
SERVICES AT RESTAURANTS: EXPECTATION AND SERVICE PERCEPTION OF GUESTS -A CASE STUDY OF RANCHI.

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ABSTRACT

The meal experience for the guest is changing its face and the guest experience of meal starts well before his arrival in the restaurant. Eating out is accepted in the present day more than before. People do not hesitate in spending money if they get the opportunity to eat the food of their choice in the environment of their liking. This increasing demand of restaurant services along with changing customer expectation, with time and place, it has become important to understand the attributes which shape the customer perception of the restaurant service.

This study focuses on the different attributes of Restaurant service from customer view point. The attributes are divided into core and peripheral, depending upon the importance customer lays to them. Based on the findings, the priority given to core and peripheral attributes of the restaurant service by guest is determined. The study is also aimed to find out the expectation and service perception of the customer and the performance of the Restaurant in meeting their expectations. Also, the attributes where there is a significant difference in the customer expectation and service perception are highlighted. The demographic profile of the guests visiting restaurants is also explored to have a better understanding of their preference.

Key Words: restaurant, customer expectation, service perception, eating out experience

Introduction:

Contrary to the popular belief, the meal experience of the guest does not start with entering the restaurant and do not end after leaving it. The meal experience of the guest begins before his/her arrival in the Restaurant. The planning of having a meal in the first class restaurant, the choices, the ambience, the waiter, etc. every aspect forms the part of the perfect meal experience of the guest. To add, even after leaving the restaurant, the conversation regarding the taste of meal, the attribute of waiter, the parking space available, the hygiene, etc. all forms the part of meal experience of the guest.

Oxford Dictionary defines Restaurant as a place where people pay to sit and eat meals that are cooked and served on the premises. It originated from the French word "restaurer" which means 'provide food for'. Wikipedia further elaborates meaning of a restaurant as a place which prepares and serves food, drink and dessert to customers in return for money. Meals are generally served and eaten on premises, but many

restaurant also offers take out and food delivery services. Restaurants vary greatly in appearance and offerings, including a wide variety of the main chef's cuisine and service models. (wikipidea)

Restaurant plays a significant role in our lifestyle, and dining out is a favorite social activity. Everyone needs to eat – so to enjoy good food, and in pleasant surroundings is one of life's pleasures. Eating out has become a way of life for families. Today more meals than ever are being eaten away from home. (John R Walker, 2008) The trend of eating out in Restaurant is increasing in India due to increase in disposable income, double income group and change in life style. Even the adoption of Western culture has increased the demand for Restaurant. Nowadays students, single working male and female, and nuclear family prefer to have night outs in weekend, throw parties on various occasions like promotion, Anniversary, birthday etc in the restaurant. Even the informal business meetings take place in the restaurant. The Private sector employer uses incentive food coupons scheme to motivate their employees and increases the business of Restaurant. Even the shopping malls have introduced restaurants in their premises to attract the customer who come to purchase in the mall.

Feel, thinking, perception and action of the consumers and the society at large keep changing frequently (Phadtare Pushkar T, 2007). This is truer when we speak about Restaurant, a part of vulnerable service sector. The success of the Restaurant depends on the perception of the consumers. More we understand our consumer, more is the chance we can make them happy and turn them into loyal (or regular) customer.

Customer expectations are beliefs about service delivery that function as a standards or reference points against which performance is judged. Since customer compare their perception of service performance after receiving the service, with these reference points for the purpose of service quality evaluation, it is important for the marketers to have full knowledge about customer expectation. (Nene Avinash, 2007). The customer expectation changes with their demographic profile of the guest. The age, education, gender, occupation and income group are the affecting demographic parameters which influence the customer expectations to an extent.

Services are the economic activities that create value and provide benefits for customer at specific times and places as a result of bringing about a desired change in or on behalf of the recipient of services. (Nene, Avinash 2007) In fact services are so varied and diverse that one needs to classify them to identify selected areas which need to be managed strategically. (Shanker, Ravi 2009).

Earlier Research works has elaborated the customer expectation and the performance of restaurant that may lead to customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The studies have identified numerous factors that influence customer satisfaction with the dining experience, including waiting time, quality of service, responsiveness of front line employee, menu variety, food prices, food quality, food quality consistency, ambience of the facilities and convenience. (Gupta, Sachin, et. al., 2007)

In this study, meal experience of the guest is divided into core and peripheral attributes. The core attributes of a meal experience covers the basic desires or prime

expectations of the consumer. This expectation can be in the form of quality of food being served to the time taken to serve this food. On the other hand, peripheral services can be defined as those attributes which are secondary only to the core attributes like location of the restaurant, parking space etc.

Study goal:

1. To prioritize the attributes of restaurant service that motivates the guests to visit a restaurant for a meal experience.
2. To compare the expectation and actual experience of guests for attributes of restaurant service and highlight the attributes where improvement is needed utmost.
3. To study the demographic profile of the guests visiting the restaurants.

