



PERCEIVED VALUE, CUSTOMERS' SATISFACTION AND BEHAVIOURAL INTENTIONS TOWARDS *MAMAK* RESTAURANTS IN PENANG

Aziz Y.², Siti Nur'afifah, J.¹, and Eik Koon T.¹

¹*School of Food Science and Technology & ²Centre of Fundamental and Liberal Education
Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, 21030 Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia*

Corresponding author's email: azizyusof2003@umt.edu.my
Field: Foodservice Management

ABSTRACT

Penang is well known for her various ethnic foods and one of the popular ones being the *mamak* dishes served in many *mamak* restaurants located everywhere in Penang. However, due to the increase in operational costs, namely food, overhead and labor, *mamak* restaurant operators are facing increasing challenges in maintaining what they are known for: the ability to provide decent food at affordable prices and provision of efficient service to customers. The objectives of this study were: to study the perceived value, customers satisfaction and behavioral intentions towards *mamak* restaurants; to compare socio-demographic variables of *mamak* restaurants' customers with their behavioral intentions; and to study the relationship between perceived value aspects with Penang-*mamak*-restaurant-customers' satisfactions and behavioral intentions. The instrument used in this study was in the form of self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire contained four parts namely section A (perceived value), section B (customer satisfaction), section C (behavioral intentions) and section D (socio-demographic). A total of 220 respondents who had just dined in at various *mamak* restaurants both in Penang Island as well as the Butterworth were randomly selected. The study results suggested that consumers' perceived value towards performance of food quality out perform the performance of service quality and atmospherics in *mamak* restaurants. In particular, aspects which require improvement are 'food portion', 'food presentation', 'lighting', 'environmental cleanliness', 'music' and 'prompt and quick service'. Significant differences were recorded in the behavioural intention between respondents' gender, race, educational level and monthly income. Consumers were more satisfied with food and service qualities than atmospherics elements in *mamak* restaurants. All aspects (food, service and atmospherics) were able to predict customer satisfaction and behavioural intention in *mamak* restaurant. However the most influencing predictor of customer satisfaction and behavioural intention respectively is customers' perceived value towards food quality and atmospherics factors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Penang is a well known destination as food heaven, among Penangites and tourists as well. According to the New York Times, Penang is ranked 12th within the segment of economical and food categories (Christina, 2009). Based on the national GDP data in 2010, service sector, including foodservice, is the second largest contributor towards Penang economy, only trailing to manufacturing

sector (Penang Monthly, 2013). *Mamak* restaurants have been recognized as one of the fastest and consistently growing sub-segments of casual-restaurant industry in Malaysia. The independantly-run-restaurants which are operated mostly by Indian Muslim community, has witnessed rapid growth in Malaysia (Mohamad & Sharbudin, 2008).





The on-going global economic downturn, coupled with the introduction of minimum wage, have inadvertently resulted in the marked increase in restaurants operational costs. As a result, alike any other restaurant operators, *mamak* restaurateurs are also finding it challenging to maintain their profit margin without either simply raising their selling price or decreasing overall operational costs. The Star (2013) highlights the fact that some *Mamak* restaurant operators try to maintain the price by cutting down the portion size or substitute current ingredients with cheaper alternatives. A recent example for the efforts pertains to the introduction of value-for-money-Menu-Rakyat-1Malaysia which offers popular menu set at reasonable prices with a maximum of RM2 for breakfast and RM4 for lunch (Hamdan, 2011). Another pertinent issue has to do with *mamak* restaurant operators' over dependency on foreign workers. It is a common knowledge that labor shortage problem is especially acute in foodservice sector (West, 2013) due to its labour intensive nature. Due to that factors, *mamak* restaurant workers are subjected to long working hours but with minimal pay thus driving away potential local workers (Business Newspaper and Magazine, 2011). This has left the restaurant operators with little choice but to depend on foreign workers in their operation (Benjamin, 2010), and many of them happen to be from India due to their cultural compatibility with the restaurants' owners as well as the restaurants' theme. However, the foreign workers also have their own set of job-related issues mainly caused by lack of communication skill in the national language of a particular country (Mayan, 2006). These could ultimately compromise on the ability of *mamak* restaurants provide fast and efficient service to their customers.

