



# The effects of restaurant attributes on customers' emotions and loyalty

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## Abstract

The fast-food industry has rapidly grown through the years, resulting in the development of multiple loyalties toward various restaurants of the customers. The study aimed to determine the significant effects of restaurant attributes on customers' emotions and loyalty, and significant effects of customers' emotions on loyalty, among top five (5) fast-food restaurants in the Philippines (in terms of foodservice value retail selling price). Restaurant attributes measured in the study were food quality, food safety, service quality, and store atmosphere. A total of five hundred and twenty-one ( $n = 521$ ) valid questionnaires were collected from cities of National Capital Region (NCR), where majority of the top five (5) fast food restaurant outlets are located. Partial least squares structural equation model (PLS-SEM) was employed to investigate the relationship among the constructs, and to test the hypotheses of the study. Results of PLS-SEM revealed that food quality ( $\beta = 0.145$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), food safety ( $\beta = 0.125$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and store atmosphere ( $\beta = 0.471$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) have significant effects on customers' positive emotions, while only service quality ( $\beta = -0.119$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and store atmosphere ( $\beta = 0.141$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) have significant effects on customers' negative emotions. Food quality ( $\beta = 0.202$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), food safety ( $\beta = 0.083$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), service quality ( $\beta = 0.139$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), positive emotions ( $\beta = 0.370$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and negative emotions ( $\beta = -0.223$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) have direct significant effects on the loyalty of the customers.

**Keywords:** Fast food, restaurant attributes, restaurant loyalty, food quality, store ambience.

## Introduction

The restaurant industry is on a continuous upward trend in terms of sales since the 1980s (Peng, Chen & Hung, 2017). United States (US) has over eight (8) million outlets, where several competing restaurants are located in every shopping area or gathering place. These restaurants are composed of small family owned businesses, and large global restaurant chains operating thousands of outlets worldwide (Ha & Jang, 2010; Naderi, Paswan & Guzman, 2018). Due to this rapid development in the restaurant industry, customers have become more demanding, and have developed multiple loyalties toward various restaurants (Ha & Jang, 2010).

Recent studies have discussed several factors that affect and develop customer loyalty among service sectors. According to Wu and Liang (2009), when customers become contented with service and its related goods, re-purchase intention is more likely to develop within the customers, thus resulting in increased company profits. Moreover, the study of Rhee, Yang, and Kim (2016) mention the combined effects of several atmospheric variables, including



employee appearance as an aspect influencing customers' emotions, and post-dining behavioral intentions in upscale restaurants. Furthermore, Liu and Jang (2009) measured the effects of positive and negative emotions on customers' behavioral intentions among Chinese restaurants. Current hospitality and management studies give attention to the relationship between customers' emotions, restaurant attributes, and loyalty. Although, various researchers have already examined the relationship between them; still, the results cannot be generalized to all types of restaurants everywhere. For instance, Jung, Sydnor, Lee, and Almanza (2015) selected a casual-dining restaurant as an experiment setting; Tsaur, Luoh, and Syue (2015) examined in full-service restaurants; and Namin (2017) investigated in fast-food restaurants, but only limited to the US market, while Nicolaidis (2012) only investigated some restaurants in a casino-complex in South Africa.

## **Fast Food Restaurants**

The foodservice industry in the Philippines has continued to grow, especially the fast-food category, which is the largest group within consumer foodservice in 2017 (Euromonitor International, 2018). Initiatives related to convenience are constantly being developed throughout the industry, such as the availability of online ordering among well-known brands and cashless payments to some McDonald's outlet (Euromonitor International, 2018). Today, customers demand convenience (Euromonitor International, 2018), and at the same time desire for an excellent restaurant experience in general (Liu & Jang, 2009). This shows how diverse the customers' needs are, and how significant for the fast-food players to understand the role of customer loyalty to meet their organizational goals. It has been a challenge for fast food players to develop loyalty among their customers who are being spoiled continuously by a variety of restaurant options (Ha & Jang, 2010), given that these customers are low-switching cost buyers (Sahagun & Vasquez-Parraga, 2014).

