

**A STUDY OF THE DINING EXPERIENCE IN  
UMS CAFETERIA: THE SATISFACTION AND  
DISSATISFACTION DIMENSIONS**

**CHIA YUEH KONG**

**SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS  
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH  
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**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN THE  
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UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH  
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**JUDUL: A STUDY OF THE DINING EXPERIENCE IN UMS CAFETERIA:  
THE SATISFACTION AND DISSATISFACTION DIMENSIONS**

**IJAZAH: SARJANA PENTADBIRAN PERNIAGAAN (MBA)**

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## DECLARATION

The materials in this thesis are original except for quotations, excerpts, summaries and references, which have been duly acknowledged.



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## ABSTRACT

The paper reports the findings of customer dining experience attributes by extending Herzberg's dual factor theory. The objectives of the paper are to identify the dining experience attributes in UMS cafeterias, and subsequently link these attributes to Herzberg's dual factor theory. Data collection is conducted using focus group and Profile Accumulation Technique (PAT), which involved 11 final year undergraduate students in focus group, and 51 undergraduate students in PAT. The findings reveal that dining experience attributes consist of personal experiential aspects and functionality/ performance of service providers. The personal experiential aspects can be termed as intangible elements whilst "functionality of service providers" can be termed as more tangible elements. In addition, this suggests that experience attributes can be interpreted into satisfiers and dissatisfiers in accordance with Herzberg's dual factor theory. Satisfiers are experience attributes associated with personal experiential aspects that derived from the combination of good food with great experience of service quality in a comfortable environment with majestic sea view. Dissatisfiers are experience attributes that related to the performance and availability of facilities by the service providers' performance (instrumental/ functionality aspects). The dissatisfiers are made up of the close type café, poor facilities, untrained staffs, poor maintenance, and low food quality. The Perception Profile of UMS Cafeteria is developed to display both positive and negative service aspects that build up the dining experience of the customers. This study has strong implications to provide the operators guidelines to improve the performance of the cafeterias.



# ABSTRAK

## **KAJIAN MENGENAI PENGALAMAN MENJAMU SELERA DI KAFETERIA UMS: DIMENSI KEPUASHATAN DAN KETIDAKPUASHATAN**

*Kajian ini mengkaji pengalaman para pelanggan yang berjamu selera di kafeteria dengan menghubungkan kaitkan dengan teori Herzberg dua faktor. Tujuan kajian ini adalah menentukan tahap penjamuan selera di kafeteria UMS, and mengiatkan faktor-faktor tersebut kepada teori Herzberg. Data dikumpul dengan kumpulan fokus (focus group) dan "Profile Accumulation Technique (PAT)". Seramai 11 orang responden dari tahun akhir pengajian universiti mengambil bahagian dalam kumpulan fokus and 51 orang lagi menjawab PAT. Keputusan yang diperolehi menggambarkan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi tahap penjamuan selera boleh dikategorikan ke dalam dua kumpulan iaitu pengalaman individu dan, fungsi dan pencapaian servis yang ditawarkan. Faktor penentuan kepuasan pelanggan yang didapati adalah kesedapan makanan, persekitaran yang baik, servis yang membanggakan serta pemandangan laut yang cantik. Manakala, faktor penentuan ketidakpuashatian pula fokus pada bangunan kafe tertutup, kekurangan kemudahan asas, staf tidak terlatih, dan makanan yang tidak berkualiti. Profil Persepsi Kafeteria UMS juga dihasilkan untuk menggambarkan aspek servis positif dan negatif yang menyumbang kepada pengalaman menjamu selera di kafe UMS. Kajian ini juga berfungsi sebagai panduan untuk meningkatkan pencapaian kafeteria.*



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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

Customer satisfaction with service is based on all their encounters and experiences with the organization. The provision of service involving contact and interaction with customers is usually a real time activity (Law *et al.*, 2004). It is a key objective for contemporary organizations and has become one of the most researched areas within marketing and consumer behaviour. In the service experience context, satisfaction is resulted from the experiential nature of consumption and contains both perceptions and experiences (Otto and Ritchie, 1996). The five consecutive phases of post-purchase behaviour in restaurants which discussed by Iglesias and Guillen (2004) is similar with the latter, where it pinpointed the positive impact of both perception and experience on customer satisfaction.

