

Intention to Purchase at a Fast Food Store: Excitement, Performance and Threshold Attributes

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Abstract

The current study aims to explore the hedonic and utilitarian values offered through fast food attributes (e.g. menu items, calorie information, location, etc.) and the impact of these values on customer consumption. Interviews were orchestrated with store managers of different fast food chains. The findings show that a hedonic value is delivered through the use of marketing strategies by offering a variety of menu items, menu customization and fun activities in promotional materials. Some fast food marketing strategies – which include simplifying the menu classification, displaying kilojoules information, and locating at convenience location – are intended to offer utilitarian value. The hedonic values tend to offer enjoyment and excitement in fast food consumption and could result in an increase in sales for a certain period of time. The utilitarian values are task-oriented consumption, which tends to motivate regular customers to visit fast food restaurants. The study concluded the findings into three attributes including excitement, performance, and threshold attributes. Furthermore, the study offers insightful managerial implications in which we discuss the potential impact of fast food marketing attributes on customer satisfaction using Kano's model.

Keywords: Hedonic Value, Utilitarian Value, Marketing Strategies, Excitement Attributes, Performance Attributes, Fast Food Chain, Intention to Purchase

Introduction

The consumption experiences offer both utilitarian and hedonic values which are important and desirable end goals (Atulkar & Kesari, 2017; Kesari & Atulkar, 2016). Utilitarian experience has been characterised by a goal-oriented consumption in which customers consume to fulfill a basic need or to accomplish a task (Kesari & Atulkar, 2016). On the other hand, the hedonic value refers to a pleasure-oriented consumption which is primarily motivated by a desire for fun, excitement and enjoyment (Atulkar & Kesari, 2017; Nguyen, Nguyen, & Barrett, 2007; Phang, Zaiton, & Cheuk, 2018). These values motivate customers to visit fast food restaurants to satisfy their hunger, eat a quick meal at a convenient location, or simply to enjoy a tasty meal. Previous studies such as Atulkar and Kesari (2017), Kesari and Atulkar (2016), and Ryu, Han and Jang (2009) tend to focus on the outcome of hedonic and utilitarian values, such as customer satisfaction and behavioural intention. However, little is known about how these values are offered through various marketing strategies. Therefore, the current study aims to explore the hedonic and utilitarian values offered through fast food attributes (e.g. menu items, calorie information, location, etc.) and the impact of these values on customers. Understanding fast food consumption is important because fast food outlets are a significant subsector of the hospitality and tourism property market and have experienced significant growth and global change over the past century (Namin, 2017; Sahagun & Vasquez-Parraga, 2014; Thaichon & Quach, 2016). The findings in this study will help fast-food restaurants understand customer motivations and the impact of their current strategies on the experience of customer consumption.

The purpose of this study is twofold: first, to understand the hedonic and utilitarian consumption experiences in fast food context; and second, to explore the values embedded in fast food marketing strategies. To achieve these objectives, we analyse the qualitative interviews of store managers from leading fast food chains, such as McDonald's, Hungry Jack's and Subway. These restaurants are the dominant leaders of the fast food industry and have large market share practically all around the world. Hence, they would be a suitable study unit for the current study. The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: first, the literature review is presented, followed by the methodology section detailing how the data collection and analysis were conducted, the results are then presented, followed by a discussion on implications of this study as well as possible future directions of research.

Literature Review

In this section, we provide a literature review on two main important areas, utilitarian and hedonic values, in fast food consumption and salient fast food restaurant attributes. These concepts form a theoretical framework for the current study.

Utilitarian and Hedonic Values in Fast Food Consumption

The concept of value has been studied by consumer researchers for several decades, and its definition may vary depending on a context of the study (Atulkar & Kesari, 2017; Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; Kesari & Atulkar, 2016). This variation reflects the multifaceted nature of value. In a broad sense, value involves all factors

which can be described in qualitative and quantitative forms and have both subjective and objective elements (Zeithaml, 1988). Values occur during customer interaction with some object or event, such as with a service provider or via a marketing activity (Holbrook & Corfman, 1985). The fast-food consumption experience can evoke two broad types of values. Firstly, a utilitarian value, which involves a rational side of consumer behaviour derived from task completion (i.e. effectiveness and efficiency) (Kesari & Atulkar, 2016). Secondly, a hedonic outcome is a subjective side of the value and typically results from enjoyment or excitement of the consumption (Atulkar & Kesari, 2017; Geetha & Bharadhwaj, 2016). Hence, in fast food consumption, the value occurs either through successfully accomplishing a task (e.g. eating a quick meal during a short lunch break) or by providing an enjoyment (e.g. feeling excited for a new burger menu after watching a Master Chef contestant create a delicious looking burger which will be sold at Hungry Jack's the next day).