## **Literature Review**

### **Food Quality**

Many studies have discussed the importance of food quality within the foodservice industry, especially among restaurants. For instance, the most significant restaurant attribute in a casual restaurant setting and in any burger restaurant type is food quality (Jung et al., 2015; Rhee et al., 2016). According to the study of Namin (2017), satisfaction with the quality of food is considered an important factor that leads to improved behavioral intentions of the customers. The effects of food quality to behavioral intentions were explored in the studies of Tsaur et al. (2015) and Ha and Jang (2010), who both proved that food quality is the most critical factor influencing the positive behavioral intentions of the consumers. The positive behavioral intentions include the decision to repurchase, spreading positive word of mouth, and recommending to others (Tsaur et al., 2015).

The relationship of food quality on customers' emotions has been examined in various studies. Some of these researches result in no provable significant effects of food quality on customers' positive emotions (Tsaur et al., 2015; Jang & Namkung, 2009). On the contrary, Peng et al. (2017), has confirmed a significant relationship between food quality and positive emotions. The experimental settings and scope of the studies may have caused the differences in the results.

### **Food Safety**

Safe food according to Behrens, Vedovato, Mancuso and Bastos (2015) is fresh, free from pesticides, and properly handled to avoid microbiological contamination. Food safety is an important restaurant attribute which when neglected by a restaurant, may result in foodborne illness suffered by the consumers. This attribute may be hard for the consumers to evaluate



since the safeness of the food can only be analyzed with its effects after consumption. The Chinese consumers based their food safety evaluation on sensory perception, such as evaluation of a restaurant's environment (mechanic clues) or assessment of a server's appearance (humanistic clues) (Bai, Wang, Yang & Gong, 2018).

According to the study of Lee, Niode, Simonne, and Bruhn (2012), food safety is an underlying factor that has a significant effect on customers' selection and continued patronage in a restaurant. Barber, Goodman and Goh (2011) concluded that food safety indicators like cleanliness of a restaurant's interior, restrooms, and staff have significant effects on consumers' intention for repeat patronage. As confirmed in the same study, there is also a significant relationship between the willingness of the customers not to return when cleanliness in a restaurant is not present, such as having dirty restrooms and dirty service wares (Barber et al., 2011). Moreover, the study of Liu and Lee (2018) has given focus on the importance of food safety measure practices, by recognizing the association between cleanliness clues, overall satisfaction, and revisit intention. It was founded that cleanliness clues have direct influence on the customers' overall satisfaction hence, significantly affects the customers' revisit intention.

### **Service Quality**

According to Kanyan, Ngana, and Voon (2016), the service sector includes the economic activities that normally create intangible products, such as food and lodging, transportation, and repairs and maintenance. The importance of service quality and its effects on emotions, behavioral intentions, and loyalty of the customers, are frequently discussed in various studies under different contexts. Some studies have determined service quality as an important factor for restaurant choice. According to Jung et al. (2015), service quality is an essential aspect being considered by the customers when selecting a casual dining restaurant. But when compared to food quality, service quality stands to be the weaker attribute so that customers may not choose a restaurant where food quality is poor, despite high service quality (Jung et al., 2015). Service quality plays a significant role in increasing the customers' satisfaction in a luxury hotel restaurant and even among ethnic restaurants (Han & Hyun, 2017; Ha & Jang, 2010).

Other than the association of service quality with customer satisfaction, it was concluded that service quality has no positive influence on customers' loyalty (Ha & Jang, 2010), and does not have a driving force of customers' willingness to pay in a negative restaurant service encounter (Sukhu, Bilgihan & Seo, 2017). More favorable perception, attitudes, and customer equity can be developed among the customers when higher level of service quality is to be provided to them (Ponnam & Balaji, 2014; Nicolaidis, 2012; Hyun, 2009; Chua, Lee, Goh, Han, 2015).

