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Mechanic clues vs. humanic clues: Students' perception towards service quality of fast food restaurants in Taylor's University campus

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Abstract

The college student's market is expanding. Earlier research shows that the common wisdom that college students and fast food go together seems valid. These young adults had formed a substantial market for the fast food industry. Both Mechanic clues and Humanic clues will be used to test the influence on college students' perception of the service quality of fast food restaurants. The objectives of this study were to gauge the college students' perception towards fast food restaurant and to determine whether Mechanic clues or Humanic clues have more impact on the perception of college student as service experience which influences the customers' perception is affected by Mechanic clues and Humanic clues; it effected the emotional perceptions of quality. Consequently, this leads to a quantitative research which examined the combined effects of the physical environment (Mechanic clues) and the behaviour of employees (Humanic clues).

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Keywords: Mechanic Clues; Humanic Clues; Service Quality; Perception; Behaviour

1. Introduction

The college student market is expanding; earlier research (Knutson, 2000) shows that the common wisdom that college students and fast food go together seems valid. These young adults had formed a substantial market for the fast food industry. Research carried out by Knutson (2000) showed that physical environment and employee behaviour are the main factors influencing college students' choice of a fast food restaurant. It is showed that

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although food quality is basic of a customer dining experience, the environment (ambience, layout, furniture, and facilities) and service performance of the staff influence a student choice and perception of a service quality in a fast food restaurant.

According to research carry out by Berry, Wall and Lewis (2006) customers always behave like detectives as they search for information and organize their perceptions in to a set of feelings about the service. Customer form perceptions based on the technical performance of the services, the tangible associated to the service such as environmental factors, and the behaviour and appearance of service provider.

Previous research (Ryu & Jang, 2007) examines the separate effects of the environment and behaviour of employees on customers' perception of service quality; however there are few studies address their combined effects. This seems to be an important area of inquiry as customers experience booth environment and employees' behaviour of a restaurant simultaneously.

Dining in a restaurant regardless whether it is a fine dining, casual dine in or fast food dining is a multi-layered experience that involves three types of clues, namely Functional Clues – the technical quality of the food and service; Mechanic Clues – the ambience and other design and technical elements; and Humanic Clues – the performance, behaviour and appearance of the waitress or waitresses (Wall & Berry, 2007). Although food quality is the basic of a dining experience, the Mechanic clues (ambience and the atmosphere of the restaurant) and the Humanic clues (staff behaviour and service performance) greatly influence a customer evaluation of a particular restaurant. The combine effect of booth mechanic clues and Humanic clues primarily influence customers' emotional perception of service quality (Berry et al., 2006).

Besides speed, fairness of wait and price factor that effect how a customer perceive a fast food restaurant, undeniably that "restaurant atmosphere" and "friendliness of staff" does influence how a college students' choice of fast food restaurant as refer to the research result carried out by (Knutson 2000). This research is aim to look into another angle of the fast food restaurant, "What is more important to college students – the behaviour of employees or the environment of the restaurant?" as restaurant customers experience both facilities of the restaurant and the employees service simultaneously.

Both Mechanic clues and Humanic clues will be used to test the influence on college students' perception of the service quality of a fast food restaurant. Consequently, this leads to a quantitative research which examines the combined effects of the physical environment and the behaviour of employees.

1.1. Research Objectives

The two key objectives of this research paper are to (1) identify which is the most significant factor that influences college students' perception of a fast food restaurant; and to (2) test the combine effects of both physical environment and the behaviour of employees on college students' perception of fast food restaurant service quality.

In-depth research on college students' perception towards the service quality of restaurant in a more critical manner will be studied to answer the question of what college students think about Mechanic clues and Humanic clues of fast food restaurants. Fulfilling the first objective and the results yielded will lead to the understanding in which is the main factor that influences college students in choosing a fast food restaurant.

