

**A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS
OF THE NEED-SATISFYING EXPERIENCES OF THE
CUSTOMERS OF A NICHE-RESTAURANT**

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DECLARATION

I, John Michael Burger, hereby declare that:

- the content of this thesis is my own original work;
- all sources used or referenced have been documented and recognised; and
- this thesis has not been previously submitted in full or partial fulfilment of the requirements for an equivalent or higher qualification at any other recognised educational institution.

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Port Elizabeth

December 2003

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SUMMARY

Tradition dictates that marketing decision-makers remain accurately aligned with the dynamic and vacillating need structures of the target markets they serve. To comply with this caveat, a time-honoured and largely unchallenged philosophy of customer orientation has been applied. Theory further strongly contends that if such a business stance is vigilantly and diligently applied, any firm is bound to gain a competitive edge in the market place.

A weakness in the above marketing mindset is the perception that when a spectrum of business elements are orchestrated and focussed on customers, target audience members will automatically be satisfied and return their patronage. This so-called marketing concept has undergone major re-evaluations over the past decades, and it is now becoming ever more prevalent to witness varied permutations of new marketing architecture evolving in literature and practice.

The unit of analysis selected for this research study is a niche restaurant that flouts many of the rudimentary traditional rules of marketing and iconoclastically succeeds despite all counter-logic.

What such organisations have been practicing, albeit unknown to themselves, is a new way of business - a stance that has only recently been taken seriously by academics, writers and marketing professionals. These intuitive marketers are succeeding in niche businesses, despite going against the tide of the ingrained paradigm mindsets of conventional marketing stalwarts.

Such niche business people have discovered is that there is more to satisfying consumer needs than simply honing in and understanding what the

basic needs of designated audiences are. A growing band of new age marketers have been challenging orthodox marketing philosophy.

Tofler, the visionary futurist, alluded to a host of unarticulated psychic consumer needs that would emerge as society drifted into a clinical and dispassionate 'new' millennium. In a world geared to instant gratification, fast-paced living and mechanistic social interactions, jaded consumers seek recognition as individuals (Tofler, 1970). They quest for inclusion rather than exclusion. They need a place to feel safe and find solace. Hence, it is now clear that simply attempting to satisfy the fundamental dimensions of consumers' needs is no longer sufficient. Consumers rather seek the fulfilment of an holistic band of experience dimensions.

Increasingly, phrases such as "winning consumer hearts and minds" are entering the vocabulary of marketers on a regular basis. The present vogue is to isolate and then include a range of intangible elements that are embodied in the process of satisfying customers needs. However, despite a growing awareness of the significance of mental-need satisfiers, in the specific domain of this investigation there is sparse evidence in literature of the mechanics of such novel thinking.

The study unit is a second generation restaurant where many of the hollowed cornerstones of conventional marketing are inadvertently flouted. Different sets of rules of engagement seem to apply to their customers, who are also their most ardent advocates. A unique philosophy and business ethos also appears to prevail.

In the study, the idiosyncratic characteristics which socially and competitively differentiate such a business were identified, explored and expiated. The constituents were then harmonised in an effort to establish what 'it' was that

magnetically attracted patrons back despite the owner's unintentional dismissive predisposition towards fundamental theory.

As a result of this in-depth qualitative study, an holistic model encompassing all of the dimensions of a dining out experience at a niche restaurant have been proposed. Consequently the pillars upon which a sustained, enduring, loyal staunch customer base can be bed-rocked have been identified. Further, for the study unit, a typology of its diner corpse has been developed.

The owners of the establishment under investigation have succeeded to provide an intimate family haven for their patrons. They, and their diners have collectively given strong, descriptive voice to the psychogenic need satisfying elements that have always existed, but to date have been unarticulated and unrecorded. This thesis brings the milieu of the iconoclast niche restaurant marketing practitioner to life.

KEY WORDS

- Customer experiences
- Customer loyalty
- Customer retention
- Dining experience
- Eating out
- Experience marketing
- Holistic marketing
- Niche marketing
- Niche restaurant marketing
- Psychic need satisfiers
- Restaurant patronage
- Typology of niche diners

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CHAPTER 1

EXPERIENCE MARKETING: THE RATIONALE AND SETTING

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND SETTING THE SCENE

Like all evolving disciplines, marketing is subject to the influence of a broad-spectrum of environmental dynamics and intense academic scrutiny. In sympathy with changing insights and as a part of the metamorphosis, new descriptive terminology and technical jargon emerges. Theorists and proponents of specific standpoints tend to pioneer unique descriptors in support of their preferred philosophical stances and the concepts relevant to their vested domains of interest (Goldsmith, 1999). Such is the case with one of the fundamental concepts, the marketing mix, that have become a bedrock of traditional marketing thinking.

Contextually, it is many decades ago since McCarthy (1975) coined the concept of the “marketing mix” as a pedagogical tool. This term was used to describe the core factors which marketing decision-makers had to routinely consider as a facet of strategy formulation. Once a firm had targeted an audience, a systematic schema was to be created to achieve sales and profit goals. The mix tools used by the marketing manager to reach these outcomes were codified by

McCarthy (1975) as constituting: the product, price, promotion and place. Marketing acumen lay in being able to orchestrate these instruments so that the application of scarce corporate resources yielded optimal results. With the efflux of time, the descriptive term used to manipulate and apply the marketing mix elements became truncated and known as “programming the 4Ps” (Doyle, 1995). The 4Ps have subsequently become embedded and entrenched as the building blocks and theme elements in marketing parlance.

