

THE EFFECT OF FOOD AND SERVICE QUALITY ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY IN UZBEK ETHNIC RESTAURANTS

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Abstract. The aim of this thesis was to investigate the relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in Uzbekistan ethnic restaurants in South Korea. A questionnaire based survey was distributed randomly to diners in Uzbek restaurants in Seoul and other cities in Korea. Service quality was measured in terms of SERVQUAL attributes. The key dimensions of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty were identified through literature. The data collected (285 valid questionnaires) were analysed using SPSS and Stata. The findings indicates that service quality influence positively to customer satisfaction. Furthermore, customer satisfaction has a positive effect on customer loyalty. The small size of the sample is the main limitation of this study. The practical implications of this study are founded on the fact that Uzbek ethnic restaurants in South Korea should realize the significant role of service quality in satisfying their customers and making them loyal.

Keywords: service quality, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, Uzbekistan ethnic restaurants

Ethnic restaurants do not always serve as food establishments, but also serve as ambassadors for culture, which hand over foreign food and culture to local customers (Wood & Munoz, 2007). Ethnic restaurants may function as a sole contact with foreign cultures for most of the local consumers, so that, authenticity may be a sign in the ethnic restaurant segment (Wood & Munoz, 2007). Food can serve as a penetration in foreign cultures and impede cultural barriers (Cook, 1997).). Among the different cultural factors food represents national identity, it is a generic term, since food itself can be a cultural symbol (Edles, 2004). Usually, in ethnic restaurants food is a natural piece of the culture, and it creates a uniqueness to separate the restaurant from its competitors but also presents a temptation for customers who are looking for and from ordinary dining (Ebster & Guist, 2004; Lego et al., 2002). Food can be defined as a part of a country's culture and at the same time represent this culture, respectively, products from other countries can attract foreigners with unique and sometimes exotic characteristics reflecting the country's culture, this uniqueness and difference are often called "authenticity". Customers in other countries can distinguish important elements of ethnic products from the local cuisine (Chandon et al.,2000; Peabody, 1985; Leclerc

In the restaurant industry service quality and food quality are important. In a highly competitive restaurant industry, dedicated service and high-quality food can attract regular customers and this is critical to business success. Perception and evaluation of the customers is totally based on service delivering (Ha & Jang 2010). Understanding the factors that influence customer satisfaction and loyalty requires that restaurants determine the quality of service and their relationship with customer loyalty (Namkung et al., 2011). Previous researches have highlighted the importance of quality of service and food in the restaurant industry, supporting that perceptions of quality have a significant impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Olsen, 2002). High-quality service improves customer satisfaction and provides measurable long-term benefits in terms of market share and profitability (Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann, 1994). High-quality services for employees caused a higher level of customer satisfaction, which, leads to a higher level of positive consumer behavior, such as returning, positive word of mouth, or recommending the restaurant to others (Chow et al., 2000; Cronin et al., 2000). Uzbeks are famous for their hospitality, that is, being polite and kind to everyone is a unique inheritance from their ancestors, so that Uzbek restaurants are mentioned with high-quality service and servers. Along the same lines, food quality has also been a significant element as service quality in customer' dining experiences that impact customer satisfaction and future behavior (Kivela et al., 2000; Namkung & Jang, 2007). Perceived quality and customer satisfaction/ loyalty have long been recognized as playing a crucial role for success and survival in today's competitive market. Considerable research has been conducted these concepts, the concepts of quality and satisfaction were linked to the intentions of the client's inspirations, such as the desire to make a purchase and loyalty, to spread positive referrals by word of mouth and complaints of many researchers (Olsen, 2002; Kang, Nobuyuki & Herbert, 2004). Many pieces of research have studied moderating, mediating and behavioral consequences between customer satisfaction, perceived value, and behavioral intentions. However mixed results were obtained.

For more than three decades, academics have been interested in the concept of customer satisfaction because customers are main source of revenue. For customer loyalty, satisfaction is crucial precondition, which is in turn a primary driver of the improvement of profit and performance (Reichheld, 1993; Heskett et al., 1997). According to Choi and Chu (2001) satisfaction is customer's assessment that is customers' expectations should be at least as good as the quality of food and service they have received. Consistent with this view, customer satisfaction is identified as an emotional response, that comes from a cognitive process of

evaluating the service received against the price of obtaining the service (Rust & Oliver, 1994). The primary fundament for success in restaurant industry is providing high quality service and food it influence customers to be satisfied and loyal (Namkung et al., 2011). Loyal customers plays main role in the growth of the restaurant (Chen & Myagmarsuren, 2013). The results of various studies have been proved that there is an established correlation between customer satisfaction and loyalty (Rauyruen & Miller, 2007; Hennig-Thurau et al.,).

Previously many researches have been examined service quality, food quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty. This study used an ethnic restaurant segment as a research center, because customers visit an ethnic restaurant not only to eat food but also to enjoy other nations' culture through the dining environment and exotic products of ethnic restaurants. Sloan (2011) referred that in the U.S. ethnic foods developed in four levels: exotic, narrow, expanding and mainstream. This study chose the Uzbek ethnic restaurant segment because it belongs to the "narrow" stage. Even though Uzbek ethnic restaurants accessible in many parts of Korea, Uzbek food remains unfamiliar to many Koreans. They can easily experience Uzbek food because most of the ingredients of Uzbek food are available in Korean cuisine. Even though Uzbek restaurants can only attract Central Asian (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) customers, firstly the number of Uzbekistan restaurants is really few and the competition between Uzbek restaurants is so slow. And the quality of service is various according to their situated city in Korea.

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction, as well as the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. In this study service quality dimensions (tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy) would have a positive effect on customer satisfaction, according to this study hypotheses H1a, H2b, H3c, H4d, H5e service quality dimensions were found to influence customer satisfaction positively in Uzbekistan ethnic restaurants. Izogo and Ogba (2015) and Al-Tit (2015) also found the same results in terms of SERVQUAL results they also found that SERVQUAL dimensions have positive influence on customer satisfaction. According to the results of this study, Uzbekistan Restaurant managers and employee should focus on assurance and empathy dimensions more because they explain satisfaction in a low percentages than other dimensions (tangible, reliability, responsiveness). Furthermore, this study examined the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, as mentioned above. Having a look on Hypothesis 6 this study proposed that customer satisfaction influence positively to customer loyalty.

This study can make contribution in understanding the significance of service quality in Uzbekistan restaurants, if they improve the quality of service with paying attention little elements, they can make customers satisfied and customers distribute positive word of mouth, and Uzbekistan ethnic restaurants can make loyal customers.

This study examines service quality dimensions (tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy) have positive effect on customer satisfaction, the analysis indicates that tangible reliability and responsiveness highly influence on customer satisfaction, but overall all five dimensions significantly effect on customer satisfaction, having a look on previous researches Dedeoglu and Demirer (2015) and Zamil, Areiqat and Tailakh (2012) all found the same results. In contrast, Qin, Prybutok and Zhao (2010) found that only three dimensions tangibles, reliability and responsiveness were prominent attributes. These above mentioned previous research results make to grasp the significance of this study results.

In terms of the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, this study proposed Hypothesis 6 that is customer satisfaction influence customer loyalty positively. According to previous research results Ahmad Al-Tit (2015) and Danish et al. (2012) have found the same results. Finally, this study is successful to contribute to restaurant industry by successfully performing the theoretical and conceptual examination on the effect of five dimensions of service quality on satisfaction and effect of satisfaction on customer loyalty.

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