### **Store Atmosphere**

The store atmosphere may affect the customer's behavior towards the restaurant. It includes the store's interior design, smell, background music, lighting, and temperature (Ha & Jang, 2010). The customers' general experience in fast food restaurants can be improved by managing different factors such as the interior design, pleasant décor, pleasant music, subdued lighting, and appealing table settings (Shamah, Moretti, Raggiotto & Francesco, 2018). The store atmosphere has a significant effect on customers' satisfaction and behavioral intentions according to Heung and Gu (2012). These behavioral intentions include intention to return to the restaurant, intention to spread positive word of mouth, and willingness to pay more in a restaurant setting.



Additionally, store atmosphere has significant effects on both the positive and negative emotions of the customers (Liu & Jang, 2009). The satisfaction of the customers in Asian restaurants can be heightened by improving positive emotions of the customers and can be decreased with customers' negative emotions. Positive emotions lead to increased satisfaction of the customers, and negative emotions lead to decreased satisfaction of the customers in Asian restaurants (Song & Qu, 2017). Hence, it is important to generate positive emotions from customers. On the contrary, Peng et al. (2017) concluded in his study, that positive emotions of the customers were not affected by atmospherics (e.g., lighting, décor, and design), though it affects the negative emotions.

### **Studies on Loyalty**

According to Jung and Yoon (2012), customer loyalty is the attachment of a consumer toward a good, service, brand or organization which is preferred repeatedly. Satisfying the customers in a family restaurant may result in loyalty since customer satisfaction positively influences customer loyalty (Jung & Yoon, 2012; Nicolaidis, 2008, 2012; Ryu & Han, 2010). Customer satisfaction is an essential variable that could strengthen loyalty and decrease switching intent (Jung & Yoon, 2012). According to the study of Namkung, Jang, and Choi (2010), customers who are highly loyal, have more tolerance for service failures.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Participants of the Study**

The respondents of the study came from the top five (5) fast-food restaurants in the Philippines in terms of foodservice value retail selling price (Table 1), located in top five (5) cities of NCR, where majority of top five (5) fast food restaurant outlets are located. A total of five hundred eleven (n = 511) respondents were accepted and utilized out of five hundred and thirty-two (532) distributed research questionnaires. Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents are Young Adults ages 18 to 29 years old (74.5%), where more than half of them are female (59%), with 86.8% of the total were classified as college degree holders, and have sources of finances amounting to Php 21,000 to Php 40,999 a month.

#### **Research Instrument**

The survey questionnaire was adopted and modified based on the studies of Namin (2017), Peng et al. (2017), Liu and Lee (2018), and Bai et al. (2018). Permission to use the questionnaires was sought from the authors via electronic email. The modified questionnaire was subjected to Cronbach's alpha mean to measure and validate its scale reliability, through pre-testing among thirty-seven (37) fast-food customers. It yielded a reliability rate of 0.84, meaning that the internal consistency of the questionnaire is high. The research questionnaire is divided into five (5) parts. The first part of the survey questionnaire covers the demographic characteristics of the respondents of the study. The second part identifies the most important fast food restaurant attribute being considered by the consumers, while parts three to five consist of questions pertaining to customers' agreement evaluation on the variables considered in the study. All of which were measured using a four-point Likert scale, from one (1) strongly disagree to four (4) strongly agree.

#### **Data Gathering Procedure**

The researcher employed a two-stage sampling method by utilizing both purposive sampling and stratified random sampling. The purposive sampling method was used to select respondents given a set of criteria. The first criterion was that customers must be currently dining inside the top five (5) fast-food restaurants. This method was based on King et al.'s (2010) suggestion, that during or after exposure to a stimulus is the most appropriate time to assess emotions. Furthermore, customers must be eating in a freestanding, mall, and in line



store asset types only. Food court restaurants were not be counted because of several brands sharing a common dining area. Lastly, only 18 years old and above with sources of finances were considered in the study. The number of respondents per brand and per location was determined using stratified random sampling.

