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MEASURING SERVICE QUALITY PERCEPTIONS OF THE CUSTOMERS OF RESTAURANTS IN PAKISTAN

Abstract: This study aims to descriptively analyze different service quality attributes and ranking of services in renowned and successful restaurants. A sample of 407 customers of 10 reputed restaurants was gathered, operating in vicinity of twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi of Pakistan, using a bilingual survey instrument to measure service quality perceptions of customers. Five service quality attributes of restaurant staff, tips, tangibles, convenience, and food quality were used and their relationship with overall satisfaction was measured. Besides, key reasons to visit a restaurant were also inquired. Majority of the participants was comprised of private sector employees and students. Results of current study will be beneficial for the restaurants' managers in knowing customers evaluations and formulating future strategies accordingly.

Keywords: service quality, customers satisfaction, restaurants, Pakistan

1. Introduction

The restaurant industry has witnessed diversified changes and fierce competition overtime. This has fostered its consumers to become more sophisticated, value and price conscious, demanding and thus switch swiftly to other alternatives in case of a single dodgy experience. Earlier if the restaurants were more focused on food quality and taste, but now have to pay equal attention to other important factors like serving, atmosphere, interior decorations, tangibles, and location etc. Restaurants in order to offer the right service become bound to seek feedback directly from their consumers fortimely awareness of their changing expectations and evaluation of their services. Furthermore, if the objective earlier was to attract potential customers, but now it's becoming rather difficult to retain the existing consumers.

In Pakistan, in the urban areas there is a growing trend of visiting restaurants with families, colleagues, and friends. At different occasions hosts also prefer to bring guests to restaurants rather than serving them at home because of better food taste, pleasant atmosphere, affordable price and good service which again is contrary to local tradition of domestic hospitality. Though restaurants use different marketing tactics to attract new customers but in this industry a positive word-of-mouth publicity plays a more convincing role as a disgruntled customer becomes a saboteur, dissuading other potential customers away from a particular service provider (Andaleeb and Conway, 2006). There is also a growing trend of opening franchised branches which encounter comparatively lower chances of failure as compared to commencing a new

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restaurant with a new identity. This study thus has endeavored to observe different service related factors which play pivotal role in customers' satisfaction.

This article has been organized in the following manner. After introduction section, an extensive literature review is narrated in which different scales used to measure service quality in restaurants and empirical findings of international and local researchers are discussed. The research methodology and the empirical analysis arepresented next, followed by discussion and conclusion. In the final section, limitations anddirections for future research are provided.

2. Literature review

SERVQUAL scale was the result of first conceptual model to measure service quality developed by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985). SERVQUAL is an instrument to measure the gap between the expectations and perceptions of customers by subtracting the former from the latter. In its development, consumers rated more than hundred aspects of service, which researchers divided into ten categories/dimensions. For data collection a bank, acredit card company, a repair and maintenance company and a long-distancetelephone company were approached. These items were further narrowed down to 31 and dimensions to 5 namely reliability, assurance, responsiveness, tangibles and empathy (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). This instrument was again refined by using it in five different customer samples and by comparing findings with those of other researchers who used SERVQUAL instrument (Parasuraman *et al.,* 1991). Bojanic and Rosen (1994) measured service quality using the original SERVQUAL instrument in restaurants. SERVQUAL also received some serious criticism due to some theoretical and functional outcomes (Carman, 1990; Finn and Lamb, 1991; Brown *et al.*, 1993; Buttle,

1996). Cronin and Taylor (1992 and 1994) proposed SERVPERF as a substitute to SERVQUAL which only covers performance/satisfaction aspect of service not expectations and which was supported by many researchers (Churchill and Boller, 1992). Fonseca *et al.* (2010) shown how to improve service quality and customer satisfaction in public transport.