In addition, the marked increase in overall labour cost due to the implementation of the minimum wage policy could pose a new challenge to *mamak* restaurant operators since the policy also covers non-citizens (Pragalath K., 2012). In the short run, the minimum wage policy may subject business entities to higher costs, especially those that have been highly dependent on low-wage workers (Bank Negara Malaysia's Annual Report, 2012). The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) warns about the imposing of national minimum wage which will

potentially cause more unemployment because independently owned or small restaurants (including *mamak* restaurants) might fail to absorb the additional labor costs (Boo, 2011). Some small restaurants operators and stall operators will transfer the extra cost to customers by simply raising their selling price (Ooi, 2013). Moreover, there have been limited research explaining the relationship between the perceived value, customer satisfaction and behavioral intention especially towards *mamak* restaurants in Penang, despite the state being well known for her high concentration of *mamak* restaurants. Therefore, any research works should be welcome in order to better understand the various challenges faced by *mamak* restaurant operators thus making them aware of their customers perception, satisfaction and willingness to revisit. However, inspite of numerous challenges faced by the restaurants, customers still expect the quality of the paid to be at least maintained, if not improved. This study's objectives were: to study the perceived value, customers satisfaction and behavioral intentions towards *mamak* restaurants; to compare socio-demographic variables of *mamak* restaurants' customers with their behavioral intentions; and to study the relationship between perceived value aspects with Penang-*mamak*-restaurant-customers' satisfactions and behavioral intentions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature wise, perceived value refers to the previous experience of different types of services, together with imaginary experiences, which impacts on current and future value-in-context experiences of customers. It has been found to be a significant predictor of customers' satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Cronin et al., 2000). As consumption activities involve both hedonic and utilitarian outcomes, Babin et al. (1994) describes utilitarian value as 'resulting from some type of conscious pursuit of intended consequences'. While hedonic aspects of the consumption experience, such as the affective response of excitement, is focused more towards increasing customer desire for entertainment. According to Overby and Lee (2006), hedonic value, which is one of the two main dimensions, is defined as "an overall assessment (i.e. judgement) of experiential benefits and sacrifices, such as entertainment and escapism. Instead of task





completion, consumers often shop for an appreciation of the experience (Babin et al, 1994). The hedonic value is further broken down into single primary dimension which is known as perceived atmospheric. Under the atmospheric, lies 9 sub-dimensions namely: interior design and decor, music, mood, layout, facilities, colours, lighting, temperature of dining area and environmental cleanliness. The utilitarian value on the other hand is defined as “an overall assessment (i.e. judgement) of functional benefits and sacrifices (Overby & Lee, 2006). It is related to efficient, task-specific and economical aspects such as ‘value for money’ (Zeithmal, 1988), besides judgments of convenience and time saving (Jarvenpaa & Todd, 1997; Teo, 2001). There are two primary dimensions discussed under the main dimension of utilitarian value namely service quality and food quality. Being the first primary dimension, service quality plays an important role in the success of a restaurant business since customers do not only evaluate the quality of food but also the service encountered during their dining experience. Perceived service quality is seen as another core determinant of customer satisfaction and behavioural intention (Liu & Jang, 2009). The sub-dimensions measured under service quality in *mamak* restaurants are prompt and quick service, knowledgeable employees as well as employee behaviour and appearance. On the other hand, the sub-dimensions measured under food quality in this research are taste, food portion, price fairness, menu variety, healthy food option, food presentation, food freshness, food temperature and food cleanliness.

