



Review

Matching visitation-motives and restaurant attributes in casual dining restaurants

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ABSTRACT

This study empirically examines the relationship between the visitation motives and attributes evaluation in the casual dining restaurant context. Based on the focus group discussions, the visitation motives and the restaurant attributes that are considered relevant by the patrons in evaluation of restaurant experience were identified. Data on restaurant visitation motives and attributes importance was collected from 316 patrons of casual dining restaurants in India. A nonlinear canonical correlation was performed to examine the relationship between visitation motives and attributes importance. The results reveal that the attribute importance varied across the visitation motives. Managerial implications, limitations and future research directions are also suggested.

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1. Introduction

Customer experience has been identified as a key source of competitive advantage in the restaurant industry. Many researchers have shown that managing restaurant experience is positively related to customer satisfaction (Yüksel and Yüksel, 2002; Ladhari et al., 2008), loyalty (Han and Ryu, 2009), and positive word-of-mouth (Babin et al., 2005). Restaurant experience can be described as the subjective response evoked in an individual based on the interactions (direct or indirect) with the service provider (Meyer and Schwager, 2007). A review of relevant literature reveals that restaurant experience is a multifaceted construct encompassing attributes spanning beyond the food-related aspects. For example, Berry et al. (2002) identified three categories of clues namely functional (e.g., taste), mechanic (e.g., design) and humanic (e.g., employee behavior) in shaping the restaurant experience. Likewise, Namkung and Jang (2008) found food presentation, food taste, seating arrangement, interior design, music, reliable services and employee competency as the key determinants of customer satisfaction. While these studies indicate that different food and nonfood-related attributes contribute to the selection and evaluation of restaurants, researchers have largely ignored the importance of situational factors influencing the customers' evaluation of restaurant experience.

Customers enter into consumption experience of a product or service to meet various goals (Fishbach and Dhar, 2005; Noone and Mattila, 2010). For example, a customer might visit a restaurant to celebrate his promotion with the family or he might want to enjoy a pleasant evening with his/her date. As consumption motives drive customer behavior (Mahatoo, 1989; Assael, 1998), it is plausible that the evaluation of restaurant experience is influenced by the visitation motives. Very few studies have approached the issue of restaurant experience from the motivational perspective (Josiam et al., 2004; Costa et al., 2007). Currently, not much is known about the influence of visitation motives on customers' evaluation of restaurants. As customers often use the product and service attributes to assess restaurant experience (Kivela, 1997; Johns and Pine, 2002), the aim of this study was to fill an important gap by exploring the relationship between visitation motives and restaurant experience.

In line with the above objective, first, this study identifies the attributes that determine restaurant experience in the casual dining setting. Although prior studies have showed food quality, atmospheric elements, service quality, price and value as predictors of customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Sulek and Hensley, 2004; Kim et al., 2009; Ha and Jang, 2010), few studies have related these factors to restaurant experience in the casual dining context. Second, while it was suggested that customers visit restaurants for various reasons (Kivela et al., 2000; Cullen, 2005); few research studies have explicitly studied the motives/purposes in casual dining context. This study seeks to explore the various motives for visiting the casual dining restaurants. Finally, this study examines the potential relationship between visitation motives and the attribute evaluation in the casual dining restaurant context.

The rest of the article is organized as follows. First, relevant literature pertaining to restaurant experience and motives are reviewed. The next section details the two studies, directed toward examining the relationship between motives and attribute importance. Finally, the findings of the study are presented along with the discussions, implications and future research directions.

2. Literature review

2.1. Restaurant experience

Restaurant experience is often linked with the evaluation of restaurant attributes (Johns and Pine, 2002; Park, 2004). The purchase decision is influenced by the customers' evaluation of various attributes in the offering. Thus, the assessment of restaurant experience is determined by the presence of various attributes and the importance these attributes have in the customer's purchase decision (Chen and Hu, 2010). Previous studies have shown that various attributes influence the evaluation of restaurants. Table 1 summarizes the restaurant attributes identified in previous studies. As mentioned in Table 1, attributes ranging from tangible elements such as food and layout (e.g. Johns and Howard, 1998; Chen and Hu, 2010) to intangible elements such as ambience and staff friendliness (Clark and Wood, 1998; Jang et al., 2012) were considered in the selection and evaluation of the restaurants. The differences in the attributes considered by various researchers could be ascribed to the situational factors (fine dining, fast food, or ethnic restaurants) and sample characteristics (e.g. United States, Australia, or UK).

Clark and Wood (1999) identified food range, quality, price, service speed and ambience as important variables while considering the restaurant choice. They found food-related attributes as key determinants of restaurant choice and customer loyalty. Similarly, other researchers have observed the significance of food-related attributes in determining the customer behavior. For example, Jeong and Jang (2011) found that excellent food quality motivates customers to indulge in positive word-of-mouth. Furthermore, other food-related attributes such as nutritional content (Howlett et al., 2009), healthy choice (Namkung and Jang, 2007), menu name (Wansink et al., 2005) and sensory properties (Rozin and Tuorila, 1993) were found to significantly contribute to the restaurant evaluation. It is plausible that since restaurant services are highly experiential, the food-related attributes provide tangible cues for customers to evaluate the restaurant experience.

Menu pricing is a tangible nonfood-related attribute that is often used to communicate restaurant quality. Studies indicate that menu pricing is an important factor contributing to the restaurant experience. Baek et al. (2006) used the conjoint analysis to examine the role of brand name, menu price, food-related factors, and service and hygiene-related factors in the evaluation of fast food restaurants. Results from analysis of Korean and Filipino college studies revealed that menu price significantly influenced the choice of fast-food restaurants. It was argued that menu price acts as a pre-purchase signal for the expected restaurant quality. Consequently, customers use menu price to adapt and evaluate the restaurant experience (Hardesty et al., 2007).

The restaurant environment is another critical factor that determines the restaurant experience. The restaurant environment includes physical, social and ambient dimensions (Baker, 1986). The physical dimension covers the restaurant layout, architecture, seat space and table setting. The social dimension consists of the service personnel and customers. The ambient dimension covers the atmospheric elements of the restaurants. Liu and Jang (2009) in their study examined the key environmental elements determining customer behavioral intentions. The results show that environmental elements such as interior design, ambience, and spatial layout influence customer emotions. Further, the visible environmental and human elements significantly influenced perceived value. Previous researchers have examined the role of other environmental elements including atmospherics (Ha and Jang, 2010), music (Sullivan, 2002), dining equipment (Ryu and Jang, 2007), servicescape (Kim and Moon, 2009) and scent (Guéguen and

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