

Underlying dimension of customer delight in the restaurant industry: An exploratory factor analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to develop a customer delight framework for a restaurant in Davao City. The study comprises the following: 1) profile of the respondents; 2) customer delight factors as perceived by the respondents; and 3) underlying factors that characterize customer delight in a restaurant. The study was exploratory and used both qualitative and quantitative approaches; thus, a sequential mixed-method research design was necessary. The study was conducted using primary data. Focus group discussions were first initiated involving six regular diners and another six restaurant employees. A systematic sampling technique in choosing the respondents was applied in the survey phase. A total of 225 diners participated in the study. Results were processed through frequency count and percentages, weighted mean, and exploratory factor analysis. Additionally, predetermined dimensions of customer delight were presented to check the respondent perception of customer delight in the context of a restaurant in Davao City. The result revealed that diners were highly delighted regarding the value-for-money experience, branding, location, ambiance, menu, service quality, food quality, and responsiveness. Five factors were extracted from the 40 items submitted for exploratory factor analysis. However, one factor was excluded from the factor structure identifications due to item isolation issues. The four factors that characterize customer delight in Davao City are product and service quality, marketing strategy, customer focus, and differentiation.

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1. Introduction

Delightful experiences in dining are indeed an essential consideration for any restaurant. Providing great customer goods and services stimulates customer inclination towards the firm and its services. Many food and service attributes, such as food quality and value, can enhance or diminish the dining experience. With this, restaurateurs have to ensure that they maintain their customers' satisfaction and loyalty, surprising them on every visit to the restaurant (Reichheld, 1993; Berry, 2000).

In the ever-changing market environment, today's food service providers must prioritize understanding the market to retain and sustain

strategic advantage in the highly competitive food service industry (Abdullah et al., 2013). This industry is considered the fastest-growing industry in the global market (Sahota, 2009) and players in the industry describe it as being in the middle of a perfect storm (Headey et al., 2010). The changes in consumer bearings and behavior and the general business environment have generated new and demanding problems for food service. These conditions entail quickly flexible food service designs, new items, service methods, operation, and atmosphere. Despite restaurants' rapid growth and popularity, their profit margins are very slight, ranging from four to seven percent. Moreover, as in other service industries prominently influenced by the economic environment, restaurant managers cannot be expectant about their business since the restaurant industry has been experiencing intense competition in recent years.

Taking a Filipino context, for instance, Capistrano and Padilla (2013) noted several factors for restaurants to consider, including the customers' satisfaction with the overall service quality of

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restaurants, ranging from its food, facilities, and staff. However, despite the tremendous impact on the business by maintaining its standards, few studies studied what delights customers. Delighting customers creates a positive emotional reaction, thus, leading to word of mouth. Without consideration of this factor, the sales and profitability of a company will be drastically affected as it helps to distinguish the company and its products and services from the competition (Ariffin and Omar, 2016). As the approach in the restaurant industry has become more customer-centric and awareness of the shift from the service economy to the experience economy has increased, there is now a growing interest in the customers' needs and desires among businesses (Pine and Gilmore, 2011).

Furthermore, customer delight is surprising customers by exceeding their expectations and thus creating a positive emotional reaction (Torres and Kline, 2013). This emotional reaction leads to word of mouth. Customer delight directly affects a company's sales and profitability as it helps distinguish the company and its products and services from the competition (Pearson, 2016). Customer delight has shown a stronger relationship to essential outcomes than satisfaction. Barnes et al. (2010) compared satisfied and delighted customers and found the latter to have higher loyalty, commitment, and repurchase levels. However, it has been discovered that mere customer satisfaction does not create brand loyalty or encourage positive word of mouth (Eisingerich et al., 2014). In the past, customer satisfaction has been seen as a critical performance indicator. Customer satisfaction measures the extent to which customer expectations are met (compared to expectations being exceeded) (Saeidi et al., 2015).

Besides, the restaurant business is no more just about the type and quality of food offered to the customers. It is about the variety of services and other aspects which are mainly intangible (Gase et al., 2014). The patrons visit a restaurant not just for food or cuisine but for ambiance, prompt and personalized services, and hedonic pleasures. The choice of going to a restaurant or eating at home is part of a consumer's affective behavior in which the role of cognitive aspects is reduced. Customers do not drive satisfaction from the food quality alone but are primarily influenced by the service (Tripathi and Dave, 2016)

According to Jin et al. (2015), it was found that 48 percent of diners cited value for money as the most important factor they consider when dining. Many see value for money as something more significant than cost or price. Consumers want to feel that the whole experience has been of value. Whether the price is high or low is not as relevant as the consumer perception of value (Sabir et al., 2014). This does not mean price is not essential. It was shown that 85 percent of consumers shop around to get the best prices. People live in a society where disposable income is dropping, and the price is a significant factor in purchase decision-making (Parsa

et al., 2012). The important takeaway from those findings is to ensure that people consider pricing and competitiveness from a value perspective.