Satisfaction occurs when customers perceive that they have obtained more benefits compared to their cost (Liu & Jang, 2009). In this research, overall customer satisfaction is measured based on information from all previous experiences by the customers (Jones, Reynolds & Arnold, 2006). The sub-dimensions of customer satisfaction measured in this research are environment satisfaction, food satisfaction and service satisfaction. Environment is the condition that affect the behaviour and development of somebody or something like the physical condition (Oxford Dictionary, 2005). During dining at *mamak* restaurants, elements that can contribute to environment satisfaction include interior designs and decors, pleasant music with moderate

loudness, good lighting, layout and colour. In restaurants, factors such as taste, food portion, price fairness, menu variety, healthy food option, food presentation, food freshness, food temperature and food cleanliness are important factors influencing customers’ satisfaction (Liu & Jang, 2009). Service satisfaction is another core determinant of customer satisfaction (Liu & Jang, 2009) in casual restaurants. Customers dining satisfaction during meal period is influenced by perceived service qualities such as serving food as expected by customer, prompt and quick, knowledgeable employees, employees’ behaviour and appearance of employees.

Previous studies have identified behavioural intentions in the form of recommendation (positive word of mouth communications), customers loyalty, and willingness to pay more. Word of mouth is a consequence of customers’ emotional responses to consumption experiences (Swan & Oliver, 1989; Ha & Jang, 2010). In these research, behavioural intention is measured as a good understanding of the determinants of favourable post-dining behavioural intentions such as communication done by a customer regarding positive traits about the restaurants to friends or family members. Willingness to recommend is derived from perceived value of consumption experiences where customers tend to express their opinion by recommending the same experience to others (Bowen & Shoemaker, 2003). Revisit intention refers to customers who have previous experiences with the restaurants that they perceive as highly valuable in terms of efficient and economical aspects which will be more likely result into revisit intentions (Swinyard, 1993; Ha & Jang, 2010).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The instrument used in this study was in the form of self-administered questionnaire and it was modified from Ha and Jang (2010) as well as Yap (2012). To ensure good reliability of the research instrument, a pilot test was conducted. Cronbach’s coefficient alpha was applied to test the reliability of the questionnaire. Each construct managed to exceed the minimum requirement of 0.7 thus ensuring adequate internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978; Liu & Jang, 2009). However, minor corrections were still conducted to further enhance the questionnaire reliability. The questionnaire contained four parts





namely section A (perceived value), section B (customer satisfaction), section C (behavioral intentions) and section D (socio-demographic). All questions except section D were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale. A total of 220 respondents who had just dined in at various *mamak* restaurants both in Penang Island as well as the Butterworth, were randomly selected. Stratified random sampling was used to initially sample the restaurants located throughout the Penang state. The data obtained were subjected to both descriptive as well as inferential statistics analysis.

4. FINDINGS

4.0 Respondents' backgrounds

A total of 220 respondents participated in this research with 55 percent of Male respondents. Majority of participants were Malays (57.7%), probably due to most *Mamak* restaurants serve *halal* food and they are widely available in Penang. 56 percent respondents aged between 21 to 30 years old whom many are in college or have just entered

society for work. They are targeted to visit *Mamak* restaurants since WI-Fi is available in those premises. A large group of respondents in this survey are professionals (27%), associate professionals and technicians (18%), and students (14%). Obviously, this is because this study was conducted in urban areas where there are a lot of offices and schools which encourage people from all walks of life to frequent *Mamak* restaurants. A large proportion of respondents (78%) who earned RM 3000 and below monthly visited *Mamak* restaurants, possibly indicating foods offered by *Mamak* restaurants are cheaper and much more affordable compared to other restaurant segments. The highest education for most respondents is Diploma (33%). In terms of companion while eating out, respondents were likely dined in with friends (49%) and family members (34%). It explains the fact that *Mamak* restaurants which have long business operation hours are often used more as a place to socialize than a place to dine (Mohamad Ramly et al, 2004).

4.1 Perceived value towards *mamak* restaurants

The descriptive data of 'perceived value' was obtained and shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of customers' perceived value towards *Mamak* restaurant.

