

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study has been conducted at three Malay restaurants in Malaysia to investigate how restaurant customers experienced the factors that influence satisfaction in order to propose a conceptual framework of the customer satisfaction dining experience. The participants involved in the study were mainly restaurant customers to three Malay restaurants. Through the qualitative research method, comprising inductive analysis and multiple data collection techniques (i.e. in-depth interviews, observations and document) with a broad range of customers and insiders (restaurant manager and staff of restaurant front house department), a conceptual framework of the customer satisfaction dining experience was generated. The focus of discussion (Chapter 6) highlights the process and practices of customer dining experience, which in turns provides implications for restaurant management.

This chapter contains of the academic context, overview of the study and outline of the thesis.

1.2 THE ACADEMIC CONTEXT

The early 1970s saw the emergence of customer satisfaction as a legitimate field of inquiry (Barsky, 1992) and the volume of consumer satisfaction research had increased significantly during the previous four decades (Pettijohn *et al.*, 1997). The issue of customer satisfaction has received great attention in consumer behaviour studies (Tam, 2000) and is one of the most valuable assets of a company (Gundersen *et al.*, 1996). With regard to the food service industry, success in the industry depends on the delivery of superior quality, as well as the value and satisfaction of customers

(Oh, 2000). Most restaurateurs have realised the effect of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty for long-term business survival (Cho and Park, 2001), and have chosen to improve customer satisfaction in an attempt to achieve business goals (Sundaram *et al.*, 1997).

Although there has been some debate about satisfaction and loyalty, where the satisfaction does not always result in repeat customers, a wide variety of studies have been done to support the link between the impacts of customer satisfaction on behavioural intentions and these have been discussed in the academic literature (Patterson and Speng, 1997). A customer being satisfied usually leads to an intention to return (Susskind, 2001). Increasing the percentage of customers who plan to return from 79% to 81% will double a company's profit (Naumann, 1995). A customer being satisfied also increases customer loyalty (Tam, 2000). Pong and Yee (2001) have found that it costs three to five times as much to attract a new customer as it does to retain the existing customers. Customer loyalty and the retention of business are ways of safeguarding long-term business survival (Donovan and Smaler, 1994) because they will encourage repeat purchase (Wan Halim and Hamed, 2005).

Customer satisfaction involves attitudinal, behavioural and emotional commitment to the restaurant. Thus, the impact of satisfied customers goes beyond repeat purchasing and loyalty. They occasionally express their satisfaction to others through positive behaviour, especially positive, word-of-mouth recommendation (Wan Halim and Hamed, 2005). A study conducted by Baloglu (2002) on the behaviour of loyal customers visiting a casino found loyal customers not only spend more in restaurants, coffee shops and gift shops, but also make positive statements, recommendations and referrals, i.e. word-of-mouth promotion that is a critical and powerful part of any marketing strategy (Kessler, 1996), particularly for new businesses and independent restaurants with limited marketing budgets (Susskind, 2002).

Most of the available global research on customer satisfaction with restaurants focuses more on the factors of dining satisfaction from the customers' side, and the impact of customer satisfaction to the restaurant. Those studies focused on nutrition and weight control in dining (Glanz *et al.*, 1998), determinants of dining satisfaction and

return patronage (Kivela *et al.*, 1999), fine cuisine and good company (Andersson & Mossberg, 2004), word-of-mouth (Barry *et al.*, 2005), high satisfaction (Namkung & Jang, 2008), and ultra-fine dining (Basil & Basil, 2009). By contrast, utilitarian aspects have been widely investigated using certain mechanistic scales, such as SERVQUAL or DINESERV, over-focusing on just service quality. In total, these studies seek to clarify a particular aspect of the dining experience, which contributes to the literature in the field. There is a limited number of studies into the processes involved in dining experience despite the fact that dining is one of the most important expenditure of daily life. The latest by Distefano (2007) claimed the dining experience consumption includes all aspects from the moment customers first make contact with the dining room's to the moment they exit after paying their bill.

Also, there is lack of consensus amongst the research community on how best to manage the influence of satisfaction within restaurant. Yuksel and Yuksel (2002) agreed that the development of a conceptual model that helps restaurateurs to understand what customers need in terms of a process of satisfactory dining experience and how the factors influencing satisfaction can be better managed to improve satisfaction has not yet received enough attention.

The lack of research into the management of customer dining experience process means the nature of customers and their subjective interactions with the restaurant are not fully understood. The research into the on-site experience will provide a deeper understanding of the interaction between customers and factors influencing satisfaction and the management of those satisfaction influences in terms of how the restaurateurs run their businesses that contribute to the process of customer satisfaction dining experience. These are amongst the research areas that are left without attention and this study will explore. This knowledge could, in turn, lead to the development and application of sustainable restaurant management practices at the restaurants. Consequently, this study seeks to understand customers' satisfaction dining experience in their own terms.

1.3 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.3.1 Research Questions

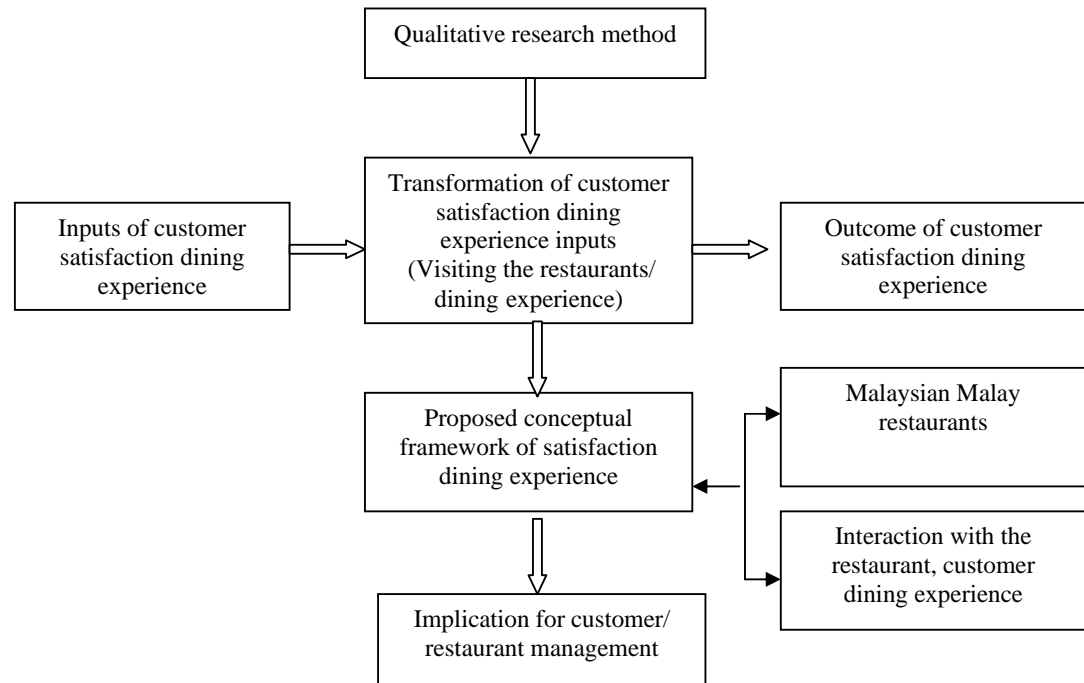
The research questions of the study were:

- a) What are the factors that influence dining experience satisfaction in Malaysian Malay restaurants and how do these factors affect the experience and satisfaction of customers?
- b) How are the factors and processes that influence customer dining experience satisfaction in Malaysian Malay restaurants are best managed?
- c) What is the conceptual framework for customer dining experience satisfaction in Malaysian Malay restaurants?

1.3.2 The Study Content

To answer these research questions this study focused mainly on the factors influencing customer satisfaction with the dining experience in three Malay restaurants. A qualitative research method was adopted for this study to provide in-depth data. An overview of the study as shown in Figure 1.1

Figure 1.1: Overview of Study



1.3.3 Research Locations

The restaurants that were involved in this study are Malay restaurants located in the capital city of Johor state, Johor Baharu. These restaurants have *Halal* Certification in selling *Halal* products and services under the mid-market family restaurants of the type 1 Food Store Category and adopt Malay race concept in terms of menu, service and ambience (Malay décoration and background music). These criteria are quite similar to criteria in other Malay family restaurants of the world. The criteria are explained in Chapter 2: The explanations of the reasons for the choice of these restaurants are set out below.

In relation to the contribution to the understanding of restaurants in Malaysia, the three Malay restaurants were chosen because they are the most established and well known Malay restaurants in Johor Bahru city centre that adopting Malay traditional

concept, patronized by a lot of customers that signed satisfaction to the researcher and willing to participate in the study.

In relation to the wider transferability of the results, and the contribution to our knowledge of customer satisfaction with the dining experience in general, the three Malay family restaurants were chosen because they are owned and managed by Malays that offered factors that might influence dining satisfaction such as big number of restaurant capacity, various type of service (self service, table service and take away) and food quality particularly menu variety.

a) SBR

SBR is situated at a corner of shop lot in Larkin Perdana. It opens six days a week at 7.00 o'clock in the morning until 4.00 o'clock in the afternoon. The SBR is owned and managed by a Malay family. It can occupy up to 200 customers and adopted modern Malay concept for interior design and service style while Malay traditional concept for staff uniform and food/ drink. The SBR offers various type of noodle, Malay local *kuih*, *Roti Jala*, *Roti Canai* and *Nasi Lemak* for breakfast and more than 60 Malay traditional dishes for buffet *Nasi Campur* during lunch hour together with restaurant specialty menus for desert and fried rice. It has three service areas: indoor none air-conditioned, indoor air-conditioned and outdoor open air.

b) SSR

SSR is the biggest Malay restaurant in Johor Baharu can occupy 470 customers at once and the only Malay restaurant in Johor Baharu that opens 24-hours for seven day a week. It is located at Danga Bay, has four branches and offering various type of family menu range from Malay, Chinese, Indian, western to continental. Malay buffet *Nasi Campur* menu is available for lunch, a la carte menu for breakfast and dinner while table d'hote menu is only for dinner. The SSR adopts modern Malay concept for interior design, service style, staff uniform and menu.

c) AWR

AWR is located at Jalan Mahmodiah, Johor Baharu. The restaurant applies combination of traditional and modern concepts for interior design and menu while Malay traditional concept for private dining room, eating style, live band and staff uniform. It opens at

11.00 o'clock in the morning and close late at night about 3.00 o'clock in the morning of the following day and offering meals for lunch, tea break and dinner. Menus available are variety that grouped according Malay, Chinese, Indian, western and continental.

1.3.4 The Potential Contributions of the Study

1.3.4.1 The Malaysian Context

The importance of restaurant service in Malaysia is associated with the increase in dining out customers due to improvement in household incomes (improvement in education standards) and increment of daily working hours. These changes make busy Malaysian lifestyles and encourage them to eat out. As a result, there is demand for restaurant services. In addition, there is the importance of restaurant services in Johor Baharu, the positive impact of customer satisfaction on restaurant services. Since there were demands in restaurant services particularly in the District of Johor Baharu, there is the need of customer satisfaction dining experience research in the restaurant service. Therefore, it was felt that this study was needed to assist both restaurateurs and the public sector to strengthen the efficiency of restaurant service and product development, improve customer experience in parallel with restaurant management to provide customers with satisfaction and memorable dining experience.

1.3.4.2 The Wider Contribution of the Research

The wider contribution of this study is the addition to knowledge about the factors that influence customer satisfaction with the dining experience and the management of that experience. This is achieved in four ways. First, it offers the results of a study

set in a different geographic and cultural context of Malaysia. Second, it offers a different philosophical (interpretive social sciences) and methodological approach (qualitative) to obtaining data on the factors influencing the customer dining experience than has generally been the case (as most studies have been positivist and quantitative). Third, the findings of this study are compared and contrasted with the findings and interpretations of previous academic research. Fourth, a conceptual model of customer dining experience satisfaction is proposed.

1.4 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

This thesis consists of seven interrelated chapters, which take the reader from the rationale of the study to the methodology approach, the findings and discussion, the thesis evaluation, and recommendation for sustainable customer satisfaction dining experience management.

1.4.1 Chapter One - Introduction

The aims of this chapter were to provide a framework of study by providing general background for this study, the rationale for the research, introducing Malay restaurants in Malaysia and the scope based on which this topic will be examined. The chapter states the research question for this study, provides an explanation of what the thesis will do in relation to data collected, data analysis and methodological choice. Subsequent chapters are as follow:

1.4.2 Chapter Two: The Contexts of the Research

This chapter provides a review of the contexts within which this research is set that divided into three main sections: the Malay restaurant context, the academic research context in respect of satisfaction with the restaurant experience and the theoretical context. The Malay restaurant context contains four sub-sections; background to the

study in terms of demand for eating out in Malaysia; the importance of Malay restaurants service in Johor Bahru; types of food premises available in Johor Bahru; and scenario of Malay restaurants in Malaysia in terms of selling *Halal* products and restaurant concept from the basis of menu, restaurant ambience and restaurant service.

The academic research context section reviews research into customer satisfaction after and before the year 2005; the management of customer satisfaction and conceptual model of customer satisfaction. Other sub-sections included are the concept of customer satisfaction and the definitions of satisfaction from the perspectives of cognitive, affective and connative.

The theoretical context section discusses the behavioural theories, cognitive perspectives and social perspectives in relation to satisfaction particularly in restaurant service.

1.4.3 Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter describes in detail the methodology and the research methods employed in this qualitative study. The case study research strategy are discussed and the theoretical aspects of the research process and research design are reviewed to provide the basis for the design of the primary data collection methods, such as in-depth, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, close observation and document.

1.4.4 Chapter Four: The Process of Data Analysis

Chapter four explains the process of data analysis. The chapter starts with the use of NUDIST in within-case data analysis and then the manual approach that was adopted for the cross-case analysis. It was done by matching between categories of factors influencing customer satisfaction and categories of the management of customer satisfaction influences. The description of the process is then illustrated through the presentation of data analysis actually undertaken.

1.4.5 Chapter Five: Research Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the factors influencing customer dining experience satisfaction and the management of dining experience satisfaction from an emic (insider) perspective. The findings are explained, based on the words of the research participants according to the stages of the customer dining experience cycle, which include antecedent experience, reservation experience, arrival experience, seating experience, meal experience, payment experience and departure experience.

1.4.6 Chapter Six: The Discussion and Evaluation

Chapter Six presents the findings of the study from an etic (outsider) perspective. The chapter has six sections: discussion and evaluation of the basic findings, summary and overall comparison with the literature discussion and evaluation of the aggregated findings, the management of customer satisfaction, the conceptual framework of customer dining experience satisfaction, and discussion and evaluation of the research according to methodology.

1.4.7 Chapter Seven: Conclusion and Suggestion

This last chapter provides a brief discussion for summary of the research findings, the relation of the findings to research problems, the contribution of the study and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONTEXTS OF THE RESEARCH

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a review of the contexts within which this research is set. Three main sections are included in this chapter. They are the Malay restaurant context, the academic research context in respect of satisfaction with the restaurant experience and the theoretical context.

The Malay restaurant context has four subsections, which are background to the study in terms of demand for eating out in Malaysia; the importance of Malay restaurants service in Johor Bahru; types of food premises available in Johor Bahru; and scenario of Malay restaurants in Malaysia in terms of selling *Halal* products and restaurant concept from the basis of menu, restaurant ambience and restaurant service.

The academic research context section reviews research into customer satisfaction in three parts: factors influencing restaurant service after and before the year 2005; the management of customer satisfaction and the conceptual frameworks of customer satisfaction. Other sub-sections available in this section are the concept of customer satisfaction and the definitions of satisfaction cognitive, affective and connative terms.

The theoretical context section discusses the behavioural theories, cognitive perspectives and social perspectives in relation to satisfaction, particularly in restaurant service.

2.2 THE MALAY RESTAURANT CONTEXT

This Malay restaurant context sub-section is about the background to the study and sets the context for this study. One of the purposes of this study is to inform the restaurant sector and the Malaysian government about the importance of Malay restaurants and how to improve the performance of the Malay restaurants, which demonstrates why this study is needed (the gap in local knowledge).

The background to this study is that there is a high demand for restaurant services in Malaysia which is largely due to the busy Malaysian lifestyle that encourages people to eat out. The demands on restaurant services are associated with improvements in education standards, improvements in household incomes, increases in daily working hours and busy lifestyles (Shamsudin and Selamat, 2005). In addition, there is the importance of restaurant services overall, and the positive impact of customer satisfaction on restaurant services. Detailed explanations of these follows.

2.2.1 Demand for Eating Out in Malaysia

Malaysia's consumer lifestyle has been evolving and changing due, in part, to rising affluence and education levels. Eating out has increased (Tan and Yeap, 2001) for a number of related reasons that include better education, higher incomes and reduced Malaysian unemployment rate. The Malaysian Ministry of Education introduced and implemented a National Education Philosophy (NEP) in 1989 and this emphasised life-long education for all Malaysian school children. Through this NEP, all Malaysian students have a chance to get a longer period of formal education: school children either study for 9 years (from 7 to 15 years) or for 11 years (from 7 to 17 years). The implementation of this NEP reduced the percentage of the Malaysian population who have no formal education and, at the same time, the system increased the percentage of Malaysians finishing secondary schooling, as well as those finishing tertiary level education (Malaysia Ministry of Education Report, 2000). At the tertiary level, the percentage of female students is higher than male students with the ratio of 60:40 since 1990s (MoHE, 2010). This might have a relationship with the increased

involvement of women in workforce from 67.2% in 2007 to 70% in 2010 (Ministry of Human Resource Annual Report, 2010) and the reduction of the unemployment rate for women from 3.1% in 2007 to 3.0% in March 2011 (Monthly report of Principal Statistics of Labour Force, Malaysia, May 2011). This has led to the growth in purchasing power, better household standards of living and allows more people to eat out.

In addition, the doubling of household income (when both spouses are working) is a common scenario in Malaysia. Nominal household income increased from RM3,249 to RM3,686 over the period 2004 to 2007 (Personal Money Magazine, 2008). 57.8% of the families are below this level and 29.3% are above it. This factor has also contributed to the increase in buying power and has helped the Malaysian population to increase its standard of living and lifestyle. About 80% of household expenditure is spent on four main groups of purchases: food; gross rent, fuel and power; transport and communication; and miscellaneous goods and services, which include food and beverages away from home (The Edge Malaysia, 2008).

In 2004-2005, urban households on average spent 1.8 times more than rural households (Department of Statistics Malaysia Annual Report, 2009). Average consumer spending was RM2,285 per month in urban areas and RM1,301 per month in rural areas (Malaysia Retail Report, 2009). A study on Malaysian Household Purchase Decisions of Food-Away-from Home by Lee and Tan (2007) showed that urban residents have a significantly higher likelihood of purchasing food away from home than the rural residents. The prediction is that the urban population will grow from 70% in 2008 (CIA World Factbook, 2009) to 76% of the total by 2015 (Malaysia Retail Report, 2009). This is likely to have positive effect on demand for restaurant services in Malaysia.

The involvement of women in the workforce has caused them to spend more time away from home and to have limited time to prepare meals at home. As a result, ready prepared food that requires less time to prepare, as well as eating out or take-away foods that involve no cooking time at all, have become a priority and part of

Malaysians' lifestyle. This scenario increased the Malaysian monthly average expenditure on food and beverage when away from home from 4.6% in 1973 to 10.8% in 2004/2005 (Tey, 2008). This study showed that Malaysians with higher monthly household incomes spend significantly more on food away from home. Stewart *et al.*, (2004) and Ishida *et al.*, (2003) noted that wealthier households are more likely to spend on products and services, including leisure and other amenities such as full service and ambience. In this context, dining out can be considered as a form of leisure, in which it is the time spent outside of household production (e.g. cooking, cleaning, shopping) and labour force activities (Stewart *et al.*, 2004). This scenario shows how important the restaurant service is to Malaysian society.

2.2.2 The Importance of Malay Restaurant Service in Johor Bahru

This study focuses on customer satisfaction in the Malay restaurant industry in Johor Bahru, the capital of Johor state. Malay family restaurants that are situated within 25 sq. km from Johor Bahru City Centre are the main focus of this study. Figure 2.1 shows the position of Johor Bahru City Centre in the map of Johor State.

Figure 2.1: Map of Johor (not to scale)



The actual and potential economic importance of the restaurant industry in Johor Bahru City Centre can be illustrated in three ways.

First, Johor State launched the campaign of 'Johor Visit Year' in 2003. One of the aims of this programme was to expose Johor State to local and foreign tourists through its food-services. It was, therefore, important for the restaurateurs to satisfy their customers in order to maintain the image of the Malaysian Malay restaurant industry in order to achieve the aims of the campaigns of Johor Visit Year 2003 (Insight Guide to Johor, 2001) and Visit Malaysia Year 2007 (Chang, 2006), The Malaysian International Food and Beverage Trade Fair 2009 and Visit Malaysia Year 2009.

Second, the State of Johor occupies a land area of 19,210 sq. km, the third largest state in Malaysia after Sarawak and Pahang, with a population of 3.2 million, comprising of a mixture of Malays, Chinese, Indians and other minorities. Johor Bahru is the second busiest city in Malaysia after the capital city of Kuala Lumpur (Table 2.1) and has 1.81 million people (Insight Guide to Johor, 2009). The city is crowded, not just with local people, but also with tourists (local and international tourists). Statistics show the total number of tourists visiting Johor increased from

8.74 million to 9.23 million from January to July in year 2010 compared to the similar period in 2009 (Malaysia Immigration Department Report, 2010). Johor Bahru attracted 2.2 million tourists in 2006 and became the most popular destination for tourism in Johor State (Malaysian Tourism Department Report, 2006). This situation indirectly has made restaurant industry very important.

Table 2.1: Population of Capital State in Malaysia

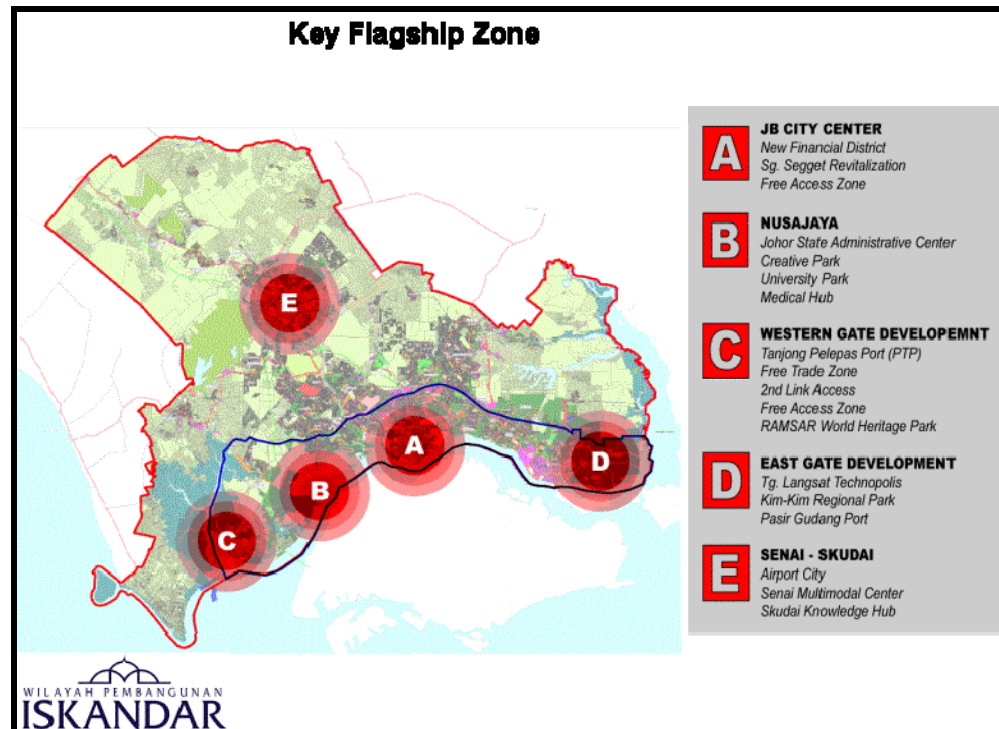
State	Capital	Area (sq. km.)	population 1991-08-14 census	population 2000-07-05 census	population 2010-07-06 census
Johor	Johor Bahru	19,210	2,069,740	2,584,997	3,233,434
Kedah	Alor Setar	9,500	1,302,241	1,571,077	1,890,098
Kelantan	Kota Baharu	15,099	1,181,315	1,287,367	1,459,994
Melaka	Melaka	1,664	506,321	605,239	788,706
Negeri Sembilan	Seremban	6,686	692,897	829,774	997,071
Pahang	Kuantan	36,137	1,045,003	1,229,104	1,443,365
Perak	Ipoh	21,035	1,877,471	1,973,368	2,258,428
Perlis	Kangar	821	183,824	198,288	227,025
Pulau Pinang	George Town	1,048	1,064,166	1,231,209	1,520,143
Sabah	Kota Kinabalu	73,631	1,734,685	2,468,246	3,120,040
Sarawak	Kuching	124,450	1,642,771	2,009,893	2,420,009
Selangor	Shah Alam	8,104	2,291,429	3,941,316	5,411,324
Terengganu	Kuala Terengganu	13,035	766,244	880,234	1,015,776
<i>Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur</i>	Kuala Lumpur	243	1,145,342	1,305,792	1,627,172
<i>Federal Territory of Labuan</i>	Victoria	91	54,241	70,871	85,272
<i>Federal Territory of Putrajaya</i>	Putrajaya	49	5,730	11,501	67,964
Total		330,803	18,379,655	23,274,690	27,565,821

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (2010)

Third, Iskandar Malaysia, formerly known as Iskandar Development Region and South Johor Economic Region at South Peninsular Malaysia is the main southern development corridor in Johor. The Iskandar Malaysia was announced on 30 July 2006 by the government of Malaysia as one of the key developments of the country in the coming years (2005-2025). It was named after the late Sultan of Johor, Almarhum Sultan Iskandar, and was singled out as among the high-impact developments of the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010). It has a mixture of development including entertainment, environment and business seamlessly converging within a bustling and vibrant metropolis.

It includes 5 Economic Zones (Figure 2.2). Zone A is JB City Center with a focus into Financial District and Danga Bay as an integrated waterfront city. Zone B is Nusajaya, which will become the new state administrative center with Universities, Medical Centres, Resorts and also forming the logistic hub in the region. Zone C is the Western Gateway Development with a fast growing world class port – Tanjung Pelepas Port and Free Trade Zone status. Zone D is the Eastern Gateway Development which covers Pasir Gudang industrial area, Pasir Gudang Port and also Southern Technology Park. Lastly, Zone E is the Senai–Skudai zone, where the state’s airport is located along with a Technology hub, a Multimedia hub, a Knowledge hub etc.

Figure 2.2: Key Flagship Zone of *Iskandar* Malaysia in Johor State



Source: Khazanah Nasional (2009)

The economic growth plan of the Iskandar Malaysia consists of two components, a Strategic Economic Thrust for immediate implementation and a Future Growth Scenario, 2005-2025, for long-term application. Both of these were developed based on the region's economic strengths in manufacturing and services, with 60% of value-

added manufacturing derived from electrical and electronic, chemical and chemical products (petrochemical, plastics and oleo chemicals) and food processing sub-sectors. A number of service and other manufacturing areas have emerged in support of these. The development of Iskandar Malaysia zone would be economically, socially and developmentally beneficial not only to 34% of Johor's unemployed population (Khazanah Nasional, 2009) but also to the restaurant service through demand for eating out from the existing 66% of Johor employment population (Khazanah Nasional, 2009).

Although restaurants play an important role in Malaysia, there is very limited up-to-date information available on the restaurant industry in Malaysia. In fact, research into factors of restaurant service that might lead to customer satisfaction dining experience in Malaysian restaurants has not been attempted before this research.

2.2.3 Food Premises in Johor Bahru

This sub-section explains the nature of the restaurant sector in Johor Bahru and where the types of restaurants used as the case study in this research fit and how they might differ from other types of restaurant. The reason for this is that several studies have suggested that restaurant selection factors differ by the type of restaurant (Elder *et al.*, 1999; Goldman, 1993; Heung *et al.*, 2000; and Lewis, 1981). Food premises that offer food service in Johor Bahru City Council are classified into two categories (Policy and Licensing Department's Circular of the City Council of Johor Bahru, 2005), which are business (under the Licensing By-Laws of Trade, Commerce and Industry, Johor Bahru City Council, 2004) and hawker (under the By-Laws Council of Johor Bahru Hawker, 1981). Food premises under the classification of business have three types, which are Category I Food Store, Category II Food Store and Category III Food Store (refer to Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Statistics of food premise under Business Category in Johor Bahru City Council

Types of food premise	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Others	Total
Category I Food Store	70	198	10	3	281
Category II Food Store	188	405	54	6	653
Category III Food Store	0	6	0	23	29
Total	258	609	64	32	963

Source: IT Unit, Johor Bahru City Council, 2010 (Data until 20th August, 2010)

2.2.3.1 Category I Food Store

A Category I Food Store is equipped with air conditioning, provides a full range of services with uniformed staff, and caters mostly for upper income customers. The customers in most of the establishments have to pay a service charge and government tax. There are two types of food premises under the Category I Food Store, which are up-market restaurants and mid- market restaurants.

i) Up-market Restaurants

Goldman (1993) classifies the up-market restaurant as the restaurant segment that offers a wide variety of restaurant concepts, including an ethnic concept. An up-market restaurant is characterized by offering a full menu, full table service, quality food made with fresh ingredients, and personalized service. The up-market restaurant segment includes not only high-check but also casual-dining and moderate-check restaurants. The upper end of this segment is a fine-dining restaurant which generally offers high quality food, décor and service. These restaurants are trademarked, are exclusive in all aspects, charges high prices (Goldman, 1993) which include a service tax and cater mostly to those in the upper income groups. The food premises that are allowed by the Johor Bahru City Council to sell alcohol under this type of business are restaurants in hotels, pubs, bars and lounges.

ii) Mid-market Restaurants

The mid-market restaurant is in between quick service restaurants and up-market restaurants. They offer buffet service, limited table service and the full services of a dining experience at a reasonable price that suits all levels of income. A limited table service is when the customers make an order, which is usually for hot food from the a la carte menu at the counter, and receive their order either at their table or at the counter after being called. Meanwhile full table service is when the customers make and receive their order at their table. This full table service is usually offered at most of the restaurants in Malaysia. These mid-market restaurants dominate food premises under the classification of business in Malaysia and the case studies in this research are drawn from a particular type of these restaurants: Malay restaurants.

Examples of the types of food premises that belong to the mid-market restaurant sector are:

- * Fast food family restaurants like KFC, Pizza Hut, McDonald's, Marrybrown and Burger King.

- * ethnic family restaurants are Malay restaurants, Chinese restaurants and Indian Chinese, Greek, Italian, Indian, Japanese, Thai, Mexican and Spanish restaurants that specialize in food preparation of certain race or ethnic groups such as Malay Cuisine, Chinese Cuisine, Indian Cuisine and etc. These restaurants offer fast food service and higher levels of service. The differences are based on the service, decoration and menu offered that comply with the race of ethnic of manager of the particular restaurant. Examples of restaurants under this category are *Mamak* restaurants, *Nasi Padang* restaurants, *Nasi Kandar* restaurants, Johor Cuisine restaurants, Penang Cuisine restaurants, and *Selera Kampung* restaurants.

Turgeon and Pastinelli (2002) define “an ethnic restaurant” as “a restaurant whose signboard or publicity clearly promises the national or regional cuisine of another land”. Similarly, Olsen, Warde, and Martens (2000) studied the dining

out market in the United Kingdom and identified all non-British restaurants as “ethnic” restaurants.

- * Family restaurants which are defined according to their format such as Beriani House, Steak House, seafood restaurant. The Steak House restaurant format applies western ideas in terms of ambience and products (food based on steak, salad, bread, seafood and others). The mid-market steakhouse offers family service with a salad bar. Steakhouses of the up-market type offer a formal atmosphere, and exclusive restaurant decoration. Seafood restaurants offer a variety of main menus based on seafood being cooked using different cooking methods. Some seafood restaurant offer additional menus like grilled meat, fried and grilled chicken, fries and a variety of vegetables to fulfil their customers’ need. These mid-market and up-market types of restaurant provide restaurant decoration that is related to the sea, such as fish nets, aquariums and seafood photos.

Family restaurants provide the atmosphere, facilities and menus suitable for both single persons and family customers. The menu offered is suitable for the taste of children, adults and senior citizens. The prices charged are reasonable and suit all levels of income. The service given is fast and full. The restaurant decoration is more about comfort and is accompanied by low volume soft music, paintings, spacious tables and chairs that are suitable for family activities. Some restaurants provide a karaoke service. They make available high chairs for children and some also provide toys, indoor games and playrooms.

Based on the definition by Turgeon and Pastinelli (2002) and the restaurant segmentation concept from Olsen *et al.*, (2000), an “ethnic restaurant” in this study is defined as a restaurant serving typical halal Malay food and dishes of foreign origin that owned and managed by Malay.

This study involved customers and restaurant staff of mid-market ethnic restaurants. The reason for the focus on the mid-market restaurant segment, that is patronized by

almost all Malaysians at all level of incomes in the context of this study, is to standardize the factors that influence customer satisfaction with the dining experience to only those that apply to a buffet service, limited table service and the full services of a dining experience dining establishment. Fast food, takeaway and low-price ethnic restaurants are not included in this research as these types of restaurants normally focus on convenience, speed and price factors.

2.2.3.2 Category II Food Store

Food premises under this category usually offer non air-conditioned atmosphere. In term of service, customers make orders, which usually are hot food from the ala carte menu at the counter and receive their order either at their table or at the counter after being called or customers make and receive orders at their table.

2.2.3.3 Category III Food Store

Food premises that are classified under this category are not air-conditioned. They are school cafeteria and canteen and factory canteens.

2.2.4 Malay Restaurants in Malaysia

The demand for ethnic foods has increased worldwide. Previous studies have highlighted the growing interest in the unique characteristics of ethnic cuisine globally. The expansion of interest and acceptance of ethnic foods reflects the increasing diversity of contemporary society (Josiam & Monteiro, 2004) due to the influences of ethnic diversity, overseas food and cultural experiences and media exposure.

However, ethnic restaurateurs cannot compete simply on the uniqueness of the cuisine. Customers who go to upscale dining establishments do not only demand good food but also a complete dining experience (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2002). The results of

past studies have emphasized that, in order to succeed, restaurant operators need to pay attention to the factors that have the highest regard in relation to the influences of customer satisfaction with the dining experience. A deeper understanding of customers' satisfaction factors will provide ethnic restaurateurs with valuable information and insights which will enable them to attract and retain more customers (Qu, 1997).

Despite the importance of factors influencing customer satisfaction, and the growth in popularity of ethnic foods, published research on consumers' restaurant selection behavior that focuses on the ethnic segment is relatively limited. Furthermore, there are also limited published empirical studies on factors influencing customer satisfaction in Malaysian restaurants. This study therefore contributes to identifying the factors that influence customer satisfaction with the dining experience at mid-market Malay ethnic restaurant, their management of the customer satisfaction factors, as well as developing a customer satisfaction dining experience conceptual framework. This study aims to fill these gaps in the literature that are limited for the Malaysian food service industry.

The ethnic restaurants under the mid-market family restaurants of the type 1 Food Store Category that are involved in this study are Malay restaurants that have *Halal* Certification in selling *Halal* products and services and adopt Malay race concepts in terms of menu, service and ambience (Malay decoration and background music). These criteria are quite similar to criteria in other Malay family restaurants of the world. Those criteria are explained as follows.

2.2.4.1 Selling *Halal* Products

Malaysia is a multiracial country with the Malay race forming the biggest part of the population and Islam as an official religion (Table 2.3). Malay restaurants are usually owned and managed by Muslims from the Malay race. These Malay restaurants play an important role in serving not only 60.4% of Malaysian Muslim population (Table 2.4), who have restriction to eating only *Halal* food, but also serving 39.6%

Malaysian population of other religions (Bank Negara Malaysia Report, 2011) that have no restrictions in terms of to eating either *Halal* or non *Halal* food.

Table 2.3: Malaysian Population According to Race in 2010

Race	Population	Percentage (%)
Malay	15,554,725	55.06
Chinese	6,876,171	24.34
Other Bumiputras	3,192,307	11.30
Indian	2,076,412	7.35
Others	367,256	1.30
Total	28,250,5	100

Source: Charles Hector (May 24, 2011)

Table 2.4: Malaysian Population According to Religion in 2010

Religion	Population (000)	Percentage
Islam	17,063.3	60.4
Buddhism	5,424.1	19.2
Christian	2,570.8	9.1
Hinduism	1,779.8	6.3
Others	1,412.5	5.0
Total	28,250,5	100

Source: Bureau of Asian and Pacific Affairs (2010)

For Muslims who live in a totally Islamic country like Saudi Arabia, the *Halal* question is not an issue at all. For those who living in a multiracial Muslim country like Malaysia, although *Halal* food or services are readily available and easy to obtain, there is a need for the Malaysian Islamic Religion Department (MIRD) to monitor and enforce standards to ensure *Halalness*, particularly when some of the products or services are made or sold or prepared or supplied by non-Muslims. This is because there are some restaurants that claim to be Malay restaurants but are owned by non Muslims. There are also Malay food premises that still have not got the *Halal* certification due to certain reasons but are already providing their products and services to Muslim customers. For instance there are 258 registered Malay food premises in Johor Bahru City Council but only 85 of the Malay food premises for the entire Johor State have *Halal* certification (Table 2.5).

Thus, to protect Muslim customers from buying non *Halal* food products and services, each food premises (hotel kitchen or commissary, franchise outlet or food court, and restaurant) must have *Halal* certification from the Department of Islamic

Development Malaysia or JAKIM (*Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia*) before they can declare that they offer their products and services to Muslim customers.

Table 2.5: Premises that Having *Halal* Certificate in Johor State

Number	Service Premise	Number
1.	Food factory	190
2.	Hotel/ resort kitchen	21
3.	Restaurant/ Food premises	85
4.	Slaughtering House	16
5.	Pharmaceutical	2
6.	Cosmetic	2
7.	Applied Ingredients	9
Total		325

Source: *Majlis Agama Islam Johor* (Data until December 2010)

Halal is an Arabic word which means permissible or lawful. It refers to things or actions permitted by *Shariah* law without punishment imposed on the doer. It is usually used to describe something that a Muslim is permitted to engage in like eating, drinking or using. The opposite of *Halal* is *Haram*, which is unlawful or prohibited under Islamic dietary guidelines. According to these guidelines gathered from the Muslim holy book of Al-Qu'ran, God commands Muslims and all of mankind to eat only the *Halal* things:

"O mankind! Eat of that which is lawful and wholesome, and follow not the footsteps of the devil. Lo! He is an avowed enemy of you." (2:168)

Thus, all kinds of food are considered *Halal* except the following, which are *Haram*:

- a) Swine/ pork and its by-products.
- b) Animals improperly slaughtered or dead before slaughtering.
- c) Animals not slaughtered in the name of Allah.
- d) Alcohol and all forms of intoxicating and hazardous drinks.
- e) Carnivorous animals, birds of prey, and land animals without external ears.
- f) Pests such as rats, centipedes, scorpions and other similar animals.
- g) Animals forbidden to be killed in Islam e.g. ants, bees, spider and woodpecker birds.

- h) Animals which are considered repulsive generally like lice, flies, maggots and other similar animals.
- i) Animals that live both on land and in water such as frogs, crocodiles and other similar animals.
- j) Blood and by-products of blood.
- k) Foods and drinks which contain any of the above *Haram* ingredients or contaminated through contact with any of the above products.

In Islam, the consumption of *Halal* food and the use of *Halal* products are obligatory in serving Allah. Muslim communities are therefore very mindful of food ingredients and handling processes. Processed food is only *Halal* if the raw materials, ingredients and additives fully conform to Islamic guidelines. Any manufacturer/ producer, distributor/ trader, sub-contract manufacturer, repacking, food premise, and abattoir that sell their products (food and cosmetic) to Muslims must have *Halal* stamp at their product packaging from MIRD to ensure the status of *Halal* of the products. To get the *Halal* stamp, MIRD will audit those premises to determine whether the products that they produced are religiously acceptable or *Halal* for Muslim.

In the auditing process to get the assurance of the *Halal* certificate by MIRD that is based on General Guidelines on *Halal* Certification, the food premises are audited at all stages of the production and supply chain, including the procurement of raw materials and ingredients, logistics (preparation, slaughtering, processing, handling, storing, cleaning and disinfection), transportation, packaging and labelling. *Halal* certificate will be awarded to those audited food premises only after examiners of MIRD fully confident and satisfied on every aspects of the examination of the food premises that are complied with *Halal* requirements.

In conclusion, religious beliefs play an important role in food selection for consumers of several religions groups (Asp, 1999; Dugan, 1994). For example, Muslims are forbidden to consume pork and alcohol and are only allowed to eat the meat of animals that are slaughtered according to the *Halal* rules of Islam. These religious requirements prevent them from going to restaurants that do not offer *Halal* food

(Hassan & Hall, 2004). The Malay restaurants that offer food choices that are prepared according to religious beliefs are likely to attract and provide a big contribution to wider groups of consumers (Dugan, 1994). Since the Malay restaurants provide a big contribution to Malaysian society regardless of religion, the Malay restaurant was chosen as a case of this study.

2.2.4.2 Restaurant Concept

The Malay restaurant concept is different from other race or ethnic restaurants as a result of the menu, ambience and service offered.

i) Malay Menu

The term “ethnic food” has been defined differently in various studies. The Food Marketing Institute (1998) defined ethnic food as a product that a particular ethnic (racial, national) or cultural group favors. Utami (2004) defines ethnic food as a regional specific cuisine that tends to reflect the particular characteristics of its local origin. Food is usually considered ethnic by people who are in a different area from its origin. The term ethnic food can also describe the cuisine of the minority immigrants in multicultural societies (Utami, 2004).

Ethnic immigrants generally like to maintain the cooking and eating habits that they had in their home countries (Mennell *et al.*, 1992). They often establish their own shops making food or selling food ingredients and other food products imported from their home countries. For example, a group of Dutch-Indonesian immigrants established their own bakeries making several different types of bread, instead of only the brown and white loaves traditionally made by New Zealanders (Burton, 1982).

Contemporary Malay cuisine, at the restaurant-industry and the home-cooking levels, has been shaped by the different influences of European food and a mixture of ethnic foods (Ray Bailey & Earle, 1993; Burton, 1982; Simpson, 1999). The trend towards a preference for ethnic foods has not only come from the growth of cultural and ethnic

diversity but also has been fuelled by the demand of Malaysia tourists who travelled overseas and were exposed to different foods and cultures (Burton, 1982; Mitchell, 2003; Nimmo-Bell Company Ltd, 2002). Malaysian who went overseas and tried the other cuisines brought back with them many new ideas for food preparation (Burton, 1982). These diners sometimes choose to go to the restaurants serving cuisines of the countries they have been, as they like those foods and/ or to recall their overseas experiences (Monteiro, 2000). Furthermore, worldwide and national media have contributed to a rise in the interest in ethnic foods and this has stimulated the demand (Robinson, 2007).

Within the broad range of restaurants ethnic 'Malay' restaurants offer a variety of Malay menu choices to customers (Zahari and Othman, 2005). The Malay cuisine is rich and spicy in taste and strongly aromatic as a result of the use of coconut milk (used to add a creamy richness to curries giving them their distinctive Malaysian flavour), dried spices and the fresh herbs mixture of *rempah*. Traditionally, the spices and herbs are grounded manually, cooked over ancient-styled oven or stove, stirred with traditional utensils and packed or served in tropical edible leaves. Main fresh herbs and roots ingredients used in traditional Malay cuisine are lemongrass, shallots, ginger, dry chillies and garlic. They are blended together and then sautéed to make a *sambal* sauce or chilly paste, a condiment that often accompanies every meal of Malay cuisine. Other herbs like galangal, turmeric, kaffir lime leaves, laksa leaves, wild ginger flower buds or torch ginger and screw pine leaves add flavour and zest to poultry, meat and seafood. The dried spices such as fennel, cumin, coriander, cardamom, cloves, star anise, mustard seeds, cinnamon sticks, fenugreek and nutmeg regularly used in various Malay soups and curries. Mohd Hairi *et al.*, (2009) agreed that the uniqueness of Malaysia food culture (food-related activities and events) that represents each ethnic group has become part and parcel of the Malaysian gastronomic products.

The authentic taste of Malay cuisine is hard to find in Malay restaurants nowadays due to the use of instant *rempah*. The instant *rempah*, however, requires less time for food preparation than the use of fresh herbs and spices. Traditional Malay cuisine is

also difficult to find due to the complicated preparation required when preparing the Malay traditional food.

The variety of Malay cuisine that is available at Malay restaurants is divided according to theme and meal times. For instance typical Malay menus for breakfast and coffee break available at the restaurants buffet counter are both sweet and savoury Malay *kuih*. There are complete plate meals like *Laksa*, *Lontong*, which consist of various types of noodle with different cooking methods, various type of rice such as Fried Rice, Porridge Rice, *Nasi Lemak* (comprising coconut rice, a slice of omelette, anchovies, a slice of cucumber and some chilli paste, and packed up in brown paper or banana leaf), *Nasi Ambang* (consist of rice, fried yellow noodle, salted fish, fried chicken with chilli paste and fried vegetable), *Nasi Kerabu* (purple rice served with local herbs, slice grilled meat and salted egg and fish), *Nasi Dagang* (fragrant unpolished glutinous rice steamed with coconut milk and served with tuna fish curry), Malay pancake like *Lempeng*, *Roti Canai*, and *Roti Jala*.

Rice is the staple diet in a Malay meal that is usually eaten together with traditional Malay dishes. Malaysians take a lot of seafood in their diet. Thus, fish, squid, prawns and crab regularly show up as a main ingredient in traditional Malay dishes, as do chicken, beef and mutton. Meats and seafood are often marinated with special concoctions of herbs and spices before being cooked. Vegetables are usually stir-fried although it is also popular to eat some vegetables raw and dipped in *sambal belachan*, a spicy chilly condiment. Therefore, all Malay restaurants sell rice with variety of traditional Malay dishes as a main menu for lunch. They are known as *Nasi Campur* and usually displayed at a buffet counter.

The most popular Malay drinks and deserts side is *chendol* (mixture of coconut milk beverage with solid coconut brown sugar, green starch strips and red beans). The juice of the coconut fruit is drunk and the flesh of old coconuts are grated and eaten with most traditional Malay cakes, which in local terms are called *kuih*. Malay menus available for tea break in the afternoon are variety of sweet cereal porridges, snacks

like fried tapioca, yam, sweet potato and banana fritters, *Keropok Lekor* and both sweet and savoury Malay *kuih*.

Types of menu for dinner available at the Malay restaurants are both, table d'hôte and ala carte mainly rice with various flavour and type of Malay dishes, *satay* (skewed meat marinated in spices and grilled over charcoal fire. It is served with peanut gravy, rice cubes, cucumber and onions) and various type of noodle with different cooking method. It is hard to find *Nasi Campur* menu for dinner at the Malay restaurants. Service for dinner usually starts late in the afternoon until late at night.

The variety of the Malay cuisine is due to the influence of mixed marriage between the three major races of Malaysia (Malay, Chinese and Indian). For instance *Nyonya* or *Peranakan* cuisine evolved out of a unique blend of Malay and Chinese cooking styles. It is characterized by sweet, sour, spicy and pungent flavours. Typical dishes include *kangkung goreng belachan* and *otak-otak* (fish meat marinated in spices, wrapped in banana leaves and grilled).

Other influences that spiced up Malay cuisine are neighbouring countries like Indonesia and Thailand and the state differences within Malaysia where each state of Malaysia has its own specialty produce in terms of taste and food decoration even though they are all cooking the same food and using the same local ingredients. For example, on the west coast, the northern states like Kedah and Penang are well known with their hot and spicy food due to the influence of Indians who arrived in Malaysia during the spice trade centuries ago. The central part of Malaysia like Negeri Sembilan and south of Selangor were dominated by Minangkabaus from West Sumatra. The main features of the food in this part of the country is rich gravy in coconut milk and the use of common ingredients such as ox meat, beef, cultivated vegetables and the very spicy bird's eye chillies, also known as *cili padi*. The southern states of Malaysia like Johor and Malacca are well known for their thick and sour spicy sauces. The east coast states of Malaysia like Kelantan and Terengganu, on the other hand, have integrated a Thai flavour into their food, due largely to the southbound migration of Thai people and their subsequent intermarriage with the

locals. Thus, Kelantanese cuisine, akin to Thai cooking, has a sweetish taste due to liberal use of coconut milk and sugar in cooking and rich fare with glutinous rice.

ii) **Malay Restaurant Ambience**

Most of Malay restaurants offer more than just food. They offer a place where customers with their family and clients can relax in warm and inviting ambience for an exquisite dining experience. Malaysia is a warm and humid country. This has an influence on the Malaysian restaurant ventilation system. Most Malay restaurants have indoor and outdoor sitting areas. The most preferable seating area, especially at the Malay restaurants that operate at night, is the outdoor area that is more casual and with fresh wind. The indoor sitting area has two separate sections: air-conditioned (non-smoking) and the other section is a smoking non air-conditioned. The non air-conditioned sitting section is equipped with industrial fans for ventilation.

In terms of decoration, Malay restaurants that adopt Malay traditional *kampong* (village) style decor are decorated with a chic and trendy edge. Pieces of artwork dominate the walls which are painted in contemporary bright colours. Malay artefacts like *Rebung* (bamboo shoots) incorporates vivid colour combinations and contrasts, classic carved teak furniture and a modest collection of traditional Malay household utensils and accessories are displayed to give traditional Malay appeal.

Typical Malay fine-dining restaurants that adopt the Malay traditional concept of etiquette and table manners provide a dining experience for customers seated on a mat (rattan woven mat). Traditional Malay feast is laid down on the *Mengkuang* mat. Men sit by criss-crossing their feet in front of them: a sitting position that is called *bersila*. Women fold both their feet on one side and this posture is known as *bersimpuh* (normally on their right side). When all of them are seated facing a square piece of cloth called *saprah* (similar to a tablecloth but it is laid on the floor), all the food is presented at the same time in the middle of the *saprah*, and not served in courses. The main dish will be rice, with three or four Malay side dishes that go with the rice.

In the Malay traditional way of eating, Malaysians eat using their right hand. They simply scoop mouthfuls of rice mixed with curry, vegetables or meat onto their palms and then ladle this into their mouths with the back of their thumbs. It is an art to keep the rice from escaping through the fingers. Dishes with sauce, soup or gravy, called *kuah* will have a spoon to scoop the sauce, soup or gravy. For dry dishes, it is simply tearing a piece of the dishes with right hand from a communal dish. Left hands should never be used to handle food in any circumstances. It is used only to handle spoon to scoop the sauce, soup or gravy from the communal dish to the individual plate and to hold glass while drinking.

A small bowl with water that known as *ketor* (a jug with cleaning water, together with a big bowl to catch the remaining water), is used to dip the tip of all right fingers for cleansing. Therefore, most Malay restaurants provide a pot of water, or sink, that is placed either at one corner of the restaurants or on every table in order for customers to wash their hands before and after the meal.

For modern Malay table manners, the customers have a choice of either using a fork and spoon, as used in the western way of dining but without dining knives, or eating with right hand. For those who eat using the right hand, the tap and sink are available at a corner of the restaurants for them to wash hands before and after meal.

Almost all Malay restaurants have prayer room facility that originally available for restaurant staff. However, in some cases the prayer room is also being used by customers who dine at the restaurant especially for short period of *Maghrib* prayer time. In Ramadhan month, the prayer room is usually fully used by those who breakfast at the restaurant.

iii) Malay Restaurant Service

Most Malay restaurants in Malaysia operate either day time or night time for six or seven days a week. Service during the day time covers breakfast, lunch and a tea break while night time is a dinner menu. There are hardly any Malay restaurants that

open for 24 hours. Operational hours for breakfast and coffee break are from 6.00 o'clock until 11.00 o'clock in the morning. While operational hours for lunch is from 11.30 o'clock in the morning until 3.00 o'clock in the afternoon and operation hour for tea break is from 3.00 o'clock until 6.00 o'clock in the afternoon. Malay restaurants that operate only at night usually start their business hour at 6.00 o'clock in the afternoon and close late at night.

The Malay restaurants provide background music from audio system and television as an entertainment for customers. Malay cultural show like traditional Malay live band and dance are hardly found at the Malay ethnic of mid-market restaurants unless for exclusive Malay restaurants.

2.2 THE ACADEMIC RESEARCH CONTEXT

It is well documented that researchers should avoid conducting a literature review prior to commencing data collection and analysis when they use an interpretive social science perspective as a research paradigm in their studies (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Strauss and Corbin, 1994; and Hickey, 1997). However, there may be a need for a preliminary literature review in order to clarify the gaps in the field of knowledge, clarify concepts, define terms, and provide a rationale for the research questions (which are raised from the real world and the literature). Therefore, it should be acknowledged that a review of literature could occur at the first stage of the research study; nevertheless, it would not proceed beyond the detailed and comprehensive level at this stage.

However, the literature in this chapter goes beyond that in order to provide a general idea about subjects studied in terms of, first, what has been done by just going through and describing the studies identify themes common to the research. Second, the evaluation of the research method on how has it been done, and third, what are the potential gaps/issues not fully resolved that this study is addressing (some of which will be potential contribution to knowledge). The academic context review of this

study meets these requirements by giving the reader an understanding of the potential concepts and research context on restaurant customer satisfaction before and after the year of 2005 were conducted and the findings were interpreted.

2.3.1 The Review of Research into Customer Satisfaction

This subsection consists of research literature before after the year of 2005. The year of 2005 was adopted for the division of the research because this study had conducted its primary research by 2005. So research after that date could not have influenced the researcher. Therefore, it would be interesting to find out if anyone else had gone the same route as this research and moved away from quantitative research approach. The focus is on what has been done (describing the studies by identifying themes common to the research), how the research has been done and the potential issues that are not fully resolved.

2.3.1.1 Customer Satisfaction Factors in the Restaurant Service

i) Pre-2005 Literature

Dube *et al.*, (1994) conducted a survey on customer satisfaction and service quality at a fine dining restaurant in New York City. They developed a pre-test of 55 respondents to measure the importance of 35 attributes against the 'return to the restaurant' dimension related to customer satisfaction and service quality. The study utilised a self-administered questionnaire which respondents had to complete at home. A conjoint analysis was used to measure the relative values of the restaurant's attributes. Service quality is associated with customer satisfaction because the customer satisfaction is a result of comparing customers' expectations about products/services with actual performance. The restaurant's 35 attributes were grouped according to dining experience scenarios: an inferior, an average and a superior one. Each scenario consisted of seven dining satisfaction attributes which are:

- a) food tastiness.
- b) food consistency.

- c) menu variety.
- d) attentiveness of staff .
- e) helpfulness of staff.
- f) wait for seating.
- g) atmosphere.

Johns and Tyas (1996) applied a modified SERVQUAL model in their survey study to measure customer service quality perceptions in various contract catering operations in the United Kingdom. The study used questionnaires as a method of data collection. Those researchers have developed 12 attributes of customer food-service satisfaction as follows:

- a) appearance of the food is attractive.
- b) food hygienically prepared and served.
- c) food served at the correct temperature.
- d) can find something on the menu.
- e) serve good portions.
- f) food tastes good.
- g) customers can contact manager.
- h) food choice balanced and healthy.
- i) give customers value for money.
- j) offer good choice of dishes.
- k) regularly change selection of dishes.
- l) food is fresh.

Oh and Jeong (1996) used a questionnaire as the research instrument in their quantitative study to determine customer satisfaction attributes that were classified into the five major themes of food, service, amenity, appearance and convenience (Table 2.6).

Table 2.6: Customer Satisfaction Attributes of Oh and Jeong (1996)

Major themes	Sub themes
1.Food	Tastiness of food Food quality Portion size Ingredient freshness Food price
2.Service	Quick food delivery Employees' greeting Responsiveness Employee attitude
3.Amenity	Restaurant spaciousness Quiet atmosphere Comfortable seating
4.Appearance	Neat establishment Cleanliness
5.Convenience	Menu item available No waiting Dining room temperature Convenient location

Pettijohn *et al.*, (1997) conducted a study evaluating the customer satisfaction determinants in a fast food restaurant by using a five point scale (1 = less important to 5 = most important). Those determinants were food quality, cleanliness, value, convenience, atmosphere and menu variety.

Table 2.7: The Ratings of Customer Satisfaction Determinants of Pettijohn *et al.*, (1997)

Rate	Determinants
5 = most important	Food quality
4	Cleanliness
3	Value
2	Nil
1	Convenience
1	Atmosphere
1 = less important	Menu variety

In 1997, Qu conducted a study to explore the dimension(s) of attributes that customers perceived to be important in their selection of a Chinese restaurant in the state of Indiana and to identify the determinants and predicting factor(s) on the basis of which customers would more likely return. A self-administered, closed-ended questionnaire with ordered choices was used to survey a sample of customers. The questionnaire comprised 55 variables that divided into three major areas: (1) general information about visiting, (2) rating on a five-point scale of 14 attributes believed to be important

in a customer's selection of a Chinese restaurant, and (3) a customer demographic profile. The 14 determinant attributes selected were based on a previous restaurant survey of Dube (1994) and were modified to match the uniqueness of the Chinese restaurant operation, service and environment. Findings showed that four dimensions within the 13 variables were defined by the original 14 variables that loaded most heavily. Those four dimensions were 'food and environment', 'service and courtesy', 'price and value', and 'location, advertising and promotion'. Each of those dimensions has its own loading (refer to Table 2.8). The study concluded that those four dimensions were perceived to be important by customers dining at a Chinese restaurant; they were also the determinant factors that influenced customers' choices in selecting a Chinese restaurant and customers returning increases when there is a higher satisfaction level in those four dimensions.

Table 2.8: Four Dimensions of Customer Satisfaction Variables of Qu (1997)

Dimensions	Variables
Food and environment	Food quality consistency Food quality Menu variety Smorgasbord Atmosphere Cleanliness
Service and courtesy	Level of service Promptness of service Friendliness
Price and value	Price Price and value
Location, advertising and promotion	Location Advertising and promotion Reputation

Kivela (1999b) investigated the relationship between customer satisfaction and return patronage in a Chinese restaurant in Hong Kong. Kivela provided 415 attributes of service encounter in hotels and restaurants in Hong Kong for customers to distinguish between satisfactory service encounters and unsatisfactory ones. The author used a standard questionnaire to derive qualitative responses. Data was analysed using Critical Incidents Techniques (CIT), a classification technique employing content analysis of stories or incidents. In the CIT technique, data are categorised with other inductive grouping procedures such as factor analysis, cluster analysis and multi-dimensional scaling (Hunt, 1983). The findings of Kivela's (1999b) study on

customer satisfaction and return patronage in restaurants in Hong Kong indicated 5 major categories of attributes related to customer satisfaction (see Table 2.9).

Table 2.9: Customer Satisfaction Attributes of Kivela (1999b)

Categories	Sub-categories
1. Food	Food presentation Menu variety Nutritious food Tastiness of food Freshness of food Temperature of food
2. Service	Friendly, polite and helpful staff Attentive staff Staff greeting customers Efficient service Staff willing to serve Staff have food and beverage knowledge Sympathetic handling of complaints
3. Atmosphere	Level of comfort in the restaurant Level of noise in the restaurant View from the restaurant Cleanliness of the restaurant Dining privacy Restaurant's temperature Restaurant's appearance Staff appearance
4. Convenience	Handling of telephone reservations Parking convenience
5. A restaurant that offers...	A new dining experience Food of a consistent standard A comfortable environment to eat there Service of a consistent standard

Table 2.9 shows that studies in Chinese restaurants indicate stereotype findings of customer satisfaction determinants. It seems that customers were satisfied with the dining at the restaurant because of the food, service, atmosphere, convenience and other elements that those restaurants provide for them.

Yuksel and Yuksel (2002) investigated the measurement of tourist satisfaction with restaurant services in Turkey. The researchers developed questionnaires that consisted of 110 items and divided them into four major areas: general information about respondent and the dining occasion, restaurant selection items, performance evaluation and overall dining satisfaction and behavioural intentions to measure

tourist satisfaction with restaurant services. A seven-point, labelled, Likert-type scale was used to rate the importance and perception items of respondents. The researchers found nine factors of customer satisfaction that were divided according to five dining segments in their study on the measurement of tourist satisfaction with restaurant services: value seekers, service seekers, adventure seekers, atmosphere seekers and healthy food seekers. However, findings of those studies showed the commonality between restaurants attributes categories and customer satisfaction. These are stated in Table 2.10:

Table 2.10: Customer Satisfaction Factors of Yuksel and Yuksel (2002)

Categories	Sub-categories
Value seekers	product quality service quality menu diversity noise
Service seekers	service quality product quality menu diversity speed of service
Adventurous food seekers	service quality convenience location
Atmosphere seekers	product quality price-value
Healthy food seekers	service quality product quality facilities menu diversity

Table 2.10 shows customer satisfaction factors in restaurant service research in Europe. Findings of the study discovered that customers dine at a restaurant to get high value and adventurous, tangible satisfaction determinants such as products, service, price-value, location, facilities and menu. Meanwhile Table 2.11a-2.11c indicates literature on factors influencing customer satisfaction in restaurant service a cross the globe.

ii) **Post-2005 Literature**

Andaleeb and Conway (2006) tested a model of customer satisfaction for the restaurant industry using the transaction-specific framework. Secondary sources were explored first to assess the past research conducted on customer satisfaction in the restaurant industry. The next stage involved gathering information via qualitative methods from restaurant goers. This process was used to identify and narrow down the key factors and the related items comprising the factors that were expected to explain customer satisfaction for the restaurant industry. The next step involved designing and pre-testing a questionnaire that was administered to a convenient sample.

The questionnaire asked respondents to evaluate the last full service restaurant they had frequented. It included perceptual measures that were rated on seven-point Likert scales. This design is consistent with prior studies on customer satisfaction and service quality. Multiple items were used to measure each construct so that their measurement properties could be evaluated on reliability and validity. The scale items measuring the dependent variable were chosen to reflect people's overall satisfaction with the services provided by the restaurant. This approach is consistent with other studies (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Andaleeb and Basu, 1994).

Respondents were selected by utilizing a table of random numbers applied to the local telephone directory, which resulted in mailing out 600 surveys. A total of 85 questionnaires were completed and returned by mail, resulting in a response rate of 14 percent. 34 restaurant users were interviewed using judgment sampling to eliminate potential biases and to select respondents from a wide spectrum. The result suggest that their model satisfactorily explains full service and restaurant owners and managers should focus on three major elements which are service quality (responsiveness), price and food quality (or reliability).

A study by Reynolds & Hwang (2006) detailed the results of a survey of customers from eleven Asian restaurants located in a large metropolitan area in the southwestern

region of the United States. These restaurants were selected because of the similarity in the types of food served and the price points (\$10 to \$20 per person per meal). The researchers developed a questionnaire for this study using guidelines from applied research in the areas of food service, tourism, and marketing (Robledo, 2001; Suskind and Chan, 2000; Soriano, 2002; and Yuksel, 2002). The survey instrument was comprised of two sections. The first section asked for respondent demographic data. The second section of the survey asked customers to rank factors of their most recent dining experience at a Japanese restaurant using a five-point Likert scale (range: 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree). The dining experience factors were categorized into five themes: service quality, food quality, menu quality, convenience/ambiance, price and value.

The surveys were distributed in the restaurants by the researchers and assistants. The survey and subject selection were reviewed and approved for the testing of human participants by a university Institutional Review Board. Respondent participation in the study was strictly voluntary. The usable sample size was 369 restaurant customers. The sample was large enough to conduct one-way ANOVA and T-testing, while compensating for the convenience sampling utilized.

In this study, the 31-40 year old Japanese restaurant customers were the most dissatisfied with their dining experiences at Japanese restaurants and seemed to be unhappy with all aspects of their dining experience. These respondents felt that the quantity of food was not large enough based on the price. They also indicated that Japanese food was too expensive and offer limited menu items for children. These consumers sense that Japanese restaurants are more formal and not casual enough for family dining.

Gupta *et al.*, (2007) investigated how the dining experience affected customer satisfaction using a satisfaction survey. They looked at the relationship of customer satisfaction to 21 attributes of the dining experience. Their findings showed that food quality had the lowest score while a 'clean, comfortable and inviting restaurant' had

the highest satisfaction ratings. Food delicious, an appropriate cost, a cheerful greeting and attentive service influenced guest intent to return.

Namkung and Jang (2008) conducted a study using a survey questionnaire that developed based on a thorough literature review. The study looked at quality perception from the perspective of a highly satisfied customer. It was then reviewed by three restaurant managers of full-service restaurants and two academic professionals in the hospitality industry to assure the content validity. The questionnaire included two constructs in relation to restaurant experience: perceived quality and customer satisfaction. Perceived quality contained three quality factors; food (five items), atmospherics (four items), and service (four items). To measure perceived quality for each factor, multi-item scales, validated in previous studies, were identified and modified to fit the study setting (Bitner, 1992; Kivela *et al.*, 1999; Kotler, 1973; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Raajpoot, 2002; Stevens *et al.*, 1995). Examples of items in food quality are “food presentation is attractive,” “the restaurant offers healthy options,” “the restaurant serves tasty food,” “the restaurant offers fresh food,” and “food is served at the appropriate temperature.” Atmospheric quality items included “the facility layout allows me to move around easily,” “the interior design is visually appealing,” “colors used create a pleasant atmosphere,” and “background music is pleasing.” Items used for service quality were “the meal is served at the promised time,” “employees are always willing to help me,” “employees have the knowledge to answer my questions,” and “the restaurant has my best interests at heart.” Overall satisfaction with the restaurant experience was gauged by asking “Overall, I am satisfied with my dining experience at this restaurant,” based on Oliver’s (1997) study. The quality factors and overall satisfaction were measured using a seven-point scale: “How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?” (1 ¼ extremely disagree and 7 ¼ extremely agree).

The findings of this study showed that differences do exist between the perceptions of highly satisfied customers and non-highly satisfied customers with regard to the crucial attributes of the three quality facets during their restaurant consumption experiences. Although the results of independent samples t tests show highly satisfied diners’ perceived evaluations of all quality attributes were significantly higher than

those of non-highly satisfied diners, logistic regression analyses showed that not all quality attributes were critical to highly satisfied customers. Availability of healthy options, freshness, and temperature were revealed not as important in comparison to taste and presentation of food. With regard to atmospherics attributes, spatial layout, interior design, and music were of significant importance to high satisfaction.

Sriwongrat (2008) conducted a study on consumers' choice factors of an upscale ethnic restaurant in New Zealand. Focus group discussions and the literature review helped identify a set of restaurant choice factors. A mail survey was used to collect the data. Factor analysis was used to refine the restaurant choice factors, and logistic regression analysis identified the five significant factors that influence consumers' decision. These were: Dining Experience, Social Status, Service Quality, Food Quality, and Value for Money, listed in order of their importance.

The data was collected by a mail survey of Christchurch residents from respondents 18 years and older. A systematic sampling method was employed in this research. First, number 7 was chosen from a list of random numbers that were generated using a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet. Subsequently, the sample was drawn systematically from the 2007/08 Christchurch Telecom White Pages. 1,300 questionnaires were distributed to the randomly selected respondents. The data collection procedures were based on the guidelines recommended by Dillman (2007). A prepaid self-addressed envelope and a cover letter were attached to the survey. Respondents were requested to return the completed surveys within 15 days after receiving them. The results of t-tests and ANOVA suggested that consumers perceived the restaurant choice factors differently based on their demographic characteristics.

Liu and Jang (2008) investigated American customers' perceptions of Chinese restaurants in the U.S., using the Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA) approach. The study also examined which attributes of Chinese restaurants influence American customers' satisfaction and behavioural intentions. The IPA shows that environmental cleanliness and attentive service are two important areas where Chinese restaurateurs can make improvements. In addition, food taste and service reliability appear to be key attributes for Chinese restaurants' success. Overall, this study indicated that food

quality, service reliability and environmental cleanliness are three pivotal attributes to create satisfied customers and positive post-dining behavioural intentions. Chinese restaurant managers should reasonably allocate their limited resources to restaurant attributes based on their contributions to customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions.

A self-administered questionnaire developed based on a thorough literature review was comprised of four sections. The first section asked respondents to rate the importance of each restaurant attribute when considering Chinese restaurants, using a 7-point Likert-type scale, where 1 = not important at all and 7 = extremely important. A total of 24 restaurant attributes were identified and were classified into four categories: food-related attributes, service-related attributes, atmosphere-related attributes and other attributes. Food-related attributes included seven items: food presentation, variety, healthy options, taste, freshness, temperature and safety (Namkung and Jang, 2007 and Sulek and Hensley, 2004). Service-related attributes consisted of seven items: (1) employees are friendly and helpful; (2) employees are attentive; (3) employees have knowledge of the menu; (4) service is prompt; (5) service is dependable and consistent; (6) employees serve food exactly as ordered; and (7) employees provide an accurate guest check. These items were selected based on previous studies (Kivela *et al.*, 1999 and Andaleeb and Conway, 2006) and identified through an expert review. They reflected the four dimensions, excluding the tangible dimension, of the original DINESERV scales (Stevens *et al.*, 1995). Atmosphere-related attributes, based on Ryu and Jang, 2007 and Ryu and Jang, 2008, included internal design and décor, lighting, music, temperature, odours, cleanliness and employee appearance. Price was measured in terms of the perceived fairness of price while authenticity was measured in terms of food authenticity and environmental authenticity (George, 2001).

The second section measured respondents' perceived performance of the same 24 restaurant attributes based on their dining experience in the surveyed restaurants using a 7-point Likert-type scale, where 1 = very poor and 7 = excellent. The third section asked the respondents to reflect on their overall satisfaction with the surveyed restaurant and post-dining behavioural intentions. Satisfaction was measured using

two items based on Oliver's (1997) study: "I am satisfied with this restaurant" and "I am pleased to have visited this restaurant." Behavioural intention was measured using three items that were modified from Zeithaml *et al.*, (1996): "I would like to come back to this restaurant in the future," "I would recommend this restaurant to my friends or others," and "I would say positive things about this restaurant to others." All of these items were measured by a 7-point Likert-type scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. The final section of the questionnaire concerned respondents' relevant personal information, such as age, gender, household income and dining-out frequency.

