

Article

Towards sustainable development at full-service restaurants in west Malaysia

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CITATION

Gaik CT, Rahman SA, Rasheedul H, et al. (2024). Towards sustainable development at full-service restaurants in west Malaysia. *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*. 8(16): 5288. <https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd5288>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 18 March 2024

Accepted: 23 May 2024

Available online: 19 December 2024

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Abstract: The food and beverage sector played a big part in contributing to the economic growth in Malaysia hence there was a major increase in the numbers of restaurants opening up for businesses. This study therefore examines factors with the aims of ensuring a sustainable development in full-service restaurants in West Malaysia. The results of this study have made a substantial contribution to restaurant owner's' comprehension of the fundamental components that underlie customer satisfaction and loyalty. By examining the moderating effect of the customer's gender in full-service restaurants in West Malaysia, the objective of this study was to ascertain the relationships between the three variables (quality of the food served at the restaurant, service quality, and environment), as well as the degree to which each attribute was able to relate to diner satisfaction. The underpinning theory for this study was the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Quantitative methods according to descriptive research and convenience sample strategy were utilized in this cross-sectional study. Questionnaires were distributed to 264 respondents through various online platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, and email. Data collection was evaluated using the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. In order to examine the connection between the three factors and diner's satisfaction, various tests such as the multiple regression analysis, One-way ANOVA and Beta Coefficient test were carried out. The findings gave current restaurant owners and potential restaurant owners an overview of the different attributes influencing diner's satisfaction at full-service restaurants in West Malaysia and also the extent of the moderating effect of diner's gender had on each attribute. The outcome of this paper is expected to provide a sustainable growth in this industry.

Keywords: diner satisfaction; service quality; full-service restaurants; west Malaysia; sustainable growth

1. Introduction

One of the global industries with the quickest growth was the restaurant sector including in Malaysia (Mohd Nazri et al., 2022). Similarly, Hafiz et al. (2019) and Hassan and Samsudin (2019) agreed that restaurant industry was one of the key sectors that helped the economy expand and over the past ten years, it had seen significant modifications with a variety of eateries, from full-service establishments to fast food establishments. The increase in income among Malaysians, which increased their spending power and enabled them to eat out, contributed to the growth of the restaurant business in Malaysia (Poulain et al., 2020). Mohd Nazri et al. (2022) also added that

the increase in the popularity of eating out was also a result of changes in dietary habits, modern lifestyles, urbanization, and the growth of the food service sector. Based on the **Figure 1**, restaurants and hotels contributed to 16.1% in 2020 compared to 13.7% in the year 2019 (Department of Statistics of Malaysia, 2023).

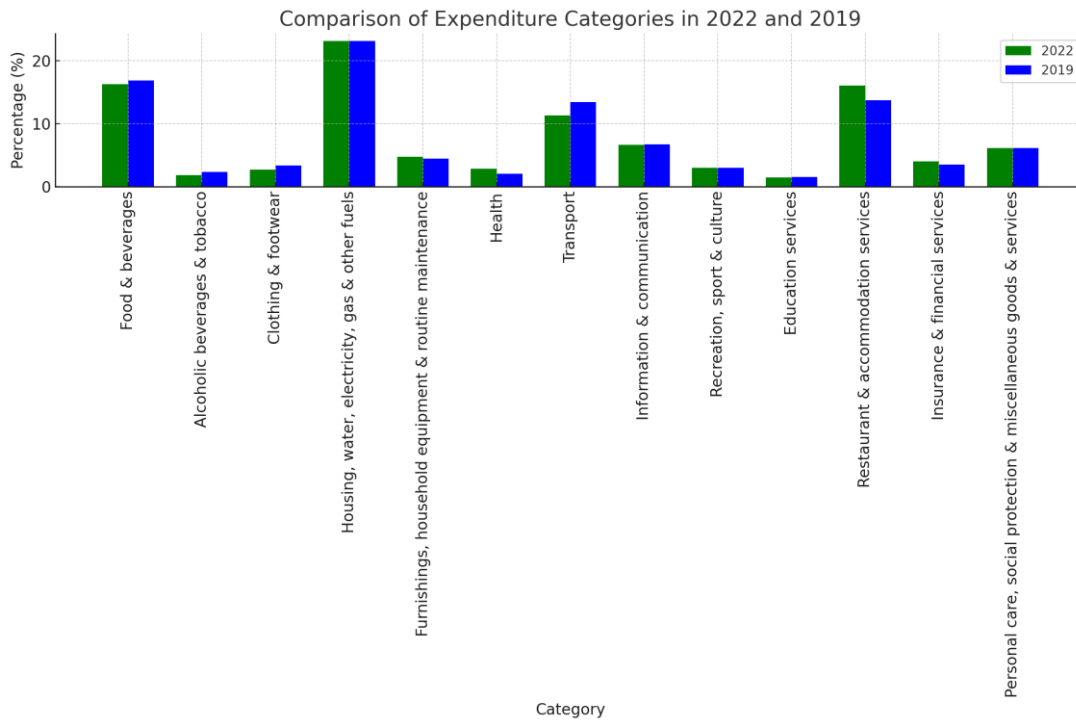


Figure 1. Composition of consumption.

Note. The comparison on the composition of mean monthly household consumption expenditure by 13 main groups in Malaysia between the year 2019 and 2022 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023).

The standard of the food, the standard of the service, and the ambience of the establishment were the three key elements that had an impact on patrons’ satisfaction in the restaurant industry (Nguyen et al., 2018). Therefore, this research attempted to study and understand the three primary elements (quality of food, service quality and the environment of the restaurant) that influenced diners’ satisfaction at full-service restaurants in West Malaysia and the moderating effect of gender had on each main factor were discussed. These helped restaurant managers to obtain information about diners’ preferences, satisfaction levels, and areas for improvement by integrating customer feedback tools, such as questionnaires, reviews, and comment cards. Overall customer happiness and loyalty were increased when these inputs were used for ongoing menu upgrades, service advancements, and operational changes which helped in the sustainability of restaurants which contributed to economic growth (Lee et al., 2023). This study examines the factors influencing sustainable development in the restaurant industry by referencing key research on customer revisit intentions, energy transition initiatives, environmental impact assessments, and customer satisfaction. These studies highlight the importance of sustainable practices in full-service restaurants in Malaysia and beyond (Ghosn et al., 2024; Munfarida and Arida, 2023; Rahman et al., 2023; Saleh et al., 2023).

1.1. Problem statement

According to the report by Retail Group Malaysia (2022), **Table 1** below showed that the Food & Beverage Outlets (Cafe and Restaurant) saw a positive growth rate of 9.8% in the fourth quarter of 2022. In comparison to the same period in 2022, the Take-Away, Kiosk, and Stall businesses of Food & Beverage Outlets experienced a 49.8% growth during the fourth quarter of 2022. With the exception of a few minor social distancing measures, all F&B establishments had been permitted to operate normally during the fourth quarter of 2022.

