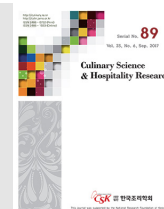


Information available at the Culinary Society of Korea (<http://www.culinary.re.kr/>)

Culinary Science & Hospitality Research

Journal & Article Management System: <https://cshr.jams.or.kr/>



 <http://dx.doi.org/10.20878/cshr.2017.23.6.006>

University Students' Perspective towards the Atmospherics of Theme Restaurants in Selangor, Malaysia

Sang-Hyeop Lee[†]

Dept. of Food Service Management, Youngsan University, Korea

KEYWORDS

Theme restaurant,
University students,
Malaysia.

ABSTRACT

This study explored the factors affecting university students' perspectives towards a theme restaurant. Atmospherics has been regarded as one of the factors that affect the satisfaction of students as it would trigger emotional responses within the theme restaurant, determining the behavioral intention of the students, whether they would return to the restaurant or not. The findings could be referred by the theme restaurant managers to understand more about customers' needs and wants in terms of physical environment of the theme restaurant. Qualitative research method was applied. 10 face-to-face interviews were conducted and the research context was in the theme restaurants around Selangor, Malaysia. As a result, this study has found that the physical environment of the theme restaurant affected students' satisfaction towards their dining experiences as well as elicits emotional responses among the students during their dine-in processes in the theme restaurants. Both satisfaction and emotional responses of the students were found out to be imposing significant effects on the behavioral intention of the university students. Hence, this study provided assistance for the theme restaurant operators to understand their customers of university students and make more effective managing strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has many restaurants that are famous for its food which attracts tourists to visit the country just to have a taste of Malaysian food (Ali & Abdullah, 2012). More and more theme restaurants are established but there are limited resources on how to gain more customers and what the customers expect from theme restaurants for the restaurant operators. There are many studies that allow restaurant operators to utilize how to attract more customers to dine in at the restaurants. However, there are not many of studies that theme restaurant operators can refer to in order to improve

the restaurants' productivity and which aspects of the theme restaurants should focus on, so that more customers would visit the theme restaurants.

Satisfaction is one of the motivations that triggers customers' restaurant patronage decision (Weiss, Feinstein, & Dalbor, 2005). If a customer is dissatisfied, the chance of returning to the restaurant would be reduced. The factors that affect the satisfaction of customers on a restaurant include physical environment, food quality, service quality, menu, and price. These factors could be used by the theme restaurant operators to increase theme restaurants' customers even though the factors are useful for general restaurants.

* This work was supported by a 2017 research grant from Youngsan University, Republic of Korea.

[†] Corresponding author: Sang-Hyeop Lee, Dept. of Food Service Management, Youngsan University, 142, Bansongsunhwan, Haeundae-gu, Busan 48015, South Korea. Tel. +82-10-3654-3291, E-mail: a09x09a@hotmail.com

Therefore, satisfaction of customers in theme restaurants could be determined through the factors as it contributes to the possibility of attracting more customers to revisit the restaurants. Moreover, atmospherics of a restaurant plays an important role in evoking emotional responses among customers, so that the customers would choose to dine in at the particular restaurant over other restaurants (Kotler, 1973). Theme restaurant operators could match the restaurants' physical environment to the theme concept of the restaurant by using DINESCAPE scales as physical environment are likely to leave an impression on customers based on the theme concept which triggers customers' positive emotional responses towards the theme restaurant and choose to dine in at that restaurant (Kim & Moon, 2009). In addition, behavioral intention affected by the satisfaction of customers also influences the customers' decisions on remaining loyal to the restaurant or revisiting the restaurant in the future (Tayyab & Rajput, 2014). This aspect could be used by the theme restaurant operators through improving the food quality, service quality or physical environment of the theme restaurant as it may generate patronage intentions of the customers towards the theme restaurant.

This study aims to investigate the elements that would affect university students' satisfaction towards a theme restaurant, to examine the effects of physical environment of a theme restaurant on university students' emotional responses which then influences their behavioral intention towards the theme restaurant. This study could be used by theme restaurant operators in Malaysia to understand more about the university students' perceptions and expectations towards a theme restaurant. This could lead to the development of theme restaurants in the country. It also allows the theme restaurant operators in Malaysia to recognize the significant factors that would meet the satisfaction of university students and create revisiting intentions to the theme restaurant. Here are the research questions of this study;

How does the physical environment influence your satisfaction in terms of theme restaurant?