The data for this study was collected from three casual dining Chinese restaurants that offered full table service in a mid-western city in the United States. The average guest check of all the selected restaurants was approximately \$11. The questionnaires were randomly distributed by the investigators in each restaurant to customers who were waiting for checks after dinner. Customers were asked to fill out a survey questionnaire on a voluntary basis. A total of 315 questionnaires were collected and 284 were used for analysis after excluding 31 due to a high percentage of incomplete responses. Among the 284 questionnaires, 92 were collected in a restaurant where there was no background music during the survey period. This might influence the average importance and performance scores of music at an aggregate level.

A study was conducted by Krishnaswamy and Karen (2009). It aimed to identify the relative importance of servicescape, human service, food quality and price on satisfaction and loyalty. The respondents in this study consisted of customers who had patronized fine-dining restaurants in Malaysia (n=200) and India (n=172). The results indicated that the significant determinants of satisfaction and loyalty were human service, food quality and price with human service as the most important factor. The impact of servicescape on customer satisfaction and loyalty for both countries was found to be insignificant.

Hwang and Zhao (2010) study was to find the differences between satisfied and dissatisfied customers. The major analytical method used was AnswerTree. An

AnswerTree method allows the researcher to more effectively target exact groups of people, to find differences between satisfied and dissatisfied customer groups. The data used for this study were collected in Miami. Surveys were conducted from May 1 to May 31, 2007. Because 15 minutes is enough time to complete all questionnaires, the surveys commenced with a question asking whether respondents have 15 minutes or not. Selected respondents were those who had visited a full-service restaurant within the last one month. The selected full-service restaurants provided full table services and the average guest check was at least \$25 per person. Of the 414 questionnaires collected, 24 were incomplete and were eliminated. As a result, a total of 390 questionnaires were used in the data analysis. The study results indicated three perceived quality factors (good value, tasty food, and restaurant cleanness) most affected satisfied customers. On the other hand, three perceived quality factors (good value, tasty food, and employees' knowledge of menu) most affected dissatisfied customers.

Tian and Wang, (2010) conducted a study on "Cross-Cultural Customer Satisfaction at a Chinese Restaurant: The Implications to China Foodservice Marketing. They examined the factors (e.g., reliability, assurance, empathy, cultural awareness, cultural atmosphere, responsiveness, control, etc.) contributing to customer satisfaction in an ethnic restaurant. The results reaffirmed the notions that reliability and value are the primary indicators of customer satisfaction. The findings from this study do not confirm some previous studies that cultural awareness of ethnic food has positive effects on customer satisfaction, an issue that needs more explorations.

In conclusion, methodologically, these customer satisfaction studies applied a quantitative approach that was based on a survey research strategy where data is collected using a questionnaire. In the questionnaire, items were developed based on the researcher's understanding of previous literature related identifying the factors of customer satisfaction. Those items were predetermined by the researcher, through prior hypotheses about the nature of customers' own dining experience (Table 2.11a and 2.12b), and were not based on customers' real experience and the phenomenological world of the customers, which was supposed to be explored through direct contact with them. Furthermore, the authors of those studies did not

look at factors that influenced customer satisfaction from staff perspectives and data were collected away from the restaurant, which may affect customers' memory about their dining experience at the restaurants.

Furthermore, most quantitative studies in food service consumer research have been concerned with some aspect of segmentation. A large amount of work in this field has established a coherent theoretical structure linking restaurant attributes to repeat custom (Table 2.11c). Many studies use expectancy–disconfirmation theory and the relationship between the quality of the offering and likelihood of repeat custom has been demonstrated using sophisticated multivariate techniques. A significant problem is that attributes of restaurant experience vary between different outlets and dining occasions. Some researchers have therefore conceptualized restaurant outcomes as service quality, for which a generalisable set of attributes exists. However, this is unsatisfactory because service quality attributes alone do not describe the restaurant experience as fully as attribute sets derived empirically from consumer data. A potential way forward is through experimental studies, which have been relatively little used in food service contexts and offer opportunities to hold groups of variables constant while others are changed. This may provide a way to clarify perceived attributes under different conditions.

Table 2.11a: Meta Analysis of Literature of Factors Influencing Customer Satisfaction in Restaurant Service

AUTHOR	FACTOR INFLUENCING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION																													
Krishnaswamy and Karen (2009)	FOOD									SERVICE										STAFF										
	/									/																				
	Menu Variety	Consistency of food quality	Authentic Food tasty-freshness	Food presentation & display	Healthy options/ nutritious	Temperature	Food safety	Hygiene	Good portion	Reservation service	Parking Attendant	Free parking	Reception service	Punctual business hour (reliable service)	24-hour business operation	Serving on time	Serving group order simultaneously	Customers can contact manager	On time attending customers (attentive service)	Responsive towards complaints and request	Treating customer equally	Staff appearance	Good personality traits <ul style="list-style-type: none">Friendly, politeHelpful	Accuracy and getting things right	Gratitude expression	Escorting customers until exit door	Inviting customers coming again	Staff performance	On-time answering phone call	Alert with request
Meiselman and Bell (1992)		/																												
Andaleeb and Conway (2006)	/																		/											
Bell <i>et al.</i> , (1994)		/																												
Bell and Meiselman (1995)		/																												
Collison and Turner (1988)		/																												
Riley, 1994		/																												
Namkung and Jang (2007)		/	/										/															/		
Reynolds & Hwang (2006)	/																													
Gupta <i>et al.</i> , (2007)		/																				/								
Liu and Jang (2008)																		/												
Namkung and Jang, (2007)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/																							
Kivela <i>et al.</i> , (1999) and Andaleeb and Conway, (2006)														/				/	/			/	/				/			
Ryu and Jang, (2007) and Ryu and Jang, (2008)																					/									
George, (2001)		/																												
Hwang and Zhao (2010)		/																										/		
Dube <i>et al.</i> , (1994)	/	/																//				/	/							
Johns and Tyas (1996)	/	/	/	/	/	/		/	/																					
Oh and Jeong (1996)		//														/				/		/			/					
Pettijohn <i>et al.</i> , (1997)	/	/																												
Qu (1997)	/															/							/							
Kivela, (1999b)	/	/	/	/	/	/					/					/			/	/		/	/		/			/	/	
Yuksel and Yuksel (2002)	/	/														/														

AUTHOR	FACTORS INFLUENCING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION DINING EXPERIENCE																		
	ATMOSPHERE								FACILITY				ACCESSIBILITY		PAYMENT				
	Spacious layout	Choice of dining areas - spatial seating arrangement - temperature	Peaceful and relaxing atmosphere - pleasing background music - Odours	Clean	Unique cultural experience - Authentic	Attractive appearance - fascinating interior design and décor	Well-organize layout	Comfortable service area	Restaurant capacity	Waiting activity	Prayer room	Toilet	plenty parking spaces	Strategic location	Commercial promotion program	Non-commercial promotion program	Reasonable price	Self-service payment	Accurate guest-check
Milliman (1986)			/																
Pliner and Hobden,1994									/										
Collison and Turner (1988)			/																
Riley (1994)					/														
Andaleeb and Conway (2006)																	/		
Namkung and Jang (2007)		/			/	/													
Reynolds & Hwang (2006)						/											/		
Gupta <i>et al.</i> , (2007)																	/		
Liu and Jang (2008)				/															
Kivela <i>et al.</i> , (1999) and Andaleeb and Conway (2006)																			/
Ryu and Jang, 2007 and Ryu and Jang, 2008		/	//	/		/													
George (2001)					/														/
Hwang and Zhao (2010)				/															
Dube <i>et al.</i> , (1994)			/																
Johns and Tyas (1996)																	/		
Oh and Jeong (1996)	/	//	/	/			/		/					/					
Pettijohn <i>et al.</i> , (1997)				/															
Qu (1997)														/	/	/	/		
Kivela (1999b)		//		/		//		/					/						
Yuksel and Yuksel (2002)														/			/		

Table 2.11c: Meta Analysis of Literature of Factors Influencing Customer Satisfaction in Restaurant Service

AUTHOR	BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES			
	Repurchase	Intention of returning	Recommend to others	Positive word-of-mouth communication
Clark and Wood (1998)	/			
Pettijohn et al. (1997)		/		
Kivela et al. (1999a, b, 2000)	/			
Gupta <i>et al.</i> , (2007)		/		
Liu and Jang (2008)		/		
Zeithaml <i>et al.</i> , (1996)			/	/

2.3.1.2 The Management of Customer Satisfaction

Most of the previous customer satisfaction studies cited in the hospitality literature have focused on identifying the factors of customer satisfaction, rather than discovering effective ways of managing the satisfaction factors. For instance studies on restaurant management on the aspects of menu design (Bowen and Morris, 1995); managing restaurant tables using constraints (Vidoto *et al.*, 2006); managing reducing time wait (Jones and Dent, 1994). That is why there is still a lack of consensus amongst the research community on how best to manage the phenomenon even though the restaurant industry involves both demand (from customers) and supply (from restaurateurs).

Cornell and Lowe (1997); and Yuksel and Yuksel (2002) identified this loophole in the literature and they claimed that the attempts to help restaurateurs to understand how those factors of customer satisfaction can be better managed to improve satisfaction had not yet received enough attention. Most of the available literature on customer satisfaction factors and the management of customer satisfaction in restaurant service has been published in text books with little empirical research to support their recommendations. This gap in the literature on how restaurant staff and management themselves identify their practices in managing those satisfaction factors, however, provides a good opportunity for further research which will be explored in this study. Furthermore, none of the research already conducted has focussed on identifying ways of managing customer satisfaction in Malaysian Malay restaurants.

2.3.2.3 Conceptual Framework of Customer Satisfaction

Almost all types of business try to analyze the concept of customer satisfaction in their own industry by understanding a customer satisfaction model. Such a model clarifies various theories about customer satisfaction, making research more focused and less wasteful of research resources. Furthermore, in order for any measurements to have validity, the researchers need to assume some model of the subject matter by

using very explicit conceptualizations of the subject matter (which are known as models). Thus, the benefits of understanding customer satisfaction models may pay commensurate dividends to understanding customer satisfaction. In this case the researchers must operationalize the concept of customer satisfaction in order to measure it.

Literature shows that the development of a customer satisfaction model is based on two constructions: macro level and a micro level. Details of the macro and micro models of customer satisfaction are explained in the following subsection.

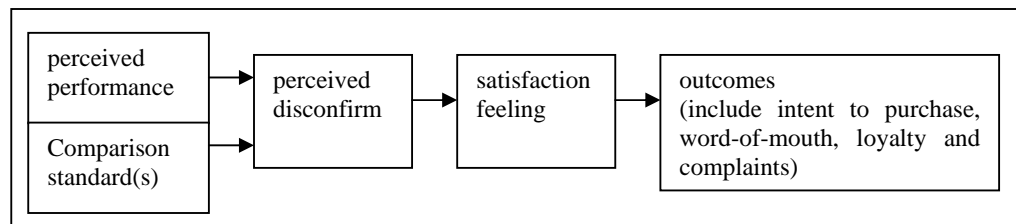
i) Macro-Models of Customer Satisfaction

The macro models of customer satisfaction theorize the place of customer satisfaction among a set of related constructs in marketing research, and have special importance for the policy-level implications for an organization's research in customer satisfaction. Furthermore, they give the researcher the strategic context of the design and of the results for a study of customer satisfaction. The traditional macro-model of customer satisfaction underlies much of the research in customer satisfaction for a longer period than that given the dates of these models (see Figure 2.3). The model notes the following:

- a) Perceived performance often differs from objectives or technical performance, especially when a product/ service is complex or intangible and when the consumer is unfamiliar with the product/ service.
- b) Comparison standards can come from numerous sources that can vary widely depending on individual, situation and product/ service type.
- c) Perceived disconfirmation is the evaluation of perceived performance according to one or more comparison standards. Disconfirmation can have a positive effect (generally implying a dissatisfying result), or a zero effect.
- d) Satisfaction feeling is a state of mind and attitude because the consumer may have different levels of satisfaction for different parts of a product/ service experience.
- e) Outcomes of satisfaction feelings may involve intent to purchase, word-of-mouth (the consumers' communication with their network of their approval/ disapproval

of a product/ service) and complaints. These outcomes also are moderated by other variables. For instance, extreme dissatisfaction will not necessarily generate complaint behaviour, especially if the consumer believes complaining will be futile.

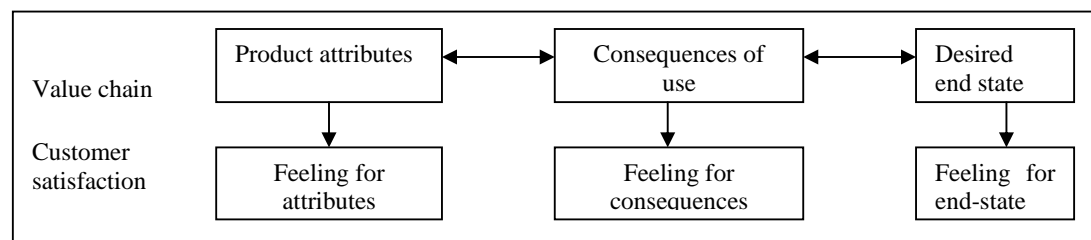
Figure 2.3: Traditional Macro-Model of Customer Satisfaction



(Adapted from Woodruff and Gardial, 1996)

Later research has produced a new model as shown in Figure 2.4. This model highlights the concept of value as a driving force in product choice and satisfaction's relationship to it as a brief psychological reaction to a component of a value chain.

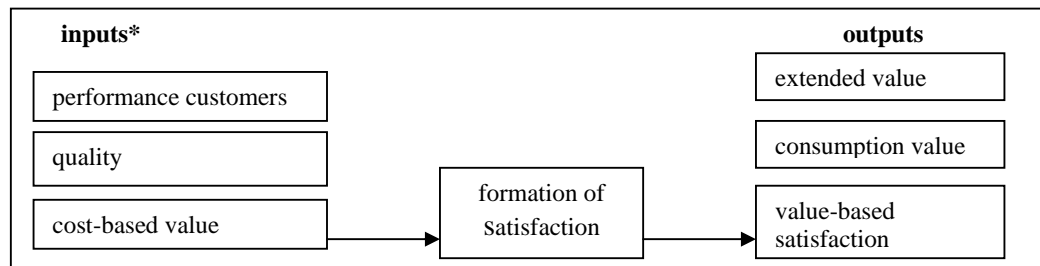
Figure 2.4: Model of Linkage of Customer Value to Customer Satisfaction



Source: Adapted from Woodruff and Gardial (1996)

Oliver (1999) provides another version of the above model, which appears in an abbreviated form as in Figure 2.5. An important point about customer value models is the use of gross, benefit-cost, judgments by consumers.

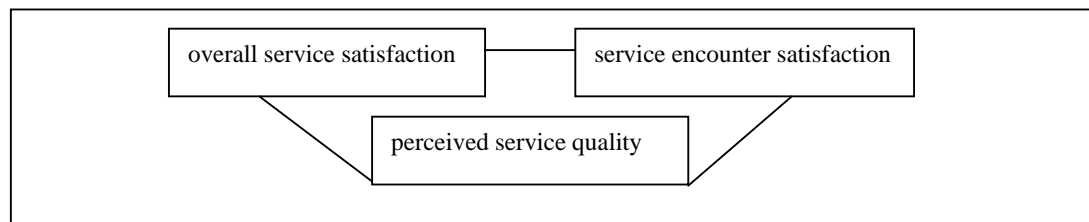
Figure 2.5: Model of Linkage between Satisfaction and Value



Source: Adated from Oliver, 1999

Another importance of this macro-model is that it would be linked to overall service satisfaction, encounter satisfaction and perceived service quality (see Figure 2.6). The model explains survey results that indicate different levels of satisfaction for a service that one individual may experience. It supports the conceptualization of perceived quality as a separate construct, distinct from satisfaction. Furthermore, it highlights the construct of a “global” level of satisfaction (the overall service satisfaction) in contrast to the construct of a component level of satisfaction (the encounter service satisfaction).

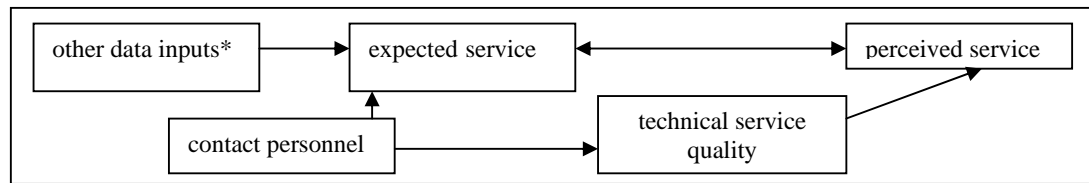
Figure 2.6: Model of Two Levels of Satisfaction and Perceived Service Quality



Source: Bitner and Hubbert, 1994

Some models differentiate between technical service quality and perceived service quality (see Figure 2.7). The model shows how satisfaction results from a comparison between expected service and perceived service. This model is explicit about the cyclical, feedback loop that affects satisfaction. A consumer’s prior experience joins “other data inputs” to shape current satisfaction with a service.

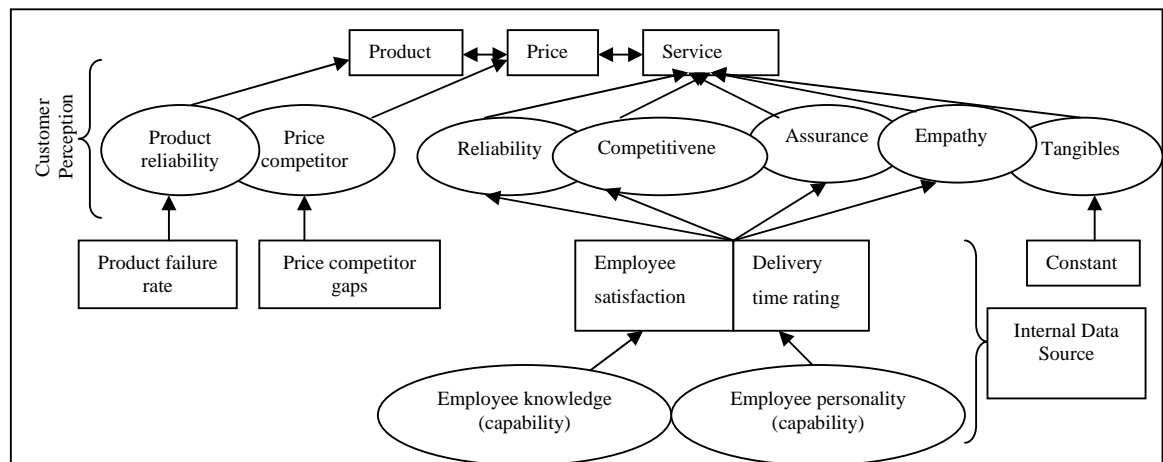
Figure 2.7: Model of Sources of Customer Satisfaction



Source: Adapted from Bateson (1991)

Al-Mutawa *et al.*, (2006) found that customer satisfaction model in restaurant depends on how well a restaurant delivers quality products, price and service to external customers. His conceptual model of customer satisfaction, however, focuses on the service quality to identify its internal data source indicators. The performance of the service quality depends on three aspects: delivery time rating, employees' capability, and employees' willingness in performing the service quality (Figure 2.8). The latter depends on six performance indicators: product failure rate, price competitor gap, deliver time rating, employee satisfaction, employee personality and employee knowledge. Each of these aspects has to be assessed to generate a figure that correlates with overall customer satisfaction value.

Figure 2.8: Sources of Customer Satisfaction of Al-Mutawa *et al.*, (2006)



Source: Al-Mutawa, 2006

Customer satisfaction, such as disconfirmation of expectations, equity, attribution, affect and regret. Those elements explain the composition of the customer satisfaction concept or construct (theorize the elements of customer satisfaction). The micro-models enable the researchers to properly operationalize measurement of customer

satisfaction and helping them to achieve construct validity in the eventual satisfaction survey.

ii) Micro-Models of Customer Satisfaction

The micro-models of customer satisfaction cover the elements that make up the customer satisfaction, such as disconfirmation of expectations, equity, attribution, effect and regret. Those elements explain the composition of the customer satisfaction concept or construct (theorize the elements of customer satisfaction). The micro-models enable the researchers to properly operationalize measurement of customer satisfaction and help them to achieve construct validity in the eventual satisfaction survey.

Erevelles and Leavitt, (1992) provided lists of the types of micro-models for customer satisfaction. A summary of each type of the micro-models is as follows:

- a. The Expectations Disconfirmation Model has been the dominant model in satisfaction research. The model has consumers using pre-consumption expectations in a comparison with post-consumption experiences of a product/service to form an attitude of satisfaction or dissatisfaction toward the product/service. In this model, expectations originate from beliefs about the level of performance that a product/service will provide. This is the predictive meaning of the expectations concept (Oliver, 1977, 1980).
- b. The Perceived Performance Model deviates from the model of Expectations Disconfirmation in that expectations play a less significant role in satisfaction formation. The model performs especially well in situations where a product/service performs so positively that the consumers' expectations get discounted in their post-consumption reaction to the product/service (Oliver, 1997).
- c. Norms Model resembles the Expectations Disconfirmation Model in that the consumer compares perceived performance with some standard for performance.

The standard, however, is not a predictive expectation. Rather than considering what will happen in the consumption experience, the consumer uses what should happen as the comparison standard. This is the normative meaning of “should” rather than its occasional chronological connotation in the English Language (Erevelles and Leavitt, 1992).

- d. Multiple Process Models characterize the satisfaction formation process as multidimensional. That is, consumers use more than one standard of comparison in forming a (dis)confirmation judgment about an experience with a product/service (Erevelles and Leavitt, 1992).
- e. Attribution Models integrate the concept of perceived causality for a product/service performance with the satisfaction process. Consumers use three factors to determine an attribution’s effect in satisfaction. These are locus of causality, stability and controllability. The locus of causality can be external (that is, the service providers get the credit or blame) or internal (that is, the consumer is responsible for the product/ service performance). Stable causes would tend to have more impact in satisfaction because consumers tend to be more forgiving of product/ service failures that appear to be rare events. Finally, controllability affects attribution in that a poor outcome in a consumption experience may mean that the consumer will be dissatisfied with the product/ service provider if the consumer believes the provider had the capacity, that is, control, to perform in a better fashion (Weiner, 1985).
- f. Affective Models differ from previous models in that they go beyond rational processes. In these models, emotion, liking, and mood influence feelings of (dis) satisfaction following the consumption experience (Cadotte *et al.*, 1987).

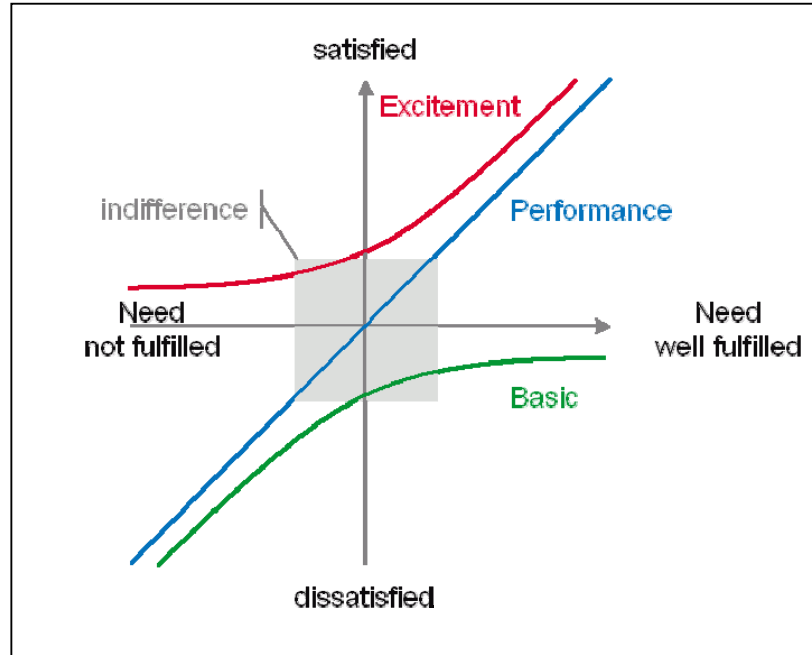
Equity Models emphasize the consumers’ attitude about fair treatment in the consumption process. Fair treatment can use the concept of the equity ratio (that is, the amount of their return for their effort made) or the concept of social comparison (that is, the perceived, relative level of product/ service performance that other

consumers experience). Oliver (1997) breaks equity down further into three categories, procedural fairness, interactional fairness and distributional fairness.

Another customer satisfaction model that applies in restaurant service is the Kano Model (see Figure 2.9). The Kano model was originally developed in 1984 by Professor Noriaki Kano to classify and recognize the importance of different "types" of customer needs. It provides insights into the dynamics of customer preferences and the thoroughness of their needs in order to ensure successful products and services. Although the model has many uses, the main application should be to proactively uncover and classify 3 main categories of needs and take action to effectively integrate all 3 types of these needs into restaurant offerings (Products or Services). Those needs are stated in the Figure 2.9 and explain as follow:

- a) the basic needs or attributes that must be met in terms of customer satisfaction. If the needs go unfilled, customer will certainly be dissatisfied. Total absence or poor performance in any of these attributes could result in extreme dissatisfaction. However, even if these needs are completely fulfilled, there is no guarantee that customers will be particularly satisfied or return for subsequent meal at the restaurant.
- b) The need that has a linear effect on customer satisfaction where better and good performance of this factor will improve customer satisfaction. The better the restaurant is in meeting these needs, the higher the likelihood that customers are satisfied with the total dining.
- c) the need that is called the excitement group or delighters. The needs are unexpected by the customers, but when present can result in high level of customer satisfaction or customer "wows"

Figure 2.9: Model of Customer Satisfaction of Kano (1984)



The lower curve of the model reflects basic customer needs, about the functions or features that the customers normally expect of a product or service. The absence of these factors will lead to customer dissatisfaction and can result in complaints and or lost business. If present or fulfilled, these attributes contribute to customer neutrality. In restaurant service, the customer expects that their basic needs (tasty food, good service and reasonable price) will be fulfilled. Attaining high levels of customer satisfaction is hard to achieve by excelling in these area alone.

Next, is the performance attributes. Generally, the better these functions or features perform the greater the level of customer satisfaction.

Finally, the upper curve of the model represents those features or functions that delight and excite customers, the unspoken or unexpected needs of the customer that when satisfied, lead to high-levels of satisfaction. In competitive situations when products or services provide similar performance, addressing the attributes that delight and excite customers can provide a competitive advantage.

Differentiation between products and services is achieved by high-levels of execution of the performance attributes combined with the inclusion of one or more customer

delighter features. This combination provides the greatest opportunity for competitive advantage.

The Kano model is a quality measurement tool used to:

- a) prioritize customer requirements based on their impact to customer satisfaction
- b) determine which requirements are important. All identified requirements may not be of equal importance to all customers.
- c) classify and prioritize customer needs. This is useful because customer needs are not all of the same kind, not all have the same importance, and are different for different populations. The results can be used to prioritize restaurateurs' effort in satisfying different customers
- d) help identify customer segments, based on the relative priority of each segment's requirement.

This Kano Model is useful in helping restaurateurs understand the difference between Basic, Performance and Delighter features. By designing in and focusing improvement efforts on those features that create customer delight, there is a much greater chance of keeping current customers and gaining new ones. It goes to show that a little extra, and a small kindness can have solid business results and be a very good investment. Provide the basic. And then deliver outstanding customer service and the restaurateurs will create customer loyalty. Customers will return again and again to be delighted.

These customer satisfaction conceptual models of previous studies were constructed around quantitative perspectives which have a limited depth of analysis and understanding of the customer experience and therefore satisfaction; and seem to have been concerned with the conceptual antecedents of customer satisfaction. In contrast, little attention has been paid to the development of informative and straightforward models that show the overall process of customer satisfaction in dining experience. This would help restaurateurs understand what customers regard as the components of a satisfactory service experience.

The aims of this study were to investigate factors of customer satisfaction, not to prioritize, classify and segment the customer satisfaction factors. Therefore all factors emerged are equally important and contributes to customer satisfaction in its own way, supporting one and another to produce holistic memorable dining experience. Therefore, restaurateurs must put their efforts on all of the customer satisfaction factors.

2.3.2 The Concepts of Satisfaction

Basically, there are two general conceptualisations of satisfaction existing in the literature: transaction-specific satisfaction and cumulative satisfaction. A transaction-specific concept of satisfaction provides valuable insights into a particular and short-run product or service encounter (Anderson and Fornell, 1993).

Satisfaction as a cumulative concept describes the customer's total consumption experience with a product or service (Anderson and Fornell, 1993) over more than one experience. The satisfaction goes beyond an expected utility to encompass post-purchase consumption utility. The satisfaction concept is not a transient perception of how happy a customer is with a product or service at any given point in time, but it is the customer's overall evaluation of their purchase and consumption experiences (Anderson and Fornell, 1995).

Customer satisfaction based on this concept is a fundamental indicator of current and long run performance because it directly affects customer loyalty and subsequent business profitability. Therefore, consumer and marketing researchers should give more attention to the management of customer cumulative satisfaction (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). Furthermore, those researchers had not looked at the 'management' of satisfaction.

2.3.2.1 The Significance of Customer Satisfaction in Providing an Understanding of the Background to the Study

The phenomenon of customer satisfaction, based on customer experience, was found to be of high interest not only to researchers but also to marketers (Cardozo, 1965). This has been reflected in the constant growth of social science literature on customer experience over the last four decades (Kivela *et al.*, 2000). Customer satisfaction has been recognised as an essential factor leading to the success of most service industries including restaurants. It can determine the restaurateur's profit (Gustafsson and Johnson, 2004). Customer satisfaction can be enhanced by providing high quality service (Stevens *et al.*, 1995).

2.3.2.2 The Need for Sustainable Customer Satisfaction Management

Cumulative satisfaction is a fundamental indicator of current and long run performance because it directly affects customer loyalty and subsequent business profitability. These are some of the reasons why consumer and marketing researchers have given more attention to cumulative satisfaction and have such a great interest in the management of customer satisfaction (Cronin and Taylor, 1992).

2.3.3 The Definitions of Satisfaction

Satisfaction has multiple definitions but it relates to people's attitude. Those definitions can be summarized and grouped according to cognitive (rational/physical) (Pizam & Ellis, 1999), affective (emotional) (Churchill and Suprenant, 1982) and connative (subsequent actions such as repeat purchase) (Pfaff, 1977 and Kivela *et al.*, 2000).

Woodruff *et al.* (1983) suggested that satisfaction should be defined to reflect the link between the cognitive and emotional processes because satisfaction/dissatisfaction is an emotional feeling in response to confirmation/ disconfirmation. These ideas were supported by Um (1989) who viewed satisfaction as a complex human process

involving extensive cognitive, affective and other undiscovered psychological and physiological dynamics. In accordance with this, Westbrook and Michael (1983) suggested satisfaction is a pleasurable, emotional state resulting from the appraisal of a product, service, retail outlet or consumer action like a complaint, shopping trip or purchase decision, etc. The definitions of satisfaction according those three grouped are discussed as below:

2.3.3.1 Cognitive (Rational/Physical)

Satisfaction is viewed as an outcome or end state that may be a cognitive state of reward as an emotional response to an experience or a comparison of rewards and costs of the anticipated consequence (Vavra, 1997).

Howard and Sheth (1969) defined satisfaction as the buyer's cognitive state of being adequately or inadequately rewarded for the sacrifice he or she has undergone. Gullledge (1990) indicated that satisfaction is a result of what the customer thinks will happen (expectations), interacting with what customers think did happen (perception). According to Zeithaml *et al.*, (1993) satisfaction is a thought that results from the comparison of the predicted service and the perceived service, whereas service quality refers to the comparison between the service and the perceived service. Hill and Alexander (2002) said satisfaction is a measurement of how the organisation's total product performs in relation to a set of customer requirements.

Satisfaction can be achieved resulting psychological state of the emotion surrounding the real experience after expectations are coupled with the consumer's prior feelings about the consumption experience (Oliver, 1981). The confirmation or the disappointment resulting from the actual experience is an evaluative process whereby a customer compares services, or product performance, to prior expectations of the service or product (Oliver, 1977, 1980; Woodruff *et al.*, 1983; and Churchill and Surprenant, 1982).

Satisfaction can be achieved through the comparison of product or service performance. For instance Oliver (1996) viewed satisfaction as consumer's fulfilment response, when a product or service feature provides a pleasurable level of consumption. The degree of satisfaction is related if expectations are correctly or better met by experience, or if its outcome is worse than expected. Oliver suggested that the evaluation process may lead to one of the following results:

- * When customers perceive services or product performance meet their expectations, it confirms their expectations. This evaluation process results in confirmation and satisfaction.

- * When a service or product is delivered better than expected, the process leads to satisfaction.

- * When the service or product does not meet or is less than expectation, it results in dissatisfaction.

Churchill and Surprenant (1982) suggested satisfaction was a post-consumption, evaluative judgment concerning a specific product or service. Day (1994) defined satisfaction as an evaluative response to the perceived outcome of a particular consumption experience. Parasuraman *et al.*, (1994) defined satisfaction as the customer's evaluation of service quality, product quality, and price. On the other hand, Hunt (1997) referred to satisfaction as evaluation that results in the product experience being judged to be at least as good as it was supposed or expected to be.

2.3.3.2 Affective (Emotional)

Satisfaction is viewed as the customer's feelings towards the product and service performance Oh (2000). It is a feeling of well-being and pleasure resulting from obtaining what one hopes for and expects from the appeal of product and or service (Pizam & Ellis, 1999) and when the services exceed a customer's expectations (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990).

2.3.3.3 Connative (Subsequent Actions Such As Repeat Purchasing)

Satisfaction is achieved when a purchase expectation has been rewarded as a result of the purchase and it leads to repeat purchase (Howard and Sheth, 1969). Anton (1996) viewed satisfaction as a state of mind in which customer needs, wants and expectations throughout the product or service life have been met or exceeded, resulting in purchases and loyalty.

2.4 THE THEORETICAL CONTEXT

At the outset a qualitative study would only review the theoretical context of literature to identify the gaps rather than fully reviewing the literature as would a quantitative researcher. However, a qualitative study would do a more detailed literature review to interpret the findings as is done in this thesis in Chapter Six. Thus, this section is to introduce the theories of customer satisfaction as a context setting to help the reader understand what this study was doing rather than as a chapter that reflects where in the study the literature review necessarily stood.

A variety of theories have been posed about consumer behaviour relating to customer satisfaction. They are behavioural theories (such as Operant Conditioning theory and Classical Conditioning theory); cognitive perspectives (such as Attribution theory, Equity theory, Expectancy-Disconfirmation theory and Gestalt theory) and social perspectives (such as Social Cognitive theory). Details about these theories are discussed below.

2.4.1 Behavioural Theories

Behavioural theory emphasizes the contribution of the environment in shaping behaviour. Theorists that are well known in behavioural approaches include Albert Bandura, Robert Gagne, Harry Harlow, Ivan Pavlov, Skinner, Edward Thorndike

and John Watson (O'Donnell *et al.*, 2005). However, behavioural theories such as Social Cognitive theory that was proposed by Albert Bandura in 1986, Classical Conditioning theory by Edward Thorndike in 1913 and Operant Conditioning theory by Skinner in 1938 that are perceived to consist of environmental elements and impact on customers' behaviour were found more relevant for this study which explores the factors and management of customer satisfaction.

2.4.1.1 Classical Conditioning Theory

Classical Conditioning theory is a learning theory that was introduced by Edward Thorndike in 1910. The Classical Conditioning theory primarily concerns itself with reflexive or unlearned behaviour. It involves the pairing of a stimulus and a response. The stimulus leads to the response without any prior learning. This theory represents the original Stimulus-Response (S-R) framework of behavioural psychology that sees learning as the result of associations formed between stimuli and responses. The paradigm for S-R theory was trial and error learning in which certain responses come to dominate others due to rewards and the learning that could be explained without referring to any unobservable internal stimuli (O'Donnell *et al.*, 2005). The existence of two stimuli, namely primary and secondary is in association with each other. As the association between the two stimuli becomes strong, it leads to the same reaction being yielded by the secondary stimulus as the primary. These are the main principles occurring in the Classical Conditioning theory:

- a) learning requires both practical experience and rewards (law of effect/exercise)
 - a series of S-R connections can be chained together if they belong to the same action sequence (law of readiness).
- b) transfer of learning occurs because of previously encountered situations.
- c) intelligence is a function of the number of connections learned (O'Donnell *et al.*, 2005).

2.4.1.2 Operant Conditioning Theory

Operant Conditioning theory deals with learned, not reflexive behaviour. The Operant Conditioning theory works by reinforcing (rewarding) and punishing behaviour based on the consequences it produces. Reinforcement is used to increase the probability that behaviour will occur in the future, whereas punishment aims to decrease that probability. It does not rely on attitudes, beliefs, intentions, and motivation for predicting and influencing behaviour.

The Operant Conditioning theory consists of three primary laws:

- a) law of effect – responses to a situation which are followed by a rewarding state of affairs which will be strengthened and become habitual responses to that situation. Behaviour that has a good effect tends to become more frequent, whereas behaviour that has bad effects tends to become less frequent (O'Donnell *et al.*, 2005).
- b) law of readiness – a series of responses can be chained together to satisfy some goal which will result in annoyance if blocked
- c) law of exercise – connections become strengthened with practice and weakened when practice is discontinued (Medin *et al.*, 2005)

2.4.2 Cognitive Perspectives

Cognitive theories are very interested in what occurs in the individual as he or she receives and actively processes information from the environment (O'Donnell *et al.*, 2005). The cognitive theories that were found relevant to this study are Attribution theory, Equity theory and Expectancy Disconfirmation theory. They were applied in customer satisfaction in food services studies conducted by Almanza *et al.*, (1994); Johns and Tyas (1996); and Kivela (1999a).

2.4.2.1 Attribution Theory

Attribution theory was introduced by Heider in 1958. The Attribution theory is a collection of ideas about when and how people form causal inferences. It examines how individuals combine and use information to reach causal judgements. The impetus of the attributions process is related to motivational aspects, while its causal analysis involves cognitive evaluation. Attributions are important because they form the underpinning of further judgements, emotional reactions and behaviour.

Weiner (2000) proposed three dimensions of attributions: locus, stability and controllability. Locus refers to whether the cause lies internally or externally in relation to the individual. Stability (stable, unstable) refers to whether the cause is constant or varies over time. When the cause of a particular outcome is considered to be highly stable, the cause will influence expectations for similar behaviour in the future. Controllability (controllable, uncontrollable) refers to whether an individual has the power to change the nature of a cause of a good or a bad outcome. When a cause is subject to high controllability, the individual will have stronger inferences of personal responsibility.

2.4.2.2 Equity Theory

The Equity theory is related to social justice and is a model of motivation that was proposed by Stacy Adam in the early 1960s. It is a theory that focuses on

“...people’s feeling of how fairly they have been treated in comparison with the treatment received by others.” (Mullins, 1992, pp. 211-212)

Equity theory is based on the notion that we compare the ratios of what we bring to a situation (i.e. inputs) and get out of it (i.e. outputs) (refer to Table 2.11) with what others bring to the situation and get out of it. According to this model, behaviour is initiated, directed and maintained by the attempts of individuals to preserve some internal psychological balance (Adams, 1965). People’s perception and beliefs about

the fairness of their treatment at work affects their motivation, attitudes, and behaviour.

Table 2.12: Potential Inputs and Outputs of Situation

Inputs	Outputs
Education	Compensation
Effort	Benefits
Ability	Recognition
Skills	Self-Concept
Knowledge	Experience
Experience	Learning opportunities
Diversity	Satisfaction

Source: Levy (2003)

This theory is based on the concept of exchange theory where people evaluate their social relationships involved in the exchange process. Feelings about the equity of the exchange are affected by the treatment they receive when compared to what happens to other people (Mullins, 1992). Equity is achieved if the ratio of a customer's total outcome to total inputs equals the perceived ratio of other customer's outcome and inputs. In this case, service performance, equity and expectation influences customer satisfaction. Unequal comparisons of the ratios, where customer's ratio of outcomes to inputs is (usually) less than that of other customers, leads to the customer experiencing a sense of inequity.

Levy (2003) suggested ways to reduce tension because of perceived inequity through changes in inputs, changes in outcomes, and alteration in perceptions. Empirical support for Equity theory is mixed. When people are paid on the basis of how much they produce and feel that their rate is not enough, they tend to produce more, but at a lower quality (Mowday, 1991). Inequity can have important motivational effect and may lead to resentment, absenteeism, and turnover (Cropanzano and Greenberg, 1997).

2.4.2.3 Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory

Expectancy Disconfirmation theory is a combination of the Expectation and Disconfirmation theories. According to the Expectation theory, customers often make some estimation about a product, its benefits, and the outcomes of using the product. They act on the basis of what they value and what they anticipate and the result of their actions (Tolman, 1932). Expectation theory consists of the models of assimilation or cognitive dissonance, assimilation-contrast and generalized negativity to explain expectation effects on judgement of product acceptability. The models describe disconfirmation expectations about what happens when the actual product is different from the expected product (Meiselman, 2003).

Disconfirmation theory asserts that individuals make purchase decisions based on their expectations of the outcomes of a specific action (Webster, 1991). The theory explains that customers purchase goods and services with pre-purchase expectations about anticipated performances. Once the goods or service have been purchased and used, outcomes are compared against expectations. When the outcomes match expectations, confirmation occurs that is neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction. Disconfirmation occurs when there are differences between expectation and outcomes (Pizam & Ellis, 1999). This difference is conceptualised as GAP by Zeithmal *et al.*, (1990). Positive disconfirmation occurs if the service is better than expected, whereas a worse performance than expected results in a negative disconfirmation. Kennedy and Thirkell (1988) categorised three outcomes of the Disconfirmation theory:

- a) Delight results from positive disconfirmation when the product or service performance is better than expected.
- b) Satisfaction occurs from adequate quality (confirmation).
- c) Dissatisfaction results from negative disconfirmation, when the product or service performance is less than expected.

The Disconfirmation theory focuses on the satisfaction or dissatisfaction that arises from discrepancies between prior expectations, importance and actual performance. Those variables are disconfirmation effects generated by satisfaction or

dissatisfaction (Oliver, 1981). Lewin's (1938) Expectancy-disconfirmation theory has received the widest acceptance, perhaps because of its broadly applicable conceptualisation (Jeong and Oh, 1998, Kivela, 1999, Hemmington *et al.*, 2005). Kivela (1999) applied the theory to investigate dining satisfaction and return patronage in restaurants in Hong Kong.

2.4.2.4 Gestalt Theory

Gestalt theory was introduced by Max Wertheimer in 1924. The Gestalt theory suggests that

“...a phenomenon (such as perception) is more than the sum of its parts and that analysis of a phenomenon should look at the whole rather than mere elements.”

It is a broadly interdisciplinary general theory that provides a framework for a wide variety of psychological phenomena, processes and applications in active interaction with the environment. The Gestalt approach emphasizes the role of the overall structure and the relationship between components in producing perceptual organization. The basic Gestalt theme is that the whole is different from the sum of its parts (Schiffman, 2001).

2.4.3 Social Perspectives

2.4.3.1 Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) was previously known as Social Learning Theory (SLT) which stresses the interplay of both behavioural and cognitive elements in motivation in terms of

“...how we process, store and use information and how this information influences what we attend to, perceive, learn, remember, believe, and feel.”

It is the most important of the social cognitive theories and was developed by Albert Bandura in 1986. The SCT emphasizes that human behaviour is influenced by the

interplay of motivational factors, self-regulatory mechanisms and environmental factors. Response consequences mediate behaviour and are used to form expectations of behavioural outcomes. The ability to form these expectations gives humans the capability to predict the outcomes of their behaviour before the behaviour is performed (Medin *et al.*, 2005).

Key constructs of this theory are reciprocal determinism and self-efficacy. Reciprocal determinism is a concept that people have the ability to influence their destiny (they are not free agents of their own will), and they are driven neither by inner forces nor environment. Humans function as contributors to their own motivation, behaviour and development within a network of interacting influences. The interactions among those influences are not in equal strength and simultaneous; they differ based on the individual, particular behaviour being examined and specific situation in which the behaviour occurs.

Self-efficacy is the most important type of self-reflection in Bandura's theory. It is the individual's perception of their ability to successfully complete a task or attain a goal (Bandura, 1989). Strengthening one's self-efficacy enhances motivation to attain a particular goal. It is perceived in relation to expectation because people are seen to become more motivated to do something that they feel competent to do well. Thus, motivation results from the joint influences of self-efficacy, expectations and self-reaction to discrepancies between current performance and some standard or goal.

According to this theory, an individual's behaviour is uniquely determined by each of three factors: directional interaction between environment and behaviour, person and behaviour, and the interaction between behaviour and the environment. The bi-directional interaction between environment and behaviour in terms of a person's behaviour will determine the aspects of their environment to which they are exposed, and behaviour is, in turn, modified by that environment. The person-behaviour interaction involves the bi-directional influences of people's thoughts, emotions and biological properties (sex, ethnicity, temperament and genetic) and gives shape and direction to behaviour which then affects one's thoughts and emotions. In the

interaction between behaviour and environment, a person's behaviour can affect the way in which they experience the environment through selective attention.

Bandura (1986) considered that people's self-regulation was composed of three major components. The first is self-observation which refers to the extent to which we pay attention to specific aspects of our behaviour. However as people are limited in their ability to process information they cannot focus on to all dimensions of their behaviour at the same time and therefore have to choose the ones that will occupy their attention. Thus, it helps us to monitor our behaviour, performance, feedback and goals and to allow for motivational strategies to develop. The second is self-evaluation which accounts for the attention that individuals devote to feedback processes in terms of how we evaluate our own performance and effort. The third is self-reactions which are the internal responses to self-evaluation.

Human beings have basic and unique capabilities: symbolizing capability (ability to model observed behaviour); vicarious capability (ability to learn from direct experience and the observation of others. Information derived can be used as a guide for future action which avoids time consuming trial and error, cost and fatal mistakes); forethought capability (ability to motivate themselves and guide their actions anticipatorily) (Bandura,1989); self-regulatory capability (ability to mediate external influences, provide a basis for purposeful action, allowing people to have personal control over their own thought, feelings, motivations and actions); self-reflective capability (ability to analyze their experiences, think their own thought processes and alter their thinking accordingly).

The SCT however was found to have 2 major limitations. Firstly, it is difficult to operationalize due to its comprehensiveness and complexity. Secondly, the application of the SCT focuses on one or two constructs like self-efficacy, while ignoring the others.

2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has indicated a starting point for understanding this study on the customer dining experience and customer satisfaction research in restaurant industries. The context in which the research is set and the key concepts and approaches that will help in the interpretation of the findings of the research. For instance, definitions of customer satisfaction, the significance of customer satisfaction in providing an understanding of the background to the study, and the need for sustainable customer satisfaction management.

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

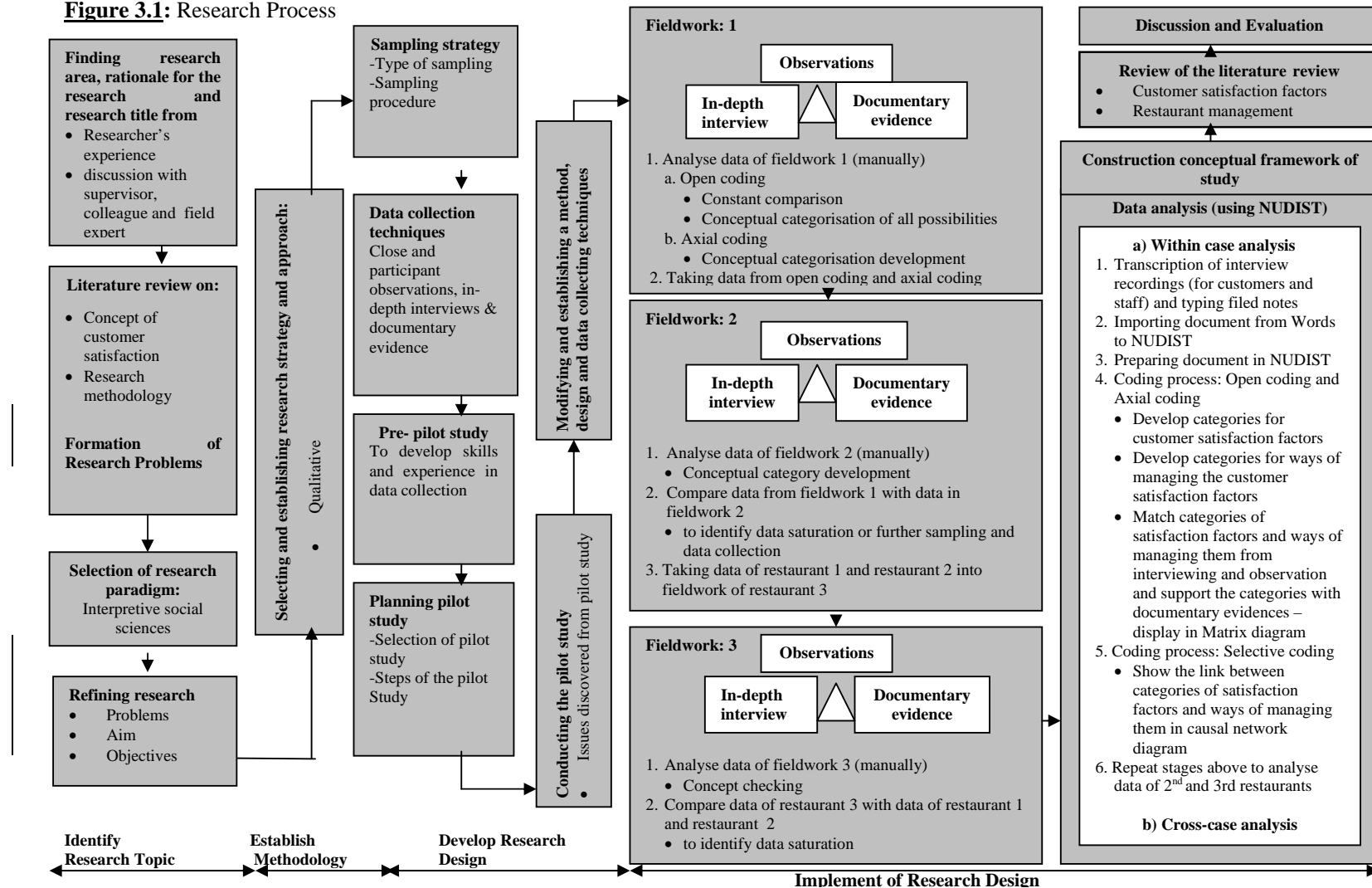
3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into three main parts: The first part reflects the basic paradigm or philosophy used as guidance in conducting the research. The second part is the discussion of the guidelines in conducting the research. The third part includes the technical aspects of specifying the research methods and data collection techniques.

3.2 RESEARCH PROCESS

The research process of this study is illustrated in Figure 3.1. It involved four main stages: identifying the rationale for the research, establishing the methodology, developing a research design, and implementing the research design. The detail of each of these stages is described in the following sections of this chapter except for the implementation of the analysis which is covered in the next chapter.

Figure 3.1: Research Process



Two stages were involved in formulating the aims and objectives for this study. They were: reviewing the literature (see Chapter Two) and establishing the aims and objectives.

In summary:

- Restaurant service plays an important role in Malaysia in meeting the high demand among the Malaysian population who eat out. Although customer service potentially has an important impact on restaurant customer satisfaction the research already conducted has paid less attention to the identification of the factors influencing the dining experience of customer satisfaction, the ways of managing the dining experience satisfaction and providing straightforward conceptual framework of customer satisfaction dining experience.

Previous research on the factors influencing restaurant customer satisfaction has mostly made use of quantitative survey methods where respondents have had to choose from pre-determined answers from the items in the research instrument, which has usually been a questionnaire. Thus, the conceptual frameworks of restaurant customer satisfaction have been constructed around quantitative perspectives which have a limited depth of analysis and understanding of the customer experience and therefore satisfaction. Very few researchers have applied qualitative methodologies where the nature of the method of data collection can drive the researchers closer to the participants in order to gain an in-depth understanding of factors influencing their satisfaction with their dining experience. Therefore, factors influencing customer satisfaction may be based on more than the food/ product, service and atmosphere, which have formed the focus of quantitative studies.

3.2.1 Research Aim

The aim of this study was to develop a conceptual framework synthesising the factors influencing and the management on customer satisfaction of the dining experience offered by Malaysian Malay restaurants

3.2.2 Research Objectives

Based on a combination of these concerns above, this research focuses on two perspectives in respect of customer dining satisfaction: restaurant customers and restaurant staff (restaurant manager, restaurant front of house staff and kitchen staff).

As a result two research objectives were developed. They are to:

- i) identify the factors influencing customer satisfaction with the dining experience offered by Malaysian Malay restaurants
- ii) investigate the management and staff practices in relation to the factors influencing customer satisfaction with the dining experience in Malaysian Malay restaurants

3.3 INTERPRETIVE SOCIAL-SCIENCE PARADIGM

This study applies the interpretive social-science paradigm to guide the research design. This section discusses the properties of the paradigm and its role in guiding the research design and the qualitative as the research method. Guba (1990, p. 17) defined a research paradigm as

“a set of beliefs that guide action or the everyday variety of action in connection with a discipline inquiry.”

The research paradigm helps to identify a research design in order to determine a method for data collection and data analysis (Smith *et al.*, 1991). This study of the influences on customer satisfaction in Malaysian Malay restaurants (through the investigation of the experiences of customers as research participants dining at the Malaysian Malay restaurants, and of the staff and managers of those restaurants) has adopted the interpretive social-science paradigm.

The interpretive social-science paradigm asserts the multiple explanations or realities to explain a phenomenon rather than one causal relationship or one ‘theory’ (Jennings 2002). It views consumer behaviour as being in a process of continuous emergence and the “*reality*”, which matters most during consumption, as that which is subjectively experienced in the consumer’s mind (Hirschman and Holbrook 1986).

The description of method of existential-phenomenology (Thompson *et al.*, 1989) supports this approach presents consumers' experience as "*being-in-the-world*" and describes this experience as it emerges or is "*lived*". Therefore, the '*interpretivist*' is represented as seeking understanding. This involves identifying both individual and shared meanings while accepting this to be only present understanding and subject to the hermeneutical understandings of the "reality" of what is being studied. Indeed, the researcher and the phenomenon or subject studied is actually interactive. The researcher cannot "*distance*" him/her self from a particular phenomenon nor can the phenomenon be understood without the personal involvement of the researcher. This leads to an ability to describe its complexity and internally constructed meaning (Hirschman, 1986).

The interpretive social-science paradigm is examined for methodological justification for this study using three bases. These are beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology), the relationship between the researcher and participants or objects of study (epistemology) and how the researcher gathered and analysed the data (methodology). Those bases are discussed below.

3.3.1 Ontological Basis

The interpretive paradigm considers that the world is constituted of '*multiple realities*'. The interpretivist assumes an inductive approach to research and commences his/her study in the empirical world in order to develop explanations of phenomena. This paradigm emphasises the real world '*out there*' as being very important especially with regard to the interaction between the objective reality and participant's subjective experience (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1986). Indeed, the reality is subjectively experienced by those participants.

3.3.2 Epistemological Basis

In the interpretive social-science paradigm, the relationship between the researcher and subject (or, to use the terminology of the interpretive social sciences paradigm,

'social actors', 'respondents', 'participants' or 'interviewees') is subjective rather than objective. Interpretivists may identify patterns of behaviour but fundamentally believe that the world is complex and changeable to attempt the identification of causal relationships (Thompson *et al.*, 1990 and Smith *et al.*, 1991). Researchers typically do not enter the field with predetermined relationships to test. The research design evolves within the changing environment. The interpretation is based on the researcher's inference of the words and actions of the participants in the phenomenon studied (Wells *et al.*, 2002).

In the context of this study, this paradigm helps the researcher to see the participants' world from the participant's point of view and to understand and explain why participants have different dining experiences. Therefore, the validity of the data about the participants' satisfaction with the dining experience was based on the researcher's inference of the words and actions of the participants in the restaurants studied. The paradigm recognises that the nature of reality is subjective and multiple. The focus in this study was on understanding the different perceptions, aspirations and interests and how these influence the participants' dining experience. For example, different participants had different expectations from their dining out experience and different perceptions towards the food experience.

3.3.3 Methodological Basis

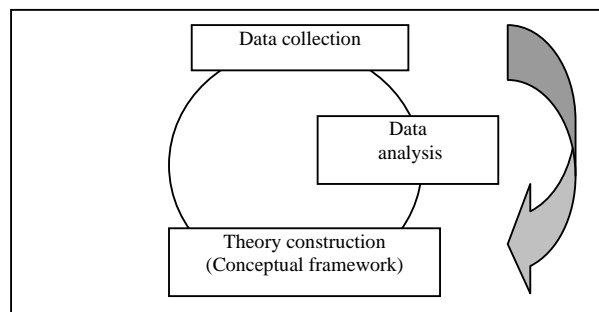
To investigate and comprehend the consumption experience, the researcher needs to be involved with the phenomenon (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1986). In this way, the researcher cultivates an openness that will be receptive to the structures and meanings that come directly from the participants. The authors add that the participants' experiences need to be understood in their own terms rather than forcing them into some pre-existing structure of the researcher's making. Additionally, an interpretivist seeks to understand phenomena from the insider's perspective (Jennings, 2002), or *'emic perspective'*, which allows for the identification of multiple realities (Fetterman, 1989). The views of social actors are taken into account and are equally valued. The language of the paradigm includes terms such as ideographic view, participants,

respondents, emic perspective, reflexivity, reciprocity, qualitative analysis, content analysis and triangulation (Jennings, 2002). To gather knowledge from the empirical world, qualitative methodologies are appropriate. A summary of the research method characteristics which align with the interpretive social-science paradigm are as follow:

- a) The research process should be subjective rather than objective.
- b) Data should be collected from the insider's perspective rather than from an outsider's perspective.
- c) Data should be collected in their real world or natural setting as opposed to being collected under 'experimental' conditions.
- d) The method of data collection would include, for example, participant observation, in-depth interviews, case studies, focus groups and appreciative inquiry.

In the interpretive social sciences paradigm, the research process (Figure 3.2) starts with data collection, is followed by data analysis and then reaches a conclusion through construction. Qualitative data is usually collected from the participants' natural world, involving small samples that are selected using non-probability sampling strategies. It focuses on providing an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in human life and an interpretation of the participants' actions (Weber, 1978). Such studies apply multiple sources of evidence including in-depth interviews, focus groups, observations, artefacts and documentary evidence (Yin, 1993). Data emerging from these sources of evidence are then analysed in order to build a conceptual model and reach a conclusion.

Figure 3.2: Inductive Research Process of the Interpretive Social-Science Paradigm



Source: Jennings (2001)

As the premise of this study is to begin the process of validating alternative epistemological practices outside the restaurant service system, the experience of participants involved in this study provides comprehensive information on their experience at the restaurants. Thus, knowledge is subjectively attained. Beyond being discovered, the knowledge is constructed. Consequently, the study requires a research approach that allows the essence of the interactions between participants and the restaurants to be expressed by those in this study. The interpretive social-science paradigm is an appropriate approach for this study, which is concerned with subjective experiences (Uriely, 2005) requiring subjective methods. Hence, a qualitative research methodology was chosen for this study to explore the experiences of restaurant customers and staff (as participants of the study) in order to provide an understanding of how the phenomenon of satisfaction of dining experience was perceived, constructed and evaluated through the eyes of those participants who were involved in the phenomenon.

3.4 SELECTING QUALITATIVE METHODS

This study focused on understanding the essence of the customers' restaurant dining experience. Given the interpretive social sciences approach, it required data collection methods that can capture and describe how the customers, staff and managers of the restaurant perceive, describe, feel, remember, make sense of, and talk about the phenomenon. This was consistent with the key principles of the qualitative approach in data collection and analysis, which is to provide an understanding of the thoughts of people and to analyse their experience, based on their own perspectives, not the researcher's (Boas, 1943, pp.314 in Jennings, 2001). In this study, data about the phenomenon of study were derived through in-depth interview with participants.

However, people cannot always describe their experiences and feelings so it was necessary to go beyond reported data from consumers and to use other sources such as observation, specifically what is referred to within the interpretive social sciences as 'close observation', to support the reported data from the in-depth interviews.

3.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design was concerned with organising the research activity including data collection (Smith *et al.*, 1991). The choice of the research design depends on the purpose of the study, which is to understand the phenomenon of study (Babie, 1992). The research design in this study involved five phases. Phase one was the choice of setting (restaurants), phase two was the observation phase, phase three was the interview stage, phase four was focused on documentary evidence and phase five was the data analysis. Details of each phase are explained under the following sub-headings of this chapter.

3.5.1 Phase One- Choice Of Settings (Restaurants)

study involved four populations. They were Malay restaurants, restaurant customers, restaurant staff and restaurant managers. The sample or unit of analysis of this study was three Malay restaurants in Johor Baharu, final customers and internal customers. Final customers were the people or end users who purchased restaurant products and services. The internal customers were the restaurant staff and managers of those restaurants who delivered products and services to the final customers.

3.5.1.1 Sampling Strategy

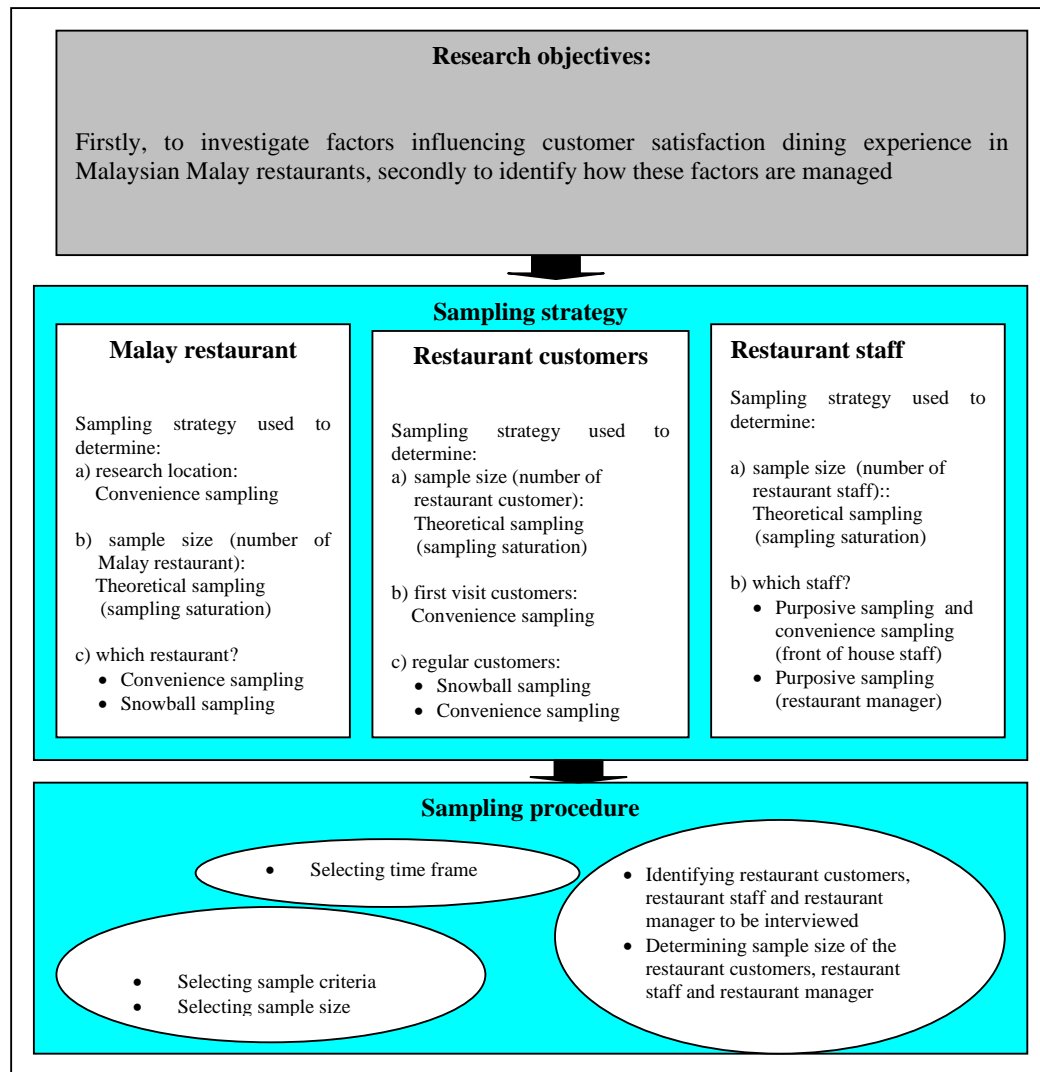
A non-probability sampling strategy was adopted in this study for the populations of Malay restaurant, restaurant customer and restaurant staff due to the following:

- Members of the Malay restaurant, restaurant customer and restaurant staff populations of the study not having an equal probability of being selected, as the study involved small samples and there was difficulty in gaining access.
- The study adopting a qualitative methodology due to the challenge of understanding peoples' thoughts and experiences. According to Creswell (1998), a non-probability sampling strategy is the most suitable sampling strategy for application in qualitative research.

- The sample selection being based on the researcher's judgement, expertise, and convenience through information derived from field observations.
- The study focused on the restaurant and the people, and was consistent with the idea highlighted by Veal (1997), that the non-probability sampling strategy is suitable for a study of people or an organisation.

The sampling framework of this study is illustrated in Figure 3.3. The figure shows that convenience sampling was adopted to choose the research location, first visit customers and regular customers and to choose which restaurant staff were to be interviewed. Purposive sampling was applied in the choosing front of house department and its staff. Snowball sampling was adopted in selecting Malay restaurants for primary research and the regular customers to be interviewed. Theoretical sampling was applied in the processing of data collection during the period of study, determining the number of Malay restaurants to be involved in the study, determining number of restaurant customers and restaurant staff to be interviewed, identifying data saturation and coding process.

Figure: 3.3: Sampling Framework



i) Sampling Strategy for Malay Restaurants

Malaysia has three major races that dominated by Malay and followed by Chinese and Indian (refer to Table 2.3). The Malays who are associated with Islamic religion have restriction to eat only *Halal* foods are called Muslims. Meanwhile Chinese and Indians that are associated with non-Islamic religion have no restriction to eat both *Halal* and non *Halal* foods are known as non-Muslims. The Malay restaurants were found play an important role in Malaysia to serve both Muslim and non-Muslim customers across religion. Thus, the selection of Malay restaurants as sample of the study on customer satisfaction in Malay restaurants is seen will give positive impacts to customers and restaurateurs of those Malay restaurants in Malaysia.

Malaysia has 13 states and each state has many districts, with each district having different areas. Due to time and financial constraints, it was impossible to select all, or a sample of, Malay restaurants across all states in Malaysia. Johor Baharu was chosen as the research location because of the importance of the restaurant industry in Johor Baharu (as stated in sub-section 2.2.2) as well as for logistical reasons that it was convenient for access by the researcher. Thus, a convenience sampling technique was applied to choose the location of the research study. According to Jennings, (2001) this sampling strategy is based on the researcher's selection procedure being based on the proximity and ease of the sample to be accessed. The potential limitations of convenience sampling are sampling bias arising because the sample is not representative of the entire population. Since the sample is not representative of the population, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to the entire population. Thus the findings have low external validity.

In determining which restaurants would be sampled, a snowball sampling approach took place. The owner of the restaurant where the pilot study was conducted introduced the first restaurant involved in the fieldwork for the study. The participation of another two restaurants in the study was based on recommendations from people who were regular customers of the restaurants. In this sampling, the researchers usually identifies one member of the population, then other participants are identified through this member and the member introduces the researcher to these other participants until an appropriate sample has been constructed (Jennings, 2001). Snowball sampling is also known as chain referral, reputation or network sampling (Hemmington, 1999). This sampling strategy also leads to sampling bias where the samples selected are not representative of the population. Thus, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the population and have low external validity.

ii) Sampling Strategy for Restaurant Customers

The number of restaurant customers as a sample was unknown prior to the research because it was hard to determine who would come to the restaurant. Again, due to time constraints, it was impossible to interview all of them. Therefore, the

determination of the restaurant customers to be interviewed depended on who was available in the restaurant and who agreed to be interviewed at the particular time the fieldwork was conducted, based on convenience. Hemmington (1999) describes a sampling strategy based on the collection of data from those who are readily available for investigation as ‘convenience sampling’.

It was also difficult to identify customers who would volunteer to be interviewed. Again, convenience sampling was adopted to determine these customers. To start with, participants were selected amongst the restaurant’s regular customers where some of them had a good rapport with the researcher that was built up while the researcher was working in the restaurant. Others were introduced by the restaurant staff. Then, snowball sampling was applied where those customers that had been interviewed were asked to recommend their friends and relatives who were also customers of the restaurant. In turn, some of those recommended customers suggested other customers to be interviewed. However, there were some first visit customers who were helpful and willing to participate too. Convenience sampling was applied to select this group of customers.

iii) Sampling Strategy for Restaurant Staff

Front of house staff and restaurant manager were selected using purposive sampling in order to achieve the second objective of this research, which was to investigate staff practices in managing the factors and the process of customer satisfaction. This sampling strategy is also referred to as judgmental sampling because the determination of who or what study units are the most appropriate to be involved in the study is based on the researcher’s judgement of the respondent’s knowledge and expertise regarding the focus of the study (Hemmington, 1999).

The front of house staff were selected on a convenience basis among those who dealt directly with restaurant customers. They were front of house supervisor, waiter/waiters, busgirl/busboy, cashier and runner. However, staff from other departments like chefs, assistant cooks and maintenance supervisors also were chosen

as sample of the study to reconfirm the gathered data from interview and observation and to explore whether there might be other new data that would emerge from them.