Table 1. Malaysia food & beverage industry quarterly growth rate, 2022.

Growth Rate (%)	1st Qtr	2nd Qtr	3rd Qtr	4th Qtr
Cafe and Restaurant	21.1	36.3	8.5	9.8
Take-away, kiosk and stall	5.6	35.5	46	49.8

Note. Café and restaurant include fast food restaurant, café, coffee café, bakery café, restaurant, full-service restaurant and caterer. Take-away, kiosk and stall include food outlet caters for take-away only, bakery without seating, kiosk and food stall (Retail Group Malaysia, 2022, 2023).

According to Goh and Choong (2020), a report by Khazanah Research Institute (KRI) shown in **Figure 2** had revealed that the expenditure by low-income households (income below RM1999) spend on eating out rather than at home had increased because of the lack of time and tight working schedules. **Figure 3** below showed that in 2022, households with low incomes (RM1999; and RM2000–RM2999) spent between 10.6% and 11.1% of their total spending on food out from home.

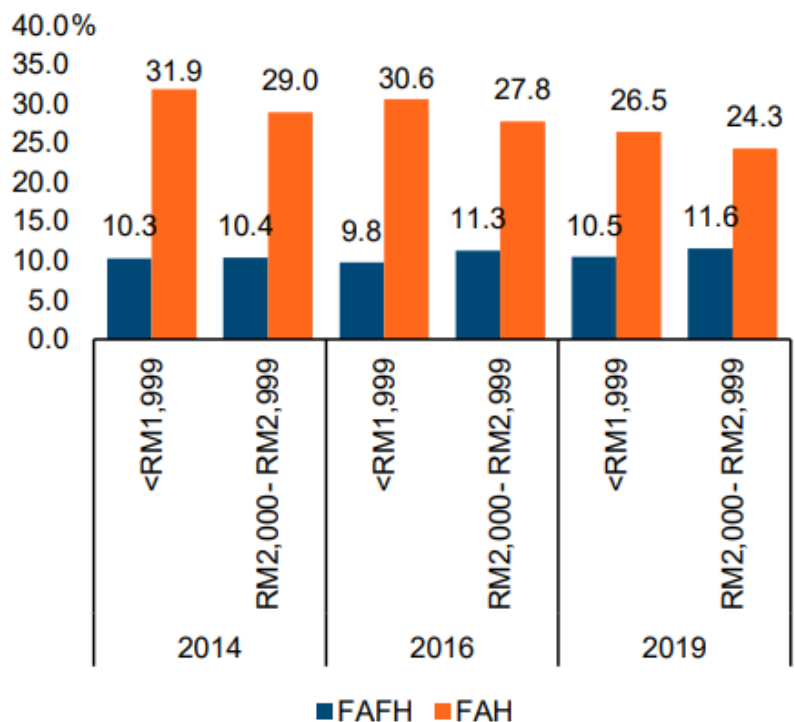


Figure 2. Expenditure shares of food away from home (FAFH) and food at home (FAH) by income class, 2014–2019.

Note. Income classes are selected as proxy for poor households, referencing the average PLI of RM2208 (Goh and Choong, 2020). CC-BY 3.0.

Expenditure Group	RM1,999 and below	RM2,000 - RM2,999	RM3,000 - RM3,999	RM4,000 - RM4,999	RM5,000 - RM5,999	RM6,000 - RM6,999	RM7,000 - RM7,999	RM8,000 - RM8,999	RM9,000 - RM9,999	RM10,000 - RM14,999
Restaurants and Accommodation Services	12.1	13.1	14.1	15.4	16.1	16.6	17.2	17	17	17.5
Expenditure on food away from home	10.6	11.1	11.8	12.6	13.2	13.6	14.1	13.8	14	14.3
Expenditure on beverages away from home	1.5	1.8	2.1	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.9

Figure 3. Percentage of monthly household consumption expenditure by household income class and strata, Malaysia, 2022.

Note. The percentage of monthly household consumption expenditure by household income class and strata in Malaysia, 2022 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023).

However, Zulhan et al. (2013) reported that many restaurants were having trouble drawing in customers although there was an increase in household’s spending on eating out. One of the contributing factors was because of service issues, particularly with regard to how long customers must wait for their meals to be served (Zahari et al., 2010). Moreover, Fraser et al. (2008) indicated that poor customer service and insufficient customer communication were other causes of service issues in some restaurants in Malaysia.

Mohd Nazri et al. (2022) also warned that customers who were not satisfied can harm a restaurant’s reputation by tarnishing its name, losing customers’ trust, and demotivating its staff, all of which had an impact on the overall aspect of the restaurants. Moreover, in our current digital world today, hate was a very dangerous manifestation because it may spread through social media and this caused a problem for the restaurant industry if they were not careful (Cooper et al., 2019).

There have been many studies to support the idea that diners’ satisfaction in fast-food restaurants in Malaysia was influenced by the quality of the food, the service, and the restaurant environment (Khoo et al., 2021; Majid et al., 2021; Siah, 2020), but there have been relatively few studies in full-service restaurants, and none of these studies have included gender as a moderating variable.

According to research by Zheng (2011), the differences in the purchasing behaviors of men and women can be explained by certain personality traits coupled with masculinity and femininity. Women were more devoted to a store than men were (Stan, 2015). Kincl and Strach (2018) focused on the asymmetric and nonlinear impacts of customer satisfaction to ascertain the extent of gender-related disparities in user satisfaction with websites. Their findings showed that women and men evaluate websites differently.

Studies have shown that gender has a somewhat ambiguous effect on customer satisfaction and there is a paucity of psychological research on the relationship between gender and customer happiness (Vinayak and Kumari, 2019).

Thus, the main intention of this study was to better understand the factors that affected patron satisfaction at full-service restaurants in West Malaysia. This study primarily looked into how men and women perceived the standard of the food, the standard of the service, and the ambience of the restaurant.

1.2. Research objectives

The objectives of this research were:

To examine the relationship between the quality of food of the restaurant with

diner satisfaction at full-service restaurants in West Malaysia.

To examine the relationship between the service quality with diner satisfaction at full-service restaurants in West Malaysia.

To examine the relationship between the environment of the restaurant with diner satisfaction at full-service restaurants in West Malaysia.

To examine the moderating effect of gender on the regression model of diner satisfaction.

