Exploring the Antecedents of Price Fairness in the Fast Food: A case of McDonald's*

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the influencing attributes on price fairness in the domain of fast food service context. As the research subject, this research selects McDonald's business because of its market share in the fast food market. Five attributes are examined to account for price fairness. The attributes are advertising attitude, employee service, waiting, convenience, and brand love. This study performed survey to collect the data. The survey participants are university students because they are essential market segment for fast food business. The number of observation is 299 for the data analysis. To analyze the data, this research used various statistical instruments (e.g., frequency analysis, mean and standard computation, exploratory factor analysis, reliability test, correlation matrix, and multiple regression analysis). Regarding the results, this research identified advertising attitude, employee service, and brand love are influential attributes to establish price fairness of university students. This research could inform the marketing director of food service business to understand university students target better.

Keywords: Price Fairness, Fast Food, Advertising Attitude, Employee Service, Brand Love
JEL Classifications: M3, L8, L83

I. Introduction

Consumers choose fast food because of various merits (e.g., taste, price, convenience, and etc.). A representative advantage of fast food could become the cheap price. University students regard the price fairness as an essential element in the consumption of fast food in accordance with Food economics (2016). In contrast, Trend monitor (2016) addressed that consumers hesitate to visit fast food store because it is

expensive. Despite of the controversial argument about fast food, insufficient studies have been examined for the determinants of price fairness in the fast food domain. Therefore, it is essential to examine the price perception of consumers in the context of fast food business.

This study chooses university students as the survey participants. In fact, prior studies have adopted university students as the sample to execute the consumer research in the fast food domain. For instance, Jang and Oh (2016) also performed research to examine the fast food consumption behavior of university students and found that price is regarded as the critical element for their decision making. Kim (2018) also examined university students and showed that price is the element to be administered consistently in the fast food management. This research chooses university students as the research subject. University students considers price fairness as an important attribute in their decision making within food consumption (HS Adzine, 2018). Also, Trend monitor (2016) presented that university students and people living alone consumes fast food more. This indicates that university students could become an important target market from the perspective of fast food companies. All in all, the purpose of this research is to investigate the characteristics of price fairness using university students.

As an explanatory variables, this research chooses advertising attitude, employee service, convenience, waiting, and brand love regarding the review of literature(Bruner and Kumar, 2007; Liao, 2007; Qin, and Prybutok, 2008; Kim and Oh, 2010; Hwang and Shin ,2012; Jeon and Kim, 2012; Yoo, 2012; Kwon, 2015; Choi

and Hyun, 2017; An and Lee, 2018). This research also adopts McDonald's as the research subject because the company shows the largest market share in the fast food domain(Food economics, 2018). Given the characteristics, McDonald's could be adequate research subject and it could help survey participants respond questions as more concrete manners. Namely, the fame of McDonald's in the market could work for the improvement of response quality.

For the accomplishment of research goal, this study proposes five research hypotheses. Also, this study mainly chooses survey as an instrument. Then, this research carried out statistical analysis to test the proposed hypotheses. Using the statistical results, this research is likely to offer the practical implications for the practitioners. In addition, this research can contribute to the literature by expanding the area of price fairness research into the fast food domain. By doing so, this study could produce the information to understand the characteristics of fast food consumers more for the establishment of marketing strategy.

II. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

1. Price Fairness

Price fairness is defined how consumers perceive their payment as rational and fair manners (Bei and Chiao, 2001; Kukar-Kinney, Xia, and Monroe, 2007; Ferguson, Ellen, and Bearden, 2014). Consumers compare their benefits with cost, and they perceive price fairness if they attain more benefits than cost. Extant

literature also employed price fairness as the explained variables (Dekhili and Achabou, 2013; Homburg, Totzek, and Krämer, 2014). Namely, price is likely to become a standard to assess the product quality and values. For instance, previous research examined the association between restaurant service quality and price fairness using fine dining restaurant customers (Bae, Han, and Shim, 2017). Also, Jeon and Ha (2010) employed price fairness as the explained attributes in the context of family restaurant domain. Jung (2019) examined coffee service consumers and selected price fairness as the explained variables. Based on the literature review, this research chooses price fairness as the dependent variable.