3.5.1.2 Sampling Procedure

The sampling procedure involved five stages, and these were selecting a time frame; selecting sample criteria; selecting sample size; identifying restaurant customers, restaurant staff and restaurant manager to be interviewed; and determining sample size of the restaurant customers and restaurant staff.

i) Selecting a Time Frame for Fieldwork

Setting up a timeline was very useful in determining the time frame because it provided a list of milestones to be achieved and served as a signpost in moving the researcher from one target to the next. In this study, the period of fieldwork conducted in each restaurant varied from one restaurant to another. It was determined by the saturation of data collected. The fieldwork ranged between 27 and 30 days.

ii) Selecting Sampling Criteria

This study involved the selection of multiple restaurants with the following criteria:

a) Number of Restaurants

In accordance with theoretical sampling in selecting additional restaurants, each additional restaurant should serve a specific purpose within the overall scope of inquiry. Yin (1989) identified three options to achieve this aim:

1. Choose a case to fill theoretical categories, to extend the emerging theory.
2. Choose a case to replicate previous cases to test the emerging theory.
3. Choose a case that is a polar opposite to extend the emerging theory.

After analysing three restaurants, it was found that the marginal improvement to the theoretical framework was small. Theoretical saturation was achieved through literal replication and the decision to conclude the research. This was consistent with Martin and Turner (1989, pp. 149):

“...by the time three or four sets of data have been analysed, the majority of useful concepts will have been discovered.” The replication logic of the restaurants focused on restaurant capacity, restaurant product and restaurant ownership as rationales (see Table 3.1). Those rationales fit the replication logic because each individual restaurant consists of a “whole” study in which information was gathered from various sources and conclusions drawn based on the information. It was predicted that similar results (replication) would be found. The multiple restaurants provided robust findings and gave more confidence in overall findings.

Table 3.1: Details of Sample Criteria

Sample criteria	Restaurant 1	Restaurant 2	Restaurant 3
Restaurant	SBR	SSR	AWR
Location in Johor Bahru	Larkin	Skudai	Mahmodiah
Type of restaurant	Family restaurant	Family restaurant	Family restaurant
Ownership	Independent Malay	Independent Malay	Independent Malay
Capacity	200 customers	470 customers	200 customers
Menu offered	Johor Malay traditional food	Main menu: Malay food Other menus: (Chinese Food and Indian Food), Western Food, Thai Food, Italian Food, Hong Kong Food	Main menu: Malay food Other menus: (Chinese Food and Indian Food), Western Food, Thai Food, Italian Food, Hong Kong Food
Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buffet service • Take away 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self service (for Malay <i>Nasi Campur</i> menu) • Table service (other menus) • Take away 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self service (for Malay <i>Nasi Campur</i> menu) • Table service (other menus) • Take away

b) Type, Ownership and Capacity of the Restaurant

Almost all Malay restaurants in Malaysia are family restaurants. The family restaurant dominates the restaurant industry in Malaysia. The Malay family restaurants chosen

as the sample of this study met a number of specific criteria for selection. The criteria were as follows.

The restaurants were owned and managed by Malays to ensure all food and beverages items served are *Halal*. The restaurants offer Malay menus as a main menu besides other menus that target customers from different ethnicities and the family dining experience, like children's and seniors' menus. The restaurants charge reasonable prices that are affordable by customers with different levels of income. The service falls between quick service (self service for Malay *Nasi Campur* Menus) and full service (table service for other menus). Usually, diners are seated at a communal table such as on bench seats, and it has children's facilities, for example a play area, or high chairs, or toys and other children's activities.

Finally Malay family restaurants with a capacity of 200 customers are a typical scenario in Malaysia due to their big range of potential customers not being limited to Malay ethnic customers only. Therefore, restaurants with a minimum capacity of 200 customers were chosen as one of the criterion for selection.

iii) Determining Sample Size

In qualitative research, there is a lack of consensus regarding sample size. Gomm *et al.*, (2000) highlighted that the number of cases investigated and the amount of detailed information gained are closely related. So, the fewer cases investigated, the more information can be collected from each. A single case allows the researchers to focus their time and full attention on one site. On the other hand, multiple cases offer a broader perspective and depth to the phenomenon of study (Glasser and Strauss, 1967). Although there is no ideal number of cases, Eisenhardt, (2002) claimed a number between 4 and 10 cases usually works well.

However, in theoretical sampling, the actual number of 'cases' studied is relatively unimportant. What is important is the potential of each case to aid the development of theoretical insights into the phenomenon being studied. This is quite similar to

multiple case studies which usually involve a small sample size based on replication logic. It means that every case has to demonstrate the occurrence of exemplary findings before the selection of a final case (Yin, 1993). The restaurants of this study were chosen to replicate previous restaurants. The sample size was not predetermined prior to the study, but the number was increased until theoretical saturation of data was reached from those restaurants. This permitted in-depth information about the phenomenon under study. It was predicted that the development of the saturation of the data would produce consistent findings and would be more convincing. The more replication, the more convincing the findings would be. However, based on saturation of data, three Malay restaurants (not including the Malay restaurant that was involved in the pilot study) emerged as the appropriate sample size for this study.

iv) Gaining Access to the Restaurants

Jauncey (1999) highlighted that gaining access to participants who are willing to participate in the research is challenging. This problem was also faced in accessing the participants when conducting a pilot study and preliminary fieldwork. This part of the study consumed a lot of time and delayed the research process. The first problem was to identify the existing restaurants that were registered with the Johor Licensing Department. Some registered restaurants no longer existed, while some were not registered. Due to incomplete data about the restaurants, the researcher had to explore in order to determine whether the possible restaurants matched the sample criteria of this study.

The second problem was to get permission from restaurant owners to conduct the research at their restaurant. Five restaurants were approached about involvement in the pilot study. Only one was receptive and willing to participate, while the other four refused. This restaurant was accessed through a friend related to the restaurant owner. For the main study, all 12 restaurants that were approached initially refused to participate. However, three restaurants were accessed through the owner of the pilot study restaurant and a friend of the researcher who was a regular customer at other two restaurants.

v) **Identifying Samples within the Restaurants**

The three groups of participants within the restaurants were the customers, the front of house staff and the restaurant managers. The customers were chosen in relation to the first aim of this study, which was to identify the factors and the processes influencing satisfaction in Malaysian Malay restaurants. Meanwhile, front of house staff and restaurant managers were selected to provide data for the second aim about how these factors and processes that influenced satisfaction are managed. The following criteria were used in selecting these samples within the restaurants:

Restaurant customers: Demographic profiles of customers were not identified in advance because the aim of theoretical sampling is to uncover as many potential relevant categories as possible along with their properties and dimensions (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). So, it was opened up to all customers who were willing to be interviewed in order to offer the greatest opportunity to gather the most relevant and rich data, from different perspectives, about the phenomenon under investigation. At the end of the fieldwork it was found that the customers were diverse in terms of gender, age, race, marital status, rates of monthly income, education background, religion, occupation, and frequency in visiting the restaurant (in terms of first visit and regular customers to the restaurant). Riley (1996) agrees with the idea of interview sampling being conducted openly, with a cross-section of participants in terms of demographic characteristics.

Restaurant staff: Front of house staff and restaurant managers and the front of house department were intentionally selected because those restaurant staff and the department are perceived to be engaged directly with customers. However, demographic profiles of the staff such as gender, education, religion, position etc were not predetermined. Based on data from observation, and data derived from interviews, it was found that staff from other departments like chefs, assistant cooks and maintenance supervisors also needed to be interviewed to reconfirm the gathered data and to explore whether there might be other new data that would emerge from them.

vi) Determining Sample Size within the Restaurants

It was difficult to determine how many people to interview and how long was needed for each observation in each restaurant. This was determined by data saturation, or the point, where the same information was heard repeatedly from participants who consistently provided similar types of information and when no major new insights or information was gained concerning the factors influencing customer satisfaction with the dining experience in Malaysian Malay restaurants and the management and staff practices in managing those factors of customer satisfaction. At what was considered to be the saturation points, the total number of participants interviewed for all three cases was 108 restaurant customers and 18 restaurant staff.

3.5.2 Phase Two – Observation Phase

3.5.2.1 Justifying of Observation

Yin (1994) suggested that there are six methods for data collection in a case study. In this study four of the methods were used: close observation, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentary evidence.

The primary data for this study was collected during the fieldwork when the researcher was actually working as one of the restaurant staff. The period of the fieldwork in each restaurant was divided into three stages: introduction stage, active stage, and saturation stage. The method of data collection, sources of data, and objective of the data collection in each stage is illustrated in Table 3.2. The procedure of data collection for each restaurant involved in the study was similar to the pilot study.

Table 3.2: The Structure of Data Collection

Stage of Fieldwork	Method of Data Collection	Source of Data	Objective
Introductory stage	Close observation	Restaurant operation Customer Staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To become familiarized with the restaurant environment and restaurant operation system 2. To learn about customer behaviour, staff practices, restaurant operation and unexpected incidents related to the phenomenon under investigation 3. To develop good relationships with staff and customers in the restaurant before further data collection
Active stage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participant observation 2. Short conversation with customers and staff 3. In-depth interview with drop-in customers 	Restaurant operation Customer Staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To get an in-depth understanding about customer behaviour, staff practices, restaurant operation and unexpected incidents related to the phenomenon of study 2. To explore key points in constructing open ended interview questions, which later on are used for in-depth interviews in the saturation stage 3. To get an in-depth opinion about factors and process of satisfaction
Saturation stage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In-depth interviews with customers 2. In-depth interviews with staff 3. Documentary evidence 	Customer Staff Document	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To get an in-depth opinion about factors and process of satisfaction 2. To get an in-depth explanation of staff practices managing factors and process of satisfaction 3. To identify areas of sensitivity and confidentiality of the research, 4. As a reference to be considered during the fieldwork. 5. To provide 'behind-the-scenes' for restaurant operation that is not directly observable.

The objectives of close observation were to become familiarized with the restaurant environment and restaurant operation system, to learn about customer behaviour, staff practices, restaurant operation and unexpected incidents related to the phenomenon under investigation and to develop good relationships with the staff and customers in the restaurant before further data collection.

'Participant observation' is a data collection approach where the observer is an active part of the actual phenomenon, as opposed to just observing the lives of the participants as an outsider (Hazel, 1991; Veal, 1997). In this study the observer was the researcher who participated in the life of the restaurant community, by working in the front of house department in a variety of roles such as waitress, receptionist, bus-girl and food runner, but sought not to influence the 'natives' by her presence during the observation. This method of data collection allowed the researcher to get closer to the participants and the restaurant, to build informal relationships, to develop a sense of trust, and to collect data through interaction while working in the restaurant. This

helped the researcher to learn about issues that the participants might be not willing to provide in an interview session due to sensitivity reasons. Besides that, the fact of becoming part of the system enabled a much greater depth of understanding through being part of the day-to-day life of the restaurant. Cohen and Manion (1998) agreed that in participant observation, researchers can identify behaviour as it occurs and are able to make appropriate notes about its salient features.

This data collection method was applied on coach tour guiding (Holloway, 1983) and on coach partying (Seaton, 2000). In an article on ensuring customer satisfaction, Ruin (2000) suggested that such participation observation allows the researchers to immerse themselves in the customers' environment, to watch and listen to them in an attempt to understand their needs in a meaningful way.

3.5.2.2 Designing of Observation

i) Close Observation

At the early stage of the close observation, the staff treated the researcher suspiciously. To develop a good working relationship with the restaurant staff before data collection, the owner introduced the researcher to all restaurant staff in each restaurant department. All the staff knew the purpose of researcher's presence in the restaurant. The prior engagement with the staff established a good rapport between them and the researcher. It was important to reduce curiosity towards the researcher's presence to make it easier to get information from restaurant staff about the phenomena of study and participation in interviews that would be conducted in the saturation stage. This introduction stage also helped to develop the trust of the owner for future researchers. Hammersley (1989) agreed that when dealing with respondents in data collection, the researcher has to quickly establish a working relationship with them.

The close observation took two days and was conducted in all restaurant departments because it was believed that all those departments have a relationship with the

phenomenon under investigation. The close observation involved listening to explanations from the restaurant manager and also a question and answer session between the researcher and staff in-charge during the first visit to their department. The researcher played her role as a direct observer and data about restaurant operations and the management of the department was recorded as field notes during the observation. Major issues observed and raised were customers' behaviour, staff practices, restaurant operation and unexpected incidents related to the phenomenon of study.

ii) Participant Observation

The presence of the researcher in the restaurant for the period of fieldwork, between 27 to 30 days, in a variety of roles including assisting customers to tables (as a receptionist), taking orders (as a waitress), serving orders (as a food runner) and clearing tables (as a bus girl) allowed staff and customers to get accustomed to the researcher in order to get valid, unbiased data. If the customers were aware of the researcher's presence as a researcher, they might have modified their behaviour, which could have led to it becoming inaccurate or distorted. Kellehear (1993) sees this data collection method as being unobtrusive, as it involves gathering information about people's behaviour without their knowledge. However, the researcher's identity was revealed to selected customers while making appointments with them for interview sessions at a later stage.

3.5.2.3 Piloting the Study

A pilot study was a final preparation for data collection, in order to refine the data collection plan in terms of content and procedure to be followed and to assist the relevant questions for the interview sessions (Yin, 1994). A pilot study for this research was done to:

- a) develop a data collection procedure;
- b) test research instruments and methods of data collection;

- c) provide the researcher with interviewing experience and feedback regarding the interview guide. (The researcher could then improve her interviewing technique in terms of the wording of the interview questions, arranging a suitable time to conduct interview sessions and a time estimate for the duration of each interview session);
- d) identify the difficulties that needed to be dealt with before fieldwork took place;
- e) develop skills in transcribing recorded interviews; and
- f) improve skills in writing field notes.

This study involved pre-pilot study and pilot study. They are explained in the following subsections:

i) Pre-Pilot Study

In order to familiarise and develop skills for data collection, a pre-pilot study had been conducted in one of the fast food restaurants in Bournemouth, United Kingdom. Although it was already known that there were no similarities in terms of culture and restaurant operation, the pre-pilot study was conducted to help the researcher to get experience in terms of writing field notes and conducting interviews with staff of the restaurant; to understand the role of staff and how it relates with the customer satisfaction prior pilot study. This pre-pilot study involved close observation and informal interviews. The observation took place 3 hours per week for one month.

ii) Pilot Study

A Malay restaurant located in Larkin was selected for the pilot study. The pilot study was selected based on similar sampling criteria to that of Malay restaurants in the main study such as ownership, location, capacity, and menu and service offered. The pilot study was carried out for 26 days and the pilot study activities were divided into three stages: introduction stage, active stage and saturation stage. A two day close observation was conducted at the introduction stage. Short conversations with

customers and staff were organised to explore issues that would be used to construct interview questions. Close observation and participant observation were conducted in the active stage. The researcher played a few roles during the period involved in the participant observation such as waitress, food runner and bus girl. Data from the observations were written down in field notes and analysed during the period of study, applying constant comparative methods to explore the differences and similarities of the data. This acted as a guideline for additional data collection and also to determine a saturation point. The active stage took 18 days before data from the observation became saturated.

iii) Issues Discovered from the Pilot Study

From the pilot study, several aspects were identified that would improve the data collection. Yin (1994) claimed that a pilot study is valuable for the researcher because it allows explicit lessons to be learnt in terms of both research design and field procedures. Issues discovered from the pilot study led to the modification and establishment of design and data collection techniques for this study, as discussed below.

Dividing periods of observation into three stages: introduction, active and saturation stage was found to be helpful when structuring the observations systematically in terms of allocating a method of data collection for each stage.

Since it was the first time the researcher had conducted participant observation, a 26 day pilot study helped the researcher to improve skills in observation and in writing field notes of the observations, for example to record only relevant data concerning the phenomenon of study.

The pilot study involved nine hours per day for 6 days a week over 26 days. Due to a lack of front of house staff in the in-charge service area that could occupy 200 customers, and with no official break, the researcher was forced to stand up for long hours. The heavy and busy work caused physical problems, particularly backache, and

had a negative impact on the researcher's emotions as well. This serious issue, physical labour as well as expert labour, should be clearly identified before conducting fieldwork. Restaurateurs need to be given a detailed explanation about the role of the researcher in the restaurant, for example either the researcher is a part of the staff, or the researcher is not part of the restaurant staff. This will ensure the restaurateurs will not misuse the presence of the researcher in the restaurant.

3.5.2.4 Selecting Participants' Criteria

i) Front of House Department Staff

Since the focus of this study was on factors influencing customer satisfaction, the front of house department, where customers receive service from staff was the main department under observation. The waiters, waitresses, bus boys, food runners, front of house supervisors, captains, beverage runners, and cashiers were identified as the staff involved in this department. The observations focused on how those staff delivered their services to customers, such as attending to them, taking and serving orders, handling complaints, staff personality, staff appearance etc. Other issues under observation were:

- a) staff interaction with different groups of customers
- b) flow of interaction among staff in the same and other departments
- c) customers' behaviour
- d) customers' feedback and suggestions about restaurant services, facilities, products and others
- e) restaurant atmosphere
- f) product, service and facilities available for customers
- g) other relevant issues

ii) Restaurant Operation

Observations were also conducted in several restaurant departments such as the kitchen department, dishwashing department, the pick-up counter, the beverage department, and the storage department. In each department, the observation focused on what the data said about activities such as the number of restaurant staff involved, staff responsibility, co-ordination amongst staff in the same department and between departments, and business hours etc. The observation was to investigate how those aspects contribute to factors influencing customer satisfaction and the management of customer satisfaction factors.

iii) Restaurant Administration Department

Observations made of the administration department were to learn about the documentary evidence that is involved in managing the factors influencing customer satisfaction.

3.5.2.5 Observing Procedures

The observation data collection method was a dilemma for the researcher – the main problem being whether to structure the observation or not. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), a tight observation structure does not allow for the emergence of relevant categories or concepts from the data. Conversely, without any observation structure the researcher may write down information that is irrelevant to the phenomenon under investigation, waste time or miss important data. For those reasons, this study used the researcher's own observations to post hoc structure procedures in order to provide a framework alongside the observational period. Since it is a flexible guideline, it has been modified according to the situation under study. The fieldwork consists of the following procedures:

i) Determining Time and Period of Observation

As noted earlier, the length of the observation period for each case was not predetermined in advance. The longer the researcher is involved in fieldwork, the more likely it is that the concepts of the phenomenon under study will emerge. However, there is a law of diminishing returns where over time fewer new concepts are identified until saturation is achieved. For this study, the observation in each restaurant was conducted during the period of fieldwork, between 5 and 9 hours a day, for five days a week. It was found that the participant observation took between 18 and 21 days (see Table 3.3).

The total number of daily observations to be carried out was determined by the saturation of the data emerging from the observation, which occurred at the end of the work in any particular restaurant. This was achieved when no new patterns or new concepts emerged from the data and similar information was observed repetitively.

ii) Designing and Writing Field Notes

Field notes were the records of the observations made. They contained a description of the people, the sequences and durations of events, details of conversations, detailed descriptions of settings, and the observer's actions, feelings, comments and working hypothesis (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). For this study, the field notes were jotted down during the observation to absorb all data that was relevant to the phenomenon of study (see Appendix 1), because it was often difficult to identify what would and would not be useful in the future. The field notes were also used to record the researcher's ongoing thoughts such as, "What am I learning?" and, "How does this case differ from the last?".

Table 3.3: Timeframe of Data Collecting Activities

Fieldwork activities	Restaurant		
	SBR	SSR	AWR
Period	29 days	30 days	27 days
Introduction stage a) Close observation b) Establishing relationship	2 days	2 days	2 days
Active stage • Participant observation • Short conversation	- 21 days - 7.00am-4.00pm (9 hours) - 6 days/ week	- 18 days - 3.00pm-11.00pm (8 hours) - 5 days/ week	- 18 days - 6.00pm-12.00 midnight (6 hours) - 5 days/ week
Saturation stage • In depth interview • Documentary evidence	6 days	10 days	7 days
Role of the researcher	1. Waitress 2. Food runner 3. Bus girl	1. Receptionist 2. Waitress 3. Food runner	1. Receptionist 2. Waitress 3. Food runner 4. Bus girl

The field notes were in the form of a memo. The memo was a bank of ideas to revisit, which had been jotted down during the data collection process (Goulding, 2002). There are several ways memos can be written in field notes: by description, presentation of dialogue and characterisation (Emerson *et al.*, 1995). These were all applied in writing the fieldwork memos for this study. Memo writing was generated simultaneously throughout the sampling and data collection process. It was written openly without seeking a context, which was established later through data analysis. Key incidents were recorded in the field notes at the time incidents happened and elaborated during breaks and at the end of the shift. This was to ensure the researcher did not forget anything. It was completed when similar incidents repeatedly occurred. This was consistent with Cohen and Manion (1998) who said recording and taking the notes after observations as quickly as possible is very important because the quantity of information forgotten is slight over a short period of time, but accelerates quickly as more time passes.

In the *descriptive memo method*, data observed was pictured through detailed explanation of basic scenes, object settings, people and actions to give a clear visualisation about participants, based on what was seen and experienced, and described with specific details. For instance, staff appearance was portrayed through

their uniform, hair condition (whether having short or long hair. If long, either the hair was tied back, or a hair net was worn, or not), having long or short nails, smell and condition of teeth. Kinetic images were pictured through body gestures, movements, postures and facial expression. Visual images were created from a detailed description (colour, shape and size). Below was an example of a descriptive, visual image memo:

The restaurant has three service sections, which are an open air and non air- conditioned outdoor section and an air-conditioned indoor section. The outdoor section consists of 4 PVC round tables that can accommodate 4 customers on each table. The air-conditioned section has 12 rectangular tables made of rattan with green marble tops. These tables are arranged in two columns and the columns are separated by aisles. One end of the aisle links to the main entrance whilst another end links to a buffet table. So every customer who enters the entrance will see the table straight away. This service section is decorated with a white floral cornice, with one big chandelier in the middle and several round dim lights at the edge of the cornice. Four big, golden frames with Arabic calligraphy hang on both sides of the wall. The calligraphy is made of copper with a black background...

The *episode memo method* of writing is a brief incident description which does not extend over a long period of time or involve many characters. The incidents were written as one continuous action or interaction. For example:

A group of old Chinese customers was seen discussing something in the service area. Whilst being served their tea for breakfast, one of them asked the waitress in charge, "Do you speak English?" The waitress answered, "Yes, I do". Then the customers asked her for help "I got this letter from the Malaysian Emigration Office but this letter is in Bahasa Melayu and I don't understand Bahasa Melayu. Could you please translate this letter in English for me?" The customers were from Singapore and they don't understand Bahasa Melayu. The waitress managed to translate the letter. The customers were really happy and before leaving the restaurant one of them gave the waitress some money as a tip.

A characterisation memo is a simple description of the participant's dress and movement to convey some minimal sense of that individual. It was characterized through the way they talk, act and relate to others. For instance:

Whilst a waitress was having a meal, two customers entered the restaurant. The waitress stopped her meal and then attended to the customers as soon as she saw that they took their seat. After making sure all their orders had been served, the waitress continued her meal.

The *dialogue memo method* was a way of writing a conversation that the researcher had with participants or others and is written as accurately as possible, for example:

Whilst being served their tea for breakfast, one of them asked the waitress in charge, "Do you speak English?" the waitress answered, "Yes, I do". Then the customers asked her for help, "I got this letter from the Malaysian Emigration Office but this letter is in Bahasa Melayu and I don't understand Bahasa Melayu. Could you please translate this letter in English for me?"

Since almost all the restaurants under study did not provide a special room for their staff, a prayer room that was quiet and peaceful was used as a place for the researcher to write up field notes. It also allowed the researcher to give comments on issues and ideas that came up during the research in terms of what had been observed, done, and listened to within the first and second half of the study period. This was to guide further data collection.

In the process of discovering meaning, and to make interpretations about what had been observed, data derived was tested by checking them with those who had been observed, particularly restaurant staff, and other further observations were also noted.

iii) Organising Observation Data

The data was analyzed within twenty four hours following the observation. Strauss and Corbin (1990) said the initial data gathered should be followed immediately by an analytic session in which the researcher examines the data. Immediate data analysis was to identify data that needed further observations to confirm validity and perhaps for discarding, modifying or replacing them with new relevant data that might arise in the following observations. It was also to determine data saturation.

iv) Short Conversations

During participant observations, short conversations with staff and customers were conducted to construct key points for open-ended, semi-structured interview questions. For instance data that emerged from close observation showed that the restaurant has regular customers. Interview question been addressed to the regular customer:

*“I noticed you have visited this restaurant for breakfast yesterday.
Well, what brought you here for lunch today?”*

Since daily observations were done over a period of five to nine hours a day, the researcher could interact with the staff freely during working hours whilst having coffee breaks with them and so on. Issues discussed in the conversation or verbal interaction with restaurant customers were based on data derived from observation. For example:

- i) the frequency of their visit to the restaurant
- ii) the reason for choosing the restaurant
- iii) the strengths of the restaurant, overall

Meanwhile issues discussed in the conversation or verbal interactions with restaurant staff were based on data derived from observation. For example:

- i) how often they worked
- ii) the reason for choosing the restaurant as a place to work
- iii) the strengths of the restaurant, overall as a place of employment or for customers

The researcher did not use interview guides or a tape recorder to record data derived from these conversations, but wrote down memos whilst having breaks. Data was collated for commonality and sorted under the same categories. Data from observations that matched with data from the conversations were combined to construct key points for open-ended, semi-structured interview questions, which were used for interview sessions later on. Throughout this stage, the researcher also identified particular front of house restaurant staff and customers to be interviewed.

However, in situations where the customers were unlikely to make further visits to the restaurant, for example drop-in customers, travellers and tourists, interview sessions were conducted at this stage.

In the study, data collection and data analysis were conducted simultaneously. Themes for factors influencing customer satisfaction dining experience were generated after a few days of engaging with fieldwork. Based on data derived from short conversations with staff and customers and in-depth interviews with drop-in customers, close observation was also noted to explore other elements like restaurant operation and restaurant management.

3.5.2.6 Evaluation of Observation

i) Modification of Behaviour

The data collected from the series of participants and close observations was done over four weeks of fieldwork, allowing the researcher to make assumptions that there was no modification in the behaviour of the participants. If there was any modification of behaviour then this is out of the researcher's control.

ii) Observation

Close and participant observations were done manually, without the support of electronic instruments like a video camera. This was to avoid the participants becoming aware that they were being observed and to avoid the possibility of them modifying their behaviour. However, this method of observation was limited only to the restaurant section where the researcher could view them, and not to the whole area of the restaurant which could only be done using a video camera. Serial observation helped the researcher to get saturation data for the observations.

iii) Reported Data

The findings of the study also depended on the honesty of the participants in telling the truth about their dining experiences and the skills of the researcher as a data collector and interpreter. Therefore, the researcher can not be regarded as a totally neutral, independent observer due to the potential for bias. However, pilot study was useful to familiarisation with the practice of methodology. Different sources of evidence, for example documentary evidence, serial observations to get data saturation, in-depth interviews from the diverse perspectives of participants discussing similar phenomenon, and participants checking the interpretations of interview transcripts, were taken to avoid bias.

3.5.3 Phase Three - Interview Stage

3.5.3.1 Justifying of Interview

In-depth interview sessions with customers and staff identified in the active stage were conducted to confirm data saturation of the observation. This stage took between 6 to 10 days before the researcher withdrew from the restaurant. This was consistent with Fielding and Fielding (1986) who said that interviews should be conducted after a period of observation.

The main purpose of using in-depth interviews with restaurant customers for this study was to identify the factors influencing customer satisfaction, while interviews with restaurant staff were to explore the processes of satisfaction and how staff practices manage these factors related to customers' experience and how staff who deliver the services affect that satisfaction. The interviews were also conducted in order to learn about aspects that cannot be seen and explored through observations and to identify data that are not stated in the documentary evidence. The interviews, in return, enable the participants to make their own interpretations of their behaviour and

practices and let them express their feelings towards the issues discussed. It also gave a chance for the researcher to collect suggestions for practical improvements.

3.5.3.2 An Interview Process and Instrument

Face-to-face interviews with both restaurant customers (see Appendix 2) and restaurant staff (see Appendix 3) were adopted to gauge the factors influencing customer satisfaction from those who experienced the phenomenon themselves. Open-ended, semi-structured, interview questions were used because it was found they had potential to generate rich and detailed descriptions of participants' experiences. The participants were allowed flexibility in discussing issues that were not predetermined and not stated in the interview guide and which were often found, later on, to be potentially relevant to the study. Cohen and Manion (1998) highlighted the advantages of this type of interview questioning. It encouraged co-operation and helped the researcher in establishing a rapport with participants, allowed participants to answer in-depth and to clear up any misunderstandings. Meanwhile the researcher could identify the limit of the participants' knowledge and experience from the answers given. Open-ended interview questions have been used to identify factors in customer satisfaction amongst its customers (Barsky, 1996).

Each participant was approached and asked for an interview. After confirmation was made by both parties regarding the date, time, purpose, place and the length of the interview session, invitation letters were sent to the participants (see Appendix 4). This was followed by a telephone call one day before the interview session took place, to remind the participants about the appointment. Some questions asked in the interview were given from the participants' answers during short conversations in the introduction stage of the fieldwork, whilst others arose from the data that emerged from the participant's answers during the interview.

Since the interview was on a voluntary basis, restaurant customers determined the dates and times for the interview session based on their preference, but within a period given for the data collection. The sessions took place in the restaurant to help

the customers refresh their memory of the experience that they had had in the restaurant. Each session took between 40 minutes to an hour.

In questioning, the researcher behaved as a 'cultural stranger' even though some answers were already known. This was done to explore the answer based on the participants' experiences and not the researcher's as in an interpretive social science approach the focus is on uncovering the experiences of others. There was no structure in terms of the sequence of questioning because it was based on the flow of the conversation. Since the interview questions were semi structured, there was some predetermined content. The content was based on general answers derived from the short conversations during the participant observation phase of the fieldwork activities. This was to allow for more potential concepts to emerge from the answer and allow a more interpretive approach as Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser (1992) suggested, the structure and direction of the interview was left open. The flexibility of the sequence of the questions was not a licence to be unsystematic but allowed the researcher to take advantage of special opportunities in response to the uniqueness of a specific case, and to probe the emergent themes and improve the resultant theory.

The interview session with restaurant customers started with broad questions such as frequency of eating out a week and then led to specific questions about reasons for eating out. These interview questions were to put to the customers in a comfortable situation in order to develop a rapport between the researcher and the customers. The interviews had similar questions for every session. However, the exact wording of questions varied in response to the participants' answers. Sometimes, from the answers given, probing had to be done to go more in-depth and to elicit a clearer description or answer. Therefore, the number of questions asked differed from one customer to another. In a situation where customers led and non directive the researcher repeated the interview question been addressed and asked them to summarize their answers.

Due to time constraints in conducting interview sessions with restaurant staff during working hours, the staff to be interviewed could choose a venue and time for the session. Since members of staff were allowed to have a day off once a week, the session was mainly conducted on that day. This was to ensure interview sessions would not interfere with the working hours of the restaurant staff. However, based on staff requests, all interview sessions were conducted away from the restaurant to allow them to talk freely about their practice, experiences and feelings.

The interview sessions with restaurant managers (see Appendix 5) were conducted in their offices to allow the researcher to get a copy of relevant documents based on issues discussed, which added to the type of documents already collected. The restaurant manager was asked similar general questions as other restaurant staff, except for questions that related to the nature of their job and practices.

A summary for customers, restaurant staff and restaurant manager interviewed was made from time to time, during the session, to counter-check the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the issues discussed and in order to avoid misunderstandings of facts given by the participants.

All interviews were tape-recorded using a mini recorder and at the same time the researcher took notes to record the participants' non-verbal behaviour including their body language. This procedure applied to all participants, in all restaurants. Use of a recorder minimised note-taking and did not distract the interviewer's attention from guiding the discussion effectively (Robson and Foster, 1989). It also allowed the interviewer to capture as much information as possible and allowed the researcher to extract verbatim quotations (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). For that purpose, a mini recorder with in-built microphone and auto-reverse program was used and placed between the researcher and the participants to maximise its reception. The tape recorder was labelled with the detailed information of time, date, restaurant and name of the participants to avoid confusion and thus allowing the researcher to go back to the interview session at any time to check the statements made by the participants. The researcher conducted all interview sessions to gain a better understanding about

the phenomenon under investigation as a preparation to analyse the data and construct the findings chapters.

Permission to tape the interview was requested from the participants before the interviews began. However, for certain situations where consent was not given, the interview sessions were not recorded but the essential points of information given by the participants were written in the interview guide. The interviews were conducted in the Malay language (Malaysian national language). Speaking the same language as the participants allowed them to convey accurate information and describe the reality of their experience, since it is well known that speaking the same language promotes shared understanding. However, participants were free to respond in both, English and Malay. Interview sessions with foreign participants who could not speak Malay were conducted in English.

3.5.3.3 Piloting of the Interview

A Malay restaurant that is located in Larkin, in Johor Malaysia, was selected as the pilot study. The restaurant involved in the pilot study was selected mainly as a result of a recommendation from a friend who is a relative of the restaurant owner. The pilot restaurant conformed to the sampling criteria of the Malay restaurants in the main study such as ownership, location, capacity, and menu and service offered. 25 restaurant customers and six restaurant staff were interviewed. The customers and staff interviewed were selected at the time of the pilot study based on their willingness to take part. The number of restaurant customers and restaurant staff interviewed were determined by theoretical sampling, which was determined by saturation of data of the interviews. This experience of saturation was used as justification for the use of saturation in the main study.

The in-depth interviews with customers and staff took 6 days in total. The interview guide and a tape recorder were used to record the interview sessions. Similar procedures of data collection using multiple sources of evidence were applied as in the fieldwork.

It was found that participants took longer to answer questions related to their opinions on a particular situation, than for factual questions. Several interview questions were altered and added, especially in terms of the vocabulary used. For instance, the phrase ‘satisfaction factors’ was changed to ‘strengths of the restaurant’. The researcher explained the meaning of specific words in person to help participants understand the issues discussed. Example of the interview question after the alteration as follow:

“Based on your experience dining here, what are the strengths of this restaurant that you could share with me?”

This experience in the piloting interview sessions helped the researcher to allocate the appropriate amount of time for each interview question and to estimate the duration of each interview with each participant. Therefore, the participants could be informed about how long their session would last.

The interview sessions were conducted in Malay language as well as the interview transcript writing. The Malay interview transcripts were later translated into English by a linguistic expert in both the Malay and English languages to avoid losing meaning during the transcription process.

The pilot study also assisted the researcher to improve the transcription of the interview recording techniques. For this, the researcher also needed to listen to the interview recording before conducting the next interview session. This was to avoid repeating the same mistakes in the following interview sessions, such as giving clues for the answer that the participants should give. However, the researcher became more experienced in questioning the participants after conducting a few interview sessions.

3.5.3.4 Interviewing Procedure

The interview guide was in the Malay language to ensure issues that arose in the interviews and information derived from the interview could be understood by both parties, and also to avoid losing the meaning of the participants’ answer. This

interview guide contained two parts: participants' demographic profiles, and questions and subsequent answers.

Part A was the participants' demographic profile that consisted of the participants' name, age, race, education background, religion, occupation, monthly income, and telephone number. This section was used to identify the phenomenon under investigation from different demographic profiles perspectives of those participants. Also, it would help the researcher contact the participant to confirm interpretations of the participants' answers discussed in the interview session.

Part B was the question and answer session. This part has three sections: introduction, question and answer and a closing section.

Introduction Section

This was the section where the researcher tried to develop a rapport with the participants to make them feel comfortable and feel free to talk about their experience in the restaurant. It was done by thanking them for their participation, by introducing herself, by explaining the title of the study and the purpose of the interview, by clarifying issues of confidentiality and explaining what the researcher would do with the information given. All participants were assured that their identity would be kept confidential to assure that no harm would come to their positions.

Question and Answer Section

This part contained a variety of open-ended interview questions based on three different groups of participants involved in the interview: customers, front of house staff and restaurant manager. Therefore, there were three different sets of interview guides prepared for those participants (see Appendix 2, 3 and 5). The number of the questions asked for each participant was different from one to another because some answers given needed to be explored in depth. However, the interview guide

consisted of both exploratory and explanatory type of questions. The exploratory questions, which started with 'what' (Levy, 1988), were to identify satisfactory factors and reasons for the factors. Morse (1994) claimed that questions that focus on participant experiences are known as 'meaning' questions. The explanatory questions addressed were mainly to explore the process of managing satisfaction factors based on staff practices. Yin (1994) said that questions that start with 'How' are recognised as 'explanatory' questions.

The general issues explored in the interviews with the restaurant customers were:

- i) the frequency of the customers' visit to the restaurant
- ii) the reason for choosing the restaurant
- iii) the strengths of the restaurant overall
- iv) how staff practices manage those strengths
- v) how staff who deliver their service affect the customers' satisfaction

Answers for each issue derived from the customers' experience were then related back to customer satisfaction. This required researcher expertise in interviewing the customers in an attempt to get the relevant answers about phenomenon of study.

General issues highlighted in the interviews with restaurant staff were:

- i) the percentage of regular customers visiting the restaurant
- ii) the frequency of a regular customer visiting to the restaurant
- iii) the reason for the customers choosing the restaurant
- iv) the strengths of the restaurant overall
- v) how staff practices manage those strengths
- vi) how staff who deliver the service affect the customers' satisfaction
 - a) the weaknesses of the restaurant
 - b) how staff practices manage these weaknesses
 - c) training for staff development
 - d) incentives and penalties for staff
 - e) facilities provided for staff

Answer given by the restaurant staff, based on their experience for each general issue discussed, was then related back to phenomenon of study.

The issues explored in the interviews with restaurant managers were:

- i) how the overall restaurant management in terms of (below) was being practiced?
 - a. Human resources (salary, incentives, penalties, staff development, facilities)
 - b. Products
 - c. Service
- ii) the percentage of regular customers visiting the restaurant
- iii) the frequency of a regular customer visiting to the restaurant
- iv) the reason for the customers choosing the restaurant
- v) the strengths of the restaurant overall
- vi) how the practices manage those strengths
- vii) how staff who deliver the service affect the customers' satisfaction
- viii) the weaknesses of the restaurant
- ix) how staff practices manage these weaknesses

The answers given by the restaurant managers, based on his/her experience for each general issue addressed, was then related back to the phenomenon of customer satisfaction study.

Closing Section

In this part, the researcher thanked the participants for their participation in the interviews and once again reiterated the confidentiality of the information given, and possibility of further interview sessions if needed.

3.5.4 Phase Four - Documentary Evidence

Documentary evidence is evidence in the form of a recorded document. It can be any form of media by which information can be preserved (Scott, 1990). In this study, the documentary evidence was used because it was relevant to research questions of the study. Not analyzing the documents would leave a hole in the study because data from those documents were something that could not be derived through observation or interview.

Based on data derived from interviews and observations, several types of documents were found relevant. These included: staff working timetables, menu cards/books, staff attendance punch cards, stock check list, reservation records and restaurant organisational charts. For example, staff working timetables according to service sections shows the impact of working in a small section, on areas such as data about staff, attention to customers, punctual service and so on. Menu cards/books collected as data can be used to demonstrate the variety of menus available, the role of the menu card/book and the use of food photos as marketing tools. From staff attendance punch cards collected as data, one can link data concerning punctual (on-time) operation hours. Stock checklists are collected to prove daily ingredient supplies and expiry dates of ingredients associated with data on fresh ingredients used in cooking. The researcher also asked for sales data to identify popular types of menu that received more orders from customers, also the flow of weekly and monthly sales. However, access to this latter information was not permitted due to confidentiality. Reservation records were collected to demonstrate how efficient the service is in practising equal opportunities to enable participants to get a chance to have their meal in their preferred service section. The restaurants received feedback from customers in terms of strengths and weaknesses; however these were verbal and not documented.

Permission to review restaurant documents was asked from the restaurant manager or owner after developing a good relationship and establishing trust with them. The researcher stated the intention to review the documents for research purposes only. The intention to review the documents was raised two weeks after fieldwork was

conducted in the restaurant, so that a rapport could be established before asking for what might be sensitive documents. However, this was contrary to Patton (1990) who pointed out that it is important for the researcher to negotiate access to a restaurant's documents and records at the beginning of the research.

3.5.5 Phase Five - Data Analysis

Details of the data analysis process of this study are presented in Chapter Four

3.6 RESEARCH ETHICS

The ethical dilemmas of this study were mainly concerned with data collection and the dissemination of findings because it involved a researcher and relationships with the participants. For example, the focus of the research was determined by how much the researcher revealed the actual purpose of the study, how the consent could actually be used, and how much privacy and protection from harm was afforded to the participants. Ethical issues raised by Creswell (1994) applied in this research in terms of protecting the anonymity of the participants, disclosing the purpose of the study, deciding how to use the information, sharing 'off the record' in the interview and determining the participant's personal experience with the researcher. These ethical dilemmas are illustrated as follows:

- a) Working in one of the Malaysian universities that is situated close to Johor Baharu City Centre made it hard to avoid meeting colleagues, friends and students who were customers of the restaurants under study and who were likely also to be amongst the participants who would be observed. This relationship was not allowed to influence the participants from taking part in, or remain in, the observation.

- b) In the introduction stage of each interview session, it was made clear that participants would be allowed to see a transcript of the interview. Restaurant owners were also permitted to read field notes and make alterations of the contents, withdraw statements, provide additional information or interpretation but not to influence the interpretation. In fact, the researcher submitted drafts of findings from the fieldwork to all restaurant owners, offering them chance to give feedback to the report.
- c) The anonymity and privacy of the participants who participated in the research process was respected. At the early stage of each interview session, the issue of confidentiality was discussed and assured. Personal information concerning the phenomena under investigation was kept confidential. All identifying information was deleted or altered to protect the privacy of the participants and restaurants involved. The original names and exact locations of the restaurants involved in the study have also been hidden for the same reason.
- d) It is unethical to use interviews without the informed consent of the interviewee, and unless the nature of the use or uses is clear and explicit (OHS, 2003). Therefore, before sending an invitation letter to the identified participants, they were verbally approached and asked for their consent. In the interview session, the researcher's background, an explanation of what the research was about, who was undertaking and financing it, why it was being undertaken, and how it would be disseminated and used were all explained to the participants. The same explanations were given to all restaurant owners before the fieldwork was conducted at the restaurant. This was to ensure that information given by the participants was done so on a voluntary basis, and with their knowledge and consent.
- e) Consent for observation was not sought from participants because the observation was in a public environment where the participants would normally expect to be seen and observed, and the observation was not focussed on private, personal behaviour, so it did not constitute an invasion of their privacy. Furthermore, the

observation was not a violation of the participant's personal space, which might cause them to feel uncomfortable.

3.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the methodology of the study that was underpinned by the interpretive paradigm. The qualitative study method drew on the strength of the interpretive approaches in terms of qualitative and unstructured data that represent the subjective understanding of actual number, inductive conceptual model development and systematic coding process and deductive verification of all finding from inductive step. The qualitative study method provided an excellent apparatus for inductive conceptual model formularising. This approach, however, was very time and energy consuming through out the whole research process besides has to critically rely on researcher's skills and experience for the data analysis.

This chapter consists of the following subsections: the basic paradigm used in conducting the research, the research process, applying qualitative study as a research method, research design, validity and research ethics. The process of data analysis of the study will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROCESS OF DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the process of data analysis. The process of data analysis of this study applied a number of coding processes. The coding processes involved were open coding, axial coding and selective coding. The qualitative computer software data analysis of NUDIST (Non-Numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorising) was used to analyse the data. This process of data analysis is divided into two main parts: within restaurant analysis and cross-restaurant analysis.

4.2 THE PROCESS OF DATA ANALYSIS

The study involved 3 restaurants. The data from each restaurant was analysed separately and then cross-restaurant analysis was undertaken. In the process of analysing data within the restaurant (i.e. Restaurant 1), the process started with preparation of the interview documents and the field note observations. These documents which were in Microsoft Word format were then imported into NUDIST N6 format. In NUDIST, the data that were derived from the restaurant customer interview transcripts, the restaurant staff interview transcripts and the field notes were coded separately.

This data was then put through the open and axial coding processes. The coding processes for the restaurant customers' interview data resulted in categories and sub-categories of factors influencing customer satisfaction. The data from restaurant staff interviews resulted in categories and sub-categories of the management of customer satisfaction factors. The coding processes for the data from the field notes established

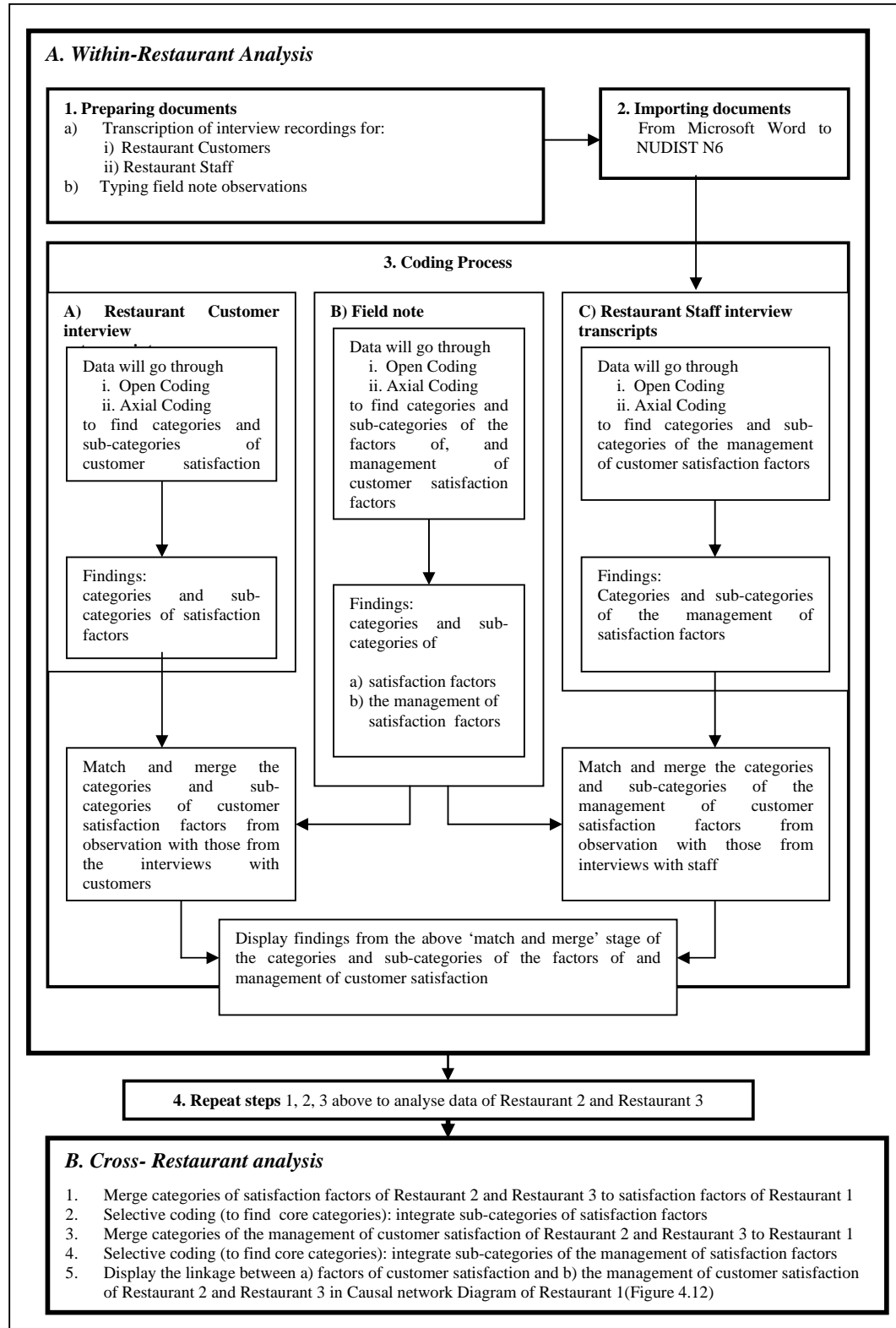
both categories and sub-categories of customer satisfaction factors, and categories and sub-categories of the management of customer satisfaction factors.

These categories and sub-categories of the factors of customer satisfaction were then displayed separately as shown in Table 4.1. A manual selective coding process was then undertaken to find the core categories of the satisfaction factors. This was done through integrating sub-categories with the categories of customer satisfaction factors. A similar procedure of selective coding process was applied to the categories and sub-categories of the management of customer satisfaction factors in an attempt to find the core categories of the management of customer satisfaction factors (see Table 4.11).

Core categories of customer satisfaction factors were then matched manually with the core categories of the management satisfaction factors, and displayed in a Causal Network diagram (see Figure 4.12) to show relationships between them (the factors of customer satisfaction and their management). Similar procedures of data analysis were adopted in analysing Restaurant 2 and Restaurant 3 data.

The cross-restaurant data analysis involved merging the categories of satisfaction factors of Restaurant 2 and Restaurant 3 with categories of satisfaction factors of Restaurant 1. The same process was adopted for the analysis of the management of customer satisfaction factors. The cross-case data analysis process was continued by expanding the linkages between the satisfaction factors and the management of customer satisfaction factors in Restaurant 2 and Restaurant 3 to satisfaction factors and management of customer satisfaction factors of Restaurant 1. The framework of data analysis is shown in Figure 4.1. Details of the process of the data analysis are discussed in the following subsections.

Figure 4.1: The Framework of Data Analysis



4.3 THE USE OF NUDIST IN WITHIN-RESTAURANT ANALYSIS

4.3.1 Introduction to Data Analysis

This study involved in-depth interviews with participants and a series of observations which provided a substantial amount of rich data. The purpose of analysing the data within the restaurant was to organise the data and to enable the researcher to cope with the large volume of data, as well as to understand each restaurant as a stand-alone entity, and to identify the replication logic and the extent to which the findings for each restaurant were similar. Replication logic is essential to multiple case analyses (Yin, 1984). In replication logic, the confirmation of the emergent relationship enhances confidence in the validity of relationships and enables the recognition of saturation (Eisenhardt, 2002).

Single restaurant analysis also provided findings by which the unique patterns of each restaurant can be compared to more generalised patterns across restaurants. In addition, the analysis gave a familiarity to each case, which in turn accelerates cross-case comparison (Eisenhardt, 2002). In other words, the single restaurant analysis was used to construct the databases for the other restaurants. This can enhance the validity and reliability of findings which is a distinct feature in restaurant study research. Yin (1989, pp. 98-99) said:

“Every case study project should strive to develop a formal, retrieval, database, so that in principle, other investigators can review the evidence directly and not be limited to the written reports. In this manner, the database will increase markedly the reliability of an entire case study.”

Sutton (1998) used a similar data analysis procedure in his research, to provide a concept mapping framework and a database to facilitate comparisons and analysis for later case-study development.

4.3.2 NUDIST

In the early stages of data analysis, the data was analysed manually. Due to difficulties in sorting out thick data from multiple sources of evidence, a software package called QSR NUDIST was used to manage and explore the text of the documents and search ideas in the data, and construct a conceptual framework from the text. NUDIST is a computer program designed for the storage, indexing (coding), searching (retrieving) and analysis of text. The program has been ranked as the most popular program for coding-oriented data analysis and has been identified as the best theory building software (Weitzman and Miles, 1995). The strongest program, which is concerned with relationship between categories identified in qualitative data, is NUDIST version 6.0 which was chosen as the most appropriate software package. Fielding (1994) said that the theory building features of the program enable it to connect codes and categories in an attempt to formulate propositions about the conceptual structure which fits the data. NUDIST has been widely used in qualitative data analysis. For instance Sutton (1998) utilised the program to analyse data from open-ended, focus group interviews on current changes in Hong Kong's fine-dining restaurants.

The NUDIST software reduced the time taken for data analysis compared to analysing the data manually (using index cards, file folders and manually linking data), which involves a lot of time and resources. More importantly, NUDIST is much more powerful than manual analysis in terms of being able to analyse very large qualitative data sets. These properties are discussed along with the coding process in the within-restaurant data analysis section.

The operation of NUDIST involved three main parts. Firstly, the document system is used to manage any analysis of the qualitative data. Secondly, the indexing system provides a database reference system to the text units in a document, either hierarchically or unstructured, which can be constantly developed, manipulated and changed. Lastly, the analysis system consists of tools which allow the researcher to explore the textual data and categories to be developed (Richards and Richards,

1991). Details of the data analysis procedure for within restaurant and cross-restaurant analysis of this study, using NUDIST, are discussed in the subsequent sections.

4.3.3 Preparing Documents

4.3.3.1 Transcription of Interview Recordings

There were two sets of interview recordings that needed to be transcribed. These were the recordings of interviews with the restaurant customers and the restaurant staff. The interviews that were conducted in Malay were transcribed word-by-word and then translated into English. Professional help from experts in both languages, Malay and English, was sought to confirm the accuracy of the translation. All the checked English transcripts were typed and saved in Microsoft Word and named according to participants' pseudonym to enable entry into the NUDIST N6 software computer program.

4.3.3.2 Typing Field Notes

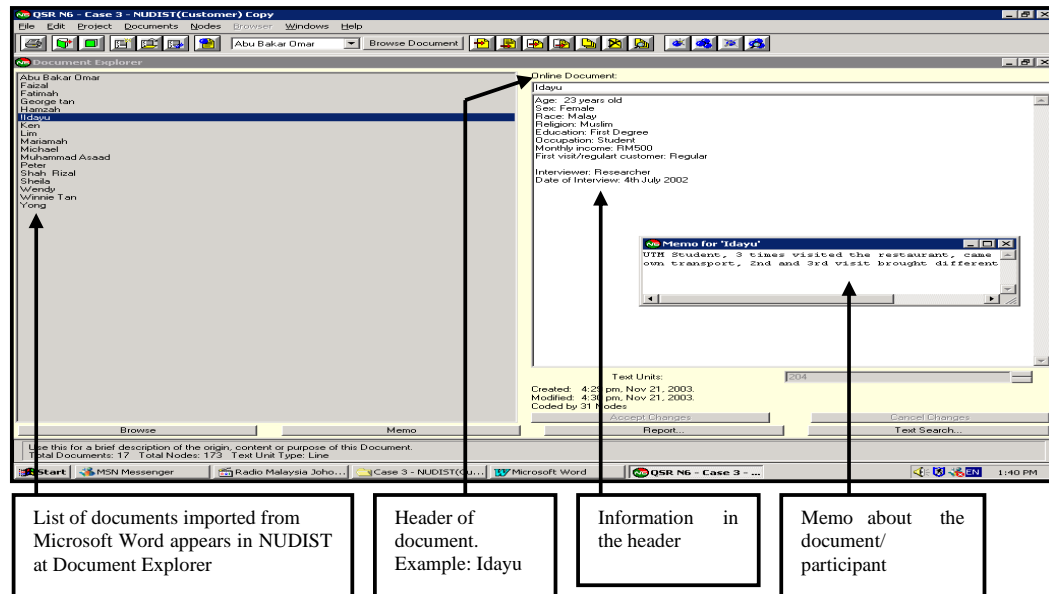
Daily hand written field note observations, in English, were typed and entered into NUDIST N6 software computer program.

4.3.3.3 Importing Documents

In NUDIST, each interview transcript and set of field notes was imported, renamed and saved in separate sets of files. The files were introduced as on-line documents, which could be read and saved as text only. Once the documents were saved, a NUDIST index system was constructed. For example, the interview transcript of Restaurant 1 was treated as follows. The list of documents that were saved in NUDIST appeared in the document browser. Each document was given a basic header with information. In this study the header information consisted of a demographic profile of the participant, the date of the interview and the name of the interviewer.

This information was important to help the researcher identify particular documents, whilst browsing text units, by just looking at the information in the header (see Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: Importing Document



In addition to the header, each document was given a memo which is a plain text note that was written and edited in the NUDIST editor. The memo was a short sentence describing the participants to whom the document related. This meant only one memo was prepared per document (see Figure 4.2). For example:

Document: Idayu

Memo: University student, 3 times visited the restaurant, came in a group of 5, has own transport, 2nd and 3rd visit brought different friends.

i) Memoing

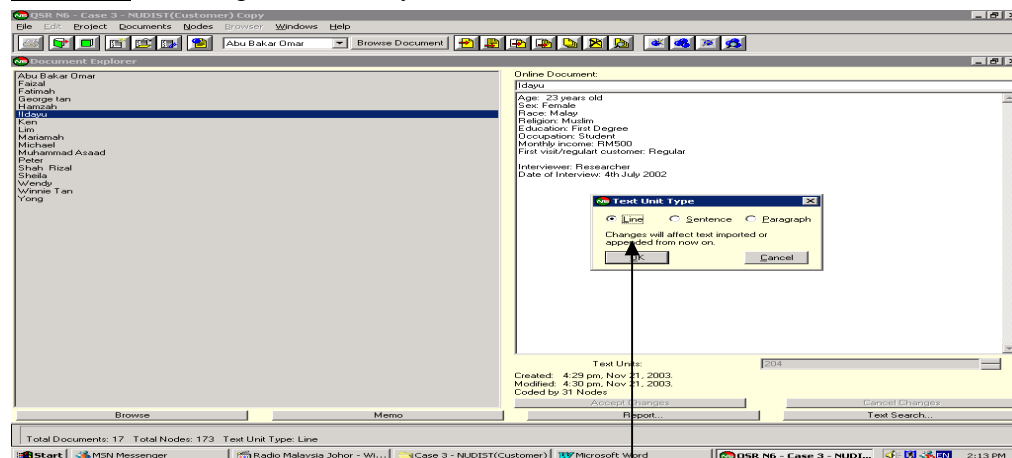
Memoing is a way to write ideas and keep records about the data during the study. It was a core stage in the theoretical process of writing up ideas to map out the emerging concepts and their properties, as well as to generate relationships, abstract

integrative frameworks and give direction for further sampling. Memo writing is an important aspect in qualitative method because it creates an audit trail that supports and allows researchers to determine the trustworthiness of the study (Glaser, 1978).

Six categories of audit trail documents were highlighted; three were raw data from the interview guide, notes and documents (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), and there were three types of memos; code memos, theoretical memos and operational memos. Code memos focused on conceptual labelling and emerged at the open coding stage. Theoretical memos, which were written in axial coding and selective coding, illustrate paradigm features and also indicate the theoretical process. Operational memos contain directions relating to the evolving research design (Pandit, 1996).

Before a document was analysed, and the text coded, the document had to be read in a holistic way to understand and familiarize the flow of the story in the document. The text of the document could then be analysed by NUDIST in three ways: line-by-line, by sentence, and by paragraph, depending on the researcher's choice. For this study, the text was analysed line-by-line to avoid missing any points that needed to be coded (see Figure 4.3). The text unit of analysis was the smallest piece of text or the minimum code-able chunk that NUDIST could recognise. Each text unit generated a number of codes depending on the meaning or interpretation of the text.

Figure 4.3: Selecting text unit analysis



Text unit analysis chosen: Line-by-line

ii) Interpretation of Text

In addition to coding, data in the text needed to be interpreted. This study applied Glaser's (1978) approach to data interpretation. The interpretations were baseline, proper line and conceptual, to develop theoretical notes or comments about the original text as stated in i) and up to v) below. The interpretations were written and saved in the memo. The categorisation of different types of data interpretation was important for developing initial codes to look for patterns and reoccurring events in the data by comparing data to identify similarities in ways of sharing and expressing the experience.

i) Baseline data was factual and used as a reference point. For instance:

Interviewer: *"How long have you been working here?"*

Participant: *"I joined this restaurant as a food and beverage manager since the end of July 2001, which is almost 10 months now."*

Interpretation: A factual statement regarding the participant's period of working as manager at the restaurant

ii) Interpreted data represents the participants' interpretation of their behaviour or experience. For instance:

Participant: *"In terms of job specification, I have to do all management works because this restaurant had no system before and I had to set up the system. For example, I made a system for filing, service, quality control, restaurant cleanliness, food cost etc."*

Interpretation: Participant explains that he has set up several systems in order to manage the restaurant. These systems are for filing, service, quality control, restaurant cleanliness and food cost.

iii) Proper line data involved participants choosing expressions to support a particular line. For instance:

In the hotel, the ratio between food cost and profit is 30%: 70%. But here, the percentage ratio of food cost and profit are opposite where 70% is for food cost and 30% for profit, which is too high for food cost and too little for profit. So I have to study what are the weaknesses, find ways to reduce the food cost and improve it. I can't increase food price stated in the available menu book because the majority of

customer are from low and medium class income, further 60% of the customers are regular and they already knew the price. What I can do is monitoring restaurant operations and do something about the food cost. I don't expect to achieve the same percentage of profit as in a hotel. My target at the moment is to help the restaurant to achieve a profit of at least 50% and reduce the food cost to 50%.

Interpretation: Participant uses the hotel as a benchmark on the ratio of profits and cost, of 30% cost and 70% profit. This led him to identify weaknesses in the restaurant and find a way to increase restaurant profit from 30% to 50% and reduce food cost from 70% to 50%. His investigation will focus more on restaurant operation and food cost instead of increasing food price due to the constraint of having the majority of regular customers from low and middle class incomes.

- iv) Vague data required further investigation. It was deliberately vague in order to conceal an aspect of behaviour. For instance:

Interviewer: *"What are the aspects that this restaurant needs further improvement on?"*

Example: *"To me there are many things which need to improve and is still far away in terms of a quality standard."*

- v) Conceptual data usually involved an underlying opinion or hypothesis.

Example: *"Good staff will inform customers about the delay and make a recommendation for a menu that takes a shorter time to prepare. If the staff doesn't inform the customer and keeps them waiting for their order, this makes customers dissatisfied with the service."*

Interpretation: The participant introduces the concept of 'good staff' and how staff could make customers satisfied with the service provided. The participants suggested criteria of good staff and how through their actions they can inform customers about delays in serving their order and also recommend items that take less time to prepare. Keeping customers waiting will end up with dissatisfaction.

4.3.4 The Coding Process

The coding process lies at the heart of data analysis in qualitative research. Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined coding as a process of analysing data whilst the code refers to a conceptual label of a category. In computer-assisted, qualitative data analysis, coding was conceived by attaching a keyword to the text unit, whilst a code is the product of coding analysis in the form of a category, or a relation amongst two or more categories (Lonkila, 1995). Coding is the operation by which the data is broken, conceptualised and put back together in new ways.

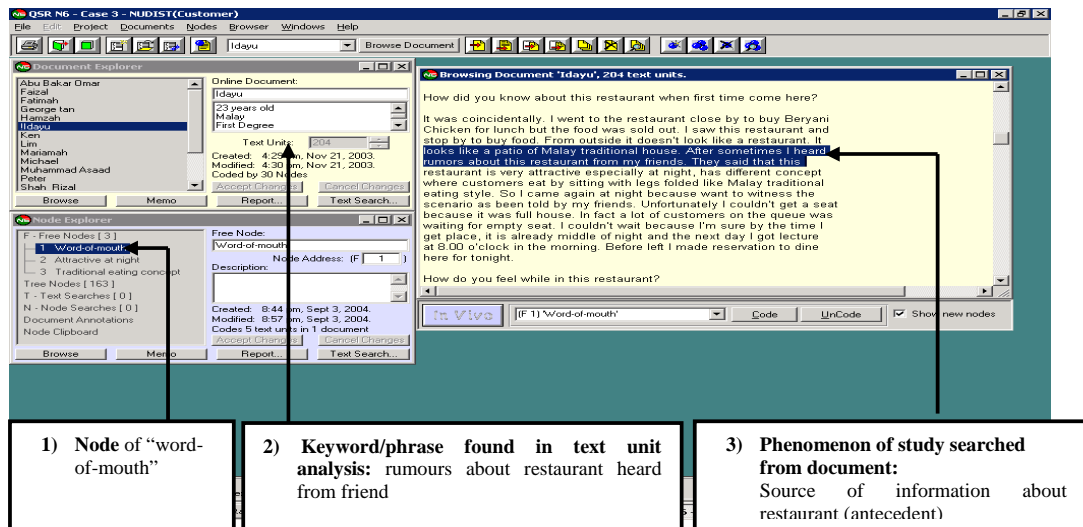
4.3.4.1 Open Coding

Open coding is:

“the process of selecting and naming categories from the analysis of the data. It is the initial stage in data acquisition and relates to describing overall features of the phenomenon under study. Variables involved in the phenomenon are identified, labelled, categorised and related together in an outline form. The properties of a category are described or dimensionalised at this stage. This involves placing or locating the property along a continuum within a range of possible values.” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 74)

The main aim of open coding was to generate new categories and to specify their properties and dimensions (Lonkila, 1995). The open coding for this study started with breaking up the data (phenomenon of study) in the documents and then segmenting them into categories based on the text unit of analysis. The categories were then coded as nodes in the Free Node of the NUDIST Node Explorer (see Figure 4.4).

Figure: 4.4: Creating Node



While analysing each text unit, key words or phrases that gave some insight into the phenomenon under study was searched. Incident after incident in the text was questioned and compared in an attempt to give similar events the same code. Comparing coded text segments allowed the researcher to be more systematic in concept development and in coding results. The code is called a conceptual label and the process is known as labelling the phenomenon.

Conceptual labels that pertained to similar phenomena were then grouped (process of categorising concepts) and given the same name (process of naming category). The name was more abstract than that given to the concept grounded to it. However, names of the categories can be given based on the exact words mentioned by participants. This is known as in-vivo codes.

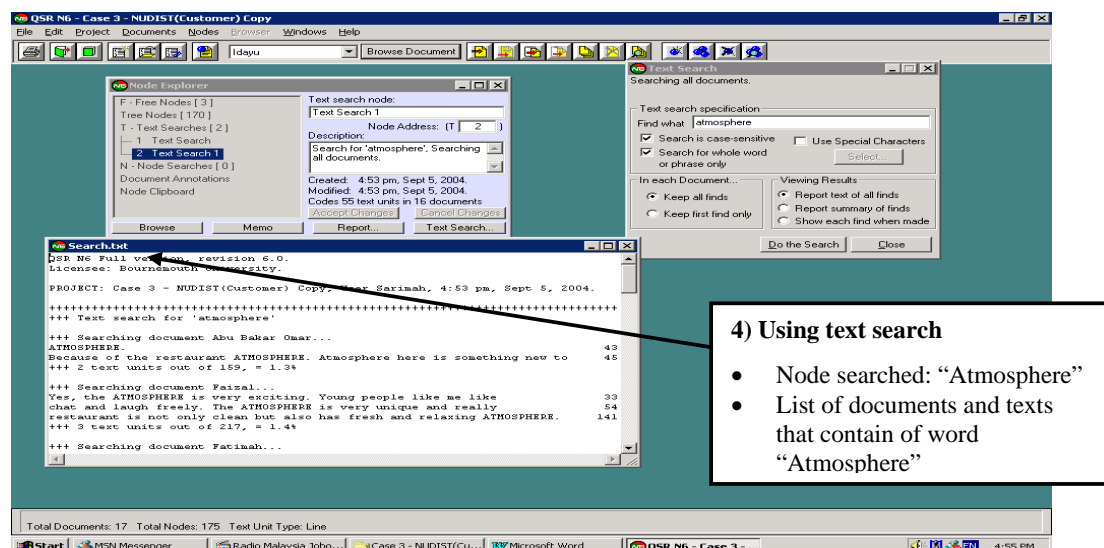
Open coding starts by identifying the properties or attributes of the categories and examining the nature, relationship and dimension of such properties that say something about the phenomenon (this starts the process of abstraction). Properties are units of information that provide broad dimensions for the category, while dimensions are the smallest unit of information analysed in qualitative data. Each property corresponds to a different continuum. The process of breaking each property

down into its dimensions is to see the extreme possibilities for the properties and this is known as dimensionalisation (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

In open coding, the node for each code appears as the Free Node of NUDIST. The Free Nodes area provides a safe holding space for early tentative ideas or apparently unconnected concepts. A Free Node is unattached to the hierarchical index system but can later be moved or copied to another location within the hierarchy. Node Explore shows all nodes and allows the researcher to move the nodes around based on their logical relations, titles and descriptions.

The nodes are located in the Index system, which contains links or references to the text to store ideas. Coding is a process of indexing the text at a node. A node can represent concepts, processes, people, abstract ideas, places or any other categories in the study. All methods of coding are methods of creating a node since coding is often a process of discovering new categories. The node can be created in four ways: using the In Vivo Button, Coding Bar, Quick Coder and Text Search. For this study 'text search' was adopted (see Figure 4.5)

Figure 4.5: Creating Node Using Text Search

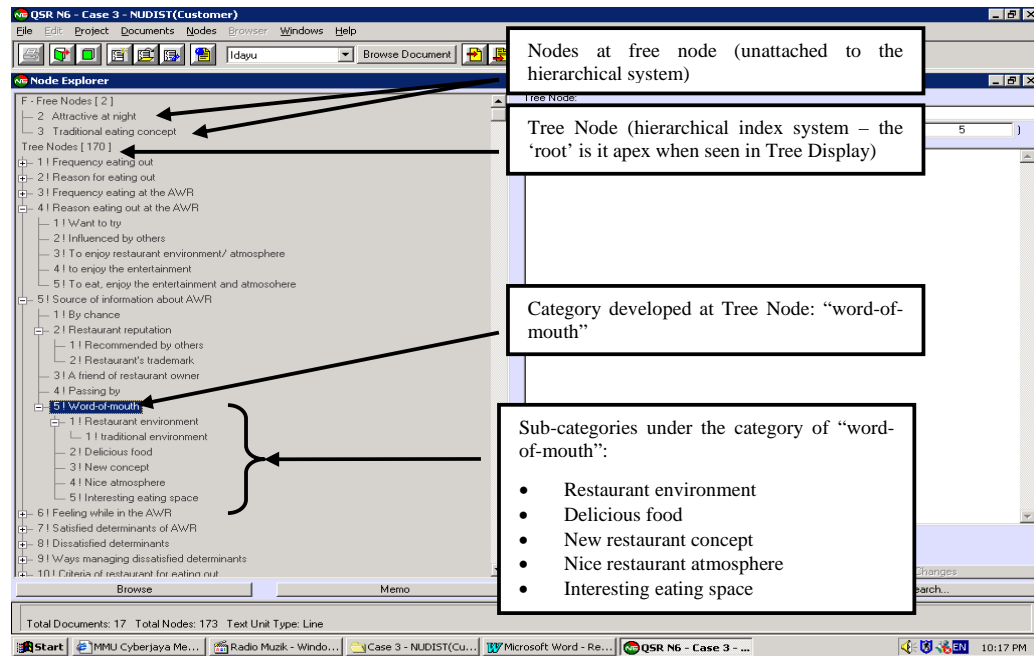


The document node also was given a memo for reference. The memo is the comment or thought about the creation of the nodes and other additional comments that can be typed in. It is introduced by a caption, which is usually a category or a concept.