Some researchers later developed service quality scales especially with respect to restaurant industry. DINESERV was the first survey instrument used to measure factors of restaurant importance (expectations Vs actual performance) developed (Stevens *et al.*, 1995) using five attributes of service namely assurance, empathy, reliability, responsiveness, and tangibles. (Raajpoot, 2002) developed TANGSERV scale having more focus on certain aspects of tangibles, which he believed were missed in DINESERV scale. DINESCAPE was a six-factor scale consisting of facility aesthetics, ambience, lighting, service product, layout, and social factors and was developed (Ryu and Chang, 2008) mainly related to physical environment of upscale restaurants. (Antun *et al.*, 2010) developed DinEx scale which took domains of food, service and atmosphere and added two new dimensions of social connectedness and healthfulness to the model. Kafel and Sikora (2013) described results of research that had been conducted in small and medium companies in polish food sector. The aim of the research was to examine connection between usage of quality management tools and methods and financial performance. In another paper (Kafel *et al.*, 2013) shown the planning in integration of management systems in polish organizations in food sector.

Bojanic and Rosan (1994) used a SERVQUAL instrument to measure service quality in a chain restaurant and used two questionnaires to measure expectations and perceptions separately for gap analysis. Expectations were found higher in all service attributes from perceptions and in regression out of five service attributes namely

tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and knowing the customers, only assurance, reliability and knowing the customers were found significant. Researchers were of the view that consumers must be better educated about the service so that they will have realistic expectations.

Soriano (2001) examined four attributes namely quality of food, quality of service, cost/value of meal and the place which influence customers' decisions to make a revisit for another meal in Spanish restaurants. A ten-item questionnaire was used and a final sample of 3,872 customers was used for analysis. Quality of food was the most important factor followed quality of service, cost/value of meals and then the place to return to a restaurant. Similarly (Sulek and Hensley, 2004) found food quality as the only one of nine factorsbeing tested that had a significant effect on intent toreturn for 239 diners at an Irish-pub-style full-servicerestaurant in the southeastern United States followed by dining atmosphere and seating-order fairness.

Andaleeb and Conway (2006) used a rather different approach for data collection from restaurant customers. From telephone directory around 600 contacts were randomly selected and were sent survey questionnaires along with postage paid envelopes which returned with only 85 (14%) response rate. To increase the response rate above 100, 34 restaurant users were interviewed to make the total sample reach 119. Four service attributes namely responsiveness, tangibles, food quality and price were used and their effect on satisfaction was measured. In research findings, tangibles (physical design & appearance) was found insignificant. Responsiveness had the greatest impact on customer satisfaction followed by food quality and price respectively.

In Pakistan a very short empirical literature is available about customers' satisfaction with respect to service quality of restaurants industry. Khan and Shaikh (2011) studied relationship of two variables namely tangibles and responsiveness with customers' satisfaction and used contents of SERVQUAL and DINESERV for survey instrument. Data was gathered from 400 respondents from one federal capital and three provincial capitals of Pakistan. Responsiveness was found having a more significant relationship with customer satisfaction as compared to tangibles. (Ehsan, 2011) carried out research in three metropolitan cities of Pakistan about customers satisfaction with fast-food restaurants. A final sample 447 customers was used for analysis and results showed that the customers considered price, variety of food, promotional deals and timely service as the important factors for the selection of fast food restaurants.

3. Research methodology

Methodology

This study aims to measure and observe customers satisfaction from the quality of services received from restaurants. Around 500 questionnaires were distributed in 10 restaurants operating in twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, 50 questionnaires in each restaurant using convenience sampling approach. Feedback of 423 respondents was received. A final sample of 407 respondents was used for data analyses after deleting incomplete questionnaires, representing aneffective response rate of 81.4%.

Study was of cross sectional nature and data was collected from frequent visits to each restaurant and in different time slots (during lunch & dinner). Restaurants were selected cautiously on the basis of brand, experience and reputation. For data collection,first a formal permission was sought from the restaurant management and they were provided the questionnaires in envelopes. Management distributed and received filled questionnaires from respondents themselves. Feedback was purely on voluntary basis and

was sought when customers were given their bills after complete serving.

Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using IBM SPSS 19. For analysisboth regression and descriptive analyses were made. Correlation and regression were used to measure nature and strength of relationship of different services offered by the respective restaurants (Independent variables) and overall satisfaction of customers (Dependent variable). In descriptive analyses, bar diagram was used for reason(s) to visit that particular restaurant and ranking of services from satisfaction perspective wasobserved. Data was carefully scrutinized through data screening. Wrong entries and outliers were rectified and missing values were treated using mean.