Marketing texts still focus heavily on the 4Ps as the central, coordinating base around which a spectrum of marketing practices revolve. Today, the perennial 4Ps still lie at the heart of most traditional marketing presentations, particularly in the case of manufactured products where they are generally used to summarise the responsibilities of marketing managers (McDonald & Roberts, 1992). Therefore the mix and its programming have tended to be of prime focus in marketing decision-making. The viewpoint that the 4Ps are used for descriptive terms is supported by Seth, Gardner and Garrett (1998), who are of the opinion that the marketing-mix management paradigm has dominated marketing thought, research and practice since it was introduced. As stayed paradigms begin to become the focus of alternative thinking, they begin to erode and lose their position.

Most advances and surrogate marketing-thinking have tended to retain the 4P prime taxonomy while adding additional new P components to cater for divergent philosophy. Since much of marketing during its initial era focused on product features, distribution and sales effort, ways had to be found to apply the newly emerging paradigms to the rapidly growing service sector (Seth *et al.*, 1998).

Breakthrough insight transpired when Berry (1980) argued that services marketing had to be distinguished from product marketing. He focused on rethinking the marketing mix and demonstrated that services marketing requires different decisions. Berry (in Lovelock, 1991) defined a product as an object, device, or thing — and a service as a deed, performance or effort. While on the surface it appeared that there were a number of similarities between the new definitions offered, it readily became apparent that there were some significant variations. Four factors were identified that characteristically isolated differences between goods and services. The elements of intangibility, inseparability of production and consumption, heterogeneity, and perishability were identified by advocates such as Stanton (1975), Zeithaml and Parasuraman (1988) and Berry (in Bateson, 1995).

Lovelock (1996), a protagonist of Berry (1980), continued to propagate the uniqueness and distinctness of services that required a fresh

marketing approach. The original 4Ps were retained, but three new dimensions, namely: personnel, physical assets and procedures were added forming the 7P's of marketing. Lovelock (1991) caused a re-evaluation of traditional marketing management thought by obscuring the boundary between goods and services, forcing the realisation that many products consist of elements of both tangible goods and intangible services (Goldsmith, 1999).

Reorganising and extending the scope of the original marketing mix elements to encompass many new ideas has been a continual process, moving beyond services marketing. The erosion of the 4Ps paradigm trap has been further manifested by new trends of thought which have emerged, not only from services marketing, but also from researchers championing relationship marketing, mass customisation, database marketing and from recent statements of marketing theory such as particle markets (O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1998; Peppers & Rogers, 1993; Slywotzy & Morrison, 1997; Webster, 1994).

For marketing theory, the result of this evolution in dogma and practice has been to modify the way in which marketing is philosophised and taught. This has resulted in a steady flow of marketing peripherals constantly emerging as the discipline unfolds and the traditional 4P fixation being challenged. The new insights that are being pioneered and shaped by both academics and practitioners has resulted in the

expansion of the way in which managers conceptualise their products or services.

In relation to the strangle hold that obsessive thinking can inflict, Seth *et al.* (1998, p.195) contend that:

We need to expand our understanding of marketing to incorporate the basic tenets of marketing, that is, market behaviour, market transactions as the unit of analysis, marketing as a dynamic process of relationships between buyers and sellers, and the exogenous variables that influence market behaviour ... What is needed is a perspective that reflects the *raison d'être* of marketing, a perspective that is the common cause that no stakeholder can question. Indeed, that perspective should really reflect what marketing is all about.

Gummesson (2002, p. 312) supports the paradigm shift that is taking place in the domain of marketing and suggests that “when a science or discipline is given a new foundation, with new values, new assumptions or new methods — the accepted and established must be set aside”. The discipline either disappears completely, succumbs to the new, or takes the role of several coexisting paradigms. The current fixation with the traditional tenets of marketing such as the 4Ps model might be regarded as an established paradigm. However, adherence to a model can become a mental prison, or it can emerge as a springboard for future innovative approaches to marketing. New thinking requires new concepts and re-conceptualisation, “so that the new will be allowed to live on its own terms” (Gummesson, 2002 p. 311).

This mindset is supported by Grönroos (1994) who holds that research into industrial and services marketing shows that another approach to marketing is required and that evolving trends in business, such as strategic partnerships, alliances and networks lend themselves to relationship marketing. Grönroos (1994) suggests that the simplicity of the marketing mix paradigm, with its 4P model, has become “straight-jacketed, fostering toolbox thinking rather than an awareness that marketing is a multi-faceted social process”. Marketing theory and customers become the victims of such mainstream mentality and a dramatic shift is needed to re-orientate thinking. As an alternative, Grönroos (1994) proposes that the idea of a marketing strategy continuum be adopted. Relationship marketing would be placed at the one end of the continuum, and transaction marketing at the other.

Currently, there are a variety of perspectives and continuum theory modifications that are converging and leading the way towards an economy that is directed towards *psychic gratification*. The insights proffered by Tofler (1970) are only now filtering into marketing rationale. Tofler (1970) contended that society had strong psychic needs that were not being addressed by traditional marketing effort and it is now becoming clearer that people seek experiences as an avenue to satisfy these unfulfilled desires. An experience is different from other segments of the economy because experiences address the intangible mental needs alluded to by this visionary.