Attributes	Mean score ± Standard deviation
Food Quality⁺	4.61 ± 0.76
Menu variety	5.21 ± 1.23
Food temperature	5.17 ± 1.23
Taste	4.99 ± 1.26
Food cleanliness	4.64 ± 1.49
Food freshness	4.64 ± 1.15
Price fairness	4.38 ± 1.44
Healthy food	4.16 ± 1.39
Food portion	3.99 ± 1.40
Food presentation	3.95 ± 1.17
Atmospherics⁺	4.26 ± 0.90
Layout	4.64 ± 1.24
Temperature of dining area	4.62 ± 1.22
Facilities	4.42 ± 1.21
Colors	4.41 ± 1.15
Interior design	4.33 ± 1.46
Mood	4.28 ± 1.29
Lighting	3.95 ± 1.13
Environmental cleanliness	3.85 ± 1.03
Music	3.70 ± 1.57
Service quality⁺	4.28 ± 0.97





Employees behavior	4.41 ± 1.37
Knowledgeable employees	4.10 ± 1.44
Prompt and quick service	3.96 ± 1.25

All scales are measured using 7-point Likert scale; 1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree;
 +Composite scores

Attributes above mean score of 4 signifies a positive perception while lower mean score means a negative perception. Table 1 show that the highest perception score was recorded for food quality ($\bar{M}=4.61$, S.D=0.76) followed by service quality ($\bar{M}=4.28$, S.D=0.97) and atmospherics ($\bar{M}=4.26$, S.D=0.90). It indicates that *Mamak* restaurants have provided good food, better than delivering good service and providing good environment. Majority attributes received positive perception except for 'food portion', 'food presentation', 'lighting', 'environmental cleanliness', 'music' and 'prompt and

quick service'. These aspects therefore need further improvement to improve customers' satisfaction or even customers' retention in *Mamak* restaurants. This finding is in line with Yap (2012) except 'food portion' was rated higher in his study. It is possibly because of different characteristics of study location. Yap (2012) carried out his research in Muar, Johor while the current study was conducted in Penang. Higher and rising costs (in material, labor and overhead) in bigger cities may force the restaurant operators to reduce food cost by decreasing food portion size.

4.2 Customer satisfaction towards *mamak* restaurants

The descriptive data of 'customer satisfaction' was obtained and shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of customers' satisfaction towards *Mamak* restaurant.

Attributes	Mean score ± Standard deviation
Overall Food satisfaction⁺	4.82 ± 1.16
Satisfaction with quality of beverage	4.86 ± 1.21
Satisfaction with quality of food	4.77 ± 1.25
Overall Service satisfaction⁺	4.71 ± 1.16
Satisfaction with quality of service	4.82 ± 1.22
Satisfaction with employees attitude	3.59 ± 1.29
Overall Environment satisfaction⁺	3.96 ± 1.24
Satisfaction with exterior environment	4.04 ± 1.34
Satisfaction with interior environment	3.89 ± 1.41

All scales are measured using 7-point Likert scale; 1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree
 + Composite scores

Based on Table 2, mean scores of all attributes measuring customer satisfaction were above 4 except customer satisfaction towards employees attitude ($\bar{M}=3.59$, S.D=1.29), interior environment ($\bar{M}=3.89$, S.D=1.41) and overall satisfaction towards environment ($\bar{M}=3.96$, S.D=1.24). This finding clearly indicates that positive employees' attitude and pleasant environment contributed to customers' satisfaction. Atmospheric has a powerful impact on people's emotion, attitudes and behavior (Liu and Jang, 2009). Hence, improvement on probably those aspects received lower value perception such as lighting; environmental cleanliness, music and

prompt and quick service are beneficial in increasing customer satisfaction.

4.3 Behavioral intentions towards *mamak* restaurants

The descriptive data of 'behavioural intention' was obtained and shown in Table 3.



Table 3: Descriptive statistics of customers' behavioural intention towards *Mamak* restaurant.