Fast Food Restaurant Attributes

There are various attributes of fast food restaurants that impact customer purchasing decisions (Sahagun & Vasquez-Parraga, 2014; Squadle, 2015). The common attributes which have been reported by frequent and infrequent buyers include service speed, convenient location, and a variety of menu items, healthy menu options, and calorie content (Kara, Kaynak, & Kucukemiroglu, 1995; Namin, 2017; Miller & Ginter, 1979; Sahagun & Vasquez-Parraga, 2014). The healthy menu options and kilojoules information are becoming more relevant to consumers. A store, such as McDonald's, has been changing and innovating to retain its position at the top and to keep pace with the changing preferences of its customers (Squadle, 2015). One of the main focuses of McDonald's is to simplify its menu to make it easier for customers to choose their favourite item. This strategy is also part of a lean process which aims to offer faster services to customers (Squadle, 2015). The simplicity of the menu help staff prepares the food quickly and work efficiently with fewer errors. In addition, shorter waiting time would lead to customer satisfaction and overall happiness toward to the service (Borges, Herter, & Chebat, 2015; Grewal, Baker, Levy, & Voss, 2003; Lin, Xia, & Bei, 2015). Simplifying the base menu will allow more to be offered, such as special limited-time options and unique regional dishes, to attract more customers and earn their loyalty to the brand.

Healthier options, such as Caesar salads and grilled chicken wraps, are being introduced to cater to increasingly health-conscious customers. Bringing in these healthier options is found to be a necessary strategy to keep up with the changing needs of customers (English, 2013). The kilojoules labelling for fast food chains is compulsory for several countries. Many reports have suggested that teenagers would be more likely to choose a low-calorie meal option if the nutritional value of each component was described (Melnick, 2013). However, there are many factors that can account for the probability that customers will consider or ignore the mentioned kilojoules rating. It is possible that once a customer reaches the cash register, his/her thoughts about calorie consumption and health are often offset by the desire to eat the food that they want. However, this may not be the case with everyone. Some studies have shown that many consumers do not even care about the calorie intake (Melnick, 2013).

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction refers to a customer's overall judgement in relation to the extent to which product or service performance meets their expectations (Söderlund, 2018; Tam, 2012). Customer satisfaction is a critical ingredient of success and has considerable strategic implications for businesses in all industries (Ihtiyar, 2018; Ojo, 2010; Söderlund & Oikarinen, 2018). Consumers will be satisfied if the brand can fulfil its promises and meet their expectations (Bayraktar et al., 2011; Cao, Ajjan & Hong, 2018). Previous research such as Deng et al. (2010), Ha and Stoel (2012), Thaichon et al. (2014), and Tontini, Sölen and Zanchett (2017) indicates that quality of the service offering has a strong relationship with customer satisfaction. In particular, Babin et al. (2005) found that service quality has a positive impact on customer satisfaction in a restaurant setting. This is supported by Ryu, Lee and Kim (2012)'s research in a restaurant marketing context. Iglesias and Guillén (2004) also conclude that perceived quality has a direct impact on the satisfaction of restaurant customers.

The Kano Model

In order to understand the relationship between quality attributes and customer satisfaction, Kano's two-dimensional quality model is used. This is an innovative two-dimensional quality model first proposed by a Japanese expert in quality management, Noriaki Kano. The theory proposed by Kano et al. (1984) explained that attractiveness of quality or attribute is based on the relationship between customer satisfaction and the degree of sufficiency of a quality attribute. As a result, businesses can develop various marketing strategies based on quality characteristics to maximise customer satisfaction and loyalty (Shyu, Chang, & Ko, 2013). Several studies (e.g. Nilsson-Witell & Fundin, 2005; Löfgren & Witell, 2008) have employed the theory to examine how different product attributes, or different dimensions of service experience, satisfy customers.

Based on Kano's model, there are five dimensions of perceived quality, namely: attractive (or excitement), one-dimensional (or performance), must-be (or threshold), indifferent quality, and reverse quality. The threshold values are fundamental and failing to deliver these values will lead to customer dissatisfaction. The performance value will create satisfaction when fulfilled and dissatisfaction when unfulfilled. It is used for building customer satisfaction, and companies compete on offering better performance values. Also, excitement value is often unexpected and can create customer delight when achieved, but do not cause dissatisfaction when not delivered.