2. Literature review

2.1. Diners' satisfaction in full-service restaurants

According to Ritchie et al. (2021), full-service restaurants were defined as a well-trained server or waiter will attend to customer's order directly at their table. and meal courses in an elegant or midscale dining setting, all provided by well-trained staff (Kivela, 1997). Hence, diner satisfaction was a common performance metric that was derived from the expected service treatment versus actual level of service treatment that they had received (Abedi and Jahed, 2020) when they were at a full-service restaurant. In this study, customer satisfaction was determined by the way they felt about the food quality, the level of service, and the atmosphere the restaurant provided. If restaurants wanted to be successful, competitive, and able to convert their consumers into repeat customers, they had to make sure that their customers were pleased and satisfied.

Diners' satisfaction in global context

According to Chang and Aggarwal (2016), customers held a great deal of power and influence over all businesses because they had the purchasing power to purchase the products or services offered in the market. Hence, it was very important to ensure their satisfaction was fulfilled so that they will become a returning customer.

Customer satisfaction was a crucial exhibit type and a key differentiator of business frameworks in the current real business world. This meant the higher the customer satisfaction, the longer the business relations can be maintained including restaurants (Wai et al., 2024). The more satisfied the customer was, the higher the returning intention. They will revisit the restaurant again for various occasions or just for a casual dining (Al-Majali and Almhurat, 2018). Besides that, satisfied diners will most likely recommend the restaurant to people close to them or post them on social media without asking for anything in return and according to Farooq et al. (2019), informal channels like this generated 85% of new businesses globally.

Besides the three factors that were included in this study, another important element that heavily influenced diners' satisfaction was the price (Nguyen et al., 2018). Similar views were observed by Smith et al. (2020) whereby various factors including the menu, flavor, price, and restaurant's ambience had a big impact on the satisfaction of diners at restaurants. If diners were not pleased with the food quality, service quality, and ambience of the restaurant, they would stop eating there (Misiran et al., 2022).

2.2. Variables influencing diners' satisfaction

2.2.1. Quality of food to diners' satisfaction

One of the main elements that influenced diner's satisfaction was the level of food quality (Kukanja et al., 2020). According to Serhan and Serhan (2019), the quality of food was a distinguishing factor for customers when they dined in a restaurant. Based on their expectations and previous consumption experiences, customers evaluate the quality of their food (Talapatra et al., 2019). Besides that, it was also discovered that customer's happiness and behavioral intentions were significantly impacted by the quality of food (Kannan, 2019). As a result, it was believed that a key component in determining the restaurant industry's success was the quality of the food. So, it was crucial for restaurant operators to comprehend the standards that patrons will utilize to assess the quality of the food. Martins et al. (2019) found that there were various definitions of quality in the literature. The ISO's definition of quality, which is the one that was used most frequently, "the totality of qualities and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its capacity to satisfy expressed or implied needs" (Menon and Ravi, 2021).

Quality of food was greatly influenced by the freshness, flavor, and presentation of the food (Petrescu et al., 2020). This statement was also agreed by Abdullah et al. (2018) who also underlined that the food's flavor and preparation affected its quality, concurred with this assertion. In summary, the actual food's flavor, the preparation, the smell, and whether it was presented in accordance with the menu all contributed to the satisfaction of customers (Talapatra et al., 2021). Hence, the first hypothesis in this study was quality of food positively and significantly influenced diner satisfaction.

2.2.2. Service quality to diners' satisfaction

Based on Talapatra et al. (2019), another crucial factor that influenced diner satisfaction at full-service restaurants were the service quality. A customer's level of satisfaction will drop when they have a negative experience, and as a result, they are more likely to cease coming back to the restaurant (Talapatra et al., 2021). It was also likely that they will convey their bad experiences to others which will impact the restaurant's business because their image will be tarnished and badly judged by customers who might have yet to visit the restaurant personally.

Hence, the owner of the restaurant should be aware of the criteria that customers used to assess the level of their service, and they should always be prepared with a variety of solutions in case a service-related issue develops (Barbosa et al., 2020). According to the research by Strenitzerova and Gana (2018), delayed in services was one of the factors contributing to decreased consumer satisfaction levels in the service business. We can therefore conclude that based on earlier findings, better service quality fulfilled the satisfaction of customers, which will lead them to revisit the restaurant (Meesala and Paul, 2018). The second hypothesis of this study was service quality positively and significantly influenced diner satisfaction.

2.2.3. Environment of the restaurant to diners' satisfaction

Customer's emotions, expectations and dining experiences which will lead to their level of satisfaction was significantly impacted by the environment of a restaurant (Kranzbühler et al., 2018). According to Daries-Ramón et al. (2018), customers will first consider the environment before engaging in any services; the way they perceived the services over time could influence their responses to the services provided in restaurants. A restaurant's competitive advantage was its setting or ambience, which

was in addition to the high quality and selection of cuisine it served (Longart et al., 2018). The environment of a restaurant included the seats layout, the ambiance, the cleanliness, the lighting, and the noise level (Talapatra et al., 2021).

Based on the results from the research done by Park et al. (2020), it was concluded that customers were impressed by a restaurant's cleanliness. Besides that, the results from the research by Hadi et al. (2019), generally people like to visit restaurants with inviting and comfy seating arrangements. Rashidin et al. (2020) concluded that diner's satisfaction can be directly measured by their perception on the environment of the restaurant which was studied as Hypothesis 3 whereby the environment of the restaurant positively and significantly influenced diner satisfaction (Annathurai et al., 2023).

2.2.4. Moderating role of gender on diner satisfaction

According to certain studies, men were perceived as being more aggressive and independent, whilst women were perceived as being generally more emotional. The performance scorecard was typically rated higher by women than by men (Hoffman and Hurst, 1990). Additionally, based on Noble et al. (2006), when women were served by others, they may want to be associated with others and prioritized more on social connections.

Different research showed that women tended to pay more attention to and worried more about what they eat than most men do (Blanck et al., 2008; Liebman et al., 2001). Fekete-Farkas et al. (2021) also found that men and women had distinct perspectives in service evaluation, with women placing a higher importance on unfavorable information than men did and their tendencies to give bad reviews were higher than men. These contributed to the development of the hypothesis below:

Hypothesis 4a: Gender will moderate the relationship between quality of food and diner satisfaction, such that the relationship between quality of food and diner satisfaction is stronger for women than for men.

Hypothesis 4b: Gender will moderate the relationship between service quality and diner satisfaction such that the relationship between service quality and diner satisfaction is stronger for women than for men.

Hypothesis 4c: Gender will moderate the relationship between environment of the restaurant and diner satisfaction such that the relationship between environment of the restaurant and diner satisfaction is stronger for women than for men.

2.3. Research framework

The research framework showing the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable is as shown in **Figure 4** below.