1.2. Research Questions

1. To investigate whether the Mechanic clues or the Humanic clues are the most significant factor that influences college student perceive the service quality of a fast food restaurant?
2. Will the Mechanic clues influence Humanic clues on how college students perceive the service quality of fast food restaurants?
3. Will Humanic clues influence Mechanic clues on how college students perceive the service quality of fast food restaurant?
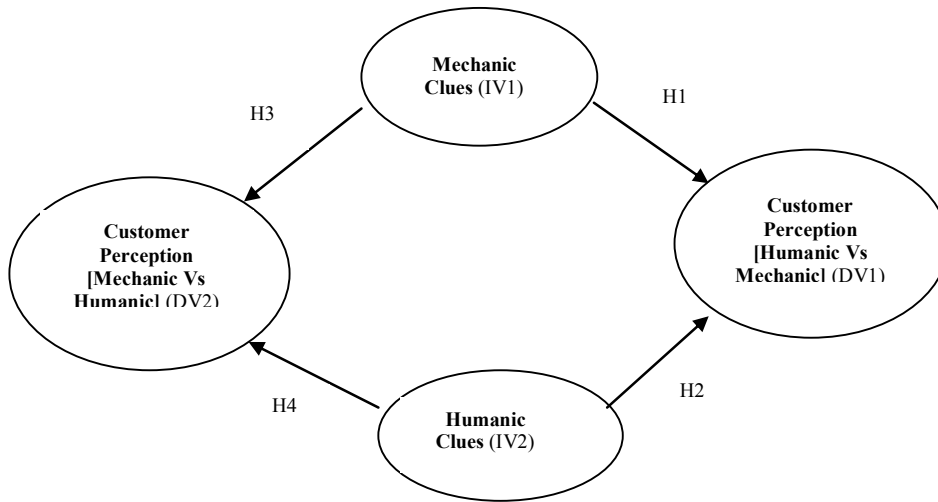
1.3. Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

Fig. 1. A Conceptual Framework Model Showing Relationship among Study Variables

1. Mechanic clues have influence on the customer perception of service quality (Humanic vs. Mechanic).
2. Humanic clues have influence on the customer perception of service quality (Humanic vs. Mechanic).
3. Mechanic clues have influence on the customer perception of service quality (Mechanic vs. Humanic).
4. Humanic clues have influence on the customer perception of service quality (Mechanic vs. Humanic).

Figure 1 display the conceptual model used in this study. It shows the relationship between Mechanic Clues and Humanic Clues towards service quality. The changes of Mechanic Clues and Humanic Clues will results in changes of customers' perception towards service quality.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Consumer Perception

Perception is largely a study of what we subconsciously add to or subtracts from the raw sensory (5 senses) inputs to produce a private picture of the world, brand or product (Puth et al, 1999). Perception study are significant in marketing context and so as for the marketers due to the fact that consumers act and react basis on their perception rather than of the objective reality (Schiffman and Kanuk, 1991), particularly in the fast food market where recent surveys show consumers actually show very little commitment to any particular fast food brand. Hence, it is important for the marketers to understand the entire notion of perception so that they can identify what will lead the consumers in action to purchase or use their products or services. According to past literature, problem often engage in perception studies is that the perception process in highly individual when associated with individual needs, values, expectation or emotion (Schiffman and Kanuk, 1991). Furthermore, comprehension of the perception process is further complicated by phenomenon such as thresholds, the possible involvement of subliminal perception and the selective perception process. Thus, comprehension of the consumer perception towards a particular product/ service or a brand remains relatively complex phenomena despite the in depth research undertaken in the area.

Although this service sector has grown into the largest and most dynamic element within the economy of most nations for some time, it has traditionally been viewed as product rather than services (Jones, Hillier, Shear & Clark-Hill, 2002). Hence, studies on the consumer perception aspect had been long focused on product rather than service

brand. However, the fast food service model in this century has provided the consumers with uniformity and repeated experience (Schlosser, 2002).

There are several common aspects regarding the studies of this research scope that had been commonly discussed in the past. Typically, in the aspect of customers' service experience which lead to their perception towards a certain restaurant, which in this research is fast food restaurant. Studies in the past found that challenges often occur in the branding of a service brand, (Blankson and Kalafatis,1999) suggested that service are particularly different with product, particularly in that service characteristics which include element of intangibility are different from those physical goods and they rely on employees' action and attitude.

Nevertheless, (Jones, Shears, Hillier, & Clarke-Hill, 2002) studies of consumer perception in the UK major fast food retailers had at least provided some initial and exploratory insight into how consumers perceive the fast food retails namely McDonald, KFC and Burger King in UK and therefore, has inspired the forming of the research model and concept of this paper. This study of (Jones, Shears, Hillier, & Clarke-Hill, 2002) on consumers' perception has employed the study in three major themes of focused position, consistency and value which are each tested in their balance of the service characteristic that refers to their tangible and intangible components.