2. Illustration of Independent Variables

2.1. Advertising Attitude

Advertising attitude refers how individuals build the attitude toward the advertising and it could be established either positive or negative manners(MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989; Yoon, 1995; Dutta-Bergman, 2006; Piao and Park, 2019). People are exposed to the advertising prior to purchasing decision, advertising attitude is likely to become influential for the consumer decision making and reaction(Muehling, 1987; Tsang, Ho, and Liang, 2004; Bruner and Kumar, 2007). Previous studies presented empirical evidence between advertising attitude and consumer behavior. As an example, Heo and Jung (2011) demonstrated the effect of advertising effect

on the purchasing decision. Moreover, Kim and Han (2011) used hotel website advertisement and demonstrate positive impact of advertising attitude on purchasing decision. Kim and Son(2010) used resort advertising and demonstrated the association between advertising attitude and purchasing intention. Lee, Kang, and Lee (2015) showed that brand attitude is positively affected by advertising attitude using food service customers. Hwang and Shin (2012) also examined advertising attributes and price fairness. Regarding the literature review, advertising attitude has been widely researched in various domain, even though sparse research has been implemented to identify the relation between advertising attitude and price fairness. Therefore, this research proposes the following research hypothesis:

H1: Advertising attitude positively affects the price fairness

2.2. Employee Service

Employee attitude is an essential element in the food service because the service is delivered by labor and employee attitude(Lia and Chuag, 2004; Kim, Tavitiyaman, and Kim, 2009; Jang and Kim, 2019). Therefore, extant research argues that the hospitality service is assessed by the labor elements(Newman, 2001; Liao, 2007; Qin, and Prybutok, 2008; Yoon, 2019). A vast body of literature addressed importance of employee attitude in hospitality area. Kim and Seoung (2011) demonstrated the association between employee service and customer attitude in the domain of coffee service (e.g., revisit intention and satisfaction). In a similar

vein, Lee and Kim (2012) addressed the positive association between employee service and price fairness. In the fast food domain, customers are less likely to consider the employee service as an important attribute because the service is limited. It indicates that employee service could be less essential in the fast food service domain. To clarify the association between employee service and price fairness, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Employee service positively affects the price fairness.

2.3. Waiting

Time is a kind of resource, and a merit of fast food service is time-saving, which builds the competitive advantages(Davis and Vollmann, 1990; Jones and Peppiatt, 1996; Bielen and Demoulin, 2007). Also, Lee and Lambert (2000) claims that waiting time is imperative to account for the food service customer satisfaction. This indicates that waiting time is likely to results in negative outcomes because time is a sort of resource in the food consumption(Tom and Lucey, 1997; Dharmawirya, Oktadiana, and Adi, 2012). Given the importance, numerous studies examined the effect of waiting time on the personal decision making. For instance, Yoo and Seo (2010) investigated the positive association between waiting time and break away intention in the domain of food service industry. Similarly, Kim and Oh (2010) empirically shows that waiting time negatively affects the perceived service quality of family restaurant customers. Additionally, An and Lee (2018) showed that waiting time is negatively

associated with revisit intention in the pizza service domain. All in all, waiting time is an essential element in the food service business to establish negative perception to consumers mind, even though scant studies have been implemented to examine the association between waiting time and price fairness. To identify the relation between two attributes, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Waiting negatively affects the price fairness.

