

Hotel Restaurants Ramadhan Iftar Buffet Menu Attributes, Brands and Muslim Customer Purchase Behaviour

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Abstract: This paper reports an empirical investigation on the effect of the hotel restaurant menu attributes, brand image and Muslims purchase of Ramadhan Iftar buffet at the four and five-star hotel restaurants. This study used causal research design through a quantitative method, self-reported and self-administered questionnaire. Specifically, this research surveyed the individual Muslim customers who break their Iftar Ramadhan at the selected four and five-star hotel restaurants in the city of Kuala Lumpur. Through the descriptive and inferential statistics, some useful insights about the issue investigated were significantly obtained. There is without adoubt that the Ramadhan Iftar buffet menu attributes that are the food quality, menu variety and food presentation have a significant impact on Muslim customers purchase behavior or influence their dining mood at the at the four and five-star hotel restaurants.

Key words: Iftar Ramadhan Menu Attributes • Brands • Muslim Customers • Purchase Behavior

INTRODUCTION

As one of the five pillars of Islam, fasting in the Ramadhan month indeed requires Muslims learns to be patience, perseverance and awakens in the feelings of gratefulness by abstaining of taking food and drink especially during daytime and allowing them to break their fast at sunset or called Iftar. Iftar is referring to the evening meal when Muslims end their daily Ramadan fast at sunset. In other words, Iftar besides others is closely associated with food and drinks [1]. Based on the Islamic teaching, Muslim is allowed to break their fast or Iftar anywhere they prefer, whether at home, mosque, restaurant or even hotel restaurants.

Regarding Malay Muslim eating out in the Ramadhan month, countless foodservice establishment including the star rating hotel restaurants whether big or small tries to win the customers by offering an attractive Iftar Ramadhan buffet [2]. Huge promotion is normally made especially by the various star rating hotels in attracting not only among the Muslim but none Muslim customers as well. The promotion is typically done through competitive pricing, avariety of menus ranging from the traditional to modern food, entertainment and other

facilities such as the prayer hall. One of the reasons for the huge promotion made is because most of the hotel restaurants are getting fewer consumers during the daytime. Thus, to generate revenue or breakeven cost during the fasting month, they need to use strategies as much as possible during the night. With that, most of thehotel restaurants do not want to miss the golden opportunity to serve the Iftar buffet during the Ramadhan month.

Dining out during Ramadan month has become common for Muslim especially in Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory and other large cities in the country. Most of the four and five stars rated hotel in Kuala Lumpur, for instance, are offering Iftar Ramadhan in their hotel restaurant. According to [3], despite slightly expensive there is an emerging pattern observed that the number of customers patronizing at the four and five hotel restaurants' for Iftar buffet is steadily increasing from year to year. He argued that Iftar buffet in four and five-star hotel has certainly attracted many Muslim customers and this uniqueness trend has never declined. Based on the general restaurant setting, there isevidence that elements of food, service and other related determinants influence customers patronizing the restaurant [4, 5, 6, 7, 8].

Besides this, with the waves of modernization and as the customer has hastily adapted with the changing of the lifestyles, they are no longer focus on the functional value alone but interested and turn into a brand or image when deciding to choose the restaurant [9]. In other words, restaurant brand or image is becoming one of the criteria in selecting the restaurant and the increased of such customers or popularly known brand seekers are obviously apparent in this present days [10].

From the above notion and pertains to the Iftar Ramadhan buffet at the four and five-star hotel, some fundamental questions are triggered. 1). Why are some Muslim customers inclined toward having Iftar Ramadhan in the prestigious hotel restaurants' despite knowing that the cost is slightly higher? Does the variety of food, quality of food or quality of service cause the causation? On the other matter, is the connotations of branding image matters to Muslim customers in patronizing the prestigious hotel restaurants during Ramadhan month? Owing to the scarcity of studies related to Iftar Ramadhan, the understanding of the arising questions needs to be revealed. With that, this study is empirically examining the effect of the hotel restaurant menu attributes, brands and Muslims purchase behavior toward the Ramadhan Iftar buffet in the four and five-star hotel restaurants.