2.2. Service Attributes

Customer service can influence consumer perception towards a restaurant. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1991) defined service quality as the overall evaluation of a specific organization that results from comparing its performance with consumers' general expectations of how organization in its industry should perform. Thus, customers' level of satisfaction with a restaurant may be proportionate to how accurately the restaurant responds in exceeding their specific service needs. It is also reasonable to suggest that the quality of service delivery is a critical factor in customers' satisfaction (Lowenstein, 1995) which results in behavioural intention and influence consumers' perception towards a restaurant. According to Kivela & Chu (2001), main classification for quality service includes core service given by the employees to the customers which includes promptness and friendliness while cleanliness, environment and food quality is a sub classification for consumer satisfaction. Quality of customer service will have a great impact on how its customers perceive about the restaurant (Kivela & Chu, 2001).

2.3. The Service Clues that Affect Customers' Perception

Services are performances rather than objects. Performance is the most important value when service is being provided to the customers. Performance of service requires the presence of customers and this is called as inseparable services. Customers need to visit the place where services are created, which includes the environmental factors; and to interact with people performing the service, which includes the employees, waiters and servers.

While experiencing service, customers consciously and unconsciously filter experience clues and organize their perceptions into a set of impression (Berry, Wall and Carbone, 2006). Anything that can be experience via 5 senses (see, touch, taste, hear and smell) is a clue. Customers process the "clues" that they experience during their service and after the service and decide whether or not to buy the service. Some clues are more important than others in influencing customers' overall perceptions of the experience. There are three types of clues that influencing and creating the total experience of the customers. According to Berry, Wall and Carbone (2006), service clues are generally fall into three main categories, Functional clues, Mechanic clues and Humanic clues. Functional clues are 'what' of the service experience, revealing the reliability and competence of the service. It concern with the technical quality of the offering of service, it is the ability of the performers to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Mechanic clues concern with the sensory presentation of the service. It comes from things and this includes smells, sounds, tastes and textures. Humanic clues come from the behavior and appearance of service providers which includes level of enthusiasm, body language, choice of words, tone of voice, tidiness and appropriate of dress of the service providers.

Service experience which influences the customers' perception is affected by Mechanic clues and Humanic clues; it effected the emotional perceptions of quality. Thus, in line with the topic of this research, the researcher will further discuss about Mechanic clues and Humanic clues.

2.4. Mechanic Clues

Mechanic clues are to do with the tangible elements of the service experience. Customers experience Mechanic clues before experiencing the other types of clues before making purchase decision. As cited from Berry, Wall and Carbone (2006), environmental psychologists have examined the physical environment's influence on people's thoughts, feelings and behaviours. In a widely studied model of Mehrabian and Russell (1974) proposed that the three main basic emotions that control behaviour of a person in an environment are pleasure, arousal and dominance. These three emotions are associated with behavioural responses which are categorized as either approach (to purchase a service and to continue purchase) or avoidance behaviour (to avoid buying the service due to bad experience). Pleasure refers to the degree to which a person feels good, happy, or satisfied in the situation; arousal refers to the degree which a person feels excited or stimulated; and dominance refers to the extent to which the individual feels in control of the situation.

Example of Mechanic clues are mainly environmental factors facilities design, equipment, furnishings displays, signs, colours, textures, sounds and lighting. These sensory clues are the visual communication between customers and the service providers without a single word being spoken. Mechanic clues provide customers with information about what they can expect during a service performance. The right kind of mechanic clues help a company or a restaurant to attract the right type of customer it seeks.

2.5. Humanic Clues

Humanic clues consist of the behaviour of the employees, including body language, tone of voice, friendliness and level of enthusiasm. Example of Humanic clues in a restaurant would be friendly and helpful waiters with sincere greetings. Humanic interaction in the service experience offers the chance to cultivate emotional connectivity that can extend respect and esteem to customers, and exceed their expectation, strengthen their trust and deepen their loyalty. It is more effective when service provider performs with uncommon kindness, caring or resourcefulness. Customer perception of employee effort in delivering service has an especially strong impact on service satisfaction and loyalty. Humanic clues are the most important in exceeding customers' expectations. Exceeding customers' expectations requires the element of pleasant surprise and the best opportunity for surprising customers is when service providers and customers interact.