What is your opinion on the physical environment of the theme restaurant and how does it influence your emotional responses?

How does the physical environment affect your behavioral intention regarding to the theme restaurant?

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Factors affecting Customer Satisfaction

Continuously providing customer satisfaction fosters customer relationships in long term (MacLaurin & MacLaurin, 2000). By fostering customer relationships, customer retention could be achieved. When customer retention strategies are developed and improved, loyal customers are created. Moreover, satisfaction of customers is important to generate more businesses and revenues as customers would have a higher chance to share their experiences with other people when they are satisfied (Othman & Goodarzirad, 2013). This means word of mouth behavior would increase when customer satisfaction is achieved. Therefore, customer satisfaction is important for organizations to grow and increase profitability, especially service oriented organizations, such as restaurants. Because the key contributors to profits of service organizations are customers. If the customers are dissatisfied by the service provided, chances of customers returning to the restaurant would be low and the customers may share their unhappy experiences to their friends or family through word of mouth or social media, which are some of the effective ways that could reach out to the public fast, leading to business loss of the restaurant (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996).

Satisfaction is the reaction when customers are pleased. It occurs when customers judge a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, whether it gave or is giving a pleasant feeling of fulfillment, including under or over fulfillment regarding to the consumption of the product or service (Tayyab & Rajput, 2014). Theoretically, satisfaction is the results of purchase and usage of the customer's comparison on the benefits and disadvantages that the purchase would provide in relation to the consequences that is expected to come along with the purchase. Customer satisfaction also means a customer's expectation on a product after the usage of the product and how customers assess the product in a single manner and compare with rivals' products (Othman & Goodarzirad, 2013). Moreover, satisfaction is defined as the overall attitude or behavior that the customers have on the service provider, or the response of the customers in terms of emotion towards the difference between expectation of customers and the reality of what they have receive, which is related to the needs, wants or goals of customers. Therefore, satisfaction is meeting customers' expectations of products or services and the pleasant feelings of fulfillment they have when

the customers are using or after they have used the products or services.

In the restaurant context, customers determine satisfaction based on few elements. According to Weiss et al. (2005), the elements of customer satisfaction in a restaurant includes food quality, service quality, atmosphere of the restaurant and experience seeking-behavior in terms of cognition, sensation and novelty. Service quality, product quality, physical design and price are the components of customer satisfaction with the restaurant. Furthermore, in restaurants, especially themed, the elements of satisfaction consist of theme concept, service quality, food quality, menu, atmosphere, convenience, value, product merchandise and pricing (MacLaurin & MacLaurin, 2000). Thematic experience, environmental perception, service quality, accessibility, and meals satisfaction are the factors of themed restaurants customers' satisfaction. Thus, it could be assumed that food quality, service quality, theme experience, atmosphere, price and menu are the elements that would influence customers' dining experiences that lead to the satisfaction towards the theme restaurant.

2.2. Emotional Response

Emotions have a huge effect on our decision making process. When decision making is needed, emotions from preceding experiences related to the decision would judge and analyze the choices that is being considered. Emotions lead to decisions as preferences are produced (Kim & Moon, 2009). Therefore, it is concluded that emotions are one of the factors that could affect customers' decisions on whether to dine in at a restaurant or not. This shows that it is important for restaurant operators to induce positive emotional responses among customers, so that the customers have a higher chance to choose to dine in at the restaurant, even creating revisiting behavior.

Atmospherics, which is also known as physical environment or servicescape of a restaurant, is one of the factors that would trigger emotional responses among customers (Kotler, 1973). Jang and Namkung (2009) agreed that atmospherics is important to the dining experiences of customers as atmospherics would affect their emotions and expectations. Physical environment (atmospheric) could evoke customer's emotional response, especially during hedonic consumption (Kim & Moon, 2009). Thus, it is reasonable to state that atmospherics is the factor of occurrence of emotional reactions among cus-

tomers, which means a specific environment that would increase a customer's purchasing intention through the emotions created.