Attributes	Mean score ± Standard deviation
Overall behavioural intention ⁺	4.97 ± 1.33
Revisit intention	5.18 ± 1.40
Positive word-of-mouth	4.87 ± 1.48
Willingness to recommend	4.87 ± 1.45

All scales are measured using 7-point Likert scale; 1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree

⁺ Composite scores

Table 3 indicates that respondents would be willing to revisit ($M=5.18$, $S.D=1.40$), spread positive word-of-mouth ($M=4.87$, $S.D=1.48$) and willing to recommend ($M=4.87$, $S.D=1.45$) *mamak* restaurants to others. Similarly, Yap (2012) reported customers will be likely to revisit rather than spreading word-of-mouth or recommend *mamak* restaurants to their family members, friends and others in the future. Based on the results, *mamak* restaurants in Penang

seem to have bright future due to high revisit intention.

4.4 Comparison of customers' behavioral intention across various socio-demographic factors.

ANOVA was conducted to examine the difference in customers' behavioural intention across various socio-demographic factors and the data is shown in Table 4.

Table 4 : Descriptive statistics of customers' behavioral intention among various socio-demographic factors

Factors	Category	Mean±SD
Gender	Male	4.81±1.34 ^a
	Female	5.18±1.28 ^b
Race	Malay	5.32±1.23 ^a
	Chinese	4.39±1.41 ^b
	Indian	4.64±1.18 ^b
Educational level	UPSR	4.68±1.36 ^a
	SPM	5.04±1.22 ^a
	Sijil Kemahiran	5.05±0.85 ^a
	STPM	4.99±1.23 ^a
	Diploma	5.23±1.30 ^a
	Sarjana Muda	4.87±1.36 ^a
Monthly Income	Sarjana atau lebih tinggi	2.25±0.96 ^b
	<RM1000	4.86±1.44 ^{ab}
	RM1001-RM2000	4.84±1.42 ^{ab}
	RM2001-RM3000	5.30±1.14 ^a
	RM3001-RM4000	4.97±1.34 ^{ab}
	RM4001-RM5000	5.26±0.98 ^{ab}
>RM5000	3.75±1.05 ^b	

All scales are measured using 7 point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Means with different letters in the same column for each factors are significantly different ($p<0.05$).

Differences in score of behavioral intention among seven socio-demographic factors (i.e. gender, race, age, education level, occupation, monthly income and

dining companion) were examined. Only 4 factors (i.e. gender, race, educational level and monthly income) have significant differences and are reported

in this report. Females ($M=5.18$, $S.D=1.28$) had higher mean score compared to males ($M=4.81$, $S.D=1.34$) which means females has higher intention to revisit, recommend and spread positive word-of-mouth towards *Mamak* restaurants in Penang. This may be due to the fact that most *Mamak* restaurants in the study were located in city center thus had close proximity with female workers.

Malay ($M=5.32$, $S.D=1.23$) had significantly higher mean score of behavioral intention compared to other races. It is possibly because most *Mamak* restaurants serve *halal* food at affordable price range in Penang and also provide local Malays preferred food especially curry-based dishes. Respondents who have postgraduate education ($M=2.25$, $S.D=0.96$) had significantly lower mean score of behavioral intention than those who have lower education. Respondents with higher education might have encountered one or series of bad experience regarding food offerings, service delivery or environment in *Mamak* restaurants. As a result, they refuse to return to *Mamak* restaurants. For monthly income, respondents who received an income of more than RM5000 ($M=3.75$, $S.D=1.05$) had

significantly lower rating of behavioral intention compared to those who earn less. It is assumed that this group of customers earns more thus they have more luxury money and are willing to spend at restaurants with higher average check. Thus, their intention to revisit or spreading word-of-mouth on *Mamak* restaurants would be less important. This study generally supports Chen et al (2011) who proposed that consumer's social and economic backgrounds lead to their intention to repurchase but failed to empirically proved that 'gender' and 'age group' as suggested by Harrington et al. (2010) are important market segment in behavioral intention.