The next stage in the open coding process is to group conceptual labels into categories where concepts within the same phenomenon are categorised. The categories are then given names that are different than the names given during labelling. This is done by questioning the concepts of the incident, one by one, in terms of what the concept is about i.e. is the concept similar or different from the previous one? They are then indirectly compared against one another. Whilst categorising the concept, the researcher continuously identifies incidents, events and activities from the text and constantly compares them with other emerging categories until the core underlying themes of categories are identified to develop a saturated category. This is known as *constant comparison*. The development of the categories and data analysis phase terminates when no new information can be added to the emergence of the category.

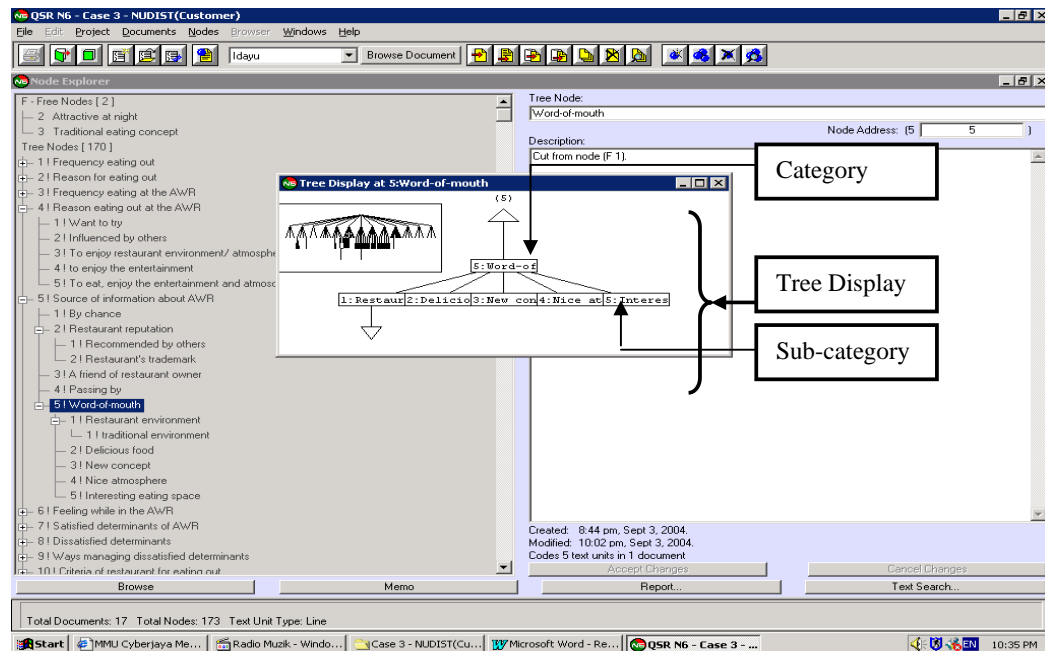
In NUDIST, nodes that describe similar concepts are grouped under the same category and a name is given to the category that represents the address and title of any subordinate nodes. It is done by cutting, copying, merging and attaching nodes at Free Nodes and putting them into or below other nodes in Tree Nodes. If different, they are left aside and might become an entry to a new category. All nodes under this category are called sub-categories. They are organised hierarchically, for example; category, sub-category etc. Structuring the node system in this way helps the researcher to locate and manage all nodes, to find categories and use them for expressing information based on their hierarchies. By testing one category against another systematically, new sub-categories emerge. This made the tree index system increasingly complex and multiple stranded (see Figure 4.6). Each category has its own memo for reference, such as a comment about the criteria of sub-categories generated and any additional comment.

Figure 4.6: Creating Category and Sub-categories by Grouping Nodes



Another characteristic of the Tree Node is that categories and their sub-categories can be visualised in the Tree Display at 'root' to give a graphical view of the hierarchies of the category. The Tree Display could only show two levels at a time (see figure 4.7). However, one can navigate up and down to visualise the sub-categories underneath. The tree node is the hierarchical index where the 'root' is its apex when seen in the Tree Display and the nodes being branches of the tree. The diagram of the whole tree node of the index also served as an interrogative device for the information of the qualitative data. The Tree display only displays the Tree Nodes, not Free Nodes, or text search, or index search. NUDIST can retrieve coded data by browsing it to see text coded as concepts, make a report, edit or print, and change ones mind about the code. The coding process continued until all text units in the document were coded.

Figure 4.7: Category and sub-categories of “word-of-mouth” in Tree Display



4.3.4.2 Axial Coding

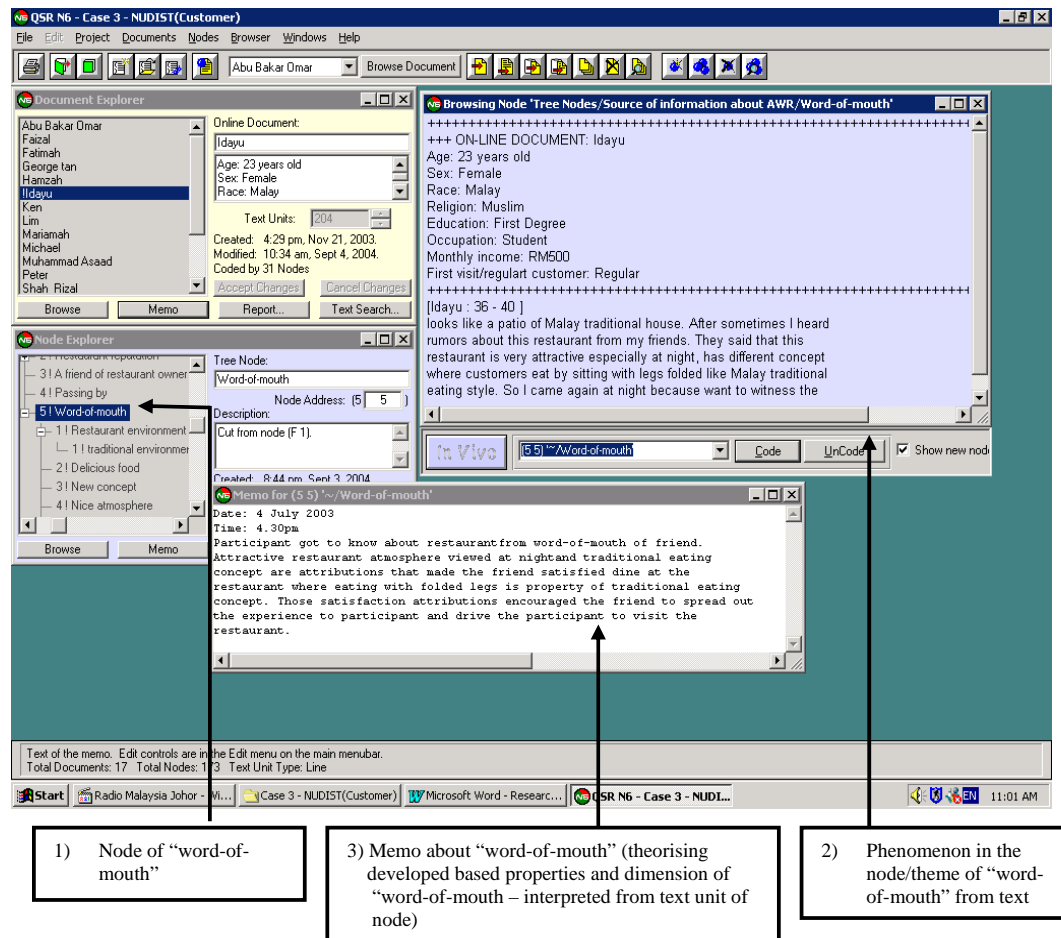
Axial coding is the process of making a connection between a category and its sub-category (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The *paradigm model* was used to specify the relationship of the category to other categories in axial coding. The paradigm model comprised the phenomenon under study, its causal conditions, its context, intervening conditions, actions and interaction strategies of the actor involved and consequences of the actor's action. The central phenomenon was the formation of the visual theory, model or paradigm. This was chosen by examining open coding categories and selecting one that had the most conceptual interest, was most frequently discussed by the participants of study and that was most saturated with information. It was placed at the centre of the qualitative method of study and labelled as the “central phenomenon”. The consequences were the outcomes of strategies taken by participants in the study. These outcomes could be positive, negative, or neutral. The context was the particular set of conditions within which the strategies occur. The intervening conditions were broader than the context within which the strategies occur. There might be social, economic and political forces, which influence the strategies in response to the central phenomenon.

In applying the paradigm model (as shown in this chapter), a central phenomenon was identified and then returned to the database to identify a) what caused the phenomenon to occur, b) what was the phenomenon that emerged, c) what strategies or actions were employed in response to it, d) what context (specific) and intervening condition (broad context) influenced the strategies and e) what consequences resulted from these strategies. For instance, they suggested why a certain cause influenced the central phenomenon, which in turn influenced the use of a specific strategy (Creswell, 1998).

Memoing was also used as a technique within the analysis. The memo in axial coding represented conceptual theorising about what the researcher perceived about the data in a particular coded text unit. It was written and stored in memos during the coding process and could be retrieved when necessary. The memo was written in order to construct a theorising concept of the data (see Figure 4.8).

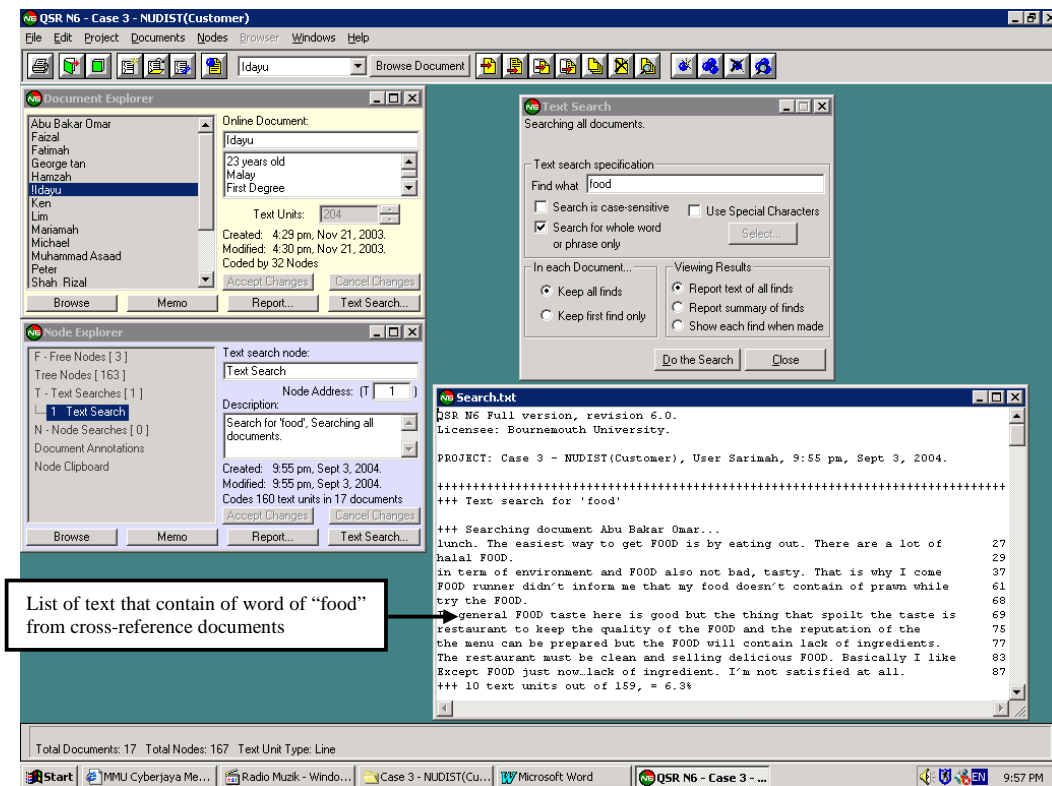
The memos were attached to nodes and documents, which could then be accessed either from the Node Information Box or the Document Dialogue Box. A hierarchical structured tree node explained the relationship amongst the nodes in hierarchical terms. In this system, growing nets or hierarchies of concepts and evidence were linked, grouped and so on to support the emerging theory. Theorising using NUDIST was done by coding the data, making constant comparisons amongst the text in different categories, examining the linkages among categories employing a paradigm model, writing memos and identifying the Tree Display diagram.

Figure 4.8: Theoretical Memo for Node of “word-of-mouth”



Cutting, copying, merging and attaching nodes to Tree Nodes and then putting them into or below other nodes in the same tree is a linkage process amongst categories in NUDIST. This was consistent with Richards and Richards (1994) who noted that NUDIST allows the nodes representing categories, sub-categories, labels and so on. The index was used not only to index the text, represent relationships among concepts, set up a case-wise organisation of data for cross-case analysis, but also to fix together data from interviews and observations on the subject and interviews with different participants who mentioned the same subject (see Figure 4.9).

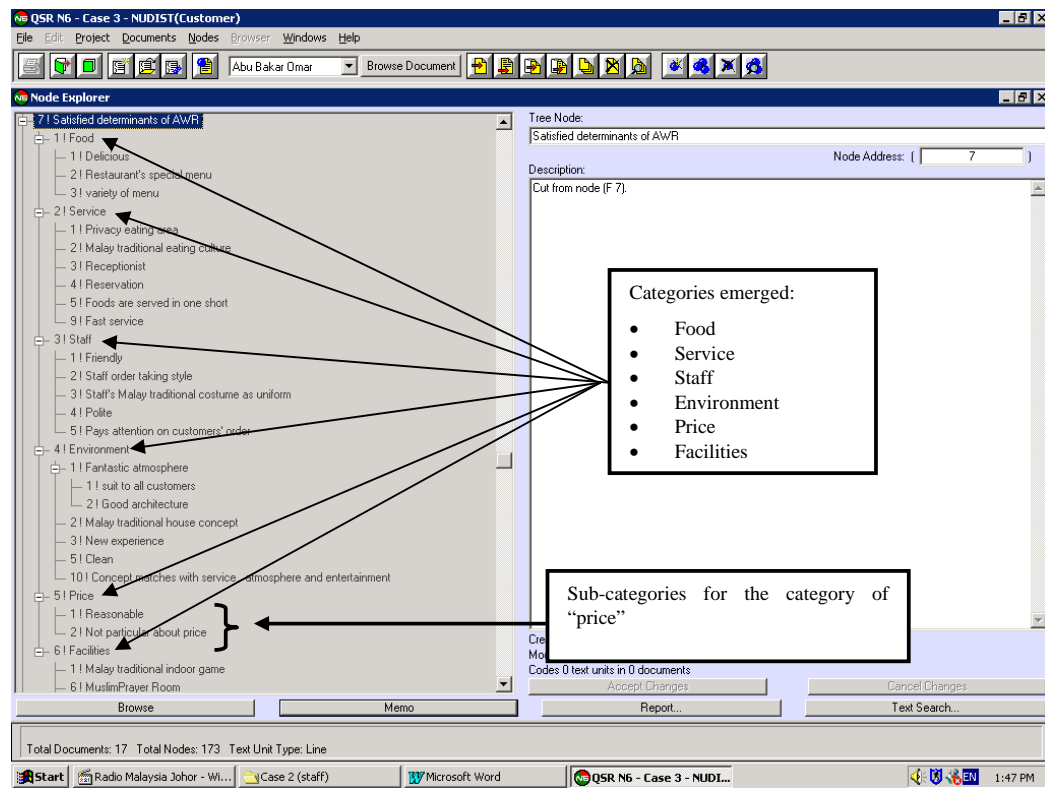
Figure 4.9: Searching Particular Node Cross-Reference



i) Matching the Categories between Sources of Evidence

There were two sets of findings derived from interview transcripts of axial coding of each restaurant. These were customer satisfaction factors and the management of customer satisfaction. Both sets of findings were in the form of categories and their sub-categories which were then matched with categories and sub-categories of the satisfaction factors that derived from field note observations. This could be done by employing NUDIST Boolean operators or manually as applied in this study. Documentary evidence was used to support the relevant categories.

Figure 4.10: Categories and Sub-Categories Emerged



ii) Displaying of Findings in a Matrix Diagram

Miles and Huberman (1984) outline specific techniques to manage and present qualitative data. Their ideas included a variety of devices such as tabular displays and graphs. Tabular displays were applied when the findings of satisfaction factors emerged from the triangulation of sources of evidence in the form of categories and sub-categories of customer satisfaction factors that are coded as meal quality, service quality, staff performance, atmosphere, payment, facilities and accessibility. Each of those categories has various subthemes (see Tables 4.1).

Table 4.1: The Categories and Sub-Categories of Customer Satisfaction Factors of Restaurant 1

Category	Sub-category
Meal quality	Menu variety
	Authentic food
	Food presentation and display
Service quality	Punctual business hours
	Reservation service
	Serving on time
Staff performance	Good personality traits (polite, smiling, friendly and helpful)
	Responsive towards complaints and requests
	Staff appearance
Atmosphere	Cheerful interior design
	Choice of dining areas
	Restaurant layout
	Peaceful and relaxing atmosphere
	Cleanliness
Payment	Self-service payment system
Facilities	Free parking
	Prayer room
	Toilet
	Parking spaces
	Waiting activity
Accessibility	Strategic location
	Commercial promotion program (television, radio and food sample)
	Non-commercial program (direct experience that lead to word of-mouth communication)

Categories of the restaurant management of customer satisfaction of Restaurant 1 were then matched according to the restaurant customer satisfaction factors (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: The categories and Sub-Categories of the Management of Customer Satisfaction Factors of Restaurant 1

Category of satisfaction factors	Sub-category of satisfaction factors	The management of satisfaction factors
Meal quality	Menu variety	To provide a variety of complete meals, traditional and ordinary food, restaurant special menu, 2 sources of protein for every main course
	Authentic food	The use of home made spices, fresh ingredients, complete ingredients, sufficient amount of ingredients and gives training in cooking to chef
Service quality	Attractive food presentation and display	Appropriate training in cooking, using a combination of modern and traditional serving equipment, creative food arrangement, and colourful food garnishing
	Punctual business hours	All restaurant come 30 minutes earlier than working shift, early food preparation, continuous early ingredient supply
	On time serving order	The management of Self-service
Staff performance	Good personality traits (polite, smile, friendly and helpful)	Formal and informal staff training
	Responsive towards complaints and requests	Formal and informal staff training
	Answer phone call quickly	Informal training
	Alert with request	Informal training
	Staff appearance	Appropriate Uniform
Atmosphere	Cheerful restaurant interior design	Chandeliers, air-conditioning, table arrangement, cleanliness, spacious
	Comfortable service areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indoor • Outdoor
	Cleanliness	Regular cleaning service
Payment	Self-service payment system	Effective table service and counter payment system
Facilities	Free parking	Provided by local Johor Bahru Authority
	Prayer room	Provided by the restaurant
	Toilet	Provided by the restaurant
Accessibility	Strategic location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close to road side • Located in a strategic location

4.4 CROSS-RESTAURANT ANALYSIS

There were two main reasons for doing cross-restaurant analysis as part of this study. Firstly, it was to frame the phenomenon of customer satisfaction in order to help to identify the replication logic in terms of whether the patterns of findings emerging from the last restaurant matched with the patterns of findings for the previous restaurants. All three restaurants in this study produced similar findings.

Secondly, cross-restaurant analysis helped the researcher to identify factors of restaurant customer satisfaction and the management process of that restaurant customer satisfaction through examining similarities and differences in the findings across restaurants. According to Stake (1995), cross-case analysis involved examining themes across cases and to discern themes that are common to all cases. There are three ways of producing good cross-case comparisons as identified by Eisenhardt (2002):

- a) by selecting categories or dimensions and then by looking for within-group similarities coupled with inter-group differences. Dimensions can be suggested by the research problem, existing literature or by the researcher simply choosing some dimensions.
- b) by selecting pairs of cases and then listing the similarities and differences between each pair.
- c) by dividing the data according to the source of data, which are in-depth interview, observation and documentary evidence. A pattern from one data source can be collaborated with the evidence from another to provide a strong and well-grounded finding.

The steps in the cross-restaurant analysis in this study were based on an adaptation of Eisenhardt's (2002) suggestions as follows.

First, matching the similarities and differences of the categories of satisfaction factors of Restaurant 2 and Restaurant 3, from the axial coding process, with the categories in Restaurant 1 (see Table 4.3)

Table 4.3: Cross-Restaurant Analysis of the Categories and Sub-Categories of Customer

Categories	Sub-categories	Restaurants		
		R 1 (SBR)	R 2 (SSR)	R 3 (AWR)
Meal quality	1. Menu variety 2. Authentic food 3. Food presentation and display	X X X	X X X	X X X
Service quality	1. Reservation service 2. Parking attendant 3. Free parking space 4. Reception service 5. Punctual business hour 6. 24-hour business operation 7. Serving on time 8. Serving group orders simultaneously	X X X X	X X X X X X X	X X X X
Staff performance	1. On time attending customers 2. Responsive towards complaints and requests 3. Treating customers equally 4. Staff appearance 5. Good personality traits (polite, smiling, friendly and helpful) 6. Accuracy and getting things right 7. Gratitude expression 8. Escorting customers to restaurant's exit door 9. Inviting customers to come again 10. Staff performance 11. On time answering phone call 12. Alert with request	X XX X X X X X	X XX X X X X X X	X X X X X X X
Atmosphere	1. Spacious restaurant layout 2. Choice of dining areas 3. Peaceful and relaxing atmosphere 4. Cleanliness 5. Unique cultural experience 6. Attractive restaurant appearance 7. Well-organise restaurant layout 8. Comfortable service area	X X X X X X X	X X X X X X X	 X X X X X X X
Facility	1. Restaurant capacity 2. Waiting activity 3. Prayer room 4. Toilet 5. Plenty of parking spaces	X X X X X	X X X X X	X X X X
Accessibility	1. Strategic location 2. Commercial promotion program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> television radio food sample 3. Non-commercial promotion program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Word-of-mouth recommendation Direct experience 	X X X X X	X X X X X X	 X X
Payment	Self-service payment system	X	X	X

The second stage of the analysis was to match and merge the categories of the management of customer satisfaction of Restaurant 2 and Restaurant 3, from the axial coding process, to the categories of the management of customer satisfaction in Restaurant 1 (see table 4.4a-4.4e)

Table 4.4a: Cross-Restaurant Analysis of the Management of Customer Satisfaction From Staff Interviews and Observations

Categories	Sub-categories	<i>The management of customer satisfaction factors</i>		
		Restaurant 1	Restaurant 2	Restaurant 3
Meal quality	Menu variety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete meal • Offered traditional and ordinary foods • Offered restaurant special menu • Cooked sauce in big quantities and divide into two for different main protein like chicken and meat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete meal • Offered restaurant special menu • Variety of kitchen departments • Lease kitchen departments for non-specialised department to outsiders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offered restaurant special menu • Offered traditional and ordinary food • Variety of kitchen departments • Cooked sauce in big quantities and divided into two for different main proteins like chicken and meat • Lease kitchen departments for non-specialised department to outsiders
	Authentic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used home made spices • Used fresh ingredients/ authentic food • Used complete ingredients • Used sufficient amount of ingredients • Gave training to cook 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used fresh ingredients/ authentic food • Used home made spice • Used complete ingredients • Used sufficient amount of ingredients • Employed expert chef 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided training for cook/ chef
	Food presentation and display	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided training for cook/chef • Used a combination of modern and traditional serving equipment • Beautiful food arrangement • Beautiful combination of food colour and garnishing • Well-organised serving equipment arrangement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used a combination of modern and traditional serving equipment • Beautiful food arrangements • Beautiful combination of food colour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gave training to cook • Well-organised serving equipment arrangement
Service quality	Unique experience of order taking and eating style			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malay traditional eating concept
	Punctual business hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early continuous ingredients supply • Staff come 30 minute earlier than their working shift • Early food preparation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early and continuous ingredients supply • Restaurant apply an attendance punch card • Early food preparation • 24-hours business operation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early and continuous ingredients supply • Restaurant apply an attendance punch card
	Serve group orders simultaneously		Good networking between bill reader and food runner	Good networking between bill reader and food runner
	Self-service payment system	Table service and counter payment system	Counter payment system	Counter payment system

Table 4.4b: Cross-Restaurant Analysis of the Management of Customer Satisfaction From Staff Interviews and Observations (cont.)

Categories	Sub-categories	<i>The management of customer satisfaction factors</i>		
		Restaurant 1	Restaurant 2	Restaurant 3
Service quality (cont.)	On time attending customers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working in small sections Give sign to attended customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working in small sections
	Serving on time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Combination of self-service and table service Checking kitchen progress from time to time Early food preparation Offer combination of menu that takes less time to prepare Take customers order from more that one table at once (in desperate situations) Send customers order form to kitchen department straight away Doesn't leave service area unattended 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer a combination of menus that takes less time to prepare Take customer's order from more than one table at once (in desperate situations) Send customer's order form to kitchen department straight away
	Reception service	Receptionist at the counter	Receptionist at the main entrance	Receptionist at the main entrance
	Accuracy and getting things right	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read order list in front of customer after taking their order 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read order list in front of customer after taking their order Order marking system Table number system Standardize short form for menu available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read order list in front of customer after taking their order Order marking system Table number system
	Professional staff		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pick up phone call quickly Answering phone call politely Treating customer equally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pick up customers phone call quickly Answering customers phone call politely Treating customer equally Alert with customers request

Table 4.4c Cross-Restaurant Analysis of the Management of Customer Satisfaction From Staff Interviews and Observations (cont.)

Categories	Sub-categories	<i>The management of customer satisfaction factors</i>		
		Restaurant 1	Restaurant 2	Restaurant 3
Staff performance	Treat customers equally	Informal training	Formal training	Informal training
	Polite	Informal training	Formal training	
	Friendly	Informal training	Formal training	
	Helpful	Informal training	Formal training	
	Smiling	Informal training	Formal training	
	Patient	Informal training	Formal training	Informal training
	Responsive towards complaints and requests	Informal training and working in section	Formal training and working in section	Working in sections
	Good appearance	Uniform	Uniform	Uniform
	Performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> About restaurant products and services Communicate in different languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff have a chance to taste all foods available free of charge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restaurant order list distributing system Training Employ staff who are capable of speaking in different languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff have a chance to taste all foods free of charge Restaurant order list distributing system Employ staff who are capable of speaking in different languages
	Treating customer equally	Nature of the staff and informal training	Formal training	Informal training
Payment	Self-service payment system	b) Priced offered based on quantity of food taken from buffet table c) Staff charge customers' food price at the cashier counter	Staff charge customers' food price at the cashier counter	Staff charge customers' food price at the cashier counter
Facilities	Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free of charge Plenty of space Close to premise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free of charge Plenty of space Parking attendant Close to premise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free parking Close to premise
	Prayer room	Available	Available	Available
	Toilet	Available	Available	Available
	Entertainment	Stereo	Television and stereo	Live entertainment
	Waiting activity	Reading corner	Children's playroom	Indoor games

Table 4.4d: Cross-Restaurant Analysis of The Management of Customer Satisfaction From Staff Interviews and Observations (cont.)

Categories	Sub-categories	<i>The management of customer satisfaction factors</i>		
		Restaurant 1	Restaurant 2	Restaurant 3
Atmosphere	Cheerful restaurant interior design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neat and spacious table arrangement • Beautiful decorative buffet table • Delicious food and presentable buffet table • Friendly staff • Smiling staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colourful and different shapes of lighting • Big sizes of colourful food photos hanging on the wall • Huge number of people • Big restaurant capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colourful and different shapes of lighting • Huge number of people • Live entertainment • Traditional interior architecture • Traditional interior decoration
	Choice of dining areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor • Indoor • Smoking area • Air-conditioned area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor • Indoor • Smoking area • Air-conditioned area • eating space for special function 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor • Indoor • Smoking area • Private eating space
	Cleanliness	Clean atmosphere 1. Fan blower 2. Daily cleaning service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean atmosphere 1. Fan blower 2. Daily cleaning service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean atmosphere 1. Fan blower 2. Restaurant surrounded by a fresh natural beautiful environment 3. Daily cleaning service
	Peaceful and relaxing atmosphere			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soft music from live entertainment • Away from hectic area • Surrounded by natural beautiful environment
	Spacious eating space	Good layout <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neat table arrangement • Ample space between tables and queuing area 	Good layout <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neat table arrangement • Ample space between tables and queuing area 	

Table 4.4e: Cross-Restaurant Analysis of the Management of Customer Satisfaction From Staff Interviews and Observations (cont.)

Categories	Sub-categories	<i>The management of customer satisfaction factors</i>		
		Restaurant 1	Restaurant 2	Restaurant 3
Accessibility	Strategic location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through friendship with restaurant owner • Located close to important landmarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private and government offices • Neighbourhood area • Visible from road side • Has restaurant signboard • Positive word-of- mouth comments about restaurant concerning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety of food • Delicious food • Joyful live entertainment • Elegant restaurant atmosphere • Restaurant promotion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • television • radio • food sample • Previous direct experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delicious food • menu variety • elegant restaurant atmosphere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through friendship with restaurant owner • Located close to important landmarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private and government offices • Neighbourhood area • Visible from road side • Has restaurant signboard • Positive word-of- mouth comments about restaurant concerning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety of food • Delicious food • Restaurant promotion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Television • Radio • Previous direct experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delicious food • Menu variety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through friendship with restaurant owner • Positive word-of- mouth comments about restaurant concerning of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety of foods • Delicious food • Joyful live entertainment • Exciting restaurant atmosphere • Unique eating space, order taking and eating style concepts • Previous direct experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delicious food • Menu variety • Joyful live entertainment • Exciting restaurant atmosphere

4.4.1 Selective Coding

Selective Coding in the cross-restaurant analysis took place after the categories had been developed and the connections between categories specified. This involved the process of integrating categories to form the initial theoretical framework. Thus, a story line as a descriptive narrative about a central phenomenon of the study was formed. The story line was the conceptualisation of the story (abstraction) of the integrating categories. When analysed, the story line becomes the core category (Pandit, 1996).

4.4.1.1 The Development of the Core Category

The core category was the main theme which summed up a pattern of behaviour that was the substance of the process that was taking place in the data. It was a central phenomenon or main theme when all other categories were integrated (Glaser, 1978). Most categories and their properties were related to the core category by rendering it dense and saturated from the relationships between the categories (Strauss, 1987). The core category pulled all the strands together in order to explain the behaviour under study. A core category should be saturated as much as possible and should be based on a full theoretical sampling in order to maximise differences in the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

The development of a core category should be traceable back through the data by staying in the field until no new evidence emerges from the data collected, and this is done through an ongoing process of theoretical sampling. It is based on the assumption that the data is fully integrated and negative restaurants and findings are identified and accounted for. Glaser (1978) stated that the criteria for the core category as follow:

- a) It must be central and account for a large proportion of the behaviour
- b) It is based on a re-occurrence in the data
- c) It takes longer to saturate than other categories or concepts
- d) It must relate meaningfully to other categories

- e) The theoretical analysis should be based on the core category
- f) It should be highly variable and modifiable

Realising that the dining experience is a process that involves intangible elements as well as tangible elements, the third step of grounding the data was to integrate sub-categories between factors of customer satisfaction from customers' perspectives categories (see Table 4.5).

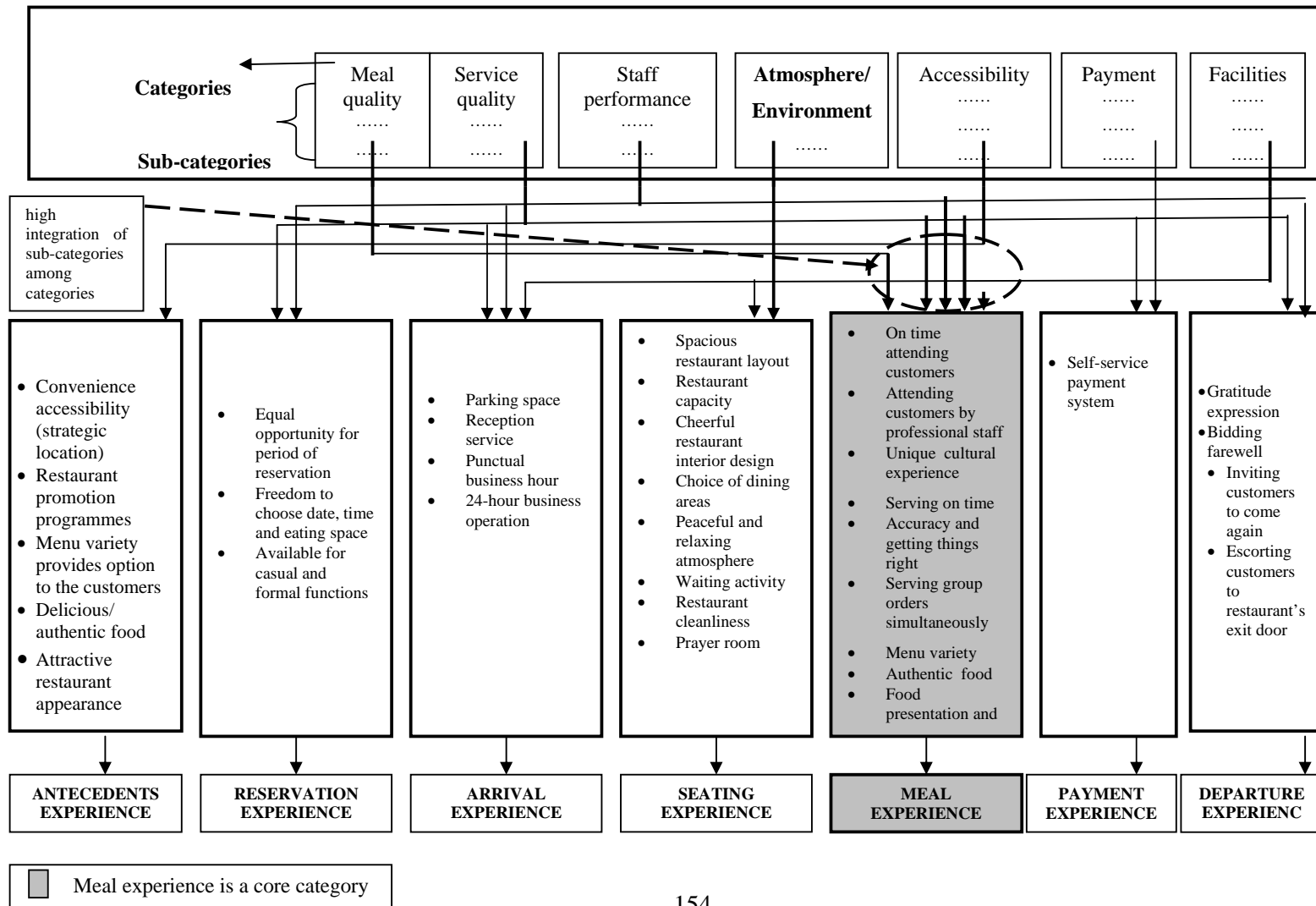
Table 4.5: List of Customer Satisfaction Factors From the Cross-Restaurant Categories and Sub-Categories of the Customers' Perspectives that are Ready To Be Integrated

CATEGORY	MEAL QUALITY	SERVICE QUALITY	STAFF PERFORMANCE	ATMOSPHERE/ ENVIRONMENT	PAYMENT	ACCESSIBILITY	FACILITY
SUB-CATEGORY	Menu variety	Reservation service	On time attending customers	Spacious restaurant layout	Self-service payment system	Strategic location	Restaurant capacity
	Authentic food	Parking spaces		Cheerful restaurant interior design		Commercial promotion program	Waiting activity
	Food presentation and display	Parking attendant	Responsive towards complaints and requests	Choice of dining areas		• television	Prayer room
		Free parking space	Treating customers equally	Peaceful and relaxing atmosphere		• radio	Toilet
		Reception service	Staff appearance	Cleanliness		• food sample	
		Punctual business hours	Good personality traits (polite, smiling, friendly and helpful)	Unique cultural experience		Non-commercial promotion program	
		24-hour business operation		Attractive restaurant appearance		• Word-of-mouth recommendation	
		Serving on time	Accuracy and getting things right			• Direct experience	
		Serving group order simultaneously	Gratitude expression				
			Escorting customers to restaurant's exit door				
			Performance				
			Alert with request				
			Answering phone call quickly				

New categories evolved from the integration of the sub-categories. The creation of these new categories was based on close observation towards stages in the process of the customers' dining experience which included antecedent experience, reservation experience, arrival experience, seating experience while waiting for the order to be served, meal experience, payment experience, and departure experience.

Amongst those categories, 'satisfaction of meal experience' was found to be the core category of the study that got the most links and integration of sub-categories (see Figure 4.11). A detailed explanation about each stage of the dining experience process is discussed in Chapter 6.

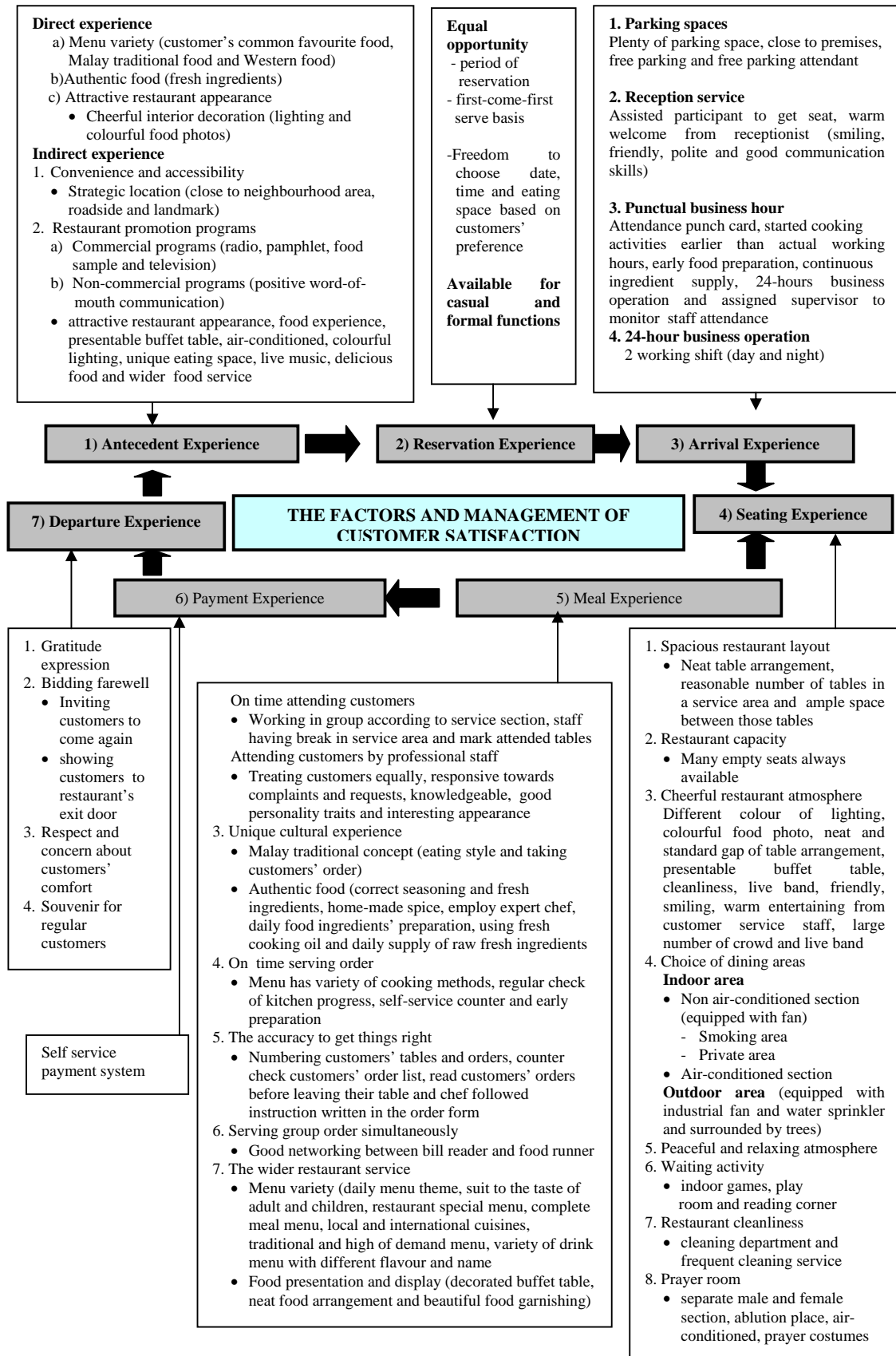
Figure 4.11 The integration of sub-categories of the factors of, and management of, customer satisfaction to find core category



4.4.1.2 Matching between the Categories of Customer Satisfaction Factors and The Categories of the Management of Customer Satisfaction

The last step in the cross-restaurant analysis of this study, based on an adaptation of Eisenhardt's (2002) procedures, was to expand the process of customers' dining experience into a cross-cased Causal Network Diagram (see Figure 4.12) to show the overall findings of this study (customer satisfaction factors and management of the customer satisfaction according to stages in the dining experience process).

Figure 4.12: Cross-restaurant Causal Network Diagram (overall findings of the study)



4.4.2 The Adoption of Coding Strategy

The decision to adopt a particular coding strategy was made following the approach advocated by authors such as Miles and Huberman (1994) and Mehmetoglu and Altinay (2006), with the key consideration being that of an approach that allowed the data to take primacy, and to allow codes to be generated inductively. As Mehmetoglu and Altinay (2006: 14) suggest, the different approaches to analysis often overlap, and with no clear consensus on any one 'right' approach, as "as individual methods of analysis may easily be used in any research strategy". Thus sequential coding, whereby key themes were developed from the data was used, rather than the constant comparative method, which is more generally associated with grounded theory.

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the process of data analysis using NUDIST in within-restaurant analysis. This was followed by cross restaurant analysis. Within-restaurant analysis involved the processes of open coding (to find categories) and axial coding (to derive sub-categories) of both customer satisfaction factors and the management of satisfaction factors. The NUDIST N6 computer software helped in analysing a very large volume of diffuse, qualitative data. The findings of the study were based on the variables in the research objectives which are the factors and management of customer satisfaction and the conceptual framework of customer satisfaction in Malaysian Malay restaurants will be discussing in next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this study is to develop a conceptual framework of customer satisfaction with the dining experience in Malay restaurants in Malaysia. The findings of this study were gathered mainly from the qualitative interviews. These are supported by close observation, participant observation and documentary evidence to provide strong and well-grounded findings in order to achieve the research objectives which are to identify the factors influencing customer satisfaction dining experience and the management of those factors that influencing customer satisfaction dining experience. How factors influencing customer satisfaction construct dining experiences satisfaction in Malaysian Malay restaurants are critically discussed in this chapter.

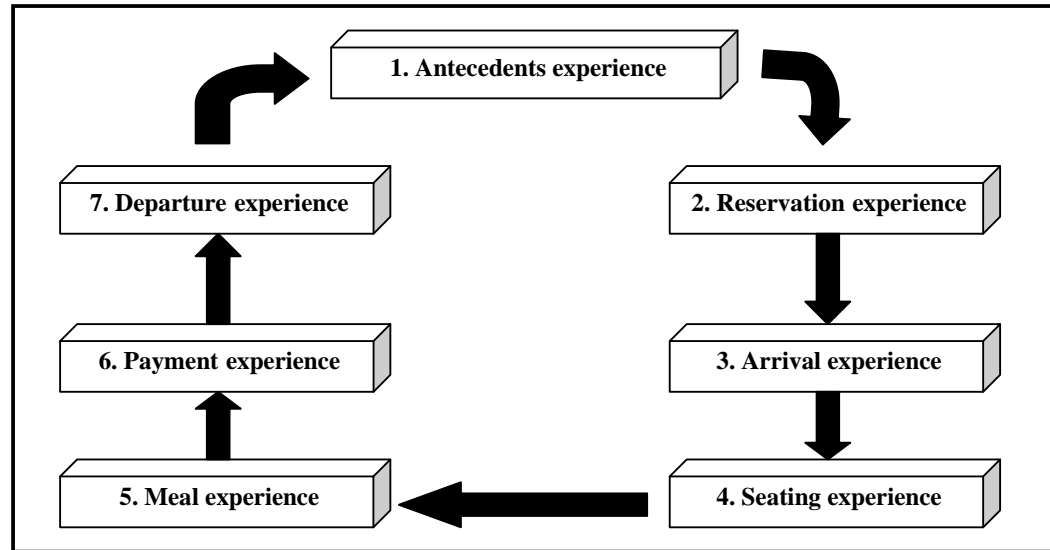
This chapter presents the findings of the study, which are the factors in, and management of, customer satisfaction dining experience. The conceptual framework of the customer satisfaction dining experience in Malaysia Malay restaurants is discussed in Chapter Six.

5.2 THE FACTORS IN, AND THE MANAGEMENT OF, CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

This section deals with customer satisfaction with the dining experience (the influential factors in customer satisfaction and the management of these factors by the business). Customer satisfaction with the dining experience is discussed based on the stages of the participants' dining experience consumption (see Figure 5.1) that were derived through in depth interviews mainly with restaurant customers and supported

by in depth interviews with restaurant front of the house staff and restaurant managers and participant observations. These stages, and their content, constitute the main findings of this study.

Figure 5.1: Stages of Dining Experience Process in a Restaurant for Return Customers



The initial stage in the restaurant customer satisfaction experience starts with the customers' first contact with the restaurant through the antecedents of the experience (as discussed in section 5.2.1) and then making a reservation. This is followed by their arrival experience and seating experience, particularly while waiting to be attended and waiting for their meal to be served, by the meal experience, payment experience and finally, departure experience. Factors influencing customer satisfaction dining experience and the management of restaurant customer satisfaction during these stages are discussed in the following sub-sections.

5.2.1 ANTECEDENTS OF EXPERIENCE

The main focus of this study was the actual (consumption) dining experience at the restaurant. However, the study also found some interesting aspects relating to the antecedents of the dining experience which are discussed in this section. Figure 5.2

shows the factors influencing customer satisfaction for the antecedents of the dining experience.

First visit customers get to know about the restaurants, and are influenced to visit them, because of the visibility of the restaurant to passers by, word-of-mouth recommendations from other customers, paid-for promotion programmes such as the TV3 programme of '*Jalan-jalan Cari Makan*' and radio programme of '*Suara Selatan*' and non-paid promotion programmes such as distributing food samples at shopping complexes.

Repeat customers, on the other hand, are largely influenced by their direct experiences of dining at the restaurant. Most of the repeat customers will, presumably, have had good experiences on previous visits, in terms of having had the choice of a varied menu, delicious food and because of the attractive appearance of the restaurant. Some of the repeat customers, however, are also influenced by promotions. The process of direct experience and other knowledge sources at the antecedent stage are summarised in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2: Customer Satisfaction with the Antecedent Experience

a) RETURN VISIT				
The management of satisfaction		Factors influencing satisfaction	Cognitive evaluation process of satisfaction	Outcome of satisfaction
Restaurants offer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer's common favourite food • Malay traditional food • Western food 	➔	Menu variety provides option to the customers	➔	Behavioural changes (revisit the restaurant)
Use fresh ingredients		Delicious/ authentic food		
Create cheerful interior decoration by using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - different impact of lighting - illuminated colourful food photos 		Attractive restaurant appearance		

b) FIRST VISIT				
The management of satisfaction		Factors influencing satisfaction		Cognitive evaluation process of satisfaction Outcome of satisfaction
Restaurant premises situated in strategic location (close to residential area, road side and important landmarks).	➔	Convenience and Accessibility.	➔	<p>Satisfaction emerged from the pleasurable feeling resulting from obtaining their hopes.</p> <p>Satisfaction is achieved when the restaurants managed to deliver products and services that fulfil the hopes of the customers.</p> <p>(Satisfaction derived from what happens when the actually went to the restaurant and found that they got what they expected)</p>
Commercial promotion programs (television, radio, pamphlet and food samples).				
Non-commercial promotion Programs (attractive restaurant appearance via presentable buffet table, colourful lighting; exciting restaurant atmosphere via air-conditioned, unique eating space, live music; and food wider service via menu variety and delicious food).		Having restaurant promotion programs.		
				➔ (revisit the restaurant)

5.2.1.1 Previous Experience of the Repeat Customers

It was found that customers made repeat visits to the restaurants due to their satisfaction with aspects of their previous meal experience. Repeat customers said things like:

“I like to come here because this restaurant sells a variety of food. I can find almost everything here, not only Malay food but also Western food.” (Rhndall-R2)

“This restaurant sells a variety of food including traditional food. In other restaurants I rarely get dishes like Asam Rebus, Pindang etc but here just name it, you will get it. It has motivated me to have lunch here.” (Abdul Majid-R1)

“...I choose this restaurant as a place for dining out because this restaurant sells my favourite food, Beriani Rice and Lamb Chop.” (Doris Lim-R2)

“I come here purposely to eat Chicken Rice, my favourite food. I used to come here and found that the Chicken Rice was so delicious.” (Khadijah-R2)

These findings indicate that the customers were satisfied with their previous meal experiences based on their evaluation of what they received from the restaurants in relation to their purpose for visiting the restaurant. The restaurants managed to provide (confirm) their needs in terms of an appropriate variety of food options for the customers. For instance Restaurant 1 and Restaurant 2 sell almost all types of food including eastern and western foods. The restaurants not only provided the customers' common favorite food but also Malay traditional foods that are rarely found in restaurants nowadays.

Besides food variety, the quality and taste of the food available at the restaurants was another factor influencing customer satisfaction from previous dining experience that emerged from the data. The actual reason for customer satisfaction was because the quality and taste of the food (the products performance) available at the restaurants confirmed the customers' expectation. Delicious or authentic food, due to fresh ingredients, is an indicator of the quality of the food taste. The quality of food had influenced customers to revisit the restaurant even though some of them had to drive

long distances to get to the restaurant and had to pay more for similar types of food to that which was being offered by other restaurants. The following quotations illustrate this point:

“...I like the foods available here. It is delicious especially seafood. That is why if I want to eat seafood I will come here even though I have to drive 45 minutes all the way from Pontian to Johor Bahru.” (Zulkifli-R2)

“Although the food is more expensive compared to other restaurants... I’m satisfied because the food is really delicious and fresh...but the main reason I come here tonight is because I want to eat rice porridge. I have eaten it before. The taste was very delicious.” (Roziah- R2)

The number of customers in a restaurant was seen to provide an indication of the quality of the food to potential customers. For example, the large number of people at Restaurant 1 succeeded in drawing a potential customer’s attention, as the customer commented:

“I passed by this restaurant every day, on my way to work. I saw a large crowd especially at night. It made me curious about the food being sold here. It gave me an impression that the food here is delicious and that motivated and dragged me here. After my first experience dining here I have no doubt that the food is delicious. It made me revisit this restaurant.” (Amirul-Case 2)

The attractive appearance of the restaurants included beautiful décor with illuminated and colourful menu photos and different lighting effects. The restaurants’ interior decoration was another attraction in the meal experience. These elements made the restaurants look stylish. A number of customers confirmed this point, for example two respondents suggested that:

“The first time I saw this restaurant, to me it looked beautiful. Its interior decoration with illuminated framed photos of the menu items made the restaurant looks stylish. I was attracted by its look and popped in. Not only that, the food is also delicious. This is my third visit to this restaurant.” (Eda Haryani-R2)

“...I passed this restaurant. Illuminated framed photos of menu items hanging on the wall there looked very beautiful from outside... It was the main attraction that dragged me here. The food is also not bad, emm... I mean delicious.” (Lina-R2)

The data thus suggested that the factor influencing a customer's satisfaction with a previous dining experience was whether what the customers' experienced in the restaurant was better than their expectation and/or whether the products offered by the restaurant confirmed their expectations. For instance, a varied menu consisting of Malay traditional menus, Western menus and customers' common favourite menus gave them the opportunity to choose. The customers were also very particular about the freshness of the food ingredients because they believed that freshness was responsible for the authentic flavour of the food. The customers also used the number of customers at a restaurant as an indicator of the quality of the restaurant. They believed that restaurants with many customers usually sell delicious food. Finally, attractive and stylish restaurant appearance due to their interior decoration resulted in them developing loyalty towards the restaurant and as a result revisiting the restaurants.

5.2.1.2 First Time Customer Knowledge of the Restaurant

i) Convenient Access

Two of the restaurants studied were situated in strategic locations. For example, it was observed that Restaurant 1 was located close to a private company and government offices. The location provided easy access to the restaurant for these local markets. Several customers confirmed this:

"I didn't face any problem to gain access to this restaurant. It is located in a strategic place and easy to access." (Fara-R1)

"Furthermore, this restaurant is located in a strategic location. I send my car to get a service in the nearest workshop every 3 months. While waiting for the car to get done, I will come here to eat." (Abdul Majid-R1)

"I eat at this restaurant everyday because it is close to my office." (Salma Lim-R1)

Meanwhile the position of Restaurant 2, visible from the roadside and situated close to several important landmarks such as the Singapore checkpoint, Lido Beach, M

Suites Hotel and Sultanah Aminah General Hospital, also helped easy access to the restaurant. Several customers revealed:

“I passed by this restaurant while on my way back from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore. This restaurant could be seen from the roadside.” (Abdul Majid-R2)

“The restaurant’s closeness to the main road and Lido Beach made this restaurant easy to access. In fact, that was the landmark that helped me to get to know this restaurant. At that time I was passing by this restaurant on my way from my home to my work place at the Sultanah Aminah General Hospital.” (Nurul-R2)

“I’m a Singaporean and am not familiar with roads in Johor Bahru. The nearest restaurant in Johor Bahru from Singapore Checkpoint is this restaurant. From the checkpoint I just have to go straight to get here and after that drive back to Singapore...very easy.” (Rhndall-R2)

The convenient accessibility had encouraged one of these customers to introduce the restaurant to others. According to the customer:

“Actually I brought many people from Singapore to have a meal here. Some of them didn’t know this restaurant at first. I gave them instructions how to get here.” (Rhndall-R2)

These restaurants were also situated close to residential areas. The location was advantageous for both restaurant and neighbouring residents. The restaurant could get different groups of potential customers while the neighbourhood residents could easily dine out due to having a restaurant close by. Several customers gave convenient accessibility as a reason they chose the restaurant as a place for dining out:

“...because this restaurant is close to my house...convenient for me to come.” (Ali-R2)

“This is the closest restaurant to my house.” (Ridzuan -R2)

Thus this study has indicated that convenient accessibility to the restaurant is one of the important factors that influence first time customers to visit the restaurants included in the study. The restaurants were easy to access either because they were located at a strategic location such as private and government offices that were visible from the roadside, or close to many landmarks, or they were situated in a residential area. The transportation links such as roads to access the restaurants was an issue.

The findings also show that the demographics, traffic patterns and firsthand knowledge of the site and the surrounding area are all parts of the site selection equation, which, lead the customers to come back to the restaurants.

ii) Restaurant Promotion Programmes

Commercial promotion programmes are important mechanisms to inform the public about the existence of the restaurant. Some of the restaurants in this study were known via their commercial promotion programmes such as television, pamphlets and food samples. Several customers supported this, for example:

“I heard an advertisement about this restaurant on the radio.” (Zulkifli-R2)

“I heard a lot of advertisements about this restaurant through television and radio.” (Haiqal Aiman-R2)

“The ways I promote this restaurant are through Johor Radio, television... distributing pamphlets and food samples to the public in shopping complexes.” (Owner-R1)

Many customers were motivated to visit the restaurants due to positive word-of-mouth communication with other customers who were satisfied with their own experience of having a meal at the restaurants. Positive word-of-mouth communication is considered as a non-commercial promotion programme of these restaurants. The factors influencing satisfaction of dining experience were associated with various aspects like attractive restaurant appearance, air-conditioning and having a presentable buffet table. A customer reported:

“She was tempted by the restaurant’s atmosphere due to it having a chandelier, air-conditioning, and a well-decorated and presentable buffet table.” (Ain-R1)

Meanwhile some customers visited Restaurant 3 specifically to feel the restaurant environment and to enjoy the restaurant’s exciting atmosphere, particularly the live music. Those reasons influenced one customer, who explained:

“This is my first visit because I want to enjoy live music and to feel the environment as my friend told me that restaurant atmosphere here is very exciting.” (Peter-R3)

A unique eating space in Restaurant 3, which is situated in the treetops, is also one of the interesting satisfaction influences publicised. A customer who was attracted by this explained:

“My friend introduced this restaurant to me. He told me that this restaurant serves food to customers in treetops. It sounds interesting and is something new. That is the reason why I’m here tonight, to experience it myself.” (Shah Rizal-R3)

In terms of food experience, several customers noted that the restaurants served delicious food alongside a variety of menus. Another customer was really impressed with the variety of drinks available at the restaurants:

“I heard about this restaurant from colleagues in the office...they mentioned about the delicious seafood sold here.” (Roziah-R 2)

“My husband and I went to the restaurant to buy take-away food for lunch. My husband entered the restaurant while I waited in the car. After buying the food and getting into the car my husband told me that the restaurant sells a variety of food and asked me to go inside to have a look but I refused. Then we went to the restaurant again on the following day for lunch. At that time both of us entered the restaurant. Amazing...there was such a variety of food and I asked the cashier how many types of food were there altogether? She replied more than 66.” (Rahmat’s wife-R1)

“...from my brother who lives in Bandar Baru Uda. He told me the food here is tasty and varies. He also mentioned that this restaurant sells a variety of drinks that is rarely seen in other restaurants.” (Akhiar-R1)

This showed that customers who were satisfied with their dining experience tended to convey their experience with others through positive word-of-mouth communication. As a result, those who received the information (potential customers) started to develop hopes and expectations of receiving the same dining experience. During the dining experience of those customers, satisfaction is achieved when the restaurants managed to deliver products and services that fulfilled their hopes and expectations. Factors that influenced the feeling of satisfaction of the customers including attractive restaurant appearance, air-conditioning, having a presentable buffet table, a unique eating space and delicious food alongside a variety of menus.

5.2.2 THE RESERVATION EXPERIENCE

Figure 5.3 shows the reservation experience factors that influence satisfaction from the customers' perspective, and the management of the customers' reservation experience from business perspectives: restaurant staff practices. This involves equal opportunity to make reservations. However, almost all family restaurants in Malaysia are of the walk-in type where making a reservation prior to a visit is not a common practice except in high demand restaurants. However, Restaurant 1 and Restaurant 2 provide reservation services, particularly for formal occasions like farewell parties and annual dinners. The reservation services were part of the dining experience at those restaurants. The owner of Restaurant 1 and manager of Restaurant 2 confirmed:

“So far I got many reservations from regular customers especially for formal functions.” (Restaurant owner-R1)

“Most of the restaurant customers who made a reservation for formal functions were those from Maybank, FAMA, Johor State Police, groups of staff from nearby factories, District Farmers Association, specialist doctors from Putri Specialist Hospital, and tourists from Singapore.” (Manager-R2)

Figure 5.3: Customer Satisfaction with the Reservation Experience

The management of satisfaction	Factors influencing satisfaction	Cognitive evaluation process of satisfaction	Outcome of satisfaction
First come first served basis; standardize period of reservation (2 hours for each reservation) that is monitored by special computer software and inform the customers while making reservation.	Equal opportunity for period of reservation.	Satisfaction is emerged when the customers are allowed to control their dining activities.	Psychological impact Pleasant feeling of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel convenience
Available for formal and informal functions.	Offer phone call reservation service.	Satisfaction is achieved when customers' expectation is fulfilled.	
Informal training	Staff answering customers' phone call quickly and politely.		

It was observed that Restaurant 3 provided a reservation service on a “first come first serve” basis. The reservation service was limited and available only for high demand,

private eating spaces (called 'Anjung') in the restaurant. The restaurant's equal opportunities practice regarding reservations was an attempt to give customers a chance to have a meal in their preferred service area. It was convenient because customers can arrange their arrival time at the restaurant. Two customers who were pleased with this service said:

"I like the reservation service for the 'Anjung' here, which is computerised and based on contact hours. It is very convenient service. Customers were informed about the contact hours while making a reservation. For example, I had dinner at one of the 'Anjungs' that is situated in a treetop and had to come down because someone else had booked the 'Anjung' for the next 2 hours." (Lim-R3)

"Another good thing about this restaurant is that it offers a reservation service. So customers can arrange time and date to have meal at their favourite service area especially the private eating space that is located in the treetop there. This service is really convenient." (Sheila-R3)

"...for instance I came here based on the reservation that I made through a phone call this afternoon and in fact, I can chose which 'Anjung' I want for dinner tonight. It is convenience, I think." (Ah Chong-R3)

How the customers are dealt with during the reservation process is very important. The customers expected their phone calls to be picked up quickly, before the third ringing of the dial tones, and answered by polite staff. The staff have to be alert to their requests for preferred seating areas and arrival times. These customer expectations are potentially met at Restaurant 2 and Restaurant 3 as the statements below suggest:

"I like this restaurant. Restaurant receptionist doesn't put me on hold to make reservation. The longest I have to wait for my call to be answered was two ringing of dial tones. Besides that the staff is alert. For instance I made a few requests concerning my preference seating area. I got them. I assume the staff wrote it down while I make the reservation." (Nadia-R3).


"A good thing about this restaurant is receptionist would not keep customers waiting no matter how busy the restaurant is. For instance 6.00 o'clock in the afternoon in Ramadhan month is a peak hour for all Malay restaurants because it is close to break fast time. I never have any problem have to wait for my phone call to be picked up even though if I call the restaurant at that hour and staff who picked up the phone answered my call politely." (Abdul Razak-R2).

The data suggests that the availability of a reservation service for formal and informal functions is part of the dining experience at the restaurant. Customer satisfaction arises when the customers are allowed to control their dining activities. For instance a reservation service gave them better control over their schedule and the opportunity to reserve their places demonstrated that the restaurant cares about its customers. The reservation, which can be made through a phone call, was considered convenient by the customers because they could arrange their time of arrival, date and a private eating space for dining out. Who received the reservation was not important. The most important thing was how the customers were dealt with during the reservation process. Customer satisfaction was achieved when expectation of their phone call to be answered quickly by a polite and professional staff is met.

5.2.3 THE ARRIVAL EXPERIENCE

The findings reveal four major factors that influence customer satisfaction with the customers' arrival experience. These influential factors in customer satisfaction are the availability of parking spaces, having a receptionist, punctual business hours and having a 24-hour business operation (see Figure 5.4). These influences on customer satisfaction and the management of them are discussed as follows:

Figure 5.4: Customer Satisfaction with the Arrival Experience

The management of satisfaction	Factors influencing satisfaction	Cognitive evaluation process of satisfaction	Outcome of satisfaction
Plenty of parking space, close to premise, free parking and having parking attendant.	Parking spaces.	Common service available in customer dining experience causes dis-satisfaction if not present. Adequate quality of service leads to satisfaction.	Behavioural changes Choose the restaurant as a preferred place for dining out.
Staff training.	Reception service assists customers to get seat, warm welcome from receptionist (smile, friendly, polite and good communication skill).	Satisfaction occurred when customers' expectation is met.	
Staff attendance punch card, assign supervisor to monitor staff attendance, start cooking activities earlier than actual working hours, make early preparation and receive early and continuous ingredient supply and 24-hours business operation.	Punctual business hours.	Satisfaction is achieved when customers receive what they wanted from the restaurant and lead to loyalty.	Psychological impacts Pleasurable feeling of: • Feeling welcomed • Feeling convenience
Two staff working shift for day and night operations.	24-hour business operation.	Satisfaction is achieved when the restaurants of study managed to fulfil the needs of customers.	

5.2.3.1 Parking Spaces

Elements under this sub-heading are very likely lead to dis-satisfaction with the customer dining experience if they are not present rather than necessarily promoting satisfaction. For instance, a sufficient number of parking spaces at the restaurants is convenient to customers as it allows the customers to park easily, even during peak hours. Several customers confirmed this:

“... I don’t have any problem to get a parking space even though restaurant customers have to share the parking lot with other users, especially staff who work at the nearest offices.” (Rahmat-R1)

“So far I managed to get a space for parking, no problem at all, even though there is a huge crowd here.” (Rhndall-R2)

“So far I never had any problem to park my car even though during peak hours like at 12.00 o’clock midday. A parking space is always available. Here everything is convenient and comfortable.” (Abdul Majid-R1)

The parking spaces of Restaurant 1 and Restaurant 2 are situated close to the premises and this was seen as preferential:

“The parking facility has plenty of space and is close to the restaurant. Not like in other restaurants where I have difficulty parking my car and have to take a long walk to get to the restaurant.” (Abdul Majid-R1)

Interestingly, Restaurant 2 provided not only free open air parking spaces but also a free parking attendant. The free parking service and free parking attendant, which is rarely found elsewhere in Johor Bahru, was considered excellent. It received positive responses from several customers:

“Other strength is the huge parking area. It has a lot of spaces, has a parking attendant and the service is free of charge. It is really convenient. In Johor Bahru City Center free parking is very rare and I can say impossible to get. Providing free parking with a parking attendant like this is a fantastic service and really can attract more customers to dine here.” (Nurul-R2)

“As for the parking facility, in my opinion this restaurant has an excellent service. The parking attendant can help customers look after their vehicles.” (Rhndall-R2).

“The parking system here is brilliant because it has plenty of space, is free of charge, is very close to the restaurant and has a parking attendant. So I don’t have to worry about safety issues and the possibility of getting a summons and I can eat with comfortable feeling. It is convenient, I think.” (Norisah-R2)

These findings show that the availability of parking spaces at a restaurant is part of the actual experience at the restaurant. Having an insufficient number of parking spaces leads to dis-satisfaction with the customer dining experience, while parking

being free of charge and there being a free parking attendant were considered an adequate indicator of good service and satisfied almost all customers. The parking attendant helped to control traffic and to look after the customers' vehicles. Thus, customers do not have to worry about the safety of their vehicle and the possibility of getting compound tickets due to illegal parking. A parking area close to the premises gives a positive impact to the customers because they do not have to take a long walk from the parking area to the restaurant.

5.2.3.2 Reception Service

Finally, the customer has the opportunity to come face to face with a person who is considered as the host of the restaurant. The host or greeter is the first person customers see and talk to when they enter the restaurant.

In the Malay culture, the host of the house is expected to greet and attend guests who come to their house. The reception service available at restaurants 2 and 3 is consistent with this practice in Malay culture. Two customers who were satisfied with the reception service commented:

"The receptionist waits for customers at the main entrance and leads them to the "Anjung" available. Furthermore, the receptionist is friendly, polite, has good communication skills and readily smiles. This is really like the Malay culture where the host entertains his guest...I feel welcomed." (Faizal-R3)

"I can say that the service is quite systematic. At the main entrance the restaurant has a receptionist to lead customers to the available table so customers don't have to search for the vacant seat by themselves. As a customer I feel welcomed because the staff do not ignore me." (Haiqal Hakim-R2)

It was observed that all three of the restaurants have weekly meetings that all staff are required to attend. At this meeting, the restaurant manager usually discusses restaurant performance for that particular week, as well as staff practice in managing the customers, and particularly how the staff can give the best service to the customers. The role of the receptionist in greeting and escorting customers to a table

is reinforced by the briefing or training that he or she received from the restaurant manager during weekly meetings. A waitress of Restaurant 3 admitted:

“I’ve been trained steps in greeting, escorting and seating the customers to their table. From the training I got various skills like addressing question to customers, presenting menu card, serving food on the table, greeting and offering them assistant if needed.”(Waitress-R3)

The findings of the study showed that customer satisfaction with the dining experience is developed when customers’ expectations are met in terms of greeting and attending guests by the front of house staff. The training helped the receptionist to seat the customers by following these simple steps:

- i) Ask the customers for any seating preference.
- ii) Try to engage the customer in some small talk.
- iii) Pull out chairs.
- iv) Wait for the customer to be seated and open the menu.
- v) When leaving the table say “Enjoy your dinner. If there is anything I can do for you, please let me know”. This is to let the customers know that they have someone looking out for them.

5.2.3.3 Punctual Business Hours

This study found that customers were satisfied with their dining experience when they received what they wanted from the restaurant such as restaurant punctuality in terms of business hours. One aspect of the punctuality of restaurants in terms of business hours was the availability of food on the buffet table during the early business hours. It was observed that Restaurant 1 and Restaurant 2 were punctual in starting their daily business hours. A customer reported:

“Many times I came here early in the morning and in fact sometimes as soon as the restaurant opens. At that time, food was already displayed on the buffet table. That was why I don’t go to other restaurants if want to have breakfast early in the morning. ”
(Shamsina-R1)

There were various actions that the restaurants had taken to ensure they could deliver on time. Those offering a 24 hour business operation, like Restaurant 2, used a clocking-in system to monitor staff punctuality. It was compulsory for staff to punch their attendance card before starting and after finishing their working hours. The supervisor on duty was responsible for monitoring staff attendance and signing the card to confirm that staff arrived and left on time. Staff punctuality enabled the restaurant to deliver its service on time as promised.