In this study, DINESCAPE scale, which is derived from SERVICESCAPE scale, is used because it is a tool that only concentrates on the internal environment of a dining area, making it somewhat different from SERVICESCAPE that describes the elements of physical environment as a whole. DINESCAPE is defined as "the man-made physical and human surroundings in the dining area of restaurants" (Ryu & Jang, 2008: p.4). The use of DINESCAPE is to investigate how the physical environment of a restaurant, which is atmospherics, could affect emotions of the restaurant's customers. The variables of DINESCAPE include facility aesthetics, lighting, ambience, layout, service product and social factors. However, Ryu and Jang (2008) found out that there is a slight difference which the identified variables are facility aesthetics, ambience, lighting, table settings, layout, and service staff. The physical environments that are aesthetic in character such as lighting, ambience, color, and music have more effect on a customer's emotional response. For example, color plays a role in customers' emotional responses as different colors could have different impacts on the feelings and emotions of a person (Othman & Goodarzirad, 2013).

Theming is a process which the environment is established based on a diverse characters (Lego Muñoz & Wood, 2009). For example, Hard Rock Café which is a theme restaurant with the theme concept of rock and roll, photos of famous rock stars and albums hang on the walls. Real guitars and other items used or signed by famous singers are also displayed as well. Many rock and roll artists often go to Hard Rock Café to perform live rock and roll shows. Rock and roll music is also played all the time in all the restaurants. These unique atmospheres act as a basis for customers to choose Hard Rock Cafe over other theme restaurants through emotions and feelings they remember from their dining experiences in Hard Rock Café. The experiences enable customers to distinguish Hard Rock Café from other cafes, which leads to its success as a theme restaurant that currently has 144 cafés all over the world (Wall & Berry, 2007). Therefore, the characteristics of the physical environment of a themed restaurant are essential in terms of architecture, decorations, music and so on.

2.3. Behavioral Intention

Behavioral intention is defined as the point to which a person has devised conscious plans on whether or not to perform some particular future behavior (Warshaw & Davis, 1985). Intentions are assumed to catch the motivational aspects that affect behavior. Behavioral intentions also include anticipated behaviors that customers expect they would display in the future. According to Zeithaml et al. (1996), behavioral intention could be seen as the sign of whether the customers would stay with or desert the company. To measure a broader range of behavioral intentions in terms of service quality, a 13-item battery was created, such as the possibility of paying premium price and displaying continuous loyalty to the company even when prices increase, doing more business with the company in the future, and complaining when service problems occur. These are classified into four categories: word of mouth communications, purchase intentions, price sensitivity, and complaining behaviors. The four categories are later configured into five dimensions of behavioral intentions which consist of loyalty to company, propensity to switch, willingness to pay more, external response to problem and internal response to problem (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Therefore, behavioral intention means the intention of a person to engage in a behavior in the future which would affect the decision on whether or not to revisit an organization again or recommend the organization to their friends or family through word-of-mouth in a service dimension.

Researchers have found that satisfaction plays an important role in the behavioral intentions of customers. Lee, Petrick and Crompton (2007) stated that both quality and satisfaction affects visitors' behavioral intention. Tayyab and Rajput (2014) agreed that satisfaction is the main motivation for customer loyalty and behaviors. In addition, customer experience is also linked to the behavioral intentions of customers (Burton, Sheather & Roberts, 2003). Other than satisfaction, perceived service value has a significant relationship to visitors' behavioral intention (Lee et al., 2007). It could be concluded that service quality, customer experience and perceived quality value which are related to customers' satisfaction could cause impacts on customers' behavioral intention.

In terms of a restaurant setting, Jang and Namkung (2009) found out that food quality, service quality and atmospherics are the three factors that contribute customers' satisfaction on their dining experiences then affect their post-dining behavioral intentions. Weiss et al. (2005) stated that customer satisfaction which is associated with food quality and service

quality could strongly contribute to the estimation of the returning intention of customers. Service quality is recognized as the element that influences customers' satisfaction and repurchasing behavior which would lead to long-term revenue generation of an organization (Tabaku & Kushi, 2013). Furthermore, servicescape, or atmospheric, also affects the patronage intention of the customers through the emotional responses. To determine whether the atmospherics of a restaurant could influence behavioral intentions of customers through their emotional responses, Mehrabian and Russell's Stimulus-Organism-Response model could be utilized.