O'Sullivan and Spangler (1998) postulate that experiences provide an opportunity for people to maintain points of stability within their dynamic lives. This is necessary as people's needs have changed and will continue to change over time. Therefore experiences are beginning to be valued over objects, and self expression over self-orientation. These changes in values suggest a movement from a more outer-directed conformity to a more inner-directed mode of life where people's psychic needs will become increasingly a high priority. It is being shown by O'Sullivan and Spangler (1998) that experiences speak to the inner needs and desires of people.

Experiences beckon to people who want to become involved in such a way that they will take elements of that participation away with them either for the moment or a lifetime. Behaviour and lifestyle patterns are changing and writers such as Frazier (1994); Popcorn and Marigold (1991) and Feig (1997) have done much to cite behavioural trends that reflect current emotional and psychological needs that can be directly linked to buying and consumption conduct.

Experience marketing is hence the next natural progression on the continuum of marketing evolution. According to O'Sullivan and Spangler (1998) experience marketing:

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- X addresses the inherent differences between products, services and experiences;
 - X speaks to the increasingly diverse, yet definitive nature of people's needs;
 - X incorporates the heightened consumer preference for personalisation as dictated by technology and rising expectations, and
 - X reflects the burgeoning competition within the industry.

1.2 **NARROWING THE FOCUS AND DEFINING THE PROBLEM**

The restaurant market, as an element of the broader service industry, is subject to academic scrutiny in addition to environmental, competitive and socio-personalised changes taking place in modern society. A host of generalised studies have been conducted addressing diverse areas such as:

- the impact of emotional satisfaction on consumer loyalty (Yu & Dean, 2001);
- the general expectations of patrons within specific age groups (Hare, Kirk & Lang, 1999);
- the influence of word-of-mouth communication in the service marketplace (Mangold, Miller & Brockway, 1999);
- service behaviours that lead to satisfied customers (Winsted, 2000);

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- analysing favourable and unfavourable service incidents (Bitner, Booms & Tetreault, 1990);
 - the commercialisation of eating out (Warde & Martens, 1998);
 - the role of non-verbal communication in service encounters (Sundaram & Webster, 2000);
 - customers' expectation factors in restaurants in specific countries (Soriano, 2002);
 - the information customers seek when deciding upon a restaurant (Pedraja & Yagüe, 2001);
 - general customer loyalty strategies (Duffy, 1998);
 - the impact of experiences on the service expectations of customers (Johnson & Mathews, 1997); and
 - exploratory generic studies of consumer loyalty in the restaurant industry (Clark & Wood, 1999).

There appears, however, to be a paucity of specific research and literature on niche restaurants. Niche restaurants differ from large, well established outlets that are socially visible, advertise regularly, are well signposted and are located in prominent geographies. Niche restaurants are those that seem to be so tucked away and unknown to the general public that it is hard to fathom their survival strategies.

Such places seldom or if ever, appear to solicit business and the concept of advertising and promotion seems of little relevance. These

restaurants tend to be geographically isolated and in some cases, carry no exterior location signage. Even more profoundly, they appear at times to flout traditional marketing rules. Despite these and numerous other supposed marketing errors they commit, they are thriving businesses, with an impressive clientele base.

The researcher has over the past three years conducted literature searches, had personal discussions and independently cogitated the 'success' of small one-man type niche restaurants. Even the owners often cannot articulate the reasons for their success. Equally so, upon interrogation, clients and patrons similarly find great difficulty in comprehensively articulating and expressing what it is that makes them support such businesses and return as loyalists.

It is within the innovative conceptualisation of marketing as an evolving discipline slanting strongly towards the mental and experience-satisfaction of target audiences, that this study was undertaken.

A prime purpose was to investigate and explore the realm of experience marketing, specifically as it relates to niche restaurant marketing so that the intangible element and the psychic component of the eating establishment could be isolated, explained and applied to other firms.

Within this milieu and context, the main problem and focus area of this study was formulated:

What are the dimensions of dining-out experiences that speak to the inner needs and desires of customers of a niche restaurant and how these are to be addressed?

Peripheral issues flowing from the core focus were:

- X What are the needs and desires of customers of a niche-restaurant?
- X What predisposing factors affect the choice of such a restaurant?
- X How is the dining experience perceived by patrons?
- X What is the post-dining response to the holistic meal experience, and how does it impact upon patronage loyalty?
- X Do the management or owners of a selected niche-restaurant understand their supporters?
- X Can a typology of repeat and loyal diners be developed?

1.3 **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH**

Since scant research has been conducted specifically on a restaurant niche market component of service marketing, this study will significantly contribute towards the body of knowledge on

understanding the psychic and intangible dimensions involved in niche-restaurant marketing. The causative concepts and principles identified will be useful when:

- X disseminated to similar eating establishments;
- X applied to other restaurants in general;
- X adopted by the service industry as a whole;
- X used to help entrepreneurs develop and refine their own marketing and business strategies so as to keep pace with unarticulated yet vital psychic needs of their client bases; and
- X gleaned knowledge contributes to the evolution continuum of marketing philosophy and practice.

1.4 **DEMARICATION OF RESEARCH**

The research has been delimited in order to keep focus and clarity. Demarcation further helps keep the project at a manageable level by setting specific boundaries for the research. Malhotra (1993 : 34) reiterates that “only when the research has been clearly defined can it be conducted properly... of all the tasks in a research project, none is more vital to the ultimate fulfilment ... than the accurate and adequate delimitation of the research problem”. The exclusion of specific topics outside the ambit of niche restaurant marketing in no manner detracts from the necessity of research in these areas. The study was demarcated as described in the unit of study below.