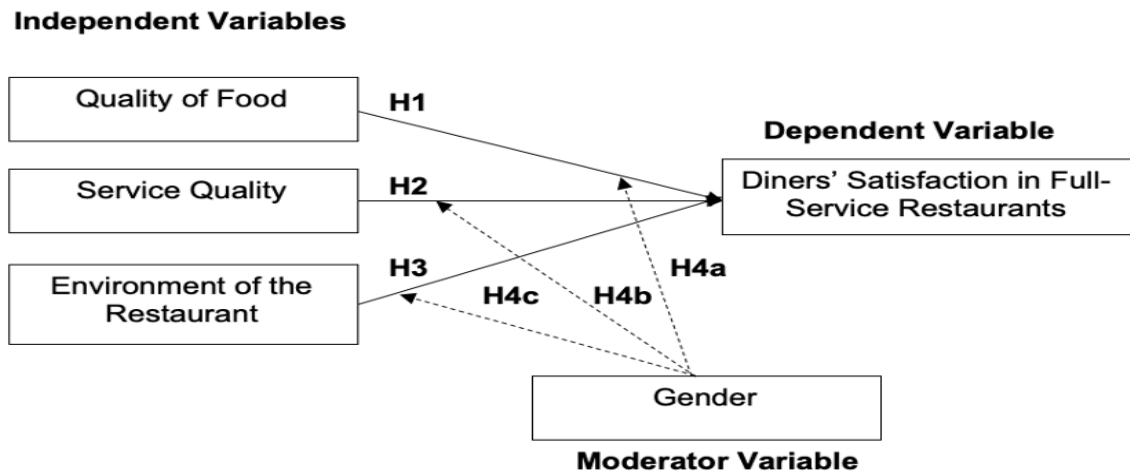


Figure 4. Research framework of this study.

2.4. Fundamental theories

The theory of planned behavior (TPB)

Research by Tommasetti et al. (2018) stated Icek Ajzen created the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in 1991 as a psychological paradigm that dealt with behavioral intention. The TPB was an enhancement from the Theory of Reasoned Action without “Perceived Behavioral Control” by Fishbone and Ajzen (1975) which was helpful for anticipating human behavior. According to Srivastava et al. (2022), the TPB was allegedly used in 1980 to forecast a person’s propensity to engage in a particular activity at a particular time and place. This theory was created on the basis of behavioral intention that the conviction that a particular action might result in the desired outcome as well as an individual’s subjective assessment of the benefits and risks of that circumstance (Abbasi et al., 2020).

Belanche et al. (2019) wrote that the TPB model has been widely utilized in the literature to explain consumer behavior in a number of contexts. It had also been used in studies that focused purely on food, notably in the context of restaurants (Srivastava et al., 2018). A study was done to find out the common food intake among middle school students. By utilizing the TPB, factors influencing food consumption in Seoul was investigated and it showed that taste, restaurant’s environment and familiarity had significant impacts on intention to satisfy customer in a restaurant (Seo et al., 2011). Moreover, Nezakati et al. (2011)’s study employed the TPB model to analyze the effect of respondents’ attitudes on consumer loyalty to their chosen restaurants in Malaysia, and it was shown that product quality, customer happiness, and brand trust had a larger than averagely favorable influence (Azhari et al., 2023).

A person’s attitude reflected their evaluation of a particular behavior. For example, the happier the diner was, the more satisfied they will become and the more likely they will visit the restaurant again (Beck and Ajzen 1991). The TPB model was utilized because the main objective of this study was to pinpoint the factors that would influence diners’ pleasure. In this study, diners’ satisfaction at full-service restaurants served as the dependent variable. The independent variables were the quality of food, service quality, and the environment of the restaurant. The moderator variable was the gender of the diners. Hence, the Research Framework for this study had been

developed based on this theory. An illustration of the theory of planner behavior is shown in **Figure 5** below.

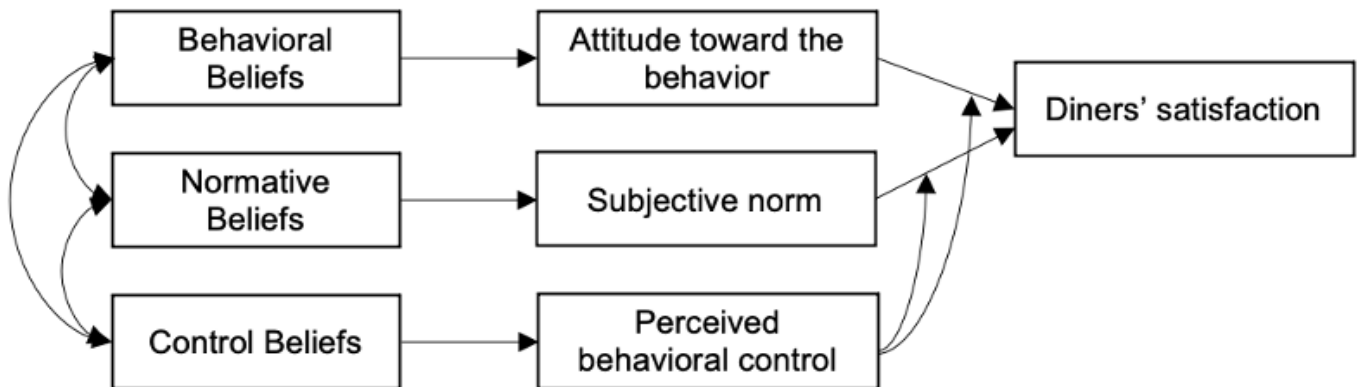


Figure 5. An illustration of the theory of planner behavior.

Note. The illustration was created based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Bosnjak et al., 2020).

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research design

A causal explanatory research design approach underlay this quantitative study. The concept for this study was stemmed by observations made in full-service restaurant settings, where diners’ satisfaction seemed to differ individually. There were also several reasons why quantitative study was being conducted. A quantitative study was conducted to identify the elements that affect diner satisfaction in full-service restaurants in West Malaysia and to examine the moderating impact of gender had on each factor. This study adopted good methodological practices from previous studies (Almonawer et al., 2023; Annathurai et al., 2023; Khalil et al., 2022; Gazi et al., 2024; Liew et al., 2024).

The investigation in current study was using causal explanatory approach to find out the existence of relationship between the independent variables (IV) and the dependent variable (DV). The IVs of this study were the i) quality of food, ii) service quality and iii) the environment of the restaurant. The DV of this study was the customer satisfaction in full-service restaurants. There were four measuring scales (refer to **Tables 2–5**) each that were used to measure the IVs and DV

Table 2. Diners’ satisfaction.

No	Items
1	My overall experience in the restaurant is satisfying.
2	My expectations of the restaurants are met.
3	My visit to the restaurant is en enjoyable experience.
4	I feel good after dining in the restaurant.

