

Customer Re-Patronage Intention: A Case Study of Pak Tam Café

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Synopsis: The case starts with the immediate pressure made by the founder, Tuan Haji Ruslin Ibrahim, on the management team as they need to decide the appropriate strategies to be implemented in attracting and retaining customers. Given the strong competition in the food and beverage industry, which is conquered by a couple of established companies (Ani Sup Utara and Old Town White Coffee), Pak Tam Café (PTC) had been struggling with maintaining their sustainability and profitability. To attract new customers and retain existing customers, PTC needs to implement appropriate strategies to make sure the number of customers and sales volume keep increasing.

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I. THE THOUGHT

Tuan Haji Ruslin Ibrahim (the owner of Pak Tam Café) was walking to his car, his eyes caught sight on a café. There seemed to be so many people queuing there early in the morning. He wondered what was so special about that café. Wouldn't it be nice if Pak Tam Café (PTC) also received a lot of customers every day," he thought.

II. CALLING FOR MEETING

Tuan Haji Ruslin called a meeting with the PTC management team to discuss ways to attract and retain customers. He had noticed for quite some time that; PTC was facing difficulties in attracting new faces. He was also aware that the number of customers were decreasing based on the sales volume (such as on certain menus like mee rebus, udangherba and aneka sup). The main agenda for the meeting was to discuss the best marketing strategies to attract new customers and at the same time retain the existing customers. Despite the growth that PTC had been able to achieve since its establishment in 1986, the company still struggled in attracting new customers and retaining its existing customers. The increasing number of competitors nowadays had made the situation worse.

Even so, in general, PTC sales volume was about RM2, 827,229.00 in 2014 and increased to RM5,111,258.00 in 2015. In 2016 the sales were continually increased to RM9,024,065.00 (please refer to Exhibit of PTC Income Statement and PTC Balance Sheet). The increasing in sales each year is a good sign for small companies that are just about to grow like PTC. The reason for the growth sales in PTC is the change in the business operation of the company. Another reason that helps increase sales is the addition of newly opened outlets.

PTC's gross profit margin was 44.4% in 2014, 43.27% in 2015, and 38.22% in 2016. This shows that as sales increased, the cost of sales also increased, which was due to uncontrollable factors like increasing oil prices which indirectly raised the price of materials in the market. At the same time, PTC had suffered a negative net profit margin in 2014 which was -0.66%, which improved to a positive net profit margin at 0.42% in 2015. The company's sales growth and gross profit had been extraordinary during the past three years and increased by 50% each year. Despite facing a loss in net profit margin in 2014, PTC managed to get up and gain profit within a year (Pak Tam Cafe, 2016).

However, Tuan Haji Ruslin, one of the boards of director members and the founder of PTC disclosed that PTC has only managed to capture the high number of customers during weekdays (total average customers per month is 9975). The number of customers dropped during public holidays (total average customers per month is 2154) and weekends (total average customers per month is 2511). Being dependent on the high costs of materials and foreign labor to run the business, which is resulted in a big amount of expenses, therefore, Tuan Haji Ruslin believed that they would need to improve their marketing strategy in order to attract new customers and at the same time retain existing customers (Davis, 2019). By doing this, he believed PTC might increase their sales not only during weekdays, but also during weekends and public holidays too. "Guys, you need to think and come out with a few marketing strategies which appropriate to attract new customers to come and enjoy our food and

beverages, during public holidays, weekends and weekdays. In addition, you also need to prepare a list of marketing strategies which are suitable to be implemented immediately in order to retain our existing customers. Please remember that our tagline ‘*Tuuu...Dia Pak Tam*’ will always reflect to our products and company brand”. These commands gave an immediate pressure on the management team as they would need to carefully think of the appropriate strategies in improving the number of customers.

III. COMPANY BACKGROUND

Pak Tam Café (PTC) was a business organization which provides food and beverage services including restaurants, cafés, catering, bakeries, retail shops and food truck businesses. PTC retained their value through customer relationship which served one client at a time. PTC also fulfilled customers’ needs by providing good services from the food service and accommodate food tastes. PTC had its own signature food like Mee Rebus Pak Tam, Nasi Bukhara, Pak Tam bread and Pak Tam coffee and offers enjoyable cuisine experiences for all customers. With expertise in Malay, Chinese, Indian and Western cuisines, and the unlimited food choices offered, it grew to be a successful business. PTC also obtained halal accreditation from Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM). The company has had the potential to expand, but it struggles in attracting new customers and retain the existing customers, especially with its increasing number of competitors. Nowadays, many returning customers come to this café, but only in the North and South *Rehat dan Rawat* (R&R) Tapah branches. Other branches showed a decreasing number of customers, especially during weekends and weekdays.