1.5 THE UNIT OF STUDY

Geographically the research was confined to the city of Port Elizabeth, South Africa, within the Nelson Mandela Bay. A specific establishment, namely the Canton Restaurant was identified. The current restaurant which is owner-managed / operated, caters for traditional cultural cuisine. It also is relatively small in scope and generally seats between 25 – 35 patrons per sitting. Currently, the restaurant is operated by the second generation owner, Peter Whitely and his wife, Verna Whitely. The restaurant has no exterior signage and is located in an up-market residential area.

1.5.1 The history of the Canton Restaurant

The proprietor's late father opened the original restaurant in North End, Port Elizabeth in August 1965, where he and his wife jointly ran the business until his death in January 1994. In typical Chinese tradition, the male members from the district of Canton (from where the late Mr Whitely immigrated to South Africa as a young man) did the cooking and the lady did the hosting of diners. The late Mr Whitely single-handedly did all the preparation and cooking in the pioneering restaurant until the age of 75, when he took ill.

The establishment had become tired and run down and had a typical traditional oriental décor consisting of lanterns and related icons.

Table decorations, curtaining and related aesthetics were also functional and simplistic. In addition, with the sub-urbanisation of the city and the consequent decline in central business district's clientele base, the area in which the initial restaurant was located changed in demography. The locale became neglected and petty crime began to emerge as a deterrent to customers. Although core patrons were still loyal, they began to voice their concerns to the owners and began lobbying for a shift in location.

1.5.2 **The current restaurant and the owners' involvement**

From early childhood and specifically since 1972, the proprietor's son, Peter Whitely sporadically assisted his late father with the preparation and cooking of meals. He was not formally tutored in cooking, but picked up the style from his father. The present chef did, however, develop his own culinary style in line with preparation of traditional Cantonese Chinese fare.

In the latter stages of his father's life, Peter Whitely gradually became more actively involved in the original restaurant, albeit with a very low profile visibility to patrons. While the restaurant was still at the original location in North End, Peter Whitely took over the complete running of the establishment because of his father's rapidly deteriorating health. His wife, Verna Whitely, also became involved in the business on a part-time basis.

In April 2000, the second generation owners decided to close the initial restaurant and find a suitable new location. For a six month period the business was totally dormant and many customers lost complete contact. A new venue, in a more sophisticated residential environment was found and refurbished in consultation with a professional friend. Great care was taken with the restaurant design, the internal colour scheme and lighting. A simple, elegant and stylish feel, with a subtle oriental nuance was opted for and no specific oriental decorations, symbols and icons are displayed or used in the re-located establishment.

In October 2000, after a six month shut-down, the second generation proprietors re-opened the restaurant. They relied solely upon a few telephone calls to former loyal diners, and thereafter word-of-mouth was the mode of communication used to expand the diner base. In addition, the restaurant does not use any exterior signage to identify its present location and no form of promotion, other than word-of-mouth is practiced.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research was conducted using the triangulation method. This is an investigation protocol that combines the use of multiple methodologies to improve the reliability and validity of a study

(Jackson, 1995a). A detailed discussion of the research design and methodology is provided in Chapters 2 and 3. The main focus was on the qualitative approach that embodied:

- X a comprehensive literature study of available texts, journals, dissertations, theses, technical papers, newspaper articles, electronic media and any other relevant secondary sources of information;
- X unstructured and informal preliminary in-depth interviews with niche restaurateurs to establish the degree to which the reasons for their customer support base have been conceptualised, understood and exploited;
- X preliminary unstructured pilot focus group interviews with selected typically profiled target customers of the business to become familiar with the logic proffered for their sustained and continued support of the niche restaurant under study; and
- X semi-structured, comprehensive in-depth focus group interviews with selected clusters of diners to probe issues relevant to the study.

1.7 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The study consists of the following chapters:

CHAPTER 1

Experience marketing: The rationale and setting

CHAPTER 2

Research design and methodology: *Part One*

Data and qualitative research

CHAPTER 3

Research design and methodology: *Part Two*

Qualitative research design, phenomenology, sample selection and the pilot study

CHAPTER 4

The dimensions of customer needs and their impact on restaurant patronage: *Part One*

The commercialisation of mental life, the nature of dining out and Customer-need dimensions

CHAPTER 5

The dimensions of customer needs and their impact on restaurant patronage: *Part Two*

Dining satisfaction and return patronage, customer loyalty and an holistic patronage model

CHAPTER 6

The empirical study: *Part One*

Sample composition and methodology

CHAPTER 7

The empirical study: *Part Two*

The pre-dining dimensions

CHAPTER 8

The empirical study: *Part Three*

The dining experience and post-dining response

CHAPTER 9

Finalisation, conclusions and future research potential

Chapter1Complete

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CHAPTER 2
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY:
PART ONE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In society's quest for pioneering and conquering the boundaries of the unknown, new knowledge needs to be mined, categorised, synthesised and disseminated. The unknown is sought by means of deductive logic and inductive reasoning, or what is familiarly known as scientific method (Leedy, 1993). Accordingly, the search for knowledge demands that some form of research be embarked upon. Attempting to singularly define or describe this concept of research holistically is not easy. Owing to the very nature of the raw materials and building blocks of research a variety of stances and philosophies have emerged in attempts to describe the phenomenon (Van Biljon, 1999).