3. METHODS

3.1. Research Context

The research was based on theme restaurants across Selangor, Malaysia. There are many interesting theme restaurants in Malaysia. Malaysians are eating outside more frequent instead of cooking themselves at home, which leads to the number of new restaurants in Malaysia to rise quickly and the businesses of the restaurants to grow (Ali & Abdullah, 2012). Therefore, more theme restaurants and cafés that possess unique traits are established to cater specific target markets in Malaysia. However, with some of the theme restaurants closed down in the previous year such as The Cave Couple Café and Restaurant in Petaling Jaya, Palate Palette in Kuala Lumpur, The Giraffe in Klang and more, theme restaurants operators are facing difficulties in maintaining the business of the theme restaurants.

3.2. Sampling Data and Data Collection

The participants of the interviews were chosen based on the criteria of this research study. The destination of interview sessions were conducted in the theme restaurant itself. This allowed the interviewer to observe the theme restaurant and witness how the students react to the concept or environment of the theme restaurant. The interviewed participants: (i) have went to a theme restaurant for the last six months and (ii) was a university student.

It is estimated that 10 interviews were conducted and the data were collected. The interview sessions were be recorded with the permission of the interviewees. The time of the interview sessions was approximately from 30 minutes to 1 hour. After the interviews, the mobile phone numbers of the participants were jolted down for further questions on the inter-

views if there are more questions that needs to be answered from the participants depending on their willingness.

The data was collected from July to September 2016. There are three types of interviews: unstructured, semi-structured, and structured interview. In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted which the interviewers and interviewees participate in a formal interview and use a guide that contains a list of questions, topics, themes or areas that need to be covered during the conversation. This allowed flexibility during the interview sessions as the participants of the interviews could express their opinions freely in their own words and the data collected are reliable and comparable.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face as well. Face-to-face interviews involve the presence of the interviewer which is easier for the interviewee to ask questions or clarify answers during the interview (Dialsingh, 2008). The participants could answer the questions directly during the interview and the interviewer could also respond straightaway to what the participant say or does. The interviewer could also allow the interviewer to notice and capture not only the verbal cues but also the non-verbal cues of the interviewees during the interview. The interview sessions were recorded with a smartphone and important answers by the interviewees would be written down in a notebook.

4. RESULTS

RQ 1: Students were asked about their opinions towards the theme restaurant that they have been to and their satisfaction towards the physical environment of the theme restaurant.

Ten students were interviewed and have provided answers regarding to their dining experiences as well as the physical environment of theme restaurants they have visited. Seven students were satisfied with their dining experiences in the theme restaurants. Two of them have mentioned that the design of the theme restaurants provided them a comfortable dining experiences and one of them mentioned that the experience is one of a kind that she would never forget. Another one of the students felt that dining in the theme restaurant that she have been to allows the customers to create memories. Another three students were very satisfied with the physical environment of the theme restaurants. Among the ten students, three of them were not satisfied with the physical environment of the theme restaurant that they visited.

One of them thought that the colors of the pictures used as the decoration in the theme restaurant affected the student's appetite, causing the student to feel uncomfortable during the dining process. While the other two students felt that the physical environment of the theme restaurant would not affect the student's satisfaction towards the dining experiences but the quality of the restaurant's service and food would affect their satisfaction. Also, among the seven satisfied students, two of them mentioned that the food served in the restaurant was not satisfactory and they felt that the price paid was not worth for the food despite the physical environment of the restaurant. Apart from being satisfied with the physical environment of the restaurant, one of the satisfied student proposed his opinion towards the interior design of the restaurant, noting "... some of the decorations took up quite some spaces in the restaurant and hence less space is available for tables and seats... customers have to wait for quite some time before there are empty seats available... would negatively affects the customers' satisfaction ...".

RQ 2: Students were asked whether there were any emotional response triggered by the physical environment of the theme restaurant during their dining experience.

