

The Kano's Method: Evaluation Of Restaurant Service Attributes And Their Contribution To The Mature Customers' Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

The mature consumer segment has become more of importance in the U.S. economy because of the tremendous increase in the number of senior population and their increasing purchasing power. It is necessary that the restaurant industry have a better understanding of this segment to provide satisfactory dining experience. This study proposes to evaluate restaurant service attributes from seniors' point of view. The survey will be conducted to measure expectation, perception, and level of importance of restaurant attributes. Then, the Kano's method will be applied to classify those attributes according to their relative impact on customers' satisfaction/dissatisfaction. The study results will provide the restaurant industry with meaningful implications in better serving the mature market.

Keywords: *Seniors, mature market, service attributes, satisfaction, Kano's method*

INTRODUCTION

The Americans who were aged 65 years and older were 36 million in 2000, which counted for about 13% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). The rapid increase in the senior population allowed this segment to be one of the fastest growing consumer segments (Shoemaker, 2000). In fact, the senior market accounts for 53% of total market share in the U.S. in terms of the total expenditure, which made them the highest purchasing power ever in American history (American Association of Retired Persons, 2004). Therefore, for the restaurant industry, this segment implies to be a new target, and it is essential that the industry has a better understanding of senior customer behavior and their preferences for service.

This segment is a new burgeoning market and, therefore, few studies have been conducted on seniors' need fulfillment of dining experience. Existing studies mostly concentrated on senior customers' distinctive preference for restaurants, the reasons for dining-out, and the pattern of dining-out (e.g., Knutson & Patton, 1993; Moschis, Curasi, & Bellenger, 2003; Pederson & DeMicco, 1993; Sun & Morrison, 2007).

Using the Kano's method, this study will identify various restaurant service attributes that mature customers perceive as important and evaluate their contribution to customers' satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and/or both. Ultimately, this study aims to offer insight into what attributes restaurant managers need to promote when they target the mature customers and to improve for better service performance in serving the market.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mature diners

Moschis et al. (2003) examined the food consumption habits of Americans, particularly those aged of 55 years or older. Among 14 factors of the selection criteria for a particular restaurant are the availability of senior-citizen discounts, comfortable place to socialize, the proximity to home or workplace, and recommendations. The authors additionally found that mature Americans differ from younger counterparts in reasons for patronizing restaurants. Yamanaka, Almanza, Nelson, and DeVaney (2003) conducted a survey on older Americans' reasons for dining out and their eating-out behavior. The most frequently selected reason was "to meet friends," followed by "special occasion" and "do not feel like cooking at home." In addition, the top three criteria in selecting a restaurant for the mature consumers found to be the quality of food, cleanliness, and reasonable prices.

Service Attributes and Meal Experience in Restaurants

Considerable number of studies revealed different classifications of variables in order to define restaurant service quality and identified factors influencing customers' satisfaction with restaurant service. Product (food), performance (service personnel), and setting (ambience), together or separately, were three important factors that contribute to overall satisfaction with the dining experience and return patronage (Han & Ryu, 2009; Soriano, 2002; Sulek & Hensley, 2004). Andersson and Mossberg (2004) suggested five groups of satisfiers in meal experience that influence diners' experience besides food: service, fine cuisine, restaurant interior, good company, and other customers. Warde and Martens (2005) discussed four aspects of the meal experience: access, delivery of service, enjoyment, and modes of provision.

Food

Food itself is the central function of the meal (Andersson & Mossberg, 2005; Soriano, 2000; Sulek & Hensley, 2004). Many aspects of food have reported in the previous studies: Taste, visually attractiveness, smell, texture, presentation form, food serving portion, temperature, fresh ingredients, consistency of food, healthy food, nutrition. The variety of menu and menu appropriate for restaurant image or theme were considered to play a determining role in meal experience, as well as the menu design and menu description (Gustafsson, Ostrom, Johansson, & Mossberg, 2006; Raajpoot, 2002; Soriano, 2000; Stevens, Knutson, & Patton, 1995).