Note. Question 1 and 2 (Kabir, 2016). Question 3 and 4 (Ryu et al., 2012).

Table 3. Quality of food.

No	Items
1	The restaurant offers a wide range of menu options.
2	The food is delicious.
3	The restaurant offers fresh food.
4	The visual appeal of the food presentation is excellent.

Note. Question 1 and 4 (Kabir, 2016). Question 2 and 3 (Zhong and Moon, 2020).

Table 4. Service quality.

No	Items
1	Employees are friendly.
2	Employees are helpful.
3	Employees serve quickly and promptly.
4	Employees serve the food exactly as I ordered it.

Note. Question 1 (Qin and Prybutok, 2009). Question 2, 3 and 4 (Ryu et al., 2012).

Table 5. Environment of the restaurant.

No	Items
1	Employees are friendly.
2	Employees are helpful.
3	Employees serve quickly and promptly.
4	Employees serve the food exactly as I ordered it.

Note. Question 1 and 3 (Hanaysha, 2016). Question 2 and 4 (Ryu et al., 2012).

The research study setting was non-contrived since it was conducted in a natural setting without modification (Chin et al., 2019). The research event was conducted with the least amount of researcher involvement possible since the events were thought to occur naturally in the field, minimum interference of the regular flow and reducing the impact on the study's dependent variable.

The research was focused at full-service restaurants in West Malaysia as it helps in ensuring a more controllable sample size, which might be essential for carrying out in-depth analyses and by concentrating on a population that is more similar to one another in terms of cultural and economic characteristics, it can also increase the sample's representativeness (Gom et al., 2021).

The study's time frame was cross-sectional whereby different randomly chosen respondents were given the questionnaire utilized in this study, and they were only asked to complete it once. The period from 25 December 2022 to 17 January 2023 was used for the data gathering for this study.

3.2. Data collection method

Convenience sampling was used in this study because according to Yin (2009), instead of making statistical inferences about the population as a whole, it focused on small samples and was made to explore a real-world event.

This study used a self-administered questionnaire to gather its data, in which respondents read the survey questions and responded without the assistance of an

interviewer (Hair et al., 2007). Information from a large group of respondents was gathered through questionnaires at little or no cost. Using several online channels, including Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, and email, the questionnaires were sent to customers who had patronized to any full-service restaurant in West Malaysia before. An explanation on the meaning of full-service restaurants was added in the beginning of the questionnaire to ensure that the respondents had past experience of dining in a full-service restaurant for the past 3 months.

After the data collected from the distributed questionnaire, a validity and reliability test were conducted and further analyzed by using SPSS. According to Puteh and Ong (2017), SPSS statistics package offered comprehensive output, making it an appropriate statistical package compared to other statistical software (Fei et al., 2024). The following analysis was done in order to test the hypothesis.

3.3. Sample size

The number of participants or observations employed in a study was referred to as the sample size (Kumar et al., 2013).

According to a Jourden (2019) survey, Malaysians eat out far more regularly, with 87% doing so at least once a week. A sample size of 384, according to the Krejcie and Morgan table, was adequate for a population of at least one million (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970). An addition 5% on the actual sample size calculations was required due to statistical noise upon expected sample size (Andrade, 2020).

3.4. Research instruments

Questionnaire design

In this study, a three-part questionnaire was used. Part A which referred to the demographic information consisted of both nominal and ordinal scale; part B referred to questions in relation to customer satisfaction and part C was connected to factors influencing customer satisfaction at full-service restaurants in West Malaysia. The 5-point Likert scale was used for parts B and C.

4. Data analysis

4.1. Demographic profile

The questionnaire for this survey consisted of 5 sections. Section A was on demographic profile, Section B was on the quality of food, Section C was on service quality, Section D was environment of the restaurant and Section E was on diners' satisfaction. There were 4 items in Section A, and they were age, gender, marital status, and frequency of visiting full-service restaurants. **Table 6** showed the results of the descriptive analysis based on the frequencies (*f*) and the percentages (%).

Table 6. Demographic profile of respondents ($n = 264$).

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency (<i>f</i>)	Percentage (%)
Under 18	6	2.3
18–24	78	29.6
25 to 34	70	26.5
35 to 44	51	19.3
45 to 54	36	13.6
55 and above	23	8.7
Male	109	41.3
Female	155	58.7
Single	164	62.1
Married	96	36.4
Divorced	2	0.75
Widowed	2	0.75
1–2 times every 6 months	59	22.4
2 times every 3 months	29	11
Once a month	50	18.9
2–3 times a month	61	23.1
1–3 times a week	36	13.6
More than 3 times a week	29	11

The survey from this research was collected from 264 respondents which involved a total of 109 males (41.3%) and 155 females (58.7%). Gender was also the moderator variable in this research.

There was a total of 78 (29.5%) respondents between the age of 18 to 24 years old, followed by 70 (26.5%) respondents were in between the age of 25 to 34 years old, 51 respondents (19.3%) were in between the age of 35 to 44 years old, 36 respondents (13.6%) were in between the age of 45 to 54 years old, 23 respondents (8.7%) were 55 years old and above and 6 respondents (2.3%) were under 18 years old.

Majority of the respondents were single (164 respondents, 62.1%) while another 36.4% of respondents were married (96 respondents) and there were 2 divorcees (0.75%) and 2 widowers (0.75%) in this research.

Out of the 264 respondents, 61 of them (23.1%) visited full-service restaurants at least 2 to 3 times in a month while 59 of them (22.4%) only visited 1 to 2 times every 6 months. Besides that, 50 of them (18.9%) visited full-service restaurants at least once a month and 36 of them (13.6%) visited them 1 to 3 times a week. There was an equal of 29 respondents (11%) each that visited full-service restaurants at least 2 times every 3 months and also more than 3 times a week.

4.2. Reliability analysis and multiple regression analysis

A reliability test evaluated the consistency of the results obtained from repeated measurements taken using the same measuring tool and under the same circumstances (Sürücü and Maslakci, 2020). Using the 264 data that had been collected, the reliability

test for the study’s dependent variable (Diners’ Satisfaction) and independent variables (Quality of Food, Service Quality and Environment of the Restaurant) was evaluated (Khalil et al., 2022).

According to Ursachi et al. (2015), an acceptable degree of reliability was defined as having an alpha value between 0.6 and 0.7, and a very good level as having an alpha value of 0.8 or above. However, scores above 0.95 indicated redundancy, thus they were not always a positive indicator. Based on **Table 7**, the Cronbach’s Alpha values for both the dependent variable and independent variables were all considered acceptable or good reliability. The value for the dependent variable (Diners’ Satisfaction) was at 0.897. The value for the first independent (Quality of Food) was considered acceptable at 0.797 and very near to 0.8. The values for the other 2 independent variables (Service Quality and Environment of the Restaurant) were at 0.865 and 0.820.