Even though it is said that Humanic clues is more important for labour intensive, interactive services, however it is undeniable that Humanic clues do play an important roles in fast food restaurant. Based on Knutson's study of College Student and Fast Food (2000), friendliness of employees of fast food restaurant contribute 67.5% influence on college students' choice of a fast food restaurant. Thus, it is clear that Humanic clues are not only important for labour intensive and interactive services restaurants, but it also affects fast food restaurants.

2.6. Importance of Mechanic Clues – The Environmental Factor

Research indicates that customers always use price and tangible as surrogates for quality (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1993) and customers' perceptions of service experience and customers' expectation are the standards against which such service experience are judged. For example, a customer would expect a better quality of facilities and equipment in a fine dining restaurant compare to a fast food restaurant.

Consumers are attracted to a restaurant for its good food. Though, good food is part of the total dining experience, people are attracted to a restaurant more than just to have the good food. Environment is one of the reasons that could influence consumer's perception towards a brand or image of a restaurant. According to Booms and Bitner (1982), customers perceptions are not only influence by marketing messages such as advertising, publicity and sales promotions, but it is also influence by tangible clues such as architecture, lighting, temperature, furnishing, layout and colour.

Design factors which includes functional and aesthetic elements such as architecture, style and layout, always been highlighted as drivers of atmosphere in the hospitality settings. This is rather a crucial element in the service experience which has the most direct relationship with the consumer's perception (Baraban & Durocher 2001).

Kotler (1973) defined atmospherics as the conscious design of space to create certain effects in buyers to enhance perceive image and purchase likelihood. Thus, atmosphere can have an effect on the purchasing behaviour of consumers as well as the result of the perception formed in consumers' minds toward particular restaurant. Atmosphere is an intangible element made up of everything associated with the brand that will yield an impression towards the particular environment. The building design, décor, interior colour scheme, texture of the walls, service and the food creates the atmosphere. The proper atmosphere can make the food; service and whole dining experience seems better (Quinn, 1981).

Comfortable and mellow lighting for instance in gourmet coffee chains symbolically conveys full service and relatively high prices, whereas bright lighting may symbolize quick service and lower prices. Therefore, restaurants that cater similar setting as fast food restaurants, targeting children and young families often use bright colours on the exterior to attract attention. Accordingly, bright colours reflect a happy, friendly, comfortable feeling and indicate that families are welcomed (Newell 1965). Thus, exterior lighting can attract the attention of passers-by and create an impression of the inside atmosphere (Newell 1965). If people are getting past the front door of the restaurant, the exterior design must be attractive and giving people a level of confidence in the quality of the establishment. Design and colour of building, windows, curtains, view of the inside, lighting, all will be closely scrutinized by consumers in forming the impression and evaluation of the brand.

Apart from that, intangible environmental factor such as non –visual senses will affect customer subconsciously too. These background conditions usually include music, scent and temperature. In hospitality context, this could be seen in chains that serve gourmet coffee or baked goods which attract customers through the aromatic products they display or produce at the establishments. For example, Coffee Bean and Tea Leave displaying various coffee beans at the order line to allow the scent from the beans to influence the buyer's choice of coffee.

The interior design and décor of the dining area could affect the consumers' attitudes towards the restaurant (Baker, Berry & Parasuraman 1988). In addition to the appeal of the architectural design, customers may be influenced by the colour scheme of the dining area. Different colours lead to different moods and emotions and feeling (Bellizzi & Hite 1992). This may influence consumers' perception as well as the process of evaluation of the brand or image of a restaurant with their first impression towards the restaurant. Other aspects of interior design, such as furniture, pictures, painting, plants or wall decorations may also serve to enhance the perceived quality of dining environments, creating emotions of pleasure and arousal in a customer. For instance, if the fast-food restaurant is aimed to target younger generation market as a popular hangout spot, it must have elements that fit their requirements like having comfortable or hip-looking colours for furniture, walls and ceilings. If the target market is mainly for kids, then the consideration of setting the mood for the restaurant changes. Restaurateurs should look at what type of target market they are looking at and design interior décors that cater and appeal to the targeted market. The interior design of the establishment can influence their consumers' behaviour patterns and satisfactions level and also the perception held towards the restaurant image after the service experience (Lambert & Watson, 1984).

2.7. Importance of Humanic Clues – The Employees' Factor

Employees' behaviour during a service also provides powerful clues that contribute to customers' perceptions of service quality (Berry, Leonard and Bendapudi, 2003). Employees, especially the front liners are the central to service encounter that either satisfies or dissatisfies customers and it results in favourable or unfavourable service encounters (Kivela et al, 2000). Thus, employees especially in the service firm like restaurant should be capable of sustained, proactive and high-quality performance.