Improving service quality has become one of the most important strategies a service provider can use to differentiate itself from its competitors and thus position itself more effectively in the marketplace (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). Rust and Oliver (1994) suggested that quality is one dimension on which satisfaction is based. Service quality is viewed as an antecedent to satisfaction. Since the customer's interaction with the service provider and the service-producing process have a significant impact on the customer's perception of service quality and subsequently influence customers' satisfaction and marketing concepts. That is why researchers suggested customer satisfaction should be



incorporated into the management's operational decision-making process (Law et al., 2004).

Consumer satisfaction is important in the hospitality context due to the nature of the business that deals with people and provides services to paying guests (Lockwood and Jones, 1984). Favourable and unfavourable responses resulting from satisfaction and dissatisfaction are important areas for improvement in service quality and are pertinent to today's competitive business environment (Chan and Baum, 2005). In an increasingly competitive environment, companies must be customer-oriented. It is thus not surprising that companies spend substantial resources in measuring and managing customer satisfaction.

Dining experience is closely related to the service quality of an eating outlet. The dining experience represents a moment in the everyday life of human beings (Mäkelä, 2000), and individuals will have their own experiences of meals – whether they eat at home or in a restaurant (Warde and Martens, 2000). Meals occur as complex phenomena, and for an understanding of the different facets of meals in practice increased acknowledgement of the complexity of the meal is required (Meiselman, 2000). Bitner and Hubbert (1994) highlighted there appears to be a consensus emerging among researchers that service quality is the customer's overall impression of the relative inferiority/ superiority of the organization and its services. The hospitality industry provides a series of experiences derived from both tangible (physical) and intangible elements within the hospitality environment (Chan and Baum, 2005). Otto and Ritchie (1996) argue that the psychological environment (also called service experience) to be subjective personal reactions and feelings experienced by consumer when they



consume a service. Ross and Iso-Ahola (1991) has found the service experience to be an important aspect of consumer evaluation and satisfaction with services.

As in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), competition amongst food stalls and cafeterias increases, resulted from the implementation of food court style cafeteria to replace the solely owned restaurants in the campus. To improve customer satisfaction, cafeterias' operators must understand the both hygiene and motivator factors which influence customer satisfaction and dining experience; and then try to make improvements in these critical areas so that they can have more satisfied and loyal customers. Thus, improvement in cafeteria quality will be beneficial for the students and staffs whose daily meals are closely related to these food service providers.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

It has been quite a long time, complains and dissatisfaction towards UMS's cafeterias are noted among the students. The poor cleanliness, unfriendly waiters and operators, limited variety of food, smoky dining environment, and unreasonable pricing are the common negative comments heard among the students. However, there is lacking of research that has been carried out to examine this issue. Therefore, this study is basically to be carried out as the pioneer in examine the dining experience and the customer satisfaction in cafeteria UMS. Specifically it focuses on the evaluation of food service in term of quality from students perspectives in cafeteria's quality.



### **1.3 Research Objectives**

Therefore the aims of this paper are to:

1. To examine the customer satisfaction and dining experience in UMS cafeterias.
2. To establish the coherent dimensions of diner satisfaction and dissatisfaction by cross-referencing the findings of Profile Accumulation Technique and the focus group.
3. To highlight the reasons of customers are being satisfied and dissatisfied with the cafeterias in order to explain this issue in more detail.
4. To give input of the cafeterias to improve their cafeterias' service quality and attributes that influence the customer satisfaction and enable the growth of positive competition among food stalls or cafeterias.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The four main research questions are stated as below:

1. How do people perceive eating in UMS cafeterias or restaurants?
2. What are the satisfaction and dissatisfaction dimensions of these cafes?
3. Why are the customers being satisfied or dissatisfied with the cafés?
4. How do the restaurants owners improve the cafeterias' performances?

### **1.5 Significance of Research**

At the end of this research, significant suggestions shall be produced to help the operators to improve their service quality, which directly improve the dining quality among customers. Furthermore, the improvement will further promote a more competitive environment in UMS foodservice industry. The increase of competition is believed to be a catalyst to enable the service providers to serve their customer that up to their expectation in order to meet the customer satisfaction. Most of the cafeterias' operators own restaurants or catering



businesses outside university. Therefore, in a greater view of this improvement, the new culture and practices in UMS cafeteria could be then spread out in the whole Kota Kinabalu City, where, it has positive impact in the whole city foodservice performance.

## **1.6 Organization of Thesis**

This research proposal consists of the first three chapters of the full research paper. The chapters are introduction, literature review, and the research methodology and framework.