Table 7. Results of Cronbach’s alpha test ($n = 264$).

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach Alpha	Items
Y: Diners Satisfaction	4.009	0.6481	0.897	4
X1: Quality of Food	3.917	0.6398	0.797	4
X2: Service Quality	3.949	0.6961	0.865	4
X3: Environment of the Restaurant	3.872	0.6921	0.82	4

Multiple regression

Multiple regression was used in this study to examine the relationship between two or more important variables (Kumari and Yadav, 2018). Hence, the Independent *T*-test and Multiple Regression Analysis were conducted in this study (Barman et al., 2023).

Based on **Table 8**, the regression analysis in Model 1 combined both the dependent, independent variables and moderator variable revealed that quality of food (QOF), service quality (SQ), environment of the restaurant (EOTR) and Gender (G) accounted for around 57.3% of the variation in diners’ satisfaction in full-service restaurants in West Malaysia. The adjusted *r*-square was at 57.3%.

Table 8. Model summary of multiple regression.

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> Square	Adjusted <i>R</i> Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	<i>R</i> Square Change	Sig. F Change
1	0.757	0.573	0.567	0.427	0.573	<0.001
2	0.779	0.607	0.596	0.412	0.033	<0.001

Model 2 showed that the percentage increased in the variation explained by the addition of gender to each independent variables were reflected in the change in R^2 , which was 3.3%. With a *P*-value of less than 0.05, this was statistically significant. Therefore, it can be said that gender does moderate the relationship between the quality of food, service quality, and the environment of the restaurant to diners’ satisfaction (Ahmed et al., 2022).

Table 9 showed that the relationship between the quality of food and diners’ satisfaction was stronger for the females as it accounted for 45.2%. The adjusted *r*-

square was at 67.2%. Besides that, males were accounted for 17.7% while the adjusted *r*-square was at 42.1%.

Table 9. Model summary of multiple regression on quality of food (group by gender).

Gender	Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig. F Change
Male	1	0.421	0.177	0.17	0.48	<0.001
Female	1	0.672	0.452	0.448	0.535	<0.001

Based on **Table 10**, it was shown that the relationship between the service quality and diners’ satisfaction was also stronger for the females as it accounted for 56.8%. The adjusted *r*-square was at 56.5%. Besides that, males were accounted for 27.9% while the adjusted *r*-square was at 27.2%.

Table 10. Model summary of multiple regression on service quality (group by gender).

Gender	Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig. F Change
Male	1	0.528	0.279	0.272	0.45	<0.001
Female	1	0.754	0.568	0.565	0.475	<0.001

The relationship between the environment of the restaurant and diners’ satisfaction was also stronger for females because it accounted for 52.4% and the adjusted *r*-square was 52.1% as per stated in **Table 11**. As for males, they were accounted for 34.2% and the adjusted *r*-square was 33.6%.

Table 11. Model summary of multiple regression on environment of the restaurant (group by gender).

Gender	Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig. F Change
Male	1	0.585	0.342	0.336	0.43	<0.001
Female	1	0.724	0.524	0.521	0.499	<0.001

Table 12. Analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Model	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	63.34	4	15.84	87.01	<0.001
1	Residual	47.14	259	0.182		
1	Total	110.48	263			
2	Regression	67.01	7	9.57	56.39	<0.001
2	Residual	43.46	256	0.17		
2	Total	110.48	263			

The significant value (*p*-value) from the analysis of variance (ANOVA) was at < 0.001 which was lower than 0.05 (refer to **Table 12**). This indicated that the diners’ satisfaction at full-service restaurants in West Malaysia can be predicted using at least one of the three independent variables (Quality of Food, Service Quality and Environment of the Restaurant). Additionally, the result also showed that there were considerable variances between the sample means.

The moderator variable of gender and diners’ satisfaction also had a significant relationship because the *P*-value was lower than 0.05.

Table 13. Multiple regression.

Model	Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	0.75	0.18		4.14	<0.001		
1	QOF	0.2	0.06	0.2	3.62	<0.001	0.56	1.78
1	SQ	0.35	0.06	0.42	4.73	<0.001	0.45	2.2
1	EOTR	0.37	0.05	0.4	7.41	<0.001	0.57	1.75
2	Gender	-0.21	0.05	-0.02	-0.39	0.701	0.99	1.01
2	QOF x Gender	0.19	0.05	0.19	3.66	<0.001	0.56	1.78
2	SQ x Gender	0.32	0.32	0.32	2.42	0.112	0.43	2.2
2	EOTR x Gender	0.33	0.36	0.36	6.75	<0.001	0.55	1.81
2	(Constant)	0.79	0.18		4.45	<0.001		
2	Gender	-0.33	0.05	-0.51	-0.21	0.83	0.59	1.7

Table 8 indicated that the independent variables (Quality of Food, Service Quality and Environment of the Restaurant) accounted for 57.3% of the variation in diners' satisfaction in full-service restaurants in West Malaysia (dependent variable).

The explanatory factors which were quality of food (X1), service quality (X2) and environment of the restaurant, (X3) had statistical significance at alpha level 0.01 as per shown in **Table 13**. The average positive relationship effect of an improvement in quality of food (X1) of 1% is thus a 0.20% rise in diners' satisfaction, with statistical significance at the 0.001 level, while maintaining other factors constant. Similar to this, a 1% improvement in service quality (X2) and restaurant environment (X3) had an average positive relationship effect of increasing diners' satisfaction by 0.27 and 0.37%, respectively, with statistical significance at the 0.001 level.

In general, if the Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) was greater than 4 or the tolerance was lower than 0.25, multicollinearity may be present and further research is necessary (CFI Team, 2022). The multicollinearity statistics showed that the tolerance for quality of food (0.56), service quality (0.45) and environment of the restaurant (0.57) were all larger than 0.25. These values are all presented in **Table 14**. This means that there were no multicollinearity issues raised because the VIF value for each variable were less than 4.0.

It can also be seen that the *P*-value for quality of food (QOF) x gender (G) was 0.03. Since the *P*-value was less than 0.05, we assumed that the moderator variable gender affected the relationship between the independent variable quality of food and the dependent variable diners' satisfaction. However, the *P*-value for service quality (SQ) x G and environment of the restaurant (EOTR) x G was 0.11 and 0.83 respectively. Hence, we assumed that gender would not affect the relationship of both service quality and environment of the restaurant towards diners' satisfaction.

Table 14 showed that gender worked as the moderator variable in this study with females showing stronger relationship because the significance level for all variables were at 0.001. However, for males, it had a significant effect on both service quality and environment of the restaurant but not on quality of food.

