



DETERMINANTS OF RESTAURANT SELECTION AND PATRONAGE IN CHINA: PLS-SEM APPROACH

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Abstract

China has been on the rise economically for over two decades now and the economic outlook of the country looks phenomenon. This has resulted in the creation of economic freedom and the citizens seem to be living lavish life styles. There is an upsurge in the patronage of restaurants services for the Chinese as they prefer to eat out especially the working class. This study investigated the determinants of restaurant selection in China as well as assessed the effects of restaurant image and customer satisfaction on behavioural intention of restaurant patrons in China. The study was anchored on the theory of planned behavior as well as the SERVQUAL model. Data for the study was obtained from 329 sample restaurant patrons in the Jiangsu Province of china using structured questionnaires. The data for the study was analysed by the help of SPSS and SmartPLS software for the structural equation modeling analysis. Findings from this study revealed that determinants of restaurant patronage in China are perceived service quality, brand image, sacrifice, face and perceived value. Again, this study revealed that perceived service quality, brand image, face and perceived value have a positive and significant relationship with behavioural intention.

Keywords: Service quality, Customer satisfaction, Brand image, Behavioural intention, Restaurant, China

INTRODUCTION

There is an upsurge in the patronage of restaurants services for the Chinese as they prefer to eat out especially the working class. The increase patronage of restaurant services in every developing city of the world might be influenced by globalization (Tabassum & Rahman, 2012). According to Ahmed, Hossain, Malek, and Begum (2008), there is an increase in the trend of restaurant patronage in the upper class in society, especially among teenagers and the youth. Also, Park (2004) explained the reasons for eating out at fast food restaurants includes satisfying hunger, convenience, pleasure, entertainment, time saving, social interaction and the mood transformation (Olise, Okoli, & Ekeke, 2015).

According to the data from the McKinsey Global Institute analysis, by the year 2025, the urban households of China will make up one of the largest consumer markets in the world, spending about 20 trillion Yuan per year (Farrell, 2010). Economic growth and development in China have been influenced by the expanding middle class. Middle class households typically have enough income to satisfy their primary needs – food, clothing, and shelter – with some disposable income left over for additional consumption and savings. This study targets the middle class in china to determine factors that influence their choice and patronage of restaurants services. The reasons for targeting middle-class consumers include the fact that middle class spending growth has been primarily driven by consumers in the upper-middle income band, which have a significant amount of disposable income.

A review of the extant literature shows that reasons customers patronize restaurants include “food quality, service quality, environment, price, and quick service” (Akbar & Alaudeen, 2012; Tabassum & Rahman, 2012; Tat, Sook-Min, Ai-Chin, Rasli, & Hamid, 2011), “restaurant image” (Ling, Mun, & Ling, 2011) “and fast food store image factors, customers' values of eating-out, customers' opinions about the globalization” (Ibrahim & Vignali, 2005).

The research on the customer satisfaction of restaurant services in China has gained much attention in recent times. However, there appear to be paucity in the literature with regards to Chinese customers dining experience and factors influencing it. Empirical findings on the determinants of customers' behavioural intention such as the perceived value, quality, face, sacrifice and brand image is also lacking. Again, limited studies have been conducted on restaurant image and the interrelationships among image, service quality, customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions have not been explored fully (Ryu, Lee, & Kim, 2012).

This gap in the literature has brought about the need for research, regarding the effects of service quality, perceived value, face, brand image and sacrifice on the behavioural intentions

of customers in restaurant setting in China. This study therefore seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- To investigate the determinants of restaurant selection and patronage in China.
- To assess the effect of the restaurant selection determinants on the behavioural intentions of customers

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perceived Service Quality and Behavioural intention

Perceived service quality has been explained as the customer's perception of the overall quality of a service relative to other alternatives. Perceived quality is, first, a perception by customers. Quality is explained by matching with the consumer's preferences (Berry, Parasuraman, & Zeithaml, 1994). Perceived service quality has a critical role in the consumers' evaluation and decision-making process; thus, the perceived service quality is a critical concept in business and service marketing (Kim & Han, 2008).