2.4. Convenience

Convenience is defined how consumers use the food service easily(Swoboda and Morschett, 2001; Hjelmar, 2011; Buckley, Cowan, and McCarthy, 2007). Food is habitually consumed, which indicates that convenience is likely to plays a significant role for the perception of consumers because they do not need to pay (e.g., education and search) to purchase(Buckley, Cowan, and McCarthy, 2007; Roy, Lassar, and Shekhar, 2016). Given the argument, prior studies depicts the empirical evidence about convenience. Fot instance, Yoo (2012) implemented research using resort consumers and presented positive impact of convenience on revisit intention. In the food service area, Kim, Ng, and Kim (2009) demonstrated the positive effect of convenience on the food service customer satisfaction. In the coffee service domain, Kwon (2015) presented empirical evidence about the accountability of convenience for the consumer behavior and loyalty. Regarding extant literature, convenience could be regarded as the element causing positive consumer behavior. Despite of the

fertile evidence regarding the convenience, sparse research examined the association between convenience and price fairness in the fast food area. Thus, this research proposes the following research hypothesis:

H4: Convenience positively affects the price fairness.

2.5. Brand Love

Brand love is a kind of emotion, and it is the degree of emotional attachment for a certain brand(Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010; Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012). Once consumers build a brand love, they prefer every aspect of the brand(Sarkar, Ponnam, and Murthy, 2012; Roy, Eshghi, and Sakar, 2013; Rauschnabel and Ahuvia, 2014). Therefore, brand love is likely to bring about positive reaction of consumers(Rageh Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Rauschnabel and Ahuvia, 2014; Karjaluoto, Munnukka, and Kiuru, 2016). For instance, Rageh Ismail and Spinelli (2012) examined young fashion brand consumers and brand love results in word of mouth. Jeon and Kim (2012) employed online consumer and found that brand love is an antecedents of brand loyalty. Choi and Hyun (2017) used to tourists visiting Korea and demonstrated the positive association between brand love and intention to visit. Moreover, Alnawas and Altarifi (2016) shows that brand loyalty is a consequence of brand love using hotel customers. However, studies regarding the association between price fairness and brand love are scarce. Hence, this research proposes the following research hypothesis for the clarification:

H5: Brand love positively affects the price fairness.

Fig. 1. Research model
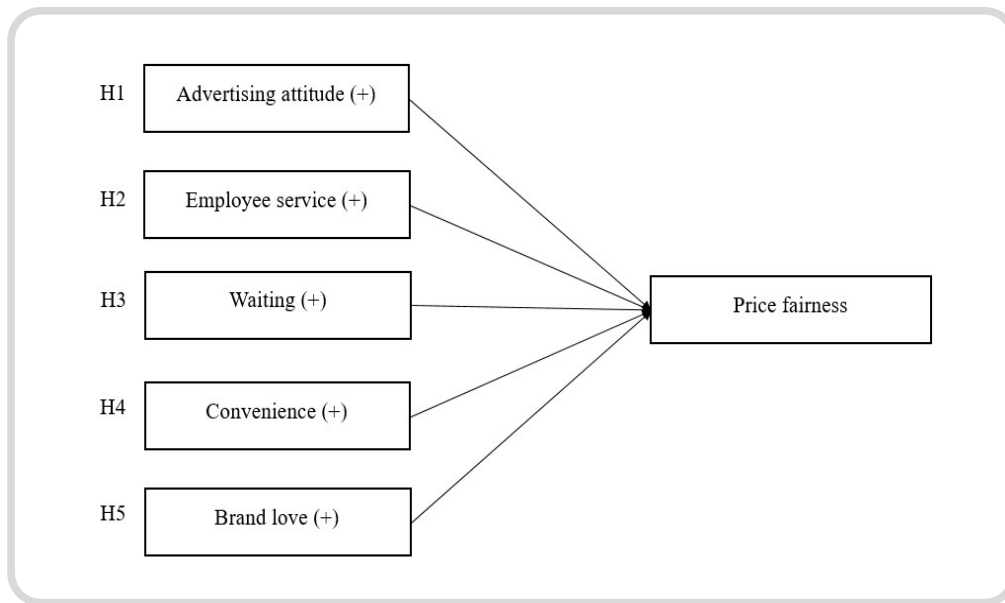
Ⅲ. Method

1. Research Model and Data Collection

Figure 1 shows the research model. The dependent variable is price fairness. Five independent variables are employed in this research, and these include advertising attitude, employee service, waiting, convenience, and brand love. Only waiting is negatively associated with price fairness, whereas other four attributes are positively related to price fairness.