Chapter one, introduction, is the first chapter of writing of this paper. It highlights the overview of the research title and elaborates the title in more details. Besides that, the problem statement, research objectives, and significance of research are also included to further draft out the overall picture of this study.

Meanwhile, literature review is the second chapter of this paper. Studies of researchers which are related to the present study are gathered and explained the possibility and appropriateness to carry this research. This secondary source also builds the foundation for the future of present study.

The following chapter is the research methodology and framework of this study. Research framework, research design, sampling design, instruments design and data analysis methods are presented here. It is the heart of the research, where, all procedures for getting the research correctly are highlighted and explained based on valid citations, in order to obtain true and reliable findings.



# CHAPTER TWO

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Service – The Views from Provider and Customer's Perspectives

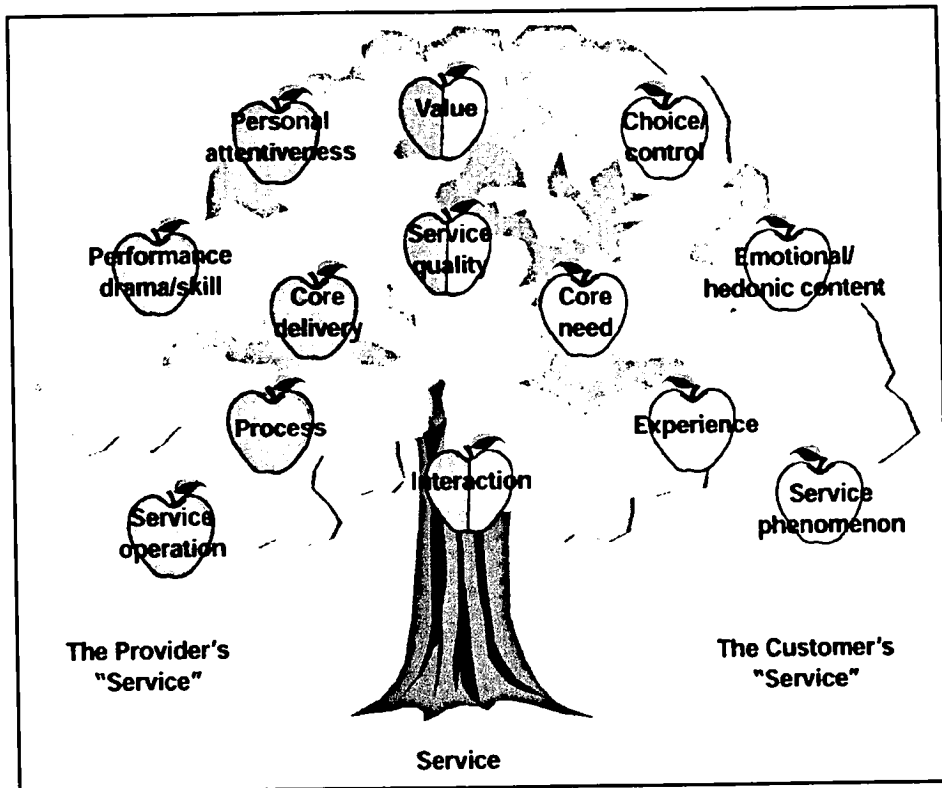
The views of restaurant service are varied from both provider (restaurant operator) and customer (diner) perspectives. The provider sees the service offering in terms of process, related to service operation. The customer, on the other hand, views it as a phenomenon, part of the experience of life. These parallel concepts are shown diagrammatically in Figure 2.1 (Johns, 1999). The figure 2.1 shows the provider's process as related to core delivery and performance and, paralleling this, the customer's experience has elements of core need fulfillment and emotional or hedonic content. Personal attentiveness and the choice/ control balance are similarly paired. Nevertheless, the concepts: service, interaction, service quality and value are common to both the provider and the customer.

#### 2.1.1 Service interactions – the provider's view

There is a discernible tension in service management between delivering the core service, and choreographing the interaction between customers and front-line personnel. As stated by Gummesson (1995), *"Brain is given more attention than heart in service quality management. We have a fanatic belief in structures, systems, information technology and legal technicalities to solve our problems: we are easily blinded by the tangible outer that may hide the real, abstract nature of inner wisdom and consciousness"*.