**Table 1. Top Five (5) Fast Food Restaurants in the Philippines**

Brand Name	Foodservice Value RSP (in PHP million)
Jollibee	81,053.60
McDonald's	42,679.40
Chowking	17,472.50
Mang Inasal	16,900.30
KFC	9,966.40

**Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

	Traits	%
Gender	Male	59.3
	Female	40.7
Marital Status	Married	22.1
	Unmarried	77.9
Age	18 - 29 Young Adults	74.5
	30 - 44 Middle Youth	20.3
	45 - 59 Mid-Lifers	5.2
Monthly Income	20,999 and below	26.1
	21,000 - 40,999	47.0
	41,000 - 60,999	14.6
	61,000 to 80,999	4.8
	81,000 and above	7.5
Education	High school degree	2.7
	Postgraduate degree or above	10.6
	University of college degree	86.8

**Table 3. Parameter Estimates of the Model**

Hypotheses	Path Coefficients ( $\beta$ )	SE	p-value	f2
Ha1: Food Q -> Positive E	0.145	0.043	0.000	0.066
Ha2: Food Q -> Negative	-0.066	0.043	0.064	0.010
Ha3: Food S -> Positive E	0.125	0.043	0.002	0.065
Ha4: Food S -> Negative E	-0.007	0.043	0.439	0.001
Ha5: Service Q -> Positive E	0.033	0.043	0.228	0.015
Ha6: Service Q -> Negative E	-0.119	0.044	0.003	0.023
Ha7: Store A -> Positive E	0.471	0.044	0.000	0.297
Ha8: Store A -> Negative E	0.141	0.041	0.000	0.028
Ha9: Food Q -> Loyalty	0.202	0.044	0.000	0.100
Ha10: Food S -> Loyalty	0.083	0.043	0.028	0.035
Ha11: Service Q -> Loyalty	0.139	0.043	0.000	0.065

Ha12: Store A -> Loyalty	-0.051	0.044	0.120	0.025
Ha13: Positive E -> Loyalty	0.370	0.043	0.000	0.221
Ha14: Negative E -> Loyalty	-0.223	0.042	0.000	0.104