The founder, Tuan Haji Ruslin, has over 30 years of experience in F&B specializing in restaurants, cafés, catering operations, training and mentoring. He is the mastermind behind the existing various outlets under the same logo. Tuan Haji Ruslin was also the creator of various products such as Kopi Pak Tam, Original Pak Tam Bread, Pattern Slice Food Truck as well as Quick Bite. He currently holds the position as a Board of Director for Sirah Heritage Holding Sdn. Bhd. (the parent company for PTC) and Managing Director for Juara Saji Sdn. Bhd. (the subsidiary company of PTC and Sirah Heritage Holding Sdn. Bhd.). He has excellent cooks with expertise in various cuisines around the world and holds great experience as a serial entrepreneur. Consequently, Tuan Haji Ruslin was invited to share his experience and culinary knowledge in countless talk and seminar locally as well as overseas that make him popular in his area.

Since 1986, with RM25 capital, Tuan Haji Ruslin and his wife sold ‘meerebus’ and ‘rojak pasembur’ at a street stall at Taman Selayang and Ramadan bazaars. After a year, customers began to be familiar with ‘mee rebus’ and ‘rojak pasembur’, Tuan Haji Ruslin and his wife traded at a stall, then a cowboy shop at the same place which was then demolished for development by the authorities in March 2002. The couple gained experience and knowledge on the food and beverage industry through hard work, confidence, high self-esteem, learning from experience, reading and attending courses and training provided by the government. Starting with an average net income of just around RM600 a month, his income has increased to no less than five figures a month. Tuan Haji Ruslin, his wife and colleagues continuously improve their business in quantity and quality.

Today, PTC wholly owns six companies, namely Juara Saji Sdn. Bhd., Pak Tam Katering Sdn. Bhd., Jalinan Madu Sdn. Bhd., Kulit Kayu Manis Enterprise, Ana Boss Enterprise and Jalinan Madu Enterprise. PTC specialises in the food and beverage business, which includes restaurants, cafés, catering, bakeries, retail shops, and food trucks with 14 branches all over Malaysia. It also produces its own products including Kopi Pak Tam, drinking water, and Malay traditional biscuits and cakes. Recently, the company had launched its latest brand, the Pattern Slice; a wonderful line of delicious cakes and pastries for sweet lovers. In addition, the main cooked noodles and frying recipe were also prepared with their own recipe with the ingredients of nasikandar. All the dishes are in the main menu of the restaurant chains and kiosks.

PTC has significantly evolved in serving small functions to serve over 15,000 people in a single event, with the combined expertise of the management team and experienced employees. PTC services are available for all business and private social events and functions, including weddings, corporate events, business luncheons and dinners, open houses, themed parties, private party barbecues and more. PTC’s brand is still unpopular among Malaysians due to lack of exposure or advertising in social media, printed advertisements or electronic advertisements. At the same time, PTC only focused on their few signature foods. Strengthening the product brand has also been very difficult. In other words, PTC is facing constraints in attracting and retaining its customers due to low awareness of the brand, which led to a decreasing number in sales. Therefore, in order to advance the business, they need to invest in promotions and strengthen their brand.

IV. PAK TAM CAFÉ ACHIEVEMENTS

Recently, PTC was awarded a certificate of achievement for successfully acquiring a three-star rating in 2017 under the SME Competitiveness Rating for Enhancement (Retail & Distributive Trade) by SME Corporation Malaysia. Star ratings are assigned to indicate the performance level of a company based on seven-assessment criteria, namely financial strength, business performance, human resource, technology acquisition and adoption, certification and market presence. A three-star rating is awarded to a company that showcases the

uses of technology from semi to fully automated, its ability to implement a quality system, the undertaking of product and process improvements, intellectual properties registered, readiness to export compliance certification and recommend measurements for improvement.

Having achieved a three-star certification from SME, PTC is entitled to various development programmes and financial assistance schemes to enhance the capability and capacity of the company. Apart from offering advisory services relating to the development of the industry, SME Corporation Malaysia also facilitates in developing SMEs through various support programmes aimed at improving their capacity and capabilities, thus enabling them access to international markets. One of the programs which was participated by PTC was the Malaysian Brand. The Malaysian Brand is an accreditation scheme for quality, excellence and distinction of products and services of a collaboration between SME Corporation Malaysia with SIRIM QAS International Sdn. Bhd. Participation in Malaysian companies is evaluated through stringent standards, whereby auditing and monitoring measures are put in place to ensure adherence to the set quality standards. If successful, the products or services will be given the right to carry the national mark of the Malaysian Brand for a period of two years. To retain the mark, auditing and monitoring measures will be done periodically to ensure adherence to the set criteria.