The physical environment of the theme restaurants have created emotional responses among the students. There were six students felt happy and excited during the dine-in process in the theme restaurants are happiness and excitement. The students felt excited and happy due to the unique theme and setup of the decorations and the furniture in the theme restaurant, as well as the ambience and colors used in the theme restaurants. They felt that dining in the theme restaurants is a new and different experience. One of the students felt curious with the food presentation and the taste of the food as the student stated "... we never know how the food we order would appear in what kind of design and how they actually taste...". The student was also interested with the decoration of the theme restaurants as it created surprises. Other than that, the music of the theme restaurant have made one of the students felt peaceful and relaxing. The setup of the theme restaurants also created pleasure feelings to another one student. One of the students, however, stated that the

physical environment did not evoke any emotional responses but the food served did.

RQ 3: Students were asked if they would return to the theme restaurant again in the future and how did the physical environment affected their behavioral intention on whether to revisit the theme restaurant or not.

The students were also asked on their behavioral intention - if they would revisit the theme restaurant again in the future. Among the ten interviews conducted, four students would not revisit the theme restaurant again while the other six students would revisit the theme restaurant in the future. One of the four students who would not revisit the theme restaurant felt that one-time experience of the theme restaurant is enough for her and they would like to explore other theme restaurants instead of returning to the same one. Also, two of them felt that the food served in the theme restaurant was not worth for the price that they paid for even though the physical environment of the restaurant are satisfactory. One of the four students, however, added that he would recommend his friends to visit the theme restaurant just for the experience. Another one of them mentioned that if the theme restaurant is able to improve on its physical environment, which is the changing the paintings on the wall, he would consider returning to the restaurant. On the other hand, the other six students said that they would revisit the theme restaurant again in the future due to the attractive design and unique dining experience in the theme restaurant. One of them mentioned about the music and decoration of the theme restaurant was the reason he would revisit the theme restaurant again, which triggered the feelings of peacefulness. Also, one of the six students revealed that the theme of the restaurant reminded her of her childhood memories and she would gladly return to the theme restaurant again for the memories, mentioning "...I would visit the restaurant once in a year so that I could be reminded of my childhood...". However, among the six students, two of them brought up about the food issue as well. They thought that the food served in the theme restaurant should be improved in terms of quality and taste, so that it would increase the chances of them revisiting the restaurant more often. Nevertheless, different answers were obtained from a student which she mentioned that she would return to the theme restaurant for the food but not for the physical

environment of the theme restaurant.

Overall, it could be said that the physical environment of the theme restaurant would affect the satisfaction of the students towards the theme restaurant. The physical environment of the theme restaurant also triggers emotional responses from the students, which would lead to the revisiting behavior of the students to the theme restaurants. However, besides the physical environment of the theme restaurant, the quality of food served in the restaurant also plays an important role in determining the satisfaction and behavioral intention towards the theme restaurants.

5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to discover university students' perceptions towards the physical environment of theme restaurants. Ten university students were interviewed and the results were presented. From the results, it has been identified that physical environment of a theme restaurant would indeed affect a student's satisfaction towards their dining experiences. However, not only does the physical environment would affect a student's dining experiences but the quality of the food as well. Moreover, the physical environment of the theme restaurants would also create emotional responses among the students during their dining experience in the theme restaurant. Most of the emotional responses invoked were positive emotions rather than negative emotions. According to the results, satisfaction towards the dining experiences in the theme restaurants and emotional responses triggered during the dining period would affect the decision of the students to revisit the theme restaurant or not in the future. Most of the students are likely to return to the theme restaurant that they have been to. Nevertheless, besides the physical environment of the theme restaurant, the quality and taste of food also play crucial roles in determining the student's satisfaction towards the theme restaurant as well as the behavioral intention of the students.

The physical environment of the theme restaurant has a significant effect on the satisfaction and emotional response of the students which consequently affects their behavioral intentions as well. Pleasurable atmospherics which includes the ambience, lighting, music, colors used by the theme restaurant are able to influence the satisfaction of the students towards the theme restaurant. Physical environment that is able to create memories would enhance the satisfaction of the cus-