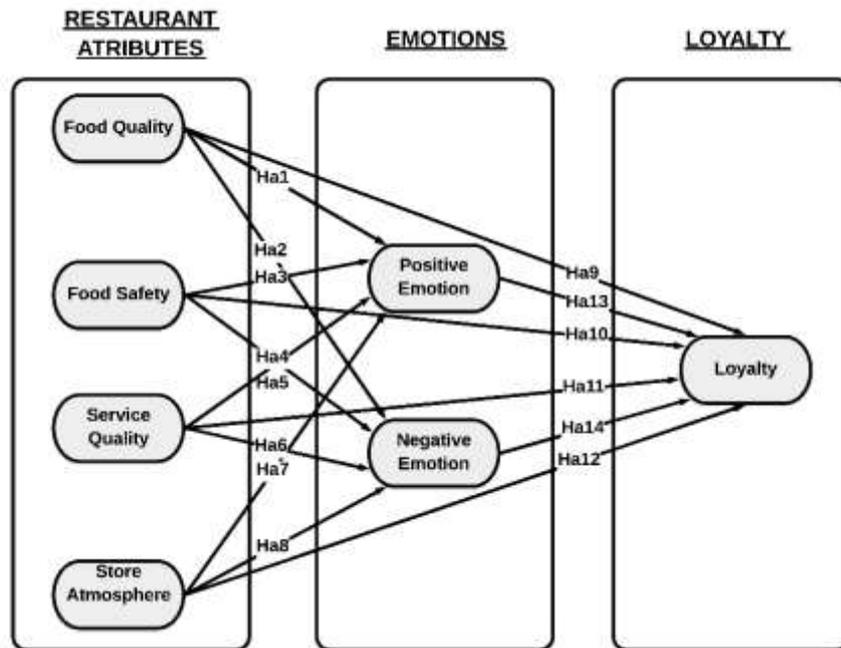


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

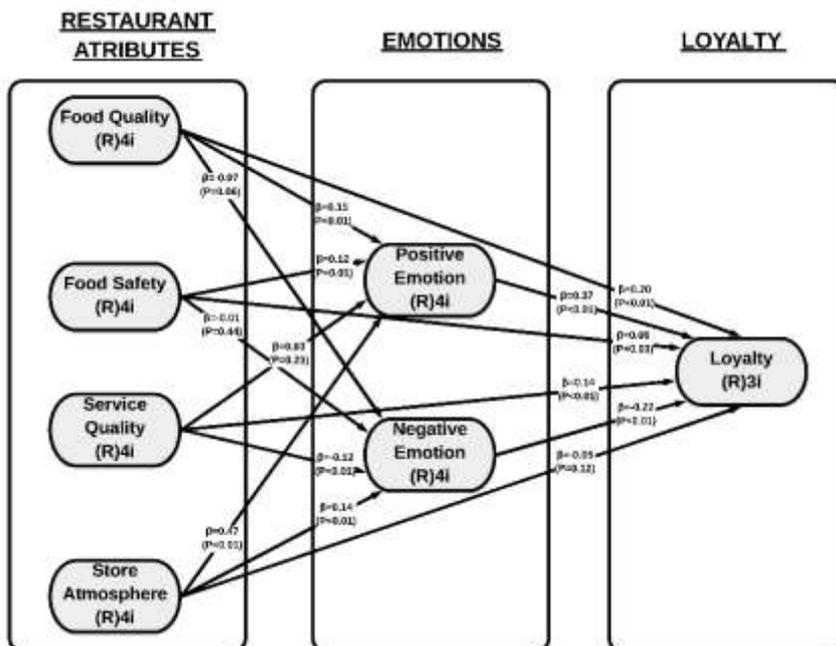


Figure 2. Hypothesized Model Test Results

## Results

Figure 2 presents the research model of the study. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM) was utilized in the study to test the hypotheses. Food quality ( $\beta = 0.145$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $f^2 = 0.066$ ), food safety ( $\beta = 0.125$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ,  $f^2 = 0.065$ ), and store atmosphere ( $\beta = 0.471$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $f^2 = 0.297$ ) were proven to have a significant effects on customers' positive emotions, thus Ha1, Ha3, and Ha7 were accepted. Furthermore, restaurant attributes with significant effects on negative emotions are service quality ( $\beta = -0.119$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ,  $f^2 = 0.023$ ) and store atmosphere ( $\beta = 0.141$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $f^2 = 0.028$ ) hence, the present study accepts Ha6 and Ha8. It can be noted that all restaurant attributes have significant effects on loyalty with the exception of store atmosphere ( $\beta = -0.051$ ,  $p = 0.120$ ,  $f^2 = 0.025$ ). Moreover both hypotheses attributed to the significant effects of positive ( $\beta = 0.370$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $f^2 = 0.221$ ) and negative emotions ( $\beta = -0.223$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $f^2 = 0.104$ ) on loyalty were verified to have significant relationship, and therefore Ha13 and Ha14 were both accepted. A path coefficient with negative (-) value means that the level of the dependent variable decreases, as the level of the independent variable increases. An example of this is the significant relationship of service quality on negative emotions; negative emotions decreases as the quality of service were being heightened.

## Discussion

The present study examined the significant effects of restaurant attributes on customers' emotions and loyalty, and the significant effects of emotions on loyalty, among top five fast-food restaurants in the Philippines. This research utilized the discrete emotion approach or the positive and negative emotion scheme based on Izard's (1997) categorization of emotions, as cited in the study of Jang and Namkung (2009).