Putrajaya Hospital Cafeteria PTC Branch was also awarded the Certificate of Recognition for Clean, Safe and Healthy (BeSS) by the Ministry of Health Malaysia and was the first cafeteria in Malaysia to receive such recognition. Another PTC branch, the Seremban Hospital Cafeteria Branch, was also recognized by the Ministry of Health Malaysia as the first hospital cafeteria in Malaysia which introduced a healthy menu, which also became a model for hospitals across Malaysia under the Ministry of Health Malaysia.

Besides, PTC enhances its business line by providing restaurant and café, catering and event management, training and consultation and business opportunity for those who interested to join them. Part of that, PTC also provided e-shop or online shop for all foods and drinks.

V. COMPETITORS

The direct competitor of PTC is Ani Sup Utara, while the indirect competitor is Old Town White Coffee. PTC is a local company which is like Ani Sup Utara. Both companies were established as SMEs in Malaysia and are run by local Malaysians. They provide similar dishes which are mainly Malaysian. Ani Sup Utara focuses more on soup-based dishes as its main dish. In comparison, Old Town White Coffee is a global company with numerous branches in Malaysia. In terms of corporate image, it has a strong image in the F&B industry. PTC has a strong corporate image which uses black and red colors to attract consumers to remember their logo. Old Town White Coffee uses a dark brown color scheme which is suitable to create their restaurant's traditional interior design.

PTC has halal certification from JAKIM and offers Malaysian signature dishes and food tastes suitable for Malaysians. They offer a variety of products, which does not only focus on one product and attractive packaging, and they also chose strategic locations. Meanwhile, Ani Sup Utara has its own strengths in which it has more branches and is in urban areas. However, for the indirect competitor, which is Old Town White Coffee, its strengths are in its high market share value in Malaysia and its good franchise system. All of three businesses are located strategically near crowded places or typically in a mall or hospital. This shows that the locations have strengths when opening a store and operating a business.

However, the food that is provided by PTC, Ani Sup Utara and Old Town White Coffee can only withstand one day. If the customer wants to eat the food on another day, they need to opt for takeout and keep it in refrigerators. However, the customers will not experience the same quality as having it on the first day. In addition, they do not operate in a good central kitchen, hence the food taste is different for every branch. Besides that, the weaknesses face by Ani Sup Utara is less advertisements on social media, newspapers and television.

All three businesses stated above have their own opportunities in terms of management and operations. PTC could go global by using its brand, which contrasts with Ani Sup Utara which has not yet had the opportunity to expand globally. This is because they need to establish a strong presence in the Malaysian market. However, Ani Sup Utara has a long-term plan to expand their business into the global market such as in Southeast Asia. In terms of halal certificates, all of three businesses have halal certificates and logo from JAKIM that enable them to run business operations in Malaysia. Halal certificates create confidence for Muslim customers when purchasing food and drinks in the restaurants. In terms of e-commerce, PTC and Old Town White Coffee have implemented extensive processes of adding more product lines to the existing product and introducing a new product mix. This creates more opportunities for these businesses to be well-positioned in the market as consumers always want to know and purchase new products in the market.

The three businesses also face external threats come from their direct and indirect competitors. Hence, they need to craft better marketing strategies to attract their customers. They need to understand and examine the feasibility study about customer demands in choosing their meal.

Ani Sup Utara was identified as the primary competitor for PTC. Ani Sup Utara is the largest restaurant that serves soup in Malaysia. It began operations on 1st July 2003 at Plaza Sentral, Shah Alam, SelangorDarulEhsan. The distributor of Ani Sup Utara is Allahyarham Mr. Hasanuddin bin Ibrahim and Mrs. Rohanibinti Abu. Ani Sup Utara has its own company, namely Little (M) Sdn. Bhd. that was established on 13th June 2005 and was registered under Suruhanjaya Syarikat Malaysia (SSM). Little (M) Sdn. Bhd. manages the chain of Ani Sup Utara restaurants, which has 36 branches throughout Malaysia. The 36 branches consist of 13 restaurants and 23 kiosks at malls and government offices. Ani Sup Utara produces food based on soups such as meat soup, mixed soup, chicken soup, bone soup, gearbox soup and many more. It also serves NasiLemak as a breakfast dish. It is famous for the tagline 'Ingat Sup Ingat Ani Sup Utara'. The pricing strategy is based on the type of soup served to the customer.