tomers as they could have a one of a kind experience that they could recall back. However, the satisfaction of the customers does not depend only on the physical environment, but the price and the quality of the food served as well. The effort of trying to satisfy the customers by theme restaurant operators whom only focus on the atmospherics of the restaurant but have ignored the importance of the food quality and price of the food would be in vain as the three factors are the major factors of ensuring the satisfaction of the customers towards the restaurant. Moreover, physical environment of the theme restaurants which are able to elicit emotional reactions among the students are more likely to promote loyalty among the students. Physical environment such as music, decorations and designs used by the theme restaurant could be utilized to stimulate different kinds of emotions so that it would be memorable for the students, leading to higher chances of the students to revisit the theme restaurants. When the students are both satisfied and displayed positive emotional response towards the physical environment of the theme restaurant, the possibility of them patronage the theme restaurant in the future would be higher as satisfaction and emotional response are positively linked to behavioral intention. Nevertheless, higher quality of food and reasonable price should be offered to the students while providing a pleasant physical environment to the customers in order to effectively retain the students' loyalty and ensure their revisit intention.

Hence, to attract and retain more customers, theme restaurant operators should look into the quality and taste of food while maintaining the physical environment of the theme restaurant at the same time. Although from the study, it has been acknowledged that physical environment of the theme restaurant is important in assuring the satisfaction of the customers, theme restaurant operators should also not neglect the main product that a restaurant provide, which is the food. Besides, theme restaurant operators should examine whether the theme, decoration used, ambience, lightings and other aspects of the physical environment of the theme restaurant suits the liking of the customers or not before setting up the theme restaurant so that it could satisfy and meet the preference of the targeted customers.

The results have suggested that atmospherics of a theme restaurant have imposed significant effects on the satisfaction of the university students. The physical environment of the restaurant such as the pictures on the wall, presentation of

food, or the colors used by the restaurant to suit its theme are able to influence the students' satisfaction towards the theme restaurant, which mentioned that the physical environment of a restaurant which also includes the physical appearance of the food presentation is one of the factors that determines the students' dining experience. A theme restaurant that provides comfortable and pleasant dining experiences to the students have increased the students' satisfaction towards the restaurant. The ability of the theme of the restaurant to allow the customers to create memories is also one of the factors that have enhanced the students' satisfaction during their dine-in process in the restaurant. With unique atmospherics, students were able to experience new environment by themselves or with their peers in the theme restaurants, leading to satisfaction as memories were created through the new experiences. Experiences allowed the customers to store memories are capable of affecting the customers' satisfaction towards the hospitality setting. Customers would often feel pleased when there is something unforgettable that they could recall back whenever they think of the place. Therefore, if the theme restaurant has the ability to let the students to have memories due to the atmospherics of the restaurant, the satisfaction towards the theme restaurant among the students would be higher.

However, the results also showed that despite the theme restaurant provides a pleasant physical environment, if the theme restaurant provided low quality food with high price, it would affect the students' satisfaction as well. Students patronage theme restaurants not only for the physical environment of the restaurant but the food as well. If the restaurant served food with low quality and unreasonable price is charged, it would influence the satisfaction of the students towards the theme restaurant. The service quality provided by the theme restaurant is also one of the reasons that have affected the satisfaction of the university students. Students were expecting to be provided with great service while they were dining in the theme restaurants. If the physical environment is good and the quality of food is nice and affordable but the quality of the service provided is low, it would highly affect the satisfaction of the students. In addition, the space and layout and decorations used by the theme restaurant also played a role in affecting the students' satisfaction. To represent the theme of the restaurants, theme restaurant operators tend to have more decorations and furniture that takes up spaces in the restaurant which lead to lesser seats available for the cus-

tomers to sit in and dine in the restaurant. As a result, customers had to line up and waited for some time during peak hours which lead to customer dissatisfaction. Restaurants with specific themes are able to trigger emotions among the students which have led them to patronage the theme restaurant. The inventories and props used by the theme restaurant as decorations and a part of the restaurant's design have elicited emotions among the students. Other than that, music used by the theme restaurant is also one of the reasons that evoked emotions among the students during their dine-in process in the restaurants. Playing music in the background allows the students to have different kind of feelings while dining in the restaurant such as relaxed, happiness, calm, excitement and so on. Music acts as a strong emotion stimulator as people are able to generate feelings unconsciously while listening to music; for example, we would feel excited when music with strong beats and fast tempo are played.