Service quality has been examined by different scholars, for example, Lee, Lee, and Yoo (2000) noted that, service managers should emphasize on the performance perceived by the customers rather than the difference between perceived performance and prior expectations. In restaurants and food service sector, the research studies have no conclusive evidence regarding which service quality dimension is important to consumer loyalty (Hoare & Butcher, 2008).

Service quality has also been described as a form of attitude regarding the superiority of the service (Carman, 1990; Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Service quality has been conceptualised as multilevel and multidimensional higher order construct (Brady, Cronin, & Brand, 2002; Clemes, Mohi, Li, & Hu, 2018). There appear nonetheless to be a lack of agreement on how to measure the construct across various industries (Brady et al., 2002; Clemes et al., 2018). Research findings for instance in the restaurant industry has not confirmed Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) SERVQUAL dimensions as representing service quality. The SERVQUAL model thus, has been considered inadequate in capturing the food quality dimension as it ignores several food quality elements (Lee, Shanklin, & Dallas, 2003; Sulek & Hensley, 2004). As such, new concepts and models such as DINESERV, TANGSERV and DINESCAPE have been proposed as new models for measuring service quality in the restaurant sector.

Olorunniwo, Hsu, and Udo (2006) and M. D. Clemes, Gan, and Ren (2011) argue that, high levels of service quality leads to positive behavioural intentions and low levels of service quality leads to the opposite effect. Service quality has also been argued to influence

behavioural intentions of customers directly or indirectly through customer satisfaction (Qin & Prybutok, 2008). From the above, we propose the hypothesis that;

H1. There is a significant and positive relationship between perceived service quality and behavioural intention of customers

Perceived value and Behavioural intention

Perceived value as a concept has gained a lot of attention in the marketing research studies (Chang & Wang, 2010). Perceived value has been explained as the value perceptions that is obtained when customers compare the benefit against the price of a particular product or service (Clemes, Shu, & Gan, 2014; Kwun & Oh, 2004). Customer's perceived value often has little to do with actual price. Rather, it deals with the abstract costs. The perceived value is important because it determines the extent of willingness shown by the customers to purchase the product or service offered, such that, the greater the perceived value the greater the intent to purchase the product or service is shown by the customers (Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991). Researchers agree that perceived value is a major influence on consumer loyalty (Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha, & Bryant, 1996; Yang & Peterson, 2004) and ensures long term business performance. Perceived value is proposed to have a positive influence on customer satisfaction (Brady et al., 2002; Chen, 2008; Clemes et al., 2018).

H2. Perceived value would influence restaurant customers behavioural intention positively

Face

Research on cross-cultural psychology and sociology suggests that face as a construct, is a powerful tool in fostering social interactions among Asians (Kim & Nam, 1998). Face is an important Chinese cultural concept in every aspect of life in China. It is a concept that has influenced Chinese lives for thousands of years (Dong & Lee, 2007). In China, face affects the credibility of the person you are dealing with. If someone is able to save his or her own face while giving face to his or her partners, he or she gains credibility and this will build a harmonious relationship in future transactions or interaction (Dong & Lee, 2007). We propose the following hypothesis:

H3. There is a significant and positive relationship between face and behavioural intention of customers

Brand Image and Behavioural intention

Image as a construct has been defined as the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person or a group has of an object. The object may be a company, product, brand, place or

person. A brand image is how the consumers perceive the brand (Aaker, 1996). Aaker (1991) explains that brand image is a set of associations which might not even reflect the objective reality. Arnold and (1992) explained brand image as the way in which certain groups decode all of the signals resonating from the product or service.

Brand image has a major impact on consumer's buying decision making and behavioural intentions. If the consumer's perception of the brand's image is positive, his or her behaviour towards the brand would also be positive. Once a customer is satisfied with a brand, he/she becomes loyal to it for long time. Keller (2003) assert that, building positive brand image is only possible when the important features of the brand are linked to the personality of the customer and getting the consumer associate to build strong brand association.