The indirect competitor for PTC is Oldtown White Coffee. Oldtown White Coffee was established in 1999. It became the indirect competitor of PTC as Oldtown White Coffee also serves coffee to the customer and they also provide complete meal sets. The products and service offered are quite similar compared to PTC. Both businesses are established by Malaysian entrepreneurs.

VI. RE-PATRONAGE INTENTION

A satisfied customer on the services being provided will highly use the services again. Scholars identified that positive emotions happened when the customer are feel satisfied with the service provided. Abdullah, et al. (2016) said that the positivity felt by the customers will increase re-patronage intention and willingness to recommend to others, in their study. They added that a positive customer feedback are able to influence customers' intentional behaviour. Hellier et al. (2003) defined re-patronage intention as an individual's intention to revisit the same place or service provider again. In addition, Huang, Qiu, Bai, and Pray (2006), knowledge and information concerning the concept of *Shariah* Compliance influences customers' behaviour as they will be exposed with the information on *Shariah* Compliance to have a better picture of it. Therefore, PTC should improve their service quality in order to fulfill customer needs and wants.

VII. MARKETING AND STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP) PRACTICE

7.1 Market Analysis

PTC introduced few new products which can be strategized for online marketing. PTC has its own target market for its new products and services. Many parents are working now, and they are very busy compared to previous generations. Therefore, PTC came out with products that allows customers to prepare food easily, namely food paste, instant food, instant drinks and so on. PTC also provided food delivery for set meals, so busy family can get food through the PTC outlets or online.

7.2 Marketing Strategy

1. Generic Strategy Framework - Product Differentiation

PTC's generic strategy framework is through product differentiation. Consumers are becoming more educated on the benefits of healthier choices (Olayanju, 2019). PTC creates products which offer quality and original taste at optimum prices. PTC plans to add more products to its existing product lines in the future. The market segment for PTC range from kids to the elderly who enjoy traditional Malaysian cuisines. Hence, the traditional Malaysian cuisine served in modern methods is a competitive advantage for PTC.

2. Growth Strategies

PTC has been classifying and upgrading its selected brands to attain optimum standards.

Each brand was re-named according to the customers' market segment in the F&B industry. The cafe's operations in hospitals is known as The Canteen. The Canteen is targeted to customers who are classified in the low to moderate income group. For the branches located along the North-South Expressway (NSE), they had been re-named as The Eatery. The new name better reflects the food court concept for customers who travel long distances. The concept cafe targets customers from moderate to high income segments. The concept cafe used the name "*Tuuu...Dia Pak Tam Cafe*". Another segment is Pak Tam Katering in which the services, appearance, and food quality has been upgraded, and various food choices were added to Pak Tam Katering.

3. Innovation Strategies

The fourth industrial revolution had changed buying behavior and food consumption (McGovern, 2015). The world revolves around the idea of the Internet of Things (IoT). Hence, PTC was also responsive towards the external changes in the environment. The adoption of new technologies such as online purchasing for food products and online payment methods are utilized by PTC. Though food consumption is classified and measured in terms of its actual taste and authenticity, PTC did not hesitate to adapt with the changes in

customers' lifestyles in terms of food consumption. Hence, continuous improvement towards the changes was performed by PTC by delivering both convenience and quality of the food dining experience.

7.3 Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) Practice

Food industry are operating in a highly competitive, global environment and they must constantly engage in product development change of operations to be more lean and agile (Mahalik & Michal, 2008). PTC implemented comprehensive standard operating procedures (SOPs) in their daily operations to make sure that it could manage the quality of foods and beverages offered. Quality products are mandatory to maintain customer satisfaction, increase customer loyalty and increase food safety. The strict and wide-ranging SOP has enabled PTC to cumulatively collect awards from various organizations. For the record, Putrajaya Hospital Cafeteria Branch was awarded the Certificate of Recognition as Clean, Safe and Healthy (BeSS) by the Ministry of Health Malaysia and was the first cafeteria in Malaysia to receive such recognition.

Another PTC branch, the Seremban Hospital Cafeteria Branch, was also recognized by the Ministry of Health Malaysia as the first hospital cafeteria in Malaysia which introduced a healthy menu, which then became a model for hospitals across Malaysia under the Ministry of Health Malaysia. This is the optimistic beginning of PTC towards acquiring ISO 9001.