Study:

This study was an empirical study based on the primary data collection from the restaurant guests of Ranchi city in the month of March' 11. The survey was restricted to the radius of 5km from the Firayalal Chowk, centre of the Ranchi city, as it has restaurants for different market segments and people of different social and economic status visits them, which could be considered ideal.

First, a study was done to list the ten core and ten peripheral attributes related to restaurant service by Semi structured depth interview method. Second, a pilot survey was done on 35 respondents to know the level of preference given to different attribute by guests. A structured questionnaire was used to rank the attributes of both core and peripheral attributes.

Third, the survey was done on 61 guests of 10 restaurants of Ranchi on Likert scale through a structured questionnaire to know the level of expectation and actual experience of guests for top seven attributes of core and peripheral areas separately. Respondents were drawn on stratified random sampling method. Quantitative and qualitative methods were applied in the study.

Analysis and interpretations

Semi structured depth Interview:

Semi structured Depth interview was conducted with 10 technical experts possessing either more than 5 years of Industry experience or academic experience. The experts were asked about their opinion regarding the core and peripheral attributes of the customer in restaurant service. Their opinion has been analyzed and summarized as under (with no specific order of preference): -

Peripheral Attributes:-

- Cleanliness & hygiene- washroom
- Cleanliness at parking area

- Entrance/ exterior
- Live performance
- Location of restaurant
- Parking charge
- Security at parking
- Service charge at MRP product
- Sufficient parking space
- Value for money

Core Attributes:-

- Ambience
- Attitude of waiter
- Cleanliness of eating area
- Drinking water
- Food quality
- Furniture, crockery, cutlery
- Menu choice
- Music
- Service time
- Waiters knowledge

Pilot study:

The guests were asked to rate peripheral and core service attributes of restaurants on scale of 1 to 5 with 1 representing the least preferred and 5 the most preferred. The descriptive analysis of peripheral attributes (Table- 1) shows the highest mean of 4.51 for security at parking and lowest mean of 2.82 for cleanliness at parking. After security at parking, the other top six attributes of preference are sufficient parking space, cleanliness and hygiene of washroom, location of restaurant, service charge at MRP products, value for money and exterior or entrance. The maximum standard deviation is 0.83 and thus the ranking is reliable.

The high ranking of security at parking and parking space shows that people want to enjoy the meal without the concern of their vehicle. Location of restaurant is at fourth place, which indicates that guests will not mind to drive few kilometers extra if they get preferred facilities at a restaurant. Also, the value for money at sixth place indicates that guests are ready to pay premium price if they get expected service.

Table - 1: Preference for peripheral attributes

Peripheral attributes	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking
security at parking	35	4.51	.65	1
sufficient parking space	35	4.14	.80	2
cleanliness & hygiene-washroom	35	4.11	.79	3
location of restaurant	35	3.97	.74	4
service charge at MRP product	35	3.88	.75	5
value for money	35	3.77	.73	6
entrance/ exterior	35	3.71	.75	7
live performance	35	3.31	.71	8
parking charge	35	3.20	.83	9
cleanliness at parking area	35	2.82	.74	10
Valid N (list wise)	35			

(To check the reliability, Cronbach Alpha was used. The value is 0.786 which indicates the data is reliable and valid.)

The descriptive analysis of core attributes (Table- 2) shows the highest mean of 4.51 for food quality and lowest mean of 2.82 for waiter's knowledge. After food quality, the other top six attributes of preference are service time, drinking water, menu choice, cleanliness of eating area, attitude of waiter and ambience. The maximum standard deviation is 0.80 and thus the ranking is reliable.

The top three priority for food quality, service time and drinking water shows that guests attach more value to their basic requirement. Attitude of waiter at sixth place and waiter's knowledge at tenth place indicates that guests look for well behaved informal environment in restaurant where one can have a free dining experience.

Survey:

To find the significant difference between the expected and actual experience of different attributes of restaurant service Paired Sample Test was done for 14 attributes. The top seven peripheral and the top seven core attributes of restaurant service were taken from the pilot study.

Paired sample test shows (Table- 3) that there is a significant difference between the expected and actual experience of the following attributes:

1. Security at parking
2. Service charge at MRP products

Table - 2: Preference for core attributes

Peripheral attributes	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking
food quality	35	4.51	.65	1
service time	35	4.40	.60	2
drinking water	35	4.25	.74	3
menu choice	35	4.08	.70	4
cleanliness of eating area	35	3.91	.74	5
attitude of waiter	35	3.85	.80	6
Ambience	35	3.71	.75	7
furniture, crockery, cutlery	35	3.34	.68	8
Music	35	3.08	.56	9
waiters knowledge	35	2.82	.74	10
Valid N (list wise)	35			

(To check the reliability, Cronbach Alpha was used. The value is 0.776 which indicates the data is reliable and valid.)

3. Attitude of waiter
4. Sufficient parking space
5. Service time

The result indicates that guests are highly unsatisfied with the service charge at MRP products and delayed service of food. Also, the attitude of waiter, insufficient parking space and security at parking are not up to the expectation of the guests of Restaurants.