However, Restaurant 1 did not use attendance punch cards to monitor staff attendance. Everything depended on staff self-discipline, their sense of responsibility, honesty and commitment towards their work. It was observed that kitchen staff started their shift half an hour earlier than their actual working time which is at 7.00am in the morning to ensure the restaurant could start the business operation on time. The chef of the restaurant reported:

“I arrive at 6.30 in the morning everyday even though my working shift starts at 7.00 o’clock. I then defreeze fish, chicken and meat. While waiting for those ingredients, I make preparations for every dish available and cook them straight away.” (Chef-R1)

Early preparation was observed to be another action that allowed the restaurant to start its business operation on time. In addition, early preparation was found to be associated with the continuous availability of raw ingredients to ensure that the kitchen operation ran smoothly. A quotation from an interview with a chef of one of the restaurants confirmed this:

“For example, for tomorrow’s business operation a supply of ingredients will arrive at the restaurant by 2.30 in the afternoon, after today’s kitchen operation. The daily kitchen operation is between 7.00 o’clock in the morning until 12.00 o’clock midday. Kitchen helpers will make preparations in advance for tomorrow’s business operation from 2.30 until 6.00 o’clock in the afternoon and put them in the fridge and freezer. Tomorrow morning, I will cook them, starting from 7.00 o’clock in the morning until 12.00 o’clock midday.” (Chef-R1)

To summarise, this study indicated that customer satisfaction with the dining experience was achieved when customers got what they wanted from the restaurant such as restaurant punctuality in terms of business hours. This influential factor leads

to customer loyalty. It has been managed through the restaurants offering a 24 hour business operation, using a clocking-in system and having a supervisor to monitor staff attendance and to sign the card to confirm that staff arrived and left on time in order to monitor staff punctuality. In addition, encouraging staff self-discipline and a sense of responsibility, honesty and commitment towards their work. Finally, there was the willingness of staff to take part in early preparation of food that was associated with the continuous availability of raw ingredients to ensure that the kitchen operation ran smoothly.

5.2.3.4 24-Hour Business Operation

Late-night restaurant operations are a common phenomenon in the Malaysian restaurant industry. This service was considered to be very convenient, especially amongst late diners. However, Restaurant 2 was found to be the only Malay restaurant that offered a 24-hour business operation in Johor Bahru. This service received positive feedback from customers especially amongst travellers and late night shift workers. According to them:

“This restaurant opens for 24 hours...After coming back from my office I usually take some sleep and by the time I wake up for dinner it’s already 2.00 o’clock in the morning. This 24-hour business is really convenient for me as I can get food in the middle of the night.”
(Nurul-R2)

“Furthermore, this restaurant opens for 24-hours. This is the only Malay restaurant that opens for 24 hours in Johor Bahru. That is why I choose this restaurant as a preference place for dining out. The operation hour is very convenient for me because I frequently travel from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore late at night and drop by around 3.00 o’clock in the morning to have supper.” (Rhndall-R2)

How a restaurant manages its 24-hour business operation is explained by the manager:


“This restaurant has two working shifts. The first shift is from 8.00 o’clock in the morning until 8.00 o’clock at night. The second shift is from 8.00 o’clock at night until 8.00 o’clock in the morning.”
(Manager-R2)

This study indicated that satisfaction is achieved when the restaurants of study managed to fulfil the needs of customers in term of offering 24-hour restaurant operation to public.

5.2.4 THE SEATING EXPERIENCE

Through observation the study found that once customers enter a restaurant they will usually start observing and enjoying the restaurant's atmosphere. They will begin to look around at the restaurant's physical surroundings. The seating experience refers to the customers' experience of being seated, waiting for their order to be taken, waiting for their order to be served and the whole time that they spend in the restaurant. There are eight factors influencing dining customer satisfaction in relation to the seating experience. Those factors influencing customer satisfaction with the seating experience include spacious restaurant layout, restaurant capacity, cheerful restaurant interior design, choice of dining areas, peaceful and relaxing restaurant atmosphere, restaurant cleanliness, the availability of waiting activities and a prayer room. The factors influencing satisfaction and the management of the satisfaction in the seating experience (Figure 5.5) are discussed in the following sub-sections.

Figure 5.5: Customer Satisfaction with the Seating Experience

The management of satisfaction	Factors influencing satisfaction	Cognitive evaluation process of satisfaction	Outcome of satisfaction
Neat table arrangement Reasonable number of tables in a service area and Ample space between tables	Spacious restaurant layout	May lead to dissatisfaction if they do not exist. It does not necessarily lead to satisfaction.	Behavioural changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preferred place for dining out • Purchase restaurant product • Visit the restaurant • Introduce the restaurant to others
Restaurant capacity (Many empty seat always available).	Restaurant capacity	Satisfaction is developed due to the restaurants provided service (restaurant capacity) that is equal to customers' expectation.	
Colourful framed photos of food, Neat and standard gap of table arrangement, Presentable buffet table, Clean atmosphere, Huge crowd, Live band, Friendly, smiling and warm hosting of customer service staff and different colour of lighting.	Cheerful restaurant interior design	Satisfaction because of pleasurable feelings that emerged from obtaining what restaurants provided to them.	
Indoor dining areas (equipped with industrial fan) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - non air-conditioned section (smoking area, non-smoking area and private area) - Air-conditioned section Outdoor dining area (equipped with industrial fan and water sprinkler and surrounded by trees).	Choice of dining areas	Satisfaction is developed when the customers are allowed to control their dining activities.	
Indoor games, Playroom and Reading corner.	Waiting activities	Satisfaction is emerged when the restaurants offer something than can replace dis-satisfaction of the customers.	 Psychological impacts Pleasurable feelings of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel convenient • Feel excited • Feel welcomed • Feel warm • Feel comfortable • Feel safe • Feel relaxing • Feel peaceful • Feel happy
Service area cleaning strategies: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Slip-resistant tiles Daily cleaning activity Frequent cleaning service Special cloth and detergent for customers table Special trolley for customers dirty serving equipment Toilet <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Having cleaning department Frequent cleaning service 	Restaurant cleanliness	Without the restaurant cleanliness it caused dis-satisfaction of customer dining experience.	
Having separate male and female sections, ablution place, air-conditioned and prayer costume.	Prayer room	Satisfaction occurred when the restaurant fulfil a basic need of the customer. Satisfaction level is increase when what was provided is more than needed.	
Quiet atmosphere, located far away from hectic area, relaxing atmosphere, soft melodies from Malay traditional live band.	Peaceful and relaxing atmosphere.	Satisfaction is developed when the restaurants manage to fulfil customers' hopes.	

5.2.4.1 Spacious Restaurant Layout

The findings of this study found that the customers feel comfortable dining in restaurants where the eating space and the queuing area for the self-service counter are spacious:

*“Comfortable. This restaurant is clean... spacious and huge.”
(Rhndall-R2)*

*“Restaurant layout is also good because it doesn’t interfere with the traffic flow of the restaurant. This aspect is very important especially for restaurants that apply a self-service system like here...the queuing area where you take the food is also spacious and comfortable.”
(Fara- R1)*

A neat table arrangement, a reasonable number of tables in the service area and ample space between tables were the factors that were found to have contributed to the spaciousness of the eating area:

“The environment is very comfortable. The table arrangement is neat and the restaurant looks spacious.” (Zurina- R1)

“This restaurant is very spacious and comfortable. While taking a seat, my chair didn’t graze other customers’ chairs. So, I don’t interrupt other customers even though I have friends who are sitting next to me. In some restaurants they put too many tables in one service area to accommodate a high number of customers so the restaurant becomes cramped and customers do not feel comfortable.” (Joko-R2)

The study found that customer evaluations of the restaurant layout may lead to dissatisfaction. For instance, a spacious restaurant layout in the eating space and queue area, particularly in a restaurant that offers a buffet service, gives a feeling of comfort to customers and a large restaurant size promises a spacious area, which, does not necessarily lead to satisfaction. However, a lack of creativity in arranging the restaurant furniture will make the restaurant look crowded. The way the restaurants are managed to provide a spacious layout and good traffic flow is by arranging a reasonable amount of furniture (dining tables and chairs) in a neat arrangement in each service section.

5.2.4.2 Restaurant Capacity

The findings show that customers were pleased with the large size of the restaurants which meant the restaurant could accommodate many customers at once. Based on observation, it was found that Restaurant 3 and Restaurant 1 could accommodate 200 customers while Restaurant 3 provided 470 seats for customers. The large restaurant capacity influenced the satisfaction of many customers. Those customers believed that big restaurants have plenty of seats and they do not have to make a reservation as they can safely assume that the restaurant will not be fully occupied. They confirmed:

“... and it can occupy a big number of customers. I came here many times with my family, which was a big number of people, but I never had any problem to get seats. I’m satisfied with the capacity of the restaurant.” (Ali-R2)

“One more thing is that this restaurant can accommodate a big number of customers, roughly up to 400 if I’m not mistaken. If I want to have dinner with my friends, I won’t go to any other restaurant because I know this restaurant can occupy a big number of customers even without a reservation in advance. It is really convenient.” (Ridzuan-R2)

This study found that the satisfaction of the restaurant’s customers is developed when the restaurant provided the service (restaurant capacity) that customers expected, which leads to loyalty through repeat visit. Customers assume that a big restaurant capacity indicates plenty of seats. This is convenient particularly for walk-in customers because they do not have to make a reservation even if they come to the restaurants in big groups. In fact, this factor influenced the customers of study to make one of the restaurants studied their chosen place for dining out.

5.2.4.3 Cheerful Restaurant Interior Design

This study found that restaurants should have a simple but pleasant interior decoration, provide an elegant look and promote comfort. A customer explained:

“This restaurant is very comfortable and looks elegant. The interior decoration is very simple but nice.” (Zurina-R1)

“The interior design of this restaurant also makes me feel comfortable having a meal here.” (Doris Lim-R2)

Customers perceived that the attractive interior decoration of the restaurants is due to various elements. Amongst these elements are different coloured lighting; big, colourful, food photos on the wall; neat and standard gaps between table arrangements and a presentable buffet table. The buffet table, which was considered as a focal point of these restaurants, was decorated with a bouquet of flowers, sateen skirting and an attractive arrangement of serving equipment. According to one customer:

“...it is very attractive... because of indirect lighting; the bar counter looks stylish and there are big menu photos hanging on the wall...the table arrangement looks neat with standard gaps between tables. The buffet table with gold sateen skirting, a bouquet of flowers and the arrangement of stainless steel chafing dishes makes the restaurant looks presentable. It is the main attraction of this restaurant, I think.” (Eda Haryani-R2)

Different lighting and colourful food photos hanging on the wall contributed to a cheerful environment, which pleased the customers while dining at the restaurant:

“So far I feel happy with the restaurant atmosphere because it looks very cheerful with the effect made by the lighting and colourful food photos hanging on the wall.” (Ali-R 2)

“The atmosphere is so cheerful with different coloured lighting.” (Idayu-R3)

Bright lighting created a pleasant and comfortable effect because the customers could read the menu card/book and see the food served clearly:

“I feel comfortable because the indoor service area where I’m sitting at the moment is very bright and I can read this menu book and see what I eat clearly.” (Majid-R2)

It was found that Restaurant 3 had two types of menu cards/menu frame as a marketing tool. The first was in the form of A3 size card, double sided, laminated and full of colourful food and drink photos together with the price list. The second was in the form of a big, framed photo of food. Through observation it was seen that the food photos have multiple functions. They are part of the restaurant’s interior decorations and also serve as a promotional tool to help customers make the right order and stimulate their appetite, which leads to the purchasing restaurant products. A customer shared her experience of being influenced by the menu card which shows its function as a marketing tool:

“...but when I saw the menu card, I changed my mind about eating other food. All of the food on the menu card looked zestful. Although at the beginning I wanted to eat Chicken Rice and I had many choices, I still insisted on changing my mind.” (Khadijah-R2)

This study also found that restaurant cleanliness is amongst the elements that contribute to a restaurant’s attractive interior and made customers feel comfortable dining at the restaurant:

“The interior design is interesting in terms of a neat table arrangement, spaciousness, and is very clean. I feel very comfortable.” (Rehan-R1)

There are other factors that contributed to the cheerful restaurant environment which pleased the customers while dining at the restaurant. These factors included a large crowd of people and having a live band at the restaurant.

“I feel excited. You see many people here... and a very good live band.” (Idayu-R3)

It was also observed that friendly and smiling restaurant customer service staff encouraged customers to be friendly and to smile as well and led to a warm relationship between customers and the customer service staff and a cheerful restaurant environment. Two customers explained:

“...waiter and waitress here are friendly and readily smile. Everything is cheerful here, not only the interior design but also the people in this restaurant.” (Eda Haryani-R2)

“Your staff are not only look smart in their uniforms but they are also friendly and smile all the time.” (Dewi-R2)

The cheerful interior decoration made the overall look of the restaurant appear exclusive. It met the expectation of Malaysian customers who like to eat at exclusive restaurants but at a reasonable price and which are habitually patronized by customers from the middle and upper class income range:

“The interior design of this restaurant makes the restaurant looks exclusive and attracts customers’ attention. It is simple but nice. This suits the Malay customers’ eating out needs. Like other Malaysians, I like to go to restaurants that look exclusive or high class but which are reasonably priced. The interior design makes both upper and middle class customers come here. Middle class customers can afford to pay while upper class customers don’t feel embarrassed to dine here because the interior design looks elegant.” (Syed Abdul Rahman-R1)

“...those who come from a high class income group don’t feel inferior eating here because the restaurant atmosphere that looks exclusive and elegant suits them. Middle class customers can also eat here because this restaurant offers reasonable priced for food and drink within their price range.” (Fara-R1)

Interestingly, the combined elements of comfortable atmosphere, cheerful interior decoration, beautiful buffet table decoration and attractive presentation of a variety of food did not only create pleasant feelings but also stimulated customers’ appetites. One customer reported:

“I’m not fussy in choosing a restaurant to eat out but the problem is I hardly ever have an appetite. After coming here everything was changed. I saw a very comfortable environment, cheerful interior decoration, beautifully decorated buffet table decoration, very attractive food presentation and plenty of different varieties of food. These stimulated my appetite.” (Ain-R1)

The findings of this study indicated that customer experienced satisfaction dining at the restaurants included in the study because of pleasurable feelings (happy, pleasant, comfortable, warm, and excited) arising from obtaining what the restaurants provided to them in term of comfortable dining atmosphere from the impact of interior

decoration. The satisfaction in turn stimulated their appetite. A cheerful restaurant interior decoration was considered as part of a restaurant's attractive appearance, signalling a welcome, and became a factor influencing customer satisfaction. There were various ways the restaurants managed the factors influencing restaurant customer satisfaction dining experience. For instance, by employing friendly and smiling customer service staff; having a live band; and a clean restaurant.

5.2.4.4 Choice of Dining Areas

The findings showed that two out of three of the restaurants had two dining areas: indoor and outdoor. The indoor dining areas in both Restaurant 1 and Restaurant 2 have air-conditioned and non air-conditioned sections. Customers were pleased with these facilities because the variety of dining areas provided an option for them to choose their preferred eating-place. The responses from several customers indicated that the air-conditioned dining section provided fresh air, and looked formal and comfortable. It was quiet and suitable for non-smokers and for conversation and discussion. They pointed out:

"The environment here is fantastic. Customers can choose where to sit, either in the open-air outdoor area which is more casual, or in indoor service area that I think is quite formal." (Rhndall-R2)

"Different service areas available give an option for customers to choose where to sit. If they want to enjoy a casual atmosphere, they can sit in the outdoor service area. Those who like to experience a formal atmosphere can have a meal in the air-conditioned service area." (Ali-R2)

"... if I bring guests and I'm sure that they don't smoke or if I come here for discussion, I'll choose the air-conditioned section." (Zaleha-R1)

However, the outdoor dining section that was not air-conditioned was warm and noisy as this customer commented:

"This restaurant is convenient for discussion. I will choose the air-conditioned section if want to discuss something with my friend. The outdoor service section is too noisy." (Amirul-R2)

Due to the hot and humid weather of Malaysia, with the average temperature between 27°C and 34°C throughout the year, the air-conditioned service section was found to be an essential facility to help customers enjoy their meal in a fresh and comfortable environment. A customer said:

“I feel comfortable because this restaurant is air-conditioned. For a warm country like Malaysia, an air-conditioned facility is very important.” (Khadijah-R2)

The air-conditioned service section, which is usually enclosed by glass walls, also makes an impact in terms of creating a positive effect because it frees customers from air and sound pollution, and psychologically makes them feel safe. A customer stated:

“...the obvious thing about having a meal in a fully air-conditioned restaurant like this is the safety issue. I feel safe from air pollution.” (Rosli-R1)

The air-conditioned service section of these restaurants is free of charge. This gives an impression to customers that the restaurant owner is generous in investing in the customers' experience and sharing the restaurant's profit with the customers:

“Air-conditioned rooms are also available for customers without extra charge. It seems that the restaurant owner is not greedy with the restaurant profit.” (Zulkifli-R2)

It was found that different Malaysian customers have different perceptions of an air-conditioned dining section and an open-air service area. Some customers believed that restaurants that are equipped with an air-conditioned facility sell expensive food because the restaurant will charge them for the electricity of the air-conditioning. Psychologically only high income customers can afford to dine at this type of restaurants. They know the restaurant has air-conditioning because of its physical look; air-conditioned areas are usually enclosed by glass walls. Meanwhile, restaurants with an open air service area give an impression that the price offered is reasonable and suitable for customers from all levels of income. The following quotation illustrated this point:

“... looking at the restaurant that has an open air service area, gives me an idea that this restaurant is suitable for all levels of customers. If all service areas are covered with glass walls, Malay customers will be afraid to enter because it gives an impression that this type of restaurant provides expensive food.” (Rehan-R1)

The restaurants were also concerned about their customers who smoke. Open air and non air-conditioned indoor dining areas are available for this group of customers. As a result of the heat and humidity of the Malaysian weather, the non-air conditioned dining areas of Restaurant 2 had been equipped with cooling facilities like industrial fans and water sprinklers to ensure customers' comfort. The availability of this facility gave a positive impression to the customers that the restaurant owners were concerned about their customers' comfort, which is important for their long term business investment. Several customers confirmed:

“... the owner is very concerned about customers' comfort. For instance each section of the outdoor service area has been equipped with a standing fan and water sprinkler to ensure that customers get fresh air and have their meal at a comfortable room temperature.” (Manager-R2)

“Standing fans equipped with water sprinklers show that the restaurant owner is really concerned about customers and invested a lot of money for long-term business.” (Ridzuan-R2)

“The restaurant also provides a big standing fan with a water sprinkler for the outdoor service area. To me it is very useful, especially in a hot country like Malaysia.” (Norisah-R2)

Another factor influencing customer satisfaction was the fresh atmosphere. This is characterised by the absence of food smells from the kitchen interfering with the restaurant service area due to a good ventilation system. Two customers highlighted this factor:

“...and the atmosphere here is fresh with no food smell interfering with the service area.” (Rahmat-R1)

“There is also no food smell from the kitchen interfering with the atmosphere in the service areas...Malaysians usually don't like food smell except from the food on their plate. This restaurant has a good ventilation system...I feel comfortable dining here.” (Shamsina-R1)

The fresh restaurant atmosphere was also perceived to be influenced by the presence of large trees surrounding the restaurant. Two customers commented:

“The natural beauty of the environment cools the restaurant atmosphere.”(Sheila-R3)

“The trees make the restaurant atmosphere and surrounding areas fresh and calm especially at night.” (Sheila-R3)

A staff member confirmed:

“...the atmosphere of a restaurant’s open-air service area like this is usually warm because Malaysia is a hot and humid country. However, this restaurant is different. The restaurant atmosphere is cool and fresh even though none of the service areas at this restaurant is equipped with air-conditioning. It is because the restaurant is surrounded by trees.” (Waitress-R3)

This study also found that customers were satisfied with having their own private eating space. For instance, Restaurant 1 provided a unique, authentic and private eating space called ‘Anjung’. The ‘Anjung’ is an individual dining room that is situated under and amongst the treetops. It is suitable for customers who like to have their meal in private and it is also comfortable and relaxing. This new concept of eating space provided a unique and exciting meal experience for the customers. Many customers were pleased with this new concept and it encouraged them to introduce the restaurant to others and revisit the restaurant. They said:

“Besides that I have privacy because of eating in my own dining room that is separated from other customers’ eating spaces. So I can talk, chat and laugh freely. The dining room which is known as ‘Anjung’ is very unique and having a meal here is an exciting experience. I will encourage my friend to dine here” (Faizal-R 3)

“It is very private because customers have their own dining space, ‘Anjung’, which looks like a Japanese dining room.” (Shah Rizal-R3)

“Something new about this restaurant is that the private dining rooms are located on the top and under big trees. I have never experienced this concept before. I will come again with my family” (Sheila-R3)

“...I feel disappointed because I really hoped to get one of the ‘Anjung’ on the top of the trees but I couldn’t get it...it was fully booked. Never mind, I will come again and make sure make reservation before arrival” (Wendy-R3)

“It depends on where you sit. If you sit at the ‘Anjung’ either on the top or under the trees, it is very comfortable, relaxing and private. However, if you sit over there, which is like other restaurants, there is no difference at all.” (Lim-R3)

The eating space of the ‘Anjung’ is an adaptation of the Malay traditional house patio concept. The patio concept, which is rarely found in any other restaurants in Malaysia, is unique and makes the customers feel as comfortable as if having a meal at home. According to one of those customers:

“I feel at home. Usually we have patio at our house. The similar concept of patio is used here as a dining room. It is really comfortable” (Ken-R3)

The findings of this study suggest that the satisfaction of customers with the dining experience is developed when the customers are allowed to control their dining activities by giving them the option to choose their preferred eating-place. It was achieved when the restaurant provided many service areas like air-conditioned areas, open air areas and non air-conditioned indoor dining areas and private eating space, which managed to fulfil the needs of different group of customers. The satisfaction has motivated customer loyalty (revisit the restaurant) and positive word-of-mouth promotion.

5.2.4.5 Peaceful and Relaxing Atmosphere

The restaurant environment in Restaurant 3 was quiet. It was observed that the quiet atmosphere was associated with the restaurant location: it is situated in a neighbourhood area, which is usually calm and far away from hectic locations like the town centre. The quiet restaurant atmosphere provides a peaceful and relaxing meal experience to customers. This was illustrated by the following interviewees:

“This restaurant is situated in a neighbourhood area and is far from busy and noisy areas like Johor Bahru city centre. It makes the restaurant atmosphere very quiet.” (Sheila-R3)

“Here we feel peace and calm, and we are relaxed because the restaurant’s location is far from hectic area and busy roads. The environment helps to release any tension after working for long hours...definitely suitable for gatherings and convenient for discussion as well.” (Faizal- R3)

Peaceful and relaxing feelings depend not only on the location of the restaurant but also on the type of background music that provided. Entertainment was found to be a factor that influenced the satisfaction of customers. Different instrumental music, local and international, played with Malay traditional musical instruments was available in Restaurant 3 and made the restaurant atmosphere very relaxing and promoted a valuable experience to the customers according to diners:

“Another attractive thing about this restaurant is the live, Malay, traditional band for entertainment... the musicians not only play Malay, musical instruments and traditional, instrumental, Malay melodies but also instrumental, English and Japanese melodies... These instrumental melodies really make the restaurant atmosphere very relaxing.” (Shah Rizal- R3)

“The live band with traditional, Malay instruments playing different instrumental melodies really makes me feel relaxed dining here.” (Idayu- R3)

“...instrumental music from a Malay traditional live band makes the restaurant atmosphere very relaxing.” (Sheila- R3)

“I want to experience the environment besides wanting to listen to the fantastic music by a traditional, Malay, live band. The traditional, Malay, musical instrument is difficult to find nowadays...What really amazes me is the musicians can play not only traditional but also modern melodies using the musical instrument.” (Lim- R3)

The existence of a live band was associated with the number of customers dining at the restaurant. For instance, the restaurant 3 offered the live band only for six nights a week. Based on observation, that restaurant received the lowest number of customers on Monday night when there was no live band. The manager and one of customers interviewed noted this phenomenon.

“Although I’m a regular customer to this restaurant and come here almost every night, but I don’t dine here on Monday night because of there is no live band on that night.” (Shah Rizal- R3)

“Business is very slow on Monday night because of not many customers. The primary reason is because of there is no live band on that night. If possible this restaurant wants to provide the live band every night but has constraint because musicians of the live band want to have rest one night and they choose Monday night. As a customer I have to respect their decision.” (Manager- R3)

The relaxing restaurant atmosphere promoted a comfortable feeling amongst the restaurant staff too, and helped to release any tensions or tiredness caused by work.

The staff expressed their positive feelings about the atmosphere:

“I like the restaurant environment and atmosphere here; it’s very relaxing and comfortable... Although working as a waiter is a tiring job but the atmosphere and live entertainment has released my tension.” (Waiter- R3)

“Working here is really tiring because this restaurant is always full with customers and staff have no time to take a seat unless during their break. One advantage working here is that this restaurant has a live band. Different types of melodies reduce the tension of the staff. So we work happily...of course this has a positive impact on customer service. For instance, I readily smile at the customers” (Waitress- R3)

The findings of this study clearly show that customers dine at the restaurants not only because of the food and social activity but also to get a peaceful and relaxing atmosphere. Customer satisfaction is developed when the restaurants manage to fulfil customers’ needs by offering their service in a quiet, peaceful and relaxing atmosphere, which is usually far away from hectic places, and by providing entertainment either from a sound system or live bands with selected, instrumental melodies. The instrumental melodies provided a peaceful and relaxing atmosphere for the customers and reduce the tension of the staff who worked long hours and, in addition, the music helps to make staff feel happy. The happiness of the staff has a positive impact on customer service. The existence of the live band was also found increase the number of customers dining at the restaurant.

5.2.4.6 Waiting Activities

It was observed that two of the restaurants took some time before collecting orders and serving customers. However, these restaurants provided activities to fill the customers' time while they were waiting for their orders to be taken or served. For instance, Restaurant 3 provided traditional Malay indoor games like “*Congkak*” and “*Dam*”, which are suitable for both children and adults, in every private eating space, or ‘*Anjung*’. A customer who was very pleased with this facility stated:

“I like the idea of putting Malay, traditional indoor games like Congkak in every ‘Anjung’. So customers can play the game while waiting for their order to be served. It is a really fantastic idea.” (Wendy-R3)

“...the restaurant provides Malay, traditional indoor games in each ‘Anjung’ that are suitable for adults and children like Chongkak and Dam.” (Ken-R3)

Meanwhile Restaurant 1 provides a reading corner to fill the customers' waiting time.

A customer commented:

“I like the idea of providing a reading corner over there. Customers can read while waiting to be entertained or while waiting for their order to be served. Psychologically I don't feel the restaurant service is slow if the waiting time is full with activities.” (Fara-R1)

However, waiting activities available at the Restaurant 2 had a different purpose. The restaurant has a high percentage of family customers who dine with their children. Realizing that children like to play, the owner of the restaurant invested a sum of money to provide a free of charge, air-conditioned playroom that is equipped with toys for this young group of customers. This was to make the customers with children feel comfortable and able to have a meal without constant interruptions from their children. The facility received a good response from customers with children and they commented:

“The playroom facility is good for family customers.” (Norisah –R2)

“I've got two children. One reason I like to eat here is because this restaurant provides a playroom for children. Usually I feed my children first before they are allowed to play in the playroom. Then my

husband and I will concentrate on our meal. Basically children don't like to sit without doing anything unless they have something to play with. Otherwise they will cry or play around and distract the parents who then can't concentrate on their meal. This playroom really helps me to avoid those problems and I can enjoy my meal.” (Rohani-R2)

“Another strength of this restaurant is having a playroom for children. The room helps the parent in two ways. Firstly, they can concentrate on their meal and secondly, the children can play while waiting for their food to be served.” (Manager-R2)

This study found that restaurants provide waiting activities like a reading corner, indoor games and playroom, which without them can cause dissatisfaction of their customers. These facilities give the customers an impression that they are already being attended to by the restaurant front of house staff, feel their visit to the restaurant is appreciated and to divert their attention towards restaurant slow service. The playroom facility was to ensure parents of the children could enjoy their meal peacefully while their children amuse themselves in the playroom. This facility managed to meet the parents need.

5.2.4.7 Restaurant Cleanliness

Cleanliness is a top priority in the restaurant business that cannot ever be taken lightly. Improper sanitation standards can be disastrous for business. Restaurant cleanliness was a main satisfaction factor that was raised when customers discussed the restaurant's atmosphere. Customers perceived that cleanliness covers all the restaurants' areas including inside as well as outside the restaurant.

“I'm very satisfied with the restaurant cleanliness. It is not only the service areas, but also other areas outside the restaurant. For example the restaurant's corridor, are also clean.” (Raja-R1)

“...the cleanliness is very good.” (Majid-R1)

The indicators of a clean restaurant according to the customers are the shining floor, shining table and serving equipment, empty and clean tables at all times and no flies. According to them:

“It is clean...no flies and staff take action quickly to clear customers’ tables and there is always empty and clean tables available.” (Abdul Majid-R1)

“Why I say it is clean? You see this table, floor and glass all of them are shining.” (Joko-R2)

Another aspect of restaurant cleanliness was the toilet. Having toilets provides a convenience to the customers, for example a customer mentioned:

“Another important thing is that your restaurant provides toilets. This is a more important facility than others in every restaurant but certain restaurants don’t provide toilets. It is very inconvenient if a restaurant has no toilets.” (Sheila-R3)

Having a dry floor in the toilet cubical is not a common scenario for public toilets in Malaysia because Malaysian Malay society uses water instead of toilet paper for cleaning purposes. However, a different scenario was observed at the toilets in almost all the restaurants where the flooring of these toilets was dry. Thus, another criterion of toilet cleanliness is having dry flooring, as one customer confirmed:

“It was not only clean but also dry, well decorated, and smelt fragrant.” (Waitress-R2)

The restaurant’s cleanliness also played a part in a customer introducing the restaurant to others:

“...because of cleanliness. This restaurant is clean so I won’t feel embarrassed to bring my guests to have a meal here...In terms of cleanliness, I have no doubt that it is clean.” (Rosli-R1)

There are six ways that the restaurants manage their cleanliness. Firstly, it was observed that these restaurants used slip-resistant tiles for flooring in the service area and for the toilet due to safety and cleanliness. For example, the flooring of the restaurants’ corridor was made of concrete while the flooring of the restaurant toilet was made of tiles. It was observed that these concrete and tile surfaces were easy to clean and maintain.

Secondly, each department in the restaurants had its own daily cleaning schedule. For instance, all departments in Restaurant 1 made early preparations before starting the daily business hours. A part of the preparations was the cleaning activity. Customer service staff were instructed to sweep the floor of the restaurant service area at least three times during the period of the daily operation hour which are at 7.30 and 11.00 o'clock in the morning, and at 4.00 o'clock in the afternoon. Mopping the floor with special detergent took place at 6.00 o'clock in the evening as well as just before the end of the day. However, if the floor was found to be dirty in between these cleaning service times, the staff were required to mop the floor immediately. This was explained:

“The restaurant doesn’t employ cleaners to do the cleaning. Front of house staff have to sweep the floor 3 times a day. In the morning about 7.30 am before starting business hours then at 11.00 o'clock in the morning which is just before peak hours and lastly at 4.00 o'clock in the afternoon. Before leaving the restaurant at 6.00 o'clock in the afternoon, we have to mop the floor with special detergent. If any food/drink spills are found on the floor, staff have to mop the floor immediately.” (Waitress-R1)

Meanwhile, the daily cleaning service was also done in each of the restaurant's kitchen departments. Kitchen staff cleaned the stoves, workstation and kitchen floor with special detergent everyday after the kitchen operation had finished. A member of kitchen staff confirmed:

“For kitchen department, kitchen staff including the cook will clean the stove, workstation and wash kitchen floor at 2.00 o'clock in the afternoon every day after finishing the cooking activities.” (Waitress-R1)

Thirdly, it was observed that the busboy/busgirl of all restaurants cleared the tables immediately after the customers finished each course. Clearing tables does not mean the staff were chasing the customers away but it was to ensure that they felt comfortable sitting at the clean table. Cleaning tables was also done immediately after customers left their table. It was followed by polishing the table with a special cloth and detergent. Therefore, flies were hardly ever seen in the restaurant even though Malaysia is a hot and humid country:

*“For customers’ table, special detergent and cloth are used to polish the table every time after customers leave their table to avoid flies.”
(Waitress-R1)*

Fourthly, it was observed that Restaurant 1 and 2 provided a special trolley for all dirty serving equipment. On the trolley all the cutlery was soaked in hot water that contained washing up liquid. Leftover food was put in a separate bin before sending the trolley to the dishwashing department.

In maintaining toilet cleanliness, the restaurants had a frequent toilet-cleaning service. For instance, Restaurant 2 had a special department that was responsible for the restaurant cleaning service. The department consisted of 5 stewards who were in charge of the restaurant-cleaning service. The toilet cleaning service took place four times a day: in the morning, afternoon, evening and at night. In between these cleaning times the steward on duty had to check the toilet cleanliness every half an hour. The manager of this restaurant reported:

“Stewards are not only doing washing up, but are also responsible for cleaning the toilet, service area, corridor, and restaurant environment.” (Manager-R2)

Restaurant 1 also had a toilet-cleaning service system, which was twice a day. However, the frequency of the cleaning activity increased during the rainy season and peak hours due the increased number of customers using the toilet:

“For toilet cleaning, we have to clean it twice a day, which is before and after peak hours. If the restaurant has high turn over of customers or during the rainy season when toilet floor gets wet easily, the toilet will be cleaned more often.” (Waitress-R1)

Meanwhile, Restaurant 3 assigned a maintenance supervisor to monitor restaurant cleanliness:

“The supervisor also monitors the cleanliness of the restaurant. Every section of the service area is provided with rubbish bin and sink. That’s why I hardly see rubbish either in the outdoor or indoor service areas.” (Waiter-R3)

This study showed that all the restaurants offer a clean restaurant atmosphere. Without the restaurant cleanliness it caused dis-satisfaction with the customer dining experience. Restaurant cleanliness was found to be a factor influencing customer satisfaction of this study and determined a positive word-of-mouth promotion. A dirty kitchen can have a negative effect in the service area because the smell and waste from the production activities in the kitchen department can attract flies and disrupt the restaurant's atmosphere. The restaurants have a detailed plan to provide a clean and sanitary environment and safe fresh food, exterior and interior of the building, which encompasses: the trash area, landscaping, exterior building walls, parking lot, entranceways, dining room, kitchen, storage areas and toilet.

Six ways have been applied to ensure restaurant cleanliness, which include using slip-resistant tiles for flooring in the service area and for the toilet area due to safety and maintenance purposes; having daily cleaning activities in each restaurant department; clearing customers' tables immediately after they finish each course or leave their table; providing a special trolley for all dirty serving equipment; and having a special cleaning department to monitor the frequent toilet-cleaning service.

5.2.4.8 Prayer Room

A Muslim prayer room is a common facility available in public areas in Malaysia. This facility is related to the Islamic rule that obligates Muslims to pray five times a day. Since most of the restaurant staff in this study were Muslims, and the restaurants were situated far away from the Mosque, these restaurants provided prayer rooms for the staff. However, it was observed that restaurant customers were also using this facility. Thus, the availability of the prayer room was found to be a factor influencing customer satisfaction for both customers and staff because it was convenient for them to perform their prayers. Restaurants that provided this facility had a greater chance to be chosen as a place of eating out by Muslim customers. The following quotations illustrated customers' view towards this facility:

"This facility is very important especially to Muslim staff that spend 12 working hours in the restaurant everyday." (Manager-R2)

“This facility is also convenient for customers because the restaurant is located far away from the mosque.” (Manager-R3)

“... this restaurant has prayer room facility. I used the room to perform Maghrib prayer just now. It is convenient for both Muslim staff who work and the customers who dine here not to miss their prayers.” (Hamzah-R3)

“Prayer room facility here is important especially for a traveller like me. I’m on my way back to Singapore. After performing Maghrib Prayer here I don’t have to stop to find a mosque to perform the prayer. So I can drive to Singapore straight away.” (Kadir-R2)

Customers were satisfied with the condition of the prayer room that was fully equipped with separate male and female sections, air-conditioned, having an ablution place and prayer costumes. According to them:

“This restaurant also has separate prayer rooms for men and women.” (Manager-R2)

“This restaurant provides Muslim prayer rooms for both male and female users.” (Ain-Case 1)

“...I performed Zuhur and Asr prayers at that prayer room today. Although the room was a bit far and isolated from the restaurant service areas, it was really convenient and comfortable because it has male and female sections besides being fully air-conditioned.” (Muhammad Asaad-R3)

“I don’t have any problem to perform Zuhur and Asar prayers if come here for lunch and tea break because this restaurant has a prayer room that is equipped with a ablution place and prayer costumes.” (Abu Bakar-R3)

Dining experience satisfaction of the customers is achieved when the restaurants provided a basic need of the customer which is prayer room. The satisfaction level is increased when what was provided is more than expected (the prayer room has male and female sections and equipped with prayer costume and air-conditioned).

5.2.5 THE MEAL EXPERIENCE

People frequently assume that restaurants are places for serving food only. However, this study found that a restaurant is primarily a venue for meal experiences where all

tangible and intangible elements are blended together to produce valuable, memorable and meaningful dining experiences. Thus, the food plays a key, but not the only role. The intangible elements of factors influencing customer satisfaction of this study have been found. They were staff attending customers on time; professional behaviour by staff such as being responsive towards complaints and requests; treating customers equally; knowledgeable; having an interesting appearance, and having good personality traits. Other intangible elements were providing a unique experience; serving orders on time; the accuracy to get things right; serving group orders simultaneously and a wider restaurant service (see Figure 5.6). These factors that influence satisfaction and ways of managing the satisfaction influence factors are discussed in the following sub-sections.

5.2.5.1 On Time Attending Customers

Through observation it was found that the staff of the front of house department of the Restaurant 1 and Restaurant 2 attended customers on time. On time service is defined as staff attending customers as soon as the customers take their seat. Several customers complimented this by saying:

“They don’t ignore the customers. They entertained me quickly. As soon as I take a seat I don’t have to call them to make an order or wait for long to be attended.” (Joko-R2)

“... front service staff were excellent. They attended me very quickly.” (Khadijah-R2)

“Service was very good. You as a waitress attended us and served our food on time.” (Majid-R1)

Figure 5.6: Customer Satisfaction with the Meal Experience

The management of satisfaction	Factors influencing satisfaction	Cognitive evaluation process of satisfaction	Outcome of satisfaction
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Working in group according to service section Staff have break time in service area Mark attended tables 	On time attending customers	No satisfaction reason	Behavioural changes <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Repeat visit Positive word-of-mouth publicity
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Responsive towards complaints and requests Treat customer equally Staff performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> About restaurant product and service Communicate in different languages Staff appearance Good personality traits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patient, smiling, polite, friendly and helpful React towards complaints and requests 	Attending by professional staff	<p>Satisfaction emerged when the restaurants offer something that can replace dissatisfaction of the customers.</p> <p>Satisfaction is achieved when the restaurants provide staff who can perform more than what the customers want.</p> <p>Satisfaction is developed when the restaurants provide something outstanding from the customers' usual dining experience.</p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Malay traditional concept (Sitting on the floor with shoe off and folded leg) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on customers' need (survey) Based on restaurant owner's creativity Authentic food <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delicious (Complete and sufficient amount of fresh seasoning and ingredients) Correct seasoning and fresh ingredients, having food quality controller Using home-made spice, packaging and labelling ingredients before storage Daily supply of fresh raw ingredients, using aquarium to store live fish Daily food ingredient preparation, using fresh cooking oil only Employ expert chef 	Unique cultural experience	Satisfaction occurred when the restaurants provide more than ordinary (unusual) dining experience.	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Menu has variety of cooking methods Regular check of kitchen progress Self-service counter Early preparation 	Serving on time	No satisfaction reason	Psychological impacts <p>Pleasurable feelings of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feel entertained Feel attended Feel comfortable Feel casual and relaxed Feel welcomed
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Tables are numbered Customers plates numbered using tweezers Counter check customers order list with customers Read order list before leaving customers' table 	Accuracy getting things right	Satisfaction because of the restaurants managed to fulfil customers' request.	

5. Chef followed instructions written in order form					
Good networking between bill reader and food runner		Serving group order simultaneously		Satisfaction emerged when the restaurants managed to provide customers' request as expected.	
1. Menu variety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daily theme, suits the taste of children and adults, restaurant special menu, complete meal, Western and local cuisines, traditional and high demand menus, variety of drinks with different flavours and names 2. Food presentation and display <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decorated with traditional serving equipment Neat food arrangement Beautiful food garnishing 		The core restaurant service.		Satisfaction is developed when the restaurants offer products that beyond customers need.	Feel convenient Have freedom to choose Feel happy Feel accepted Feel appreciated Stimulate appetite Look attractive Delicious

The on time service offered by these restaurants was observed to be associated with the restaurant's systematic working system. For instance, the front of house department at Restaurant 1 was divided into groups according to service station (refer to Table 5.1 and Table 5.2).

Table 5.1: Service Stations of Restaurant 1

Service areas	Service station	Total table number	Number of customers	Number of front of house department staff
Indoor (non air-conditioned)	A	31	124	8
Indoor (air-conditioned)	B	12	48	3
Outdoor	C	7	28	2
TOTAL	3	50	200	13

Source: Restaurant's 1 observation field note

Table 5.2: Service Stations of Restaurant 2

Service areas	Service station	Table number	Total table number	Number of customers	Number of front of house department staff
Indoor (non air-conditioned)	A	1-18	18	90	9
	B	64-73	10	50	5
Outdoor	C	50-63	14	70	7
	D	19-33	15	75	7
	E	80-100	21	75	7
Indoor (air-conditioned)	F	34-49	16	80	8
	G	74-79	6	30	3
TOTAL	7	79	100	470	46

Source: Restaurant's 2 observation field note

Each station had its own organization that consisted of a supervisor, a bus boy and between four and five waiters/waitresses. Working in groups based on the service stations was found to be more effective in producing a well organized working system. Customers and staff of the restaurant suggested:

"... the restaurant has a systematic service where service areas have been divided into small stations...this system is more effective. Logically everything that we do in small numbers is usually easier to supervise rather than working in big numbers." (Ridzuan-R2)

"...customer service staff and working systems are well organised. For example, the staff work in groups according to sections, one group for one station." (Haiqal Hakim-R1)

"To make the service operation more systematic...Each station consists of 1 supervisor, 4 or 5 waiters and or waitresses and a busboy to manage between 13-15 tables that can occupy an average of 70 customers. I found out it works very well." (Manager-R2)

It helps the customer service staff to share their workload with other staff in the same service station in order to deliver efficient service to customers. For instance it was observed that there was always at least one member of staff available at each service area of Restaurant 2 to attend the customers no matter how busy the restaurant was. Thus, the staff managed to give full attention, especially to customers who were in

their station, in terms of attending them on time, taking additional orders and thanking them before they left their table. According to a staff member:

“A good thing about this restaurant is that its staff are working in small stations. One station consists of 4 to 5 waiters and waitresses looking after about 13 to 15 tables. So every time customers sitting in my station or leaving the station, I will know. So there is no reason for me not to attend them, for example offering to take additional orders or missing to say ‘thank you’ before they leave their table unless I’m busy doing other things like...” (Waitress-R2)

This was supported by customers, who suggested that:

“...I meant the staff gave me full attention starting from I took my seat. They also asked me whether I needed to order additional food such as dessert and hot drinks or not.” (Nadia Natassha-R2)

“The difference with the service here compared to the service in other restaurants is here the staff ask customers for feedback about the food and service provided and offer to take additional food orders if I need...I felt the staff really pay attention to customers.” (Akhiar-R1)

“They don’t leave the service area unattended. At least one of them will be here....” (Zukiflil-R2)

It was observed that Restaurant 2 and Restaurant 3 had a shortage of front of house department staff. Nevertheless, those restaurants had developed a system to identify customers that had been attended. The system was designed to avoid different staff from attending the same customers while keeping other unattended customers waiting and to ensure the restaurant offers on time service. For instance, Restaurant 2 used a rolled order form that was placed in the order form holder on the customers’ table as an indicator that customers sitting at that particular table had been attended and their order had been taken.

It is difficult to determine the time of the customers’ arrival especially for walk-in restaurants. In this case restaurant staff need to standby at all times even during their break. It has been observed that all customer service staff had their break at the restaurants’ service area instead of in the staff eating area. This was to ensure that the staff could see customers arrive and attend them on time. In fact, it was observed that

several staff sacrificed their break just to attend the customers. The following episode illustrated this influence of customer satisfaction factor:

While a waitress was having lunch, 2 customers entered the restaurant. The waitress stopped her meal for a while to attend the customers as soon as she saw the customers took their seats. After making sure all customers' orders have been served the waitress continued her meal (R 2)

This study found that attending customers on time, which is related to on time service, was a factor that influenced satisfaction of the customers in this study. There are two ways the influence of this factor on satisfaction has been managed. The first method was by having staff working in groups according to service stations to serve small numbers of customers. This system permits the staff to share their workload with other staff in the same service station. As a result they could concentrate particularly on the customers sitting in their service station that is to attend them in time and to offer to take additional orders and bid them goodbye before they leave their table. The second method of managing the influence of this factor was by having restaurant staff always in the standby position to ensure they are on the alert to the customers' arrival.

5.2.5.2 Attending by Professional Staff

Staff are an important element of a restaurant's assets. Excellent service and good quality restaurant products depend on them because they are responsible for manufacturing and delivering the product and service to the customers. They are also a critical factor in creating the dining experience through staff performance. This study found that customers were satisfied when being attended by professional front of house staff. Some criteria of staff professionalism were responsiveness towards customers' complaints and requests, expertise in taking and serving customers' orders and table clearance. The quotation below illustrates those criteria:

"They also looked professional in term of taking customers' orders, handling customers' complaints, serving food, and clearing their table." (Haiqal Hakim-R 2)

Other criteria of professional staff performance were treating customers equally, being knowledgeable about restaurant products, appearing interested and having good personality traits. Details of these criteria are discussed as follows:

i) Responsive Towards Complaints and Requests

Front of house department staff and managers at these restaurants were used to receiving complaints about elements of the restaurant service. However, it was found that if staff reacted positively to complaints, this reaction satisfied the customers. Several customers confirmed this by saying:

“I used to make complaints and so far staff took action after receiving a complaint.” (Syed Abdul Rahman-R1)

“One thing that I noticed is there is no kitten playing around this service area anymore. Seems to me that the staff took action after receiving my complaint.” (Salma Lim-R1)

The customers noticed that staff who responded to customers' complaints and requests paid attention and took the initiative to provide a better service to customers. For instance, a member of the front of house department staff in the Restaurant 2 served the customer hot food as soon as the staff received a complaint from the customer that the food served was cold. An episode and interview quotation below illustrated this scenario:

It was observed that a member of staff reacted immediately by serving customers with hot Plain Rice after receiving a complaint that the Plain Rice available at the Nasi Campur counter was cold (R2)

“I used to order SS Fried Rice but the food served was cold and I complained to one of the waitresses. She reacted immediately and gave me the hot food. Not only that but every time that I have requested something the staff took action.” (Norisah-R2)

This study found that the process of acting upon customers' complaints and requests involved six steps. The staff would firstly apologise to the customers. This would be followed by either giving a discount for the food order that had received the complaint or replacing the faulty order with a new one. These actions were to avoid

dissatisfaction and to minimise the likelihood of customers spreading the word about their bad experience or deciding not to come back in the future. A member of staff shared her experience of handling a customer's complaint:

"If it's confirmed that there is something wrong with the food like it is too salty, tasteless, etc, I will offer the customers new food or give them a discount...This is to avoid the customers from telling others about their bad experience at this restaurant which could damage the restaurant's image." (Waitress-R2)

"I lodged a complaint that a teacup that the waitress gave me was not so clean. The waitress took immediate action by changing the teacup with another even though I hadn't drunk the tea yet. I was very pleased with her immediate action." (Zul-R1)

Other than that, during peak hours, the restaurant staff managed food delay complaints by giving suggestions to the customers to exchange their order for a menu item that takes less time to prepare. Some staff shared their practice:

"I used to receive complaints from customers, "What is this, I have waited for 45 minutes but the food hasn't arrived!" When I checked his order form, yes the customer was right. He had been waiting for his order to be served for 45 minutes. So I went to the kitchen department to check his order form with the bill reader. I found out that the queue of customers' order form was very long like a snake. There was nothing that I could do to overcome this problem except to recommend to the customer to order items that take less time to prepare." (Waiter-R2)

"As for food delay, I will find out the reason for the food delay from the relevant kitchen department. Then I inform the chef in charge about the complaint and ask him how long he will take to prepare the food. Then I will give feedback to the customers. If the queue is really long, I will make a suggestion to the customers to order other food that take less time to prepare. If they refuse, I will ask the chef to give priority to those customers." (Assistant supervisor-R3)

"... I will go back to the customer and suggest to them other food that takes less time to be served, like ready cooked food at the buffet counter." (Food Runner 2-R2)

"... try to suggest items that take less time to prepare or inform the customer about the estimated time for their order to be served. If they ordered food that takes a long time to be prepared it's up to them whether they want to change the order or not...."(Khadijah-R2)

It was observed that Restaurant 3 offered pre-prepared cooked food like *Beriani* Rice, Chicken Rice and *Nasi Campur*, all of which take less time to serve. The food did not only give variety to the menu but also acted as an alternative to overcome food delay problems.

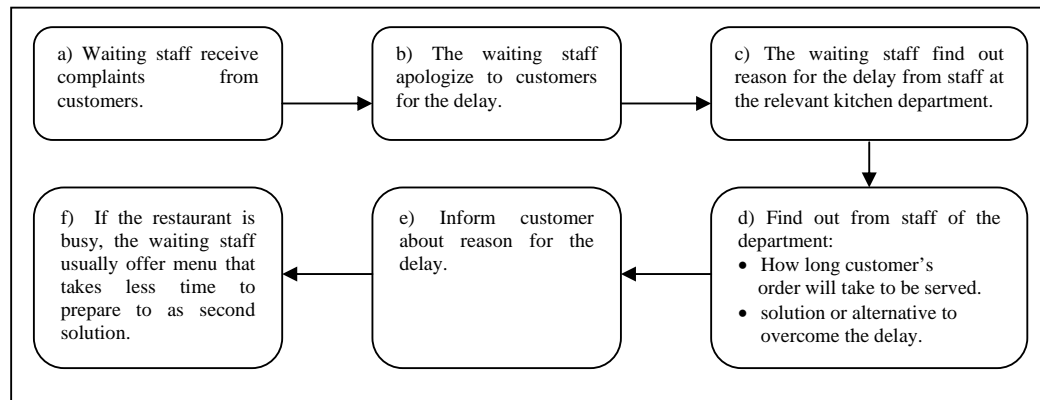
This study found that another way that the restaurant staff showed their attention and took care of customer needs was by checking customers' tables from time to time to identify whether customers' orders have been served or not. A customer reported:

"The member of staff that took my order was really responsible. He kept checking my table to ensure whether orders that I made have been served or not. The service is really impressive." (Zulkifli-R2)

The findings of this study show that due to a number of reasons, it was found that not all customers' requests could be fulfilled. What was more important to the customers however was not so much finding a solution to their complaint but the way the staff responded towards complaints and requests. The complaints that the restaurants received mostly related to food delay and flavour.

A summary of the findings for the management of food delay complaint handling is summarized in Figure 5.7. Within 10 to 15 minutes after receiving a customer's order, customer service staff would usually check the customer's table from time to time to ensure the customer's order has been served. Once the restaurant staff received a complaint from the customer, the staff would immediately apologise to the customer for the delay and then find out the reason for the delay from the kitchen staff, clarify how long the order will take before it is ready to be served and ask about alternatives to overcome the delay. Later, the staff would get back to the customer to inform them about the reasons for the delay and offer some solutions to solve the problem. For customers' complaints concerning flavour, the way the restaurant staff manage this complaint was by giving a discount on the food that received the complaint or by replacing the food.

Figure 5.7: The Handling of Food Delay Complaints



This findings of this study suggests that a complaint is an important piece of information in terms of improving customer satisfaction. The complaint loop begins when a restaurant owner, or staff member, or manager receives complaint from a customer, collects the complaint, and uses it for future planning.

ii) Treating Customers Equally

This study found that the restaurant staff were able to develop personal relationships with customers over time. These relationships made customers feel comfortable and preferred to be served by particular staff. This meant that the customers made repeat visits to the restaurant as this member of staff said:

“One obvious thing that I realized is regular customers prefer to be served by the same staff every time they come here.” (Waitress-R2)

The staff further added:

“...I can remember regular customers’ favourite food and their special request. If some of them don’t see me they will ask other staff, “where is Diah? Could you please call her? I prefer Diah to take my order because she knows what I like and don’t”. Sometimes if I want to take their order, they don’t mention name of the food, but they just say “as usual, Diah...It means I already know what they want to eat, which is the food that they usually order.” (Waitress-R2)

The following episodes illustrate what has been observed at the Restaurant 1 concerning a similar factor influencing satisfaction:

One old couple entered the restaurant at 4.00 o'clock in the afternoon. The restaurant captain approached the customers to take their order. However, one of them asked the captain "Where is Ina? If you don't mind could you please ask her to take our order?" The captain replied, "Oh no problem. I know you're her regular customers. I will call her for you" The customers replied, "Actually I got used to being attended to by Ina. She knows our favourite food very well." (R1)

As soon as 2 ladies took their seats, a new member of staff, X, approached the customer to take their order but she was stopped by a senior staff member, Ina, who reminded her, "Don't take their order. They're Maria's fans. Usually they prefer Maria to take their order." However, X insisted on entertaining the customers reasoning that it was her duty as a waitress. Without even having the opportunity to greet the customers, one of them asked her for help, "Could you please call Maria to take our order?" X answered, "Oh sure". Ina explained to X that at the SBR most of regular customers have their own favourite staff. The customers feel more comfortable if that particular staff member attends them. (R1)

Despite personal relationships with customers, the staff gave equal attention to all customers. For instance it was observed that restaurant staff had short conversations to ask for feedback about the restaurant experience product and service, not only to particular groups of customers but also to almost all of the customers. The staff were also friendly to both local and foreign customers and to regular or first visit customers. Several customers stated:

"The same questions were addressed to other customers who were sitting next to my table. They treated the customers equally...." (Eda Haryani-R2)

"They treated me equally like they treated others. Although I'm a regular customer here, no special attention was given to me if compared to the attention that they gave the first time I was here." (Salma Lim-R1)

"Restaurant staff are friendly. In some restaurants the staff become friendly only after the customer becomes a regular to the restaurant but here it is different. The staff have been friendly to me since I first came here." (Teo-R1)

Treating customers equally made foreign customers feel comfortable as this customer acknowledged:

“... even though I’m Indonesian they treated me equally like they treated local customers. Indonesians look different compared to local people here and I’m sure the staff can identify it but the staff did not look at me like a stranger. For this reason I feel really comfortable.”
(Joko-R2)

In summary, this study found that usually loyal customers are likely to experience more interaction and conversation because the restaurant staff knew them better and a relationship had developed over time. However, this relationship was not a reason for the customers to get special attention. The findings of this study found that restaurant staff gave equal attention to all customers. This was perceived as a factor influencing customer satisfaction. The equal attention that the staff gave to the restaurant customers over the period they were in the restaurant gave the impression to the customers that the staff of the restaurant were naturally sincere towards all customers no matter whether this was their first visit, or they were regular customers, or whether they were local or foreign customers.

iii) Staff Performance

This study found that not all customers who visited the restaurants knew what they wanted to eat. This problem was usually faced by customers on their first visit who were not familiar with the menu available at the restaurant, particularly in terms of taste, ingredients and how the food looks. This group of customers usually required the waiter/ waitress to explain the menu. In some cases waiters/ waitresses were requested to make suggestions about a special menu or a menu that was suitable for the customer’s diet. A staff member explained a scenario that she had experienced:

“Based on my experience entertaining customers, many of them did not know what they wanted to eat and in other cases customers refused to read the menu book that I presented to them. They preferred for me to explain to them. In these situations, I have to explain what menu is available to them.” (Waitress-R2)

“I’ve also had the experience that customers wanted me to suggest a menu that was suitable for their diet and almost all first visit customers usually ask me about the restaurant’s special menu....”(Waitress-R2)

They added:

“Therefore, as a customer service staff, knowledge about menu and food is very important in order to give an excellent service to customers.” (Waitress-R2)

Thus, knowledge related to the restaurant’s products and services was important to all customer service staff in order for them to give an excellent service and to entertain the customers. Several customers in one of the restaurants commented:

“The member of staff who entertained me just now can be considered as knowledgeable about the restaurant products. He has not only showed me the menu that is hanging on the wall but also suggested a few menus that are good for health in terms of cooking methods and ingredients.” (Nadia Natassha-R2)

“The way she talked showed that she was very confident and knowledgeable about the foods and drinks sold here. She mentioned most of the foods and drinks available without referring to the menu book, and in fact she could suggest an interesting menu to me.” (Roziah-R2)

The way the staff developed their expertise and performance was based on the restaurant operation system. For instance, through observation it was found that each kitchen department at Restaurant 3 had its own special menu. Each waiter/waitress was given a book of order forms for jotting down customers’ orders. If customers ordered Chinese food, the original copy of the order form had to be sent to the Chinese Kitchen Department. A customer service staff confirmed her order taking routine as:

“After taking the order, I will send a copy of the food order form to the relevant kitchen department that is going to prepare the food.” (Waitress-R2)

In this case waiters/ waitresses were indirectly forced to know and memorize the list of menus offered by each kitchen department to help them send the order form to the right kitchen department. It was also observed that all restaurants have a weekly meeting which all staff were required to attend. In this meeting, the staff usually discussed restaurant performance for that particular week, as well as giving briefing about new menu items and how to understand the nuances of flavour and taste in each dish in the menu. In fact, Restaurant 1 provided food samples of its new menu items

to be tested by the restaurant staff in order to develop the expert knowledge of the restaurant staff related to the new menu. Thus the staff had experience with the menu so that they could serve the customers well.

Front of house staff that were able to speak more than one language proved to be a great advantage for restaurants as it helped them receive customers who were not fluent in Malaysia's first language, *Bahasa Melayu*. For instance regular foreign customers of Restaurant 2 who did not understand *Bahasa Melayu* preferred to be served by staff who could speak English. They perceived the staff who spoke in this language understood them better and could deliver what they wanted. Thus, staff ability to speak different languages was found to be another factor influencing customer satisfaction of this study:

"I'm a foreigner and prefer to deal with staff that can speak English very well because they understand what I want. If you ask other foreign customers I'm sure they will give you a similar comment."
(Ahmad-R2)

"Since this restaurant is the nearest restaurant to the causeway, many Singaporeans come here. Most of them will stop by; we also get Indian and Chinese of Malaysian origin and foreign customers. It is important for the staff to learn simple English words in order to communicate with the customers. For instance my husband is Chinese and he doesn't understand Malay. Sometimes he wants this and that in English and I have to translate what he wants into Malay for restaurant staff. It is much better if the staff can speak English so that they can communicate to the customers straight away ..." (Rhndall's wife-R2)

During the fieldwork, two incidents were observed, one in Restaurant 1 and one in Restaurant 3, where the ability of staff to speak more than one language was observed to be very important:

A group of old Chinese customers had been seen discussing something in the restaurant service area. While serving their tea for breakfast, one of them asked the waitress in charge: "Do you speak English?" the waitress answered, "Yes, I do". Then the customers asked her for help, "I got this letter from the Malaysian Emigration Office but this letter is in Bahasa Melayu and I don't understand Bahasa Melayu. Could you please translate this letter into English for me?" The customers were from Singapore and they don't understand Bahasa Melayu. The waitress managed to translate the letter. The customers were really happy and before leaving the restaurant one of them gave the waitress a sum of money for tips. (R2)

In the second incident:

Two Chinese men ordered 'Tea Tarik' and asked a customer service staff for help to choose the menu. While serving their drinks, the staff member smiled to the customers and greeted them "Enjoy your drink, sir." While having this short conversation they were communicating in English. One of the customers asked the staff member: "How long have you been working here?" The staff member answered, "Nearly 2 weeks, Sir." The customer further asked the staff: "Do you want to work at my restaurant? I can offer you double the salary compared with what you get here." However, the staff member refused politely. Then she asked the customer: "Why are you offering me the same job rather than a higher position?" The customers explained: "Not all customers understand Bahasa Melayu and in this case they prefer to communicate in English. This group of customer usually needs restaurant staff who are able to speak English." The customer further admitted: "Like myself, I don't understand Bahasa Melayu. Luckily I met you here and you assisted me to choose this menu." After confronting the waitress, the customer explained: "Actually I'm going to open a new restaurant in the next two months and I'm looking for new staff who can speak English. To me restaurant staff who can speak English very well are an asset for a restaurant because the staff can attract more customers." Those customers were really impressed with the waitress's service and before leaving one of them left RM10.00 at the cash counter and ask the cashier to give the money to the waitress as tips. He told the cashier that both of them were really satisfied with the service that the waitress had given them. (R3)

This study found that customer satisfaction was achieved when the restaurant was able to provide staff who could perform beyond the customers' hopes. There are two generic themes concerning restaurant staff performance. The first generic theme is the restaurant staff's expertise and in-depth knowledge of restaurant products and services. Expert restaurant staff were not only able to memorise but also had in-depth

expert knowledge about restaurant products and services available. The restaurant staff expertise would help them to entertain the customers in terms of explaining food ingredients and cooking methods, and they were able to make suggestions about suitable menus for the customers, according to their diet. These staff performances have been developed through the restaurant operation system, particularly by the order taking system and kitchen operation system that forced them to memorize all types of products and services available. Moreover, staff expert knowledge about the products and services was developed through weekly supervisory briefing and food sample testing.

The second generic theme concerning staff performance was the restaurant staff's ability to communicate in different languages. The official language of Malaysia is *Bahasa Melayu*. However, English is a second language, widely spoken in the business world, and it is a compulsory subject in Malaysian schools. Therefore, most Malaysians can speak at least *Bahasa Melayu*, English and their own ethnic language like Tamil, Cantonese, Mandarin, Malay etc. Speaking the language that the customers understand helps the staff to understand them better, particularly their needs and requests. The restaurants of study managed to have restaurant staff that could speak different languages by employing staff that could already speak those languages.

iv) Staff Appearance

The study found that almost all the restaurant staff wore a uniform. The restaurant uniform made the staff look presentable and professional and at the same time created a good image of those restaurants. Several customers commented:

"That staff looked smart and presentable with uniform." (Roziah-R2)

"...your staff look smart and clean in uniform." (Eda Haryani-R2)

"Staff look neat and presentable in uniform." (Haiqal Hakim-R2)

The customers perceived that staff who wore restaurant uniform have good self discipline because they manage to follow the restaurant rules of wearing the restaurant uniform:

“...and the staff look tidy in restaurant uniform. It seems to me that they have good self-discipline.” (Amirul-R2)

In addition, the restaurant uniform differentiated restaurant staff from customers so that the customers could identify them easily for assistance:

“They look presentable in uniform and it’s easy to differentiate them from customers.” (Abdul Majid-R1)

Different restaurants have different uniforms and it was observed that the restaurant uniform was related to the restaurant concept. *Baju Kurung* and *Kebaya* are two types of female Malay traditional costumes while *Baju Cekak Musang* and *Kurung Johor* are Malay male traditional costumes. These Malay traditional costumes were chosen as the staff uniform for Restaurant 1 and Restaurant 3, both of which adopted the Malay traditional culture as the restaurant concept. The costumes consisted of a long skirt and long blouse which require the staff to move gently and make them look polite and beautiful:

“Female, staff uniform is suited with the name of this restaurant that sounds traditional.” (Zaleha-R1)

“Staff also looked polite and nice in Malay, traditional costume.” (Mariamah-R3)

“I noticed service line staff wearing Malay, traditional costume. They looked really beautiful.” (Abu Bakar-R3)

Meanwhile Restaurant 2 had different colours of staff uniform based on staff working days and their position in the restaurant. For example, during the weekends and on formal occasions, all staff must wear a white shirt, black trousers and black shoes while on the weekdays they were allowed to wear casual uniforms of T shirts and black trousers. These staff uniforms are shown in Table 5.8. The manager of the restaurant confirmed:

“... I arranged the uniform for them according to their position at the restaurant. For instance red is for customer service staff, navy blue for supervisors, white for kitchen and cashier staff, green for stewards and black for the house staff. However, for weekends and formal functions all staff must wear white shirts, black pants and black shoes...Besides that they have also been given one apron to wear and one cloth to clean customers’ tables.” (Manager-R2)

The manager further added:

“Kitchen staff, either males or females, are required to wear a cap or headscarf and flat black shoes. No restaurant staff are allowed to keep long fingernails. For waitresses who don’t want to wear a headscarf, I don’t force them to do so but they must tie or wear a hair net to cover their hair to ensure they look presentable and to avoid hair dropping and spoiling the food.”(Manager-R2)

Almost all restaurants in Johor Bahru applied modern themes, including staff uniform. Thus, having a meal at a restaurant that had adopted the Malay, traditional, concept for staff uniform was an interesting and unusual experience for customers. A customer commented:

“This restaurant is different from other restaurants in terms of the concept, it’s like the houses in Malay, traditional culture. Not only that, front of house department staff also wear Malay, traditional costumes. It is really an interesting experience.” (Sheila-R3)

This study found that the management of this influential factor on satisfaction was associated with the knowledge and experience of the managers of the restaurants. One of the restaurant managers said:

“Malay, traditional costumes have been chosen as the staff uniform and this is based on the Malay concept of this restaurant. I got the idea through my experience travelling around the world working as a restaurant chef. I use to work in Turkish restaurants in Turkey. Waiters/waitresses in the restaurant wore Turkish, traditional costume. They looked very nice in the uniform and I found it was a very interesting experience. So I adopted the idea.” (Manager-R3)

In summary, it was found that staff uniform has several operational purposes. For instance, it has been used to differentiate between restaurant staff and customers; to show staff performance by following the restaurant rules and regulations; and to guard

the restaurant's image through presentable and clean staff appearance. However, applying Malay, traditional, costumes as staff uniform, made the staff look polite, beautiful and different from the regular modern staff uniform was found to be a new and an interesting experience for customers. Therefore, a uniform helped make the staff appear interesting and this was found to be a factor influencing customer satisfaction dining experience. The restaurant managed this aspect of factor by employing a restaurant manager who was qualified in terms of knowledge, skills and experience. These qualifications helped the restaurant manager to generate interesting ideas for the restaurant, particularly with regard to the staff uniform.

v) Good Personality Traits

The data revealed that the restaurant staff had good personality traits in terms of being polite, friendly, smiling, helpful and patient. Some of the customers observed:

"...service is good. Good in terms of the way staff attend customers. They are polite...." (Doris Lim-R2)

"The staff is also polite and helpful." (Rhndall-R2)

"If you ask me about their politeness, yes, I agree with you that they are polite and courteous." (Amirul-R2)

"The staff are friendly, easy to smile and helpful. I think the strength of this restaurant depends on the food and staff. The staff really won the customers' heart." (Zurina-R1)

Restaurant staff showed their politeness and friendliness both verbally and non-verbally. Verbal politeness and friendliness were expressed through greetings and by having short conversations with the customers. These took place usually while the staff took the customers' orders, served their food, cleared their table and placed the bill on their table. Several customers were pleased with the politeness and friendliness of the staff and they said:

"Here is different...while serving food just now, the waitress greeted me, 'Enjoy your food Miss,' then after having my meal she asked me for feedback about the food. I feel welcomed." (Lina-R1)

“While serving the food or having to interrupt me, she never missed to say, ‘Excuse me’. While placing my order the staff say to us ‘Enjoy your meal, Madam.’” (RoZIAH-R2)

“They approached me not only to take the order but sometimes to have a short conversation. We don’t talk about heavy topics or personal things but just say, ‘Hi’ or they ask me, ‘How are you today?’, or give a compliment like, ‘You look nice today.’” (Devi-R2)

Meanwhile non-verbal politeness and friendliness was shown through smiling, shaking hands and seating the customers. Two customers reported:

“They greeted me and smiled at me as soon as I entered this restaurant’s entrance. I feel comfortable and welcomed.” (Gan-R1)

“If the restaurant is not busy I will shake hand with female regular customers. For first visit customers, I just pull out a chair for them to be seated. This is especially for female customers.” (Food runner-R2)

Staff politeness and friendliness made customers feel welcome and comfortable largely because it gave the impression that the staff enjoyed serving them and accepted them as guests. This phenomenon could be the basis of good host-guest relationships. According to several customers:

“... staff here are friendly. The way they attend me seems that they really want to serve the customers.” (Zaleha-R1)

“I feel welcomed and comfortable. It seems that they are happy to receive me as a guest and really enjoy dealing with customers.” (Devi-R2)

“One thing that I noticed here is friendliness and politeness of the staff. Just imagine how do you feel if you go somewhere and the host ignores you? Of course it is annoying. Here I feel welcomed and very comfortable. It seems that they are happy accepting me as a guest.” (Lina-R1)

Interestingly this study found that staff politeness and friendliness could cover bad service that the restaurant faced such as food delay:

“Front line staff are friendly and quick to give a smile. This positive manner sometimes makes me forget about my anger towards food delay.” (Nadia Nassha-R2)

In fact, one of customer service staff agreed that the staff greeting and friendliness was important in making the customers feel happy and appreciated. This could develop good relationships between the staff and customers:

“After serving the food I will greet the customers by saying, ‘Enjoy your food Sir or Madam.’ I can differentiate customers’ faces between the ones that I greet and I don’t. The ones that I greet usually look happier and thank to me many times rather than the ones that I don’t. Might be they feel appreciated.” (Food Runner-R2)

“... and smile all the time...This restaurant made me feel relief because of the warm, entertaining staff. I faced many problems in the office. The smiling faces of the staff helped me to forget about those problems for a while.” (Devi-R2)

These personality traits won customers’ hearts and encouraged them to convey positive word-of-mouth publicity to others. The owner of one of the restaurants of the study explained:

“If compared to a similar category of restaurant, the staff here are much better than staff in other restaurants, I think. They are courteous, mature in communication, and have a good rapport with customers. The way they handle customers’ complaints and entertain the customers is quite impressive. Actually, these aspects are the cheapest way for a restaurant to promote itself. I’ve got feedback from many regular customers who said that the staff here are courteous, helpful, quick to smile and friendly. Maybe that’s what made them come back to this restaurant.” (Owner-R 1)

In terms of the personality trait of helpfulness, customers perceived that helpful staff reacted towards a customer’s request and helped them willingly. A customer highlighted this by saying:

“The staff here are very helpful. For instance, I asked a waitress whether this restaurant sells any food made with venison or not, because I don’t see any item with venison in this menu book. She took quick action by asking the chef in the kitchen about it even though I didn’t ask her to do so. I think all staff should be helpful like that waitress to make customers feel that they are really well entertained.” (Rohani-R2)

“Staff are also helpful. If they see me entering the restaurant carrying something heavy, they will open the door of the restaurant entrance for me...” (Raja-R1)

Two episodes that illustrate the scenario of helpful staff anticipating customers' needs and providing a comfortable meal experience are described below:

As the baby chair was being used, one of customer service staff who was standing in the service area volunteered to hold a baby of one of customers, just to ensure the mother of the baby could concentrate on her meal. (R2)

A cashier of the restaurant in Case 1 assisted one old couple aged between 80 and 90 years old to take their seat and then helped them to choose food displayed on the buffet table. The cashier was also seen serving the food chosen on the couple's table. After the meal the cashier once again was observed escorting and assisting the couple to get in a taxi. (R1)

Having restaurant staff who are helpful not only gave a good impression of that particular staff member but also brought customers back to the restaurant. For instance, a customer at Restaurant 2 preferred to be attended by the same staff every time he dined at the restaurant, due to having good and memorable experiences with the staff. As the customer stated:

"It happened one time the cashier of this restaurant over-charged me. While discussing the bill with my wife, Halim came to offer his help. That was the way I got to know Halim as he helped me check my bill. That's why every time I come here, I'll choose these two tables with the hope Halim will attend me." (Rhndall-R2)

In the restaurant industry, those who come to a restaurant usually have different backgrounds, expectations and needs which are reflected in their behaviour. Some might be fussy about taste while others are very particular about punctual service. However, it was observed that the front of house department staff of all of the restaurants in this study were very flexible, understanding and patient when dealing with these various personalities. Several customers commented on the staff's good personality traits as follows:

"I never heard them use rude or nasty word talking to customers even though some of the customers are very fussy. They attend the customers with patience." (Shamsina-R1)

"Sometimes I got angry with fussy customers here but I never behaved negatively and showed my unpleasant feeling towards them... and in fact I've treated them nicely..." (Waitress-R1)

“...the staff are also patient. Although I didn’t respond to his explanation, not even a word, but he continuously mentioned the menu available with a hope that I would be influenced and wouldn’t change my mind from having a meal here.” (Lina-R2)

“...the waitress who entertained me just now is good. She was really patient waiting to take my order even though I took quite a while to read the menu card before making the order.” (Khadijah-R2)

“Staff are very decent and patient towards customers’ complaints and requests. They really entertain the customers and as a customer I feel appreciated.” (Ahmad-R2)

“Although I get angry with customers’ attitudes and behaviour, this feeling never interferes with my responsibility to deliver good service to customers. I know to differentiate between emotion and professionalism.” (Waitress-R3)

It was found that the way the restaurant managed this factor was through continuous training and encouragement that was delivered during weekly meetings by the restaurant manager. The restaurant manager and a member of staff confirmed:

“During weekly meeting the restaurant manager keeps reminding us to be patient and friendly to customers. The manager also teaches us how to entertain the customers.” (Cashier-R2)

“I personally give them training based on their post. For example I train customer service staff based on 3 modules, which are motivation, restaurant behaviour, and service style. ... In the first module, staff was given motivation in order to produce good and quality service to the customers including being patient with their behaviour and attitude....” (Manager-R2)

In conclusion, it was found that the customer service staff in all restaurants in this study showed positive personality traits such as being polite, friendly, patient and helpful to customers. These traits were perceived to be factors influencing customer satisfaction. The staff anticipated customers’ needs and provided a good impression of the restaurant in various ways. This included staff friendliness helping in restaurant service recovery, staff patience helping them to understand and be flexible towards different types of customer behaviour. Staff helpfulness helped customers to achieve satisfaction from their visit to the restaurant. These good personality traits established positive guest-host relationships where the customers felt welcome, comfortable, accepted and appreciated. These pleasant feelings encouraged them to make positive

comments about the restaurant to others. Through staff training, employing staff with good personalities and by continuous encouragement, restaurant managers brought out the best in their staff and in this way manage this influencing factor of customer satisfaction.