Moreover, several studies confirmed that the restaurant industry is continuously growing worldwide (Yan et al., 2010; Marinkovic et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2014). As the number of restaurants increases, people have many options for choosing a restaurant. When guests dine out at a restaurant, they cognitively evaluate their experience. Among the potential candidates, value for money has been generally accepted as the singular antecedent of customer satisfaction. Like most service industries, the importance of value for money has also been recognized in the restaurant industry (Gagic et al., 2013).

The study was primarily conducted to develop a customer delight framework for a restaurant in Davao City. Such a customer delight framework can be developed by determining the underlying factors of customer delight. The study likewise sought to determine the profile of the customers as well as ascertain their perception of customer delight factors for a restaurant in Davao City.

2. Research methods

2.1. Research design

This study is exploratory and uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches; thus, a sequential mixed-method research design was necessary. The qualitative method investigates the why and how of decision-making, not just what, where, or when (Creswell, 2013). On the other hand, quantitative research is characterized by deductive reasoning, objectivity, a structured instrument, and statistical data analysis procedures (Johnson, 2001). In this study, the qualitative method was used by conducting focus group discussions to explore customer delight as an experience of customers in a restaurant. In contrast, the quantitative method was conducted in descriptive and exploratory approaches, which aim to characterize factors or attributes that theoretically describe or characterize customer delight in the context of the restaurant industry.

2.2. Research respondents

Primary data were gathered in this study, sourced from key informants of the FGD, followed by survey respondents who were diners. These were people who could be sought for any source of delightful dining experiences in the restaurant that are considered necessary, involving six regular diners of the seafood restaurant and another six employees of the seafood restaurant. This study used a discussion guide and a survey questionnaire to gather the data. The first phase used the key informants' discussion guide, wherein qualitative statements were elicited from them based on the guide questions. The

researcher used the resulting transcripts to formulate the final set of items for the questionnaire used in the survey.

2.3. Research instrument

This study used a discussion guide and a survey questionnaire to gather the data. The first phase used the key informants' discussion guide, wherein qualitative statements were elicited from them based on the guide questions. The researcher used the resulting transcripts to formulate the final set of items for the questionnaire used in the survey. Moreover, the survey questionnaire in the second phase of the data gathering consists of two parts: Part I asks the profile of the respondents, and Part II asks the respondents to rate the numbered and ungrouped items on customer delight, which were the result of the focus group discussion. Beforehand, the questionnaire was content-validated by experts. Validation results involving three experts are shown in Appendix E. Moreover, the survey questionnaire was subjected to a reliability test using Cronbach's alpha to check the internal consistency of the items based on the average inter-item correlation. Based on the reliability test, the alpha value was 0.979. For a highly-reliable instrument, a score of 0.70 must be achieved (Hair et al., 2019). Moreover, in responding to the items, this study used the seven-point Likert attitudinal scale since Finstad (2010) found out that a 7-point scaling is more accurate, easier to use, and a better indication of the reflection of the respondent's accurate evaluation than other scales. The 7-point Likert scale is between the semantic differential pairs of "Strongly Agree or Strongly Disagree."

2.4. Data analysis

This study employed two sampling techniques – one for the focus group discussion and another for the survey. In the focus group discussions, purposive sampling was used, involving two customers/diners from each of the three branches of the restaurant. The primary criterion for selecting the clients is that they must have dined more than once in the past six months in any of the three branches of the restaurant. Another FGD was conducted, which involved two employees from each branch. The primary consideration in selecting the participating employees is that they must have been employed for the past six months and are involved in customer service. Creswell (2013) posited that 6 to 12 individuals are sufficient informants of focus group discussions and are the ideal numbers for data saturation.

In the survey phase, the researcher used a systematic sampling technique to choose the study's respondents. A population was identified based on any number of desired characteristics that suit the study's purpose. The final sample size was ascertained, grounding on the number of items in the final developed scale; the number of items in the

questionnaire is 40. The adequate sample size is computed as five times the number of items (Bryant and Yarnold, 1995). In this study, a total of 200 respondents were targeted with additional 25 questionnaires, which were also answered in case of response validity issues. The total number of respondents reached 225, which satisfied Bryant and Yarnold's (1995) criteria.

The researcher used the following statistical tools to analyze the data: Descriptive statistics, particularly frequency count and percentages, were used to present the profile of the respondents. Weighted mean was used to determine a restaurant's extent or level of customer delight. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to identify the salient factor structures of customer delight in the restaurant industry.

3. Results and analysis

In this chapter, the researcher presents the findings and discussion based on the data gathered-the discussion proceeds on underlying factors for customer delight.