4.5 Relationship between perceived value aspects with satisfaction and behavioural intention.

Relationship between all variables was determined using correlation analysis Table 5 depicts r values for the relationship between independent variables perceived value (i.e. food quality, service quality, atmospherics) and two dependent variables i.e. consumer satisfaction and behaviour intention.

Table 5: Correlation coefficients between study variables

	Perceived value towards food quality	Perceived value towards service quality	Perceived value towards atmospherics
Satisfaction	0.43	0.34	0.39
Behaviour intention	0.44	0.36	0.51

All correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Low correlation between all independent variables and customer satisfaction ($r=0.34$ to 0.43) and behavioral intention ($r=0.36$ to 0.51) was depicted in Table 5. Generally, these indicate an increase in perceived value of food quality, service quality and atmospherics will increase customers' satisfaction and behavioral intention. Regression analysis was used to further examine these relationships. Result of regression analysis is exhibited in Table 6.

Table 6: The regression model statistics between independent and dependent variables

Variables	Dependent			
	Customer satisfaction		Behavioural intention	
Independent	β	t	β	t
Perceived value of atmospherics	.195	2.74**	.347	5.15**
Perceived value of food quality	.255	3.46**	.193	2.76**
Perceived value of service quality	.167	2.51**	.158	2.51**
P value	.000		.000	
R²	.24		.32	
F Ratio	22.78		33.26	

**p < 0.05



R² statistic shows 29 percent and 32 percent of the total variance for the estimation of customer satisfaction and behavioural intention respectively, towards *mamak* restaurant is explained in the model. All independent factors may influence satisfaction and behavioural intention. The strongest predictor of satisfaction is customers' perceived value towards food quality ($\beta=.26, t=3.46$). This finding is supported by study of Arora and Singer (2006) and Namkung and Jang (2007).

Perceived value towards atmospherics ($\beta=.35, t=5.15$) predict behavioral intention more than other factors. Jaafar (2012) also found the influence of 'food quality', 'service quality' and 'environmental quality' on behavioral intentions, however focusing more on which quality factors predicting 'intention to return' and 'intention recommend'. As shown in Table 6, 'atmospherics' becomes utmost important in customers' behavioral intention. Jaafar (2012) revealed that environmental quality in restaurants would influence customers' intention to recommend. This suggests that customers are concern of attributes related to environment such as cleanliness, layout, comfort and décor in restaurant. Negative experience relating to these attributes may result in customers spreading negative words to other persons and in turn, this may give bad impression and influence potential customers not to visit the restaurant. Hence, Management of *mamak* restaurant may concentrate on providing quality food and pleasant environment as well as clean restaurant area in order to improve customers' satisfaction and in turn will increase customers' retention.

5. CONCLUSION

In a nut shell, consumers' value perceptions towards performance of food quality out perform the performance of service quality and atmospherics in *mamak* restaurants. In particular, aspects which require improvement are 'food portion', 'food presentation', 'lighting', 'environmental cleanliness', 'music' and 'prompt and quick service'. Significant differences were recorded in the behavioural intention between respondents' gender, race, educational level and monthly income. Consumers were more satisfied with food and service delivery than atmospherics elements in *mamak* restaurants. All

aspects (food, service and atmospherics) predict customer satisfaction and behavioural intention in *mamak* restaurant however the most influencing predictor of customer satisfaction and behavioural intention respectively is customers' perceived value towards food quality and atmospherics factors. Understanding the factors involved in consumer's satisfaction and behavioral intentions in *mamak* restaurants may provide a better insight to the new restaurant proprietors, outlets operators, supervisors and those who share the same interest. This research however has more room for improvement especially study limitation that restricts the generalization of the findings which open directions for future research. This study was conducted to only one state therefore; results cannot be generalized to the whole population in Malaysia. It is suggested that sampling location can be expanded, perhaps on other regions in Malaysia and in more *mamak* restaurants. Sampling size can also be increased in future research in order to strengthen the generalization. It is also recommended that further research may consider other aspects or criteria that will further foster the findings of this study to better comprehend consumer behaviour in *mamak* restaurants.

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