Eliwa (2006) assert that, the choice of restaurant is influenced to some extent by the image of the restaurant. Restaurant image has been mentioned as an important component of customer satisfaction and is typically seen an important factor in the profitability of restaurants due to its ability to influence behavioural intention of customers (Ryu, Han, & Kim, 2008). For instance, the decision of customers who have never patronised a restaurant might be influenced by their first impression on the restaurant's image. The image might also influence their future behavioural intentions such as re-patronising the restaurant. We therefore propose the hypothesis that:

H4. Positive Brand image would have a positive and significant effect on customers' behavioural intentions

Relationship between Sacrifice and Behavioural intention

Sacrifice is what consumers foregoes or give to receive or acquire a certain product or service (Zeithaml, 1988). Consumers sacrifice things like money, time, energy and effort to acquire goods and services (Zeithaml, 1998). Sacrifice has a negative effect to the consumers' perceived value of the products (Snoj, Korda, & Mumel, 2004). Some studies explain that sacrifice can be expressed in monetary and non-monetary costs (Agarwal & Teas, 2004; Snoj et al., 2004; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). Non-monetary costs such as psychic cost, presents the consumers' mental situation or emotional labor during the acquisition of goods and services is referred to perceived sacrifice. The items that represents the consumers' perception on the monetary and non-monetary price associated with the acquisition and use of services are used as the indicators of sacrifice construct (Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000). We hypothesise therefore that:

H3. There is a significant and positive relationship between sacrifice and customers' behavioural intentions

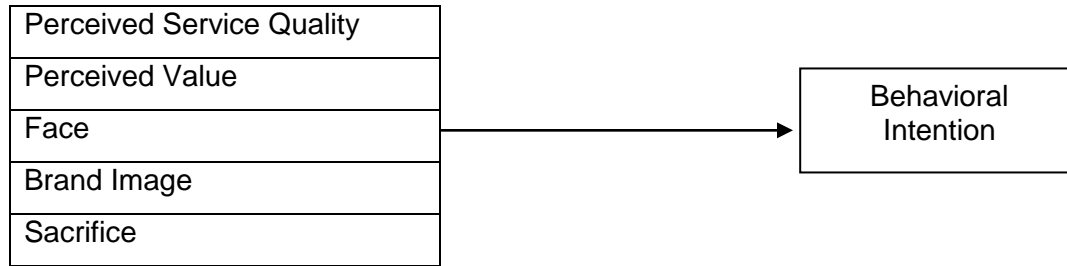


Figure 1: Conceptual model

METHODOLOGY

In the current study, quantitative research approach was used. A research design and approach is defined as the overall strategy that is chosen to integrate different parts of a study in a coherent manner to address a research question (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Adopting a convenience sampling technique, the study sampled 329 restaurant customers in the Jiangsu province in China. We developed a self-administered and structured questionnaire which was pre-tested and administered to the respondents. We used an informed consent form to seek the permission of respondents and also assured them of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses.

A five-point Likert scale was used to measure variables for the research constructs as recommended in previous works. The Likert scale ranged from strongly disagree (Bagozzi & Yi) to strongly agree (5). The items measuring the five multi-item constructs had 24 items that were adopted from previous studies and adapted to fit in our current study.

To analyse our study's findings, we first performed data cleaning and recoding of the data to remove outliers through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS V.22). Next, we performed an exploratory factor analysis Nefat, Belazić, and Alerić (2012) to determine number of factors to extract for our study using the direct varimax rotation. This enabled us to test the proposed relationships among the study variables. Drawing on the view of Pallant (2011), three main steps were followed in carrying out the EFA: "Bagozzi and Yi (2012) Assessment of the suitability of the data for factor analysis, (2) Factor extraction, and Bagozzi and Yi (2012) Factor rotation and interpretation."