PTC ensures that the quality of the provided products and services meet the customers' expectations in several ways. Firstly, it developed a comprehensive system, enabling systematic food handling operations and services, which was provided to cover food preparation processes and services. Secondly, it created a guideline and clear expectations on the task given. Thirdly, it introduced an automated way of handling the products and services to move away from human dependency such as a central kitchen where the food is prepared, measured and packed as per the intended quantity and is delivered to each outlet to avoid mishandling of food processing at the outlet itself. A central kitchen is commonly used by companies with limited retail space. By having a central kitchen, PTC reduced the kitchen space and made best use of the retail space. For the task where human resources are unavoidable, PTC recruited capable employees to fill the competency gap. Lastly, PTC also provided comprehensive training to equip the staff on the importance of food and service quality and to ensure the staff are certified to perform the task. At the same time, PTC also enforced procedures that abide the labour law to ensure the required SOPs are correctly followed.

SOPs alone are insufficient to retain the quality of product and services. Therefore, PTC also applied a comprehensive supply chain management system. The adoption of the central kitchen as a part of the business significantly helped to improve PTC's operations and profit. Food preparation time was reduced as most of the dishes were generally prepared in advance at the central kitchen before delivering to the outlets. As such, manpower at the outlets was also reduced and this directly helped to reduce the labour costs. The central kitchen not only prepared food in quantity, but also maintained consistent quality. Therefore, the centralized food service system improved quality, reducing costs and time which resulted in better productivity and increased profit.

Customers nowadays anticipate a company to deliver quality products, otherwise, they will quickly look for alternatives. It is important for an organization to have a deep understanding of consumer behavior (Recordati, 2015). Quality is critical to satisfying the customers and retaining their loyalty so they will continue to buy from PTC in the future. Quality products is an important contribution to long-term revenue and profitability. They also enable PTC to charge and maintain higher prices.

7.4 Brand Management

PTC has expanded to 10 outlets across Malaysia and looks forward to growing even bigger, aiming to be a company with global operations in hospitality and a leader in world class innovations and excellent service through different target customers and food concepts. PTC applied its branding strategy through its corporate image color which is black and red that is eye-catching to attract customers besides their slogan of "*Tak Sedap Bagi Tahu Pak Tam, Sedap Bagi Tahu Kawan*". This simple slogan and corporate image color are retained in the customers' minds through repeated advertisements on brochures, television and radio commercials. However, currently, all PTC outlets carry their logo without standardization on the prices, cafe concept and servicing style. This causes confusion to the customers, especially when the services or the prices do not meet their expectations. To overcome this challenge, PTC attempted to build a stronger brand by classifying the outlets based on the target customer and cost requirement. Brand awareness has a positive influence and significantly strengthen the brand relationships that customers display towards their preferred food (Mackay et al. 2013).

In order to capture the low to moderate income customers, the hospital cafés in Hospital Kuala Lumpur, Hospital Putrajaya and Hospital Titiwangsa were renamed from *Tuuu...Dia Pak Tam* to The Canteen. For the food court concept, outlets like PTC in Tapah Selatan, in Tapah Utara and Ulu Bernam were renamed to The Eatery. PTC in Vista Alam remained as the blueprint outlet that targets moderate to high income consumers. PTC had significantly evolved from serving small functions to serving 15,000 people in a single

event. PTC services are available for all businesses and private social events and functions including weddings, corporate events, business luncheons, dinners, open houses, themed parties, barbecues and more. With this strategy, the brands are defined clearly, and the consumers are clear about what to expect when they visit each outlet (Hargrave, 2019). When PTC classified their outlet based on the target and cost requirement, the consumers can also choose their favorite food at existing outlets. With this classification, PTC can also accurately assess the investment opportunity and place the right brand at the right location (Vkeong, 2019).

PTC is more comprehensive from the marketing perspective. The concept of marketing needs to be widely implemented and analyzed to sustain its. Therefore, there is an urge for PTC to implement new strategies to achieve their goals.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The case study on Pak Tam Cafe provides a more comprehensive look at an example of one of successful Malaysian SME companies from the marketing perspective. The concept of marketing has been widely implemented in analyzing the business in PTC specifically, and Malaysia business in F&B, generally. It also identifies the internal and external issues and challenges faced by PTC to sustain its business by attracting new customers and retaining existing customers. However, PTC needs to implement new strategies which can contribute in achieving the goals.

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