Globalization of hospitality organization such as fast food restaurant which could be clearly seen in 'Mcdonalization' increases the competitiveness and challenges among fast food restaurants. The increasing global competition resulting in more discerning customers appears to warrant an evaluation of service delivery performance in restaurant (Kivela and Chu, 2001). However, restaurateurs seldom seek answers within their organizations and seldom make the assessment of ways to improve employees' performance as their key responsibility (Sink and Tuttle, 1990). This phenomenon happens in fast food restaurants as it is always being stereotype as non-labour intensive industry and service quality is frequently being ignored. Thus it inspire to the research of this paper to find out whether Humanic clues are important for fast food restaurants consumers, especially among students.

Good behaviour from the service providers or the employees could create a quality relationship between employees and customer, which could lead to a rewarding experience and improve customers' perception. This is particularly significant in restaurants operations, where waiters' table manners and attitude are very important to customers. The favourable service encounters of customers with the waiters would influence customers' dining satisfaction perception (Finkelstein 1989).

According to the research of Kivela and Chu, (2001), unfavourable encounters of customers are majority caused by service providers' unwillingness to respond to certain service needs and inability to understand customers' demand in the restaurants. Besides, time taken to respond to service request and unprompted service offered are also the root causes of feeling of dissatisfaction.

3. Research Methodology

First stage of this research paper was instigated with determining the research objectives which are to (1) test the combine effect of both effects of physical environment and the behaviour of employees on college students' perception of fast food restaurant service quality; (2) identify which is the most significant factor that influences college students' perception of a fast food restaurant.

After reviewing the related literatures, a set of research framework that describe the relationship between (DV) and independent variable (IV) of this research were developed. A set of hypotheses were then established to investigate the relationship between the independent variables (Mechanic Clues and Humanic Clues) towards the dependent variable the customers' perception towards the service quality (**Humanic** vs. **Mechanic** and **Mechanic** vs. **Humanic**).

3.1. Profile of Respondents and Sampling Methods

In order to assess the college students' perception towards the environmental factor and employees' behaviour factor of fast food restaurants and the hypothesis formed for the framework, quantitative research techniques of questionnaire survey were adopted to congregate in-depth information from a sample size of 364 students from the students of Taylor's University through online using social website such as Face Book as well as distributed personally.

3.2. Research Design

The questionnaire was developed based on thorough literature review, as well as the conceptual model. The questionnaire includes college students' general perception towards fast food restaurants which includes the frequency of respondents visit fast food restaurant and the factor that motivate them to dine in a fast food restaurant. Part A is to test college students' perception towards the Mechanic clues of fast food restaurants; Part B is to test college students' perception towards the Humanic clues of fast food restaurant; Part C and D are to test college students' perception towards the service quality (Humanic vs. Mechanic and Mechanic vs. Humanic) with Humanic and Mechanic Clues.

3.3. Data Analysis Methods

Collected data will be compiled and organized using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software. The data collected were entered into Microsoft Excel, and then exported to IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for processing the data. SPSS was used for correlation analysis, regression analysis, reliability analysis and descriptive analysis. The statistical instruments used were Cronbach's alpha (1951) for the test of internal-consistency reliability. For Cronbach's α coefficient, the norm of 0.70 set by Nunnally (1978) was used. Result generated through SPSS 18 will be further analysed to determine the combined effect of both physical environment and the behaviour of employees on University students' perception of fast food restaurant service

quality as well as to identify which is the most significant factor that influences University students' perception of a fast food restaurant.

Obtained results will be analysed if it is coherent with the hypothesis of this study. Finally, areas that need further improvements are determined in order to provide necessary and relevant recommendations.

4. Findings, Analysis & Discussion

4.1. Descriptive Analysis

The table 1 below illustrates that from the total sample size of 364, there were 47.5% of respondents who dined atleast once a week at the fast food restaurants located at Taylor's University Lakeside campus. There were 27.5 % of respondents who visited the fast food restaurants for less than a week while the rest 25% of respondents dined only once a month. The most significant reaosn to eat at a fast food restaurant was found to be the Food with 48.1%. Price (25.8%) and Promotion (14.3%) were second and third reason respectively. Rest 11.8% included the Service and Restaurant environment which were the least significant reasons for the respondents to dine in a fast food restaurant.