Figure 2.1: "Tree" relating concepts of "service" in provider and customer perspectives



Source: Nick Johns, 1997

The word "service" commonly carries a connotation of interpersonal attentiveness, although "services" may take a quite different view of their business. For example Evans and Brown (1988) differentiate between "operations-intensive" service delivery systems, which offer a standardised service to a mass market, and "interpersonal-intensive" systems which take a more relational view of their market. The first type includes fast-food operations, automated teller machines and self-service retail and occupies a substantial segment of the services market. The second type corresponds to Gummesson's service paradigm, and is currently the area of much academic discussion and competitive business activity.

Two broad assumptions are made by many authors:

- (1) service personnel are there to deliver core services; and
- (2) the interpersonal interaction they provide is the main contributor to customer satisfaction with the service.

In fact, “service” personnel are often incidental to the core service. For instance it is the pilot who delivers an airline’s core service, not the air hostess, and the chef, not the waiter, is responsible for the quality of the meal. The second of these assumptions is variously justified by the fact that service delivery is “simultaneous” with consumption (Lewis, 1990), incurs a great deal of interpersonal contact (Shostack, 1977) or is subject to professional mystique. For example, Singh (1991, p. 228) notes that *“performance ambiguity, coupled with (the intangibility of services) causes difficulties for consumers in evaluating the service received. For this reason, marketing researchers posit that consumers utilise the quality of the provider-consumer interaction itself as the basis for evaluating the service received”*.

According to many authorities, this places the front-line employee in a position of power relative to the service organization (Nick Johns, 1999). Thus, Gummesson (1995, p. 31): *“service design must differ from goods design in one essential aspect: it must include a certain amount of discretion and it must empower employees to use their best judgment in interaction with customers”*. Furthermore, Singh (1991) had pointed out a problem of unpredictability for the service organization; noted that *“the quality of service delivery rests to a large degree on the way in which the provider- consumer interaction (i.e. service encounter) proceeds and, consequently, it is unpredictable a priori”*.



Nick Johns (1999) stated that “service” carries a connotation of differential status, which many authors assume is inherent in the interaction between front-line staff and customers, perhaps manifested as a form of ritual. Nikolich and Sparks (1995, p. 44) state that “...communication serves to facilitate the task dimension while making the customer feel valued and important ... In general it is assumed the service provider will follow a set, but unspoken, procedure”.

The service interaction is often identified as the “moment of truth” when customers actually experience service (Lewis and Mitchell, 1990). It is also widely referred to as the “service encounter” (Nick Johns, 1999). Beside the denotation “meeting” the word “encounter” has connotations of an adversarial confrontation (Carlzon, 1987) or a chance meeting more akin to everyday experience. It is possible (but apparently never specified or researched) that the connotation differs from service provider to customer. Organisations, and hence front-line staff, may feel that they have to gird up their loins (i.e. adversarial) to face the customer, who in contrast is more likely to feel that a particular service interaction occurred largely by chance.

### **2.1.2 Service experience – the customer’s view**

The intangible, performance-dependent nature of service offerings, together with a “service ethic” (Marshall, 1985) which stresses customer focus, lead to a notion that service exists only in the customer’s mind. As Parasuraman *et al.* (1986) put it; service quality is “*an inference about the superiority of a product or service based on rational assessment of characteristics or attributes, or an affective judgment, an emotional response similar to an attitude*”.

Klaus (1985) refers to service quality as an epiphenomenon, a phenomenon within a phenomenon, emphasizing the phenomenological nature of



service itself. Thus different individual customers experience a given service event in different ways and customers must have very different views from service providers about the nature of service. Various authors (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1986; Surprenant and Solomon, 1987) acknowledge the holistic complexity of service experiences, and Chadee and Mattsson (1996) noted “*we have reason to believe that the entire service encounter is evaluated by the customer and not just the interaction with the service provider*”.

Customers focus their assessment of service upon tangible aspects wherever possible. Lawton (1992) notes that while service organizations employ verbs to denote service, emphasizing process, customers use nouns, indicating the benefits they have received. Horovitz and Cudennec-Poon (1990) note the importance of a chipped wine glass in an assessment of restaurant quality, and Gummesson (1995) reports an incident in which the domestic airline of Sweden received letters of complaint about the peanuts they served on board. These observations are at odds with studies which seek to elicit abstract qualities of service such as reliability or responsiveness directly from customers. It seems likely that tangible aspects act as signifiers of service quality and that intangible service aspects can be accessed through them. Johns and Howard (1998) suggest that tangible aspects of the meal experience may have a similar semiotic role in customers’ assessment of restaurant service.