On the other hand, indifferent attributes do not contribute to customer satisfaction; as a result, their existence or absence does not have any impact on satisfaction. Reverse quality refers to undesirable attributes which if present, would result in consumer dissatisfaction, while their absence would lead to consumer satisfaction. It can be seen that only the first three dimensions increase satisfaction with a rise in attribute-level performance (Zhao & Dholakia, 2009), and can be related to customer perceived values that occur during the fast food consumptions and (Bhattacharyya and Rahman, 2004). Therefore, it is important to understand attractive (or excitement), one-dimensional (or performance), must-be (or threshold) quality dimensions in a fast food context.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative, inductive approach to data collection using a sample of 16 store managers of fast food chains in Australia to achieve insights into the stores and subsequently the company. The qualitative methodology implied followed the format of interviews undertaken mainly from the perspective of fast food chains as stores and companies. Adopting a qualitative approach meant that the effects of marketing strategies, promotional campaigns, and other insights for the store managers could be explored (Thaichon, Sharma, Raina, & Kapoor, 2016). This issue will be difficult to examine using quantitative methods because it often requires the different levels of meaning to gain an insight into this topic (Thaichon, 2017).

Prior to the interview, one of the authors, who have an extensive experience using this interview technique, provided an “interviewer with a training session.” An interviewer was recruited based on his/her interpersonal and communication skills. The training session includes an introduction to the aim and purpose of the study, a review of the interview technique, and a discussion of ethical issues. The author asked the interviewers to go through the interview guide, which provides an introduction, a set of interview questions, and closing statements. The author also encouraged the interviewers to ask questions if there was an unclear issue. At the end of the session, there was an interview rehearsal set up for the interviewer.

The interviews followed an in-depth, loosely structured approach and involved the use of open-ended questions, with probing questions used by the interviewer to clarify and elicit more detail from the participants’ response to the original question. Most managers started to share their own experience and perception of marketing strategies, competitors, and consumers. The themes covered in the interviews include an exploration of their attitudes toward fast food advertising, marketing strategies, promotional campaigns, as well as consumer eating habits and behaviour. Template analysis was employed to detect the key themes emerging in the interviews (Crabtree and Miller, 1999). This involves the development of codes, which underline wide themes, and subsequently finer, specific themes that are significant to the study.

The store managers who reported years of work experience had been working with fast food chains ranging from 2 – 15 years. The fast-food stores included in this study are Oporto, Subway, Domino’s Pizza, Hungry Jack’s, and McDonald’s. Two of the respondents refused to specify their exact years of working experience as a store manager. The managers were contacted by the researchers via email or face to face, and they were interviewed in their office or at a café at the agreed time. A suitable time and location were confirmed with those who met the screening criteria and consented to be interviewed. In general, interviews were arranged to take place at their earliest convenience after the first contact. Overall the interviews lasted from 25 minutes to 50 minutes. The details of the interviewees are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Selected Demographic Information of the Participants

No.	Participant Identification	Gender	Experience
1	AB	F	3 Years
2	CD	F	2 Years
3	EF	F	9 Years
4	GF	M	7 Years
5	PT	M	3 Years
6	IJ	F	4 Years
7	KL	F	5 Years
8	TK	M	2 Years
9	MN	M	15 Years
10	OP	M	4 Years
11	NQ	M	3 Years
12	QR	F	2 Years
13	ST	M	9 Years
14	RT	F	3 Years
15	UV	M	n/a
16	WX	F	n/a

Findings

The interviews with the store managers provide great insights into common marketing practices among fast food restaurants. This is illustrated by the Word Cloud created by NVivo in Figure 1. Based on previous studies (Squadle, 2015; Godelnik, 2013; Melnick, 2013), we broadly classify fast food marketing activities into four main areas: (1) menu items, (2) kilojoule information, (3) competitive promotion and (4) location. We explore what values (i.e., hedonic and utilitarian) were delivered by each marketing initiative and how consumers respond to these values.



Figure 1: Word Cloud from the Interviews

Menu Items

A Variety of Menu Items

Offering a variety of menu items is one of the key strategies of fast food chains to create excitement and drive sales volume (Syam & Bhatnagar, 2015). According to the store managers, new menus, such as limited-time and seasonal items, offer a hedonic value in fast food consumption. Customers tend to respond positively, resulting in an abrupt sales boost and an increase in revenue during the period when the new items were introduced. The relatively healthy fast food chains, such as Oporto and Subway, tend to offer new menu less frequently than other fast food chains. Although the new items are likely to evoke the excitement, the fast food store managers of Oporto and Subway believe that many of their customers prefer the original menu items.

AB: The frequency of the change of the menu items is not fixed. It is variable. The items on the menu generally remain the same and are not altered much. If any, there are only minor changes. People who prefer Oporto are generally fond of the existing items on the menu. The introduction of new items keeps up the sales for up to three months. For more affordable items, the sales boost even stays for up to six months.

CD: The menu of food items remains more or less the same. The customers who visit Oporto are more or less regular customers and prefer the items that are provided on the menu. There are not many changes made. Only a few minor changes may be made rarely. The sales boost attributable to the change in menu items may last for around one and a half months. Sometimes it may last for six months if the changes are really accepted by the customers.

