dining restaurants around Kota Bharu, Kelantan. Sample size is a subset of the population needed to ensure that information is sufficient. Due to the large number of people in Kota Bharu, Kelantan which are 363,000 persons (DOSM, 2023). Therefore, 384 participants from the table in (Krejcie & Morgan's, 1970) constitute the proper sample size for this investigation. Convenience sampling is a technique used to collect data from a group of readily accessible respondents. Due to its speed, simplicity, and low cost, it is the most popular sampling technique (Sukhtatme, 2008).

Data Analysis

In this study, three different forms of data analysis were used: descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, and Pearson correlation. The results were examined using SPSS version 2.4, a Statistical Programme for Social Science, to analyze the information collected from the questionnaire.

The descriptive analysis includes the central tendencies and the measure of variability. Standard deviation, variance, minimum and maximum variation, kurtosis, and skewness are among the measurements of variability, whereas mean, median, and mode are among the indicators of central tendency. Researchers can understand the data more efficiently by using descriptive analysis. The average was evaluated as Strongly Disagree 1.00–1.80, Disagree 1.8–2.60, Neutral 2.6–3.40, Agree 3.4–4.20, and Strongly Agree 4.21–5.00.

Reliability analysis means the verifying the general, group and specific factors among the items, as the consistency of the result in the factors from test to test. In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was utilised to evaluate the questionnaire's reliability. The association's strength is classified as follows: <0.6 poor, 0.6 to <0.7 moderate, 0.7 to <0.8 good, 0.8 to 0<.9 very good, and 0.9 excellent.

The Pearson Correlation method, which was the most widely used method for analyzing numerical variables, was given values between 0 and 1, with 1 signifying total positive correlation and 0 denoting total negative correlation (Boslaugh et al., 2008). In the following interpretation, a correlation value of 0.7 between two variables indicates a significant and positive relationship between them (Steven Nickolas, 2021).

FINDINGS

Table 1: Demographic Analysis

Demographic	Categories	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	156	40.6
	Female	228	59.4
Age	Below 18	16	4.2
	18-24	267	69.5
	25-34	70	18.2
	35-44	21	5.5
	45 and above	10	2.6
Race	Malay	269	70.1
	Chinese	55	14.3
	India	58	15.1
	Others	2	0.5
Marital Status	Married	52	13.5
	Single	332	86.5
	Others	0	0
Education Level	Primary School	5	1.3
	Secondary School	57	14.8
	Diploma	66	17.2
	Degree	243	63.3
	Masters	8	2.1
	PhD	5	1.3
Occupation Level	Students	169	44.0
	Employed Part	105	27.3
	Time	93	24.2
	Employed	16	4.2
	Unemployed	1	0.3
	Retired		
Income Level	Below RM2000	176	45.8
	RM2001-RM3000	145	37.8
	RM3001-RM4000	42	10.9
	Above RM4000	21	5.5

The demographic analysis of the respondents is shown in Table 1. That show that out of 384 respondents, there were 59.4% more female respondents than male respondents 40.6%. The age group with the greatest percentage, 18 to 24 years old, had a rate of 69.5%. The second largest percentage, 18.2%, was among those between the ages of 25 and 34. The third age group, 35 to 44, has 5.5%. 4.2% of people are below 18 in the fourth age group. The lowest percentage, 2.6%, was found in people over the 45 and above. Most of the respondents that were involved were Malay, which consists of 70.1%. The second highest was Indian, which made up 15.1%. The remaining respondents were Chinese and other races, which consists of 14.3% and 0.5% respectively. For marital status, 86.5% were single. 13.5% were married, and 0% were others. For education level, the highest 63.3% degree. Diploma 17.2%. Secondary school which is 14.8%. Master which is 2.1%. Primary school and PhD have the same percentage which is 1.3%. Meanwhile, for occupation level, the largest percentage with 44.0% which is students compared to retired which the lowest with 0.3%. In between, employed part time is 27.3% and employed is 24.2%. The unemployed, which is next lowest with 4.2%. For income level, 45.8% of

the respondents gain salary below RM2000. 37.8% gain salary between RM2001-RM3000. 10.9% gain salary between RM 3001-RM4000. While only 5.5% gain salary above RM4000. This statistic represents the actual demographic consumer perception of food safety at casual dining restaurants in Kota Bharu, Kelantan.

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Food Quality	384	4.39	0.602
Service Quality	384	4.14	0.495
Restaurant Ambience (Casual Dining)	384	4.34	1.488
Consumers Perception of Food Safety	384	4.25	0.474

Table 2 displayed the total number of respondents, the mean and standard deviation of the independent and dependent variables, respectively. Food quality had the highest mean among the independent (4.39), followed by service quality (4.14), and restaurant ambiance (4.34; casual dining). Furthermore, 4.25 was the dependent variable's mean.

