

# The Impact of Food Quality on Customer Retention and Satisfaction in the United Kingdom

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to investigate the impact of food quality on customer retention and satisfaction in the United Kingdom. The main focus of this study is to investigate the reason why the quality of service is more valued than the quality of food, in relation to customer satisfaction and retention in the United Kingdom. The study was aimed at UK fast-food restaurants. This research was chosen because food in the United Kingdom is considered to be of very low quality, and therefore the author chose the UK as the object of study. The gap in this research is that there is little to no evidence on how food quality affects customer satisfaction and retention in the United Kingdom. Firstly, the dissonance theory and the 4p's marketing mix were applied to this study. This study will adopt a qualitative approach that aids in understanding the change in customers attitudes. To achieve the results, 30 samples will be chosen of middle income from ages 16-24 years, and they will be selected using non-probability random sampling. Their interviews will be taken in-depth. According to the findings of this research, to achieve customer satisfaction and retention, the quality of food has to be good because that is more important than other factors such as service quality or environment. The author found out that many factors affect customer satisfaction and retention and some of them are psychological such as prices. In conclusion, this study finds that service quality is more important than food quality in the United Kingdom.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### *1.1 Background information*

The hospitality industry comprises four main departments, namely: Housekeeping, Food production or Kitchen, Front office and lastly the Food and Beverage service, which generates most of the income and therefore it is considered as the main element in the industry (Sulaiman and Haron, 2013). The quality of food is the main factor that fulfills the guests needs in a restaurant, and it also

determines the brand image of the restaurant. The quality of food has a positive impact on the image of the restaurant. A business cannot be successful without good food quality (Muhaydin et al., 2017). High food quality can be used as a tool for marketing, which satisfies and retains the customers. Various studies were conducted showing that customer satisfaction is positively impacted by the quality of food provided (Zhong and Moon, 2020). According to Zhong and Moon (2020), females are most likely to return to a restaurant they were satisfied with rather than men,

who do not take food quality into consideration. The dining-out trend has resulted in the expansion of this trade, supported by other rising trends like an increase in salary and a growing population in urban areas (Sulaiman and Haron, 2013). This contributes to managing the customer's requirements and expectations to enhance the industry's sales. Routledge (2017) states that unhealthy products are produced to increase customer satisfaction, loyalty and retention; for example, McDonald's. According to Al-Tit (2015), the food quality is measured in five dimensions; the food is fresh, delectable, healthy, has a variety of items on the menu, and the food should be aromatic. According to Wilson et al. (2012), many good experiences in a restaurant creates a positive image of good quality service. Still, a single bad experience can destroy the whole positive image created due to all the good experiences.

On the other hand, according to Ahmad A. Al-Tit's findings, not many studies have examined food quality and customer satisfaction in relation to customer retention (Al-Tit's, 2015). However, limited studies have been done to research how customer satisfaction can be achieved by improving the quality of food, thus enhancing customer satisfaction and retention in the hospitality industry (Suria Sulaiman and Mahmud Sabri Haron, 2013). Limited amounts of evidence have been found to support how food quality has a real impact on customer retention and behavioural intentions towards the restaurants (Kannan, 2017).

Moving forward, historically talking about the food context, McCrea (2020) establishes that during the war in the early to mid 20th century, British people had to ration food. After that, the quality of food has declined (McCrea, 2020). In the '80s and '90s, people from all social statuses were eating out more often than chain restaurants came to the UK, and until the late '90s people did not know anything more than pizza hut (Steer, 2016). Due to the widely available ready to eat meals, people do not cook, and they "eat to live" in the UK (Hatton, 2018). Many studies have been conducted proving that service quality is more important than food quality because a great service can compensate for any possible issue from the kitchen team (Sciacca Grill, 2017). "Service quality is defined as how well a consumer's needs are met and how well the service delivered meets the customer's expectations" (Rahman and Jalil, 2014).

## *1.2 Rationale*

The gap in this research is that there is little to no evidence on how the quality of food affects customer satisfaction and retention (Sulaiman and Haron, 2013). Customer loyalty is affected by customer satisfaction which is influenced by the quality of service provided (Rahman and Jalil, 2014). This research aims to determine why service quality is given more value than food quality in relation to customer satisfaction and retention. According to Nguyen et al. (2018), service is the factor that affects customer retention and satisfaction in the United Kingdom, which therefore proves that little to no research has been done about how the quality of food affects customer retention and satisfaction. Khan et al. (2013) show us that service quality and brand are the main factors affecting customer retention and satisfaction in the U.K. As stated by Chow, Krishnapillai and Lee (2019), there has been a lack of research about satisfaction of food quality and the return intentions of customers.

According to (Henry, 2019) the food quality in the United Kingdom is ranked the poorest, and it mainly contains a lot of fat and salt. As mentioned in the blog, quality food is costly and therefore, not many restaurants use good quality ingredients. The stereotype that British food is not good is partly true because the people travelling to the United Kingdom do not expect good quality food (Poirot, 2020). British cuisine is known to be "bland and plain weird" (Overtake, 2018).

This study will be beneficial to restaurants in the United Kingdom because it shows how to gain customer satisfaction which leads to loyalty and retention by improving food quality. There have not been many studies conducted in the U.K regarding how customer satisfaction and retention is affected by food quality in fast-food restaurants. However, the finding of this research paper will contribute to the study of Suria Sulaiman and Mahmud Sabri Haron, (2013).

## *1.3 Aim and Objectives*

The aim is to investigate the impact of food quality on customer retention and satisfaction in the United Kingdom.