OP: We bring out a new product every two to three months or so; otherwise, all other items remain the same. Our menu display also doesn't change much as customers like it that way and remember it well. The customers stated that changes in menus stimulate them, as they find new items on the menu to be exciting. The way in which the new items on the menu are portrayed catches their attention.

The leading fast-food chains for burgers and pizza, like McDonald's, Hungry Jack's and Domino's Pizza, tend to make frequent changes to their menu items to boost up their sales. Hungry Jack's tries to cater to a large market segment. It emphasises monthly market reports that monitor the changing trends and preferences regarding fast food items, brings out new products and changes its menu items, keeping just a few key signature food items, like "Whopper" and "Royal," intact. It also has multiple display boards to show what is new. The newness factor drives excitement and sales volume for several fast food chains.

EF: Our menu items change every month. We try to bring in those items that the people want and try to show those items properly on display. We keep just a few main items intact on the menu lists.

GF: The menu change depends on customer needs and preference. It happens every three to four months with something innovative in the desert and pizza section of the menu. This is done in order to present people with something new and exciting. The change in menu is never too drastic. If a new product is not well received by the customers, it is generally removed in a span of a few weeks.

IJ: The change in menus or menu boards takes place every three months and is decided by the head office. The marketing managers from the head office visit the store managers at regular intervals and collect the customer information regarding their preference. Even though a lot of menu items are common across the McDonald's outlets, items specific to the location are also present to cater to the wants of the customers in that specific location.

KL: The basic items remain the same, but new minor changes are introduced every two months. Thus, the menu remains more or less the same. When slight changes occur, there is a slight boost in revenue, but the effect of this change does not last very long.

Menu Customization

Some fast food chains offer menu customisation as a way to engage with customers. The customer chooses different ingredients – such as meats, sauces and bread – and they can see their food being prepared. This strategy aims to offer hedonic value to customers.

OP: We prepare the food in front of them. We ask them everything that they want, from veggies to sauces.

Classification of Menu Items

Some fast food chains provide a clear classification of menu separating a group of vegetarian and healthy items from other menus. This type of display helps to emphasise the fresh and healthy positioning of fast food restaurants. It is intended to offer utilitarian values to health-conscious customers who are likely to choose fresh food or vegetarian options. The customers can quickly look for and order their preferred menus.

QR: The strict classification of the menu items into vegetarian and non-vegetarian has really helped in acquiring customers. Most of the visitors to the store are regular visitors. People who are vegetarian often have Subway as their first preference. This is because most other fast food outlets do not provide vegetarian food.

AB: The menu of fresh items is classified and kept separate from the items that are provided immediately after the order is placed. The grilled items on the menu of Oporto are kept separate from items, like burgers and fries that are kept prepared and ready to be delivered. The grilled items are prepared on the spot and are preferred by the consumers who like fresh food. Thus, the classification helps to influence customers, and it affects their purchasing behaviour.

Kilojoules Information

The kilojoules information offers utilitarian values to customers. Fast food consumers are diverse. The low kilojoules items are only attractive to a certain group of consumers. Customers who are conscious of their calorie intake will want to have kilojoules information and use it to indicate which menus they should order. On the other hand, young consumers tend to avoid purchasing healthy menus with low kilojoules.

AB: The items provided in the store are not only fresh but also one of the healthiest items that are provided by any of the fast food chains in Australia. The consumers who visit the store are aware that the items sold in Oporto are healthy. Thus, no one really enquires about the healthiness. Also, the energy values are mentioned on the menu for the customers to see. Thus, there is not much negative impact on the revenue because of calorie consciousness. There are instances too in which people who are unaware of the health benefits or adversities of the food that they eat ask the people in the store about the calories that they are going to take in.

CD: Many customers ask about the differences in the energy values of items in different categories – grilled and fried. Also, the revenue is slightly affected because of the healthy products that are sold by Oporto. Many kids visit the mall and are not particularly inclined towards the healthy menu of Oporto. Thus, Oporto loses out on revenue in that segment. The adults are mostly concerned with healthy food, and the main revenue comes from them.

QR: Most of the people who visit the store are health conscious and enquire about the energy values of the food items and seem to prefer items with low-fat content. Besides the menu, the daily limit of the energy intake values of average children and adults are written. This serves as a way for Subway to convey the health benefits of maintaining a balanced diet.

For stores in which the food items tend to be generally high in energy value, consumers are generally not concerned about the kilojoules information when they purchase the food.

TK: The customers visiting the store are not inquisitive about the kilojoule ratings of the items on the menu. The revenue remains unaffected by the KJ [kilojoules] ratings of food.