Table 3: Reliability Analysis

Variable	Number of Item	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient	Strength of Association
Food Quality	5	0.700	Moderate
Service Quality	5	0.730	Good

Restaurant Ambience (Casual Dining)	4	0.651	Moderate
Consumers Perception of Food Safety	4	0.704	Good

Table 3 demonstrates that the food quality Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0.700, indicating a moderate strength of association. The coefficient found for the questions relating to the food quality variable is thus valid. Second, there is a good strength of association between service quality and the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.730. The coefficient found for the questions relating to the service quality variable is valid. Thirdly, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of restaurant ambience (casual dining) is 0.651 which resulted as moderate strength of association. Thus, the coefficient obtained for the questions of the restaurant ambience (casual dining) variable is valid. Finally, four questions were employed in this study to assess the consumer perception of food safety. With a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.704 and a good strength of association, consumers' perceptions of food safety are generally positive. The coefficient found for the consumer perception of food safety variable questions is therefore valid.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variable		R- Value	N	Level
Food Quality	Pearson Correlation	0.416	384	Moderate
Service Quality	Pearson Correlation	0.643	384	Moderate
Restaurant Ambience (Casual Dining)	Pearson Correlation	0.561	384	Moderate

This research aims to identify relationships between the independent variables (food quality, service quality, and restaurant ambience) and the dependent variables (consumers' perception of food safety). Table 4 displays the significant value, number of responses which is 384, and Pearson correlation coefficient. The p-value was 0.000, which was below than the significance

threshold of 0.01. The association between food quality and consumer perceptions of food safety is moderate, with a correlation value of 0.416. The p-value was 0.000, which was below than the significance threshold of 0.01. A moderate association between service quality and consumers' perceptions of food safety was suggested by the correlation value of 0.643. The p-value was 0.000, below the threshold of significance of 0.01. The moderate association between restaurant ambience (casual dining) and consumers perceptions of food safety was shown by the correlation coefficient of 0.561.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

According to the findings, relationship between food quality and consumers perception is moderate (r=0.416, n=384, p<0.01). As a result, food quality plays an important role in consumer perception of food safety at restaurants in Kota Bharu, Kelantan. A study conducted in a restaurant in Spain demonstrates that the people agree that food quality is the most crucial factor in ensuring the safety of food for consumers (Authors, 2012). Second, the finding shows a moderate significant relationship (r=0.643, n=384, p 0.01) between the service quality and consumers perception of food safety in Kota Bharu, Kelantan. In influencing consumer purchase decisions, service quality is a major factor. This is reinforced by a study conducted in an eating area on the island of Mauritius, which found that consumers in Mauritius value this component of service quality more than others, making it the primary factor in determining whether or not they are satisfied with their purchases (Ramseook-Munhurrun, 2012).

The results also show a moderate significant correlation (r=0.561, n=384, p 0.01) between restaurant ambience (casual dining) and consumers' perceptions of food safety. The ambience of a restaurant is crucial to creating a positive first impression and luring diners into impression (Mehrabian et al., 1974). An international study that supports restaurant ambience was conducted in a restaurant in Hong Kong and states that the restaurant's marketing strategies depend not only on the quality and style of the food but also on other attributes like the restaurant ambience created by that restaurant (Chow et al., 2007). This is supported by the fact that the restaurant's marketing strategies depend on these other attributes as well. Based on the results of the data analysis and the preceding case study, it can be said that all the independent variables in Kota Bharu, Kelantan, have a moderate impact on consumers' perceptions of food safety, but the service quality has the greatest impact.

In this study also has its own limitations. The first limitation that had been discovered was the lack of study in this especially in Kota Bharu, Kelantan. Even though there were a lot of restaurants that had been open, it was still hard for this research to be conducted. It was hard for the researcher to collect the data and not all of them were concerned about answering the questionnaire.

In any researcher has their own limitations. Therefore, this study is essential for continuation in future research. The findings reveal that the

independent variable which is service quality was one of the most reasons the respondent goes to the restaurant. Therefore, it is recommended the theoretical for the restauranter to improve the service quality to attract more customers. Furthermore, it is recommended methodologies for future researchers to conduct a systematic review to identify and evaluate the methodological tactics utilized in training programs. Additionally, it is also recommended the practical for the future researchers to develop a safe food handling which is include maintaining personnel cleanliness, preventing cross-contamination, heating the food properly, maintaining food at proper temperature and avoiding consumption of risky food.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to find out about consumers perception of food safety in Kota Bharu, Kelantan and to see if these variables (food quality, service quality and restaurant ambience) can influence the consumers perception. This finding provides extension information to some antecedent predictions that related to consumer perception of food safety in restaurants. Considering this finding, all independent factors have a marginal impact on the dependent variable, with service quality having the largest impact. To secure the long-term viability of the food industry, knowledge is crucial in the decision-making process.

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