The demographic profile of the guests are analyzed (Table - 4) and it was found that guests of age group 30 - 44 years has highest percentage (45.9%) of total restaurant clientele. The second highest percentage (27.87 %) is of 45 – 59 years age group. Whereas guest with the age group of 60 year and above are not interested in visiting restaurant, and are only 1.64 percent of total restaurant clientele.

The service class people hold the highest percentage (44.26 %) among those who visits the restaurants. The second position is jointly held by students and house wives with 22.95% each. However, business class people stand third in their visibility in the restaurant with 9.84 %.

Study revealed that guest in the income group of 36,000-50,000 (monthly) has the highest percentage (55.74%) of total restaurant clientele followed by the income group of 50,000 and above (monthly) with 31.15%.

Table- 3: Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Devia- tion	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	Expected security at parking- Act. Experience security at parking	.459	1.104	.141	.176	.742	3.247	60	.002
Pair 2	Expected service charge at MRP products - Act. Experience charge at MRP products -	.639	.895	.115	.410	.869	5.579	60	.000
Pair 3	Expected attitude of waiter – Act. Experience. attitude of waiter	.541	1.259	.161	.218	.864	3.355	60	.001
Pair 4	Expected sufficient parking space – Act. Experience. sufficient parking space	.525	1.178	.151	.223	.826	3.479	60	.001
Pair 5	Expected service time – Act. Experience. service time	.574	1.040	.133	.307	.840	4.308	60	.000

(To check the reliability, Cronbach Alpha was used. The value is 0.887 which indicates the data is reliable and valid.)

The cross tabulation (Table – 5) of Demographic profile with various restaurant service attributes were done and the two alarming results are:-

- Majority (46%) of the respondent who belonged to the age group of 30-44 years strongly believe that the service time in the restaurant needs to be improved.
- Respondents belonging to the income group of 36,000 to 50,000 (which forms the major clientele of Restaurant) feel strongly that there should be more space for vehicle parking and showed their dissatisfaction with the current availability of parking space.

Table - 4: Demographic Profile

Age of Respondents	Percent	Valid Percent
Under fifteen	11.48	11.48
15-29 years	13.11	13.11
30-44 years	45.90	45.90
45-59 years	27.87	27.87
60 years and above	1.64	1.64
Educational Level		
below 10th	11.48	11.48
10th	8.20	8.20
12th	8.20	8.20
Undergraduate	26.23	26.23
Postgraduate	45.90	45.90
Occupation of Respondents		
service class	44.26	44.26
Student	22.95	22.95
Business	9.84	9.84
house wife	22.95	22.95
Income Group		
20,000-35,000	13.11	13.11
36,000-50,000	55.74	55.74
50,000 and above	31.15	31.15
Gender		
Male	55.74	55.74
Female	44.26	44.26

Table – 5: Cross Tabulation

A – Age of Respondents and Service Time

space for parking					
Age of Respondents	Total Disagree	Percentage	neutral	Total Agree	Percentage
under fifteen	3	4.92	1	1	1.64
15-29years	0	0.00	0	8.00	13.11
30-44years	2	3.28	0	28.00	46.0
45-59years	1	1.64	11	5.00	8.2
60years and above	1	1.64	0	0.00	0.00

B – Income Group and space for parking

space for parking					
Age of Respondents	Total Disagree	Percentage	neutral	Total Agree	Percentage
20,000-35,000	1	1.64	7	0.00	0.00
36,000-50,000	0	0.00	7	27.00	44.26
50,000 and above	0	0.00	2	17.00	27.87

Conclusion and recommendation:

1. The research work has highlighted the core and peripheral attributes of restaurant service. The attributes are ranked in the order of preference of customer in which food quality, service time, drinking water, menu choices and cleanliness of eating area are of prime concern of customer under core attributes. For peripheral attributes the priorities are security at parking, sufficient parking space, cleanliness and hygiene of washroom, location of restaurant and service charge at MRP products.

The Restaurant Management should give more emphasis on the improvisation of the above highlighted core and peripheral restaurant attributes to improve their performance and make their customer satisfied.

2. The expectation of the guest and service perception at restaurant has wide gap in security at parking, service charge at MRP products, attitude of waiter, sufficient parking space and service time.

The Restaurant Management should ensure that steps are taken to fill the above mentioned gap so that customers can be satisfied. If the present gap persists, it will be difficult for them to retain their customers.

3. The demographic profile shows that the service class people with income group of 36,000 – 50,000 (monthly) form h the major part of Restaurant clientele

The Restaurant Management should plan their promotional policies to attract more people from service class with the income group of 36,000 – 50,000 (monthly) to retain their customers. Also, the student segment can be targeted to increase the percentage by discount schemes. Happy hour scheme can also be started for students so that the business of slack period between 3.00 p.m.to 6.00 pm can be increased.

4. The Customer of age group 30 -44 years and from the income group 36,000 -50,000 (monthly) are the major part of Restaurant clientele. However, they are highly dissatisfied with the time taken for service and insufficient parking space.

The Restaurant Management should take necessary steps to retain and satisfy this customer segment, which generate more than 50 % of their revenue.

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