Table 1 presents the demographic information of survey participants. This research used survey questions for the data collection. The data was collected using both offline and online channels. By collection the data using both channels, it could enhance the quality of data because both method has pros and cons (e.g., constraint in time and place, faithfulness to the response). The data collection was implemented between May and September 2019. At the beginning, this research collected 305 observations. After eliminating six poor quality responses, 299 observations were used for the statistical analysis. Table 1 depicts the demographic information of survey participants. Total number of observation is 299. The number of male and female are 159 and 140 respectively. Regarding age, the number of 18-20 participants is 55. The numbers of 21-23 years old and 24-26 years old respondents are 95 and 106 respectively. The number of no income participants is 133. Also, 147 participants responded as less than 1 KRW. For visiting frequency, 206 respondents shows less than 1 time a week.

Table 1. Demographic Information of respondents

Item	N (%)	Item	N (%)
Gender		**Age**	
Male	159(53.2)	18-20	55(18.3)
Female	140(46.8)	21-23	95(31.7)
		24-26	106(35.3)
Monthly household income		Older than 27	44(14.7)
No income	133(44.3)	**Using frequency**	
Under 1 million KRW	147(49.0)	Less than 1 time a week	206(68.7)
1-2 million KRW	14(4.9)	1-3 times a week	78(26.0)
Over 2 million KRW	6(2.0)	More than 4 times a week	15(5.3)
Total	299(100)	Total	299(100)

Note: KRW stands for Korean won

2. Depiction of survey questions and data analysis

This research selected 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). Regarding the measurement items, this research defined price fairness how consumers perceive the level of fast food price and prior research was employed to measure (Bei and Chiao, 2001; Kukar-Kinney et al., 2007; Bae et al., 2017; Jung, 2019). This research defined advertising attitude how consumer build a positive attitude toward fast food advertising, and employed extant literature and modified it for the purpose of current research (Kim and Han, 2011; Hwang and Shin, 2012; Lee et al., 2015). Employee service is defined how consumers perceive the employee service of fast food restaurant using prior studies items (Liao, 2007; Qin and Prybutok, 2008; Lee and Kim, 2012). Waiting is defined as how consumers perceive their waiting time in the food service domain, which is measured considering prior studies (Yoo and Seo, 2010; Kim and Oh, 2011; An and Lee, 2018). The definition of convenience is how easily consumer use the fast food service, and it is measured using extant literature items with modification (Bukely et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2009; Kwon, 2015). This research also defines brand love as how individuals are attached with a certain brand, which is measured using extant literature with modification to fit the research purpose(Roy et al., 2013; Rauschnabel and Ahuvia, 2014; Bagozzi, Batra, and Ahuvia, 2017).

Statistical analysis was performed to examine the data, which contains frequency analysis, exploratory factor analysis, reliability test, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analsysis. Initially, this research carried out frequency analysis to attain the demographic information. Then, exploratory factor analysis was performed, and its cut-off value of factor loading with varimax rotation and eigen value are 0.6 and 1 respectively (Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson, 2010). For the reliability analysis, this research used Cronbach's alpah and its threshold is 0.7. Moreover, this research used correlation matrix to examine the overall association between two variables. Additionally, this research calculated both