The main focus of this study is to investigate the reason why the quality of service is more valued

than the quality of food, in relation to customer satisfaction and retention in the United Kingdom. The following objectives will be considered to achieve the aim:

To evaluate the relationship between service quality, food quality, customer satisfaction and retention in UK Fast food restaurants.

To evaluate the importance of food & service quality in the UK fast-food restaurants from the customer's perspective to gain customer satisfaction and retention.

To identify the main factors that influence customer satisfaction and retention regarding food quality in UK fast-food restaurants.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### *2.1 Introduction*

In this chapter, the author will highlight definitions, theories, and models that significantly influence fast-food restaurants in the United Kingdom. There is a lack of studies about the impact of food quality on customer retention and satisfaction in the UK. However, in this chapter, the author will discuss the theories and models in relation to the behavioural intentions of customers (dissonance theory) and the expectancy disconfirmation model. According to the author, these mentioned theories can lead the United Kingdom market to know what their market considers important and consequently help them earn customer loyalty.

According to Kannan 2017, little to no evidence has been found to prove that food quality has a real impact on customer retention and behavioural intentions towards the restaurants. Because of the insufficient findings, the author will use theories, models and empirical research from other countries that have a similar target market like the UK to investigate the relationship between food quality to customer retention and satisfaction in the UK.

### *2.2 Conceptual and Theoretical background*

#### *2.2.1 Dissonance theory*

In chapter 2, the author will analyse the Dissonance theory, the 2ps from the marketing theory, and the expectancy dissonance model. According to Miria (2018), the definition of customer satisfaction is the

psychological state (feeling) after receiving a service or consuming a product. Food quality is one factor that leads to customer satisfaction and retention in the hospitality industry, ensuring a pleasant dining experience (Canny, 2016). Customer satisfaction is attained by food quality in terms of appearance, taste and temperature.

Satisfaction compares what was expected with the quality of the product or service, also known as the confirmation or disconfirmation process (Theories of customer satisfaction, n.d). Customer satisfaction is achieved by food quality, customers which and if the quality is not according to customers' customer's expectations, they will feel cognitive dissonance, and that will affect the customer's intention to return to the restaurant.

The dissonance theory suggests that if a person anticipated a high-value product and received a low-value product, the person would notice the difference and feel cognitive dissonance. This theory creates dissonance and emotional discomfort due to negative expectations (Yuksel and Yuksel, 2008). One of the most significant studies done by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry's (1994) is that food quality can be assessed by comparing customers' expectations with their perceptions of an outstanding experience. Consumers may experience an emotional tension and may attempt to decrease it by having a varied perception about the product due to the difference between the product's expectation and performance (Miria, 2018). Cognitive dissonance and service quality are the main factors that affect customer satisfaction and retention in fast food restaurants (Mohan, Gopal and Njula, 2018). The service quality can also be a factor of dissatisfaction for the customer if not carried out properly, stated by Mohan, Gopal and Njula, 2018. According to Mohan et al., 2018, in fast-food restaurants, the customer expects quick service, the accuracy of the order and good packaging of the food. A person's opinion may change if it does not match their belief, and therefore they will change their response to suit what they believe in (Festinger, 1959). According to Kim 2011, fulfilled customers find that cognitive dissonance could be an overwhelming factor of repatronage behaviour.

Furthermore, the dissonance theory suggests that people tend to adapt their opinions based on their beliefs. Therefore, Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) experimented to analyse if people would experience

cognitive dissonance when forced to carry out a tedious task (McLeod, 2018). The investigation was performed on 71 male students assigned to do boring tasks such as turning pegs in a pegboard for 1 hour. In the second part of the experiment, the participants were paid \$1 or \$20 to convince a candidate from the waiting list that the activity they were doing was fascinating and enjoyable. Most of the participants decided to take part in the experiment. The outcome of this investigation was that the participants who were paid \$1 described the task to be more interesting and not boring, rather than the participants who were paid \$20, and they chose to lie about their experience (McLeod, 2018).

Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) concluded that the candidates paid only \$1 were not motivated to lie, so they experienced dissonance. Moreover, the participants who were offered \$20 had the motivation to perform a boring task, and thus, they did not undergo any dissonance (McLeod, 2018).

To further explain the theory, as stated in Oxfordbibliographies.com (2020) that individuals tend to settle down for a situation where they do not feel comfortable because of the cognitive dissonance they are facing. High levels of dissonance being experienced compel a person to strive to lessen the dissonance. Dissonance theory has many similar definitions as all others describe it as a mental state of mind that occurs when new information is introduced, and it does not match a person's beliefs or perceptions (Definition & Britannica, 2019).

Moving on to the limitations of dissonance theory, as Vaidis and Bran (2019) investigated in scientific studies, it is appropriate to use one word to define a particular notion. The Cognitive Dissonance theory has a flaw where one term is used to define three different concepts. According to Festinger (1957), the theory that he originally published mentions that dissonance describes three different concepts, which are: the theory itself, the triggering situation and the generated state (Vaidis and Bran, 2019). This title is still used today's date but leads to inaccurate results. As to clarify the terms, it is said to have three different words for three different concepts as follows: "the trigger to be known as inconsistency, the evoked arousal a cognitive dissonance state (CDS) and the theory cognitive dissonance theory" (Vaidis and Bran, 2018).