All restaurant attributes except for service quality have significant effects on customers' positive emotions. Moreover, service quality and store atmosphere have significant effects on customers' negative emotions (Nicolaidis, 2008; 2012). It means that to heighten the positive emotions of the customers, food quality, food safety, and store atmosphere among fast-food restaurants in the Philippines must be improved. Whereas to inhibit the negative emotions of the customers, service quality and store atmosphere must be enhanced. Though service quality has no significant effects on customers' positive emotions, neglecting this attribute may result to increase negative emotions of the customers.

Furthermore, all restaurant attributes except for store atmosphere have direct significant effects on loyalty, meaning that to improve the loyalty of the customers, food quality, food safety, and service quality among fast-food restaurants in the Philippines must be focused on by fast-food players. The store atmosphere was considered not significant to loyalty of the customers. It does not necessarily mean that restaurant owners may already ignore this attribute since it has the largest effect size at  $f^2 = 0.297$  (Cohen, 1988) on customers' positive emotions, which may, later on, result in loyalty intentions of the customers. It means that to improve the loyalty of the customers, fast food players must develop more positive emotions and less negative emotions on their customers.

## Recommendations and Directions for Future Research

In the present study, the positive and negative emotions of the customers have the largest effect size (at  $f^2 = 0.221$  and  $f^2 = 0.104$  respectively) as compared to other restaurant attributes, directly linked on loyalty (Cohen, 1988). Therefore, fast food restaurant owners in the Philippines can enhance or maintain the loyalty of their customers by managing the emotions of their customers thus driving for more positive emotions and less negative emotions which are not good for sustainability.



The study suggests that fast food restaurant owners must pay attention to developing the quality of their products, such as by making them fresh and tasty, with good presentation and good aroma. While all fast food restaurants are known to serve foods that are prepared quickly, the customers started looking beyond just the speed of service. The customers nowadays demand a good overall restaurant experience (Mills, 2000 cited by Liu & Jang, 2009, Nicolaides, 2012), considering the quality of food served to them as well. Managers must ensure that the food they serve is not just tasty and presentable, but also safe for consumption. Customers can become sensitive to pests especially when linked to food. That is why keeping good sanitation practices among fast-food restaurants can retain loyal customers. Furthermore, store atmosphere must be given focus by restaurant owners because it has significant effects on both positive and negative emotions of the customers (Nicolaides, 2012). It does not have a direct relationship with loyalty intentions of the customers, but has the largest effect size in generating positive emotions leading to favorable loyalty intentions of the customers.

Future researches can investigate other factors that must be improved, to heighten positive emotions, and inhibit negative emotions of the customers among fast-food restaurants in the Philippines. Future studies may consider other variables such as brand image of the restaurant (Han, Nguyen, Song, Chua, Lim & Kim, 2018). The present study investigates the top five fast-food restaurants in the country which follows that these brands, already have established a good brand image for their customers. This may have an effect on the emotions of the customers which were not considered in the present study. Furthermore, positive and negative emotions of the customers may be triggered by other factors that were not considered in the study. Future studies may also try to explore product value (Rhee et al., 2016), menu variety, food trends, social media reviews, and commercial advertisements as variables for investigation. Expanding the scope of the study by increasing the number of participants will also create a more comprehensive quantitative data. In this way, the results of future studies will be more validated and verified. Lastly, future researches may cover larger scope of sites by considering all cities of the National Capital Region or even include provincial areas in the study.

## Conclusion

In the present study, positive emotions and negative emotions have significant effects on the loyalty of the customers. Actually, the effect size of emotions on loyalty is larger when compared to the effect size of any of the restaurant attributes directed on loyalty. On the other hand, service quality is not significant to positive emotions, but lacking in this aspect can lead to an unfavourable effect on customers' loyalty. It was also found that food quality, food safety, and store atmosphere have significant effects on customers' positive emotions. It means that these attributes can be enhanced to increase the positive emotions of fast-food customers, and may lead later on to loyalty intentions of the customers. Also, store atmosphere has a non-significant effect on loyalty but has the largest effect size on the positive emotions of the customers, which can also lead to more loyal customers.

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