Table 2. Exploratory Factor Analysis and Reliability Test

Factor	Item	Loading	Eigen(Var%)
Price Fairness α = .951	McDonald's price is reasonable. McDonald's sells product with adequate price. McDonald's price is fair. McDonald's price level is appropriate.	.914 .926 .855 .922	6.479 (26.995)
Advertising Attitude α = .915	McDonald's advertising is impressive. McDonald's advertising is memorable. McDonald's advertising allures me. McDonald's advertising is well-made.	.890 .881 .837 .845	3.327 (13.862)
Employee Service α = .904	McDonald's employees are kind. McDonald's employees are responsive. McDonald's employees are friendly. McDonald's employees are trained well.	.793 .900 .891 .864	2.651 (11.046)
Waiting α = .887	McDonald's waiting time is long. McDonald's food takes lots of time to serve food. It is time consuming to receive McDonald's food. It is time consuming to eat McDonald's food.	.740 .844 .920 .919	2.439 (10.162)
Convenience α = . 861	McDonald's is accessible. McDonald's is convenient to access. McDonald's is near to my place. McDonald's is easy to reach.	.848 .804 .812 .841	2.099 (8.744)
Brand Love α =. 830	I love McDonald's brand. I have an affection to McDonald's brand. McDonald's is the best franchising brand. I am attached with McDonald's brand.	.831 .614 .774 .836	1.470 (6.124)

Note: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure = .822, Bartlett's χ^2 = 5401.801, p<.01, Total Variance Explained = 76.934%

mean and standard deviation of main variables. To test the research hypotheses, this research implemented multiple regression analysis.

IV. Results

1. Exploratory Factor Analysis and Reliability Test

Exploratory factor analysis was implemented. Considering, KMO measure (.822) and Bartlett's Chi-square, the model is statistically significant (χ^2 = 5401.801 p<.01) (See Table 2).The cutoff value

of factor loading is 0.6. For testing reliability, Cronbach's alpha was used using 0.7 as cutoff value. This research also used Eigen value 1 as the threshold to derive the constructs(Hair et al., 2006). Regarding the criteria, six factors are derived. The constructs are price fairness, advertising attitude, employee service, waiting, convenience, and brand love. Each construct is composed of four items.

2. Correlation Matrix

Table 3 illustrates the correlation matrix with mean value and standard deviation.

Table 3. Correlation Matrix

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Price Fairness	3.048	0.988	1				
2. Advertising Attitude	3.142	1.018	.286*	1			
3. Employee Service	3.482	0.780	.160*	.257*	1		
4. Convenience	3.423	1.016	.017	.105	-.044	1	
5. Waiting	2.328	0.827	.250*	.233*	.199*	-.009	1
6. Brand Love	2.679	0.956	.394*	.343*	.241*	.265*	.274*

Note: *p<.05 SD stands for standard deviation

Mean values of price fairness, advertising attractiveness, convenience, waiting, employee attitude, and brand love are 3.048, 3.142, 3.423, 2.328, 3.482, and 2.697. respectively. It indicates that survey participants showed the most agreeableness with the employee service in fast food, whereas the survey participants presented the least agreeableness with the waiting. With regard to the correlation coefficients, price fairness positively correlates with advertising attitude(r = .286, p⟨.05), convenience (r = .160, p⟨.05), employee attitude (r = .250, p⟨.05), brand love(r = .394, p⟨..05). Brand love positively correlates with advertising attractiveness(r = .343, p⟨.05), convenience(r = .241, p⟨.05), waiting(r = .265, p⟨.05), and employee service(r = .274, p⟨.05).

3. Results of Multiple Regression

Analysis

Table 4 is the results of multiple regression analysis. Adjusted R^2 is .1895. The model is statistically significant given the statistical values(F=14.93, p⟨.05). Regarding, the beta coefficient, advertising attitude positively affects price fairness (β =.146, t-value=2.62, p⟨.05). Also, employee service is positively associated with price fairness(β=.154, t-value=2.19, p⟨.05). Lastly, price fairness is positively influenced by brand love(=β.339, t-value=4.22, p⟨.05). Given the results, three hypotheses are supported out of five.