After EFA, we also performed a confirmatory factor analysis Rice, McFarlin, and Bennett (1989) and then transferred the data SmartPLS 3 for further analysis. Our proposed model was, therefore, assessed for model fitness using the structural equation modeling Tessema and Soeters (2006) via SmartPLS 3.

RESULTS

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Our study performed the Harmann's Single-Factor test to check the common method variance. This test was conducted using exploratory factor analysis Nefat et al. (2012) and loading 6 items on one factor. Twenty-nine items were initially entered but 6 of the items were later removed leaving 20 items. The remaining items or components explained about 94.7% of the variance in our sample (see table 1).

Table 1. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.947
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square	6572.826
Df	406
Sig.	.000

Reliability and validity of Scales

To check the validity of our scales, we first tested for convergent and discriminant validity. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was adopted for the measurement of construct validity while the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was employed for the measurement of Sampling Adequacy of individual variables. To perform factor analysis, it is expected that the KMO overall score should be 0.6 or higher (Özdamar, 2017). Accordingly, the results of the Bartlett's test of Sphericity and KMO revealed that both are significant and suitable for the factor analysis (see Table 1).

The empirical result of the cumulative variance shows 95%, which exceeds the minimum acceptance level of 60% (Özdamar, 2017). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity from the table above shows that the correlation between the variables is 9278.068 which is sufficient, and significant ($P > 0.000$). While the factor loadings of all the construct exceeded 0.5 (Hair Jr, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Gudergan, 2017; Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015). The figures in the table shows that, there is convergent and discriminant validity (See Table 1).

Results of the Measurement model (reliability and validity)

To assess the internal consistency of our result, we tested the reliability of our constructs. We assessed this through the item factor loadings which exceeded 0.70 and also through the Cronbach's alpha which were all higher than the required level of 0.7 (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011; Ringle et al., 2015).

Table 2: Item loading and construct validity

	FL	CA	rho_A	CR	AVE
BI1	0.847	0.910	0.910	0.933	0.735
BI2	0.847				
BI3	0.878				
BI4	0.865				
BI5	0.850				
FC1	0.783	0.817	0.819	0.879	0.645
FC2	0.812				
FC3	0.824				
FC4	0.792				
IMG1	0.779	0.848	0.851	0.898	0.687
IMG2	0.834				
IMG3	0.856				
IMG4	0.846				
PV1	0.743	0.760	0.760	0.846	0.579
PV2	0.794				
PV3	0.774				
PV4	0.730				
SFC1	0.845	0.784	0.804	0.872	0.695
SFC2	0.831				
SFC3	0.824				
SQ1	0.823	0.877	0.883	0.910	0.668
SQ2	0.856				
SQ3	0.782				
SQ4	0.839				
SQ5	0.784				

Notes: FL – Item Loadings, BI – Behavioural intentions, FC – Face, IMG – Image, PV – Perceived value, SFC—Sacrifice, PSQ – Perceived Service quality, AVE-Average variance extracted, CR- Composite reliability, CA – Cronbach's alpha

Again, we also ensured convergent validity using the average variance extracted (AVEs) and composite reliability Brady et al. (2002). From table 2 the convergent validity was also achieved since the AVE and CR satisfied the minimum requirement of 0.50 and 0.70 respectively (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Ringle et al., 2015)

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

	BI	B_image	Face	P-Value	PSQ	Sacrifice
BI	0.857					
Brand_image	0.773	0.829				
Face	0.413	0.479	0.803			
P-Value	0.475	0.580	0.617	0.761		
PSQ	0.798	0.749	0.473	0.587	0.817	
Sacrifice	0.764	0.736	0.453	0.550	0.769	0.833

Table 3 show the result of the discriminant analysis which requires a factor to correlate higher than with any other construct on its scale (Messick, 1988). All the variables in the Table 3 loaded higher than any other factor on their individual scales. Behavioural intention had a value (0.85) which was higher than all the other values on that scale. Brand image had a value of (0.82), Face (0.8), P-value (0.76), PSQ (0.8) and Sacrifice had a value of (0.83).