Furthermore, theme restaurant offers the chance for the students to experience an environment that they could not experience before. For example, they could get close to their favorite childhood cartoon characters and have meals in the environment that gives them the feelings of being together with the cartoon characters if they are dining in a theme restaurant that has that specific theme. By providing the physical environment or experience that the student could personally experience it rather than imagining it could also evoke them emotionally such as excitement as they could not experience the environment before. Through personally performing what they have been visualizing before, it created a more memorable experience, which then led to higher chances of the customers to revisit the theme restaurant for the experience again.

Emotional responses allows relationships to be created between the theme restaurant and the students, where loyalty towards the restaurant could be created and enhanced. The findings have showed that most of the feelings and emotions triggered are positive emotions which includes happiness and excitements. Peace, pleasant and relaxation were also some of the positive emotions evoked during the students' dining experience in the theme restaurants. From the results, satisfaction and emotional responses of the students on the physical environment of the theme restaurant affected the behavioral intention of the students towards the theme restaurant. Students who were satisfied with the physical environment of the theme restaurant and elicited positive emotional re-

sponses due to the physical environment during their dining experience at the theme restaurant that they have been to have displayed intention of revisiting the theme restaurants in the future. When the students feel satisfied with the experience through the atmospherics provided by the theme restaurants, there is a higher chance inducing repeat- patronage intentions among them. Satisfied customers are also more likely to be engaged in positive word-of-mouth behavior, whom would share his or her dining experience and the physical environment of the theme restaurant to his or her peers and recommend them to pay a visit to the theme restaurant. Customers who have had emotional responses triggered due to the physical environment of the theme restaurant showed more intention to return to the theme restaurant for another dining experience again. When there is a bond between the service provider and the customer through emotions, the customer are be more likely to show future repurchase intentions as they have grown feelings towards the service provider. However, there are still cases of students who have shown satisfaction and positive emotional response while dining in the theme restaurants that they have been to would just visit the theme restaurants just for the sake of experience. Once they have got the experience of the physical environment of the theme restaurants, they would not visit the theme restaurant again although they felt satisfied with the atmospherics of the theme restaurants and there was positive emotional responses during their dining experience in the theme restaurants. This is because the experience they had in the theme restaurants that they have been to is not memorable enough for them to return to the theme restaurants again and they felt that it is not worth for the money.

The behavioral intention of the students are affected not only by the physical environment of the theme restaurants that they have been to, but also the price and food quality that is provided by the theme restaurants. Providing an atmospherics that is memorable and unique is apparently not enough to retain loyal customers. Reasonable price and high quality of food is needed to be served to the students so that they would choose to revisit the theme restaurants again. Physical environment of the theme restaurant does play a major role in enhancing the students' behavioral intention to patronage the restaurant again in the future but the food quality should not be neglected as well. Customers tend to judge the restaurant after tasting the food served in the restaurant even if they are pleased with the atmospherics of theme restaurant.

If the food quality does not meet up the expectations of the customers, they might not visit the restaurant again in the future despite being satisfied with the experience provided by physical environment of the theme restaurant.

6. CONCLUSION

This research was conducted to discover the perceptions of university students towards theme restaurants in terms of satisfaction, emotional responses and behavioral intention. The findings have suggested that there is a positive link between satisfaction, emotional responses and behavioral intention. The findings also implied that the physical environment, which includes the colors, food presentation, spatial layout, and the ambience of the theme restaurants have a significant and direct impact on the students' dining satisfaction. The colors, decoration, ambience and music as part of the physical environment are also directly connected to the emotional response of the university students. From the findings, satisfaction and emotional responses have a significant effect on behavioral intention of university students towards theme restaurants.

This study provides assistance for the theme restaurant operators to understand more of the perception of university students towards the theme restaurant. Theme restaurant operators should put more effort into enhancing the students' satisfaction towards theme restaurants. The colors, music, ambience and decorations used should be carefully picked and chosen in order to suit the theme of the restaurant which subsequently satisfy the students who came to the theme restaurant for a unique experience. For example, a restaurant which the theme is more to the romantic category should choose soft colors such as pastel colors and play romantic love music at the background so that it would give the impression of romanticism to the customers; the decorations and ambience of the restaurant should also be carefully picked so that it would let the customers to feel the theme of the restaurant. The colors, music, ambience, decoration and design does not only should boost the satisfaction of the students towards the theme restaurants, they should also be able to incite emotional response among the students so that the students could feel the sense of belonging to the theme restaurant and create a bond between the theme restaurant and the students, which subsequently creates loyalty towards the theme restaurants. Behavioral intention which the students would

choose to revisit the theme restaurants could be created when both satisfaction and emotional response were generated. By enhancing the satisfaction, emotional response and behavioural intention of the students, not only the reputation of the theme restaurant would increase as a result of higher word-of-mouth behaviour from the students which leads to higher patronage of the theme restaurants, it would also promote growth in the business of the theme restaurants grow which would lead to higher profitability.