MN: The energy ratings have no impact at all on customer purchasing behaviour. As per law, the kilojoule values are mentioned for each food item, but no one cares about the ratings.

Competitive Promotional Strategies

Fast food chains often use digital media to promote their brands and food items. The promotional activities include related financial rewards, free food and drinks, collectable items, and games. It can offer both utilitarian and hedonic values. Customers tend to respond positively to the promotion campaign.

AB: Oporto uses both online website promotions and promotions via mobile apps to engage customers. Oporto has reward cards. On registration of the Oporto mobile app or on registering on the website after scanning a QR code on the rewards card, customers are entitled to bonus welcome gifts, free meals on birthdays, members-only offers, etc.

CD: Oporto's central office is open to suggestion about changes or offers to be made on the apps from various stores. This helps in providing store-specific offers.

QR: Subway has a daily rewards card where the card gets stamped with each purchase. The higher the number of purchases, the higher-value products one gets as gifts. Free takeaways vary from cookies and drinks to full free subs [long submarine-shaped sandwiches]. Also, the website provides online promotions for members and the Subway Mobile Club [the mobile app] provides many promotional offers for the members.

KL: The promotions are available online on the site of McDonald's. Registered members get discounts and free items.

MN: There is a mobile application for McDonald's. Registered members get discounts and free items via the app. The Central Head Office of McDonald's accepts suggestions from the stores for improvements in the app, but the stores have really no control over the app. The Head office controls it.

Domino's app extensively caters to the home delivery segment. It helps the customers to track their orders in real time and thus inculcates trust among the customers. This trust factor assures the customers that their products will be delivered on time, which is one of the criteria for which Domino's stands out: quick customer service. Hungry Jack's works on similar lines.

EF: Our shake and win feature in our app is a real winner. I have indeed noticed a great amount of buzz about Hungry Jack's after the launch of the app. Children love it because they could come to this place, do a check-in on a social media site and win a free or discounted item.

Additionally, fast food chains continually come up with new ideas on the Internet and on social media sites to keep their customers engaged with their products. McDonald's adapted the game 'Monopoly' with exciting prizes to be won. The game aimed to create anticipation among the customers. Thinking about which coupon they may win next, the customers made another run to the fast food outlet. This was found to increase sales. It also offered immediate prizes for certain coupons, which won customers a complimentary dish. Through this, the happiness quotient was tapped and helped the firm to retain customers.

Location

The location of fast food restaurants has a great influence on their sales. This strategy offers utilitarian value to customers who demand a quick meal in a convenient location, such as a near their workplace or home. A store located in a highly-populated area tends to be busy all day long with customers constantly coming in and out. The popular items tend to vary from one location to another.

IJ: The menu varies with the location. The outlet at Olympic Park, being an event outlet, has more sales depending on the events that happen and hence has menus accordingly, whereas the McDonalds at Auburn, which is more of a commercial yet leisure outlet, has menus according to the people's preference there.

QR: The store is located in a densely-populated area, and most of the customers are regular customers, but in peak hours, when there is a huge crowd, and the store is full, some customers get impatient while waiting and consequently some do walk away. Thus, the location is very important.

ST: The area in and around Parramatta is filled with people from India. The Indian food items provided by the store provide a slight competitive edge over the other big players. Thus, the location is important for the revenue generation of the food outlet.

Discussion

Based on the results of the current study, we would like to propose Figure 2. The qualitative analysis revealed that offering a variety of menu items, menu customisation and fun activities in marketing promotion aims to evoke the hedonic experience in fast food consumption. Utilitarian and hedonic values are offered to fast food customers through various marketing activities (Atulkar & Kesari, 2017; Kesari & Atulkar, 2016). On the other hand, the marketing strategies that involve the menu classification, the kilojoules information, and the location of the store are intended to offer the utilitarian value (Figure 2). The hedonic values tend to offer enjoyment and excitement in fast food consumption and could result in a temporary sales increase. The utilitarian value is viewed as a task-oriented consumption which motivates regular customers to visit fast food restaurants. The findings of the current students also align with the concepts of utilitarian and hedonic values concluded by Atulkar and Kesari (2017) and Kesari and Atulkar (2016).