Measures & Hypotheses

The questionnaire used in this study was newly designed in which all the contents of the questionnaire were developed with an extensive consultation and guidance of some restaurant managers, their customers and literature. Before the questionnaire was finalized, four restaurant managers in full-service restaurants and one academic marketing senior faculty member reviewed the questionnaire for content validity. A small level pilot study was also carried out of around 60 customers from two restaurants to check the reliability, weaknesses and outcomes of the questionnaire.

Five service quality attributes of restaurant staff, tips, tangibles, convenience, and food quality were developed and their relationship with overall satisfaction was measured, details of which are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Operational definitions of independent and dependent variables

Variables	Operational definitions
Overall satisfaction	Satisfaction received from the overall quality of service provided to customers; the food quality; revisit intentions and recommending it to others.
Restaurant Staff	Refers to customers satisfaction with subject to staff attitude, behavior, courtesy, responsiveness, and appearance etc.
Tips	It includes whether tips are expected by the staff and that whether service quality is effected by tips or otherwise.
Tangibles	This section includes tangible facilities provided by the restaurant like appropriate parking, modern looking and visually appealing equipment and building and comfortable/hygienic environment etc.
Convenience	Includes convenience in terms of access to restaurant, necessary arrangements of disabled customers/children, resolving complaints and queries.
Food Quality	Refers to taste, quality, and freshness of meals and about variety of menu.

On the basis of above five types of services, five hypotheses were developed and their impact of overall satisfaction was measured.

H1. The better the overall service of staff, the higher the level of customers' overall satisfaction is.

H2. The higher the tips rewarded are, the higher the level of customers' overall satisfaction is.

H3. The better the tangibles are provided, the higher the level of customers' overall satisfaction is.

H4. The better the convenience is, the higher the level of customers' overall satisfaction is.

H5. The better the food quality is, the higher the level of customers' overall satisfaction is.

Questionnaire was bilingual in nature (Urdu and English) keeping into consideration the lingual convenience of respondents. Each questionnaire carried statement expressingthe purpose of the study, guaranteeing confidentiality, and emphasizing the voluntarynature of the study.

Questionnaire was comprised of three sections. Section-1 (32 items/questions) and 2 (5 items) sought feedback about service quality attributes and overall satisfaction respectively using five point Likert Scale ranging from 5=strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree for section-I and 5=very much to 1=very less for section-II. Whereas Section-3 sought demographic information of respondents asking nine questions related to gender, age, income, marital status, occupation, qualification, frequency of visit and preference to visit with.

Total number of respondents were 407 in which male were 270 (66.3%) and female 137 (33.7%) of the total. Majority of the respondents fall in age group of 18-24 (50.1%) and least in age less than 18 (2.5%). On the basis of marital status, majority of respondents were single (65.6%) followed by married (33.9%) and engaged (0.5). A question about respondents monthly income was raised in which majority opted not applicable option (38.8%). According to employment status, majority were employee of private firms (34.6%) followed by students (32.2%). Education wise majority of respondents were holding bachelors degree (45.7%) followed by masters (41.5%). According to frequency of visit to this particular question, majority of respondents visit this particular restaurant once a month (46.4%). Majority of visitors opts to visit restaurants with friends (48.4%) and family (43.7%).

Results

Demographic results are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic details

Demographic Variables	Restaurants ($n = 10$)	
	f	%
Participants	407	100%
Gender		
Male	270	66.3
Female	137	33.7
Age in years		
Less than 18	10	2.5
18-24	204	50.1
25 - 34	121	29.7
35 - 44	49	12.0
Above 45	23	5.7
Marital Status		
Single	267	65.6
Married	138	33.9
Engaged	2	0.5

Monthly Income (Rs.)