Table 1. Details of sample (n = 364)

	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Frequency of dining in a fast food restaurant @ Taylor's University		
Once a week	173	47.5
Less than a week	100	27.5
Once a month	91	25.0
Total	364	100.0
Most significant reason to dine in a fast food restaurant		
Food	175	48.1
Service	26	7.1
Restaurant Environment	17	4.7
Price	94	25.8
Promotion	52	14.3
Total	364	100.0

The percentage of the gender of the respondents were 53.3% females and 46.7% of males. From the total of 364 respondents, 79.4% were aged between 18 to 21 years and 18.4% in the age range of 22 to 25 years. This indicates that most of the diners were students who were actually studying at Taylor's University. Among these respondents, 57.1% were Diploma and 40.4% were Degree level students. Majority of the respondents had Chinese (70.1%) origin, while others (18.7%) were international students studying at Taylor's University.

4.2. Reliability Analysis

Table 3 demonstrates that the overall reliability (internal consistency) of the study was found to be coefficient alpha 0.804, which is deemed acceptable (Churchill, 1979; Nunnally, 1978), which suggests that the "measures [were] free from random error and thus reliability coefficients estimate the amount of systematic variance" (Churchill, 1979, p. 4). Reliability analysis is well known as to test the 'degree of consistency between measures of the scale' (Mehrens & Lehman, 1987), when each factor (study variables) such as 'Mechanic Clues', 'Humanic Clues', 'Humanic vs. Mechanic', 'Mechanic vs. Humanic', was examined, it was found to be reliable with coefficient alpha more than 0.70 at aggregate level, cut-off point (Churchill, 1979; Nunnally, 1978). The high alpha values indicated good internal consistency among the items, and the high alpha value for the overall scale indicated that convergent validity was met (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml, 1991).

Table 2. Details of Demographics

	Frequency (F)	**Percentage (%)**
Gender		
Female	194	53.3
Male	170	46.7
Total	364	100.0
Age		
18-21	289	79.4
22-25	67	18.4
26-29	5	1.4
Less than 30	3	0.8
Total	364	100.0
Education		
Foundation	2	0.5
Diploma	208	57.1
Degree	147	40.4
Post Graduate	7	1.9
Total	364	100.0
Ethnicity		
Malay	31	8.5
Chinese	255	70.1
Indian	10	2.7
Others	68	18.7
Total	364	100.0

Table 3. Reliability of the Study

	Variables	**Cronbach Alpha (α)**	**Number of Items**
Independent Variable	Mechanic Clues	0.842	5
	Humanic Clues	0.934	5
Dependent Variable	Humanic vs. Mechanic	0.844	5
	Mechanic vs. Humanic	0.765	5
Overall		0.804	20

4.3. Regression Analysis

Since regression analysis is "the technique used to derive an equation that relates the criterion variables to one or more predictor variables; it considers the frequency distribution of the criterion variable, when one or more predictor variables are held fixed at various levels" (Churchill, 1995, p. 887). Table 4a shows that the regression analysis was used having 'Humanic vs. Mechanic' as the dependent variable and 'Mechanic Clues' and 'Humanic Clues' as the independent variables while the Table 4 b displays 'Mechanic vs. Humanic' as the dependent variable and 'Mechanic Clues' and 'Humanic Clues' as the independent variables. It was necessary to use the regression analysis to predict the implications of 'Humanic vs. Mechanic' level and the obtained results showed in table 4a that there was a positive correlation with R^2 of 0.163, F value of 35.167 and p value of 0.000 at the significance level of $p \leqslant$ 0.05. It is found that 'Mechanic Clues (β =0.320)' and 'Humanic Clues (β =-0.622)' exerts significant positive effect on 'Humanic vs. Mechanic' level, making Hypothesis H1 and H2 to be Accepted.