5.2.5.3 Unique Cultural Experience

Malaysia is a diverse and multicultural country with Malay, Chinese and Indians as the major ethnic groups. Each ethnic group has its own way of doing things including customs, beliefs and traditions, and also the way they eat. The Malay, the natives of Malaysia, have a culture rich in the Islamic faith. Part of the Malay customs that are influenced by their religious beliefs involves taking shoes off before entering a house and eating with fingers. Traditionally most meals are served on the *Mengkuang* mat and people eat by sitting on the *Mengkuang* mat with folded legs. Unfortunately, the influence of the western eating style of using chairs and tables has led to the Malay traditional eating style being forgotten.

Realising that the Malaysian community seeks different dining experiences, Restaurant 3 introduced a combination of Malay traditional and Japanese eating styles as a restaurant concept. The concept is suitable for both those who like modern and traditional eating styles. In this combined concept, customers enter the private eating space ‘*Anjung*’ with shoes off and sit with folded legs on the cushions that are placed around the Japanese dining table. Dishes are served in the middle of the Japanese table and customers eat either with their fingers or cutlery. Some customers perceived this eating concept as something different, unusual, and exciting and providing a new meal experience. According to the customers:

“Your restaurant applies a Malay, traditional eating concept where customers take off their shoes before entering dining room, sitting on the Mengkuang mat with folded legs. This concept is never applied in other restaurants, neither in Johor State, nor Johor Bahru City Centre. It is something new and it is very interesting.” (Yong-R3)

“In other restaurants customers usually sit on the chair and food is served on the table. Here it is different. Customers need to sit with folded legs on the Mengkuang mat while food is served on a very low table like a Japanese dining table.” (Idayu-R3)

The concept of ‘Anjung’ is similar to the concept of Malay, traditional house patios. Since Malay, traditional houses are hardly ever seen nowadays; having a meal at the ‘Anjung’ makes customers feel proud and motivates them to share their unique experience with others, especially foreigners, and the younger generation of Malaysians. As some of the customers stated:

“This restaurant should be introduced to foreigners and to the Malaysian, young generation to make them aware about Malay, traditional culture. I feel proud to introduce this restaurant, which has a totally, unique concept and identity, to my friends outside Johor Bahru. To me this restaurant is something that I can be proud of.” (Idayu-R3)

“This restaurant applies the Malay traditional culture concept. It is good and different from the concepts in other restaurants. It is good in the sense that it introduces the cultural concept to the young generation because we hardly ever see Malay, traditional houses, either in urban or in rural areas, nowadays. This restaurant gives an opportunity to the Malaysian young generation and foreigners to know Malay, traditional culture closely.” (Lim-R3)

“Besides having fun with the music and enjoying the food here, I can introduce Malay inheritance, which is available at this restaurant, to my children.” (Wendy-R3)

This restaurant also adopted Malay traditional concepts for its architecture and interior decoration which is also something new to the customers, particularly in comparison with the modern concept that is adopted by most Malay restaurants nowadays. The quotation below illustrates this:

“I meant the interior design and restaurant architecture look like houses in Malay, traditional culture. Interior decoration as well as antique stuff in this restaurant is hardly ever seen nowadays. It is interesting and something different for me.” (Peter-R3)

It was observed that the restaurant also adopted similar traditional Malay approaches to order taking and serving customers. The waiter would sit in a similar style to the customers, with shoes off and folded legs while taking the customers’ orders. This

scenario attracted customers' attention because none of restaurants in Johor Bahru, or even in Malaysia, apply a similar concept, which again provides a different and interesting experience. Several customers commented on this:

"I sit on the floor with shoes off and folded legs while having a meal like in Malay houses. Interestingly the waitress who took my order also sits like me while taking my order. She looks very polite." (Abu Bakar-R3)

"The way waiters and waitresses take customers orders by also sitting on the mat together with customers really look very polite and it's an interesting experience." (Faizal-R3)

"... customers take off their shoes before entering the dining room, sitting on the Mengkuang mat on the floor with folded legs look casual and less protocol." (Yong-R3)

Entering the 'Anjung' with shoes off and sitting with folded legs made customers feel casual and relaxed like at home. Several customers said:

"The way staff take customers' order by sitting together with customers with folded legs also looks casual but really polite...something new to me." (Shah Rizal-R3)

"The way customers are eating with folded legs is really relaxing and, in fact, I feel at home." (Fatimah-R3)

It was found that the way the restaurant manages the Malay concept was based on the findings of the restaurant's informal survey about potential new restaurant concepts. The findings of this survey showed that the restaurants with modern concepts and styling were no longer favourite dining places to visit. Malaysian society prefers a restaurant that provides something different and offers privacy for dining out activities. Realizing the perception that the modern restaurant concept is somewhat stereotypical, whilst the market expressed a desire for something different, the owner of Restaurant 3 introduced the traditional Malay concept to provide a new dining experience in order to meet the customers' preferences. The manager of the restaurant stated that:

“The reason this restaurant adopted this concept is because society needs it. The owner of this restaurant had made a survey to identify what concept of restaurant the Malaysian society prefers. Our society nowadays needs something different and private. Restaurants with a stereotype concept and easy to access is no longer a main criteria that society chooses as a favourite place for eating out... a restaurant that can provide privacy and something different is preferred by customers nowadays. Like this restaurant, it is difficult to access with no signboard, no commercial promotion, and located in an isolated and unexpected area but people still come and in fact it is always full house. Do you know why? Because this restaurant offers customers a unique meal experience that is based on Malay, traditional culture.” (Manager-R3)

It was found that the customers’ unique cultural experience was also associated with food authenticity. The authentic food taste motivates the customers to make additional purchases and repeat visits:

“I like the food and drinks here because their taste is really pure, like homemade products. You see...I made three additional orders for lunch today... As I mentioned before, the chef uses fresh and pure spices and herbs, not the instant ones.” (Akhiar-R1)

“I prefer to eat Tom Yam here because it contains of fresh ingredients instead of the instant ones.” (Kadir-R3)

“The obvious thing that I noticed is this restaurant sells quality food. I’ve been here many times and every time I come here I will order western food. All main ingredients like chicken, lamb, and beef are very fresh. In fact, black pepper and brown sauces for the food are also fresh.” (Eda Haryani-R2)

“The food that is sold here is of good quality from the aspect of taste and freshness of the ingredients.” (Assistant Supervisor-R2)

“... I like the restaurant’s speciality here. The first time I came here I ate Mutton Beriani. It was marvellous.” (Ken-R3)

Almost all of the customers agreed that the authenticity of fresh food is because of the use of correct seasoning and fresh ingredients in the food, as these customers commented:

“I like Fish Asam Pedas here. The sauce is thick and has been cooked using fresh chilli instead of instant chilli paste. The taste is sufficient in terms of sour and hot chilli as it should taste, like Malay Asam Pedas.” (Zurina-R1)

“I like the foods and drinks here because their taste is like homemade products. I think the chef used fresh ingredients instead of instant ones.” (Zulkifli-R2)

“Your Fish Head Curry is delicious. The sauce is thick and its ingredients are complete with curry leaf and mustard seed. The hot taste of curry spices, coconut milk and sour taste of tamarind are in perfect proportions, I think.” (Raja-R1)

“All the food is delicious. I think it is because fresh and sufficient quantities of ingredients are used. I’m a food service teacher. I know the factors that make food taste delicious.” (Rehan-R1)

“The taste is different if compared to the taste in other restaurants. It might be because the chef used fresh ingredients.” (Fara-R1)

The episode below illustrates an observation at Restaurant 2 concerning the use of fresh ingredients in the food:

2 customers ordered seafood Tom Yam Soup, Plain Rice, Sweet and Sour Fish, and Chap Choi Vegetables. After completing their meal, the restaurant captain asked the customer, “How was your food sir?” One of them answered “Fantastic. It was very delicious” Another customer who sat next to him added, “The fish was very fresh. I liked it. You see nothing is left in my plate.” (R2)

Two of the staff of Restaurant 3 agreed that the restaurant sold delicious food and it had been proved through the high demand for the food from customers:

“Yes, I got very good feedback about the food that I cooked. Customers like my food very much. There are only about 2 or 3 pieces of leftover chicken, or lamb, or meat from the Beriani every day.” (Assistant cook-R3)

“I don’t have any problem about Gam Beriani Rice and in fact most of the customers come here because they want to eat the Gam Beriani Rice.” (Manager-R3)

It was observed that steps had been taken to ensure ingredients and seasonings are fresh and genuine in an attempt to maintain the authenticity of food taste. Firstly, two out of three of the restaurants in the study used home-made spices instead of instant spices. For example the chef of Restaurant 2 prepared home-made brown sauce for lamb and chicken chops instead of using instance brown sauce available at the supermarkets.

Secondly, the restaurants received daily supplies of fresh raw ingredients. The ingredients were kept in the fridge and freezer for a night. For instance fish, lamb, chicken, meat, seafood and vegetables that arrive on a particular day were for the next day's kitchen operation. A stock record was used to control all ingredients supplied and keep a check on their expiry date. Staff of those restaurants confirmed:

"Suppliers come everyday to supply vegetables, fruit and other fresh ingredients. This means that the vegetables are also fresh. However, as for seafood, the restaurant has to freeze it to ensure the restaurant has a continuous stock...." (Food Runner-R2)

"Usually I order fresh ingredients every day. This is to keep the ingredients fresh. For example, the supply for tomorrow's business operation will arrive at the restaurant at 2.30 p.m., after today's kitchen operation. Kitchen helpers will make the preparations for tomorrow's kitchen operation from 2.30 until 6.00 p.m. and then put the ingredients in the fridge and freezer. Tomorrow morning, I will defrost and cook them, starting from 7.00 o'clock in the morning until 12.00 o'clock midday." (Chef-R1)

"We do stock them but not for a long time. The store room has a stock record for all ingredients. For instance, the date of the material received, the quantity, the expiry date etc. are recorded. This is to control the quality of food that we sell here." (Manager-R2)

Thirdly, Restaurant 1 and Restaurant 3 assigned a food quality controller to check the quality and freshness of ingredients supplied and to monitor the cleaning process of the ingredients before they were put into small packages for storage.

"Staff at the back of the house do the job and it is an order from the restaurant owner. All ingredients must be cleaned and washed before storing them in the fridge. Supervisors always checked their activity to ensure all ingredients are really clean and fresh." (Food runner-R2)

"The restaurant manager is really particular about the quality of the raw ingredients. He or the day supervisor or sometimes storekeepers are the only people who are entitled to receive all raw materials supplied by the food suppliers because he wants to make sure all ingredients are of good quality." (Assistant Supervisor-R2)

Staff who had been assigned as restaurant quality controllers confirmed their responsibility for this aspect:

“...not only me but the owner also stressed this issue. The day supervisor, storekeeper and sometimes myself are the only people responsible to receive raw material supplied by the supplier. For fresh materials, we accept only really good and fresh ingredients.” (Manager-R 3)

“I’m the only person entitled to make and receive orders, either for dried or fresh ingredients....” (Chef-R1)

Fourthly, ingredients that had been packed were labelled before they were stored according to the kitchen department that ordered the ingredients. In this way, only the kitchen department that made up the order would take out packs that were labelled for the department, based on the label (which consists of the name of the kitchen department which ordered it, and the times and date of the ingredients being packed). This system of tracking helped to ensure the quality and food safety (hygiene) of the ingredients:

“Another aspect is about food hygiene. All raw ingredients like vegetables, meat, chicken, seafood, and chillies etc. were cleaned and washed before storing or sending them to the relevant kitchen department. This has been ordered by the restaurant owner to avoid food poisoning and to produce quality food.” (Food runner-R2)

Fifthly, Restaurant 2 has several big aquariums for live fish. Customers could choose which fish they preferred to eat and the chef would cook the fish straight away, after it had been caught from the aquarium. The food runner of the restaurant said:

“...there are a few aquariums for fresh fish. Customers can choose what type of fish they want to eat. The chef will cook the fish according to the customers’ choice.” (Food Runner-R3)

The use of fresh ingredients also applied to the beverage department. The bartender prepared ingredients on a daily basis. According to the bartender:

“...for Laicikang, the ingredients must be fresh to have a good taste. If I make them at night, even if it is just before closing the restaurant, the taste will change after the ingredients have been stored overnight. The same applies for Milo Ice and Ice Lemon Tea.” (Bartender-R1)

Sixthly, an interesting finding was that the restaurant in Case 2 did not use recycled cooking oil in cooking for health reasons, and to avoid the cooking oil from spoiling the taste of the food. The manager of the restaurant reported:

“We don’t allow the restaurant chef to use recycle cooking oil because it is not healthy and could spoil the taste of the food. The restaurant provides one big, special tank to store used cooking oil. We don’t throw the oil but sell it.” (Manager-R3)

Finally, customers’ perceived that only Thai and Chinese chefs could produce the authentic taste of Thai and Chinese foods, and this led the restaurant owner to employ expert chefs who were Thai and Chinese and who specialized in Thai food and Chinese food to maintain food authenticity. A customer backed this up, saying:

“In terms of authenticity of food taste, I prefer to eat Thai food that is cooked by a Thai chef because I am confident that only a Thai chef can produce the best quality Thai food. The relationship between the quality of food and the origin of the chef that cooked the food is sometimes undeniable. For example, Malays and Indians both can make Roti Canai but the taste and texture of the same food cooked by them are different. Roti Canai that is originally from India is soft in texture and oily but if it is cooked by Malay chefs, it’s a bit dry and crispy. This restaurant is really concerned about this issue. The owner employed a Thai chef from Thailand to cook Thai food, a Chinese chef to cook Chinese food, and a Malay chef to cook Malay food.” (Amirul-R2)

For instance, it was observed that the restaurant in Case 2 had employed a Turkish chef to be in charge of the kebab department, and all chefs and kitchen staff in the Malay kitchen department were Malays, and Chinese chefs and Chinese kitchen staff were responsible for the Chinese kitchen department, whereas Thai chefs and Thai kitchen staff managed the Thai kitchen department. Meanwhile, the owner of Restaurant 3 employed an experienced Malay cook who specialised in *Beriani* rice to produce the authentic taste of that Malay food:

“For the Beriani Kitchen Department, this restaurant employs an experienced chef from Batu Pahat for cooking Beriani Rice. He used to work with the inventor of Beriani Gam. This food item is well known in Malaysia and is originally from Batu Pahat...I learnt a lot from the chef...” (Assistant cook-R3)

Finally, not all restaurants can afford to employ expert chefs due to constraints in the labour cost. Therefore, some restaurants employed inexperienced chefs. Even though they were not experts however, daily training and using standard recipes, as observed, helped the chefs to produce a similar quality of food as the expert chefs. For instance,

training and daily practice helped the chef of Restaurant 1 to produce the authentic food taste of Johor Malay traditional food. The chef got her training from the wife of the restaurant owner who was an expert in Johor Malay traditional food. The chef explained:

“Actually, I had no working experience as a chef but I got training from the wife of the restaurant owner who has all the recipes. At first she was the chef and I was the assistant cook of the restaurant. After she was confident that I could cook and produce the same quality of food in terms of food taste, presentation etc as she cooked, she quitted her job and asked me to take over her position. The owner of the restaurant employed another staff to replace my position as assistant cook and I trained the assistant cook, as the wife of the restaurant owner had trained me.” (Chef-R1)

The restaurant owner’s wife agreed that training and standard recipes helped the inexperienced chef to become an expert chef as she developed her skills by practising cooking various types of food at home:

“Before opening this restaurant I used to run a food stall. I’ve been involved in the food service industry for more than 20 years and was in charge of the kitchen department, as a cook... I have created all the menus available in this restaurant. Most of them I learned based on my experience eating in other restaurants. After coming back from the restaurant I tried to cook it until I got the exact taste of food that I ate at that restaurant.” (Wife of restaurant owner-R1)

She further added:

“I used to have a kitchen helper that I trained and he has now become the chef of this restaurant. The chef worked for me for more than 5 years. I taught him from zero until he could cook all the recipes that I created, exactly like the taste, presentation and quality that I cooked.” (Wife of restaurant owner-R1)

A similar method of training and practice from an expert chef was also applied at the Chicken rice department of Restaurant 2 and the *Beriani* department of Restaurant 2. Staff of those departments confirmed:

“I learnt how to cook Chicken Rice from a previous staff member who was in charge of the department before he quitted from his job as Chef of the Chicken Rice Department. Now I’m recruiting Atin. If I’m on my day off, Atin will take over.” (Chicken Rice chef-R2)

“At the early stage of the learning process, I made preparations together with the chef and we cooked the food together. After that, when I became more experienced, the chef asked me to cook the food. Now I can cook this food without his supervision.” (Assistant cook-R3)

In conclusion, it was found that a unique meal experience was a factor influencing customer satisfaction. Customers of one of the restaurants got the unique experience through an unusual restaurant concept (Malay traditional house). The most obvious Malay traditional concepts that are applied by the restaurants include taking shoes off before entering the private eating space, eating with fingers and eating by sitting on the *Mengkuang* mat with folded legs. Meanwhile the waiter sits in a similar style as the customers, with shoes off and folded legs, to take customers' order. This extraordinary dining experience which offers something different, but exciting, made the customers feel casual and relaxed, like eating at home. The restaurant's unusual concept provided customers with a unique meal experience and motivated them to discuss the experience with others. The way the restaurant managed the restaurant concept was by conducting informal surveys concerning new restaurant concepts that were preferred by the market (Malaysian society).

The findings of this study also show that customers were satisfied with the authentic fresh food available at the restaurants and this encouraged them make repeat visits and additional purchases. Authentic food is associated with correct seasoning and fresh food ingredients used in cooking. Several methods were used by the restaurants to produce authentic food. For instance, chefs used homemade spice instead of the instant ones; food quality controllers monitored fresh and hygienic raw ingredients; expert chefs were employed; training was given to non-expert chefs; authentic recipes were followed; fresh fish and fresh cooking oil were used; packaging and labelling food ingredients according to the kitchen department was done on a daily basis for hygiene purposes; and ingredients were prepared on a daily basis.

5.2.5.4 Serving on Time

Timing is important in restaurant service. Customers do not want to wait an extended period of time for drinks or food and, at the same time, they do not want to be rushed. Setting time standards for delivery of food and beverages, from the time they are ordered at the table is very important. The finding of the study showed that on-time service was found to be one of the factors influencing customer satisfaction offered by most of the restaurants studied:

“So far I never had a problem about order delay. Everything is on time. To me this aspect is very important.” (Rehan-R1)

“...and service is okay, fast.” (Rhndall-R2)

“Service is very good...Drink that I ordered is really served on time.” (Syed Abdul Rahman- R1)

“Service is good. I mean food arrives on time....” (Amirul-R2)

Customers perceived on-time service as their order being served within 10 to 15 minutes of the order being placed:

“Service is also good... food is served between 10 to 15 minutes, quite fast.” (Ridzuan- R2)

“Usually, if after 15 minutes the food still hasn’t been served yet, I will check with the bill reader in the kitchen to clarify why the order for table so and so is delayed and how long the customers need to wait for their food to be served.” (Waitress- R2)

Several actions had been put in place to ensure that customers’ orders were served on time.

- i) After taking the customers’ order, the waiter/waitress who took the order sent the order form to the relevant kitchen department straight away to ensure the bill reader received the order form quickly so that the chef could also prepare the order quickly.
- ii) During peak hours, the waiter/waitress took the customers’ order from tables that were situated close to one another and sent the order form to the bill reader at

once. This was to save time and avoid making customers wait to be attended. A waitress confirmed this:

“If the customers that I took the orders from are sitting at tables that are close to each other, I can gather the order forms and send them at once to the relevant kitchen department.” (Waitress-R2)

- iii) Staff who took customers’ orders checked on the kitchen’s progress from time to time to ensure that orders were prepared and served quickly. According to one of the restaurant staff:

“From time to time, I must go back to customers’ table where I took the order to ascertain if their order has been served or not.” (Waitress-R2)

- iv) After serving the order, the food runner ticked the items that had been served in the customers order form to avoid confusion with items that had not been served. If the kitchen department was busy with a backlog of customers’ order forms and a particular order takes time to prepare, the waiter/waitress informed the customers about the delay and offers a second option: either to wait for their order to be served, or change their order to a menu that takes less time to prepare. Two staff shared their similar practice:

“If the customers order food that really takes time to cook, I will tell them straight away that this food will take time to prepare. It is up to them to decide whether they want to wait or change the order to a menu that takes less time to prepare.” (Waitress-R2)

- v) It was observed that kitchen staff of Restaurant 1, Restaurant 2 and the *Beriani* Department staff of Restaurant 3 prepared food ingredients well in advance of restaurant business hours. This advance activity (*“mis en place”*) helped the restaurant to ensure that its meals were produced on time. Kitchen staff of one of the restaurants confirmed this practice:

“My main duty is to make early preparations for ingredients of each menu of the Beriani. For example, Beriani Rice includes Dalcha, Salad, Papadum, Chicken Beriani, Beef Beriani and Lamb Beriani as dishes. So I need to prepare all of those dishes ready for cooking.” (Assistant cook-R3)

vi) The restaurants offered a *table d'hôte* menu that was ready-cooked in large quantities in advance, such as *Beriani* Rice. Offering this type of food can save time. If he received an order from the customers, the chef just had to reheat the ready-cooked food before it was served to the customers. An assistant cook of one of those restaurants explained:

“For Beriani Rice I cook between 45 to 50 kg of rice a day, 20 chickens for Chicken Beriani; 20 kg of lamb for Lamb Beriani and 20kg of meat for Beef Beriani. Sometimes, I have to cook twice, with the same quantities each time.” (Assistant cook-R3)

vii) Besides table service, the restaurants studied also offered a self-service counter where customers could get food themselves whenever they liked, in addition to table service. Several customers complimented this service:

“I never had any problem about food delay because this restaurant offers a self-service system with various types of food. If I order the a la carte menu and find the order is delayed, I will cancel it and get other food from the self-service counter.” (Zaleha-R1)

“For those who cannot wait for the a la carte menu, they have the option to choose food from the buffet table where they can get food straight away. In this case the restaurant won't lose customers.” (Khadijah-R2)

It was observed that all the restaurants offered a self-service counter system to customers. The self-service counter has advantages for both restaurateurs and customers in many ways. The customers could get their food more quickly, rather than wait for food from the a la carte menu. This was especially convenient for customers that had a short time for meal breaks, such as office staff that only had an hour for lunch.

The self-service counter also gave freedom to customers to manage their time to get food from the food counter. The service was also found to be flexible for those who had plenty of time and wanted to enjoy their meal at the restaurant. Several customers were pleased with the service:

“I like the idea of a self-service counter here because I get the freedom to choose and control my time. I don't have to wait for restaurant staff to take my order and for my order to be served. The service also doesn't force me to rush.” (Rehan-R1)

“I like the self-service system here because I can get my food quicker than by table service where I have to wait for my order to be served...This system is good, I think, because customers can manage their time by getting food on their own. For example, if I want to eat quickly, I can get the food from the buffet table quickly. If I choose a la carte menu, for sure I have to wait for the food to be served.” (Ain-R1)

By having the self-service counter, customers could choose the type of food they would like to eat based on their appetite, budget, and the quantity of food. The quotations below illustrate these perceived advantages:

“Customers also can estimate their budget. If they feel they want to eat more and still have money they can make an additional order.” (Rehan-R1)

“I like this system, self-service. I can take the food that I want to eat based on my appetite and capacity to eat.” (Zaleha-R1)

“Furthermore, I can control the food quantity that I’m going to take based on my capacity to eat, except for Roti Canai because its size is already fixed” (Shamsina-R1)

...other restaurants offer a set menu with a fixed combination of food items that sometimes doesn’t suit the customers’ appetite.” (Zurina-R1)

Another advantage of the self-service counter was that it provided a chance for the customers to see the cooked food available at the restaurant. This would avoid making mistakes when making a food order because of being influenced by the colourful photos printed on the menu card particularly in an a la carte menu.

“I like the self-service system here because I can take the food that I want to eat besides being able to see what food is available with my own eyes, not rely on photos in the menu card.” (Shamsina-R1)

“I like the self-service at this restaurant because I have the chance to see all the food items available before making any choice.” (Zurina-R1)

From the restaurateurs’ point of view, self-service avoids the potential of losing customers due to food delay problems. It also involves less staff, low capital for labour costs and at the same time promises more profit as this customer stated:

“Besides, this service style doesn’t force the restaurant to employ many other customer service staff except to take drink orders and serve the orders....” (Ain-R1)

In summary, it was found that serving orders on time contributes to customer satisfaction. Several actions were taken to manage this influence on customer satisfaction. These actions included customer service staff sending food orders to the relevant kitchen department straight away; taking customers orders from many tables together and sending the orders to the kitchen department at once; checking kitchen progress from time to time; ticking the items that have been served on the order form; preparing food before business opens; offering ready-cooked food, and offering a self-service counter which also involves less staff.

The findings show that the self-service counter available at all the restaurants studied provided an impact on customers in various ways, partly because of their convenience, but also because the self-service counter gives flexibility for those who have plenty of time to stay longer at the restaurant and those that have a short time for a meal break and must get their food quickly. This counter service also gives the customers freedom to choose the type of food they want based on their preference, particularly in terms of food quantity, besides allowing the customers to see the cooked food. Thus the self-service counter was found to be one of the contributors to customer satisfaction in this study.

5.2.5.5 Accuracy

This study found that accuracy in dealing with customers is also a factor influencing customer satisfaction. Customers think that staff, who can manage to serve them with the right things, show that they paid attention to them and what they were doing. For instance, the staff of Restaurant 3 could memorize the customers’ order as soon as it had been mentioned by the customers. A customer that had experienced this said:

“The staff are alert towards customers’ orders. I mentioned the items that I wanted to order only once but the staff could remember them straight away. Seems to me that the staff really paid attention to what I said.” (George Tan-R3)

It was found that attention was not only given by the waiter/ waitress who took the customers' order but also the chef in the kitchen. The chef managed to follow instructions written by the waiter/ waitress on the order form and prepare the customers' orders precisely according to the requests. The success of the restaurant in fulfilling the requests of the customers indirectly gave a good reputation to the restaurant and brought customers back to the restaurant. A customer shared his experience concerning this matter and expressed a strong and positive preference for this restaurant:

"I'm single and always dine out. I keep comparing one restaurant to another especially in relation to the instructions given to the waiter/waitress. For example, I like to eat Bandung Noodles but I don't take fish balls and fishcakes even though those two ingredients are basic ingredients in Bandung Noodles. Usually I make a special request not to put those ingredients in my order. So far, only this restaurant really fulfilled my request. That's why I prefer to dine here. I think either the waiter or waitress who took the order or the chef who cooked the food were alert about my request...." (Amirul-R2)

It was observed that the restaurant management system played an important role in ensuring they got things right for the customer. Several measures were taken to ensure the accuracy of the staff service. Firstly, in the service section, all customer tables are numbered and arranged in the right order to avoid confusion and ensure that the food runner serves the order to the correct table. Customers' plates are also numbered according to the table number where they sit. Secondly, front of house staff who take the customers' order need to read the customers' order list in front of the customer before leaving their table. This is to counter-check and ensure that the staff have written all the customers' orders correctly. Several staff shared similar practice and they reported:

"This restaurant has a service system where every staff member that takes the customers' order must read the order in front of the customer to counter-check their order and clarify all the orders that have been written are right." (Food Runner-R2)

"For example, after taking their order I will read the order out, in front of the customers, to counter-check the order list that they have made." (Waitress-R2)

Thirdly, the bill reader in the kitchen department reads the order form loudly in front of the chef to make sure he transfers all the information written on the order form clearly so that the chef can prepare the order based on the information given. Fourthly, the bill reader uses pegs that are printed with a number to clip to the customers' plates. The numbers are based on the table number of customers who made the order. This was to help food runners serve the order to the right table according to the number of the pegs.

To conclude, the findings of this study showed that customers were very satisfied with their dining experience because the restaurants managed to fulfil their request by having restaurant staff's accuracy and ability to ensure customers get what they had ordered. In fact, this factor caused one customer to choose one of the restaurants as a favourite place for dining out because of this reason. There are several ways for the restaurant staff to manage this factor. These are by numbering the customers' table; reading the customers' order list in front of the customers before leaving their table to counter-check, as this ensures the staff have written details of the order correctly; reading customers' order forms loudly to transfer all information written on the form for the chef to prepare the order based on the information given, and numbering customers' plates according to table number where they sit.

5.2.5.6 Serving Group Orders Simultaneously

This study shows that customers who dine in groups prefer their order to be served simultaneously with orders of the other members of their group, even though they often ordered different menu items. This is to ensure they can enjoy their meal together. It was observed that all the restaurants in the study practised this service and it was appreciated by many customers. One of them commented:

"... I like the way the food was served, which was simultaneously. All of my friends and I got our food at the same time and we could eat the food together, even though we ordered different menus." (Shah Rizal-R3)

The research indicated that customers were satisfied with their dining experience because the restaurants were able to fulfil their request as expected through serving customers' orders simultaneously. The way the restaurant managed this aspect is by having good communication between the bill reader in the kitchen and the food runner at the pick-up counter. It was observed that Restaurant 2 and Restaurant 3 had its own bill reader for every kitchen department. The bill reader of each kitchen department was responsible for sending orders that had been cooked by the chef of his or her kitchen department to the pick-up counter. Then the food runner would take the orders from the pick-counter to be served to the customers' table. In the situation where there were a few food orders of particular customers still under preparation such as in the Chinese kitchen department, the bill reader of the Chinese kitchen department would inform the food runner to wait until all of the orders were ready even though different menus that were cooked by other kitchen departments were at the pick-up counter ready to be served. However, the food runner had to ensure all the food that was going to be served did not go cold whilst it was waiting at the pick-up counter. This system had been developed to ensure that all customers' food orders can be served simultaneously.

5.2.5.7 The Core Restaurant Service

Menu variety and food presentation and display are factors that contribute to satisfaction in customers' meal experience. These factors, influencing satisfaction and the management of the satisfaction, are discussed in the following sub-sections.

i) Menu Variety

It was found that all the restaurants in the study offered a wide range of meals. Several customers commented:

"It really amazed me...there was plenty of food and I asked the cashier how many types of food there were altogether? She replied, 'More than 66 different types'...O gosh, unbelievable..." (Rahmat' wife-R1)

“O yes, this restaurant sells Malaysian cuisine like Malay, Chinese and Indian food. It also offers international food like Western and Thai food. Other food is available like Otak-otak, snacks like Dodol, Malay traditional cakes and Telur Pindang.” (Manager-R3)

“This restaurant sells a variety of international food as well. So customers have many food choices.” (Ahmad-R2)

For instance the Restaurant 1 offered both types of menu: modern menus that are commonly found in other restaurants and Johor Malay traditional menus that are hardly ever found, mainly due to complicated cooking techniques and difficulties in finding traditional ingredients. According to several customers:

“This restaurant sells a variety of food including traditional food. In other restaurants I hardly ever get traditional dishes like Asam Rebus, Pindang etc but here just name it, you will get it.” (Abdul Majid-R1)

“This restaurant specializes in Johor Malay traditional food. Sometimes I find food that I have never tasted before or food that is hard to cook because it requires great skill to cook it. So even though I don’t cook this at home, I still can get it here.” (Lynn-R1)

Each type of menu has a complete course and each course has a variety of choices. According to several customers:

“... this restaurant also offers complete sets of meals starting with appetizer, salad, soup, main course, dessert and hot drinks...most interesting is that every course has a variety of choice and all of them are Malay traditional foods. It is really amazing!” (Ain-R1)

“The menu available is varied and complete. Complete in terms of food courses like appetizer, soup, salad, main course and dessert. Each course has a variety of choice as well. So customers can get complete nutrients.” (Shamsina-R1)

“The special thing about the variety of menus is that the restaurant provides complete courses that contain complete nutrients for every mealtime starting with appetizer to dessert and each course has a variety of choices. So customers can get whatever they want to eat like salad, soup, fruit, noodles etc.” (Ain-R1)

It was observed that Restaurant 1 also offers 49 different types of drink with interesting names, different flavors, ingredients and tastes. Customers considered the variety of drinks as an interesting dining experience too. They said:

“Secondly, here we have a variety of beverages, up to 49 choices with different names, tastes, and presentation.” (Restaurant owner-R1)

“Drink also has many choices. You see...up to 49 types of drink with different flavours, tastes and names...Amazing!” (Akhiar-R1)

“There are many choices of foods and drinks. For drinks only, the restaurant has 49 different tastes and interesting names like Cobra Shakes, King of the Dragon etc.” (Uda-R1)

The variety of food provided customers with options to choose from. For those who visited the restaurants in a group, having a variety of menus can solve the problem of people preferring different food choices. Two customers agreed:

“...this restaurant offers menu variety; Eastern food and international food. The international food is Western food, Italian food, and Thai food. With varieties like this, customers have many choices. This is very convenient especially if customers come in groups where everyone has a different choice of food. This restaurant can solve that problem because everything can be found here.” (Lina-R2)

“I like to come here because this restaurant sells a variety of food. I can find almost everything here, all under one roof.” (Rhndall-R2)

“The reason I like to have a meal here is because this restaurant provides different courses for each meal from appetizer to dessert.” (Abdul Majid-R1)

“Back to food just now, the restaurant also provides food for children. I wouldn’t say they provide special menus for children but a menu is available that suits the taste of both children and adults.” (Rehan-R1)

Satisfied with some of the unusual choices of menu variety, some customers conveyed positive word-of-mouth publicity about the restaurant to others. For instance, one customer said:

“I’m eating out person and a good eater. My nephew suggested this restaurant to me. He said this restaurant sell unusual of menu variety.”(Idayu-R3)

“If I have guests, this restaurant becomes the first choice for me to bring them to and have a cup of tea because I want to make sure that I introduce them to a restaurant that provides suitable food according to their taste. Since this restaurant offers a variety of food I think it meets that criterion.” (Rosli-R1)

“... So my guests have many options to choose from the menu.” (Salma Lim-R1)

It was observed that the restaurants managed menu variety in various ways. The first was by providing a different daily menu theme. For instance Restaurant 3 offers a *Beriani* Rice menu theme from Tuesday until Sunday. Meanwhile, the Tomato Rice menu theme was on Mondays. This was to avoid regular customers from getting bored with the same menu, attracting first visit customers to come back while retaining the regular ones. A customer commented:

“I like the menu here because it is varied and changes on a daily basis. This can attract customers to come again to try different menus so that the restaurant can get regular customers. I think it is a part of the restaurant marketing strategy, to retain regular customers.”
(Winnie-R3)

Secondly, since the restaurant business is a competitive industry, it was observed that all the restaurants studied offered their own special menu which helped to create their identity besides providing regular menus as sold in other restaurants. This idea was part of the restaurants’ strategy to draw customers’ attention to their restaurant. The customers of one of these restaurants commented:

“Interestingly this restaurant has its own special menus like AW Fried Rice, AW Noodles, and AW Porridge Rice. Each menu has a totally different taste and presentation that is not found elsewhere. Maybe the restaurant owner wants to develop the identity of this restaurant through the menu.” (Sheila-R3)

“About the restaurant’s special menu: it is a part of the restaurant’s strategy to compete with other restaurants... we need to be more creative in attracting customers’ to come here. The idea of creating a special menu is a common scenario in the restaurant industry. Recipes for special menus in this restaurant have been proposed by the restaurant owner to show the restaurant identity and uniqueness in terms of menu to customers. So if customers want to eat those foods they have no choice except to come here.” (Manager-R3)

Thirdly, Restaurant 2 has developed several kitchen departments (see Table 5.3) where each department specialised in different food and prepared its own variety of menus. Having separate kitchen departments allowed each department to lessen their workload and the staff in each department to concentrate on food quality, their specialisations, and in creating new menus. For instance Restaurant 2 has 12 separate kitchen departments as the manager explained:

“This restaurant provides a variety of food from 12 different kitchen departments like Malay Kitchen Department, Chinese Kitchen Department, Thai Kitchen Department, Chicken Rice Department, Nasi Champur Department, Sate Department, Porridge Rice Department, Kebab Department, Grilled Fish Department, Beverage Department, Dessert and Juices Department, Western Department, and Roti Canai Department. Each department produces different varieties of food.” (Manager-R2)

Table 5.3: Kitchen Departments Available at the Restaurants of Study

No	Restaurant 1	Restaurant 2	Restaurant 3
1.	Noodle Department	Chinese Department	Dessert Department
2.	Beverages Department	Malay Department	Beriani Department
3.	Malay Department	Thai Department	Western Food Department
4.		Roti Canai/ Indian Department	Soft and Hot Drinks Department
5.		Western Department	Thai Department
6.		Beverages Department	Malay Department
7.		Dessert and Juices Department	Chinese Department
8.		Kebab Department	Western Food Department
9.		Sate, Bean Curd, Chicken Wing and Otak-Otak Department	Beriani Department
10.		Chicken Rice and Toast Department	Satay Department
11.		Rojak, laksa, Seashell, and Porridge Rice Department	
12.		Grilled Fish and Seafood Department	

Source: Field note observation of Restaurant 1, Restaurant 2 and Restaurant 3

Fourthly, some restaurants in the study lacked expertise in certain menu areas, such as Western food, and this type of food is in high demand. To fulfil customers’ needs, the restaurants offered the opportunity to provide these menus to outsider operators who were more expert in this type of food. For example, Restaurant 2 had a high demand for kebabs, which are famous in Turkey, but none of the chefs at the restaurant was an expert in kebab cookery. To solve this problem the owner of the restaurant let one corner of his restaurant to a Turkish kebab seller who was an expert in kebab making. The same solution has been adopted to overcome the problem of providing grilled seafood that was also in high demand from customers. By allowing these small food entrepreneurs from outside to do their business at the restaurant, it has indirectly motivated and trained the entrepreneurs to open up their own restaurant business. It

has also helped the restaurant to save on the budget for labour costs and food costs. This system has also been adopted by Restaurant 3, as its manager confirmed:

“Food that are really produced by this restaurant are only from the Thai, Malay and Beriani Kitchen Departments. Food from the Western Department and food that comes under the category of Other Food, as stated in the menu book, are provided by outsiders. The outsiders rent counters to sell their food by themselves. In this case the restaurant can reduce food costs and the use of manpower in producing that particular food in attempt to provide a variety of food. We don’t actually want to solely monopolise this business. By merging with outside small food entrepreneurs, the restaurant gives opportunities and encouragement to them to get involved in real business.” (Manager-R3)

Fifthly, Restaurant 1 offers a buffet service. The restaurant is popular and has a variety of Johor Malay traditional food. Malay dishes have been distinguished by several types of dishes for *Nasi Campur* such as *Masak Lemak*, *Masak Pedas*, *Masak Asam*, *Masak Merah* and *Sambal*, depending on their basic ingredients. These dishes can include a variety of main foodstuffs such as meat, poultry, vegetables, all kinds of seafood and fish. For example the chef prepares a big quantity of *Masak Lemak Cili Padi* sauce then divides the sauce into two portions: one portion is for fish and another portion either for chicken or meat. This provides an option for customers to choose either to eat Fish *Masak Lemak Cili Padi* or Chicken *Masak Lemak Cili Padi*. The chef of the restaurant confirmed:

“I cook the same sauce in big quantities and divide it into two. Usually one portion is for fish and another portion either for chicken or meat. For example, for the menu of Mask Lemak Cili Padi, I will cook the sauce for the Masak Lemak Cili Padi for 2 different sources of proteins at one time. Then I divide it into one portion for fish and another portion for chicken. This is because sometimes customers don’t eat chicken and prefer to eat fish. That’s why I provide an option for them.” (Chef-R1)

This study has shown that the restaurants provide a wide range of meals and as a result met the need of customers and satisfied them. They included a diverse range of culinary styles. The diversity of menus was an important issue and contributed to the satisfaction of almost all of the customers in the study. As a consequence, it motivated customers to convey positive word-of-mouth publicity about the restaurants to others and for them to revisit the restaurants themselves. The way these restaurants managed

this factor included creating several kitchen departments which specialised in different foods and cookery; offered buffet service; merge their provision with outside food providers that are expert in producing a particular kind of food, which the restaurants could not provide; introduced a restaurant special menu which provided the same dish using different types of meat and seafood; and provided a different daily menu theme.

ii) Food Presentation and Display

It was found that Restaurant1 gave attention not only to menu variety but also to the visual aspect of food presentation to satisfy the customers. The findings indicated that food presentation and display were another important factor influencing customer satisfaction. Several customers gave positive comments on the presentation and display:

“...Although the plate used is quite small, the chef managed to garnish the food by putting small trimmings of different coloured vegetables to make the food look zesty.” (Devi-R2)

“Not only that, each type of food has very attractive garnishing and a nice presentation.” (Raja-R1)

Attractive food presentation and display gives a positive impression to the customers; they think that the taste of the food is delicious and it stimulates their appetite. In fact, several customers admitted that their decision to purchase the food items had been influenced by the food presentation. The customers reported:

“Furthermore, the way you present roasted chicken in the Chicken Rice counter made it look delicious.” (Khadijah-R2)

“I can say food presentation here is excellent, very creative, and can stimulate customers’ appetite.” (Gan-R1)

“It was because of attractive and zesty food presentation. It encourages me to buy the food.” (Ain-R1)

It was observed that the buffet table is considered a focal point and therefore decorating the buffet table was essential. For instance, a mixed look had been created by the use of modern and traditional food containers in the buffet section of

Restaurant 1. The traditional food containers made the buffet table appear different from the buffet tables in other restaurants, which were usually decorated in a modern style. For example, chaffing dishes, clay pots, bamboo trays and stone pestle and mortar made the buffet table look traditional but, at the same time, presentable and stylish. The food containers arranged at various levels made the table looked more attractive. Sateen skirting made the whole presentation of the table look attractive. Customers commented:

“I like to see the buffet table presentation here and the way food is displayed on the buffet table. It looks colourful and delicious. In other restaurants food is put in chaffing dishes and displayed either on the table or in a bain-marie. Here the food is displayed in traditional clay pots and each pot has its own garnishing. This makes the whole presentation of the buffet table look very traditional, unique and attractive. Everything looks pleasant here.” (Rehan-R1)

“Here food is presented in Malay traditional serving dishes like Niru, Lesung Batu etc. that are suited to Johor Malay traditional food. This made the buffet table look very attractive and presentable.” (Fara-R1)

“The buffet table looks very attractive with sateen skirting, nice traditional food containers....” (Raja-R1)

It was observed that the variations in the food garnishing and the colour of the different dishes gave an attractive look to the buffet table from a distance. Thus the combination of food garnishing and the well decorated buffet table not only provided a pleasant meal experience for customers, and served to catch their attention, but also enticed them to approach the table and therefore indirectly to the food displayed as well.

It has also been observed that efficient food organization on the buffet table helped to keep buffet traffic moving. The food was arranged and grouped into sections according to the different courses of the meal, for example starter, soup, salad, main course and dessert. This was to help customers to find the food easily as well as making the table look neat, even though it consisted of more than 60 different types of dishes. All kinds of dessert including fresh cut fruit, puddings and cakes were placed at the end of the traffic line to give customers more space. Food items that most people stopped at were put at the end of the table so they did not hold up the line and

this helped to ease the traffic flow. The overall view of the buffet table attracted several customers to express their feelings as follows:

“The buffet table looks presentable and food containers are well organized.” (Fara-R1)

“The buffet table looks very attractive with a neat food arrangement...” (Raja-R1)

“Dishes on the buffet table are arranged in 3 systematic ways and well presented. The same foods are arranged at the same place everyday. So regular customers get used to it and know which section they should go to get particular food. In this case the customers can save their time to get the food, especially in the situation where more than 60 different types of foods are displayed on the table.” (Gan-R1)

There were two ways the restaurant managed the buffet. The first was by giving training to the restaurant chef. The training encouraged the chef to be creative in producing decorative food garnishes and a presentable buffet table. As quoted previously, the chef explained:

“I got training from the wife of the restaurant owner. After she was confident that I can cook and produce the same quality of food in terms of garnishing, buffet presentation etc...she quitted her job and asked me to take over her position....” (Chef-R1)

The second was by assigning a member of the kitchen staff to supervise the buffet table in order to maintain the presentation of the food displayed. This was done by ensuring serving plates, cutlery and serviettes were always available on the buffet table, removing empty food containers, and refilling the display food containers on the buffet table with new, fresh food. Two waitresses of the restaurant confirmed their responsibilities:

“Since the restaurant started a self-service system, the buffet table became its focal point. One customer service staff is usually assigned to keep the table looking presentable and clean. The staff must also ensure all food containers are always clean. Empty containers need to be brought to the dish washing area as soon as they are empty. We don’t keep the containers on the table.” (Waitress 1-R1)

“I am also responsible for lifting empty food containers from the buffet table to the dishwashing area, for ensuring all serving equipment like cutlery, plates and serviettes are available, and that the buffet table is always clean and looks presentable.” (Waitress 2-R1)

In short, it was found that attractive food presentation and display at the restaurant buffet table, including a combination of various elements, was another aspect influencing customer satisfaction in this study. These elements included the use of modern and traditional food containers that made the appearance of the buffet table different from buffet tables in other restaurants; specific food containers; the arrangement of these food containers at various levels which made the table look more attractive; and efficient food organization on the buffet table to ensure that buffet traffic was kept moving and to help customers find the food easily. In addition, variations of food garnishing and the colour combination of the food made it look delicious.

There were two ways the restaurant manages this aspect of satisfaction. One is by giving training to the restaurant chef to be creative in producing decorative food garnishing and a presentable buffet table, and another is by assigning kitchen staff to supervise the buffet table, to maintain the presentation of the buffet table and the food displayed. The attractive food presentation and display provides a positive impression for the customers who then want to taste the food displayed to see if it is delicious. This not only stimulates their appetite, but also creates a positive impact on the restaurant's sales.

5.2.6 THE PAYMENT EXPERIENCE

The main factor that influenced customer satisfaction in the customers' payment experience was the self-service payment system. The self-service payment system that the restaurants provided was based on determining the food price at the customers' table and sending the bill to their table.

It was observed that two out of three restaurants applied a self-service payment system where the bill was prepared while customers were having their meal. The bill was presented to the customers after their meal and they needed to pay the bill at the payment counter. This system was found to be convenient for customers because they did not have to wait or call a waiter or waitress to ask for the bill, as well as giving

them the choice of paying for the bill at any time they liked (as long as it was before leaving the restaurant). Several customers gave positive comments about this system:

“The payment system is also good. The waitress sends the bill to the customers’ table, so they can pay for the bill at any time they like and they don’t have to call the waiter or waitress to ask for the bill.” (Rosli-R2)

“The payment system is also convenient. Customers have a copy of their order list and they just have to go to the cashier counter, at any time, to pay for the bill. In this case they don’t have to wait for a waiter or waitress to bring the bill to them.” (Amirul-R2)

“Furthermore, I can pay for the bill at any time I like and I don’t have to wait for the staff to send me the bill.” (Raja-R1)

It was observed that Restaurant 1 offered the buffet service in a slightly different way in terms of the way the food was priced. However, the restaurant still adopted a similar system of self-service payment. Practically, the cashier charged the price for food taken at the customers’ table before they ate and then placed the bill on their table. After completing their meal the customers are required to pay for the bill at the payment counter. If the customers made additional orders after the bill had been issued they needed to inform the cashier to allow the cashier to add the price of the additional food to the total price that was already printed in the bill. Customers were happy with this system because they had chance to ask for clarification about the price charged to the cashier, straight away, before consuming the meal, if they wanted to know about the price. A customer commented:

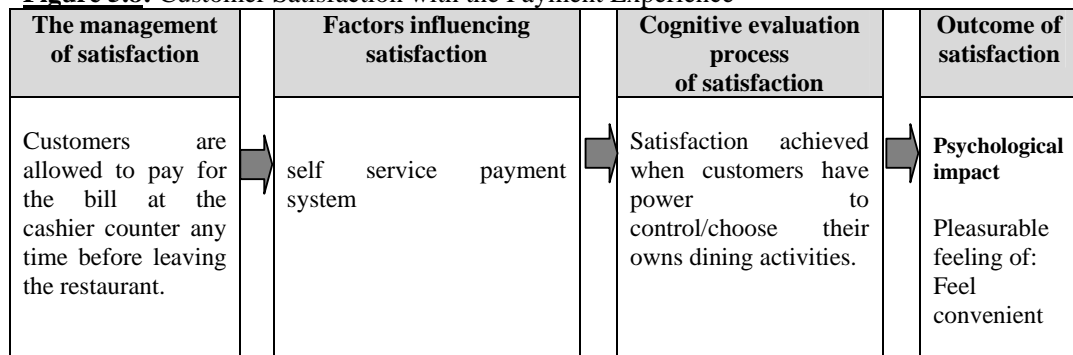
“I like the payment system here where the staff comes to customers’ table to determine the price of food and drinks taken and gives the bill to customers straight away. I’m pretty happy about this service because if the price is too expensive or the staff make a mistake in the charges, I have the chance to ask for clarification from the staff.” (Raja-R1)

The system was also convenient because customers did not have to queue with food in their hands to get the bill before the meal as this customer confirmed:

“the payment system is good because staff come to the customers’ table to charge for the price of food that they took and drinks that they ordered. To me it is convenient and safe time because I don’t have to queue at the cashier counter with my food in my hand.” (Teo-R1)

Thus, the study indicated customers felt satisfied with their dining experience because they had the power to control dining activities through determining time for products/ services payment that they consumed at the restaurants. It was achieved through self service payment system. In the self service payment system, front of house staff leaves bill on customers' tables for food price that charged before the customers having their meals. This allows the customers to pay for the bill at the cashier counter any time before leaving the restaurant. This self service payment system is convenient for the customers besides the bill is more accurate.

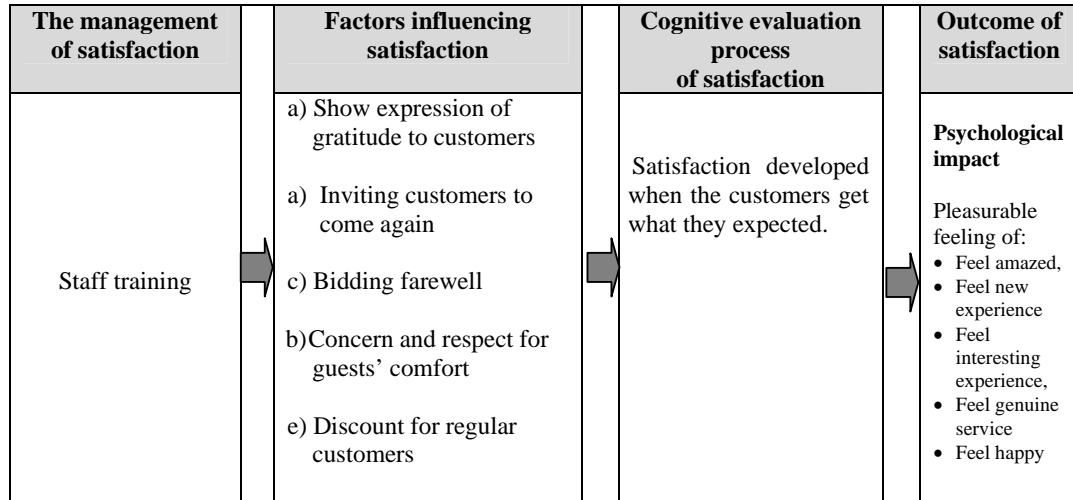
Figure 5.8: Customer Satisfaction with the Payment Experience



5.2.7 THE DEPARTURE EXPERIENCE

Figure 5.8 shows the aspects of the departure experience which contribute to satisfaction. The factors that influenced customer satisfaction are staff expressing gratitude, bidding farewell by escorting customers and showing them the restaurant's exit door. This study found that in the Malay culture the way that a host entertains his or her guest has influenced the way staff express their gratitude to customers. For instance front of house staff at all restaurants in the study showed concern and respect for the customers' comfort while Restaurant 1 provided discount to regular customers.

Figure 5.9: Customer Satisfaction with the Departure Experience



Meanwhile the common aspects that were observed at Restaurant 2 and Restaurant 3 were that the receptionists at those restaurants showed their gratitude by saying “thank you” to customers, particularly while they made their payment, and inviting them to come again before leaving the restaurant. The receptionist also escorted the customers to restaurant’s exit door as a gesture to bid them farewell. A customer confirmed this:

“They never miss to say “thank you” before I leave the restaurant. The common farewell that I get is “thank you very much and please come again.” In fact, the receptionist of the restaurant escorted me to restaurant’s exit door.” (Devi-R2)

Restaurant 2 provided an open air car park with a parking attendant. Interestingly, it was observed during a rainy day that the parking attendant escorted customers with a big umbrella from their car at the car park to the restaurant’s entrance and from the restaurant’s entrance to their car, to avoid the customers from getting wet. This service was a new experience for most of the customers and made them happy. They perceived that the restaurant was really taking care of them not only before but also after the payment was made. A customer also experienced a similar scenario and she reported:

“I had an interesting experience dining at this restaurant. By the time I entered the parking lot it was raining heavily and coincidentally I didn’t bring an umbrella. What really amazed me was that one of the restaurant staff fetched me from the parking lot with a huge umbrella and escorted me to the front door of the restaurant. The staff also did a similar thing with customers who wanted to leave the restaurant. To me this is an exceptional service.” (Norisah-R2)

In brief, the findings indicated that most of the customers were satisfied with their departure dining experience due to they get in what they expected from the way that a host entertains his or her guest as in common Malay hospitality culture regardless of the payment. Customers perceived that the staff in the restaurants studied took care of them, not only before entering the restaurant but also after payment being made through receiving an expression of gratitude and also being bid farewell from front of house staff. The customers were also satisfied because they felt they had received genuine service from the restaurant when the receptionist escorted them to the exit door. This showed that the restaurants studied are not only concerned about selling food but also take care of the customers and they are concerned about their service.

In conclusion this study showed that everyone that came into contact with the customer must take personal pride and responsibility to ensure a great dining experience. A receptionist is only not a fixture by the front door charged with the responsibility of moving customers to seats.

5.3 CONCLUSION

This study shows that dining experience satisfaction has two major factors: external factors (tangible and intangible factors influencing dining satisfaction and the management of those factors that influencing dining satisfaction), and internal factors (outcome of cognitive evaluation after consuming the extrinsic factors during dining experience). The external factors of dining experience satisfaction are derived according to stages of dining experience process.

The study indicated that the function of a restaurant is not only to provide customers with just food and drink but to provide an entertaining dining and meal experience. What makes a customer satisfied when dining at a restaurant was based on the very special dining experience that the restaurant provides while the positive experience of the customer was based on the integration of tangible and intangible factors that influencing customer satisfaction. Each of these influential factors was important and played its own role as part of the whole dining experience. However, the influential factors do not work in isolation; they are blended together to produce a valuable, meaningful, holistic and memorable satisfying dining experience. In this case the products of a restaurant are no longer depending on food, service, and ambience and so on, but dining experience.

The study found that dining experience satisfaction is a process that involves seven stages. These are the stages of antecedent experience, reservation experience, arrival experience, seating experience, meal experience, payment experience and departure experience. It was found that the meal experience was a core stage of dining experience process. Those influential factors were on time attending customers; attending by professional staff (responsive towards complaints and requests, treating customers equally, staff performance, staff appearance, good personality traits); unique cultural experience; serving on time; accuracy; serving group orders simultaneously; the core restaurant service (menu variety and food presentation and display). However, the satisfaction of dining experience was not based on satisfaction at the meal experience stage only because the meal experience stage was only a part of the stages in the dining experience process. Therefore to get the total dining experience satisfaction it is necessary to take into account the satisfaction from the other dining experience stages as well.

The study also showed that customer dining experience satisfaction was an outcome (in a form of feeling) of customers' cognitive evaluation process towards what the customers received from the restaurant during their dining experience in comparison with what they hoped for, or requested, or expected, or needed, or wanted. Thus, dining satisfaction is subjective and based on the customer's individual reason for visiting the restaurant and their dining experience in terms of how they interacted with

the restaurant setting at each stage of the dining experience (such as interaction with staff and controlling their own dining activities in term of fully use the availability of choice provided by the restaurant). Elements of evaluation may be influenced by elements in their antecedent experience.

The customers' dining experience satisfaction outcomes were expressed through first, psychological impact (pleasurable feelings). Customers love to talk and will normally talk more about a bad experience or bad service than they talk about anything good that occurred.

These pleasurable feelings later motivated the customer to show behavioural changes (second dining experience satisfaction outcome) in five major ways. They revisited the restaurants, purchased restaurants' products and or services again, were price tolerant, publicised the restaurants through word-of-mouth and made a particular restaurant their first choice. These five positive impacts were behavioural measures of service loyalty. Thus, this study showed that customer satisfaction is an antecedent of service loyalty while the service loyalty can be claimed as a key indicator regarding the success of the restaurant.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The foci of this chapter is the interpretation of what has been found (the details of the findings are in Chapter 5) through the primary research: interpreting the potential impact of what has been found; demonstrating the confidence that can be placed in the findings by reflecting on what has been done; and identifying what has been learnt, in terms of conducting research, as a result. Therefore, this chapter has six sections: discussion and evaluation of the basic findings, discussion and evaluation of the aggregated findings, the summary and overall comparison with the literature, the management of customer satisfaction, the conceptual framework of customer dining experience satisfaction, and discussion and evaluation of the research.

6.2 DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION OF THE BASIC FINDINGS

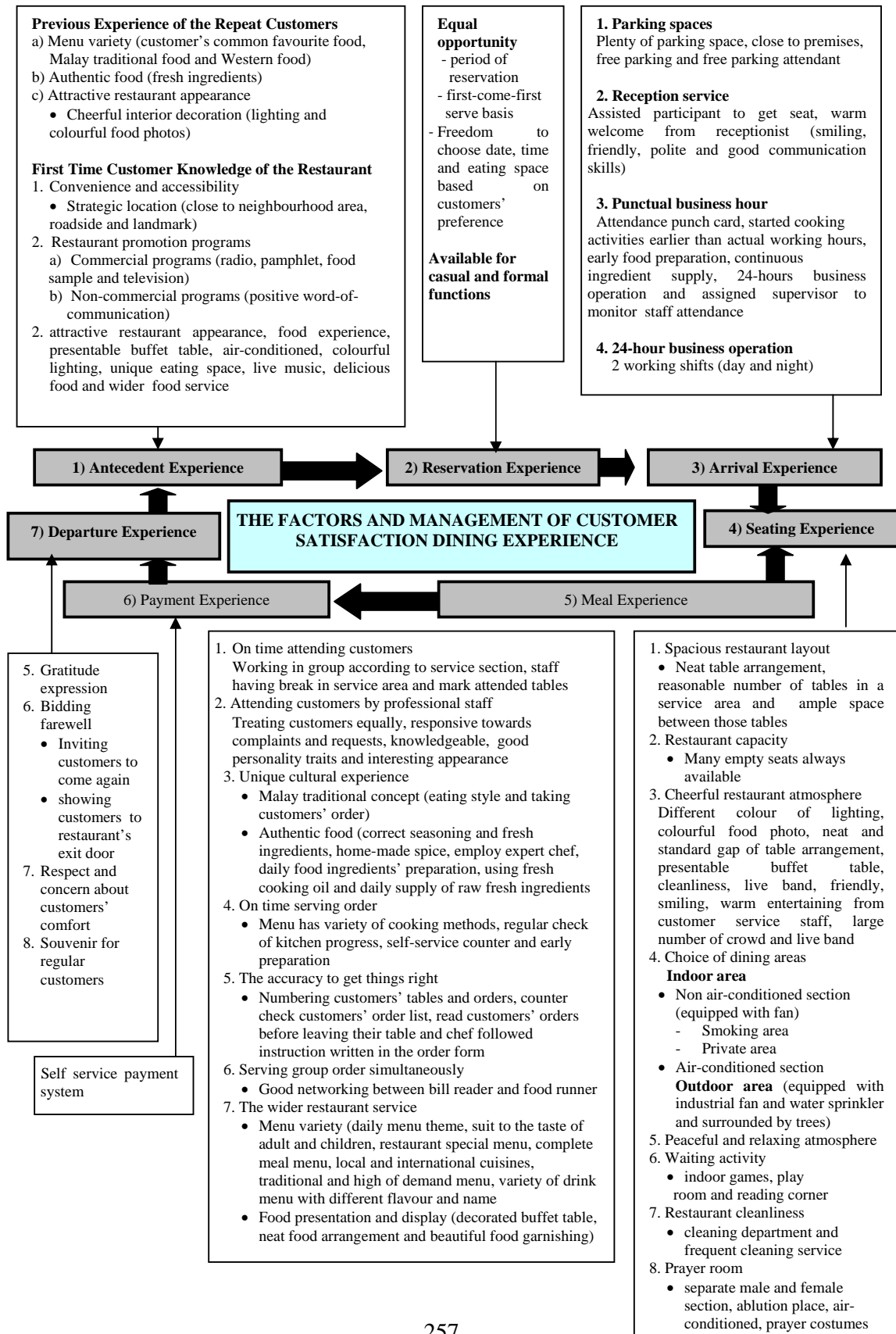
This section will discuss and evaluate the findings in terms of the difference or similarity to what others have written about. The section has four subsections: the process of the dining experience at a restaurant, the pre-meal experience, the actual meal experience and the post-meal experience.

6.2.1 The Process of the Dining Experience

The process of the dining experience identified by this study comprises of a number of stages. These stages are set out in Figure 5.1 and consist of the antecedent experience, the reservation experience, arrival experience, the seating experience, the meal experience, the payment experience and the departure experience. Within each of these ‘experiences’ are a set of factors that are evaluated individually and holistically in terms of overall satisfaction. They can be grouped into the pre-meal

experience, the meal experience and the post meal experience. Thus the dining experience is a continuous process (refer to Figure 5.1) which starts with the customers' first engagement with the restaurant, through the pre-meal experience stage (reservation experience stage, the arrival experience stage and), during the meal experience stage (the seating experience and the actual meal), and the post-meal experience stage (the payment experience stage and the departure experience stage). The findings from this study suggest that there are more factors involved than were previously identified by past studies, such as those conducted by Dulen, (1999); and Susskind and Chan (2000) who found that food, atmospherics, and service are the three major components of the dining experience at a restaurant. Each of the stages and the factors involved are discussed below. A summary of the overall findings of this study in relation to each of these stages is presented in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1: Summary of Overall Findings of the Study



6.2.2 The Pre-Meal Experience

There are potentially three stages of the dining experience involved in a customers' pre-meal experience. They are the antecedent experience stage, the reservation experience stage and the arrival experience stage. These factors are discussed below in relation to previous literature.

6.2.2.1 The Antecedent Experience

This study found that the antecedent experience stage is a stage where repeat customers developed their dining experience at the restaurants (refer to 5.2.1.1) and how first time customers gain knowledge of the restaurant (refer to 5.2.1.2).

First time customers got their knowledge about the restaurants through commercial promotion programs (such as television, radio, food samples and pamphlet distributions). The study also found the demographics, traffic patterns and first-hand knowledge of the restaurant and the surroundings were achieved through convenient accessibility to the restaurant such as being located at a strategic location (for example close to private and government offices that were visible from the roadside, or close to many landmarks, or situated in a residential area for the transportation links such as roads to access the restaurants).

For repeat customers, the finding of this study showed that they developed loyalty towards the restaurant, and as a result revisited the restaurants because their experience in the restaurant was better than their expectation and/or the products offered by the restaurants confirmed their expectations. For instance, satisfaction with the dining experience was achieved when the product performance of the restaurants confirmed the customers' expectation through providing them with the opportunity to choose from a varied menu (Malay traditional menus, international menus and customers' common Malay favourite menus), confirmed customers' needs through providing fresh food ingredients that gave the authentic food flavour; and an attractive and stylish restaurant interior. In addition, during the dining experience, satisfaction

was achieved when the restaurants managed to deliver products and services that fulfilled their hopes and expectations through an attractive restaurant appearance, air-conditioning, having a presentable buffet table, a unique eating space and delicious food alongside a variety of menus. This finding is consistent with Pliner and Hobden (1994) who viewed individuals as being more likely to try new foods if they first see others eating and enjoying them. These satisfaction factors, for repeat customers, then influenced the customers to develop loyalty towards the restaurant and as a result influenced the customers to come back to the restaurants. The customers then shared their satisfaction with the pre-meal experience with others by conveying positive word-of-mouth communication. Those (potential customers) who received the information started to develop hopes and expectations of receiving the same dining experience. The factors influencing customer satisfaction with a previous dining experience influenced the customers' level of satisfaction with the dining experience based on whether what the customers' experienced in the restaurant was better than their expectation and/or whether the products offered by the restaurant confirmed their expectation. This finding of this study is in line with the study of Brady, and Robertson (1998), who aimed to test the relationship between service quality and satisfaction in order to determine whether service quality should universally be considered as an antecedent of satisfaction. The results of these authors' study confirmed that the effect of service quality on behavioral intentions is mediated by consumer previous dining experience and the customers' level of dining experience satisfaction. These findings, for both repeat and first time customers, on antecedent satisfaction with the dining experience are consistent with the findings of Yuksel *et al.*, (2006). They focused on the evaluation of consumers' continuous attitude at the post-purchasing point. These authors suggested that the customers' overall attitude to a restaurant can be developed before or after purchasing and satisfaction mediates the relationships between its antecedents and consequences. The antecedents of dining experience can be in a form of self-congruence (intention to return) and service quality (physical quality and staff behavior).