Less than 25,000	32	7.9
25,001 - 30,000	36	8.8
30,001 - 40,000	39	9.6
40,001 - 50,000	53	13.0
50,001 - 60,000	40	9.8
60,001 and above	49	12.0
Not Applicable	158	38.8

Occupation

Employee (Public)	40	9.8
Employee (Private)	141	34.6
Own Business	46	11.3
Retired	5	1.2
Unemployed	5	1.2
House Wife	32	7.9
Student	131	32.2
Other	7	1.7

Education

Middle/Secondary	1	0.2
Matriculation	11	2.7
Intermediate	31	7.6
Bachelor	186	45.7
Masters	169	41.5
Other	9	2.2

Frequency of visit

More than once a week	59	14.5
Once a week	112	27.5
Once a month	189	46.4
Once a year	47	11.5

Preference to visit restaurant with

Friends	197	48.4
Family	178	43.7
Alone	23	5.7
Official/Colleagues	9	2.2

Figure 1 depicts information about reason(s) to visit that particular restaurant. According to results majority gives highest weightage to location (25.8%) followed by environment and service quality each (22.1%), food quality (19.9%), price (12.8%), others (5.4%), interior (4.7%), play area for children (3.9%) and parking (1.7%).
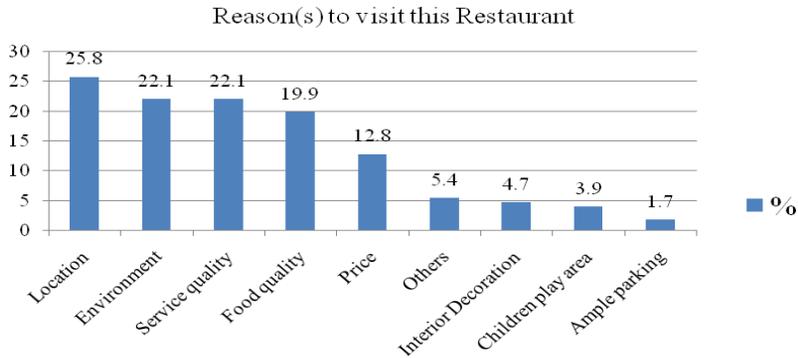

Figure 1. Reason(s) to visit this restaurant

Table 3 displays correlation results along with number of items in each variable, Cronbach Alpha results, and Mean scores. Alpha scores range from 0.648-0.879 which are within acceptable range (Sekaran, 2006). Highest means scores was found of food quality (3.80) and least of Tips (3.26). Correlation results of all variables were positive and significant except of Tips, whose relationship was insignificant with restaurant staff, food quality and overall satisfaction. High correlation was observed between restaurant staff and tangibles (0.667) (p=0.01).

Table 3. Cronbach Alpha, Means and Correlation Coefficients Results

No.	Variables	No. of Items	Alpha α	M
1	Restaurant Staff	13	0.879	3.66
2	Tips	2	0.648	3.26
3	Tangibles	9	0.839	3.59
4	Convenience	4	0.694	3.60
5	Food Quality	4	0.783	3.80
6	Overall Satisfaction	5	0.775	3.76
Correlation Coefficients				
1	2	3	4	5	6
1					
0.047	1				
0.667**	0.140**	1			
0.529**	0.114*	0.587**	1		
0.456**	0.013	0.485**	0.432**	1	
0.561**	0.047	0.592**	0.456**	0.649**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Model summary, ANOVA and multiple regression results are given in Table 4 which show that the multiple regression coefficient (R), using all the predictors simultaneously, is 0.736 (R2 = 0.542) and the adjusted R2 is 0.536, meaning that 54% of the variance in overall satisfaction can be predicted by the independent variables (restaurant staff, tips, tangibles, convenience, and food quality). Independence of error terms was checked via Durbin-Watson which resulted 1.880, a value which fell between 1.5 and 2.50 and was found significant at p<0.001 indicating values are independent. Model was found significant (p<0.001), F=94.842 indicating that regression model fitted the data well and that there existed a significant relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable.