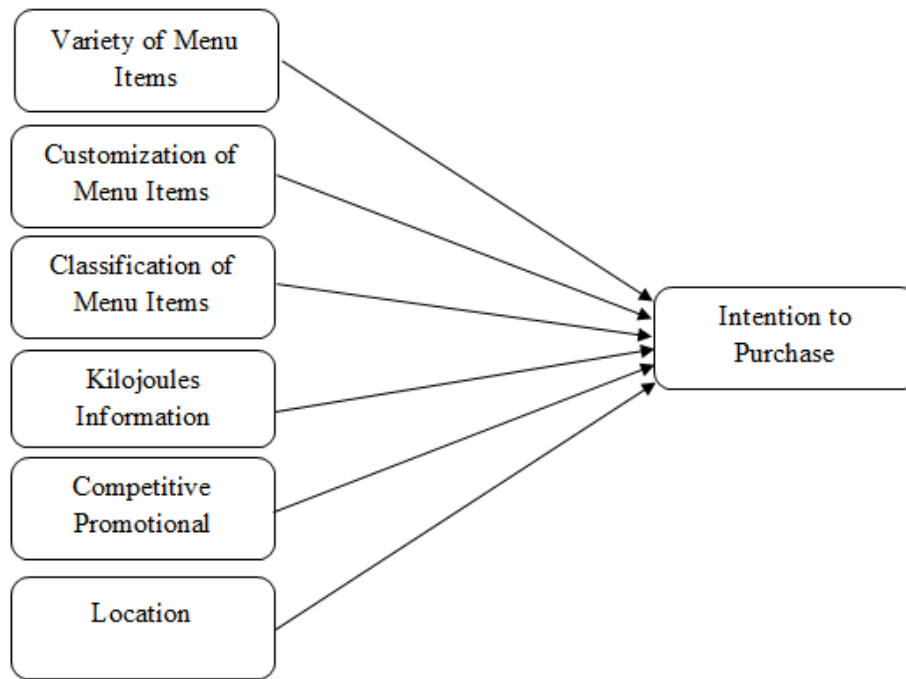


Figure 2: Proposed Framework from the Results of the Current Study

Offering menu customization and a variety of menu items, such as introducing new items for a limited time, often create excitement among consumers and an increase in sales volume for a certain period of time. Another strategy relating to menu attributes is a clear classification of menus separating a group of vegetarian and healthy items from others. This simple display highlights the fresh and healthy menu categories that fast food restaurants offer. The health-conscious customers are motivated by this utilitarian value. The kilojoules information is also a key information for this group of customers who are conscious of their calorie intake. They will use kilojoules information to determine their purchase decision. However, the utilitarian value of this strategy does not motivate young customers or regular customers of the fast food stores, such as Hungry Jack's or Domino's, in which the food items tend to be generally high in energy value.

Next, marketing promotion can offer both utilitarian and hedonic experiences, depending on the type of activities that used to engage with customers. For example, Hungry Jack's has a dedicated smartphone application whereby customers can shake their smartphone to win the game. They enjoy the fun in the activity, and if they win, they may be rewarded by receiving special offers. The related financial reward provides economic benefits (utilitarian value) that motivate customers to visit while the non-financial reward, such as games and collectable items, tend to offer enjoyment and fun (hedonic value). Lastly, the utilitarian value in the location of fast food restaurants tends to motivate the customers to visit the store for the convenience benefit.

Implications for Business Marketing Practice and Recommendations

In this section, we discuss the impact a broad set of fast food attributes using the 'Kano' model. This is an innovative two-dimensional quality model first proposed by a Japanese expert in quality management, Noriaki Kano. Kano's two-dimensional quality model is mainly used to realise different types of quality characteristics. Manufacturers can select different marketing strategies based on various quality and other characteristics to generate maximum customer satisfaction and loyalty (Shyu, Chang, & Ko, 2013).

The theory proposed by Kano et al. (1984) explained that attractiveness of quality or attribute is based on the relationship between customer satisfaction and the degree of sufficiency of a quality attribute. Several studies (Hogstrom, Rosner & Gustafsson, 2010; Nilsson-Witell & Fundin, 2005; Logfren & Witell, 2008) have employed the theory to examine how different product attributes, or different dimensions of service experience, satisfy customers. Based on Kano's model, there are five dimensions of perceived quality, namely: attractive (or excitement), one-dimensional (or performance), must-be (or threshold), indifferent quality, and reverse quality. The first three could be related to customer perceived values that occur during fast food consumptions and have an impact on customer satisfaction (Bhattacharyya & Rahman, 2004). Therefore, we employ excitement, performance and threshold as the three main categories for grouping fast food attributes. The threshold values are fundamental and failing to deliver these values will lead to customer dissatisfaction. The performance value will create satisfaction when fulfilled and dissatisfaction when unfulfilled. It is used for building customer satisfaction, and companies compete on offering better performance values. Lastly, excitement value is often unexpected and can create customer delight when achieved, but do not cause dissatisfaction when not delivered.

Using this model, fast food chains can introduce new products and implement new practices that will satisfy the taste of Australian customers and cater to their changing needs. A broad set of fast food attributes includes price, a variety of menu, taste, customer service and non-healthy food items. We will evaluate and classify these attributes using The Kano Model (Figure 3).