Result of the Structural Model

Figure 2 depicts the result of the structural model’s assessment regarding the relationship between the variables. The assessment includes the path coefficients that estimate the relationship between the variables. From Figure 2, perceived service quality related positively with behavioural intention (0.404) which means that, perceived service quality influences intention of customers to patronise a particular restaurant by about 40%.

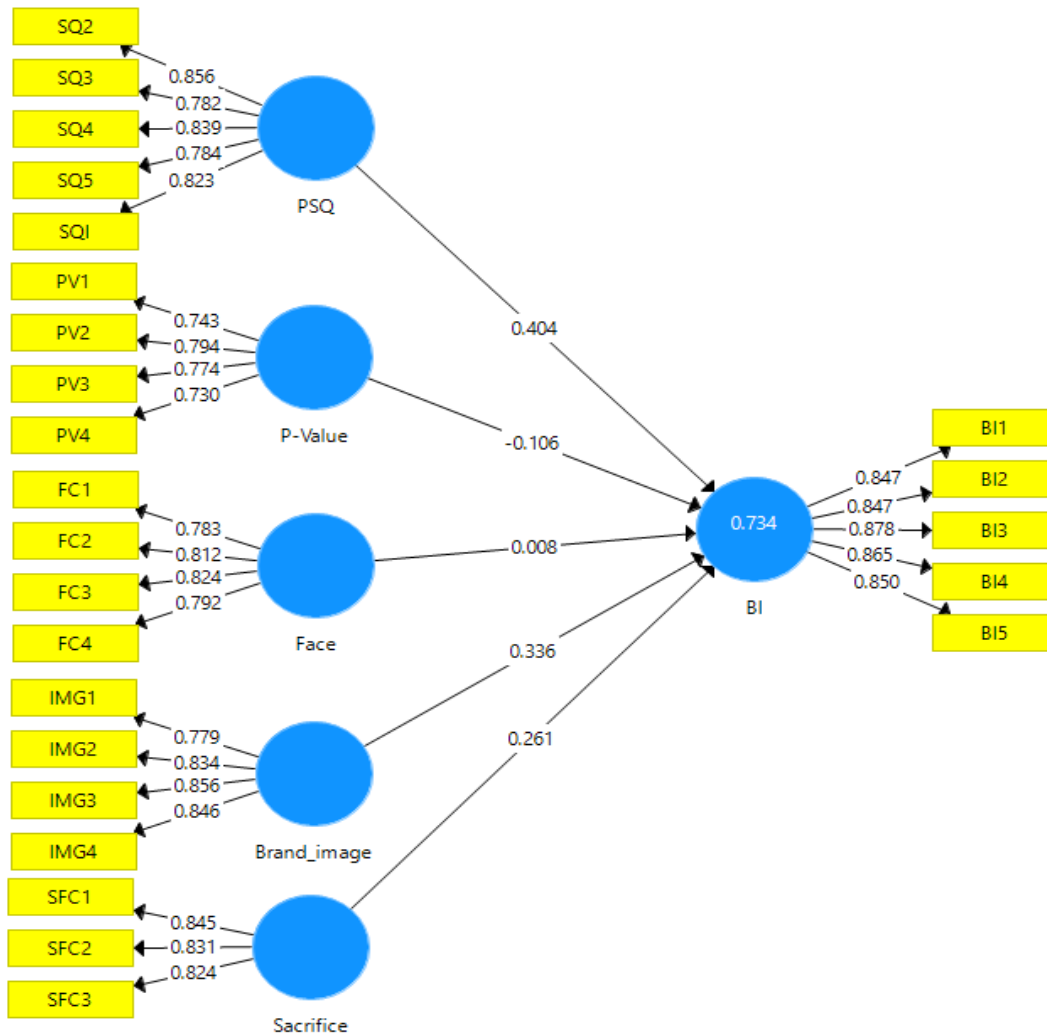


Figure 2. Structural model showing relationship among the variables

Also, brand image related positively with behavioural intention (0.336). Again, sacrifice also related positively with behavioural intention (0.261). Face also related positively with behavioural intention (0.008). however, perceived value related negatively with behavioural intention.