Table 4. Regression Coefficients

	Standardized coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
	β	t	Sig.	TV	VIF
(Constant)		3.994	0.000		
Restaurant Staff	0.188	3.978	0.000	0.510	1.962
Tips	-0.004	-0.117	0.907	0.970	1.031
Tangibles	0.239	4.746	0.000	0.452	2.213
Convenience	0.029	0.661	0.509	0.601	1.664
Food Quality	0.435	10.829	0.000	0.709	1.410

$R^2 = 0.542; \Delta R^2 = 0.536; F = 94.842; p<0.000;$ Durbin Watson = 1.880

Dependent Variable: Overall Satisfaction

In regression results, Multicollinearity was not found as all the tolerance values (TV) were above 0.10 and all VIF (variance inflation factor) values were below 10 (Neter and Wasserman, 1974). Among five independent variables, three were found significant i.e. restaurant staff (β=0.19, t=3.987, p<0.001), tangibles (β=0.24, t=4.746, p<0.001), and food quality (β=0.44, t=10.829, p<0.001). According to beta weights results, strongest relationship was observed of food quality (β=0.44) whereas negative and lowest score was of tips (β=0.004). So hypotheses 1, 3 and 5 are retained whereas hypotheses 2 and 4 are rejected. These results also conform to the studies of (Soriano, 2001; Sulek and Hensley, 2004; Raajpoot, 2002),where food quality was the most important predictoramong others.

As far as negative aspect of Tips is concerned, it varies from culture to culture. According to Lynn (2001), restaurateurs rely on tips to (1) motivate servers to deliver goodservice, (2) measure server performance,and (3) identify dissatisfiedcustomers. Customers give bigger tips when they get better services (Snyder, 1976; Speer, 1997) but very often people also feel strong social pressure to tip 15 to 20 percent of the bill sizewhich prevents them from leaving a small tip even when they are dissatisfied with the service (Lynn & Grassman, 1990). In our study tipsshowed negative and insignificant relationship with customers overall satisfaction in regression (β=0.004; t=-0.117; p=0.907) (Table 4) and overall lowest mean score (3.26) (Table 3) and also received lowest means scores too in ranking of services (Table 5) where services are not provided properly without tips received lowest mean score of 3.09 and of

restaurant staff expects tips (3.43). These results indicate that customers have to award tips to get a better service and they give it even when they are not satisfied with the service. Participant restaurants were reputed ones and had majority of customers belonging to middle and upper class only, so restaurant managers need to realize this aspect of tips too which is perceived in a negative manner by their customers.

Convenience was the other independent variable that failed to predict significant relationship with overall satisfaction in regression results (β=0.029; t=0.661; p=0.509). The items included in this variable were related to easy access to restaurant, resolving guests' complaints quickly, facilities for disabled persons, and easy access to restaurant information and facilities. Among these, facilities for disabled persons received lowest mean score (3.48) along with restaurant good in resolving customers' complaints (3.57) which shows that restaurants lack of arrangements for disabled persons and don't

taking seriously customers complaints cause low satisfaction of customers.

Ranking of services from satisfaction perspective was measured using mean scores showing ten services each in ascending and descending order (Table 5). Customers ratedconsistent food quality, its fresh and hot serving, consistent good taste, correct order delivery the very first time followed by restaurant comfortable and hygienic environment and caring staff as the most satisfactory services. Here majority of customers agree that best satisfaction they received from their favorite restaurant was from its food consistent quality and taste followed by other aspects of services (tangible/intangibles) offered by the restaurant.

Among the services which were rated unsatisfactory included services not provided properly without tips followed by over-crowded restaurants, insufficient parking area, tips expected by the staff, and no facility for disabled persons etc.

Table 5. The ranking of services from satisfaction perspective

Descending Order	M	M	Ascending Order
The quality of food is consistent	3.84	3.09	Services are not provided properly without tips
Food served by restaurant is always hot/fresh	3.83	3.39	Restaurant is never over crowded
The food is tasty	3.80	3.40	Sufficient parking area is available in the restaurant
Order delivery is performed correctly the first time	3.80	3.43	Restaurant staff expect tips
Restaurant has comfortable environment	3.77	3.48	Restaurant provides convenience for disabled guests
Restaurant has hygienic environment	3.76	3.52	Building of restaurant is visually appealing
The staff is caring	3.75	3.55	Services provided are prompt
The menu has large variety of meals/refreshments/desserts	3.75	3.55	Toilet facilities are clean
Cleanliness is maintained throughout the facility	3.74	3.57	Restaurant is good in resolving guest complaints and compensating for the inconveniences
Access to the restaurant is easy	3.69	3.58	Rules and regulations are strictly maintained