To carry on, now the author will discuss how cognitive dissonance affects different environments and people and relationships. The hospitality industry can manipulate their guests using cognitive dissonance against them, e.g. they mention that they will save water and energy by not replacing the used linens. In contrast, when the guest arrives in the room, lights and radio are switched on; this leaves the guest with an impression of how "environmentally friendly" the hotel is perceived (Harvard Business Review, 2010). On the other hand, dissonance theory is not only applicable in the hospitality industry; it can also be used as a motivator in eLearning (eLearning

Industry, 2016). Cognitive dissonance also occurs in relationships, and it may not be visible until experienced, for example, a friendship that started many years ago may have been because of common interest, but over the years, values and beliefs change and therefore, the similarities and interests also change (EverydayHealth.com, 2019).

The theory shows a relation between expectation and satisfaction but does not demonstrate how the failure to confirm expectations leads to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Dissonance theorists agree that both cognitive and affective elements exist in dissonance theory (Ong, 2017). On basis of all the studies conducted, it shows that food quality and perceived value are associated with customer satisfaction and a customer's revisit intentions. From the fundamental knowledge of this theory, it has occurred that there is a process of different emotional states that cycles through discomfort to guilt and last but not the least to shame (Psychom.net - Mental Health Treatment Resource Since 1996, n.d.). Dissonance theory fails to explain customer satisfaction, as it states that customers expectations are not consistent and can change during the customer's experience (Yuksel and Yuksel, 2008).

### *2.2.2 Customer satisfaction (Price & Place)*

"Marketing is a societal process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering, and exchanging products and value with others" (Kotler, 1994). "The marketing mix refers to the set of actions, or tactics, that a company uses to promote its brand or product in the market. The 4Ps make up a typical marketing mix - Price, Product, Promotion and Place. (The Economic Times, 2018)". Customer loyalty is affected by 61.7% by the 4Ps and

customer satisfaction (Sudari et al., 2019). 68.9% of the 4Ps contribute to customer satisfaction (Sudari et al., 2019).

To demonstrate the relation of Price to customer satisfaction, the author will discuss the theory and justify the relationship between the marketing mix elements and customer satisfaction. As stated by Nuseir and Madanat (2015), Product, Price, Place, and Promotion are variables that need to be adapted according to the psychological behaviour of the target market.

Firstly, one of the 4Ps is the price, where Işoraité (2016) stated that “price is perceived as the only element of the marketing mix, generating revenue and the most important customer satisfaction and loyalty factor”. To set the price of products or services, certain factors such as costs, competitors prices and whether the product is worth the price charged for should be taken into consideration (Twin, 2020). As stated by Kotler et al. (2008), price is the only variable that can be adapted to manipulate customers buying decisions as it has a psychological effect on the guest. Nuseir and Madanat (2015) argue that Price is the only variable that has a significant impact on the customer’s satisfaction and loyalty, based on whether the product or service he is receiving is equivalent value to the amount of money he paid or not. Customers may also raise appraisals of the products because the product’s price is too high for the customer (Youjiae Yi, 1990).

As studied by many researchers previously, in every business and market, a customer needs to be satisfied with the product before they become loyal to the company (Wahab et al., 2016). As mentioned above, customer satisfaction is dependent on price, which is one of the main variables in this study. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry's (1994) assert that customers are more trusted to become faithful customers if they receive a good quality product at a desirable price. Moreover, the products need to be updated from time to time to satisfy the customer needs and wants and for the business to be successful (Sudari, 2019). To maximize customer satisfaction, the following variables need to be considered; the product should be of value, the price should be equivalent to the value of the product, the customer should not face any inconvenience while buying a product (Twin, 2020).

The second factor that the author wants to highlight is the place, which is chosen based on the target market, the convenience of the customers e.g. the parking should be close to the restaurant and not far, making it difficult and a possibility to lose customers (Long Thanh Nguyen RESTAURANT STARTUP MARKETING MIX Case study Mad Wok and Helmi restaurant-success and failure in marketing, 2017). In restaurants, the place is the restaurant’s environment, which means how they are treated until they leave (Prudhvi Raj, 2015). The place is about the environment and the location and distribution facilities, and those are variables that could have a negative impact on the demand and supply of the product or service (Nuseir and Madanat, 2015). Several studies have shown that the quality of the product or service and consumer satisfaction leads to a higher income because the potential competitiveness of a business relies on the satisfaction of the existing customers (Yu cheng Lee, 2016).

A study conducted by (Wahab et al, 2016), focused on the connection between the marketing mix(4ps) and customer loyalty in the hijab industry, and also investigated the factor that could possibly affect customer satisfaction. Business owners know that if they offer a good quality product, there are customers who are willing to travel a long distance or spend more time to acquire the product, proving that the quality of the product is as important as the price (info today, n.d.). It is heard that retailers always mention that the right product should be at the right price, at the right place and at the right time. It then becomes difficult to change potential customers into genuine customers (Purely Branded, 2017).

### *2.2.3 Customer retention*

Ahmad Al Tit (2015) defined customer retention as “a customer’s future propensity of a customer to stay with the service provider”. According to him, customer satisfaction is not the only variable affecting customer retention. Ramakrishnan (2006) defined customer retention as a marketing objective to prevent a customer from switching to their competitors. Ahmad Al Tit (2015) states that “customer retention indicates customer’s intention to repurchase a product from the same company.” The type of product indicates its perception of consumers of brand personality traits and further helps to create and build a meaningful relationship between the brand and the consumer leading to

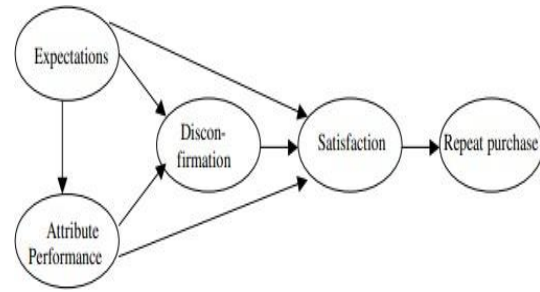
customer retention. To build a positive customer relationship, the brand needs to develop its marketing strategies to satisfy customers' needs and establish customer loyalty (Raduzzi and Massey, 2019).