When tracing the notion of research and its evolution as a scientific instrument, a rich spread of protocols and a complex nomenclature can be unearthed. In addition, the descriptors involved in research become blurred and lose their intended clarity and elucidating capacity (Leedy, 1997). Thus, at the embryonic phase of the current research inquiry, it is prudent to establish coherence and clarity on important concepts. Consequently, the semantics surrounding selected key

viewpoints concerning the terms research and design will be explored at the outset.

2.1.1 The semantics of selected terms

Research is a powerful word in the English language that is often misused, maligned and abused (Van Biljon, 1999). Leedy (1993) stresses that research is not easy to describe and is not universally understood. Some authors fail to provide a concise definition of research, as they do not describe it as some phenomenon, but rather depict it in conjunction with other concepts such as design, process, approach, philosophy and dimensions (Van Biljon, 1999). The following definitive descriptions will attempt to clarify the term:

- Webster's Dictionary of the English Language (1930), quoted in Leedy (1993) provides the following elaborated definition:

“an inquiry or examination, especially a critical and exhaustive investigation or experimentation having as its aim the discovery of new facts and their correct interpretation, the revision of accepted conclusions, theories, or laws in the light of newly discovered facts or the practical application of such conclusions, theories or laws”.

- Tuckman (1978 in Van Biljon, 1999 p. 28), and Kerlinger (1978) state that research is: “a systematic attempt to provide answers to questions. The investigator uncovers facts and then formulates a generalisation based on the interpretation of those facts”. According to the above authors, scientific research is thus “a systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of

hypothetical propositions about presumed relations among natural phenomena”.

- A modern contemporary dictionary definition of the word research is: “Systematic investigation to establish facts; a search for knowledge; to inquire into; an attempt to find out or explore” (Online dictionary: Wordweb.com).

However, no matter the semantics involved, when a variety of definitions of the term research are dissected into suitable component elements, certain core themes can be extracted and assigned as essential descriptors. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001) and McCotter, (2001), these themes are:

- *Systematic and rational.* Research should be well organised and planned; the tactical aspects of the design, the data to be gathered and the mode of analysis to be employed should detailed in advance.
- *Objectivity.* Since research is human endeavour, the implication is that a researcher should strive to be unbiased and unemotional in performing responsibilities. This attribute is seen as a hallmark of scientific enquiry.
- *Informational and decision-making.* These notions are implicitly embedded and are characteristics of experience and judgement. Consequently, research should answer a question or contribute

towards solving a problem. Information emerges when data has been assimilated and holistically encapsulated and becomes the premise upon which objective decision-making is based.

- *Critical thinking*: This is another aspect coupled with the meaning of research. The researcher should set aside personal prejudices and bias and, in a distanced and cognitive manner pursue truth.

The concept of design is codified in the following sources / references:

- *The Online dictionary, Wordweb.com*, defines the term *design* as: “the act of working out the form of something (as by making a sketch or outline or plan); an arrangement scheme; something intended as a guide for making something else”.
- Mouton and Marais (1992) are of the opinion that the aim of research design is to plan and structure an inquiry such that the eventual validity of the research is maximised.
- Leedy (1993, p. 125) comments that “research design is a common sense approach; a complete strategy of attack on the central research problem that must be conceived in the researcher’s own mind”.
- From the perspective of Yin (1994) research design can be interpreted as meaning the preparation of a working plan or

blueprint geared to systematically assembling, organising and integrating data to solve the research problem.

In essence, research represents a systematised and orderly fashion of approaching, conducting and concluding a facet of study of something or phenomenon and the design is the blueprint or framework that logically serves as the pathway or conduit by which the inquiry is engaged in.

2.1.2 The characteristics of methodology

The methodology adopted in any research inquiry is not a haphazard activity (Leedy, 1993; Leedy & Ormrod, 2001), but a standard procedure in a logical sequence of steps. As such, research:

- originates in the mind of the researcher as a result of a curious, observant attitude towards a phenomenon that needs further investigation;
- demands that the researcher articulates a specific goal for the investigative approach – technically termed the problem statement;
- dictates a specific plan of action or procedure, known as the research method;
- generally recognises that a frontal attack on the entire problem is too large in scope for a single investigation, and, consequently, the

matter under scrutiny is divided in sub-problems that are manageable;

- is traditionally guided by the specific research problem, question or constructs called hypotheses. An hypothesis is a tentative theory or opinion based on incomplete evidence about the natural world or a concept that is not yet verified, but, if true, would explain certain facts or phenomena;
- accepts certain critical assumptions that are axiomatic and essential for the research process to proceed;
- requires the collection and interpretation of data in an attempt to resolve the problem that initiated the research; and
- is, by nature, a circular iterative, or more exactly, a helical process.

The above explanations are verified and supported by Churchill and Peter (1998) and Cant, Gerber-Nel, Nel and Kotze, (2003). It is reiterated that the plan on how to collect and analyse data is known as research design. The process is sequential and is like a map; more than one path can be taken to reach the desired destination. Deciding on which path to follow, and, consequently, the type of research to use, depends upon the intended destination and the resources available.

The current research project adhered to the above caveats, as it aimed to solve the stated research problem through a well-defined

methodical process of investigation and an exhaustive analysis and reconstruction that was controlled and managed by the researcher.