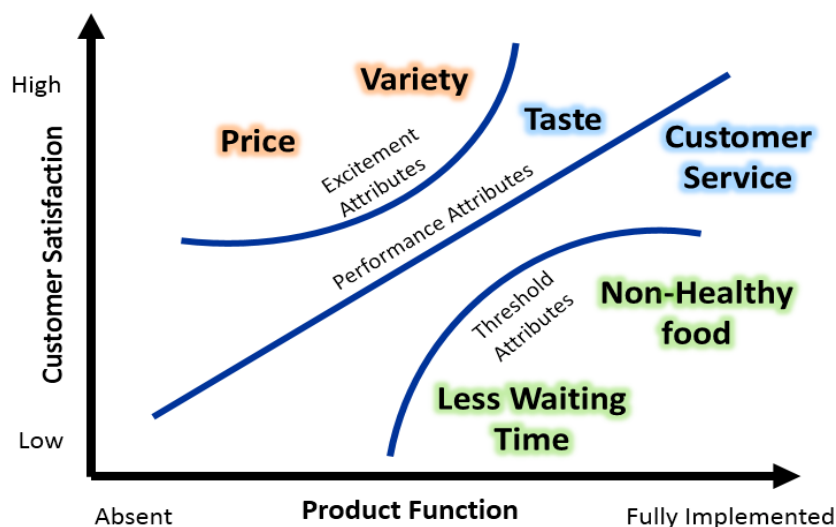


Figure 3: Recommendations Based on the Kano Model

Price and variety attributes of fast food that are the most preferred by the consumer and can be termed the excitement attributes. Any positive changes or new schemes introduced regarding these attributes could delight customers. Taste and customer service are the performance attributes that must be present at all costs as the level of customer satisfaction can rise or fall depending upon how the attributes are delivered. The study also suggests that shorter waiting time and non-healthy food are things that customers expect from a fast food outlet.

Excitement Attributes

Price Bundling

Price bundling is a strategy whereby a seller bundles together many different items and sells them as a single unit, instead of selling them separately (Li, Hardesty, & Craig, 2018). The bundling technique has been considered and applied across various industries to attract customers and boost sales. Similar strategies can be adopted by the fast food giants as well (Li, Hardesty, & Craig, 2018; Olderog & Skiera, 2000). The providers can introduce new combo meals, which can make the customers believe them to be the items with the best value for money, for example, combining a new item with an already popular item in a meal.

Variety

As the current study suggests that a frequent change in menu is always popular with customers, fast food outlets can capitalise on that liking by changing their menu, especially by seasons. For example, they can introduce something very special, very sweet and delicious for Christmas or a very spooky burger/sandwich for Halloween. This findings also confirm by Martenson (2018) and Syam and Bhatnagar (2015). Bringing out varieties like these keeps the excitement level of the customers high and helps them to feel more engaged with the brand (Martenson, 2018).

Introducing separate organic food sections can help fast food outlets to cater more for health-conscious people. As the demand for more organic items increases, it is advisable for fast food outlets to start generating new innovative ideas and food items regularly (Guthman, 2003). Furthermore, having a separate organic section can have positive implications for customers' buying intentions as it is easy for them to find what they need and helps them to recall better what they had eaten previously when wishing to make a repeat purchase.

Other Recommendations

Fast food outlets can also instigate partnerships with upcoming blockbuster movies. This recommendation is also similar to the finding of Martenson (2018) who stated that choice and variety of reward could also lead to purchase behaviour. Besides, action movies are enjoyed not only by children of various age groups but also by adults. Targeting these segments, who are also the most regular fast food consumers, can help fast food outlets with their sales. To deal with less traffic in lean hours, fast food outlets can implement ideas such as happy hours, like bars and other food outlets.

Performance Attributes

As these attributes are directly linked to customer satisfaction, there should be a continuous process in place to enhance them.

Customer Service

Most of the fast food chains already have rigorous training programs for their employees to accustom them to the work and procedures (Namin, 2017; Sahagun & Vasquez-Parraga, 2014). However, it is important to keep the process continuous and evaluate it regularly. Firms can also adopt reward programs to encourage employees to perform better. Most of the fast food outlets employ these plans, but often they are not followed and die out. Managers must ensure that these practices are kept in place and assessed regularly. It is also recommended for fast food outlets to emphasise the need for employees, especially those at the counter, to be courteous to their customers at all times, as this is one of the most important attributes in a service industry.

Taste and Quality

There can be no second standard for taste in fast food restaurants. If an item does not feel nice or is not delicious to eat, customers will not make a repeat purchase. It is important for all fast food outlets to conduct an in-depth study of the likings and the needs of their customers before introducing any particular item. This process can be carried out, not only nationally, but also regionally, as people's tastes and preferences can vary within regions.