Literature Review: The hotel menu attributes are closely related to four main elements that are food quality, price, menu variety and food presentation which are thought to be the building blocks of hotel restaurant menu features that attract the customers.

Food Quality: Food quality is one of the most critical components of a customer dining experience [4, 11] and it is a primary factor influencing customer loyalty in restaurant choice [12] and a key determinant for a customer visiting a restaurant [13]. When compared with other aspects of the restaurant, such as environmental components and service quality, Sulek and Hensley [13] found that food quality is the most important element of customer satisfaction and there is a positive linkage between food quality and satisfaction and customer behavioral intentions.

Price: Price has been used as a chief indicator of product quality [14]. Undoubtedly, lower price strongly influences buyers buying power and some buyers perceive price as a display of quality. The higher the price, the more likely they are to purchase the item because of their perceptions

of the product quality [15]. Pricing must also provide a perception of value to a consumer to influence behaviour [16, 17]. In the restaurant setting, the price is ranked fourth in the list of the most frequently mentioned factors that influencing the customers dining. In other words, customers are very sensitive to the pricing when dining at a restaurant [18] and they make purchasing decisions when they believe the presented price is fair.

Menu Variety: Several types of research were initially looking at the factors influencing the consumer to choose a restaurant. Menu variety, price, atmosphere and convenience are the most common important attributes recognized by [19] and a wider variety of food and beverage selection attracted a wider range of consumers. [20] postulated that type of foods, price, atmosphere, service and food quality are top in the echelon that determined the customer inclination toward dining at the restaurant. [21] stipulated that food types were the most important factor followed by food quality, value for money, image, atmosphere, location, the speed of service and the opening hours. This variable, in fact, is a strategy used by the restaurant operators not only to attract, retain but to be competitive among its competitors [22].

Food Presentation: Presentation of food is a key attribute in modeling dining satisfaction [23]. In addition, food presentation as one of the product/service factors in the tangible quality scale [24]. The presentation through the color of food or drink has also been shown to influence our experience of food or beverage [25, 26]. People use visual information and presentation to judge the freshness of food [27] and how refreshing they expect it to be [28].

Brands: Brands are increasingly seen as valuable assets and sources of differentiation which play an integral part in marketing strategy [29, 30, 31, 32]. Brand depicts as a distinguishing name and a symbol (such as a logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of one seller, or group of sellers and to differentiate those goods or services from competitors who would attempt to provide products that appear to be identical. [30] posited that brand as a differentiation strategy used by businesses and this is the primary reason why brands are attractive to firms wishing to gain a strategic resource in their asset profile. The brand differentiation features the fact it constitutes a value proposition [32].

The growing emphasis on building and managing brand as a primary driver of a hospitality firm's success is obviously apparent among the hotel organizations [33]. For examples, Hilton, Holiday Inn, Marriot and Hyatt and many others are recognized by customers as some of the world's best-known hotel brand with finest restaurant setting. Also, some firms seeking growth opportunities have preferred to acquire existing brands, thus establishing brand management as a formal component of their corporate strategy [34]. [35] view the hotel brand from four aspects; hotel brand value, hotel brand satisfaction, hotel brand association and hotel brand and franchising.

Purchase Behaviour: Consumer purchase behavior from the marketing perspective relate to behavior that consumer display in searching for, purchasing, using, evaluating and disposing of products and services that they expect will satisfy their needs [36]. It is the process of gathering the information before buying and the activities in purchasing [37]. In this sense, consumer purchase behavior reflects many inquiries that refer to why consumers make purchases; factors influenced their purchases and changes in community factors [38]. It covers various aspects such as recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, the building of purchase intention, the act of purchasing, consumption and final disposal [39].