3.1. Underlying factors that characterize customer delight in a restaurant

The following are the four factors that resulted from the Exploratory Factor Analysis.

Factor 1: Product and Service Quality. Table 1 shows the factor loadings of items that comprise customer delight's first component or dimensions. There are 15 items that were found to comprise the first dimension. The item with the highest coefficient is Item 9 ("The restaurant ensures that I am given very good service"), having a value of 0.738. In contrast, the item with the lowest coefficient is Item 19 ("I give a tip for every good service of the restaurant"), having a value of 0.459.

Based on the item loadings, this attribute speaks of a restaurant with an atmosphere offering good service, having well-trained staff, providing a unique dining experience, being a tourist destination, and ensuring food quality, among others. Thus, this dimension is named "Product and Service Quality."

The finding is consistent with the statement of Ali et al. (2016), who mentioned that customer delight can be created by the quality of the product itself, by accompanying standard services, and by interaction with people at the front line. Moreover, this also substantiated the claim of Tripathi and Dave (2016). They averred that the patrons visit a restaurant not just for food or cuisine but for ambiance, prompt and personalized services, and hedonic pleasures. They also noted that customers do not drive satisfaction from the food quality alone but are primarily influenced by the quality of service.

Factor 2: Marketing Strategy. Table 2 shows the factor loadings of items that comprise customer delight's second component or dimension. 11 items were found to comprise the second dimension. Under this dimension, the item with the highest

coefficient value is Item 37 ("The restaurant has a customer service that can be reached through email"), with a coefficient value of 0.779. In contrast, the item with the lowest coefficient value based on

the factor loading is Item 31 ("The restaurant strictly implements discount of senior citizens and PWDs"), with a coefficient value of 0.442.

Table 1: Factor 1: Product and service quality

Item	Statement	Coefficient
9	The restaurant ensures that I am given very good service	.738
11	The restaurant staff are well-trained to engage customers like me	.711
26	Dining in this restaurant gives me a unique experience including eating with bare hands	.699
12	I am delighted with the serving size of the food	.696
27	The restaurant is a destination for tourists and locals alike	.691
28	I am paying for an exquisite dining experience in this restaurant	.652
13	The restaurant has consistency in maintaining its food quality	.648
10	Waiting time for orders to be served is reasonable	.601
15	I find the dishes served by the restaurant satisfying	.601
14	I am delighted with the unique taste of the food	.582
30	Dining in this restaurant gives me value for my money	.568
16	I tell my friends and relatives about how the quality of the food at the restaurant	.553
7	The restaurant considers in its menu the customers' cooking preferences	.537
18	The restaurant does its best to gain my loyalty because of the good service	.481
19	I give tips for every good service of the restaurant	.459

Based on the item loadings, this attribute speaks of a restaurant that is effective in communicating itself to its current and potential customers through promotions and visibility, the use of traditional media as well as social media in making the customers informed, being physically visible and

accessible, having active customer service, striving for customer convenience by offering parking lots and PWD access as well as giving discounts among others things. Thus, this dimension is named "Marketing Strategy."

Table 2: Factor 2: Marketing strategy

Item	Statement	Coefficient
37	The restaurant has a customer service that can be reached through email	.779
34	The restaurant is featured in local newspapers	.761
33	The restaurant has an active social media engagement among diners	.680
39	The restaurant has noticeable signage and billboards	.671
38	The restaurant has an active telephone line	.667
32	The restaurant offers periodic promos that are relevant to diners	.651
17	The restaurant continues to improve and innovate its menu	.542
35	The restaurant is known by word-of-mouth	.529
40	I found the restaurant's parking space convenient	.524
36	The restaurant's location is accessible	.496
31	The restaurant strictly implements discounts for senior citizens and PWDs	.442

The above finding is a corollary to the pronouncements of [Torres and Kline \(2013\)](#), which purports that customer delight must create a positive emotional reaction leading to word of mouth. Likewise, [Pearson \(2016\)](#) exemplified this as an effective way of informing customers, making the firm's products and services distinguishable from its competitors, and making its sales much more profitable. [Hirschman and Holbrook \(2012\)](#) also claimed that the strategy of providing only practical benefits will prove deficient in today's product and service environment, thus the need to effectively promote what the firms have in store for the

customers – ranging from effective customer service to make the customers' experience worth the visit.

Factor 3: Customer Focus. [Table 3](#) shows the factor loadings of items that comprise the third component or dimension of customer delight. Seven items were found to comprise the third dimension. Under this dimension, the item with the highest coefficient value is Item 23 ("The restaurant makes sure that my complaint is settled before I leave"), with a coefficient value of 0.693. In contrast, the item with the lowest coefficient value is Item 29 ("The restaurant values paying customers like me"), with a coefficient value of 0.533.