As stated in (Factors Affecting Customer Satisfaction in Restaurant Services-A case study on Rangpur and Bogra City, Bangladesh, 2020), most customers are disappointed by the price of the menu items and, instead, they are happier with the location.

Food hygiene is another factor affecting customer satisfaction and retention in fast-food restaurants, as it influences the customer's returning decision based on the hygiene levels of the restaurant, for example, the food itself (Afzal, 2013). A higher-priced restaurant may be seen as providing better food and service quality (Woods and Muller, 1994). One of the most important factors is the waiting time in the restaurant; however, the lighting in the restaurant can influence customers' expected quality; for example, in a greenish lighting ambience, customers tend to expect a shorter waiting time (Chow, Krishnapillai and Lee, 2019).

The factors directly affecting the restaurants are Service quality, Price and environment of the restaurant (Ghafoor et al., 2014). The price of a product directly affects the demand, and if the price is low, it will lead to satisfaction and therefore result in returning customers (Gustafsson et al., 2005). People often re-visit a restaurant based on the taste of the food and not the service, but good quality service is a bonus, leading to customer satisfaction (Soderlund and Rosengren, 2008). Creating a positive image in the guest's mind, such as music, decorations, scents etc., makes a customer want to come back to enjoy the ambience (Lim, 2010).

Based on the research above, the following model illustrates the expectancy disconfirmation cycle.



**Figure 1.** The expectancy disconfirmation model (Montfort et al., 2000)

In the figure above, disconfirmation is considered a central variable of intervention, since it is essentially the degree of disconfirmation that is believed to generate satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Consumers can be expected to integrate levels of expectations to levels of satisfaction to avoid dissonance that may result from a divergence of expectations and levels of satisfaction (Raduzzi and Massey, 2019). Writing in 1999, Kivela, Inbakaran and Reece (1999) stated that customers make a decision to buy based on their expectation of the product or service.

According to the expectancy disconfirmation model (EDM), customer satisfaction is not only confined to a customer's expectations of a product or a service. The first step to gaining a customer's trust in the products and services provided by a company is to satisfy customers from perceived data. Positive disconfirmation results from perceived data of a product or service that can satisfy a consumer's primary expectations leading to satisfaction. In comparison, negative disconfirmation leads to dissatisfaction as a result of perceived information not matching their initial satisfaction. It has been recognized that satisfaction has a direct effect on performance (Oliver and De Sarbo, 1988). Satisfaction is the outcome of direct product experiences, and it happens by comparing perceptions with a standard (e.g. expectations) (Anon, n.d). Satisfaction takes place to post an experience of a service or product (Chow, Krishnapillai and Lee, 2019).

Existing Empirical Research

#### 2.2.4 Dissonance theory

The dissonance theory was used by several researchers such as (Yuksel and Yuksel, 2008),

(Miria, 2018), (Mohan, Gopal and Njula, 2018), (Festinger, 1959) to discover its impacts on customer satisfaction and retention.

According to Yuksel and Yuksel (2018), the dissonance theory has not been used by many researchers, as it is not considered to be reliable as to prove that customer satisfaction changes as expectations change. However, when expectations of a product are raised way above the product's quality and fail to meet the set expectation, it may result in a failure. The customer's expectation may change as, for e.g. a hotel guest makes an assumption of the experience just by the service provided in the reception, but as they go to the room or restaurant, their perception changes because of the previous experience at the reception (Yuksel and Yuksel, 2008). As mentioned in (Customer satisfaction Theories: A Critical review, Yuksel and Yuksel, 2018), that customer satisfaction is determined based on the set standards, although there are no results found that prove which standards are the most effective.

According to Montecinos (n.d), there are four different ways of measuring cognitive dissonance in different situations. One of the examples is the effort-justification paradigm. It is where participants are chosen to perform high achievement goals such as performing strange rituals to become part of a certain group. This experiment resulted in the participants giving more importance to the experiential goal rather than their personal goals; it is to protect themselves from regret post the experiment. The second method to investigate the effect of dissonance theory is by asking a participant to perform unethical behaviour in a public place, for e.g. littering on the street. Then the participant is asked why they behaved that way, so there is some self-reflection. The reason for this experiment is to make their unethical behaviour obvious (Montecinos, n.d.).

The limitations of the above-mentioned experiments are that the investigation was done only based on student samples, rather if they used non-student older samples the results would be different as to the younger generations (Montecinos, n.d.).

A study conducted by Mohan, Gopal and Njula (2018) aims to investigate the factors that create dissonance in customers and also the factors that relate to the customer's dissonance. This study is conducted in fast-food chain restaurants in Chennai city, India. The outcome of their study shows that

there are two factors that affect fast-food restaurants, which are consumer dissonance and service quality. According to Festinger (1959), cognitive dissonance occurs when the many cognitions we have about the world clash with ourselves and a disparity evokes. An experiment was conducted on consumer-decision making which consisted of four components that were produced in line with the dissonant-producing factors. Despite the fact that the study is restricted to one item, an automobile battery, the results could be of help to many other varieties of products.