[40] contended that consumer needs to go through five stages before making decisions accurately in the purchasing of the products that are; 1). Recognition – the reason to purchase that stimulated by internal (such as hunger) or external (such as word of mouth); 2). Information search – is a consumer effort to search, identify and evaluate the information obtaining from many sources such as online media, visual, print and word of mouth for their judgment; 3). Evaluation of effectiveness – the consumer will be comparing and evaluates some of the different product or brands in the same categories on the attributes that ability to deliver the benefit to the consumer needs; 4) Purchase decision – consumer made the decision to purchase and choose the products that meet their needs and, 5) Post-purchase behavior – consumer will compare the new purchase products with the previous ones whether the new product is making them satisfied or dissatisfied. If the consumer satisfied, this will result to brand loyalty but if dissatisfied the process will start all over again until they are satisfied.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sampling and Population: This study is designed to examine the influence of hotel restaurant menu attributes, brands and Muslims customer purchase behavior of the Ramadhan Iftar buffet in the four and five-star hotel restaurants. A quantitative approach to a cross-sectional study with a self-reported and self-administered survey questionnaire opted. As the intention of this study to tap the experience of the Muslim customers regarding Ramadhan Iftar buffet menus attributes that are food quality, price, menu variety and food presentation, the selected four and five-star rating hotels in the city of Kuala Lumpur were chosen. The 4 and 5-star rating hotels are chosen to owe to its brand image while two reasons for choosing Kuala Lumpur as a venue for data collection. The first reason is dealing with time constraints. Due to fasting month, there researcher is slightly unable to collect the data throughout the whole country. For the second reasons, reaching the targeted respondents is not an issue as more than 500 Muslims are breaking their fast at the various 4 and 5-star rating hotels every day in Kuala Lumpur in the fasting month.

Research Instrument: The survey instrument is consisting four sections with Section A solicit the information about respondent demographic information. Section B is designed to measure the Muslim customers view toward Iftar Ramadan menu attributes that are food quality, price, menu variety and food presentation. Section C is created to examine perceptions of Muslim customers on the hotel brands consisted elements of hotel reputation, the physical appearance of the premise, the prestige of the star-rated hotels and elitism while Section D is designed to examine the Muslim customer purchase behaviour. Respondents were required to translate their view on a five type Likert scale ranging from 1 with “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree. Most items in all dimensions were replicated from the previous related studies with a few minor modifications of wording made to address specific needs of the current research [29, 37, 41]. A pilot study was initially conducted to verify and confirm the reliability and validity of the items used.

Data Collection Process: Owing to fast month, four research assistants were seeking to collect the data at multiple locations simultaneously. Participants or Muslim

customers were approached at the lobby and within the hotel premise. 215 questionnaires were successfully distributed. The data were then categorized and coded. The name and location of each hotel, however, was not revealed to preserve confidentiality and anonymity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profiles: Through frequency tests, the middle age group (36-45 years) dominated the sample of the respondents which accounted 63.7 percent (n=137), followed by young age group (25-35 years old) and senior age group (46-60 years) which both represented around 17.7 percent (n=38) and only 0.9 percent (n=2) of those respondents above 60 years old. 55 percent (n=119) were female compared to 44.7 percent (n=96) of male respondents. 54 percent (n=116) of them were married while 46 percent (n=99) were single. Out of 215, 47 percent (n=101) of the respondents are having their iftar break with friends, 42, 7 percent (n= 95) with family members and 8.8 percent (n=19) with clients.

The relationship between Iftar Ramadan menu attributes and Muslim customer purchase behaviour: To test the strength of the relationship between Iftar Ramadan buffet menu attributes and Muslim customer purchase behavior as the first hypothesis (H₁) of the study, a single-step multiple regression was conducted. The Iftar Ramadan buffet menu items as the predictor and customer purchase behavior items as the criterion were collapsed and entered into the equation at once. Table 1 displays the summary of the result.

Model 1 depicted that Iftar Ramadhan menu attributes can uniquely account for about 21.7 percent (R² =.217, F-change = 58.960, p <.001***) of the changes in the variance of Muslim customer purchase behavior. Strengthening the result is the fact that the β-value is found to be positive and significant (β=.466, p <.001***). From this result, one can have assumed that the Iftar Ramadhan menu attributes have a significant impact on Muslim customers purchase behavior. In another word, food quality, price, menu variety and food presentation as part of Iftar Ramadhan menu attributes strongly influence the Muslim customers dining at the four and five-star hotel restaurants. Therefore, hypothesis H₁ is supported.