Table 3: Factor 3: Customer focus

Item	Statement	Coefficient
23	The restaurant makes sure that my complaint is settled before I leave	.693
22	The restaurant staff thanked me for raising my concerns	.692
21	The restaurant listens to the concerns of its diners	.674
20	I am checked back by the assigned staff every now and then	.649
24	The restaurant replaces my food when I raised a complaint and offers complimentary food	.634
25	I can raise suggestions for the improvement of the ambiance of the restaurant	.604
29	The restaurant values paying customers like me	.533

The items speak of a restaurant that does not only listen and take note of customers' complaints and concerns but also acts on them promptly. It also includes items that denote management's value of

customer feedback as input for their improvement plans. Thus, this dimension is named "Customer Focus." This finding is coherent with the studies of several authors ([Barnes et al., 2016](#); [Sniezek and](#)

Buckley, 1995; Wang et al., 2017) which highlights customer delight as one that does not only meet customers' emotional needs but exceeds them as well. These three studies agreed that the value of customer feedback is an interaction that has the potential to fulfill a customer's emotional hunger in the provision of a recommendation, which can be further exemplified through eliciting a suggestion in favor of, or advice relative to, a course of action.

Moreover, Lord et al. (2001) suggested that customer recommendations are an example of informational social influence, whereby the employee provides credible evidence of reality. They added that the provision of advice mentally engages the customer with the firm and its products, and the delight that is experienced is likely attributed to the firm.

Factor 4: Differentiation. Lastly, Table 4 shows the factor loadings of items that comprise customer delight's fourth component or dimension. Five items were found to comprise the fourth dimension. Under this dimension, the item with the highest coefficient value is Item 3 ("I am delighted with the ambiance of the restaurant.") with a coefficient value of 0.752, while the item with the lowest coefficient value is Item 5 ("The restaurant has a unique recipe compared with other restaurants.") with a coefficient value of 0.628. The items speak of being delighted and a sense of uniqueness of the restaurant and the dining experience. Thus, this dimension is named "Differentiation."

Table 4: Factor 4: Differentiation

Item	Statement	Coefficient
3	I am delighted with the ambiance of the restaurant	.752
1	I have the feeling of being welcome in the restaurant	.724
2	I am delighted the moment I enter the restaurant	.660
4	I found the ambiance of the place unique	.659
5	The restaurant has a unique recipe compared with other restaurants	.628

The finding is parallel with the pronouncements of Jayasimhan et al. (2017), which stated that setting uniqueness will set a surprising feel for the diners in addition to the comfort and pleasurable experience in visiting the restaurant. Moreover, Jovanovic et al. (2014) averred that uniqueness entails having fantastic food, excellent service, and a unique concept of the restaurant's ambiance, which makes the visit worth it.

Overall, the restaurant scored highly in terms of delighting its diners, especially in product and service quality and differentiation dimensions. This means that restaurants put more emphasis on ensuring that they restaurant could create an impression of quality (in both product and service) as well as ensure that they experience one-of-a-kind, authentic dining.

Furthermore, the restaurant also scored high in customer focus while rated the least (yet still high) in marketing strategy. This result purports that while the restaurant puts value on communicating

and creating an impression outside through marketing efforts, it has been seen to put more emphasis on the three components that are felt during the dining experience. This finding is analogous to the postulation of Rychalski and Hudson (2017), whose study emphasized that customer delight is more referent to customers who are experiencing "pleasant surprise" and possess a highly positive effect, especially during the actual service experience.

To typify the explored factors, the study reveals the four (4) valid dimensions of customer delight in the context of a restaurant in Davao City. These four factors are labeled as (a) product and service quality, (b) marketing strategy, (c) customer focus, and (d) differentiation. These are the components of the Customer Delight Framework in the context of the restaurant business in Davao City." This framework accounts for 71.119 percent of the variations of the data as gleaned from the collated responses of 225 diners.

4. Conclusion

Results of the study revealed that diners were found to be highly delighted with the restaurant's value-for-money experience (5.98), branding (5.93), location (5.82), ambiance (5.98), menu (6.01), service quality (5.97), food quality (6.04), and responsiveness (5.91).

Five factors were extracted from the 40 items submitted for exploratory factor analysis. These factors explained 71.119 percent of the variations in the data. The 40 items were loaded successfully into five components. However, one factor was excluded from the factor structure identifications due to item isolation issues. The remaining four constructs are named (a) product and service quality, (b) marketing strategy, (c) customer focus, and (d) differentiation.

Based on the study's findings, it can be concluded that the restaurant's diners are particular about product and service quality, marketing strategy, customer focus, and differentiation. These are the factors that characterize customer delight in the restaurant industry.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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