This research was conducted using the Descriptive Research method, which is also called Statistical Research; it is done using statistics and characteristics about the population or the situation which is being studied. To carry out the experiment mentioned above, a primary research method was used, which is qualitative research in the form of a structured questionnaire. It was used to measure the most relevant factors between Consumer Dissonance and Customer Loyalty amidst the respondents of the fast-food restaurants in Chennai, India.

Convenience sampling is a method used by researchers to efficiently collect data for research from a large number of respondents (Barratt, 2009) (Shantikumar, 2018). In this investigation, the Convenience sampling method was used, where the respondents of the four fast-food restaurants were grouped based on the basis of the four fast-food restaurants and then 104 respondents were chosen to be part of the study. The following were chosen for the study: 26 respondents from KFC, 14 from Pizza Hut, 22 from McDonald's and lastly 42 from Subway. In reference to the authors of this paper, they indicate that a negative relationship exists between the 4 consumer dissonance dimensions (Emotional concepts, Cognitive Changes, Wisdom of Purchase and Concern over deal) and also the quality of service from the respondents of the 4 fast-food restaurants. Mohan, Gopal and Njula (2018), recognize the lack in their research as follows; The connection between Consumer Satisfaction and Word of Mouth, Consumer Satisfaction and Consumer Loyalty, Consumer Service Quality and Service Quality, lastly the relationship between Consumer Dissonance and Consumer Service Quality for all the respondents of the fast-food restaurants in Chennai, India. According to a study by Al Tit (2015), food quality is one of the most important attributes of a restaurant apart from the service and ambience of

the restaurant. This variable has been found to have a positive impact on customers' behavioural intention aspects such as returning to the restaurant and recommending the restaurant by word of mouth.

### *2.2.5 Customer satisfaction*

There are not many studies conducted to define the relationship between customer satisfaction and cognitive dissonance. According to Koller and Salzberger (2010), cognitive dissonance has been a significant part of customer behaviour; however, studies about dissonance in relation to satisfaction and loyalty are insufficient. Similarly, Sweeney and Soutar (2001) verified that dissonance and satisfaction are a definite link, with cognitive dissonance being an essential component. Loyalty is approved as a result of satisfaction Kasper (1988).

Customer satisfaction takes place over a period of time as it can only be assessed after the product is used; however, cognitive dissonance occurs immediately after purchase. This study took place in two separate outlet shops which sold electronics and household goods, where two variables were used as a measure. Firstly cognitive dissonance was immediately measured after the purchase. Secondly, customer satisfaction and loyalty were measured three months after the purchase.

Customers who purchased a product more than €50 were suitable for the post-purchase interview. 250 customers were interviewed, and surprisingly the type of product did not have an effect on the level of dissonance undergone. Moreover, the price range was quite similar for the different levels of dissonance.

Those who had been interviewed earlier were contacted again to take part in the second survey. It was a questionnaire sent by direct email to 125 participants. People who did not use the product for themselves were excluded from the experiment as it would manipulate the results.

The results of this study found that dissonance does not disappear completely, and it still has an impact three months after purchase. The study suggests increasing advertising to reduce post-purchase dissonance. To dissolve the state of discomfort, the dissonance theory states that discomfort is a motivation used to take action for e.g. complaining about the product. While dissonance leads to negative actions, satisfaction leads to positive

actions, e.g. repurchase intention and word of mouth. Furthermore, the lack of dissonance does not lead to negative action (the guest does not complain) and due to lack of satisfaction customers repurchase intention will reduce. As concluded by Koller and Salzberger (2010) the connection between dissonance and satisfaction is relying on the time of measurement.

In contrast to a study conducted by Kencana (2020), it is mentioned that satisfaction achieved from the service staff is by delivering efficient service and also to be dressed neatly and lastly have knowledge of the menu. The food was not served on time and it was delayed. The management of this restaurant needs to play a role in this situation to improve the service quality.

In this investigation, the environment of the restaurant was also analysed, and it resulted in the guests not being satisfied with the ambience as it does not maintain an appropriate level of sound, the lighting was dim and the air conditioning was not sufficient.

Comparing both the scenarios above, the overall satisfaction of the restaurant was that 52% of the customers were not satisfied with the overall environment within the restaurant and 54% of the customers had many other reasons to complain about the restaurant (Kencana, 2020).

### *2.3 Primary Research Background*

The main purpose of this study is to investigate why the quality of service is more valued than the quality of food, in relation to customer satisfaction and retention in the United Kingdom. The author of this research would like to study the customer behaviours and perceptions before and after consuming a product from UK fast-food restaurants. According to McCrea (2020), until the early to mid 20th century, British food had a good reputation. From then onwards due to the war, people were rationing for decades. Their priority was to survive and not to enjoy the food. As the UK is a multicultural country and therefore some traditional dishes were cooked according to western tastes for e.g. balti (created by Pakistani residents adapted to western tastes) (Curnow, 2015).

### *2.4 Conclusion*

Payton et al (2003) claim that the theory has a number of shortcomings. The theory shows a



relation between expectation and satisfaction but does not demonstrate how the failure to confirm expectations leads to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Dissonance theorists agree that both cognitive and affective elements exist in dissonance theory (Ong, 2017). On the basis of all the studies conducted, it shows that food quality and perceived value are associated with customer satisfaction and a customer's revisit intentions.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### *3.1 Aim and Objective*

The aim is to investigate the impact of food quality on customer retention and satisfaction in the United Kingdom.