2.1.3 General criteria for a research project

In planning a research project, certain features common to all authentic research should be implanted and serve as guidelines (Bennet, 1991; Leedy, 1997; Leedy & Ormrod, 2001; Radder, 1997).

The suggested criteria are:

- *Universality.* The research project should be such that any competent person, other than the researcher, should be able to conduct the research. The researcher is merely a catalyst in the quest for and inquiry into knowledge. Surrogacy of personage and the successful non-prejudicial completion of valid research is the hallmark to strive for.
- *Replication.* The research should be repeatable and such that any competent person will be able to render comparable results within the same research milieu.
- *Control.* Specific parameters and delimitations must be set, and the factors critical to the success of the research must be isolated and capable of replication; a further consideration being the degree to which the variables involved can be manipulated and measured in a controlled way.

-
-
- *Measurement.* The data collected should be susceptible to some form of measurement. Whereas the physical sciences lend themselves to accurate measurement, in the social sciences and humanities, this aspect can never be as precise.
 - In the *planning and design of research*, the data and constraints associated therewith, together with their impact on the entire project have to be visualised.

2.2 DATA AND THEIR ROLE IN RESEARCH

Once a methodology has been developed to serve as a framework and blueprint within which facts are positioned to make their meaning more lucid, data is needed. Data are manifestations of a reality and nuggets of discovery of underlying truths. Researchers must be mindful that even the most carefully collected data may have an elusive quality about them as they are volatile and evaporate quickly (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Data refers to raw, unanalysed facts, which are firsthand responses about the subject of investigation. Only when data has been processed does it become information (Hair, Bush & Ortinau, 2000; Van Rensburg, 1997).

All data can be categorised as being either primary or secondary. Primary data is “the layer closest to the Truth – these are often the most valid, the most illuminating, the most truth-manifesting”. Secondary data is information gleaned, synthesised and constructed

by another researcher and which, at some stage in their lineage, were derived from primary data. The current research project relied principally on the use of primary data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001 p. 95).

2.2.1 **Linking data and research methodology**

To extract meaning from data, a process called research methodology is employed. The data being collected and the methodology employed in this process are inextricably interdependent. Different research problems lead to varying research designs and methods, which in turn result in the collection of different types of data and different interpretations thereof. To some extent, the data required dictates the research approach that ought to be employed in a study. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) forcefully contend that over the years numerous methodologies have emerged to accommodate the spectrum of forms that data is likely to take and that a broad view must be taken when approaching the concept of research methodology. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001 p. 100) "There is no exclusive highway that leads us exclusively to a better understanding of the unknown. Many highways can take us in that direction. They may traverse different terrain, but they all converge on the same destination: the enhancement of human knowledge."

2.2.2 Deciding between quantitative and qualitative approaches to research methodology

It is best to visualise the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research as a continuum. All research methods can be placed somewhere between the extremes of pure quantitative and pure qualitative research (Jackson, 1995a). However, Van Biljon (1999) is of the opinion that it is plausible to indicate whether a research project is more qualitative or quantitative by nature. This would in turn play an important role in decisions on processes to follow and measuring instruments to select.

A literature scrutiny reveals a rich variety of comparisons and distinctions between a qualitative and quantitative approach to research. These differences have been reflected in a broad general format in Table 2.1. By conducting such an examination of the differences between the two approaches, the researcher was able to begin identifying a possible approach which appeared the best for the study at hand.

Table 2.1 **Qualitative versus quantitative approaches to research**

	Qualitative research	Quantitative research
Hypotheses	Hypotheses are frequently undeclared or merely stated in the form of a research goal	Hypothesis stated explicitly and formulated beforehand
Objective	To gain an insight and understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations	To quantify the data and generalise the results from the sample to the population of interest
Focus	Concepts are in the form of themes, motives, generalisations, taxonomies. Concepts can be interpreted in a number of ways. Holistic and broad focus	Concepts are in the form of distinct variables which have an unambiguous meaning
Sample	Generally, a small number of non-representative cases / observations	Large numbers of representative cases
Perspective	Insider focus, first-hand experience	Outsider perspective, detached and objective
Reality	Concerned with changing or dynamic nature of reality	Focus on accumulation of facts, within a stable milieu
Conditions	Collected within the context of the natural occurrence	Controlled to rule out extraneous variables
Data collection	Data in the form of words from documents, observations, transcripts. Largely unstructured	Data in the form of numbers from precise measurement. Structured
Data analysis	Analysis proceeds by extracting themes or generalisations from evidence and organising data to present a coherent, consistent picture. Non-statistical	Analysis proceeds by using statistical methods, tables or charts and discusses how what they reveal relates to hypotheses
Outcomes	Develop an initial understanding of phenomena. A valid, representative picture emerges	Reliability and replication of findings. Recommend a final course of action

Source: Adapted from Burger (2001), Leedy & Ormrod (2001), Mouton & Marais (1992), Stainback & Stainback (1984), Welman & Kruger (1999)