Table 14. Multiple regression (group by gender).

Gender	Model	Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Male	1	(Constant)	1.73	0.3		5.88	<0.001		
Male	1	QOF	0.05	0.08	0.06	0.61	0.54	0.57	1.77
Male	1	SQ	0.19	0.08	0.27	2.52	0.01	0.51	1.97
Female	1	(Constant)	0.14	0.22		0.62	0.54		
Female	1	QOF	0.29	0.07	0.26	4.27	<0.001	0.56	1.78
Female	1	SQ	0.37	0.08	0.35	4.79	<0.001	0.4	2.48
Male	1	EOTR	0.35	0.76	0.41	4.57	<0.001	0.69	1.45
Female	1	EOTR	0.33	0.07	0.33	4.99	<0.001	0.49	2.07

4.3. Hypothesis testing

There was a total of 6 hypothesis developed in this study and the relationship between each hypothesis will be tested in this section.

H1: Quality of food positively and significantly influences diner satisfaction. Based on **Table 13**, the p -value showed 0.001 which was less than 0.05. This indicated that there was a strong relationship between the quality of food and diners' satisfaction (p -value = 0.001). Therefore, hypothesis H1 was supported (0.001). This result showed that the quality of food positively and significantly influenced diners' satisfaction at full-service restaurants.

This was also supported by the study from Bashir et al. (2013) and Chun and Nyam-Ochir (2020) which found that customers consistently took meal quality into account when choose which restaurant to eat. The quality of the food served by the restaurants was crucial to ensure that diners were satisfied because 23.1% of the 264 respondents in this survey attended full-service restaurants at least twice of three times per month.

H2: Service quality positively and significantly influences diner satisfaction. The p -value in **Table 13** showed that the p -value was 0.001 which was less than 0.05 therefore service quality positively and significantly influenced diners' satisfaction. The hypothesis H2 was supported as service quality positively and significantly influenced diners' satisfaction at full-service restaurants. Service quality was also another important factor in influencing diners' satisfaction besides the quality of food (Sharif et al., 2015).

H3: Environment of the restaurant positively and significantly influences diner satisfaction. Hypothesis H3 was supported because the p -value was at 0.001. This had shown that the environment of the restaurant had a positive significant influence on diners' satisfaction (Haque et al., 2020). This was also aligned with the study by Wu and Ko (2013) who had reported that the environment of the restaurant played an important role in determining diners' satisfaction.

H4a: Gender will moderate the relationship between quality of food and diner satisfaction such that the relationship between quality of food and diner satisfaction is stronger for women than for men. As per **Table 14**, the p -value as per shown was 0.026 which was lower than 0.05 hence hypothesis H4a was supported. **Table 14** also showed that the relationship between the quality of food and diners' satisfaction was stronger for women than for men as the significant level for women was at 0.001.

According to several research like Liebman et al. (2001) and Blanck et al. (2008), on average, females paid greater attention to food and were more concerned with food choices compared to men.

H4b: Gender will moderate the relationship between service quality and diner satisfaction such that the relationship between service quality and diner satisfaction is stronger for women than for men. The p -value as shown in **Table 14** was at 0.107 which was higher than 0.05 means that it was not significant therefore, the null hypothesis will not be able to be rejected. Gender will not affect service quality and diners' satisfaction and this result is consistent with several of the earlier research studies on this subject that had been published (Ladipo et al., 2020; Vinayak and Kumari, 2019). This may be due to service quality had been a strong factor that determined satisfaction regardless of gender (Ramalingam et al., 2024).

H4c: Gender will moderate the relationship between environment of the restaurant and diner satisfaction such that the relationship between environment of the restaurant and diner satisfaction is stronger for women than for men (Francis et al., 2023). Gender will not affect the environment of the restaurant and diner's satisfaction because the p -value was at 0.830 which means that it was not significant. Hence, the null hypothesis must be accepted. This was aligned with the results from past research (Yong and Liu, 2020). The environment of the restaurant played a significant role in determining diners' satisfaction at a restaurant for both men and women.

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1. Summary of the research's findings

5.1.1. Research question 1: Does quality of food of the restaurant predicts diner satisfaction at full-service restaurants

Quality of food and diners' satisfaction

H1: Quality of food positively and significantly influences diner satisfaction.

Based on the first research objective and research question in this study, it intended to evaluate if the quality of food appeared to influence diners' satisfaction at full-service restaurants in West Malaysia. Four of the most significant characteristics were related to the food quality, including the variety of food offered on the menu, taste, freshness, and presentation of the meal.

The choice of full-service restaurants are influenced by the significant relationship between quality of food and diners' satisfaction. The research by Carvache-Franco et al. (2021) had also indicated that the quality of food was the main attributes that determined diners' satisfaction. Another study had also confirmed that the quality of food in a restaurant influence diners' satisfaction. Another study had also confirmed that the quality of food in a restaurant influenced diners' satisfaction and the intention to dine in the same restaurant again (Ewanlen, 2022).

5.1.2. Research question 2: Does service quality of the restaurant predicts diner satisfaction at full-service restaurants?

Service quality and diners' satisfaction

H2: Service Quality positively and significantly influences diner satisfaction.

This study's second objective and research question aimed to ascertain whether

diners' satisfaction was significantly influenced by service quality and based on the results from this study, service quality positively and significantly influenced diners' satisfaction. It was crucial for employees to remember that having a courteous attitude and menu knowledge were often regarded as two of the most essential factors in determining diners' satisfaction. Employees who were aware of the menu offerings typically gave a quick feedback and also responded quickly to customers' inquiries or questions efficiently which considered as a restaurant service attribute. Customers will be contented and satisfied by the service attribute with the reliable service and attentive staff.

There should be two key areas of caution. According to Erkmen (2019), the first area was the employees' courtesy and service which can be referred to the interaction between restaurant's staff with diners. The second key area was the pace that the employee provided their service (Carvache-Franco et al., 2021). These two factors were those that affected and forecasted the total diners' satisfaction. It was also advised to retain these two factors in order to maintain the level of satisfaction.

5.1.3. Research question 3: Does environment of the restaurant predicts diner satisfaction at full-service restaurants?

Environment of restaurant and diners' satisfaction

H3: Environment of the restaurant positively and significantly influences diner satisfaction.

Results from this study had shown that there the environment of the restaurant had a positive significant influence on diners' satisfaction at full-service restaurants which was aligned with the results from the research by Wu and Ko (2013). The layout of the restaurant, the interior design, music, and overall cleanliness all contributed to a restaurant's environment.

The environment of the restaurant mostly acted as the primary determinant of the restaurant's reputation. A customer's view of a restaurant's environment shaped their dining experience (Oyewole, 1999). Wang et al. (2014) indicated that a customer's favourable impression of the environment caused them to feel good, and in turn caused them to have a favourable opinion of the restaurant and the food that they offered.