The main focus of this study is to investigate the reason why the quality of service is more valued than the quality of food, in relation to customer satisfaction and retention in the United Kingdom.

The following objectives will be considered to achieve the aim:

To evaluate the relationship between service quality, food quality, customer satisfaction and retention in UK Fast food restaurants.

To evaluate the importance of food & service quality in the UK fast-food restaurants from the customer's perspective in order to gain customer satisfaction and retention.

To identify the main factors that influence customer satisfaction and retention in regards to food quality in UK fast-food restaurants.

### *3.2 Research Approach*

The main purpose of writing this research paper is to achieve the aim and objectives which is to investigate the impact of food quality on customer retention and satisfaction in the United Kingdom while using the qualitative approach. The qualitative approach is best described as "to answer the hows and whys of human behaviours, opinion, and to collect information that is difficult to acquire through quantitative methods of data collection"(2 COLLECTING QUALITATIVE DATA, 2012). In the case of UK fast food restaurants, there is a possibility that the buying patterns may change and therefore the qualitative research aids to understand the change in customer's attitude and it becomes

easier for a business to adapt to its customers needs (Gaille, 2018).

The author of this research paper aims to find out how the customers feel, as the main focus is to learn about the perception of each customer's experience in the fast food restaurants in the UK. Qualitative method of research is chosen for this study because it allows for data to be collected in more detail and it is more accurate as compared to quantitative research method (Gaille, 2018). The quantitative research focuses on figures and statistics which is difficult to evaluate as it does not measure how the consumer's behaviour changes (Miller, 2020).

Furthermore, to achieve a deep understanding of the impact of food quality on customer retention and satisfaction within the United Kingdom, the type of research chosen is a descriptive one. According to Descriptive Studied (n.d), Descriptive studies are designed to collect the information without interfering in the environment itself. Taking into account the background of this research paper, the data will be collected by using a qualitative approach. The method of research being used will provide the author the data needed to analyse what are the main factors that affect customer's perception on service quality and food quality, as well as how these aspects influence the customer retention and satisfaction in fast food restaurants in the UK.

### *3.3 Sampling*

In order to have the more accurate responses in regards to what is the impact of food quality on customer retention and satisfaction a non-probability random sampling will be used. This type of sampling will help the author to find the respondents, helping in the data collection.

Non-probability random sampling is where the researcher chooses samples depending on their judgement rather than random sampling. This method of sampling is based on the researchers judgement and observation (Etikan and Bala, 2017). In order to better understand these concepts, open-questions will be used during the interview, with the aim to better understand the feelings and experiences of the customers. The chosen instrument for conducting this research is interviews. By giving the customers the autonomy to share their opinions, they will be more open and willing to talk about their perception of the service

and food quality. Their options and observations in regards to the food quality will give the necessary information for the research objectives to be achieved. The interview questions will be made based on the aim and objectives of this paper and the interview process will be conducted in fast food restaurants such as McDonalds in the UK.

There will be around 30 samples chosen, because people are giving answers in depth and therefore more valuable information is collected (Etikan and Bala, 2017). The samples will be 16-24 years old as mentioned by Statista, n.d in a good food magazine poll that this age group spends more money on fast food compared to other age groups. The samples will be of middle class as they can afford to go to fast food restaurants.

### *3.4 Data collection*

As mentioned in chapter 3.3, the author will be using Non-probability random sampling. In this study interviews will be used to gather information because it produces in-depth understanding from different points of views and it will be the most efficient (Jamshed, 2014). According to Trochim (2006), the interviews will be recorded for future references and to ensure data collected is accurate. A consent form will be signed by the respondents to ensure that the data collected is strictly for academic purposes and also to ensure privacy and anonymity of the participants.

Prior to the interview, the respondents will be given an overview of the study for better understanding as to why the study is conducted. The interview will consist of open ended questions to receive a detailed response and it will be a maximum of 15 minutes. The interview will be conducted in English for accurate results and it will also make the interview fair.

Candidates will be chosen from different age groups consisting an equal number of both genders to ensure a perfect mix of data samples. The results from this interview will be beneficial to the future researchers who will conduct a study in the relevant field.

### *3.5 Data analysis*

This research is carried out to investigate the impact of food quality on customer satisfaction and retention in the United Kingdom. This study is

conducted to find reasons as to why the quality of service is more valued than the quality of food. To acquire the results data will be collected by using a qualitative research approach. In depth interviews will be conducted and the collected data will be analysed in a rational sequence, to achieve accurate evaluation (Mason, 2005). According to Akinyode and Khan (2018), the first step of qualitative data analysis is to organize the data systematically to answer the research question. Moreover, the data should be collected in a sequential manner as it contributes to a detailed assessment and does not misinterpret the meaning of the information accumulated (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). The author suggests using structural coding because according to Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012), structural coding is “a content-based or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data that relates to a specific research question which is used to frame the interviews”. It is the appropriate method to use because it is designed for studies with multiple participants and hypothesis testing and other variables. To suit the coding method, the author has chosen a thematic analysis approach to evaluate the data. It is most suitable because it “seeks to understand a set of experiences, thoughts, or behaviours” (Braun and Clarke, 2006). By evaluating all the collected data the author will be able to conclude on the main factors that affect the food quality in the UK.