Model 2 is looking at moderating effect of the hotel brands on the relationship between Iftar Ramadhan menu attributes and Muslim customer purchase behavior.

Table 1: Results of the Relationship Between Iftar Ramadhan Menu Attributes, Brands and Customer Purchase Behavior

Predictor	Model 1 Std. β	Model 2 Std. β
Step 1: Model Variable		
Menu attributes	.466***	
Step 2: Moderating Variable		
Hotel Brands		.607***
R ²	.217	.368
Adj. R ²	.213	.362
R ² Change	.217	.064
F – Change	58.960***	21.397***

Note: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

The result of the hierarchical multiple regression is exhibited in Table 1. It can be observed that the Iftar Ramadhan menu attributes can explain 21.7 percent (R² =.217, F-change = 58.960, p <.001) of the variation in the Muslim customer purchase behavior. The value of β = .446, p < .001 demonstrated that Iftar Ramadhan menu attributes have a greater impact on Muslim customer purchase behavior. In the second step of hierarchical multiple regressions, the hotel brands as the mediator were entered as another independent variable to influence the dependent variable. As a result, hotel brands able to explain an additional 15.1 percent (R² Change =.064) as a moderator for Iftar Ramadhan menu attributes to influence the Muslim customer behavior. The beta value (β =.607, p <.001) strengthening the moderating effect of Iftar Ramadhan menu attributes. Hence, it can be deduced that hotel brands fully moderate the relationship between Iftar Ramadhan menu attributes (food quality, price, menu variety and food presentation) and Muslim customers purchase or dining at the four and five-star hotel restaurants. In other words, the prestigious star rated hotel can influence customer purchase behavior. Therefore, hypothesis two is supported.

CONCLUSION

In general, every hotel, regardless their star rating including its restaurant is set up to win the customer's heart and it undeniably attracts and retaining customers is essential for restaurant performance. In dining perspective, either dealing with ala carte, table d' hotel or buffet, most of the previous studies manifestly revealed that variety choices of food, the taste of food, quality of food and few others are rated by customers as far more important in influencing their dining at a specific restaurant. These attributes in fact not only influence their dining mood but increase their repeat patronization as well. In line with that, results of this present study despite only looking at the seasonal period that is Ramadhan Iftar

buffet but provides an insight that Ramadhan Iftar buffet menu attributes at the four and five-star hotel restaurants have a significant impact on Muslim customers purchase behavior. In other words, the food quality, menu variety and food presentation provide by these star rating hotel restaurants can create a positive inclination among the Muslim customers during the Ramadhan month. Most importantly the Ramadhan Iftar buffet menu attributes at four and five-star hotel restaurants although slightly expensive successfully attracted interest among the middle and young age group of the Muslim customers. This indicates that food quality, price, menu variety and food presentation as part of menu attributes are the important tools or act as a customer pulling factors to dine in any given situation including the Ramadhan month. In a different mode of saying, well managed and maintain those elements would still able the hotels in the Muslim countries in particular to provide, if not a large profit but breakeven revenue during the slow dining period and in this case the fasting month.

Besides menu attributes, another remarking finding drawn from this study is that brands proved to give a strong moderating effect toward Muslim customers of breaking their Iftar Ramadhan at the four and five hotel restaurants. This result explicitly denoted that brand name and in the case of this study, the four and five hotel restaurant able to attract customers patronizing mood or customers are willing to spend on the established brand name hotels. With this, it is wise for the hotel management of four and five-star hotels to allot substantial focus to build and maintain a strong and positive brand image which ultimately lead to customer purchase behavior. Undoubtedly, certain brands will portray customers' social status as well as their social identity. What could be concluded from this discussion is that managing the menu attributes and brands not only able to attract new and repeat customers' patronization but closely associated with restaurant operation survival.

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