The limitations of this study include the small sample size of only 10 interviewees. However, the study offers a brief preview of how could the physical environment of theme restaurants could affect satisfaction, emotional responses and behavioral intention of university students. Another limitation is that the interviewed students might associate theme restaurants with other places that is similar to theme restaurants and provide answers according to the place that they have in their mind even after the definition of theme restaurant is explained to them. In addition, future studies could focus on the effects of the other aspects such as food quality, service quality, price and physical environment on the satisfaction, emotional response and behavioral intention of the university students. It is also possible for future studies regarding to physical environment being conducted on other food and beverage settings.

REFERENCES

- Ali, N., & Abdullah, M. A. (2012). The food consumption and eating behaviour of Malaysian urbanites: Issues and concerns. *Malaysia Journal of Society and Space*, 8(6), 157-165.
- Burton, S., Sheather, S., & Roberts, J. (2003). Reality or perception? The effect of actual and perceived performance on satisfaction and behavioral intention. *Journal of Service Research*, 5(4), 292-302.
- Dialsingh, I. (2008). Face-to-face interviewing. *Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods*, 2.
- Jang, S. S., & Namkung, Y. (2009). Perceived quality, emotions, and behavioral intentions: Application of an extended Mehrabian-Russell model to restaurants. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(4), 451-460.
- Kim, W. G., & Moon, Y. J. (2009). Customers' cognitive, emotional, and actionable response to the servicescape: A test of the moderating effect of the restaurant type.

- International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 28(1), 144-156.
- Kotler, P. (1973). Atmospherics as a marketing tool. *Journal of Retailing*, 49(4), 48-64.
- Lego Muñoz, C., & Wood, N. T. (2009). A recipe for success: understanding regional perceptions of authenticity in themed restaurants. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 3(3), 269-280.
- Lee, S. Y., Petrick, J. F., & Crompton, J. (2007). The roles of quality and intermediary constructs in determining festival attendees' behavioral intention. *Journal of Travel Research*, 45(4), 402-412.
- MacLaurin, D. J., & MacLaurin, T. L. (2000). Customer perceptions of Singapore's theme restaurants. *The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 41(3), 756-785.
- Othman, M., & Goodarzirad, B. (2013). Restaurant color's as stimuli to enhance pleasure feeling and its effect on diners' behavioral intentions in the family chain restaurants. *Journal of Tourism, Hospitality, and Culinary Arts*, 5(1), 75-101.
- Ryu, K., & Jang, S. (2008). DINESCAPE: A scale for customers' perception of dining environments. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, 11(1), 2-22.
- Tayyab, M. H., & Rajput, A. (2014). Service quality orientation with customer satisfaction and customer loyalty revisited through literature. *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research*, 21(3), 550-555.
- Tabaku, E., & Kushi, E. (2013). Service quality, customer satisfaction, perceived value and brand loyalty: a critical review of the literature. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 2(9), 223-228.
- Wall, E. A., & Berry, L. L. (2007). The combined effects of the physical environment and employee behavior on customer perception of restaurant service quality. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 48(1), 59-69.
- Warshaw, P. R., & Davis, F. D. (1985). Disentangling behavioral intention and behavioral expectation. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 21(3), 213-228.
- Weiss, R., Feinstein, A. H., & Dalbor, M. (2005). Customer satisfaction of theme restaurant attributes and their influence on return intent. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, 7(1), 23-41.
- Zeithaml, V. A., Berry, L. L., & Parasuraman, A. (1996). The behavioral consequences of service quality. *Journal of Marketing*, 60(2), 31-46.

Received: 10 August, 2017

Revised: 04 September, 2017

Accepted: 14 September, 2017