### *3.6 Credibility*

According to Guba and Lincoln (1985), qualitative research consists of four main components namely; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. By demonstrating trustworthiness an author can convince the reader that their study is worthwhile. Credibility is a necessity in qualitative research because it shows whether the research can be trusted or if it is reliable (Trochim, 2006). In order to ensure accuracy of the data, the author will record all interviews with permission from the participants as it allows for the data to be available anytime and it allows the researcher to refer to the data numerous times which ensures accuracy. In addition the data will all be kept confidential, and that may allow the interviewees to be more honest and genuine and the results will be more accurate. The data collected and the conclusions will be peer reviewed to extract any personal biases from the research.

### *3.7 Confirmability*

Confirmability is the degree to which the research study's conclusions could be corroborated by other researchers in the same field (Korstjens and Moser, 2017). All the conclusions drawn from this study using applied theories, data collection and data analysis enables the author to see if the findings are assented or not (Stommel and Wills, 2004). The findings discussed in the literature review are built on second hand data, thus the information collected can be compared with other researches in the same field. To make sure if the results are trustworthy and valid, the author will use an audit trail which is a technique in qualitative research to verify the study's findings (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006). An audit trail is "a transparent description of the research steps taken from the start of a research project to the development and reporting of the findings" (Malterud, 2001).

### *3.8 Dependability*

Dependability is, how reliable and consistent the findings of the research are and also considering how the research procedures were documented (Sandelowski, 1986). According to Gunawan (2015), dependability is more closely linked to a person's behaviour than their emotions. The results from this study would be depending on the participant's culture, social class and emotions as they would differ for every person and that would influence their buying decision. The author is using non-probability random sampling and therefore must choose people from different backgrounds for accurate results. It is the responsibility of the interviewer to record all the changes during the research and while analysing the results, as these differences may influence the research approach (Lichtman, 2010).

### *3.9 Transferability*

Transferability is, if the research findings or the theories used can be applicable to future researches (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this study the researcher aims to find out what factors influence the customers and they will have different experiences, therefore it becomes difficult to transfer the findings to another similar study as people's experiences are different (Trochim, 2020). As an example, the impact of food quality on customer retention and satisfaction will depend from one place to another and also their cultures, emotions and social classes will change their

experiences. Hence, it will be difficult to transfer these findings to other similar research as experiences for people in different countries and restaurants will not be alike.

### *3.10 Ethical issues*

Veal (2011) states that candidates will take part in the study voluntarily and to ensure their privacy and anonymity, the author will provide participants with a waiver to ensure privacy and to conceal their identity, and moreover to assure that all the data collected is strictly used for academic purposes. The interview will be recorded and transcribed to guarantee accurate results (Trochim, 2006). The interview will be free from any biases, by peer reviewing to achieve the best results. Lastly, any data collected from the respondents will be the responsibility of the author to guarantee that the information will not be passed out under any circumstances.

### *3.11 Limitations*

This study has a few limitations. Firstly, it is that the dissonance theory fails to explain customer satisfaction, as it states that customers expectations are not consistent and can change during the customer's experience (Yuksel & Yuksel, 2008). It has not been used by many researchers and therefore is not considered reliable to prove that customer satisfaction changes as their expectations change. Looking at The Cognitive Dissonance theory, it has a flaw where one term is used to define three different concepts. Festinger's (1957), theory mentions 3 different concepts which are the theory itself, the triggering situation and the generated state which leads to inaccurate results (Vaidis and Bran, 2019).

Secondly, to conduct the research not only in fast-food restaurants but also in all types of restaurants in the UK. Only in fast-food restaurants can result in limited findings. Thirdly, the chosen samples will not be willing to participate or they also may be biased, which will hinder the results of the study. Lastly, the use of a qualitative method is a limitation because the results can not be verified as different studies have different scenarios and participants. And also only 30 samples were chosen which can not represent the entire population of the UK and it can result differently.

## Chapter 4: Discussion chapter

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the reader can find detailed discussions of the three objectives of this study which were written to investigate the reason why the quality of service is more valued than the quality of food, in relation to customer satisfaction and retention in the United Kingdom.

### 4.2 To evaluate the relationship between service quality, food quality, customer satisfaction and retention in UK fast food restaurants.

As previously mentioned a business cannot be successful without good food quality which means it is directly related to customer retention (Muhaydin et al., 2017). According to Al-Tit (2015), not much has been researched about the relationship between customer satisfaction and food quality in regards to customer retention.

The main factors affecting customer retention and satisfaction in the UK are service quality and the brand (Khan et al, 2013, Nguyen et al, 2018). The stereotype that British food is not good is partly true (Poirot, 2020).

In this study a dissonance theory was used and it shows the relation between expectations and satisfaction but does not demonstrate how the failure to confirm expectations leads to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. According to Yuksel and Yuksel (2008), customers expectations are not consistent and can change during the customer's experience and therefore the dissonance theory fails to explain customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is achieved by food quality and if the quality is not according to customers expectations, they will feel a cognitive dissonance, and that will affect the customers intention to return to the restaurant.

In an empirical study by Al Tit (2015), food quality is one of the most important attributes of a restaurant apart from the service and ambience of the restaurant. This variable has been found to have a positive impact on customers' behavioural intention aspects such as returning.

As argued by Canny, 2016 food quality is one of the factors that lead to customer satisfaction and retention in the hospitality industry ensuring a pleasant dining experience. On the contrary, according to Nguyen et al. (2018), service is one of the main factors affecting customer retention and

satisfaction in the United Kingdom, it is therefore assumed that customers in the UK would give more importance and value to the quality of service rather than the quality of food. It is therefore suggested that in order to improve the quality of food in the UK, customers should pay more importance to the food quality rather than just "eat to live" in the UK (Hatton, 2018).