This means that perceived service quality, brand image, sacrifice and face positively influence behavioral intention of restaurant customers in restaurant selection and patronage in China.

Hypotheses test

We tested the hypotheses using bootstrapping method with 5000 samples to assess the effect of service quality and customer satisfaction on consumers' behavioral intention in restaurant setting in China.

From the hypotheses tested, four out of the five hypotheses showed a positive and significant relationship with the dependent variable (H1, H2, H4 and H5; $p < 0.05$). Service quality had a positive and significant relationship with BI ($\beta = 0.404$; $t = 7.55$; $p < 0.001$) and this led to the acceptance of H1. This finding means that, perceived service quality would influence consumer selection of restaurant services or patronage intention of restaurants. Again, for hypothesis 2, perceived value had a negative but significant relationship with BI ($\beta = -0.106$; $t = 2.22$; $p < 0.05$); this led to the acceptance of H2. The Beta score -0.106 means that when perceived value reduces by 1%, behavioural intention to patronise the restaurant service would reduce by about 10.6%. Face had a positive but insignificant relationship with BI ($\beta = 0.008$; $t = 0.187$; $p > 0.05$). hypothesis 3 was therefore not accepted. Brand image also had a positive and significant effect on BI ($\beta = 0.336$; $t = 6.28$; $p < 0.001$); this led to the acceptance of H4. Sacrifice also had a positive and significant relationship with BI ($\beta = 0.261$; $t = 5.75$; $p < 0.001$); this led to the acceptance of H5.

Table 4. Path Coefficients

Path	Beta	STDEV	t-value	p-value
H1 PSQ -> BI	0.404	0.053	7.55	***
H2 P-Value -> BI	-0.1.6	0.048	2.22	*
H3 Face -> BI	0.0008	0.043	0.187	0.852
H4 B_image -> BI	0.336	0.053	6.28	***
H5 Sacrifice -> BI	0.261	0.045	5.75	***

Note: * = <0.05 , *** = <0.001

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the determinants of restaurant selection and patronage in China as well as the effect of the determinants of restaurant selection and patronage on behavioural intention of customers. Findings from this study revealed the determinants of restaurant selection and patronage in China are perceived service quality, brand image, sacrifice, face and perceived value.

Additionally, findings with regards to the effect of the determinants of restaurant selection and patronage on behavioural intention of customers revealed that, service quality, brand image, sacrifice and perceived value had significant effect on behavioural intention of customers. Service quality had a positive and significant effect on the behavioural intention of restaurant customers. The effect of service quality on restaurant patronage has since been established and confirmed by previous research. What this means is that, quality of service or perceived quality would influence customers patronage as well as purchase intention and behaviour in restaurant setting. This finding corroborates earlier findings by W. Kim and Han (2008) who found that perceived service quality has a critical role in the consumers' evaluation and decision-making process. Again, this findings supports studies by Hyun (2010) and Abdelhamied (2011) that, positive perceptions of service quality has the tendency to elicit positive response from restaurant patrons and might engage in re-patronage and providing positive word-of-mouth.

Furthermore, this study found a positive and significant relationship between brand image and behavioural intention. This finding suggests that, restaurant with good image are likely to be selected by consumers due to the positive message they convey about the restaurant to customers through the brand image. Brand image is an important selling point of services which denotes value. Due to the inability of customers to evaluate service before consumption, consumers rely on brand image to prevent any negative service experience from the service encounter. Also, when consumers perceive good image of a restaurant, they are likely to re-patronise the restaurant than visiting new ones. This finding supports earlier studies (Clemes et al., 2018; Dodds et al. 1991; Eliwa, 2006). In their study D. M. Clemes et al. (2018) found that "behavioural intentions to re-patronise a restaurant and recommend it to friends are influenced more strongly by restaurant image than. Dodds et al. (1991) assert that, consumers rely heavily on brand image when engaging in decision. Also, Eliwa (2006) is of the view that, consumers rely on brand image when taking decision on the restaurant to dine.