6.2.2.2 The Reservation Experience

The availability of a reservation service, based on a phone call for formal and informal functions, was found to be a factor that influenced satisfaction. The reservation service provides choice for customers to control their time of arrival, date and a private eating space to sit. Satisfaction is achieved when customers' expectation of their phone call to be answered quickly by a polite and professional staff is fulfilled. Most of the previous studies focused on quality service in terms of the reception service (Namkung and Jang, 2008), free parking (Kivela, 1999b), punctual business hour (Kivela *et al.*, 1999 and Andaleeb and Conway, 2006), serving on time (Namkung and Jang, 2008; Yuksel and Yuksel, 2002), and on time attending customers (Andaleeb and Conway, (2006). None of those previous studies (refer to Table 2.12) included the reservation experience with its dimensions (phone call to be answered quickly and by a polite and professional staff) as a construct of customer satisfaction with the dining experience. However, the preference of customers for their phone call to be answered quickly is consistent with Kivela (1999b) who indicated that an effective reservation system can be achieved if a restaurant has a sufficient number of staff to reduce waiting times and ensure a prompt and efficient service, especially during busy times.

6.2.2.3 The Arrival Experience

This study indicated that an adequate indicator of good service that satisfied almost all customers dining at the restaurant is when they have free of charge parking. This study found that being assisted by a free parking attendant, who helped to control traffic and to look after their vehicles, as well as having close parking area to the premises to avoid having long walk from the parking area to the restaurant at their arrival, punctuality of restaurant business hour and offering 24-hour restaurant operation to public, were factors influencing satisfaction. The satisfaction factor of free parking is in line with finding of Kivela's (1999b) while being greeted and attended by restaurant front of house staff are factors of customer dining satisfaction that are in line with the studies of Andaleeb and Conway, 2006; and Kivela *et al.*, 1999b.

6.2.3 The Actual Meal Experience

The actual meal experience stage was found to be the focal stage of the customers' dining experience. This is in line with Malhotra (1988) and Landon (1974) who argued that the effects of the self-concept on customer satisfaction are likely to vary according to consumption situations. Customer satisfaction reflects subjective customer evaluations of the attribute performance associated with the consumption experience (Cronin and Taylor, 1992).

During the actual meal experience, customers sit in the restaurant; while eating looking at the room, listening to the music etc. The nature of the room and its contribution to their satisfaction does not stop when the food arrives. The front of house staff as the service providers also play a big role in customer dining experience satisfaction. Therefore, this study found that the actual meal experience is made up of three experiences which are the experience provided by the setting in which the meal is being eaten (refer to 5.2.4), the meal (food) experience (refer to 5.2.5.7 and service quality experience (refer to 5.2.5.1, 5.2.5.2, 5.2.5.4, 5.2.5.5, and 5.2.5.6).

6.2.3.1 The Seating Experience

The seating experience refers to the customers' experience of being seated, waiting for their order to be taken, waiting for their order to be served and the whole time that they spend in the restaurant. There were eight factors influencing dining customer satisfaction in relation to the seating experience. These mostly related to the physical environment of the restaurant which can produce feelings of excitement, pleasure, or a relaxed atmosphere and this is consistent with the finding of previous authors: restaurant capacity (refer to 5.2.4.2) (Pliner and Hobden, 1994); and (Oh and Jeong, 1996), cheerful restaurant interior design from lighting and colour of food photos (refer to 5.2.4.3) (Namkung and Jang, 2008; and Reynolds & Hwang (2006), choice of dining areas (refer to 5.2.4.4) (Oh and Jeong, 1996); peaceful and relaxing restaurant atmosphere from soft melodies live band and audio system (refer to 5.2.4.5) (Ryu and Jang (2008), restaurant cleanliness (refer to 5.2.4.7) (Hwang and

Zhao (2010), the availability of waiting activities (refer to 5.2.4.6) and a prayer room (refer to 5.2.4.8). Thus this study has revealed that the physical environment was an important factor affecting customer dining satisfaction (refer to 5.2.4.3). The level of its importance and why is explained below.

Many authors such as Namkung and Jang (2008), Ryu and Jang (2007), Ryu and Jang (2008), and Kivela (1999b) have expressed interest in the role of the physical environment, or “*atmospherics*” on customer perceptions of quality, satisfaction and subsequent responses. Andrus (1986) also believed that an environmental design has an impact on service satisfaction. Various aspects of *atmospherics* were used by customers as tangible cues to assess the quality of services provided within a service setting (Aubert-Gamet and Cova, 1999; Gummesson, 1993), for instance visual and auditory cues (function and space, design, color and music).

Music is also a positive auditory cue for stimulating emotions and behaviors in service settings (Dube *et al.*, 1995; Mattila and Wirtz, 2001). Milliman (1986) reported that slow sentimental music caused people to linger longer over their meal, and in the process to spend more at the bar. However, a study by Herrington and Capella (1996) claimed that musical preference and familiarity were the key factors, while tempo and volume have little effect upon consumers’ enjoyment or behavior. It is also important to note that customers may seek a dining experience totally different from what they may obtain at home, and the atmosphere may do more to attract them than the food itself. According to Tan and Yeap (2001), pleasant ambience conditions at the restaurants provide a distinct dining experience especially to restaurant customers who are environmentally conscious. Customers increasingly value atmosphere in the entire dining experience, which is consistent with the feature of physical environment in the study.

Interior design of a restaurant may influence how long customers stay in the restaurant (Wakefield and Blodgett, 1996). For example, color is a strong visual component of a physical setting that draws the customer’s attention and stimulates emotional responses (Bellizzi and Hite, 1992). The findings of social status as an

influential factor are consistent with the study of Peters (2005) and Cheng (2006) who highlighted that restaurant patron associated their dining out with social status and esteem. Restaurant management can opt for a trendy and classy image to attract customers who are concerned about their personal image when dining out. For example, a restaurant that has stylish furnishing and interior design, professional-looking wait staff, and quality tableware may attract diners who are looking for a fine dining environment that can boost their self-esteem.

Among these eight satisfaction factors of the seating experience, the availability of additional facilities is important. The availability of waiting activities helping customers to fill their time while waiting for their order to be taken or served, divert their attention from focusing on a restaurant's slow service and for children to play and thereby allow their parents to have their meal without interruption. This facility is relatively important for the customers due to the long waiting time in Malay restaurants in Malaysia in comparison to waiting time at Indian Muslim restaurants (Zahari and Othman, 2005). As this study was conducted at Malay family restaurants, customers dining at the restaurants with children are a common scenario. The prayer room facility that equipped with prayer costume was two of the dining satisfaction factors for Muslim customers and staff. This was because this study was conducted at Malay restaurants where the majority of restaurant customers and staff are Muslim who are obligated to pray five times a day. Thus, to attract more customers, especially among Muslims, restaurateurs should provide these facilities to fulfil the needs of those targeted groups of customer.

6.2.3.2 Food Experience

This study found that the meal experience stage consists of more categories and sub-categories (refer to figure 4.12) of factors influencing customer dining satisfaction than any other stage in the dining experience process. Those categories and sub-categories can be grouped as service quality and divided into two major themes: intangible factors (interaction between customer and service provider) and tangible factors (food). This finding is in line with Lovelock's (1985) framework that stated

that food offerings in restaurants are the core attributes while the physical environment and service are secondary attributes of customer satisfaction.

This study found that the tangible factor of service quality of this study is food. Food quality and the unique Malay cultural experience (food authenticity and Malay traditional eating concept) were two factors that influenced customer dining satisfaction. Food quality was the main theme that received more attention in the meal experience stage (refer to Figure 4.11). This finding is consistent with the finding of Kivela *et al.*, (1999b); Raajpoot (2002); Sulek and Hensley (2004) who found that food is the most essential part of the overall restaurant experience. Peri (2006) viewed food quality as an absolute requirement in order to satisfy the needs and expectations of restaurant customers. Collison and Turner (1988) used a hedonic scale and multiple regressions to compare two types of meal experience. They also reported that tangible food was the dominant factor in the quality of everyday meal experiences, but for “special” meals, such as Christmas dinner, environment and atmosphere were more important.

The concept of food quality is subjective and, while it may be interpreted in very different ways, it is a significant predictor of customer satisfaction. Rhu and Han (2009) suggested that the quality of food is evaluated using such criteria as being delicious, nutritious, and visually attractive. Although there is no consensus on the attributes of food quality, a thorough review of the literature revealed that the general description of food quality among researchers focuses on: menu variety (Reynolds & Hwang, 2006), food presentation (Namkung and Jang (2007); healthy food options (Namkung and Jang (2007); food taste (George, 2001); freshness (Gupta *et al.*, 2007); food temperature (Kivela, 1999b), Food hygiene (Johns and Tyas, 1996); food consistency (Dube *et al.*, (1994); and portion size (Johns and Tyas, 1996). This study of Malay restaurants indicated similarly in terms of food quality attributes that satisfied customers at the three Malay restaurants. They are tasty dishes with fresh ingredients, appealing presentation, appropriate food consistency and food crispiness, providing healthy (nutritious) menu option, and the offering of a variety of choices on the menu. The finding of this study, however, added food authenticity as an attribute

of food quality which is similar to Riley (1994) who recommended that restaurants should strive for “authentic” food.

Muhammad and Chan (2011) identified that it is important for ethnic restaurant to maintain the authentic food (cuisine) of that particular premises. The study undertaken for this thesis also found that the attributes of food authenticity led to customer dining satisfaction and consisted of a sufficient amount of fresh seasoning and ingredients, the use of home-made spice, fresh cooking oil, fresh raw ingredients and cooked by an expert chef. *Food taste* was found as a key attribute in food that influenced restaurant customer satisfaction and future behavior intentions and this is consistent with Kivela *et al.*'s, (1999b) finding. Previous research has noted that freshness of food as a crucial intrinsic quality cue (Acebro'n and Dopico, 2000; Johns and Tyas, 1996; and Kivela *et al.*, 1999b). The food taste was associated with the freshness of food ingredients where the indicators of the fresh state of food are crispness, juiciness, and aroma (Pe'neau *et al.*, 2006).

Malay ethnic restaurants have the advantage of offering exotic dishes with distinctive flavors, as opposed to conventional restaurants that serve dishes that can usually be prepared at home. Thus, the Malay ethnic restaurateurs should emphasize the use of authentic fresh ingredients on the menu. However, these ingredients need to be described clearly (e.g. written on the menu or verbally by the wait staff), so that consumers do not shy away from the meals that they know nothing about, especially for the dishes that have foreign names. That this is important as indicated by findings of studies conducted elsewhere. A study of food ethnicity by Meiselman and Bell (1992) found that adding standard food components such as cheese to pasta made it seem more British to consumers, but a product that was given an Italian name was perceived as more ethnic. Bell and Meiselman (1995) found that sauces made foods seem “ethnic”. An Italian theme to menus and decor not only increased consumers’ perceptions of restaurant ethnicity, but also raised overall perceptions of food quality and the meal experience (Bell *et al.*, 1994). Warde *et al.*, (1999) also argued that contemporary Western populations lack a fixed cultural system, and this drives individuals to seek an increasingly wide variety of aesthetically equivalent cultural genres. Reynolds (1993) regrets that food available to tourists on Bali is losing its

authenticity through a reverse of this process. Food therefore is one of the last areas of authenticity that is affordable on a regular basis by the tourist. Yet because it cannot be transported, preserved or put in a galley [sic, means gallery] to be revered it is the easiest to copy and degrade (Reynolds, 1993). Poor copies of all art forms, such as carvings and artifacts and ersatz Western food are being offered as real 'cultural' expediency. The view of traditional culture as seen by the tourist to Bali is being eroded (Reynolds, 1993).

Healthy options refer to nutritious and healthy food offerings. According to Johns and Tyas (1996), healthy food could have a significant effect on the customers' perceived evaluation of the restaurant experience. The notable thing is that many restaurant customers are interested in their health, so the availability of nutritious food items has become increasingly important as one of the core properties of dining satisfaction (Sulek and Hensley, 2004). This food quality attribute, was also mentioned as one of the factors that influenced customer dining satisfaction in the restaurants where the research for this thesis was conducted. This might be because the need and awareness of Malaysian Malay restaurant customers towards the importance of balance food intake, which forces the Malay restaurateurs to fulfill their need even though the Malaysians have been exposed to very rich dishes particularly rice as the staple diet in a Malay meal that is rich with complex carbohydrate. The rice is eaten together with traditional Malay dishes where the main ingredients are red meat (chicken, mutton and beef), fish and seafood (refer to 2.2.4.2i) that rich with protein and cooked with coconut milk that contains of fat. Culturally, in the Malay meal, vegetables and salad were complementary dishes, while most of Malay desert is dominated by local *kuih*: the main ingredients of which are various flours and *umbisi*, pudding and sweet cereal porridge that also cooked with coconut milk. This eating culture of Malaysians as not reflected in the limited healthy menu options offered at Malaysian Malay restaurants and as a result, the healthy menu options was found as a part of an important attribute for food quality that led to customer satisfaction of this study. To meet the current trends and demand of a healthy lifestyle, Malay ethnic restaurants, however, should offer healthy food choices such as vegetarian, gluten-free or low-fat meals and also offer special dishes and change the specials regularly to satisfy adventurous diners who like to try new flavors.

Temperature is another attribute of food quality (Johns and Tyas, 1996; Kivela *et al.*, 1999b). Temperature, interacting with other sensory properties such as taste, smell, and sight, affects how the flavor of food was evaluated (Delwiche, 2004). However, food temperature was not an attribute of food quality found in this study. This might be because Malaysian food that is already hot and spicy in taste due to the use of a lot of chilies, dried spices and fresh herbs mixture (*rempah*) (refer to 2.2.4.2i) and the hot as well as humid climate of Malaysia with average temperature of 34°C which makes the food quality attribute of food temperature less important. The finding of this study is inconsistent with Namkung and Jang (2008), Sulek and Hensley (2004), and Johns and Tyas (1996) who conducted their studies in countries with a cold climate. The nature of food in those studies contained of less spice ingredients with cheese and bread as a staple food. In this scenario the attribute of temperature was found to be a major factor in the customer's dining experience satisfaction.

On the top of the food quality attributes, this study found that a wide range of meals with a diverse range of culinary styles met the need of customers at the Malay restaurants. *Menu variety* (refer to 5.2.5.7i) and *food presentation* and display (refer to 5.2.5.7ii) were core restaurant services that influenced customer satisfaction. Clark and Wood (1998) reported that the quality and variety of food are the key determinants in consumer loyalty. The availability of menu variety at the Malay restaurants was important. Each restaurant had its own list of different modern and traditional menu types. Each set of those types of menus had different daily menu themes besides the restaurants have own special menu (refer to 5.2.5.7i). Thus, there was a long list of menu items available in the Malay restaurants in this study that was influenced by the immigrants who brought their own menu to Malaysia and by the mixed marriage between the three major races of Malaysia (Malay, Chinese and Indian). Each of these races has their own traditional menus. In addition menus from neighbouring countries like Indonesia and Thailand and State menu differences within Malaysia are an influence on the content of the menus. For example, each State has its own specialty in terms of food taste and decoration even though they are all cooking the same food and using the same local ingredients (refer to 2.2.4.2i).

Food presentation is defined as how attractively the food is presented and decorated. Kivela *et al.*, (1999) pointed out that the presentation of food is a key food attribute in modeling dining satisfaction. The findings of this study of Malay restaurants indicated that attractive food presentation and display at a restaurant buffet table resulted in satisfying and motivating the customers who went on to convey positive word-of-mouth publicity about their satisfaction to others. The attractive food presentation and display is associated with having a combination of modern and traditional food containers, specific food containers, the arrangement of these food containers at various levels, efficient food organization on the buffet table and variations of food garnishing and food colour combination. The findings of this study is in line with that of Raajpoot (2002) who also described food presentation as one of the product/service factors in the tangible quality scale.

This study has found that the Malay traditional eating concept and private dining space was a unique cultural experience (refer to 5.2.5.3) and contributed to customer dining satisfaction. This finding suggests that the Malay ethnic restaurants have the advantage of offering exotic dining experiences which can satisfy customers who want to escape from their ordinary dining experience. Malay ethnic restaurateurs can design their restaurant's concept to reflect and maintain the Malay ethnic authenticity in order to give diners the impression that they have been exposed to a different dining experience. The whole restaurant experience including settings, atmosphere, and restaurant staff can be designed to boost the Malay ethnic concept. The incorporation of traditional artwork, music, staff uniform and/or other Malay ethnic features is a way to communicate Malay ethnic and cultural identity, which may also provide the additional benefit of making diners feel as if they were transformed into another exotic land. Thus, the findings from this study offer ethnic Malay restaurateurs valuable information and insights with which to assess their operation, improve their competitiveness and assist them in developing more efficient marketing and operational strategies to attract and retain customers. The findings identify this stage in the dining experience process are significant satisfaction factors that influence customers to dine at mid-market Malay ethnic restaurants.

6.2.3.3 Service Quality Experience

Fornell *et al.*, (1996) and Oliver (1997) have shown that perceived quality is one of the core determinants of overall satisfaction. The attributes of service quality from Parasuraman *et al.*'s, (1988) original work are reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. *Reliability* refers to the ability to perform the promised services dependably and accurately. *Responsiveness* means willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service. *Assurance* is defined as the knowledge and courtesy of employees, as well as their ability to convey trust and confidence. In addition, *empathy* refers to the provision of caring and individualized attention to customers.

The findings of this study indicated that intangible factors influence customer satisfaction at the meal experience stage and this is consistent with those attributes of service quality identified by Parasuraman *et al.*'s (1988). They are: *Reliability*: on time attending customers (refer to 5.2.5.1); on time serving of customer's order (refer to 5.2.5.4) accuracy in getting things right (refer to 5.2.5.5); and serving customer's group order simultaneously (refer to 5.2.5.6); *Responsiveness*: being attended by professional staff (responsive towards request and complaint) (refer to 5.2.5.2i); *Assurance*: staff performance (knowledgeable about restaurant product and service and ability to communicate variety of languages) (refer to 5.2.5.2iii); good personality traits (patient, smile, polite, willing to serve and helpful) (refer to 5.2.5.2v); and *Empathy*: treating customers equally (refer to 5.2.5.2ii). The long list of service quality attributes as findings of this study is in consistent with the satisfaction factors found in restaurant service across the globe. For instance Becker *et al.*, (1999) found the Asians valued respect, unobtrusive helpfulness and personal cleanliness; USA and Hong Kong students had very different expectations of restaurant service while USA students required eye contact, personalization and product knowledge.

In conclusion, apart from providing empirical support for the factors influencing customer satisfaction that have been identified in previous studies, this study also identified a factor that is unique to the Malaysian Malay foodservice market. The Malay restaurant concept factor in this study is comprised of: authentic menu/food,

authentic ambience (décor and atmosphere: traditional background live music) and authentic service (eating style, private dining area and staff uniform). These factors may be appropriate as a choice factor for other international studies on ethnic restaurant customer satisfaction.

6.2.4 The Post-Meal Experience

Payment and departure were the two final stages that influenced customer satisfaction: the post-meal experience.

6.2.4.1 The Payment Experience

Previous studies have shown that satisfaction with the payment experience at a restaurant is associated with reasonable price (Qu, 1997, Andaleeb and Conway, 2006) and value for money (Qu, 1997; Yuksel and Yuksel, 2002). These authors suggested that price moderates the relationship between quality of food and customer satisfaction. When customers perceive that the price is reasonable, their satisfaction with food quality is enhanced. In addition, quality of service increases customers' satisfaction levels, and customer's perception of the reasonable price enhances the effect of quality of service on customer satisfaction. Further, when customers feel that the physical environment reflects quality, such as attractive interior design/décor and pleasant music/colour/lighting, their satisfaction level increases. Customers' perception of reasonable price also increases the effect of the quality of physical environment on their satisfaction in quick-casual restaurants.

However, this study found an additional factor that influenced customer satisfaction in the payment experience of dining stage, which was the self-service payment system (refer to 5.2.6). In a self-service payment system of this study, food price is determined at the customers' table and bill is left on their table. This payment system allowed the customers to have power to control their dining activities through determining the time for paying the bill for any products/services that they consumed at the restaurants, besides ensuring that the bill is accurate. Heung *et al.*, (2000); and

Kelly & Carvell (1987) found that determining accuracy of the billing process is among the most critical service related factors that diners use in their evaluation of dining experience. Therefore, the staff that are responsible for billing should be trained to take extra care when calculating the total bill by rechecking the diners' list of orders and prices.

Although reasonable price and value for money were not a major factor that led to dining satisfaction, the mid-market nature of Malay ethnic restaurateurs means that they need to ensure customers perceive that they have received good value from dining at their restaurants. Unlike customers of the lower-price restaurants, it is not just the price of the meal that reflects the value at mid-market restaurants. Instead, the mid-market restaurant goers are likely to perceive value for money from the combination of other offerings such as specialty meals, a high level of service quality, and a pleasant atmosphere (Oh, 2000). Again, mid-market restaurateurs need to make sure consumers perceive a pleasurable experience. For example, customers should be accommodated for their special needs. Any service-related or food-related defects should be resolved promptly and with care as dissatisfied customers are likely to spread negative word-of-mouth (Mangold *et al.*, 1999; and Susskind, 2002).

6.2.4.2 The Departure Experience

This study indicated every service provider that came into contact with the restaurant customers must take personal pride and responsibility to ensure a great dining experience of the customers and the customers get what they expected regardless of the payment. The findings of this study showed the influence of verbal and non-verbal communication from the service provider to the customers through expression of gratitude especially thanking the customers, being bid farewell and being escorted to the exit door (refer to 5.2.7) were factors that influenced customer satisfaction at the departure stage of dining experience process. Dentler *et al.*, (2010) recognised the importance of synchronized non-verbal and verbal communication elements in restaurant service. The finding of their study on Verbal and Non-verbal Communication Effects on Consumer Satisfaction of Service Quality indicated that non-verbal (smile, make eye contact, nod, greet and thank) dominates verbal

influences on service quality judgments and satisfaction. However, these satisfaction factors of the departure dining experience stage for being bid farewell and being escorted to the exit door were not mentioned in the previous studies by Dentler *et al.*, (2010); Parasuraman (1988); Kivela (1999); Oh (2000), Yuksel and Yuksel (2002); Raajpoot (2002); Sulek and Hensley (2004); Reynolds & Hwang (2006); Gupta *et al.*, (2007), Ryu and Jang (2008); Krishnaswamy and Karen (2009); and Hwang and Zhao (2010).

6.3 SUMMARIES AND OVERALL COMPARISON WITH THE LITERATURE

This study confirmed that the dining experience is a continuous process which starts with the customers' first engagement with the restaurant and continues until they leave the restaurant at the departure stage. Therefore, to ensure customers' loyalty, restaurateurs need to ensure all stages (pre-meal experience, during actual meal experience and post-meal experience) in the dining process provide holistic satisfaction to every customer who dines at the restaurant.

Table 6.1a and Table 6.1b shows a summary of the research findings from the previous studies that were conducted either from a European perspective, for example Dube *et al.*, (1994), John and Tyas (1996) and Yuksel and Yuksel (2002) or Asian perspectives like Oh and Jeong (1996), Qu (1997), and Kivela (1999). Those studies have come up with typical limited findings of the tangible factors influencing customer satisfaction. This is probably because they have all used survey methods where items and answers of the questionnaire used in the survey were prepared by the researchers who focused on quantitative methodology for data collection and statistical data analysis.

This gap in the literature on methodological approach of identifying factors influencing customer satisfaction led to this study adopting a qualitative approach, applying multiple methods of data collecting, such as in-depth interviews,

observations, artefacts and documentary evidence as well as collecting the data in restaurant settings with the intention of identifying whether using multiple research methods will generate different results for the factors of customer satisfaction in Malaysian Malay restaurants. It is also about depth of analysis from a multiple method case study approach applied.

Table 6.1a: Summary of Customer Satisfaction Factors of Previous Studies

Factors influencing Customer satisfaction according to research author			
Dube <i>et al.</i> , (1994)	John and Tyas (1996)	Oh and Jeong (1996)	Qu (1997)
1. Food tastiness 2. Food consistency 3. Menu variety 4. Attentiveness of staff 5. Helpfulness of staff 6. Wait for seating 7. atmosphere	1. Appearance of the food is attractive 2. Food hygienically prepared and served 3. Food served at the correct temperature 4. Can find something on the menu 5. Serve good portions 6. Food tastes good 7. Customers can contact manager 8. Food choice balanced and healthy 9. Give customers value for money 10. Offer good choice of dishes 11. Regularly change selection of dishes 12. Food is fresh	1. Food Tastiness of food Food quality Portion size Ingredient freshness Food price 2. Service Quick food delivery Employees' greeting Responsiveness Employee attitude 3. Amenity Restaurant spaciousness Quiet atmosphere Comfortable seating 4. Appearance Neat establishment Cleanliness 5. Convenience Menu item available No waiting Dining room temperature Convenient location	1. Food quality consistency 2. Smorgasbord 3. Friendliness 4. Advertising and promotion 5. Menu variety 6. Cleanliness 7. Price 8. Reputation 9. Food quality 10. Level of service 11. Price and value 12. Atmosphere 13. Promptness of service 14. Location

Table 6.1b: Summary of Customer Satisfaction Factors of Previous Studies (cont.)

Factors influencing Customer satisfaction according to research author			
Kivela (1999b)	Yuksel and Yuksel (2002)	Hwang and Zhao (2010)	Tian and Wang (2010)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Food <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Food presentation - Menu variety - Nutritious food - Tastiness of food -Freshness of food -Temperature of food 2. Service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Friendly, polite and helpful staff - Attentive staff -Staff greet customers - Efficient service -Staff willing to serve -Staff have food and beverage knowledge -Sympathetic handling of complaints 3. Atmosphere <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Level of comfort in the restaurant -Level of noise in the restaurant -View from the restaurant -Cleanliness of the restaurant - Dining privacy -Restaurant's temperature -Restaurant's appearance - Staff appearance 4. Convenience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Handling of telephone reservations -Parking convenience 5. A restaurant that offers... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -A new dining experience -Food of a consistent standard -Feels comfortable to eat there -Service of a consistent standard 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Value seekers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • product quality • service quality • menu diversity • noise 2. Service seekers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • service quality • product quality • menu diversity • speed of service 3.Adventurous food seekers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • service quality • convenience • location 4. Atmosphere seekers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • product quality • price-value 5. Healthy food seekers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • service quality • product quality • facilities • menu diversity 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. good value 2. tasty food 3. restaurant cleanness 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. reliability, 2. assurance, 3. empathy, 4. cultural awareness, 5. cultural atmosphere, 6. responsiveness, 7. control

The findings of this study emerged from the evaluation by customers of the pre-meal experience, the actual meal experience and post-meal experience. A further theoretical refinement considers that customers gauge their experience according to how well actual performance confirms or disconfirms their expectations (expectancy disconfirmation theory). Thus, in principle customer attitudes towards a meal experience can be measured by subtracting expectation from the actual performance. A favorable overall attitude to a restaurant resulted in repeat business.

As a result, the basic findings of this study found that the factors influencing customer satisfaction with the dining experience were grouped according to stages of customers' dining process (antecedent, reservation, arrival, seating, meal payment and departure). The dining experience process was found as a continuous process which started with the customers' first engagement with the restaurant and continued until they left the restaurant. The tangible and intangible factors that influenced satisfaction at each stage of the dining process were integrated together (did not work as separate entities) to produce valuable, meaningful, holistic and memorable dining experience not only for that particular stage of dining process but also as a whole dining experience process. These research findings, which provided a contribution to knowledge, close the gap in determining factors influencing customer satisfaction dining experience.

6.4 DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION OF THE AGGREGATED FINDINGS

This section presents a set of findings that are at a higher aggregated level of specification in terms of findings than has been the case in the discussion so far. Thus this section discusses the findings in relation to the theories outlined in Chapter Two. This is to demonstrate how existing theories might help in explaining the findings.

6.4.1 Discussion of the Overall Aggregated Findings

This sub-section discusses the aggregated findings (refer to table 6.2) that were derived from cognitive evaluation process of the factors influencing customer satisfaction at each stage of dining process: antecedent (Figure 5.2), reservation (Figure 5.3), arrival (Figure 5.4), seating (Figure 5.5), meal (Figure 5.6), payment (Figure 5.8) and departure (Figure 5.9). In each aggregated findings, there was a key point that indicated satisfaction.

Table 6.2: The Overall Aggregated Findings According to Dining Experience Stage

DINING EXPERIENCE STAGE	AGGREGATED FINDINGS
Antecedent Experience	Satisfaction is achieved from what happen when the customers actually went to the restaurant and found that they <u>got what they expected</u>
a) First Visit customers	Satisfaction is achieved when the restaurants managed to deliver products and services that <u>fulfil the hopes</u> of the customers.
b) Return Visit customers	Product performance available at the restaurants <u>confirmed</u> the customers' expectation. What customers experienced was <u>much better</u> than they expected
Reservation Experience	Satisfaction is emerged when the customers are allowed to <u>control their own dining activities</u> . Satisfaction is achieved when customers' <u>expectation is fulfilled</u> .
Experience	<u>Common service</u> available in customer dining experience causes <u>dis-satisfaction if not present</u> . <u>Adequate quality</u> of service leads to satisfaction. Satisfaction occurred when customers' <u>expectation is met</u> . Satisfaction is achieved when customers <u>receive what they wanted</u> from the restaurant and lead to loyalty. Satisfaction is achieved when the restaurants of study managed to <u>fulfil the needs</u> of customers.
	<u>dissatisfaction if they do not exist</u> . It does not necessarily lead to satisfaction. Satisfaction is developed due to the restaurants provided service (restaurant capacity) that is <u>equal to customers' expectation</u> . Satisfaction because of <u>pleasurable feelings</u> that emerged from <u>obtaining what restaurants provided to them</u> . Satisfaction is developed when the customers are allowed to control their dining activities. Satisfaction is emerged when the restaurants <u>offer something than can replace dis-satisfaction</u> of the customers. <u>Without</u> the restaurant cleanliness it <u>caused dis-satisfaction</u> of customer dining experience. Satisfaction occurred when the restaurant <u>fulfil a basic need</u> of the customer. Satisfaction level is increase when what was provided is <u>more than needed</u> . Satisfaction is developed when the restaurants manage to <u>fulfil customers' hopes</u> .
	Satisfaction emerged when the restaurants offer something that <u>can replace dis-satisfaction</u> of the customers. Satisfaction is achieved when the restaurants provide staff who can perform <u>more than what the customers want</u> . Satisfaction is developed when the restaurants provide something <u>outstanding from the customers' usual dining experience</u> . Satisfaction occurred when the restaurants provide <u>more than ordinary (unusual)</u> dining experience. Satisfaction because of the restaurants managed to <u>fulfil customers' request</u> . Satisfaction emerged when the restaurants managed to provide customers' request Satisfaction is developed when the restaurants offer products that <u>beyond customers need</u> .
	Satisfaction achieved when customers have power to <u>control/choose their owns dining activities</u> .
	Satisfaction developed when the customers <u>get what they expected</u> .

In producing the aggregated finding the Gestalt theory principles of averaging or grouping (Schiffman, 2001) were adopted:

- (1) *Proximity/nearness*: individual elements are grouped together according to a similar perceived distance, which can be far or close.
- (2) *Similarity*: elements that are similar physically tend to be grouped together.
- (3) *Continuity*: elements that appear to point in the same direction are readily perceived as forming a group (continuations of an aspect of a curve), such as along a straight line or simple curve.
- (4) *Common fate*: elements that move in the same direction are perceptually grouped together. This has commonality with the principle of similarity, but is applied to moving elements.
- (5) *Symmetry*: priority in grouping is given to naturally balanced, symmetrical figures over asymmetrical ones. Symmetry is generally considered a critical factor in aesthetics.
- (6) *Closure*: grouping occurs in a way that favors perception of a more enclosed or complete figure.

The key points of satisfaction that derived from cognitive evaluation process were grouped according to themes of: fulfilled basic need, adequate/ equal/ as expected/ as hoped for/ as wanted/ fulfilled hope, it existing can replace dis-satisfaction/ cause dis-satisfaction if not present, control own dining activities, more than ordinary, more than expected/needed, and outstanding than ordinary (Table 6.3). Those themes were tabulated according to the level of satisfaction (Table 6.4).

Table 6.3: The Aggregated Findings that Developed Theme of Satisfaction

AGGREGATED FINDINGS	THEMES OF SATISFACTION
Satisfaction is developed when the restaurants provide something <u>outstanding from the customers' usual dining experience</u> . -Meal Experience	Outstanding than ordinary
Satisfaction occurred when the restaurants provide <u>more than ordinary (unusual) dining experience</u> . -Meal Experience	More than ordinary
Satisfaction is developed when the restaurants offer products that <u>beyond customers need</u> . -Meal Experience	More than expected/needed
Satisfaction is achieved when the restaurants provide staff who can perform <u>more than what the customers want</u> . -Meal Experience	
Satisfaction level is increase when what was provided is <u>more than needed</u> . -Seating Experience	
What customers experienced was <u>much better</u> than they expected. -Return Visit of Antecedent Experience	
Satisfaction is achieved from what happen when the customers actually went to the restaurant and found that they <u>got what they expected</u> – -First Visit of Antecedent Experience	Adequate/ Equal/ As Expected/As hope/ As wanted/ Fulfilled hope
Product performance available at the restaurants <u>confirmed</u> the customers' expectation. -Return Visit of Antecedent Experience	
<u>Adequate quality</u> of service leads to satisfaction. -Arrival Experience	
Satisfaction occurred when customers' <u>expectation is met</u> . -Arrival Experience	
Satisfaction is achieved when customers <u>receive what they wanted</u> from the restaurant and lead to Loyalty. -Arrival Experience	
Satisfaction is developed due to the restaurants provided service (restaurant capacity) that is <u>equal to customers' expectation</u> . -Seating Experience	
Satisfaction because of <u>pleasurable feelings</u> that emerged from <u>obtaining what restaurants provided to them</u> . -Seating Experience	
Satisfaction emerged when the restaurants managed to provide customers' request <u>as expected</u> . -Meal Experience	
Satisfaction developed when the customers <u>get what they expected</u> – -Departure Experience	
Satisfaction is achieved when the restaurants managed to deliver products and services that <u>fulfil the hopes</u> of the customers. -First Visit of Antecedent Experience	
Satisfaction is achieved when customers' <u>expectation is fulfilled</u> . -Reservation Experience	
Satisfaction is achieved when the restaurants of study managed to <u>fulfil the needs</u> of customers. -Arrival Experience	
Satisfaction is developed when the restaurants manage to <u>fulfil customers' hopes</u> . -Seating Experience	
Satisfaction because of the restaurants managed to <u>fulfil customers' request</u> . -Meal Experience	
Common service available in customer dining experience causes <u>dis-satisfaction if not present</u> . -Arrival Experience	(It existing can replace dis-satisfaction/ cause dis-satisfaction if not present)
May <u>lead to dissatisfaction if they do not exist</u> . It does not necessarily lead to satisfaction. -Seating Experience	
Common service available in customer dining experience causes <u>dis-satisfaction if not present</u> . -Arrival Experience	
Without the restaurant cleanliness it <u>caused dis-satisfaction</u> of customer dining experience. -Seating Experience	
Satisfaction emerged when the restaurants offer something that <u>can replace dis-satisfaction</u> of the customers. -Meal Experience	
Satisfaction is emerged when the restaurants <u>offer something than can replace dis-satisfaction</u> of the customers. -Seating Experience	
Satisfaction is emerged when the customers are allowed to <u>control their own dining activities</u> . -Reservation Experience	Control own dining activities
Satisfaction is developed when the customers are allowed to control their dining activities. -Seating Experience	
Satisfaction achieved when customers have power to <u>control/choose their owns dining activities</u> . -Payment Experience	
Satisfaction occurred when the restaurant <u>fulfil a basic need</u> of the customer. -Seating Experience	Fulfilled basic need

Table 6.3 suggested how restaurant customers satisfy various personal needs in the context of the dining experience. This finding is aligned with Maslow's hierarchy theory of needs where there is a general pattern of satisfaction that satisfied customers with the dining experience that followed generally the same sequence. A customer could not recognize or pursue the next higher need in the hierarchy until he/ she currently recognized need was substantially or completely satisfied, a concept called *prepotency*. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is shown in Table 6.5. It is often illustrated as a pyramid with the survival need at the broad-based bottom and the self-actualization need at the narrow top. Literature showed that majority of previous study applied the theory Maslow in relation to job/ employees satisfaction and rarely employ in customer satisfaction of dining experience. This study that adopted qualitative research approach, however, managed to venture the role of Maslow theory in customer dining experience in some extent provide a contribution to the aggregated finding of this study.

Table 6.4: The Hierarchy of Satisfaction Theme

Level	Theme of satisfaction
Low	Fulfilled basic need
Moderate	Adequate/ Equal/ As Expected/As hope/ As wanted/ Fulfilled hope
	It existing can replace dis-satisfaction/ cause dis-satisfaction if not present
	Control own dining activities
High	More than ordinary
	More than expected/needed
Highest	Outstanding than ordinary

The lowest level satisfaction is achieved when the basic need of the customer dining at the restaurant is fulfilled or what restaurants provided is just adequate or equal with customer expectation. The moderate level of satisfaction is achieved when customers can control their own dining activities. The high level of satisfaction is derived when the restaurants offer something that above ordinary or more than customer's expectation. The highest level of satisfaction is achieved when the restaurant provide something that outstanding than ordinary needs.

Table 6.5: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Level	Type of Need	Examples
1	Physiological	Thirst, sex, hunger
2	Safety	Security, stability, protection
3	Love and Belongingness	To escape loneliness, love and be loved, and gain a sense of belonging
4	Esteem	Self-respect, the respect others
5	Self-actualization	To fulfil one's potentialities

6.4.2 Discussion of the Meal Experience Aggregated Findings

This subsection discusses and evaluates the aggregated findings of the meal experience in relation to customer satisfaction theories particularly the theories of Gestalt, Attribution, Equity, Expectancy-Disconfirmation, Classical Conditioning and Social Cognitive.

6.4.2.1 The Gestalt Theory

Overall the findings of this study showed that total dining satisfaction with the meal experience is the result of the combination of tangible and intangible factors that do not work as separate entities in providing customers with total satisfaction (refer to Table 4.5). The specific and overall foci of the findings of this study are presented in Table 6.6. The findings of this study indicated that intangible factors influencing customer satisfaction at the meal experience stage is consistent with the two attributes of service quality identified by Parasuraman *et al.*, (1988): *assurance* (good personality traits of staff - refer to 5.2.5.2v) and *empathy* (treating customers equally - refer to 5.2.5.2ii).

Table 6.6: Specific and Overall Focus of Findings of the Study

Overall Focus of Finding	Specific Findings
1.Meal experience consists of more categories and subcategories of customer satisfaction factors than other stages in the dining experience process.	
2. When regular customers dining experience meets their expectations, this evaluation results in customer satisfaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Regular customers have more realistic expectations and are more satisfied with their choice. b) Learning from previous, positive service experience may result in more accurate and stable expectation. c) Regular customers may make better choice when repurchasing.
3.The formation of expectations of first visit customers may be incorrect and it may result in tentative and uncertain expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) First visit customers develop expectations based on experience of others, prior to their own dining experience. b) First visit walk-in customers have low expectations prior to visit and the expectations are developed after experiencing the dining process.
4.Tangible and intangible factors influencing customer satisfaction have great influences on meal experience. Those tangible and intangible elements generate pleasurable feelings and cause positive behavioural changes in customers.	
5.The combination of tangible and intangible factors of staff, atmosphere, service and product play an important role in providing meal experience as a dining process rather than seeing them as separate entities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Treating customers equally plays an important role in providing positive psychological impact to customers. b) Unusual restaurant concept of customers' eating style plays an important role in providing unique meal experience and it provides great impact on customers' positive psychological and behavioural changes. c) Good personality traits of staff play an important role in anticipating customers' needs and have great impact on their positive psychological and behavioural changes. d) Menu diversity, food authenticity and food presentation and display play an important role in producing wide restaurant service and have a great impact on customers' psychological and behavioural changes.
6.The factors and management of customer satisfaction have a great influence on customer satisfaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Staff working in small service stations play an important role in attending customers on-time and responding towards their complaints and requests. b) Reacting towards customers' complaints and requests is more important than solving the complaint or request. c) Professional staff are able to respond better to complaints and requests, treat customers equally, promote interesting appearance, and show good personality traits than non professional staff. d) Staff knowledge plays an important role in fulfilling customers' needs and requests and has a great influence on meal experience. e) Menu diversity has great impact in providing customers' choice and freedom to choose. f) Good networking between customer service and

	<p>kitchen staff plays an important role in serving customers the correct group order simultaneously.</p> <p>g) An unusual restaurant concept plays an important role in providing unique meal experience and it makes a great impact on customers' positive psychological and behavioural changes.</p>
7. Pleasurable feelings of satisfaction have great influence on meal experience and makes a great impact on customers' behavioural changes.	<p>a) Good personality traits of staff play an important role in anticipating customers' needs and have great impact on their positive, psychological and behavioural changes.</p> <p>b) An unusual restaurant concept plays an important role in providing unique meal experience and it makes a great impact on customers' positive, psychological and behavioural changes.</p> <p>c) Treating customers equally plays an important role in making a positive, psychological impact on customers.</p> <p>d) Menu diversity, food authenticity and food presentation and display play an important role in producing comprehensive restaurant service and have a great impact on customers' psychological and behavioural changes.</p>
8. External factors of customer satisfaction influence meal experience.	<p>a) Professional staff are better able to respond towards complaints and requests, treat customers equally, promote interesting appearance, and show good personality traits than non professional staff.</p> <p>b) Staff knowledge plays an important role in fulfilling customers' needs and requests and has a great influence on meal experience.</p> <p>c) Menu diversity has a great impact in providing customers' choice and freedom to choose.</p> <p>d) An unusual concept of staff uniform that results in interesting staff appearance has a great impact on dining experience.</p> <p>e) Experience, skills and knowledge are important qualities in producing qualified restaurant managers and have a great impact on developing staff's interesting appearance, good personality traits and ability to treat customers equally.</p> <p>f) Good networking between customer service and kitchen staff plays an important role in serving correct orders and serving orders simultaneously when it is a group order.</p>

The tangible factors of satisfaction were the ambience of an authentic restaurant concept (ambience, décor, eating style, private eating space, and staff uniform) (refer to 5.2.5.3) and food quality (menu diversity, food authenticity and food presentation and display play) (refer to 5.2.5.7). Andrus (1986) believed that the design of the restaurant environment has an impact on service satisfaction. The findings of this study are consistent with the study finding on Restaurant Servicescape, Service Encounter, and Perceived Congruency on Customers' Emotions and Satisfaction that was conducted by Lin and Mattila (2010). They found that perceived congruency (i.e.,

matching the restaurant theme with the food served, and matching the exterior look with the interior décor) had a positive impact on pleasure level, while the impact on arousal was minimal. Further, perceived congruency and pleasure had a joint impact on satisfaction. The tangible cues for the environmental design were visual and auditory cues (function and space, design, color, and music (Aubert-Gamet and Cova, 1999; Gummesson, 1993). The satisfaction factor of food quality is consistent with Peri (2006) who viewed food quality is an absolute requirement to satisfy the needs and expectations of restaurant customers.

The findings of this study indicated that tangible and intangible factors work as a team (not as separate entities) in providing customers with total satisfaction from the dining experience and this is in line with Gestalt theory that suggests a phenomenon (such as perception) is more than the sum of its parts and that analysis of a phenomenon should look at the whole rather than mere elements (O'Donnell *et al.*, 2005). The Gestalt approach emphasizes the role of the overall structure and the relationship between the components in producing perceptual organization and the perception of the whole dominates the perception of its parts. The basic Gestalt theme is that the whole is different from the sum of its parts (Schiffman, 2001).

The alignment of finding of this study with the Gestalt theory clearly shows that the process of the customers' dining experience starts at the moment they get in contact with the restaurant and does not end until they leave the restaurant. Thus, each stage of the dining process provided satisfaction to the customers and therefore it is not just the meal consumption experience stage only (as focused on by previous studies). It is also the pre-meal experience stage and post-meal experience stage that are important. The satisfaction with the pre-meal experience is evaluated by including the satisfaction derived from the reservation and arrival experiences. The consumption of meal experience satisfaction has two parts: the satisfaction of seating experience and the satisfaction of food experience. Meanwhile the satisfaction of post-meal experience included satisfaction with the payment experience and the satisfaction of the departure experience. The satisfaction at each stage of dining process is contributed to by the tangible and intangible factors that work together and reflect the

style and image of restaurant's physical environment and service quality and influence customers' evaluations towards their overall dining experience. The satisfaction at all stages of the dining experience process contributes to the formation of the customers' holistic satisfaction of the dining experience is second contribution to the aggregated finding of this study.

Lin and Mattila's (2010) study applied Gestalt theory, or a holistic approach, to support the argument that an individual's satisfaction upon entering a servicescape is not based on a single stimulus. Applying the concept of Gestalt, the study suggested that people generally receive a variety of stimuli from a restaurant servicescape. However, based on their needs, they organize them cognitively into groups and derive holistic images from the stimuli (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1978). These holistic images serve to satisfy customer needs. The concept of "whole configuration" is especially applicable when evaluating the overall restaurant and the customers' dining experiences. In general, consumers view every service encounter holistically and take into account multiple aspects in their satisfaction evaluations. Thus in these authors' studies, customers are assumed to consider jointly multiple atmospheric cues (e.g., color, music, layout, and design, etc.) and tangible products (e.g., food) and services (e.g., customer, employee interactions).

Table 6.7: Specific and Overall Focus of Findings that Similar to Gestalt Theory

Overall Focus of Finding	Specific Findings
<p>The combination of tangible and intangible factors of staff, atmosphere, service and product play an important role in providing meal experience as a dining process rather than seeing them as separate entities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treating customers equally plays an important role in making a positive psychological impact on customers. (Intangible factor- refer to 5.2.5.2ii) • An unusual restaurant concept (authentic: ambience, décor, eating style, private eating space, staff uniform and eating style) plays an important role in providing a unique meal experience and it makes a great impact on customers' positive, psychological and behavioural changes. (Tangible factor- refer to 5.2.5.3) • Good personality traits of staff play an important role in anticipating customers' needs and have great impact on their positive, psychological and behavioural changes. (Intangible factor- refer to 5.2.5.2iv) • Menu diversity, food authenticity and food presentation and display play an important role in producing comprehensive restaurant service and have a great impact on customers' psychological and behavioural changes. (Tangible factor- refer to 5.2.5.7)

6.4.2.2 Attribution Theory

Attribution theory is about how people make causal explanations: about how they answer questions beginning with *why*? The theory deals with the information they use in making causal inferences (Weiner, 2000) and what they do with this information to answer causal questions (Kelley, 1973). Attributions are important because they are the underpinnings for further judgements, emotional reactions and behaviour. Three dimensions of attributions are: locus (internal, external), which is associated with changes in self-esteem and other effects; stability (stable, unstable), which is associated with changes in expectations and performance; and controllability (controllable, uncontrollable), which is associated with social effects (such as guilt, anger, pity and gratitude) and behaviour (such as decisions to intervene in one's own or another's plight) (Weiner, 2000).

The findings of this study showed the cause of customer satisfaction can be linked to the factors and management of satisfaction in the meal experience (refer to Table 6.8). These can be viewed as consisting of the tangible and intangible elements and can be

referred to as the external attributes. The tangible factors are: serving orders on-time (refer to 5.2.5.4), attending customers by professional staff (refer to 5.2.5.2), the accuracy to serve the correct things (refer to 5.2.5.5), the staff's good personality traits (refer to 5.2.5.2v) and serving orders simultaneously (refer to 5.2.5.6). Meanwhile, intangible factors are: a unique experience (refer to 5.2.5.3), cheerful restaurant interior design (refer to 5.2.4.3), peaceful and relaxing restaurant atmosphere (refer to 5.2.4.5), choice of dining areas (refer to 5.2.4.4), treating customer equally (refer to 5.2.5.2ii) and staff performance (refer to 5.2.5.2iii). These external attributes are responsible for developing customers' pleasurable feelings (internal attributes) and these pleasurable feelings are seen as a form of customer satisfaction.

At the antecedent experience stage, both external and internal attributes were consistently available over time, and later these developed first visit customers' expectations that they would get a similar experience in future visits. After consuming the dining experience, many customers showed positive behavioural changes through repeat visits to the restaurants studied, repurchase of restaurants' products and/or services, and they conveyed positive word-of-mouth recommendations about the restaurants to others.

Table 6.8: Specific and Overall Focus of Findings that Similar to Attribution Theory

Overall Focus of Finding	Specific Findings
1.The combination of tangible and intangible factors of staff, atmosphere, services and products play an important role in providing meal experience as a dining process rather than seeing them as separate entities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Treating customers equally plays an important role in making a positive, psychological impact on customers. b) An unusual restaurant concept of customers' eating style plays an important role in providing a unique meal experience and it makes a great impact on customers' positive, psychological and behavioural changes. c) Good personality traits of staff play an important role in anticipating customers' needs and have great impact on their positive, psychological and behavioural changes. d) Menu diversity, food authenticity and food presentation and display play an important role in producing comprehensive restaurant service and have a great impact on customers' psychological and behavioural changes.
2.The factors and management of customer satisfaction have great influence on customer satisfaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Staff working in small service stations plays an important role in attending customers on-time and responding to their complaints and requests. b) Reacting towards customer's complaints and requests is more important than solving the complaints and requests. c) Professional staff are better able to respond towards complaints and requests, treat customers equally, promote interesting appearance, and show good personality traits than non professional staff. d) Staff knowledge plays an important role in fulfilling customers' needs and requests and has a great influence on meal experience. e) Menu diversity has great impact in providing customers' choice and freedom to choose. f) Good networking between customer service and kitchen staff plays an important role in serving customers the correct group orders simultaneously. g) An unusual restaurant concept plays an important role in providing a unique meal experience and it has a great impact on customers' positive, psychological and behavioural changes.
3. External factors of customer satisfaction influence meal experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Professional staff are more able to respond to complaints and requests, treat customers equally, promote interesting appearance, and show good personality traits than non professional staff. b) Staff knowledge plays an important role in fulfilling customers' needs and requests and has a great influence on meal experience. c) Menu diversity has great impact in providing customers' choice and freedom to choose. d) An unusual concept of staff uniform plays an important role in providing interesting staff appearance and has a great impact on the dining experience. e) Experience, skills and knowledge are important qualities in producing qualified restaurant managers and have a great impact on developing staff's interesting appearance, good personality traits and ability to treat customers equally. f) Good networking between customer service and kitchen staff plays an important role in serving correct orders and serving group orders simultaneously.

The factors and the management of customer satisfaction involve restaurant staff (as service providers) and customers (as service receivers). It means that the customers and restaurant staff have the power to change the nature of the causes (the factors and management of customer satisfaction), particularly in the sense of controlling the production and distribution of restaurant services and/or products during the meal experience. For instance, the choice of receptionist assigning customers private seats was based on the capacity of the requests from the customers. Therefore, it was important for the restaurateurs to ensure the customers got their expected service and/or product, particularly at the desired level. Meanwhile customers were seen to have control of the situation when they had choice and were able to select their desired service and/ or product. For example, providing customers with a reservation service (refer to 5.2.2), choice of dining areas (refer to 5.2.4.4), a variety of menus (refer to 5.2.5.7i) and self-service payment system (refer to 5.2.6) gave them the choice of controlling their behaviour to choose. Therefore, the more customers perceived high levels of control in the service exchange, the more they were satisfied with the output of that exchange. Thus, this showed that the external attributes of factors and management of customer satisfaction have a strong influence on customer satisfaction. Sun (1995) identified customer involvement (i.e. the importance of the choice to the individual at the time of purchase) as a significant factor affecting restaurant customers' satisfaction.

In comparison with Attribution Theory, there were two criteria that affected customers' actions: choice and effect, and commonality. The choice and effect criterion refers to actors having choices in their actions. If the actors are forced to do something beyond their control, the theory does not assign their behaviour to enduring traits of character. People judge an actor's freedom as equal to the difficulty of performing the action (Griffin, 1994). In the context of this study, reservation service, choice of dining areas, a variety of menus and self-service payment system at the restaurants studied left a positive impact on customers because they had many choices and freedom to choose. For instance which menu the customers chose was based on their free choice and not based on any compulsion. Thus, customers' freedom was seen equal to the difficulty in making decisions (refer to Table 6.9).

Table 6.9: Specific and Overall Focus of Findings that Similar to Attribution Theory

Overall Focus of Findings	Specific Findings
The combination of tangible and intangible factors of staff, atmosphere, services and products play an important role in providing meal experience as a dining process rather than seeing them as a separate entity.	Menu diversity has a great impact in providing customers freedom to choose.

The second criterion is commonality. This criterion, however, was applied in this study in a different context. For instance, unusual restaurant concepts (refer to 5.2.5.3) were applied to the customers' eating style and private eating spaces creating a casual environment and making customers feel relaxed. These were pleasurable feelings that can be categorised as internal attributes. These internal attributes later on motivated customers to make positive behavioural changes such as revisiting the restaurant and conveying positive word-of-mouth recommendations about the restaurant to others. In this case, those pleasurable feelings of customers that emerged from their unique experience caused customers' to make behavioural changes (action) (refer to table 6.10).

Table 6.10: Specific and Overall Focus of Findings that Similar To Unique Action Assigning Internal Attributes of Attribution Theory

Overall Focus of Findings	Specific Focus of Findings
Pleasurable feelings of satisfaction have great influence on meal experience and cause great impact on customers' behavioural changes.	An unusual restaurant concept of customers' eating style and private eating space plays an important role in providing a unique meal experience and it makes a great impact on customers' positive psychological and behavioural changes.

Self-perception relates to the way that actors' use their own self-perception to assign causation for their own behaviour. According to this criterion, reinforcements and punishments are external attributes, while internal attributes include the cause of action (Mizerski *et al.*, 1979). In this study, customers perceived that external attributes such as live Malay traditional entertainment provided excitement and feelings of relaxation (refer to 5.2.4.5). These feelings encouraged the customers to revisit the restaurant. In this case, the factors and management of customer

satisfaction of live, Malay, traditional entertainment (external attributes) acted as a reinforcement to develop those pleasurable feelings (internal attributes) which later caused the customers to revisit the restaurant (action). The object-perception aspect of Attribution Theory perceives the object as an actor. The principle of this attribution category establishes attribution based on three factors: consensus, distinctiveness and consistency. Consensus is used if most of the people respond to the stimulus in the same fashion as the actor. Consistency can be used to find out if the actor's response is the same when presented with the stimulus over time. The Distinctiveness factor is used to find out whether or not the actor's response occurs when the stimulus is not present, or when it is unique to this stimulus only.

Table 6.11: Specific and Overall Focus of Findings that Similar to Self-Perception of the Attribution Theory

Overall Focus of Findings	Specific Focus of Findings
Pleasurable feelings of satisfaction have great influence on meal experience and make a great impact on customers' behavioural changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Good personality traits of staff play an important role in anticipating customers' needs and have great impact on their positive psychological and behavioural changes b) An unusual restaurant concept plays an important role in providing a unique meal experience and it provides great impact on customers' positive psychological and behavioural changes c) Treating customers equally plays an important role in providing a positive psychological impact on customers. d) Menu diversity, food authenticity and food presentation and display play an important role in producing comprehensive restaurant service and have a great impact on customers psychological and behavioural changes

In this study, the factors of satisfaction and the management of these factors can be considered as drivers for feelings of satisfaction. However, not all customers responded to a similar stimulation. For instance, only a few customers highlighted 'staff treating customers equally' (refer to 5.2.5.2ii) as a factor of customer satisfaction (refer to Table 6.12 and 6.13). This satisfaction factor was consistent because the restaurant staff practised this service every time they dealt with customers. However, the study also showed that the customers were satisfied even when this driver (treating customers equally) was not present. Thus, customer satisfaction was not unique to this particular driver (treating customers equally) only.

Abramson *et al.*, (1978) proposed the attribution of Globality. Later, Hess *et al.*, (2007) extended the concept of Globality Attribution to marketing, and found that the dissatisfaction is the responsibility of the whole business included employee, store, and firm, but not only one certain party. Therefore, customers are satisfied with service employee, branch store, and firm in the pseudo-relationship but giving credits depend on the relationship foci (people, store, or brand) respectively when encounter satisfaction occasions.

Seo *et al.*, (2011) applied the concept of Attribution in their study examining the effect of relationship quality (trust, commitment, and customer satisfaction) on behavioral intentions as well as the relationship between communication and trust in foodservices for elderly. Their findings indicated that frequent, accurate, and open communication was required to understand the perspectives of others and to build trust. Communication between customer and service provider was important in building and maintaining a relationship. However, communication was often infrequent because communication requires time and effort.

Table 6.12: Specific and Overall Focus of Findings that Similar To Object-Perception of Attribution Theory

Overall Focus of	Specific Focus of Findings
The factors and management of customer satisfaction have a great influence on customer satisfaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Staff working in small service stations plays an important role in attending customers promptly and responding towards their complaints and requests. b) Reacting towards customers' complaints and requests is more important than solving the complaints and requests. c) Professional staff are able to respond better towards complaints and requests, treat customers equally, promote interesting appearance, and show good personality traits than non professional staff. d) Staff knowledge plays an important role in fulfilling customers' needs and requests and has a great influence on meal experience. e) Menu diversity has great impact as it provides customers' with choice and freedom to choose. f) Good networking between customer service and kitchen staff plays an important role in serving correct orders and serving group orders simultaneously. g) Good personality traits of staff play an important role in anticipating customers' needs and have great impact on their positive, psychological and behavioural changes. h) An unusual restaurant concept of customers' eating style plays an important role in providing a unique meal experience and it provides great impact on customers' positive, psychological and behavioural changes. i) Treating customers equally plays an important role in providing a positive, psychological impact on customers. j) Menu diversity, food authenticity and food presentation and display play an important role in producing comprehensive restaurant services and have a great impact on customers' psychological and behavioural changes.

6.4.2.3 Equity Theory

Equity theory relates to people's happiness in relationships where the give and take is about equal (Adams, 1965). This theory focuses on people's feelings about how fairly they have been treated in comparison with the treatment given to others (Mullins, 1992). According to this theory, people's social relationships involve an exchange process. Feelings about the equity of the exchange process are affected by the treatment they receive when compared to what happens to other people (Mullins, 1992). If the ratio of a customer's total outcomes to total inputs is equal, there is equity. In this case, service performance, equity and expectation influences customer satisfaction (Mowen, 1995). Equity theory suggests that customers evaluate service experiences by assessing the balance between what they receive and what they expect, including the cost of the service.

Table 6.13: Specific and Overall Focus of Findings that Similar to the Equity theory

Overall Focus of Findings	Specific Focus of Findings
Pleasurable feelings of satisfaction have great influence on the meal experience and create great impact on customers' behavioural changes.	a) Good personality traits of staff play an important role in anticipating customers' needs and have great impact on their positive, psychological and behavioural changes. b) An unusual restaurant concept plays an important role in providing a unique meal experience and it provides great impact on customers' positive, psychological and behavioural changes. c) Menu diversity, food authenticity and food presentation and display play an important role in producing comprehensive restaurant service and have a great impact on customers' psychological and behavioural changes. d) Treating customers equally plays an important role in making a positive, psychological impact on customers.

Equity theory emphasizes that when customers are presented with an acceptable action, their perceptions of satisfaction increase, usually resulting in an overall positive perception despite situations where there is service failure. However, it is argued that Equity theory is the principal mechanism by which customers, in some cases, evaluate service outcomes against their expectations. An equity examination of this kind can take place at any point during the service exchange. For instance, if the customers experience service that they perceive to be slow they are then faced with the task of having the service experience adjusted, in some way, to align the outcomes with their expectations. Customers typically evaluate the components of a service individually such as food, service, ambience and staff rather than as a total dining experience (Kivela, 1999b, Yuksel and Yuksel, 2002). This type of factor-base evaluation is exemplified by comments such as, “the staff were friendly but the service was delayed”.

The findings of this study found that not all customers' requests could be fulfilled. What was more important to the customers however was not so much finding a solution to their complaint but the way the staff responded towards complaints and requests particularly related to food delay. In the management of food delay complaint handling, once the restaurant staff received a complaint from the customer, the staff would immediately apologise to the customer for the delay and then find out the reason for the delay from the kitchen staff, clarify how long the order will take before it is ready to be served and ask about alternatives to overcome the delay. Later, the staff would get back to the customer to inform them about the reasons for the delay and offer some solutions to solve the problem. For customers' complaints

concerning flavour, the way the restaurant staff managed this complaint was by giving a discount on the food that received the complaint or by replacing the food. This study showed that customers perceived a fair balance between what satisfied them in their meal experience (receiving responsive action from the service provider towards their complaints – refer to 5.2.5.2i) and what they gave to the restaurants in return (satisfied with the respond from the service provider).

This study also showed that customers perceived a fair balance between what satisfied them in their meal experience and what they gave to the restaurants in return. For instance, the factor satisfaction of good personality traits of staff anticipated customers' needs; menu diversity, food authenticity and food presentation and display stimulated customers' appetite; an unusual restaurant concept provided customers' with a unique meal experience and staff treating customers equally made them feel comfortable. These customer satisfaction factors led the customers to make behavioural changes such as conveying positive word-of-mouth recommendations about the restaurant to other people, revisiting the restaurants and repeat purchase of services and/ or products at the restaurants (refer to Table 6.13).

Lynn and McCall (2000) conducted a study to assess the relationship between tip size and evaluations of the service at dining parties of different restaurants. The findings showed that there was positive relationship between tip size and evaluations of service. The result is consistent with the idea that consumers use tips to reward waiters and waitresses for services rendered. This supports the equity theory notion that people are concerned about fairly compensating others for their inputs to exchange relationships. It also suggests that equity concerns about the fairness of others' outcomes apply to consumer transactions as well as to other social exchanges.

6.4.2.4 The Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory

The Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory that was applied in the study by Kivela (1999b, 2000) posits that customer satisfaction is a response to the congruency between an individual's expectations and the actual performance of a product.

Applied to restaurant service, satisfaction may be viewed as a function of the inter-relationship between what customers expect from the restaurant and their perceptions of restaurant performance. The performance evaluation of a provided product and or service of a restaurant are quite subjective and should be linked with some comparison standards (Grigoroudis and Siskos, 2004).

Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory suggests that customers would be satisfied if their initial expectations are met. However, this is not necessarily the case in every consumption situation. Depending on the situation, some customers might be satisfied with their overall meal experience even when the performance falls short of their predictive expectations, but is above the minimum tolerance level. For instance, customers still feel satisfied with their overall meal experience due to having been attended by restaurant staff with good personality traits even though there is a problem of food delay (refer to 5.2.5.4). This showed that good personality traits of the restaurant staff (refer to 5.2.5.2) had a strong, positive impact on the customers that could overcome the negative impact of the food delay. Thus, the use of expectation in the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory is meaningful for the dining experience and involves tangible elements such as food and staff, but might be less meaningful for intangible factors that are very subjective, for example prompt service and good personality traits of staff. This finding is another key contribution of the study.

Table 6.14a: Specific and Overall Focus of Findings that Contrary with the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory

Overall Focus of Findings	Specific Focus of Findings
The combination of tangible and intangible factors of staff, atmosphere, service and products play an important role in providing meal experience as a dining process rather than seeing them as a separate entity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Good personality traits of staff play an important role in anticipating customers' needs and have great impact on their positive, psychological and behavioural changes. b) An unusual restaurant concept of customers' eating style plays an important role in providing a unique meal experience and it has great impact on customers' positive, psychological and behavioural changes. c) Treating customers equally plays an important role in providing positive, psychological impact on customers. d) Menu diversity, food authenticity and food presentation and display play an important role in producing comprehensive restaurant service and have a great impact on customers' psychological and behavioural changes.

The aggregated findings of this study suggest that the scope of the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory is limited. For example the disparity between expectation and actual service is not correlated with customer satisfaction with the restaurant service in general. The Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory is useful in that it provides conceptual guidance in an area of research that has been relatively void of theory and can also help identify needed changes in restaurant practice. However, the use of prior expectations and disconfirmation measures are not applicable in all situations.

The findings of this study indicate that the dining experience involved both return and first time customers (refer to Table 6.14a). The first time customers visited the restaurant either as walk-in customers or through the recommendation of others. The Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory might apply in this study only to the first time customers who visited the restaurant because of being influenced by positive remarks of other customers about the restaurant. It would also apply to people who had been before and were satisfied but when they visited again what they received did not match the expectations that they had as a result of their previous visit. In this case the first time customers used only predictive expectation, based on the positive experience of others (what others have received), as the comparative standard. Before having a meal at those restaurants, they had expectations as a result of marketing information or just because of having seen the restaurant. For instance, this study found menu variety (refer to 5.2.5.7i), food authenticity and cheerful restaurant interior design (refer to 5.2.4.3) constituted customers' antecedent experience. However, their expectations were weak and less accurate because of the expectations developed prior to their own dining experience (refer to Table 6.14b and 6.14c).

Table 6.14b: Specific and Overall Focus of Findings that Contrary with the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory

Overall Focus of Findings	Specific Focus of Findings
The formation of expectations of inexperienced customers may be incorrect and it may result in tentative and uncertain expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) First visit customers develop expectations based on experience of others, prior to their own dining experiences. b) First visit walk-in customers have no expectations prior to visit and the expectations are developed after consuming the dining experience.

Interestingly, the findings of this study also indicated similar factors of satisfaction (menu variety, food authenticity and cheerful restaurant interior design) in the customers' own consumption of the meal experience. These factors of satisfaction can later be an antecedent experience to the customers' next visit. These findings are contrary to the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory that shows learning from previous service experience may result in more accurate and stable expectations. Experienced customers may make better choices when repurchasing, have more realistic expectations and may be more satisfied with their choice. However, this does not invalidate the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory.

Table 6.14c: Specific and Overall Focus of Findings that Are in Contrary to the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory

Overall Focus of Findings	Specific Focus of Findings
When regular customers dining experience meets their expectations, this evaluation results in customer satisfaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Regular customers have more realistic expectations and are more satisfied with their choice. b) Learning from previous positive service experience may result in more accurate and stable expectation. c) Regular customers may make better choices when repurchasing.

The aggregated finding level of this study found that this Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory was not clear when applied to customers who had no information or experience to generate meaningful expectations, for example first visit, walk-in customers who visited the restaurants with few ideas about those restaurants prior to their visit. Thus, they had fewer expectations about the restaurants until they consumed the service and/ or the products of the restaurants (refer to Table 6.15). In this case, the assumption that the formation of firm and realistic attribute-specific expectation occurred prior to every purchase of meal experience may be incorrect and it may result in tentative and uncertain expectations. For instance some customers develop expectations from the location and look of the restaurant before they enter as part of the experience itself, not prior expectations.

Figure 6.15 Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory

Overall Focus of Findings	Specific Focus of Findings
The formation of expectation of inexperienced customers may be incorrect and it may result in tentative and uncertain expectation.	a) First visit customers develop expectations based on the experience of others, prior to their own dining experience. b) First visit, walk-in customers have low expectations prior to their visit and expectation is developed after experiencing the dining process.

6.4.2.5 Classical Conditioning Theory

In comparing Classical Conditioning Theory to this study, it showed that external influences like a person (good personality traits of restaurant staff) and environment (physical environment such as menu diversity, food authenticity, food presentation and display, and unusual restaurant concept) were influential factors that were linked to customer satisfaction (refer to Table 6.16). In the customers' direct experience of dining at the restaurants in this study, the customers analyzed their experiences, through their own thought processes and altered their thinking accordingly (self-reflective capability). Since the customers, as humans, have the ability to mediate the external influences of their own direct experience (vicarious capability), it allows the customers to have personal control over their own thoughts, feelings, motivation and actions (forethought capability) towards what was provided by those external influences (staff and environment). Customer satisfaction was presented in the form of pleasurable feelings, and in turn this encouraged the restaurateurs to properly manage external influences in order to generate more pleasurable feelings in their customers. This phenomenon is known as environment-person, bi-directional interaction according to Classical Conditioning Theory.

The pleasurable feelings of the customers (internal influences) were very important because these feelings led the customers (self-regulatory capability) to form expectations (because humans have a capability to predict outcomes of their behaviour before the behaviour is performed). The information derived was used as a guide for future actions, such as revisiting and repurchasing. This information could avoid time consuming trial and error, and the costs and mistakes of subsequent dining

experiences. The expectations led to positive behavioural changes, including positive word of mouth recommendation, revisiting the restaurant and repurchasing restaurant products and/or services in order to get a similar dining experience on future visits. This is known as person-behaviour, bi-directional interaction according to Classical Conditioning Theory.

Table 6.16: Specific and Overall Focus of Findings that Similar to Classical Conditioning Theory

Overall Focus of Findings	Specific Focus of Findings
1.The factors and management of customer satisfaction have great influence on customer satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Staff working in small service stations play an important role in providing on-time service to customers and responding to their complaints and requests. b) Reacting towards customers' complaints and requests is more important than solving the complaint and requests. c) Professional staff are more able to respond towards complaints and requests, treat customers equally, promote interesting appearance, and show good personality traits than non professional staff. d) Staff knowledge plays an important role in fulfilling customers' needs and requests and has a great influence on meal experience. e) Menu diversity has a great impact on providing customers' choice and freedom to choose. f) Good networking between customer service and kitchen staff plays an important role in serving customers the correct group order simultaneously. g) An unusual restaurant concept plays an important role in providing a unique meal experience and it makes a great impact on customers' positive, psychological and behavioural changes.
2.External factors of customer satisfaction influence meal experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Professional staff are more able to respond towards complaints and requests, treat customers equally, promote interesting appearance, and show good personality traits than non professional staff. b) Staff knowledge plays an important role in fulfilling customers' needs and requests and has a great influence on meal experience. c) Menu diversity has great impact on providing customers' choice and freedom to choose. d) A unusual concept of staff uniform that results in interesting staff appearance has a great impact on dining experience. e) Experience, skill and knowledge are important qualities for producing qualified restaurant managers and have a great impact on developing staff's interesting appearance, good personality traits and ability to treat customers equally. f) Good networking between customer service and kitchen staff plays an important role in serving correct orders and serving customers' group order simultaneously.