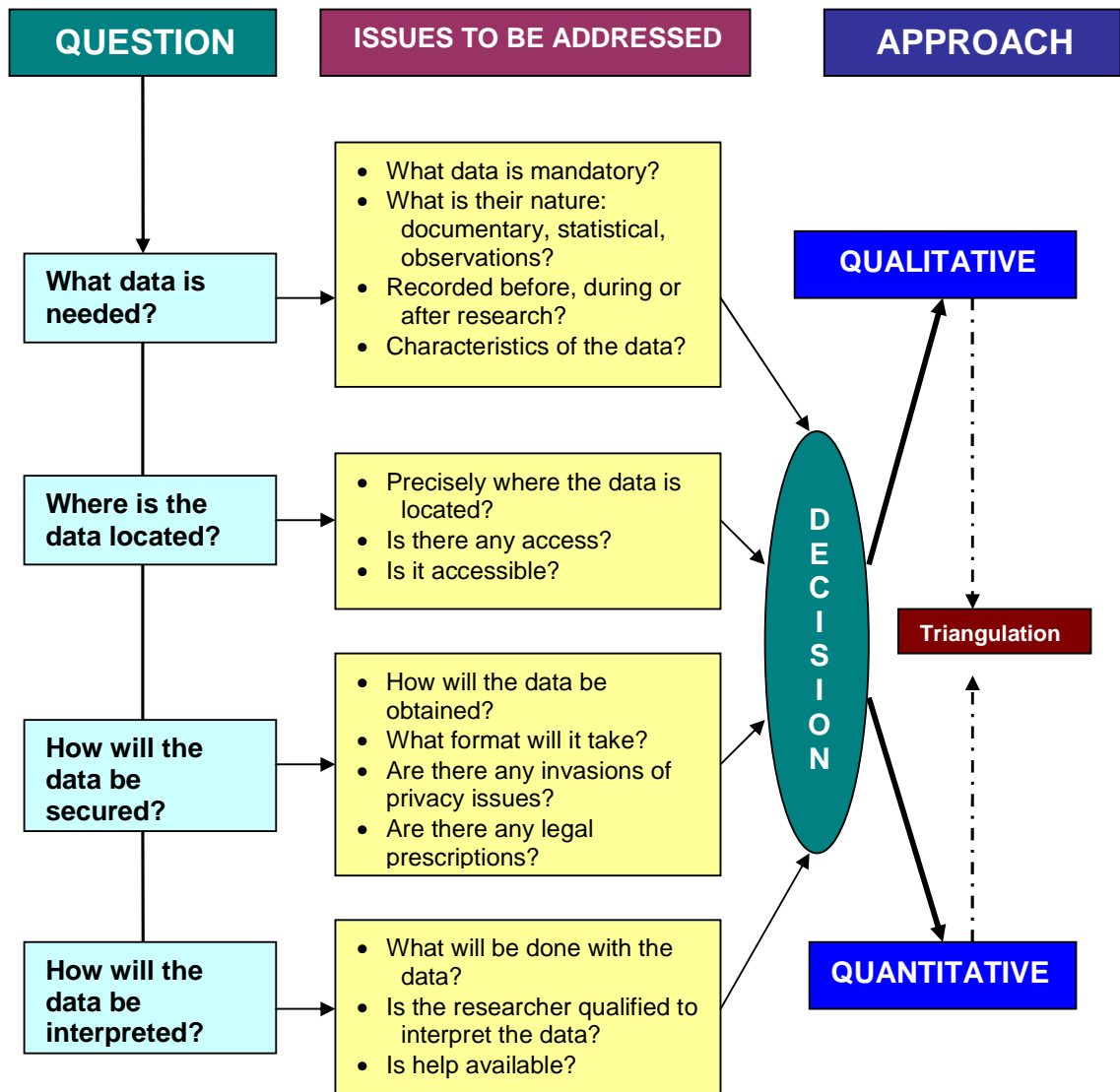
To narrow and sharpen the focus as to the specific stance to adopt for the current study, the relevance of the qualitative / quantitative distinctions had to be assessed. Thus, a further reduction process was required.

The suggestions of Leedy (1993) were used as Leedy hones the selection process down still further and contends that there are some typical general issues that need to be addressed before a tentative definite decision is made. It is posited that the answer to the conundrum of choice can be determined by:

- the nature of the data and the problem being researched;
- the location of the data;
- how the enquirer intends to access the data; and
- what the researcher intends doing with the data.

The elements that need to be considered when planning a research approach are reflected in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Issues to address when planning an approach to research



Source: Modelled on Leedy (1993)

It became distinctly apparent that the intended study of the dimensions of dining-out experiences that speak to the inner needs of patrons of niche market restaurants lent themselves to a qualitative approach being adopted. It also became clear that owing to the very nature of the intrinsic data required to complete the study successfully, coupled

with the intimacy of contact needed with informants, that some final form of judgemental tool was necessary to select an accurate choice. The choice between a qualitative and quantitative research approach was further guided by the Decalogue Checklist propagated by Leedy and Ormrod (2001), and summarised in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: **Decalogue Checklist for decision making**