Customer experience also depends upon the expertise of the service provider (Johns, 1999). It is easier for customers to evaluate the interpersonal skill with which the “dyadic exchange” (Solomon *et al.*, 1985) of a service interaction is conducted. Brown *et al.* (1990) regard the optimum interaction as one which maximizes satisfaction for both customers and front-line staff.



Thus, the balance between choice and perceived control is a key element of the service experience, which depends upon the relative competences of customer and service provider (eg: to make the choice or to exert control). Choice can also heighten a service experience in its own right. For example a buffet counter offering a wide choice may signify abundance, professional care and value to its customers. However, attentive service is also widely associated with value, and this implies a corresponding negotiation of choice and control (Johns, 1999).

## **2.2. Studying Restaurant Service Quality**

Much of the research on restaurant service quality that found applied the SERVQUAL approach (Heung *et al.*, 2000). However, there are numerous studies which applied instruments other than SERVQUAL, included DINESERV and self-amended restaurant surveys.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) developed a conceptual model of service quality that resulted in a measurement scale called SERVQUAL. SERVQUAL is an instrument for measuring the gap between the services that consumers think should be provided and what they think actually has been provided. Consumers rated the importance of more than a hundred aspects of service, which the researchers divided into ten categories, or dimensions. The consumers' ratings defined service quality. The researchers then narrowed the items down to 31 and the dimensions down to five – reliability, assurance, responsiveness, tangibles and empathy.

Bojanic and Rosen, for instance, applied the SERVQUAL instrument to a chain of restaurants in Columbia, South Carolina (Bojanic and Rosen, 1994). The researchers examined the gaps between expectations and actual performance



along the following dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, knowing the customer, and access. Results showed that the restaurants did well in knowing the customer (which had the smallest gap), followed by reliability and assurance. The researchers recommended that restaurants could improve reliability and assurance through total-quality-management programs and other changes in operations areas, as well as by improving internal marketing and training.

A service-related study that did not use the SERVQUAL measure was conducted by George Rice, of GDR Enterprises, who surveyed 1,000 consumers about their service perception of restaurants (Bernstein, 1994). The study found that the most critical service-related factors were an accurate check, orders without errors, authority to fix problems, a warm and friendly attitude, and a well-trained staff. Customer service was the second-most-important factor in selecting a restaurant, after food quality.

Stevens, Knutson, and Patton (1995) proposed an instrument called DINESERV to assess customers' perceptions of a restaurant's quality. DINESERV was adapted and refined from SERVQUAL and LODGSERV (a measuring scale for hotel service quality). In its final form, this instrument contained 29 statements that respondents rated on a seven point Likert-type scale. The researchers surveyed 598 customers from fine-dining, casual-theme, and quick-service restaurants using DINESERV. The study included periodic surveys to determine changes in normative expectations and service quality delivered. The scale also helped restaurateurs to measure, assess, and manage the quality of their guest services. Findings showed that, of the SERVQUAL dimensions, reliability ranked first with all customers, followed by tangibles, assurance, responsiveness, and empathy.



Lee and Hing (1995) assessed the usefulness and applicability of the SERVQUAL instrument to the restaurant sector by measuring, comparing, and contrasting patrons' perceived service quality at a French and a Chinese restaurant in Australia. Results revealed that the patrons' highest expectations of service quality involved assurance (e.g., orders without errors, well-trained staff and reliability (e.g., accurate check, staff are dependable in fixing problems), while their lowest expectations related to tangibles, such as visually attractive dining areas, modern dining equipment, and employees who are well-dressed.

Johns and Tyas (1996) applied the SERVQUAL instrument to assess the performance of a contract-catering service in relation to its competitors. They analyzed findings from nine study sites by mean item score, discriminate and factor analysis, and multi-dimensional scaling. Results showed that the main differentiators of one contract caterer from its competitors were employees' behavior, efficiency, appearance, and interaction. Food quality, on the other hand, was not a significant differentiator.

Heung, Wong and Qu (2000) applied the SERVQUAL methodology to four restaurant types at Hong Kong International Airport in an effort to explore travelers' expectations and perceptions of those restaurants' service quality. The study was based on an extended model of the nature and determinants of customer expectations of service 19; wanted to measure the two levels of travelers' expectations (desired and adequate) and their perceptions of the service they received at one of the four restaurant types. They adapted the survey instrument from the 29-item DINESERV scale, modifying it to suit the local situation. The researchers added four items to the list. To address one of the criticisms of the SERVQUAL methodology, the restaurant-service attributes were arranged randomly on the questionnaire. Results showed all four restaurants





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