Perceived value was also found to have a positive and significant relationship with behavioural intention. When consumers have the believe that a brand possesses an important attribute, they tend to develop positive feeling towards that brand. In this instance, customers

would select restaurants that they perceive would give them some value be it in terms of the food or the prestige they would get dining from that restaurant. Yüksel and Yüksel (2002) as well as Jang and Jooyeon (2015) claim that perceived value may be interpreted differently by consumers as consumers' tastes and preferences differ.

Additionally, this study found that face has positive but insignificantly relationship with behavioural intention of restaurant customers. Face in china means trust in dealing with one another. In business dealings, if one is said to be trustworthy then he or she has a good face. Face affects the credibility of the person you are dealing with. Dong and Lee (2007) assert that, one is able to gain credibility if he or she is able ensure that trustful relationship. In this case, restaurants would be deemed to be credible and attract customers if they are perceived to be trustworthy. However, in this study, face was found not to have a significant influence on behavioural intention of customers.

Also, findings from this study revealed that sacrifice determines the behavioural intention of customers in Chinese restaurant selection. Sacrifice is an opportunity cost of forgoing other activities or purchasing other products or services in order to have another product or service. consumers sometimes have to decide which brand to choose or services to receive. Zeithaml (1998) explains that, consumers have to sacrifice their money, time, energy and effort to acquire goods and services. These sacrifice according to Snoj *et al.* (2004) might have some negative influence on the value consumers place on products.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study investigated the determinants of restaurant selection and patronage in China as well as the effect of these restaurant selection determinants on the behavioural intention of restaurant patrons in China. The finding from this study suggest that, service quality, brand image, sacrifice, face and perceived value determine the selection and patronage of restaurant services in China as well as influence the behavioural intention of customers in patronizing these restaurants. To ensure the selection and continuous patronage of restaurants, managers and owners must pay particular attention to their quality of services (i.e. food, atmosphere and the general service escape), brand image, and perceived value of their brands. Also, the patronage or re-patronage intention and behaviour of restaurant customers depends largely on the quality of service, brand image, perceived value and sacrifice.

Since customers or consumers place much emphasis on the image of the restaurant, it therefore behooves on management of these restaurants to project a good image of their brand by engaging in good brand building strategies like building good rapport with the customers, providing adequate services, providing good services at all times and responding and solving

customers complaints effectively. These when done could send a signal to customers and potential customers about the value of that brand. Restaurants can therefore carve good niche for themselves if they engage in building a strong and positive brand image that resonates with customers.

Again, to ensure that customers value the brand, management should first and foremost determine customers' needs and find ways in ensuring that these needs are met. Customers' needs and tastes differ, as such, management should identify the differing needs of these customers and put measures in place in order to satisfy these individual needs rather than trying to satisfy customer needs collectively. In this situation, restaurant owners should vary their products and services to the best of their abilities and must ensure that individual customer needs are available 24/7.

LIMITATIONS OF THE CURRENT STUDY

This study despite being successful is without some limitations. First, the study used the cross-sectional sample to collect data from restaurant customers who might have been customers of other restaurants. Their level of experience might not be the same across the various restaurants they patronise. It is difficult therefore generalizing the findings to all restaurants as the level of service quality could be different from one restaurant to another.

Secondly, the convenient sampling approach used in this study to collect data might limit the generalizability of this study's findings to the entire population of Chinese restaurants patrons.

Again, this study assessed the perception of restaurant patrons with regards to service quality and perceived value. Perceptions are based on an individual's belief and this might differ from one person to another. Generalizing the findings on perceived service quality and value should be approached with caution.

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