Table 4a. Regression Analysis

Dependent variable: Humanic Vs. Mechanic

Independent Variables	β	t- value	p- value	Hypothesis
Mechanic Clues	0.320	3.810	0.000	H1 - Accepted
Humanic Clues	-0.622	-7.407	0.000	H2 - Accepted

Notes: $R^2 = 0.163$, F = 35.167, p≤0.05

Second regression was analysed by using 'Mechanic vs. Humanic' as dependent variable and 'Mechanic Clues' and 'Humanic Clues' as independent variables. The results shown in table 4b indicate that R2 was 0.016 and F value at 5.852. β value for 'Mechanic Clues' was 0.126 and for 'Humanic Clues' was 0.148 and the p value was 0.000 at the significance level of p≤0.05, this also illustrates that Hypothesis 3 and 4 were also accepted and thus shows that both 'Mechanic and Humanic Clues' have significant influence on the customer perception of service quality (Humanic vs. Mechanic).

Table 4b. Regression Analysis

Dependent variable: Mechanic vs. Humanic

Independent Variables	β	t- value	p- value	Hypothesis
Mechanic Clues	0.126	2.419	0.016	H3 - Accepted
Humanic Clues	0.148	2.849	0.005	H4 - Accepted

Note: R2 = 0.016, F = 5.852, p≤0.05

5. Conclusion

The objectives of this study were to gauge the college students' perception towards fast food restaurant and to determine the combine effects of both physical environment (Mechanic clues) and the behaviour of employees (Humanic clues) have more impact on the perception of college student towards the service quality. Mechanic clues concerned with the sensory presentation of the service. It comes from things and this includes smells, sounds, tastes and textures. Humanic clues come from the behaviour and appearance of service providers which includes level of enthusiasm, body language, choice of words, tone of voice, tidiness and appropriate of dress of the service providers.

Based on the results, both Mechanic clues and Humanic clues have the equal impact on the customers' perception. That means any changes in any clues of Mechanic and Humanic will have an impact on customers' perceptions towards the service quality. Apart from that, even though both Mechanic clues and Humanic clues are equally important, Humanic clues have a greater impact towards how college student perceive the service quality.

Limitations that were encountered during the research is that the result cannot be generalized as the study was conducted among the college students of Taylor's University and the students' perception was asked about the fast food restaurants located within the University campus only and it cannot be assumed that other areas, or the other people will yield the same perception. Future researchers can also include qualitative data collection techniques such as interview and focus group to ensure that all respondents understand and provide more accurate and genuine feedback.

Finally, Functional clues should be included in the future study in addition to the Mechanic clues and Humanic clues to have a complete picture of customer perception towards fast food restaurant's service quality. The importance of establishing and organizing Mechanic clues, Humanic clues and Functional clues are crucial as all these three clues have an even influence on customer perceptions and plays specific roles in creating the customer's service experience, influencing both rational and emotional perceptions of service quality (Berry, Wall, & Caborne, 2006).

6. Recommendations

According to the research by Wall and Berry (2007), restaurateurs could improve customers' perception towards a restaurant's service by orchestrating Mechanic clues. However, to maintain a good service quality, it is crucial to balance both Mechanic clues and Humanic clues in the restaurant. The finding of this research suggested that positive Humanic clues can overcome negative Mechanic clues to a certain degree however; negative Humanic clues cannot overcome positive Mechanic clues. Thus, when inconsistency occurs, it is best to be strong in Humanic clues (Wall and Berry, 2007).

Besides Mechanic clues and Humanic clues, Functional clues are important in the service industry too. Restaurants will be able to increase their competitiveness when they combine functional clues and leverage the restaurants' product with strong Mechanic clues and Humanic clues (Wall and Berry, 2007). Functional clues, as mentioned in the literature review is concern with the technical quality of the offering of service, it is the ability of the performers to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Functional clues are the core of service that effect customers' perception towards service quality.

In order for restaurants to exceed customers' expectation, though Mechanic clues and Humanic clues are important, restaurateurs should be able to manage the Functional clues well too. Functional clues are 'how' the services are deliver to the customers, the ability of the service providers to perform the service to the customers accurately, dependably and accurately, it effects the consumers' calculative perceptions of quality. For example, a walk into a very trendy and clean fast food restaurant with all the positive Mechanic clues, the customer will have a positive impression towards the restaurants. Customer's satisfaction increase when he is greeted by a very friendly employee (Humanic clues). However, when the employees could not take down the customer's required order and printed out the wrong bill, the customer's satisfaction will decrease and this will effect customer's perception towards the restaurant.

Thus, clues management in service industry which include fast food restaurant should not be ignored. Organization need to work to become more clue conscious and understand the level of subtle details that are processed in customers' conscious and unconscious thoughts impacting how they feel in an experience (Berry, Wall and Carbone, 2006).

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