V. Conclusion

This research aims to investigate the determinants of price fairness in the fast food domain. The survey participants were

Table 4. Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

Attribute	β(t-value)	Results
Intercept	1.332(4.22)*	
Advertising Attitude	.146(2.62)*	H1: Supported
Employee Service	.154(2.19)*	H2: Supported
Convenience	.012(0.22)	H3: Not supported
Waiting	-.101(-1.55)	H4: Not supported
Brand Love	.339(4.22)*	H5: Supported

Note: *p<.05 F-value = 14.93* Adjusted R^2 = .1895, Dependent variable: Price Fairness

20's because they could become the main consumer of fast food. This research proposed five attributes (e.g., advertising attitude, employee service, convenience, waiting, and brand love) to explain the price fairness, and found that price fairness is positively influenced by advertising attitude, employee service, and brand love. It can be inferred that consumers perceiving positive advertising attitude, employee service, and brand love are more likely to build positive attitude with regard to the price fairness, However, convenience and waiting were not significant attributes to account for the price fairness. Possibly, the popularity of food delivery service becomes a reason for non-significance of convenience. To be specific, the popularity of delivery service values less about the physical stores, which leads consumer to visit the stores for the consumption of fast food. In addition, consumers perceive the waiting as less dissatisfactory element given the value of descriptive statistics and the standard deviation is also low as compare to other elements (Mean = 2.328, SD = 0.827). That is, waiting might not be essential to build certain perception toward the fast food product.

This research contributes to the literature by expanding the area of price fairness into the fast food restaurant domain because insufficient studies have been executed to figure out the determinants of price fairness in the fast food domain. By identifying the influential attributes, this research contributes to the literature. In detail, this research shows the external validity with prior studies by presenting similar empirical evidence with previous studies in terms of advertising attitude(Heo and Jung, 2011; Lee

et al., 2015), employee service(Liao, 2007; Qin, and Prybutok, 2008; Lee and Kim, 2012), and brand love(Jeon and Kim, 2012; Alnawas and Altarifi, 2016; Choi and Hyun, 2017). It indicates that the three elements are essential in the domain of fast food business. By doing so, this research could support the findings of previous studies with regard to advertising attitude, employee service, and brand love. In contrast, the results of this study appeared as varied manners comparing to the extant literature with respect to the convenience and waiting((Kim and Oh, 2010; Yoo and Seo, 2010; Yoo, 2012; Kwon, 2015; An and Lee, 2018). Namely, both attributes (e.g., convenience and waiting) were identified as unimportant element in the fast food service domain.

This study presents practical implication. First of all, the results of this research could become the guideline for the marketing cost allocation decision in the fast food management. To be specific, marketing managers may need to dedicate their resources into the advertising more to build more positive attitude of consumers. In other words, marketing manager might need to allocate the business resource to create more interesting advertising contents as well as building more efficient advertising chanel. Also, marketing directors need to regard the resource allocation for the employee training rather than installing the kiosk machine inside of stores. Since employee service was identified as the imperative element to account for price fairness, adopting automated system instead of employees could cause the loss of market share. Lastly, the marketing managers might need to invest their budget

into the brand communication, which establishes positive attitude for brand love. By doing so, fast food companies could enhance the price fairness perception of consumer, which become an avenue to target the university consumers more.

This research has some limitations. First of all, the research subject is only McDonald's. This could become the constraint to establish the generalizability for the application of the research outcomes. Hence, future studies need to consider more diverse fast food brands. Also, this study considered price fairness as the only dependent variable. To make research more fertile, future studies could consider more various dependent variables (e.g., reuse intention, word of mouth, and willingness to pay). By doing so, future research could become more fruitful to understand the characteristics of fast food consumers. This could also become the avenue to inform the industry practitioners for their strategic decision making. Lastly, the sample of this research was constrained to the university students, which could limit the generalizability of the results. Future studies, thus might need to consider expanding the area of data collection, which could establish the research more fruitful.

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