### 4.3 To evaluate the importance of food and service quality in the UK Fast-food restaurants from the customers perspective in order to gain customer satisfaction and retention.

According to a study by Festinger and Carlsmith (1959), the dissonance theory suggests that people tend to adapt their opinions based on their beliefs. In UK fast-food restaurants there is a possibility that the buying patterns may change and therefore a qualitative research approach is suggested as it aids in understanding the customers change in attitude (Gaille, 2018). To achieve more accurate results open ended questions will be used during interviews which aims to understand feelings and experiences of the customers.

From the empirical research the author assumes that the customers in UK fast-food restaurants find service quality more important than food quality. From a study conducted by Kencana (2020), the author assumes that the ambience also would be a factor that would influence the perception of the quality of food and service. Based on the empirical studies by Mohan, Gopal and Njula (2018), the study was conducted in fast-food restaurants in Chennai, India and the results from the study show that service quality and consumer dissonance are the main factors affecting the guest. Therefore based on all the previous studies the author assumes that service quality, ambience and consumer dissonance are the main factors influencing customer retention and satisfaction in the UK. As stated by Khan et al. (2013), service quality and the brand play a role in influencing customer retention and satisfaction in the uk.

Based on the assumptions above, the author would recommend improving the quality of food by paying more attention to the freshness, taste and presentation of the food. Secondly to improve the environment of the restaurant as it is a major factor affecting the customers behaviours. Chow, Krishnapillai and Lee (2019), suggests that a green lighting gives perception of shorter waiting time and therefore it satisfies the customer. Lastly, the

restaurants should focus on the happiness of the customers as it leads to customer satisfaction and can result in customer retention.

*4.4 To identify the main factors that influence customer satisfaction and retention in regards to food quality in UK fast-food restaurants.*

Food quality acts as a marketing tool which satisfies and retains customers. Customer satisfaction is dependent on the quality of food provided as it has a positive impact on the guests (Zhong and Moon, 2020). Not many studies have been conducted about food quality in relation to customer satisfaction and customer retention (Al-Tit, 2015). On the contrary, limited studies have been done to prove how customer satisfaction and retention can be achieved by improving the quality of food (Sulaiman and Haron, 2013).

According to a study conducted by Al-Tit (2015), food quality is the most important attribute of a restaurant apart from service and ambience of the restaurant. Food quality has had a positive impact on customers' returning intentions. As stated by Nguyen et. al (2018), the quality of service is the main factor affecting customer retention and satisfaction in the UK and therefore the author assumes that the food quality is not the main factor affecting customers in the UK. According to Khan et al. (2013), brand is one of the main factors that influence the UK population to make their restaurant choice. In reference to the empirical studies, the author assumes that there are several other factors affecting customer retention and satisfaction in the UK.

Based on these assumptions, the restaurants in the UK should focus more on the other factors that affect customers retention and satisfaction such as brand, Cognitive dissonance (Mohan, Gopal and Njula, 2018), price, location, waiting time etc. The author recommends focusing on creating a positive brand image as that is one of the main factors affecting customers in the UK. The brand image can be improved by rebranding if needed, advertisements, keeping up with the trends, establishing a unique selling point and to keep the quality of the products consistent as it may attract customers and possibly into brand loyal customers.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations**

### *5.1 Conclusion*

To achieve the aim of this study, the author has conducted a thorough analysis of the theories, concepts and models, which prove their relation to the customer satisfaction and retention in the UK based on the impact of food quality.

According to Sulaiman and Haron, 2013, they mentioned that dining out is a luxury for most people and an increase in salary will lead people to eat out more often. Eating out has become a trend and therefore people expect to get an experience worth the money they are paying. According to the findings of this research, to achieve customer satisfaction and retention, the quality of food has to be good because that is more important than other factors such as service quality or environment (Canny, 2016).

The dissonance theory suggests that when expectations are not met by consumers in terms of the value of the product, then they will have a cognitive dissonance where they will alter their expectations according to the quality of the product (Yuksel and Yuksel, 2008). According to Ahmad Al Tit (2015), customer satisfaction is not the only variable that affects customer retention. Dissonance theory fails to explain customer satisfaction, as it states that customers expectations are not consistent and can change during the customer's experience (Yuksel and Yuksel, 2008).

The analysis of the 2ps from the marketing mix, concludes the connection between price, place and customer retention and satisfaction. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry's (1994) argue that customers are more likely to become loyal to the brand if they receive a good quality product which has a reasonable price.

Based on the research that has already been done, further research can be done on how the quality of food affects customer satisfaction and retention. This study will be beneficial to the fast food chain restaurants in the UK as it will provide them an insight that they can be ahead of other competitors and therefore create a possibility for repeat customers.

### *5.2 Recommendations*

The findings of this study will help UK fast-food restaurants to gain techniques of customer satisfaction and retention and also the importance of improving the quality of food. As stated above the dissonance theory fails to explain customer satisfaction and therefore the author suggests to conduct this study using another theory for e.g the consumer behaviour theory.

This research is carried out only in fast-food restaurants, the author recommends carrying out this study in all types of restaurants as it may provide reliable results. This study may also be conducted in countries which consume the most fast-food such as the USA as it will provide a better insight.

In this study only 30 samples will be used and therefore it will be advised to choose a bigger sample and to also use the quantitative method to provide more generalized and reliable results.

To reduce the biases, while interviewing do not re-interpret the question for the participant and instead repeat the same question as it is mentioned.

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