4. Conclusion

In this study relationship of independent variables of restaurant staff, tangibles and food quality was found significant with overall satisfaction of customers, the dependent variable, whereas other two variables tips and convenience failed to make any significant contribution. Tips showed negative and insignificant relationship in regression results which means that tips expectations from the staff and its connection with good service creates a negative impression on customers. Besides tips, convenience also showed insignificant relationship and some of its items also received low mean scores in ranking of services. In descriptive results, respondents rated location, service quality, environment and food quality the key reasons to visit that particular restaurant. In ranking of services from satisfaction perspective, customers ranked food quality, freshness, and taste followed by restaurant environment and caring staff as most satisfactory services, whereas services which were rated unsatisfactory included services not provided properly without tips followed by over-crowded restaurants, insufficient parking area, tips expected by the staff, and no facility for disabled persons etc.The restaurant managers thus need to pay attention to service quality attributes that educe customer satisfaction as well as disheartens customers to make a revisit.

5. Research limitations & future research

There are certain limitations associated with this research that needs to be addressed especially generalizability. First, only selected numbers of restaurants were approached for data collection in which there were ample chances that their customers representonly a particular segment of society not all. Second, scope of research was limited as the data was collected from twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi only, so results cannot be applied conclusively to the whole restaurant sector of Pakistan. Third, though a bilingual questionnaire was used for participants' lingual convenience (Urdu and English), but again sometimes exact and accurate translation is not possible. Fourth, the data was collected once during a year and in the autumn season and it took around two to three weeks in data collection, so had the data collected during other seasons, the results could have been different. For future research, it is suggested that a more comprehensive study should be carried out including restaurants of other cities to enhance generalizability of results. Furthermore, the aspect of expectations should be included too at the time of arrival as in this study only perceptions were inquired after complete service.

Annexure: The Service Quality Instrument (Section I & II)using five-point Likert Scale

Independent Variables
(Strongly Agree…………Strongly Disagree)

1. Restaurant Staff

A1.　The staff is caring
A2.　Restaurant staff is helpful
A3.　The staff is responsive to customers' needs
A4.　The staff respond immediately when called
A5.　Services provided are prompt
A6.　The staff is courteous/disciplined/well trained
A7.　Order delivery is performed correctly the first time

A8.   I receive adequate information about the menu of the restaurant
A9.   The staff is willing to answer any questions
A10.   The staff has a clean appearance
A11.   Cleanliness is maintained throughout the facility
A12.   Rules and regulations are strictly maintained
A13.   Toilet facilities are clean

2. Tips

B1.   Services are not provided properly without tips
B2.   Restaurant staff expect tips

3. Tangibles

C1.   The restaurant has modern looking equipment
C2.   Sufficient parking area is available in the restaurant
C3.   Restaurant has comfortable environment
C4.   Restaurant has hygienic environment
C5.   Restaurant is never over crowded
C6.   Restaurant has good sitting arrangement
C7.   Building of restaurant is visually appealing
C8.   Equipment of restaurant is visually appealing
C9.   Materials associated with service (e.g., crockery) are visually appealing

4. Convenience

D1.   Access to the restaurant is easy
D2.   Restaurant is good in resolving guest complaints and compensating for the inconveniences
D3.   Restaurant provides convenience (necessary arrangements) for disabled guests
D4.   It is easy to get information about the facilities and services of the restaurant

5. Food Quality

F1.   Food served by restaurant is always hot/fresh
F2.   The menu has large variety of meals/refreshments/desserts
F3.   The quality of food is consistent
F4.   The food is tasty

Overall Satisfaction (Dependent Variable)
(Very Much…….....Very Less)
G1.   Overall, how much satisfied are you with the service quality of this restaurant?
G2.   Overall, how much you like the food quality of this restaurant?
G3.   Your intentions to return to this restaurant in future?
G4.   Extent to which this restaurant matches your expectations?
G5.   Chances to recommend this restaurant to others?

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