The positive impact of the behavioural changes (positive word of mouth recommendations, repeat visits and repeat purchase of restaurants' products and services) are believed to have a strong effect on the restaurant's profit which encourages the restaurateurs to pay more attention to the factors that could provide positive behavioural changes in the customers. This interaction is called behaviour and environment bi-directional interaction according to Classical Conditioning Theory.

Table 6.17: Specific and Overall Focus of Findings of the Study that Similar to Social Cognitive Theory

Overall Focus of Findings	Specific Focus of Findings
1. When regular customers dining experience meets their expectations, this evaluation results in customer satisfaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Regular customers have more realistic expectations and are more satisfied with their choice. b) Learning from previous, positive service experience may result in more accurate and stable expectations. c) Regular customers may make better choices when repurchasing.
2. Tangible and intangible factors of customer satisfaction have great influence on meal experience. These tangible and intangible elements generated pleasurable feelings and caused positive behavioural changes of customers.	
3. Pleasurable feelings of satisfaction have great influence on meal experience and have great impact on customers' behavioural changes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Good personality traits of staff play an important role in anticipating customers' needs and have great impact on their positive, psychological and behavioural changes. b) An unusual restaurant concept plays an important role in providing a unique meal experience and it makes a great impact on customers' positive, psychological and behavioural changes. c) Menu diversity, food authenticity and food presentation and display play an important role in producing wide restaurant service and have a great impact on customers' psychological and behavioural changes. d) Treating customers equally plays an important role in making a positive, psychological impact on customers.

6.5 THE MANAGEMENT OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Restaurant failures can be studied from economic, marketing, and managerial perspectives. From managerial perspective, restaurant failures are often the result of managerial limitations and incompetence including loss of motivation by owners;

management or owner burnout as a result of stress arising from operational problems; issues and concerns of human resources; changes in the personal life of the manager or owner; changes in the stages of the manager or owner's personal life cycle; and legal, technological, and environmental changes that demand operational modifications (Parsa *et al.*, 2005). This study has provided information from the management perspective of the factors influencing dining experience satisfaction to ensure customers loyalty, which indirectly avoiding restaurant failure.

6.5.1 Previous Research

Previous researchers such as Cronin and Taylor (1992), Dube *et al.*, (1994), Oh and Jeong (1996), Qu (1997), Kivela (1999b), Yuksel and Yuksel (2003); Al-Mutawa *et al.*, (2006), agreed that more attention should be given to cumulative satisfaction and an emphasis on the management of customer satisfaction. This is because most previous customer satisfaction studies cited in the hospitality literature have explored the underlying factors that result in customer satisfaction, rather than discovering effective ways of managing the satisfaction factors. However, there have been a limited number of previous studies reported in the literature on the management of customer satisfaction factors in the dining experience from a practical perspective.

The available literature related to the management of customer satisfaction factors is dominated by authors such as Jones, (1993, 1996 and 2000), Mullins (1992), Jones and Merricks (1999) and Davis *et al.*, (1999), Wade (2006), and Strianese and Strianese (2008) and it is mainly based on the managerial implications identified by positivist research based authors. Meanwhile earlier studies on the ways of managing customer dining satisfaction were reviewed by Knutson (1988) who developed the principles that managers should follow to meet or exceed customer expectations, through employee greeting, improving restaurant atmosphere, increasing speed of service, and convenience. Fitzsimmons and Maurer (1991) constructed a managerial tool to measure the attributes driving customer satisfaction. Other studies have suggested numerous ways of managing the factors that influence customer satisfaction with a dining experience including reducing waiting time, improving quality of

service, responsiveness of front-line employees, providing menu variety, offering reasonable food prices, sustaining food quality, food-quality consistency, creative and convenience ambience and facilities (Davis and Vollmann 1990; Dube Renaghan, and Miller 1994; Kivela et al., 2000; Sulek and Hensley 2004; Iglesias and Yague 2004; and Andaleeb and Conway 2006). Bowen and Morris (1995) suggested improving menu design, Vidoto *et al.*, (2006) proposed managing restaurant tables, Jones and Dent (1994) proposed how to manage reducing time wait.

Those studies however, suggested only certain factors influencing dining satisfaction in general, not as a part of a whole process of dining experience and not according to classes of restaurant businesses, which should implement different managerial strategies to compete and succeed unless they are put together. Cornell and Lowe (1997); and Yuksel and Yuksel (2002) also recognised this gap in discovering effective ways of managing the satisfaction factors. However, the suggestions from those authors were not based on real staff practices of managing satisfaction factors of dining experience. That is why there is still a lack of consensus amongst the research community on how best to manage the dining experience satisfaction. The key issues emerging from this study in terms of this can now be discussed.

6.5.2 The Management of the Satisfaction Dining Experience

The findings of this study show that the tangible and intangible factors influencing customer dining experience satisfaction do not stand alone and therefore the restaurant has to manage all of the factors in order to ensure total satisfaction of the dining experience. Haswell and Holmes (1989) reported management capabilities are of primary concern in preventing restaurant failure. Those authors identified managerial inadequacy, incompetence, inefficiency, and inexperience to be a consistent theme [in] explaining small business failures and poor management can be connected to poor financial conditions, inadequate accounting records, limited access to necessary information, and lack of good managerial advice. A study of Parsa's study *et al.*, (2005) showed that the restaurant failure rate is affected more by internal factors (*Operational Factors*: Strategy, Product, Management, Financial, Marketing,

Type of Ownership, Culture and *Personal Factors*: Leadership, Demographics, Personal / Family and Goals) particularly management than by external factors (*General*: Legal & Political, Economic, Demographic, Technological, Social & Cultural and *Specific*: Competitive Forces, Suppliers, Customers, and Regulatory Agencies), although both apply. Thus this study on managing customer dining satisfaction can avoid restaurant management failure.

The findings of this study that showed the function of a restaurant is not to sell products and services only, but also to offer a dining experience. The study found that the primary reason customers of Malay restaurant dine at a restaurant is not only for the meal purpose but also to transact business (refer to 5.2.4.4), to relax (refer to 5.2.5.5) or to enjoy the company of cherished others (friends, family and spouse) (refer to 5.2.4.2). This finding is in-line with Campbell-Smith (1967) who viewed the function of a restaurant as not only concerned with food choice and food quality, but also with offering a rich meal experience to which many other factors contribute. Thus what makes a customer satisfied when dining at a restaurant is based on the dining experience that is provided by the restaurant. This study suggests in managing satisfaction for customers who dine at the restaurant due to those purposes, restaurateurs need to facilitate transactions and or create conditions in which customers are able to relax and enjoy the company of others.

Delivering quality food therefore is not the only measure of success. A restaurant must be inviting and strive to offer the public a pleasurable experience. Therefore, this study suggest that for the restaurateurs to provide an overall dining experience that satisfies customers, restaurateurs must ensure tangible and intangible satisfaction factors at each stage of dining process are taken care. Jogaratnam, Tse, and Olsen (1989) determined internal factors affecting failure rates of restaurants include poor product, internal relationships, financial volatility, organizational culture, internal and external marketing, and the physical structure and organization of the business.

A summary of the overall findings of this study in relation to each of these stages is presented in Figure 6.1. Since the factors influencing customer dining experience

satisfaction of this study were many, as well as ways in managing them, those ways of managing the satisfaction factors have been grouped according to themes: human resource management, staff training and development and restaurant rules and operation system.

6.5.3 Human Resource Management

Although all restaurant staff are responsible for contributing to customer dining satisfaction, the restaurant owner/manager, front of house staff and kitchen staff were identified as the restaurant employees who play the major role in ensuring customer dining satisfaction. Their roles were highlighted frequently in the finding of this study. LeBlanc and Mills, (1994) also agreed that the efficiency in the restaurant industry is dependent primarily on employees. Chew *et al.*, (2006) also found that main players in a restaurant are the manager and the employee. The contribution these groups of restaurant staff in managing dining satisfaction experience are discussed below.

6.5.3.1 Restaurant Owner/ Manager

The finding of this study showed that the selection of a restaurant manager was based on his qualification in terms of academic background and generic skills (like well organized tactful, friendly, quick-witted and calm, has leadership skills, and an understanding of the hospitality industry) and working experience (refer to 5.2.5.3 and 5.2.5.2iv). Those qualification attributes helped the operation manager responsible towards his role and awareness towards "little things" that gave impact to customer dining satisfaction. Parsa's study *et al.*, (2005) indicated the owner's/ manager skills and knowledge are critical factors for a restaurant success. "One should not rely on others, but should be knowledgeable in all areas of the business."

The contribution of owner-manager's qualification can be seen in a way the manager

- a) managed the opening and closing of the restaurant (refer to 5.2.3.3),

- b) trained the receptionist in steps for greeting, escorting, presenting the menu, serving orders, addressing questions, and offering assistance to the customers (refer to 5.2.3.2),
- c) organized the buffet table to keep clean and presentable (refer to 5.2.4.3),
- d) offered a willing attitude to serve customers (refer to 5.2.4.6),
- e) appointed maintenance supervisors, developed the system for front of house department cleaning strategies and arranged toilet cleaning service schedule (refer to 5.2.4.7),
- f) developed staff working service section, staff having break time in service area and mark attended table (refer to 5.2.5.1),
- g) groomed the front of house staff to be professional in terms of responsiveness, fair, knowledgeable, appearance and personality traits besides employing staff that already possess good personality traits (refer to 5.2.5.2),
- h) trained the in expert chef to provide variety of cooking methods, establishing a system for regular check of kitchen progress, offered self-service counter, and early preparation for *mice-en- plus* to ensure on time service (refer to 5.2.5.4),
- i) numbered customers table, customers plate, re-checked customers order form, chef follows instructions written in customers order form to establish accuracy getting things right (refer to 5.2.5.5),
- j) established system for a good networking between bill reader and food runner to ensure serving group order is served simultaneously (refer to 5.2.5.6),
- k) employed expert chef, give training for inexperienced chef, developed different kitchen department with different menu specialization, merged with small entrepreneur that offer different menu specialization to ensure food quality (menu variety and food presentation and display) (refer to 5.2.5.7),
- l) developed a self-service payment system (refer to 5.2.6) and trained a front house staff to greet and escorting customers to the exit door in an attempt to offer a great departure experience (refer to 5.2.7);
- m) developed marketing strategies (refer to 5.2.1.2ii),
- n) supervised personnel and scheduling the staff (refer to 5.2.3.3, 5.2.3.4 and 5.2.5.1),

- o) do not use recycle cooking oil, having quality control for ingredients supplied before storing to ensure health and safety regulations are followed (refer to 5.2.3.3, 5.2.5.2ii),
- p) kept employee records for working hours (refer to 5.2.3.3) and
- q) developed restaurant operation systems such as purchase food and beverage supplies (refer to 5.2.5.3), order taking (refer to 5.2.5.5), kitchen department orientation (refer to 5.2.5.7i), resolving customers' complaints (refer to 5.2.5.2i), creating work schedules (refer to 3.5.3.2, 5.2.5.1, Table 5.2 and 5.2.5.2) and monitoring their attendance (refer to 5.2.3.3).

Parsa *et al.*, (2005) found that the critical factors contributing to a restaurant's success in their study on Why Restaurants Fail were food quality and the characteristics of the owner-manager, including knowledge, drive, skills, determination, and passion. These factors mostly stem from the owner's own personality traits, relationships with customers and staff, and dedication to providing a quality product. The critical factors cited by failed restaurateurs as contributing to their restaurants' failure were owner-manager characteristics, including attitudes, expectations, control, knowledge, skills, and ambition. Other top factors include the already mentioned demand of labor and time; poor food-quality controls or low perceived value; being undercapitalized or having poor financial management; and the quality of employees and service, including the amount of turnover.

This study also found all restaurants of study had only one chief in their management team. It seems that the most efficient management teams should surround a single General Manager or Operator with a variety of strengths, all working together. In some restaurants, developing an effective management team requires hiring 2-5 experienced, competent staff and letting them to work as a team (refer to 5.2.5.1, and 5.2.5.7).

In managing customer satisfaction of a restaurant, this study found that effective communication played a significant role in ensuring a restaurant's successful operation. This in turn impacted on staff productivity. Communication and listening

skills were important amongst managers to employees, and also in employee to employee relationships that a manager ought to possess at all times. For instance in ensuring written communication between waiter/waitress and bill reader, and between waiter/waitress and customers to ensure accuracy getting things right (refer to 5.2.5.5), between bill reader and food runner to determine group order simultaneously (refer to 5.2.5.6) and between manager and front of house staff while giving training. Before, during and after the implementation of change, managers should listen to employees' opinions and understand their perspective and feelings on the imposed changes. This would further help managers to introduce future organizational change. Chew *et al.*, (2006) found that the key elements to support change were effective communication, employees' attitude and perception of managers' undertaken actions.

This study suggests that the owner/ manager must decide whether the expense of making the necessary investment in improving food quality and service attentiveness will garner a sufficient return on investment from additional repeat purchases. To identify the most profitable actions, the owner/ manager must place values (in terms of money, time, or trouble) on the investment in each service attribute required to achieve the targeted increase in repeat patronage. In other words, the owner/ manager still needs to pinpoint the service attribute with the highest potential for profitable improvement, which is the one with the highest ratio of marginal increase in repeat purchase over marginal-cost increase.

Research in service marketing shows that a significant gap may exist between customers' expectations and the assessment by owners/ managers of those expectations (Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman, 1988) For each potential improvement in service design, owners/ managers must estimate the marginal change in satisfaction or repeat purchase that would result from a given change in the operational standard. Marketing and operation research should develop innovative techniques to track the relationship between different levels of operational performance and customer satisfaction ratings, so that actions to be taken--and the results thereof can be easily identified.

At this point, systematic and creative thinking is appropriate. If management focuses too early on only a few practical solutions or physical measurements, it may miss creative opportunities. Perhaps additional staff is the answer, but that's an expensive choice for most restaurateurs. Instead, the manager might pare down the menu or offer early-bird or late-lunch specials to bring more guests in before or after the peak hours (or both).

Just as the guest's overall experience involves tradeoffs among different attributes, the owners/ managers must determine the tradeoffs among the possible courses of action. If a owner/ manager's analysis is accurate, the chosen course will provide the greatest guest satisfaction for each unit of cost, within a reasonable level of risk. While the numbers may not be firm, an owner/ manager still can estimate costs and benefits of a given action and compare those with other potential actions. The result should be a knowledge-based strategy for improving guest satisfaction and increasing the incidence of repeat purchases.

6.5.3.2 Front of House Staff

The restaurants in this study managed to employ front of house staff who had quality personality traits in terms of energy, perkiness, maturity, detail-oriented, taking ownership of surrounding workspace and easy development of rapport with older people when they walked into the restaurant by being quick to give a smile, polite, courteous, helpful, willing to serve, responsible, alert, flexible, understanding, decent, patient, fair (refer to 5.2.5.2ii), confident (refer to 5.2.5.2v); having good communication skill; able to talk both in English and in the ethnic language (refer to 5.2.2.2iii); knowledgeable about products and services available at the restaurant (refer to 5.2.2.2iii); and show good appearance (refer to 5.2.2.2iv).

These qualities of the staff personality were influenced by two factors. First the personalities were developed through the staff training and development given by the restaurant manager on regular basis (during weekly meeting and formal in-house training). The meetings were to discuss staff performance on the particular week, to

inform a new change in the restaurant, introducing new food samples and discussing customer complaints. The in-house training was guided by three training foci: restaurant behaviour, staff motivation and service style (refer to page 62). Second, the staff employed already possessed many of those quality personality traits and the training developed them further. Okumus and Hemmington (1998) agreed that a manager should not only look at how to lead, but, more importantly, at how followers are prepared to be led.

The finding also found that the restaurant manage to employ front of house staff who are not only have the knowledge and skills in serving the customers has motivations to take steps to correct any flaws like food delay (refer to Figure 5.7) but also always available and responsive whenever customers need them to make their dining experience better for. Along with putting organizational energies exclusively on the training and development of the front of house staff, it may be commensurate to make efforts to the recruitment of the types of people who will facilitate a positive service climate for both employees and customers alike. Parsa *et al.*, (2005) also found another critical factor a restaurant's success was the staff, including employees' training, personality, and diversity.

6.5.3.3 Kitchen staff

This study found that various food qualities (menu variety, delicious food taste, fresh and hygienic raw ingredients, using homemade spice, appetitive garnishing, correct consistency, having healthy option, various cooking method, various main source of ingredient) - refer to 5.2.5.7*i*, attractive food presentation and display-refer to 5.2.5.7*ii*, service qualities (unique cultural menu experience-refer to 5.2.5.3, serving on time-refer to 5.2.5.4, accuracy-refer to 5.2.5.5, serving group order simultaneously-refer to 5.2.5.6 came from kitchen staff performance. Providing the best products possible also means giving customers what they want. By paying attention to trends and preferences among diners and travelers (24-hour business operation-refer to 5.2.34 and prayer room-refer to 5.2.4.8), the restaurant can better serve the customers. It all starts with basic quality, which were change or enlarge menus concept, increase

advertising, reduce prices, increase portions, renovate, change uniforms (refer to 5.2.5.2iv), or even increase services quality. But the bottom line is quality. Restaurants, for example, must offer a variety of food items that are always fresh, tasty (refer to 5.2.5.7i), and attractively presented (refer to 5.2.5.7ii).

Regardless of restaurant operation, maintaining quality will do just as much and probably more to improve financial results than any other actions. In managing that finding of this study found that kitchen staff had been instructed to follow Standard Operating Procedures, recipe cards and similar guidelines to consistently produce the best product possible (refer to 5.2.5.5). At other times, managers rely on the kitchen staff own style and initiative to do the job right. Whether or not the kitchen staff must "follow the book," the attention that the operation manager pays to their actions is the true guarantee of a quality product being produced.

Practically, a chef can chop a *mirepoix* in three minutes, but rarely can the chef train someone else to do it and a successful kitchen only run with successful delegation and talented people are not always talented at working with people. This scenario happened in the restaurants of study where kitchen staff worked according to kitchen department and specialization. Each kitchen department has its own kitchen organization where chef as a leader, assistant chef as a kitchen helper and a bill reader (refer to 5.2.5.3, 5.2.5.4, 5.2.5.5 and 5.2.5.6). In some restaurants in this study, a kitchen helper handle many responsibilities (doing *mice-en- plus*) and will work hand-in-hand with Chef to form an effective team. The chef is responsible to train his close subordinate to be a future chef. The success of the restaurant in this study managing customer dining satisfaction was due to employing chefs who were not only expert in food handling and culinary art according to food quality of menu specialization but also had management and leadership skills. Interestingly, in a study of Parsa *et al.*, (2005), it was found a successful restaurant owners all had a well-defined concept that not only provided a food product but also included an operating philosophy, which encompassed business operations as well as employee and customer relations. Failed restaurant owners, when asked about their concept, discussed only their food product. They would state that their concept was *vegetarian food*, or *Alaskan seafood*. They all offered high-quality foods, but that did not make them successful. Although food

quality was discussed as being critical to restaurant success, it is obvious from the interviews that food quality does not guarantee success; the concept must be defined beyond the type of food served. This well-defined menu concept is determined by the chef who works closely with other staff in the restaurant kitchen.

6.5.4 Staff Training and Development

This study found that one of the ways the restaurant managed customer dining satisfaction was through formal and informal training (refer to Table 4.4a-4.4e). The formal training was based on modules of motivation, restaurant behavior and service style (refer to page 62) and was delivered by the restaurant manager who already had experience doing the “ground work” before holding a position as a restaurant operation manager. The standard performance assessment of staff was based on customer complaints that were discussed during the weekly restaurant meeting and training will be given according to the staff performance.

Those training modules exposed the front of house staff to understanding customers’ ideal personality characteristics and desires. As such, front of house staff should be selected not only based on their technical skills (e.g. product knowledge) but also on their ability to recognize and fulfill the customers’ symbolic needs (Yuksel *et al.*, 2006).

Front of house staff who are well-trained, have a good knowledge of the menu and possess excellent interpersonal skills are vital for customers’ perceptions of restaurant dining experience (Pratten, 2003; Sulek & Hensley, 2004). Therefore, restaurateurs should place a strong emphasis on staff training to ensure they have a service mind and are willing to deliver high-quality service.

It is important to develop appropriate programs and provide on-going training on the various attributes of responsiveness to strengthen restaurant staff’s ability to improve customer service. Although easy to suggest, instilling these qualities in the front of house staff and gaining their commitment can be challenging. However, if full service

restaurants want to deliver high levels of customer satisfaction, they could periodically track staff performance that measure “responsiveness.” By doing so, managers, supervisors and owners of restaurants can design targeted training programs that encourage front of house staff to instill this dimension of service quality. This study suggests the restaurant should use well trained front of house staff effectively to form higher levels of self-congruence and positive customer dining experiences.

Finally, this study found that not all restaurateurs can afford to hire an expert chef. For this type of restaurant, it has to hire inexperienced chef who can later be trained from time to time (refer to 5.2.5.7i) and to hire outside operators that specialize in the menu (refer to page 84).

6.5.5 Restaurant Rules and Operation System

A quantitative study on Customer Reaction to Service Delays in Malaysian between two ethnic restaurants, which are Malay restaurants and Indian Muslim restaurants conducted by Fraser, Mohd Zahari and Othman, (2008), showed that Malay restaurants are perceived as more likely to have longer delays in serving both food and drink, having neglectful staff, frequently providing inconsistent service, deliver food wrongly even after a long wait compared to the Indian Muslim restaurants. These findings however, did not represent all Malay restaurants in Malaysia due to the study being conducted only among 480 customers who had experienced dining at both Malay restaurants and Indian Muslim restaurants at only one out of fourteen cities in Malaysia, which is Shah Alam. Data were collected using questionnaire that been distributed to those customers who shopping at the Giant shopping complex. In term of quality service, the study suggested for Malay restaurants to improve their speed and consistency of service, alertness towards customers’ request and communication skills.

The finding of this qualitative study, however indicated a contrary findings for those attributes of quality service in Malay restaurants (serving on time - refer to 5.2.5.4,

responsive towards complaints and request - refer to 5.2.5.2i and staff performance - refer to 5.2.5.2iii), which provide contribution of this study. This might have a relation with the restaurant rules that been established and the way the restaurant operation system is managed. Findings of the study indicated the restaurant has an efficient working concept or better customer service within a working environment or a better system of getting things done. For instance staff attendance system (refer to 5.2.5.1) to ensure punctual business hours; staff working station system (refer to 5.2.5.4) for on time attending customers; order taking and serving system (refer to 5.2.5.1) to determine accuracy; receptionist service system (refer to 5.2.2) to show systemic service; kitchen department system (refer to 5.2.5.7) to provide food quality; ordering, purchasing and stocking food ingredients system (refer to 5.2.5.5 and 5.2.5.6) to determine cleanliness, food ingredient freshness and cash flow; staff weekly off day system to ensure staff working motivation; staff uniform system (refer to 5.2.5.2ii and 5.2.5.3) to emphasise staff appearance; staff training and development system to provide quality service and cleaning service system (refer to 5.2.4.7) to promise pleasant dining and workplace environment. Parsa *et al.*, (2005) found critical factor a restaurant's success were important in a successful restaurant management location and a well-defined concept besides capital and financial management. Having an ill-defined concept was also listed as a large contributor to restaurant failure.

This study found that clean restaurant operations started with restaurant staff who work cleanly due to the restaurant manager always looking for the why behind an unclean situation in order to eliminate its cause, not just clean up the mess. Therefore, cleaning systems have been implemented in all aspects to ensure total cleanliness of the restaurant (refer to 5.2.4.7). The restaurant exteriors were maintained as carefully as the interiors. Parking lots, driveways and sidewalks were cleaned on daily basis, or more often if needed. Areas farthest from main buildings also received the same attention as areas closest to main building of the restaurant. Strategies in keeping the front of house department clean were employed; kitchen departments were cleaned on daily and weekly basis and cleanliness of food ingredients supplies were determined by a group of staff acting as quality controllers. Hiring the right restaurant staff also means hiring the right number of people. This not only leads to cleaner and better

service, but higher front of house staff morale as well. Thus the front of house staff should not be overworked and should be free to concentrate on doing their job well.

The finding of the study showed that although customer needs often vary some preferences are common. For instance customers want a warm, attractive atmosphere that gives them a feeling of quality and security. One of the best ways the restaurant operations of study appealing is by creating or maintaining such an environment (refer to 5.2.4.3, 5.2.4.5 and 5.2.5.3). The restaurants serve customers with good food, cheerful place to dine and interesting places to meet, relax and have fun. The little, personal touches add to the look or feel of the restaurant operation makes meeting these basic needs of customers more meaningful for front of house staff and customers alike (refer to 5.2.4.5).

Parsa *et al.*, (2005) viewed although a clear concept is essential; having a well-defined strategy was not found to be critical to a restaurant's success. Some of the restaurant owners who had been extraordinarily successful were "going with the flow," while some owners failed despite well-defined strategies. The lesson in this finding is that restaurateurs must not be so rigid in their strategy that they fail to see opportunities as they appear.

6.6 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION DINING EXPERIENCE

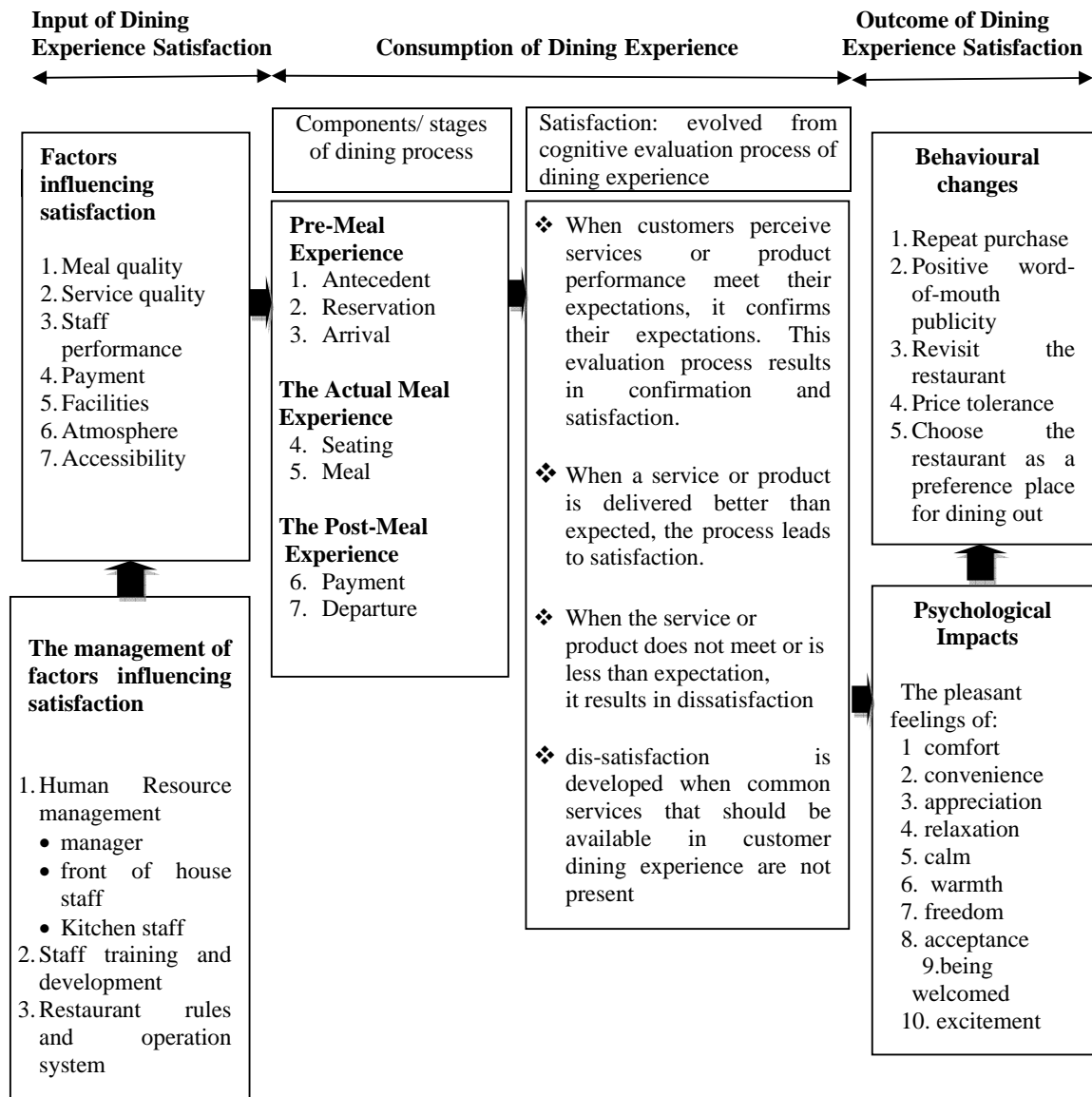
This study aimed to construct conceptual a framework representing the influences on customer satisfaction with the dining experience process and content. The conceptual framework constructed emerged from two factors: first, factors influencing customer satisfaction that were derived from the voice of restaurant customers who dined at the restaurants. Second, for the management of satisfaction, data gathered from the practices of restaurant staff. Expectations have a central role in influencing satisfaction with services and these in turn are determined by a very wide range of

factors. Managing satisfaction is therefore more than only measuring satisfaction at the end of the line in the evaluation stage.

The current satisfaction models seem to measure satisfaction by largely focusing on service quality dimensions. However, as Yuksel *et al.*, (2006) point out, although service quality is important in assessing satisfaction, this narrow focus only captures the functional aspects of services and so inadequate measurement may be a problem. Due to this deficiency, it is believed that current satisfaction surveys have already lost their credibility because their results provide little evidence for improving consumer satisfaction. This study views the dining experience as a process (refer to overall finding of this study in Figure 6.1). The conceptual framework of satisfaction with the customer dining experience in Malaysian Malay restaurants was developed based on the findings of this study that have been in Chapter Five 5.2 and divided the findings into three major concepts: inputs to customer satisfaction, the consumption of dining experience and the outcomes of dining experience satisfaction.

The inputs are those things that are put together to form the dining experience. These inputs can be managed to increase the possibility that customers will be satisfied (with different evaluations of satisfaction possible). For example, a customer can be very satisfied as it exceeded expectations, satisfied as it simply met expectations, unsatisfied as it did not meet expectations and very unsatisfied as it was an awful experience). They are discussed in the following subsections.

Figure 6.2: Conceptual Framework of Customer Satisfaction Dining Experience



6.6.1 The Inputs of Dining Experience Satisfaction (Satisfaction Causes)

In this study, the inputs to customer satisfaction with the dining experience were divided into two elements. First, the tangible and intangible factors influencing dining experience satisfaction (other studies refer to these as hard and soft factors respectively) that are simplified by grouping them according to meal quality, service quality, staff performance, payment, facilities, accessibility and atmosphere). Those factors that influence satisfaction with the dining experience occurred in the stages of dining experience process. The findings of this study indicated that the factors influencing dining experience satisfaction were greatly influenced by the ways in which these factors were managed. Therefore the second element of input of dining experience satisfaction is the management of those satisfaction factors. This finding confirmed Pine and Ray's (2002) statement that customer satisfaction is concerned not only with attribute values, but also with broader value systems. The value systems are interpreted as the management of the attribute value.

The management of dining experience satisfaction comprises of the actions that have been taken to create an environment in which dining experience satisfaction is possible. However, the management of dining experience satisfaction alone cannot satisfy customers but can minimize dissatisfaction. Customers were more likely to be dissatisfied if the management of the dining experience satisfaction was absent. For instance, the facility of parking (a factor influencing dining experience satisfaction) satisfied their customers. However the availability of free parking, a parking attendant and plenty of parking spaces at those restaurants did not lead to higher satisfaction but, nevertheless, without them there would be dissatisfaction.

The training of staff can have an impact on the customer dining experience. Customer interaction with the restaurant was very important. The restaurant owner, management and staff must have a passionate, sincere concern for the guests' total dining experiences. Customers should never feel as if they are a bother to the staff. If a customer feels that way, even if the feeling is misinterpreted, that customer will not return. Each and every customer is important to a successful business and the base of

customers grows every time a positive dining experience is delivered. The uniform the staff wears projects the restaurant image, reflects its standards, and must fit the restaurant concept.

The management of factors influencing dining satisfaction in this study were various. However based on key elements that stand behind the management of an organization, therefore, the management of customer satisfaction dining experience in restaurant service can be grouped according to human resource management (manager, front of house staff and kitchen staff), human resource development (for staff training and development) and restaurant rules and operation system.

6.6.2 The Consumption of Dining Experience Satisfaction

The consumption of dining experience satisfaction concept consists of two elements. First is the experience in consuming factors influencing dining satisfaction. Those factors evolved from seven stages of dining experience process, namely: antecedent experience, reservation experience, arrival experience, seating experience, meal experience, payment experience and departure experience (see Figure 6.1). Those stages later can be grouped under pre-meal experience, the actual meal experience and post-meal experience. However, not all customers pass through all of these stages, particularly the reservation stage.

At each stage of the dining process, a satisfied customer experienced positive effects as a result of consuming the tangible and intangible factors of dining experience satisfaction and its management. These positive effects are signs of satisfaction. Thus, the second element in the consumption of dining experience satisfaction concept is satisfaction that evolved from cognitive evaluation process of dining experience.

During the stages of the dining experience, customers engaged with the restaurant through interaction with different dining experience satisfaction factors that were created by the service providers, such as attending customers professionally, providing customers with a unique service, serving orders on time, serving a group

order simultaneously, having the accuracy to get things right, comprehensive restaurant service and price tolerance. During these interactions, the service providers jointly created pleasurable feelings and this in turn generated memorable dining experience. The pleasurable feelings involved outcomes that the customers did not have expectations about, or only had very vague expectations about. The dining experiences included mixed, strong, pleasurable feelings of excitement, curiosity, joy and surprise, which were not particular to any special stage of the dining process, i.e. the meal experience stage, but which developed first during the stage of antecedent experience, and later continued to grow during the meal experience stage until the departure experience stage. Klaus (1985) views this phenomenon as satisfaction due to the customers making a subjective evaluation of a consumption experience based on the relationships between the customers' perceptions and restaurant product.

In terms of the implications for this study, those who have eaten in the restaurants of study before will have expectations based on their previous experience. However, those who have not will have expectations based on their organic knowledge (their general knowledge of Malay restaurants that is not specific to the restaurants of study) or induced knowledge (that is specific knowledge of restaurants of study that arises from specifically designed or targeted material produced by the restaurants such as advertising material, signs outside the restaurant detailing what is offered etc.). The differences between these three (experience, organic and induced) may influence two things: first, their choice of restaurant, and second the basis of their evaluation of their dining experience (components and overall). For the second influence, it may be in that they talk about their evaluation about dining experience satisfaction but have different bases for that evaluation (refer to 5.2.1.1 and 5.2.1.2).

The customers chose the restaurants as their first preference, or had it in mind as their first choice for the place of their next dining out activity, and they revisited the restaurants with the intention to repurchase a similar memorable (customers' unexpected experience that emerged prior to visiting the restaurant) dining experience. The customers also conveyed positive word-of-mouth recommendations about their memorable experience to others. Those who had been influenced by the dining experience of others would also pass through similar stages of the dining

experience process. If they were satisfied with the dining experience offered by the restaurants, they then might show similar loyalty to the restaurants by conveying positive word-of-mouth recommendations, choosing the restaurant as their first choice, repeat the purchase and repeat the visit.

This process of dining experience however, is contrary with Muller's (1999) steps of service cycle and Morrison's (2002) definition of the service cycle. Muller defined the service cycle as the entire sequence of value-adding services starting from greeting and seating through to checking and settlement, and ending at the moment the table is prepared to receive another guest. Morrison (2002) viewed the process of the dining experience as starting from the minute the staff greet the customers. These authors perceived the dining experience as a linear model that starts only after the customers enter the restaurant and ends after they leave the restaurants' dining table, while, the process of dining experience of this study starts with the moment customers engaged with the restaurant during reservation service or arrival experience and stops at the departure experience stage, after the customers gets into their cars (refer to Figure 5.1). Satisfied customers will come back to the restaurant and experience the same dining process.

6.6.3 The Outcomes of Dining Experience Satisfaction

The outcome of satisfaction with the dining experience is determined by the overall feelings and attitudes a customer has about his/her dining experience after it has been purchased or something that the restaurants have intentionally provided for their customers. The outcome of this study was satisfaction that has two forms: psychological impact particularly pleasurable feelings and behavioural changes (refer to Figure 6.3).

This study found that tangible and intangible factors influence satisfaction with the dining experience and the management of the dining experience factors stimulate restaurant customers to be satisfied with their dining experience. The satisfied customer was usually is influenced to repeat the dining experience satisfaction. The

previous dining experience is an antecedent for their future visits to the similar restaurants or to repurchase the restaurant's products and or service, or for price tolerance, or to choose the restaurant as the first choice for dining out, or to convey positive word-of-mouth recommendations to others.

Price and Arnold's (1995) statement that the feelings of happiness, pleasure, a sense of warm-heartedness, unexpected, surprisingly pleasant, extraordinary experiences go beyond what was expected and enhances customer satisfaction. Contrary, this study found the dining experience satisfaction lead to happiness in which the happiness are expressed through the pleasurable feelings and the use of words like amazed, new experience, interesting experience, genuine service, happy, convenient, entertained, attended, comfortable, casual and relaxed, welcomed, convenient, freedom to choose, accepted, appreciated, excited, warm, comfortable, safe, relaxing and peaceful. These positive feelings later motivate the customers to be loyal to the restaurants.

This study suggests that customers unconsciously make use of shifting psychological statuses in order to determine whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied. This finding is consistent with a basic theory of Mehrabian & Russell (1974) in environmental psychology. That theory explains that there is a direct relationship between environmental stimuli, organism and response (S-O-R). In the theory, an environmental stimulus is perceived that can create psychological status for a customer, who may then respond by being satisfied or dissatisfied. The positive psychological impact creates pleasurable feelings, which later function as a stimulus for the customers to make a response.

The second dining experience satisfaction outcome found in this study was found in terms of behavioural changes like revisiting the restaurants, repurchasing restaurants' product and or service, price tolerance, choosing the restaurant as a preferential place for dining out and conveying positive word-of-mouth publicity about the restaurant to others (refer to Figure 6.3). This study defined intention to return as a consumer's likelihood of re-purchasing the same service. This intention is developed as a result of a consumer's satisfaction with his/her last service encounter and overall attitude to the

particular restaurant which provided the service. The behavioural changes indicated service loyalty to the restaurants studied.

Numerous studies have found psychological impact to be a mediating factor between predictors and outcomes in the consumption context (Ladhari, Brun, & Morales, 2008; Pullman & Gross, 2004). More recently Barrena and Sánchez (2009) suggested that emotional arousal can be applied in saturated markets as an efficient strategy to increase sales. In the dining context, Jang and Namkung (2009) support most of Barrena and Sánchez's (2009) hypotheses using an extended model based on Mehrabian & Russell's theory (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

Most studies showed strong links between customer satisfaction and repeat-purchase intentions typically employ cross-sectional data. There are certain determinants of the dining experience that affect customer satisfaction. Determining satisfaction is not sufficient, however, because one needs also to establish the link between satisfaction and repeat purchases, which are an important source of restaurants' profits. Thus, studies have addressed the links between customer satisfaction with various restaurant determinants and repeat-purchase intentions (for instance, see Sulek and Hensley 2004; Soderlund and Ohman 2005; and Cheng 2005). While these studies often found strong links, the importance of a particular determinant varied according to the type of restaurant and the type of customer. For instance, food quality is the critical determinant influencing repeat-purchase intentions in full-service restaurants, while waiting time is the most important determinant in quick-service restaurants (research focusing on full-service restaurants includes Sulek and Hensley (2004) and Clark and Wood (1998); research on fast-food restaurants is from Davis and Vollmann (1990). Kivela, Inbakaran, and Reece (2000) conducted an extensive survey of diners of various restaurants. They found that first and last impressions have the greatest impact on repeat-purchase intentions, followed by excellence in service and food quality.

The findings of this study are consistent with many of the previous research findings. For instance Gould (1995) defined loyal customers as those who not only gladly use the services but are also so pleased with them that they tell other people about them.

Zeithaml *et al.*, (1996) found customers who are satisfied with their experience will show their loyalty towards the restaurant through repeat purchases besides expressing preference for a particular restaurant over others. Saudhahar *et al.*, (2006) found loyal customers revisit the restaurant to repurchase the experience and share their positive experience with others. Meanwhile Bitner (1990) found that loyal customers make positive word-of-mouth recommendations and have repurchase intentions.

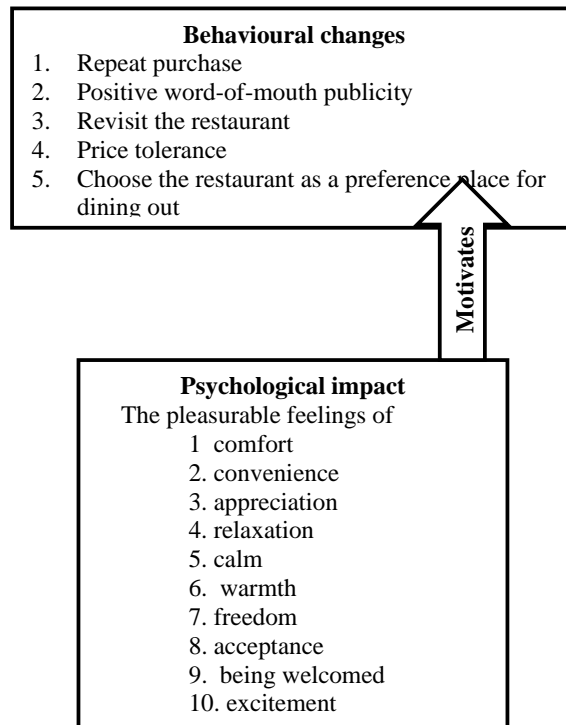
The satisfaction and the customers' overall satisfaction of dining experience were found to be antecedents of intention to return. This is an important addition to the existing models of satisfaction because incorporating attitudes into existing models of satisfaction explains one of the logical inconsistencies of the disconfirmation paradigm which was reported by early scholars such as LaTour and Peat (1979). Thus, customer satisfaction is not the only determinant of intention to return. By the same token, the customers' overall attitude to a restaurant service firm should be taken into account when predicting intention to return.

Services deliver are often intangible and difficult to evaluate prior to purchase and consumption (Ryu and Han, 2009). For instance a restaurant's service and the quality of its food cannot be judged until those elements have been experienced. Thus, consumers seek tangible cues (e.g., lighting, table cloths) to predict what the restaurant will provide. Determinants of quality in the previous hospitality literature mainly focus on intangible attributes. However, Clark and Wood (1999) argued that tangible rather than intangible elements are of greater importance in gaining customer loyalty and continued restaurant patronage. The best attribute of the brand is atmosphere, followed by food quality, menu variety, service, and cleanliness.

As such, this finding partly supports Oliver's (1999) conceptual model regarding the relationship between satisfaction and customer loyalty. Hence, satisfaction is essential for establishing behavioral loyalty (e.g. intention to return) but may become less important as loyalty is influenced by other means such as marketing communications and loyalty programs.

Because of customers can develop their attitude to a restaurant through other means, this suggests that additional factors can have a positive influence on intention to return beyond satisfaction. Also, it seems reasonable to argue that multiple dissatisfaction experiences with a restaurant service will negatively impact on the customers' overall attitude to a restaurant dining experience and intention to return in the long run.

Figure 6.3: Outcomes of Dining Experience Satisfaction



Al-Mutawa *et al.*, (2006) have proposed the latest model of customer satisfaction from the dining experience. It consists of six stages. The model of the customer satisfaction dining experience process in this study has, however, both differences and similarities with the model of customer satisfaction that has been proposed by Al-Mutawa *et al.*, (2006). Those stages are:

Stage 1: the expectation stage which includes the customer's expectation development;

Stage 2: the perception stage which represents the time during which the customer is getting engaged with the organisation to absorb the performance, and which includes three main customer satisfaction factors, namely product, price and service. Each of them will have several dimensions representing their characteristics

Stage 3: the assessment stage when the customer's perception value is weighted against the customer's expectation value to determine the level of customer satisfaction value;

Stage 4: the customer satisfaction stage includes three components representing the level of customer satisfaction;

Stage 5: the reassessment stage is the time when the customer is no longer engaged in the organisation and starts to revalue his/her satisfaction level based on the market standard and experience;

Stage 6: is the retention stage where the customer chooses to be loyal or switch to other competitors.

The similarity between Al-Mutawa's *et al.*, (2006) customer dining experience satisfaction model and the conceptual framework of customer satisfaction of the dining experience process in this study is (refer to Table 6.18), firstly, that both framework place customers' expectation development as the first stage of the model. For instance, antecedent experience in the conceptual model of this study forms the customer's expectations of the dining experience, which may be based on their previous experience of dining at the restaurant or their dining experience elsewhere or organic, induced and other peoples' experience. Secondly, both customer satisfaction conceptual frameworks found customer satisfaction as an antecedent of service loyalty and placed it at the last stage of the model.

The customer satisfaction dining experience of the conceptual framework of this study differs from the Al-Mutawa *et al.*, (2006) customer satisfaction conceptual framework mainly in relation to the tangible elements of product, price and service. The conceptual model in this study shows that these factors are only a part of the inputs into the dining experience and thereby customer satisfaction. These factors influencing customer satisfaction dining experience emerged only at the stage of Meal Experience in this study, which is at Stage 5 of the overall dining experience process. The assessment and re-assessment of customer satisfaction in this study is a continuous process that begins with the moment the customers engage with the restaurant, until they leave the restaurant at the Departure Stage. In Al-Mutawa *et al.*, (2006) conceptual model, this assessment and reassessment of the customer satisfaction process occurs at Stage 3 and Stage 5.

Table 6.18: Comparison between Stages in the Dining Process in this Study's Conceptual Framework with Al-Mutawa's Conceptual Framework

Stages of dining experience process in the conceptual framework		
Stages	This study	Al-Mutawa's <i>et al.</i> , (2006)
Stage 1	antecedent experience	the expectation stage which includes the customer expectation development
Stage 2	reservation experience	the perception stage represents the time when the customer is getting engaged with the organisation to absorb the performance, and includes three main customer satisfaction factors, namely: product, price and service, each of which will be have several dimensions representing their characteristics
Stage 3	arrival experience	the assessment stage when customer perception value is weighted against the customer expectation value to determine the level of customer satisfaction value
Stage 4	seating experience	the customer satisfaction stage includes three components representing the level of customer satisfaction
Stage 5	meal experience	the reassessment stage is the time when the customer is no longer engaged in the organisation and starts to reevaluate his/her satisfaction level based on the market standard and experience
Stage 6	payment experience	is the retention stage when the customer chooses to be loyal or switch to another competitors.
Stage 7	departure experience	none

According to Yuksel's *et al.*, (2006) meta-analysis, only a few outcomes of satisfaction have been investigated in the satisfaction literature, which were complaining behaviour, word of mouth, and repurchase intentions. On the top of them, behavioural loyalty is the most powerful outcome of consumer satisfaction (Szymanski and Henard, 2001). Authors that conducted studies related to behavioral loyalty like, Oliver (1997) who proposed three components of satisfaction: cognitive, affective, and connative. Oliver included the use of repeat usage and intention to return and these behavioral loyalties correlation with other outcomes of satisfaction. Caruana (2002) investigated the relationship between customer satisfaction and service loyalty for retail banking services. In this research, the 12-item service loyalty scale, this included a variety of behavioral outcomes such as intention to re-use, intention to switch, and intention to recommend, loaded onto a single factor. Moreover, the items which had the highest factor loadings were related to intention to re-use behavior, which is very similar to intention to return.

In conclusion, the proposed framework was extended to include components of post-purchase behaviors (e.g., retention or switching). Since the role of perceived price in

explaining post-purchase behaviors has rarely been studied, investigating the moderating effect of perceived price on the relationships between satisfaction and post-purchase behaviors may be an interesting extension of this study. Zeithaml (1988) indicated that price awareness (or perception) can differ among demographic groups. For instance, tourist and local customer demographic groups tend to show a higher level of awareness. Thus, in future studies, developing a more comprehensive conceptual framework by considering the influence of demographic characteristics may lead to a deeper understanding of satisfaction formation and subsequent customer satisfaction of dining experience.

6.7 DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH

This discussion and evaluation of the research consists of a critical reflection on the methodology and the data analysis.

6.7.1 Critical Reflection on Methodology

This subsection is a critical reflection on the methodology of the study. The subsection includes a general evaluation examining how well the research conformed to external measures of rigor.

The study adopted a qualitative method rooted in the interpretive social science paradigm: interpreting the lived experience of restaurant customers, restaurateurs and front of house restaurant staff in context to describe the social world in a way that was relevant to the participants. Throughout the study, an inductive approach was adopted, where the conceptual framework constructed emerges from, and is guided by the data and is not influenced *a priori* by existing theories. As a result this research is different to previous research because it gives primacy to the data from the perspective of the customers, restaurateurs and the front of house restaurant staff rather than being pre-defined by the researcher and given only by the restaurant customers. Conducting interview sessions with customers in the restaurant of study could avoid those

customers from having other particular restaurants in mind as they may do when filling the survey, and thus their responses may be biased to that restaurant. This subsection discusses and addresses the broad methodological issues within the study by critically reflecting on the epistemology, ontology and trustworthiness (validity) of the research methodology.

6.7.1.1 Epistemology - Subjectivity

In relation to customer satisfaction, the customers and staff of restaurants have been researched as the '*objects*' of a number of quantitative (positivist) studies. However, these quantitative studies have not considered in depth the customers dining experience and the representation of how the dining experience is perceived and managed. To close the gap, this study adopted an interpretive social science paradigm. The 'customers' and restaurant staff in this study were the participants and they defined the information they provided, and this created the understanding about their behavior, from their perspectives of the real-time delivery and consumption of the dining experience.

The relationship between the researcher and those subjects (participants in this study) was subjective. This arose because the researcher was obliged to enter the restaurant as a social setting and become one of the social actors in that social setting in order to conduct the study. In other words, the researcher became an '*insider*' by acting as one of the staff within the restaurants studied. The potential subjectivity inherent in this in terms of the data analysis and interpretation was balanced by the researcher interaction with a wide range of customers and people involved in the restaurants and by the research using a range of data collection methods. Indeed, the researcher and the participants did share insights throughout as well as mutually reflect on each other's perspectives. This insider's view was perceived as providing the best means to reach an understanding the satisfaction resulting from the dining experience.

Although the participants studied are not, as with most qualitative research, necessarily representative of the wider population, and the findings of the study may be specific to the contexts of the study, the strength of undertaking the research using the qualitative method is that it allows in depth understanding of the dining experience and the creation of customer satisfaction. This understanding was expressed in text-based rather than numerical representation. Hence, the research using this method yielded not only a conceptual framework with explanations of the factors leading to satisfaction with the dining experience but also a number of potential starting points for future research.

6.7.1.2 Ontology – Exploration of Multiple Realities Leading To New Knowledge

In this study, the data were collected from the customers' real world and in the natural settings of three restaurants. This allowed the researcher to explore multiple realities and multiple explanations of the satisfaction derived from the dining experience, and the way the restaurants tried to ensure customer satisfaction, rather than one explanation. This is to provide in depth study on factors influencing customer satisfaction the management of satisfaction as well as to provide validity to the research findings. The research approach allowed many interesting viewpoints or new notions to emerge in the study as the research assumed an inductive approach.

To gather knowledge from the empirical world, the researcher developed and used multiple data collection methods including close observation, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentary evidence. The multiple data collection methods (in-depth semi structured interviews, participant observation) enabled the collection of rich and meaningful data. In addition, the 'smallness of the research context (the restaurants) meant that the researcher could revisit the participant (most customers and all staff) if clarification was required. This approach enabled the researcher to work towards a more holistic understanding of satisfaction with the dining experience from the participants' (staff and customers) perspectives.

Moreover, the flexibility of the research approach in the diversity of the characteristics of the participants involved in this study, for example their cultural background (Malay, Chinese and Indian), age, level of income, and residential location, provided authentic information relevant to the customer's life context (the data comes from the customer/staff in their own words and is not pre-defined by the researcher). It is noted that authenticity allows a wide range of individuals from different backgrounds to express their satisfaction with their dining experience, or in terms of the delivery of the dining experience, from their own perspective and manner.

Multiple sources of data allowed the researcher to investigate the holistic aspects of the dining consumption experience, how it is constructed, and investigated the customers' perspective on their experiences by asking them to articulate what is going on in the actual dining experience process. In addition, throughout the fieldwork period, the researcher was able to reinvent and apply the instrument for data collection to fit the conditions of the dining experience in a restaurant setting.

6.7.1.3 Trustworthiness of the Research Methodology - Validity

Methodological cohesiveness refers to the consistency of the approach and the solid description of the data that leads to an understanding of the meaning of experience under the study (Stake 1995) which, in turns, answers the study's research questions. A methodologically cohesive study therefore strengthens the reliability, validity and transferability of research findings. The followings issues are relevant to the methodological cohesiveness of this study.

In essence, in relation to a qualitative approach, the idea of validation is the process by which validity can be established while the validity refers to an interpretive understanding of the truth (Angen 2000). It considers a study as a single case. Validity can be defined as the extent to which the data collected truly reflects the phenomenon being studied. Generally, it deals with truth-worthiness of the research findings and is sub-divided into internal and external dimensions. Internal validity refers to the truth

of the research findings. Validity of the study can be strengthened by establishing an identification of the chain of evidence, or 'audit' (Burns, 1994, Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). The audit trail of this study was done by counter checking content of interview transcript to the participants who been interviewed to confirm the interpretation of meaning of their answer for interview questions addressed in the interview session.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a part of the process of validation to establish validity of the findings (Stake, 1995). Triangulation means using different types of measurement or data collection techniques in order to examine the same variable (Merriam, 1998), with the researcher looking at the same phenomenon or research questions using more than one source of data. Denzin (1978) proposed four types of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation. This study is concerned with the application of data triangulation, only.

Data triangulation involves the use of multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 1994). In this study, data was drawn from multiple sources such as close observation, participant observation, in-depth interview and documentary evidence. It was achieved by cross checking data that was derived from those different sources. The purpose of using this type of triangulation was to fill in the gaps about the phenomenon of study, that would occur if relying on only one source of evidence, and to verify and validate the qualitative analysis by enabling consistency in the research findings derived from the different data collecting techniques. It also helped in the avoidance of bias or distortion in the interpretation of the data collected on the phenomenon investigated and strengthened the findings of the study. Jick (1979) argues that collecting different kinds of data on the same phenomenon can help researchers to improve the accuracy of the data and gain confidence in their findings due to the availability of relevant comparisons.

For instance series of participant observation as well as series of close observation were conducted in this study to get saturation of data about the factors influencing the dining experience and the satisfaction or dis-satisfaction derived from it by customers including the identification of staff practices in terms of managing the dining

experience to deliver satisfaction. Both of these activities indirectly support trustworthiness of the data. In addition to that, documentary evidence been used to identify areas of sensitivity and confidentiality in the research to provide ‘behind-the-scenes’ information about restaurant operation that is not directly observable.

6.7.1.4 Structure of Data Collection - Theoretical Sampling

The use of theoretical sampling guided by data collection and analysis has the benefit of being evolutionary and that preserves the study objective of investigating and explaining a socially constructed process since theoretical sampling is an important tool for recruiting participants who have had the dining experience of interest and are willing and able to articulate the dining experience. This preserves the validity of the study because the researcher would have information about sampling choices. The information of number of the sample indicated saturation of data, which can be used to demonstrate the validity of the research

The systematic analysis process of the research approach also strengthened the validity of this study. In order to enhance the internal validity of the data, data analysis included open coding in the development of concepts, categories, properties and axial coding in developing connections between categories and sub-categories. Finally selective coding was used to integrate categories to build the core category of the conceptual framework. The process continued until it reached closure of the emergent theme. The process ended at the point when improvements to the core category were increasingly small and the benefits of further analysis became marginal. This was the stage of saturation and was achieved and internal validity tested.

6.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed how the study has met research questions in terms of basic findings of factors influencing satisfaction of dining experience, the aggregated of findings, the management of dining experience satisfaction and conceptual framework of customer satisfaction with the dining experience that consist of the inputs of dining experience satisfaction (satisfaction causes), the consumption of dining experience satisfaction the outcomes of dining experience satisfaction. Some major themes for factors influencing customer satisfaction were already found in the previous studies cross the globe such as food quality, service quality, staff performance, restaurant physical and facilities and restaurant ambience. However, this study found factors influencing dining satisfaction in those major themes are different particularly factors that related to unique cultural preference concept for Malay in term of attributes for food quality, eating style, restaurant decoration, waiting activities, prayer room and private dining areas.

The management of those factors influencing satisfaction deducted from the restaurant staff practices was seen consistent with some basic element in managing of an organization. Those practices can be grouped under the theme of human resource management (hiring restaurant manager, front of house staff and kitchen staff), human resource development (staff training and development) and restaurant rules and operation system,

The conceptual framework of customer satisfaction with the dining experience process of this study involved three major concepts. First, the input for the dining experience satisfaction (consists of factor influencing dining satisfaction and ways of managing it). Second, the consumption of dining experience satisfaction (at three phases: pre-meal, the actual meal and post-meal experience) and cognitive evaluation process of dining experience that leads to satisfaction. Third, the outcomes of dining experience satisfaction (satisfaction that showed in a form of pleasurable feelings and behavioural changes).

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a brief discussion summary of the findings, the contribution of the study, the implication of the findings to Malaysia and the rest of the world and suggestions for future research.

7.2 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The primary reasons for customers of Malay restaurant dining at a restaurant are not only for the purpose of having a meal but also to transact business, to relax or to enjoy the company of cherished others (friends, family and spouse). Therefore, the function of a restaurant is not only to sell products and services, but also to offer a dining experience.

The dining experience is a continuous process which starts with the customers' first engagement with the restaurant through the pre-meal experience stage (reservation experience stage, the arrival experience stage), during the meal experience stage (the meal and the seating experience), and the post-meal experience stage (the payment experience stage and the departure).

Each stage has its own tangible and intangible factors that play their role in providing total satisfaction with the dining experience rather than working as separate entities. Satisfaction as a result of consuming those factors and ways managing them is interpreted in two forms: pleasurable feelings and behavioural changes of customers.

At the pre meal experience, the availability of a reservation service for formal and informal functions provides choice for customers to control their time of arrival, date

and a private eating space to sit. Satisfaction was achieved when customers' expectation of their reservation to be answered quickly by a polite and professional staff is fulfilled. Being assisted by a free parking attendant to help to control traffic and to look after their vehicles as well as having a parking area close to the premises, punctuality of restaurant business hours and offering 24-hour restaurant operation to the public were factors influencing satisfaction at dining arrival stage.

The meal experience stage had the highest number of categories and sub-categories of factors influencing customer dining satisfaction and is assumed as the focal stage of the customers' dining experience process. The meal experience is made up of the restaurant setting in which the meal is being eaten, the meal (food) experience and service quality experience. The seating experience refers to the customers' experience of being seated, waiting for their order to be taken, waiting for their order to be served and the whole time that they spend in the restaurant.

Menu variety (common Malay menu, traditional Malay menu, international menu) and food presentation and display were core food quality attributes found in the study that received more attention in the meal experience stage besides food nutritious-ness, food authenticity, food freshness, food consistency, food crispiness, food tastiness.

The Malay traditional authentic restaurant concept was influenced by restaurant architecture, interior design and buffet table decoration, eating style, restaurant staff uniform, order taking style, private dining space and traditional live band, which provide an exotic cultural experience.

The restaurateurs for Malay restaurant have to be more responsive to society's needs and demands in order to provide better, faster and more services. This study found that quality, quantity and speed are not the only competences that society requires from restaurants. The availability of waiting activities helping customers to fill their time waiting for their order to be taken or served, divert their attention from focusing on restaurant's slow service and for children to play to allow their parents having meal without interruption. The prayer room provides space for Muslim restaurant staff

and customers to pray in order to obligate Islamic rule of performing five-time a day prayer wherever they are.

Satisfaction was seen as a result of cognitive evaluation processes after customers' need is fulfilled. Those needs have a hierarchy. This study showed that customers' involvement in controlling dining activities drives satisfaction. For instance, at the post-meal stage, customers themselves determine the time for products/ services payment that they consumed at the restaurants any time before leaving the restaurant. Being bid farewell and being escorted to the exit door were two satisfaction factors highlighted in the post-meal experience.

The management of factors influencing customer dining experience satisfaction depend on people who provide the services on which customer dining satisfaction depends: the management of human resources (hiring the restaurant manager, the front of house staff and kitchen staff who are not only expert in food handling and culinary art according to menu specialization but also with management and leadership skills), the management of human resource development (training and development) and restaurant rules and operation system. On top of this, a qualified restaurant manager (in terms of knowledge, skill, experience and management aspect) is the person who is responsible for creating and managing changes in the restaurant aimed at improving the experience of customers with their dining experience and thereby customer loyalty.

7.3 THE RELATION OF THE FINDINGS TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

This study has provided an overview of the different methods and techniques around customer insight, including evaluating the importance of customer needs, expectations and satisfaction with the restaurant dining experience. The study gathered a lot of information that is already available on this topic and gives practical examples and cases from Malay restaurants in Malaysia. This study did not aim to be explorative or innovative in nature, but rather to give an overview and integrate existing insights.

How to manage customer satisfaction deals with the practicalities of this customer satisfaction management approach and presents a number of tools and techniques for gaining an insight in expectations, needs, experiences, perceptions and satisfaction of the customer. In gaining this insight, measuring satisfaction at the end of the process or the service delivery seems to be just one of the aspects of interaction with the customer. Having insight into and an impact on the needs and expectations of citizens/customers at the start or at a much earlier stage is also very important.

In term of managerial implication, the findings of this study provided a collection of best practices in managing customer satisfaction in Malaysian Malay restaurants and the preparation of constructs for questionnaires development to measure and manage customer dining experience satisfaction for future research. Many interesting and valuable things could be done with these good practices for customer satisfaction management particularly human resource management, human resource development and restaurant rules and operation system that include preparation, operation and quality control.

Successful restaurants use customer needs and expectations as a starting point, developing proposals around their customers' needs and expectations, also meeting other corporate imperatives. Managing satisfaction therefore has to do with managing services and/or products, but also with managing expectations and perceptions of the customer. Understanding customers in this way is something that restaurants can no longer ignore. If restaurant want their services to be used and interventions to succeed, they need to meet the public on their terms and manage needs and expectations more clearly along the way to see the results in satisfaction. Measuring satisfaction seems to be just one element in this overall satisfaction management approach. Through this study, the place and the role of customers in customer satisfaction management become clearer and Malaysian Malay restaurants will have some practical guidelines on the way to Customer Satisfaction Management.

The dynamic way of getting customers of restaurants industries involved in enhancing their perceptions, expectations and commitment through active participation, is one of

strategies to obtain a legitimate level of quality of satisfaction in restaurants. These trends are not going to reverse. Indeed, restaurants have to assume that they will have to work increasingly harder to engage the public in creating their own dining experience.

The conceptual framework of factors influencing customer satisfaction dining experience process in Malaysian Malay restaurants developed in this study will help to provide a useful framework for future research regarding total process of dining experience, factors influencing customer satisfaction and the management of satisfaction in the restaurant industry. This contribution is particularly important due to the limited empirical studies on the research focus in Malaysia.

In conclusion, the use of case study research approach through interpretive social paradigm in this study managed to explore factors influencing dining satisfaction and the management of the satisfaction deeply and produce very rich data in comparison to previous quantitative research findings that limited to research variables measured.

7.4 THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

The sections above (7.2 and 7.3) provide a broad overview of the types of findings and interpretations that have emerged from this study. They were derived from Ch 6. That chapter implicitly and explicitly identified the contributions of this study. These contributions are:

- 1) the identification of the factors involved in customer satisfaction when dining.
This was based on a social interpretive qualitative approach as opposed to the positivist quantitative approach that had been the case in research prior to this study.

- 2) the factors involved in customer satisfaction should not just be considered and treated individually but as contributing to a holistic process of satisfaction creation:
- a) dining experience is a continuous process which starts with the customers' first engagement with the restaurant and continues until they leave the restaurant at the departure stage. Therefore, to ensure customers' loyalty, restaurateurs need to ensure all stages (pre-meal experience, during actual meal experience and post-meal experience) in the dining process provide holistic satisfaction to every customer who dines at the restaurant (refer to 6.3).
 - b) there were two dining experience stages involved at the pre meal experience: reservation stage and arrival stage. The availability of a reservation service for formal and informal functions provides choice for customers to control their time of arrival, date and a private eating space to sit and answering customers' phone call quickly by a polite and professional staff were satisfaction influence factors at the reservation stage experience. Meanwhile being assisted by a free parking attendant to control traffic and to look after their vehicles as well as having a parking area close to the premises, punctuality of restaurant business hours and offering 24-hour restaurant operation to the public were factors influencing satisfaction at dining arrival stage.
 - c) the meal experience stage was found a major stage among seven stages of the dining experience process with menu variety and food presentation and display as the core of restaurant service. This study identified factors influencing dining satisfaction in the actual meal experience are different particularly factors that related to unique cultural preference concept for Malay such as private dining space, food quality attribute of authenticity, eating style, restaurant decoration, waiting activities, prayer room, and traditional live band (refer to 6.2.3).
 - d) Self service payment and being bid farewell and being escorted to the exit door were satisfaction factors for customers post-meal dining experience.
 - e) The tangible and intangible factors that influenced satisfaction at each stage of the dining process were integrated together (did not work as separate entities) to produce valuable, meaningful, holistic and memorable dining experience

not only for that particular stage of dining process but also as a whole dining experience process (refer to 6.3).

- f) This study that adopted qualitative research approach, however, managed to venture the role of Maslow theory in customer dining experience in some extent provide a contribution to the aggregated finding of this study (refer to 6.4.1).
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- 3) the identification of the restaurant management factors that influence dining experience satisfaction within the stages of the dining experience process: an aspect of customer satisfaction with the restaurant experience that was largely missing in the literature. This study found human resource management (the restaurant owner/manager, front of house staff and kitchen staff) – refer to 6.5.1, staff training and development (refer to 6.5.2) and restaurant rules and operation system (refer to 6.5.3) were elements that responsible in managing the customer satisfaction dining experience.
 - 4) an analyses of customer satisfaction in a new socio-cultural context: Malaysian Malay restaurants provided the opportunity for a cross comparison of ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ research findings and the identification of what may be the same and what may different depending on the cultural context.
 - 5) the development of a conceptual framework that will aid the understanding of customer satisfaction with the dining experience. The conceptual framework of customer satisfaction with the dining experience process of this study involved three major concepts: the input for the dining experience satisfaction (consists of factor influencing dining satisfaction and ways of managing it) – refer to 6.6.1; the consumption of dining experience satisfaction (at three phases: pre-meal, the actual meal and post-meal experience) and cognitive evaluation process of dining experience that leads to satisfaction– refer to 6.6.2; and the outcomes of dining experience satisfaction (satisfaction that showed in a form of pleasurable feelings and behavioural changes) – refer to 6.6.3.

7.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Suggestions for future research for this study are as follows:

- a) This study supports previous theoretical views of quality and satisfaction by identifying important factors influencing customer dining satisfaction. The primary discovery is that taste, presentation, spatial layout, interior design, music, promised service, willingness to help, and competency do contribute to the dining satisfaction perceived by customers. This study also supports the argument in the literature that perceived quality is an important predictor of satisfaction. Thus, more studies on relationships between customer satisfaction and perceived quality are needed to cross-validate the findings from different directions. From a methodological standpoint, future satisfaction research should benefit from developing a more robust measurement incorporating the three key quality factors and unique attributes that exist in the restaurant industry.
- b) The conceptual framework of this study suggests that the researcher should consider additional factors to explain the overall satisfaction with the dining experience at Malaysian Malay restaurants. These factors by themselves would seem to require additional study as they are likely to vary with the type of restaurant visited and with the demographic profiles of customers. This is an area that could be substantially enriched to explain customer satisfaction.
- c) The focus of this research was restricted to a small size of the Malay family up-market restaurant of the Category I Food Store in Johor Bahru. Therefore, the results can be only transferred to up-market restaurants that are located in similar demographic regions and may not be applied conclusively to the other category of the restaurant industry or other types of restaurants in Malaysia. It would be worthwhile to expand this research throughout the country to improve the transferability of the findings to other types of restaurant, such as limited service restaurants and/or upscale restaurants in order to assist restaurant managers in better matching the needs of each customer segment. Customers may take different factors influencing satisfaction into account when considering dining at

different types of restaurants. So, future researchers need to extend to different restaurants of different ethnic cuisines that have different characteristics and attributes.

- d) Future researchers could undertake a comparative study of factors influencing customer satisfaction in Malay restaurants between two different groups of customers such as Eastern versus Western.
- e) As the foodservice industry is dynamic, the factors that influence customer satisfaction may vary over time. Future research can conduct a longitudinal study to compare changes in factors that influence customers' satisfaction at different times.
- f) The following questions might direct the focus of future research. Is satisfaction related to emotions such as trust, excitement, love, or disappointment? What is the relationship between transient satisfaction which is specific to each service encounter and overall satisfaction? Is encounter transient satisfaction influenced by service recovery? Does satisfaction accumulate over time when a consumer experiences multiple experiences with a service firm? What is the impact of satisfaction on the consumers' overall attitude to a service firm compared to other factors such as marketing communication, positive word-of-mouth, or personal needs?
- g) It would be interesting to investigate whether the meal experience stage still plays the most important role in different types of restaurants. For instance, in the fine dining sector atmosphere might be more important than the food itself to customers, who dine in such establishments principally on special occasions (e.g., wedding anniversary, etc.).

7.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented a summary of the research findings of the customer dining experience. The rich summary of findings derived show the strength of the interpretive paradigm in terms of use of qualitative and unstructured data that represents the subjective understanding for the participants. Indeed, the study has extended and deepened the knowledge on experience of customers. The chapter also discusses the implication of the findings to Malaysia and the rest of the world in the food service research area in several issues and discussed limitation of the study and provides a long list of suggestion for future research.