Considering the possibility of rising demand for organic and healthy food in the future, which nonetheless is increasing day by day, fast food giants can employ certain initiatives as follows: (1) Introducing children's meals with a higher nutritional value. Many studies suggest that fast food giants have destroyed healthy eating habits in children by purposely targeting them with unhealthy children's meals (Elbel, Gyamfi, & Kersh, 2011).

To remove this negative image, a fast food company can offer items with high nutritional content and promote them with display boards and digital advertising. (2) Using healthy ingredients in sauces and preparation items. Sauces and desserts are the other menu items that often include unhealthy ingredients (Chandon & Wansink, 2007). Leaving no stone unturned in providing healthy options, fast food giants can introduce healthy ingredients into the preparation of these sauces and desserts too.

Threshold Attributes

Shorter waiting times and non-healthy food are aspects that define the fast food chains of today. These are the attributes that customers currently always want in a fast food outlet (Namin, 2017). If the service is not quick, it defies the logic of being a quick service restaurant (Lopez et al., 2017). Lastly, this study points out that fast food customers look for tasty food in fast food outlets which are most likely to have high fat and high calories contents and is not healthy. However, a small section of people is raising concerns about this unhealthy food. What if this section grows into a larger one? How will the fast food giants tackle the issue? Thus, the current study recommends that they should start working towards introducing healthy items and, more importantly, project a healthy image of themselves before they destroy their own business in the face of the changing needs.

Implications

Theoretical Contribution

This study was conducted to gain a view of consumer behaviour in making purchase decisions with respect to fast food items and the type of fast food outlet. Consumer behaviour is becoming increasingly essential for companies to understand as negative purchase decisions can potentially stunt their growth (Moser, 2016). Thus, from the perspective of its theoretical contribution, this research provides an in-depth analysis of consumer behaviour by finding various related aspects. Along with this, the question of how consumer behaviour can influence factors – such as consumer loyalty, which is essential (Kim, 2017), especially in a market with cut-throat competition and very frequent changes – was also considered. Also, this study investigated how marketing strategies can be aligned concerning the new changes and developments in the industry. The results of the analysis are linked to the model to provide relevant recommendations for companies to improve. Such an analysis can theoretically be used in any industry while also practically extending to the whole of the food industry in general.

Managerial Implications

The results and the insights gained from the survey can be used by companies to improve their customer retention while also attracting new segments of the market. Through the key findings of this project, companies can align their marketing, promotion and advertising strategies with consumer purchase intention and behaviour and thus improve their sales and revenue (Atulkar & Kesari, 2017; Kim, 2017). As it was found in the current study that the essential factors that play a vital role in consumer choice of a fast food outlet are price and variety on the menu, managers can offer a large variety on the menu as it is found to attract more customers. As recommended earlier, to cater to a wider segment of the audience, companies can also come up with an organic, preservative-free menu, among others.

Consumer loyalty plays an essential role (Atulkar & Kesari, 2017), especially in a competitive market like that of the fast food chains; thus, instigating the same is essential for these fast food giants. Whether the approach consists of promotions, advertising or providing products in line with consumer needs, it is essential that the managers keep in mind the core concept of customer satisfaction and satisfying customer needs (Kesari & Atulkar, 2016). Only then is it possible for companies to retain customers? Innovation and creativity bring differentiation and, hence, for brands to stand out in the market, unique strategies must be established, such as the shake and win strategy by Hungry Jack's. By following the recommendations made based on the key findings mentioned, managers can enhance their fast food chains in accordance with the changing trends.

Conclusion and Future Research Directions

The study concluded the findings into three attributes including excitement, performance and threshold attributes. Furthermore, the study offers insightful managerial implications in which we discuss the potential impact of fast food marketing attributes on customer satisfaction using Kano's model. However, the current study is suggesting the following future research directions. First, the study is based on the point of views of store managers. With most fast food outlets offering fast foods that are generally considered unhealthy, and with the increasing health awareness of both the government and part of the Australian population, it is essential to gain consumer perspective on the food industry as it will provide information for the future of such chains.

A future study can conduct an interview with fast food consumers and compare similarities and differences between the two perspectives. The qualitative methodology could lead to a better understanding of marketing strategies, promotional campaigns, and other insights (Thaichon, Sharma, Raina and Kapoor, 2016). Second, fast food attributes included in the current study are quite limited. Future research can examine a broader set of attributes to provide a complete understanding of satisfaction, loyalty and repatronage intentions in a fast food context (Atulkar and Kesari, 2017; Kesari and Atulkar, 2016). Lastly, the current study explores the product attributes and values in a fast food context using qualitative analysis. To broaden the understanding, future research can consider this relationship using quantitative analysis (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2006).

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