5.1.4. Research question 4: Does gender moderate the relationship between quality of food, service quality, environment of the restaurant and diner satisfaction at full-service restaurants

Gender, quality of food and diners' satisfaction

H4a: Gender will moderate the relationship between quality of food and diner satisfaction such that the relationship between quality of food and diner satisfaction is stronger for women than for men.

The results from this study found that gender moderated the relationship between the quality of food and diners' satisfaction and the relationship was stronger for women than men and consistent with the findings from Vinayak and Kumari (2019) and Ma et al. (2014). The significance of food to the image of a full-service restaurant was also consistent with earlier results that the image of a restaurant was greatly influenced by its menu and its food provided by the restaurants (Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000). This was because women have higher standards for the majority of food quality attributes compared to men (Jiayuan et al., 2018).

Various studies such as those from Manippa et al. (2017) and Uccula and Nuvoli (2017) had reported that the effect was stronger for the women compared to men in relation to food quality because women were likely to be more alert in the types of their food consumption and also the quality of the food that they consumed because they were likely to exaggerate their weight compared to men. Hence, they will choose to go on a diet in order to lose weight compared to men (Davy et al., 2006).

Studies by Dahal et al. (2022) had also reported that women tend to prefer smaller portion size of the food compared to men due to their concern on their weight and appearance. The judgement in our society was that women who ate less were considered to have more feminine traits.

5.2. Implications of the study

5.2.1. Managerial implication

One of the most crucial competitive survival strategies for full-service restaurant were customer satisfaction. Therefore, in order to have returning customers, it was crucial for restaurant owners and managers to understand the various factors that included the quality of food, service quality and the environment of the restaurant, as well as the potential impact of their customer's gender that influenced their diners' satisfaction.

According to the research by Serhan and Serhan (2019), the freshness, flavor, and appearance of the food serve had been linked to a higher diner's satisfaction. In order to be professional, proper training must be given to the employees at the restaurants. Besides that, it was also crucial to maintain the restaurant's cleanliness and comfort. Furthermore, it was important for managers to understand that happiness went beyond simple conceptions of satisfaction and that it influenced the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty. Customers that were satisfied and happy were more likely to tell their circle of influence about the restaurant and also to dine in again at the restaurant. Managers must constantly employ a variety of tactics to satisfy their customers' wants and make them feel happy as well as fulfilled in order to foster loyalty. This will in turn increase the restaurant's profit (Truong et al., 2017).

The full-service restaurant industry's gender disparity had significant marketing ramifications. They were seeing a rise in the importance of women as consumers as their income and purchasing power increased. The study also revealed that customers' happiness was a more significant predictor of loyalty among women than men, whereas food quality played a more significant impact in determining customer loyalty among female customers than male customers. Understanding gender differences helped restaurant owners to better segment their markets and captured larger market shares by helping them to better understand the requirements and behaviors of both male and female customers.

5.2.2. Theoretical implication

This study added empirical evidence to the current ideas that concentrated on the three factors affected diners' satisfaction at full-service restaurants in West Malaysia. It was important to take note that the quality of food, service quality and environment of the restaurant were crucial in determining diners' satisfaction. Results from this study were similar to those from Zhong and Moon (2020), Mutiawati et al. (2022) and

Adam et al. (2015), with the addition of gender as the moderator variable on diner satisfaction. According to Vinayak and Kumari (2019), men were more likely than women to rate restaurants highly, while ordinary ratings were given to the restaurant more frequently. Due to the fact that men and women process information differently, women typically offer average ratings since they consider a variety of factors (Mien et al., 2023). However, men find it difficult to evaluate different factors and assigned higher scores. Men and women processed information differently and employed different tactics (Senathirajah et al., 2024). Men were not comprehensive information processors whereby, they just considered the impact of the information on them personally. Females, on the other hand, were comprehensive information processors since they will elaborate and thoroughly examine all the facets of the material (Meyers-Levy, 1989; Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran, 1991). It was shown that gender moderated the relationship between quality of food and diner satisfaction and that the relationship was stronger for women than men.

5.3. Limitations of the study

There were several limitations in this study. First and foremost, although convenience sampling was used in this study, majority of the respondents were single women (107 respondents). It would have been ideal if the samples had been more diverse in terms of gender and marital status. Secondly, this study was limited to only full-service restaurants in West Malaysia, hence some of its conclusions might not be consistent with those results derived from the research on full-service restaurants in East Malaysia or other countries, or involving other types of restaurants. Thirdly, there were only three independent variables which consisted the quality of food, service quality and environment of the restaurant were examined in this study as the determinant of diners' satisfaction however, other research suggested that there may be additional factors that can be added such as perceived price, location of restaurants and the purpose of visit to the restaurant. Besides that, the fact that the data collection period for this study was conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic when all F&B establishments were only able to operate normally by the fourth quarter of 2022 (Pathmanathan et al., 2022). This circumstance may have had an impact on the study's findings. In this study, gender was the only moderator variable involved, however there may be additional moderators such as age, income level and marital status that should be investigated.

5.4. Recommendations for future study

This study was carried out based on full-service restaurants in West Malaysia, hence it might not be applicable to other areas like the East Malaysia or other nations. Therefore, a larger and more diverse location had to be studied.

Future research could also consider including additional factors such as pricing and location, besides quality of food, service quality and environment of the restaurant that will influence diners' satisfaction (Wangyanwen et al., 2023). The study can also be expanded to other types of restaurants such as fast-food restaurants, ethnic

restaurants and café.

Other moderator variable besides gender, such as age, marital status or income level can be included in future study (Wahab et al., 2024). The preferences that led to satisfaction may differ among different age group or may also differed among singles, married with or without children or even the senior citizens (Osman et al., 2022).

Lastly, this study also demonstrated the necessity for more extensive research on the purpose of diners visit a restaurant (Jye et al., 2022). There may be various reasons such as just to have a simple meal after work before going home, for family gathering to celebrate special occasion or appointment with business partner or customers. Customers' satisfaction with a restaurant may vary depending on why they visited (Sirajuddin et al., 2023). For instance, if they are dining for a celebration, they may rate the establishment higher, or if they are dining out after work, their ratings may be impacted by fatigue. However, these were just conjectures until more research conducted.

Author contributions: Conceptualization, CTG; methodology, SAR; software, SAR; validation, HR, NDS and SP; formal analysis, SAR; investigation, CTG; resources, CTG; data curation, SAR; writing—original draft preparation, CTG; writing—review and editing, LT; visualization, LT; supervision, SAR; project administration, CTG; funding acquisition, SAR. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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