Price/value

Attributes regarding price/value were examined in service quality literature (Han & Ryu, 2009; Raajpoot, 2002; Soriano, 2002; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2002). Price and perceived value of food proved to be important aspects influencing customer satisfaction, loyalty and patronage (Han & Ryu, 2009; Soriano, 2002).

Service environment

Service environment includes physical environment such as furniture, décor, layout, arrangement, and variant ambient attributes that make customers feel relaxed and cozy during meal consumption. It is proved to be one of the important factors that influence customers' positive expectation, overall evaluation of service quality and return patronage (Bitner, 1990; Ryu & Jang, 2007; Soriano, 2002; Sulek & Hensely, 2004; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1999). Bitner (1992) developed SERVICESCAPE, a measurement evaluating overall environment and surroundings that are built artificially. SERVICESCAPE includes three categories of physical environment: ambient conditions, spatial layout & functionality, and signs, symbols, & artifacts. Raajpoot (2002) proposed TANGSERVE and classified the physical attributes of restaurants into five dimensions: layout/design, building, ambiance/social, cleanliness, and interior decorations. Ryu and Jang (2008) developed the DINESCAPE to evaluate the physical and human environment of upscale restaurants. The authors identified six factors of DINESCAPE: facility aesthetics, ambiance, lighting, table setting, layout, and service staff.

Service quality

Service is a critical factor of eating-out experience in a restaurant. Soriano (2002) mentioned that quality of service is considered to be an important factor for restaurant customers. Moreover, several previous studies demonstrated the effect of service quality on perceived service performance and customer satisfaction. DINESERV is the scale developed Stevens et al. (1995) to measure the perceived service quality of restaurant customers. DINESERV adopted the five dimensions of SERVQUAL which was developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988). The scale measures tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy dimensions of service that restaurants offer.

Kano's method

Generally, it is assumed that there is a linear relationship between customers' satisfaction and service performance gap (Tan & Pawitra, 2001). If the difference between two measures is found to be positive (i.e., positive confirmation), it is considered that customers' expectation is exceeded and, therefore, customers are satisfied. Otherwise, it is said that service does not meet customers' expectation (i.e., negative confirmation) and, consequently, customer are dissatisfied. The Kano's method, however, implies that the performance of all service/product attributes is not always linearly associated with customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction (Oliver, 2010; Tan & Pawitra, 2001). The model suggests that each attribute contributes differently to satisfaction, dissatisfaction, or both together. The Kano's method puts attributes of a product or service into three categories based on how well they are able to meet customers needs: must-be, one-dimensional, and attractive (Berger et al., 1993; Matzler, Hinterhuber, Bailom, & Sauerwein, 1996; Oliver, 2010; Tan & Pawitra, 2001). The benefits that the Kano's method brings are: (1)

helping service providers identify the weak service attributes so that they can prioritize those attributes for improvement of service quality, thereby maximizing customers' satisfaction; (2) helping service providers differentiate their business from other competitors with attractive attributes identified (Matzler et al.,1996; Tan & Pawitra, 2001).

METHODOLOGY

For the item purification stage, about 20 graduate students and faculty members in a hospitality program will evaluate the measurement scale for content validity. The measurement purified will be pilot-tested with seniors. The sample for the main survey will be selected among restaurant customers who are 55 years old or older in Midwestern area.

First, service attributes of restaurants will be derived from focus groups and previous studies. Second, exploratory factor analysis will be conducted to identify the dimensionality of the attributes related restaurant service and customers' overall dining experience, and to reduce the number of attributes in each dimension. Last, confirmatory factor analysis will be conducted to confirm whether each service attribute really represents the dimension in which the attribute belongs to. The survey will include questions about the importance, expected performance level, and perceived performance level of the attributes, the Kano questions for each service attribute, and general demographic information. After completing administration of the questionnaire, the level of importance scores, expected service scores, and perceived service scores will be calculated to identify overall satisfaction scores. The service satisfaction score will be calculated by multiplying importance scores by the difference between perceived service scores and expected service scores. Last, all attributes will be classified into one of the Kano's categories.

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