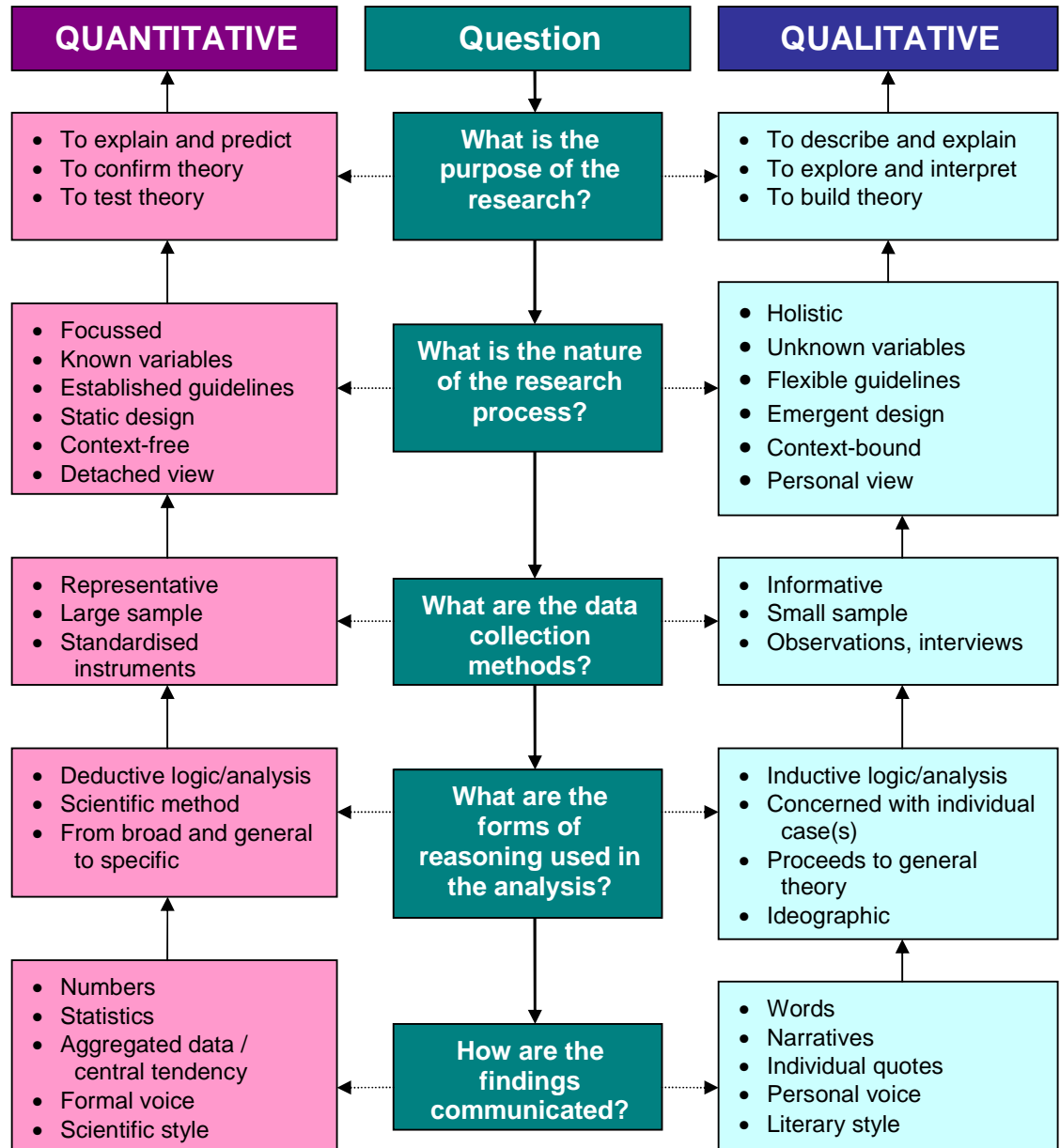
	Approach to use if:	Quantitative	Qualitative
1	You believe that:	There is an objective reality that can be measured	There are multiple possible realities constructed by different individuals
2	Your audience is:	Familiar with / supportive of quantitative studies	Familiar with / supportive of qualitative studies
3	Your research question is:	Confirmatory, predictive	Exploratory, interpretive
4	The available literature is:	Relatively large	Limited
5	Your research focus:	Covers a lot of breadth	Involves in-depth study
6	Your time available is:	Relatively short	Relatively long
7	Your ability / desire to work with people is:	Medium to low	High
8	Your desire for structure is:	High	Low
9	You have skills in the area of:	Deductive reasoning and statistics	Inductive reasoning and attention to detail
10	Your writing skills are strong in the area of:	Technical, scientific writing	Literary, narrative writing

Source: Leedy & Ormrod (2001 p. 112)

A consideration of the above analytical exercises reinforced was the simple obiter propagated by Leedy (1993 p. 145), that “If that data is verbal, the methodology is qualitative; if it is numerical, the methodology is quantitative.”

It was further evident that the guidelines suggested in Figure 2.2, namely: purpose, process, data collection, data analysis and reporting of findings are of significant relevance and would be key determinants in the choice of the most suitable research approach for the current study.

Figure 2.2: Distinguishing characteristics of quantitative and qualitative approaches to research



Source: Adapted from Welman & Kruger (1999), Leedy & Ormrod (2001)

When the issues at stake in the study were considered and applied to each of the questions in Figure 2.2 again, it was apparent that a qualitative stance would be the most applicable. The reasons for this conclusion are as follows:

- The purpose of the study was to describe, explore and explain deep-seated psychic reasons for patronage and the findings of the study would help proffer tentative theories.
- The nature of the research process would be holistic with many unknown variables. The process would be context-bound with emergent design and very intimate.
- The data-collection methods would rely on the dynamics of individuals and small groups being observed and intensely interviewed.
- The form of reasoning and analysis would be inductive, and
- The findings would be communicated in narrative linguistic style, with personal voice.

In addition to the above considerations, the researcher was further assured of an accurate research approach choice having completed the Decalogue Checklist propagated by Leedy and Ormrod (2001 p. 112). All ten questions could be confidently and affirmatively answered, thus confirming that the qualitative research approach adopted was the most prudent and pragmatic.

In addition to having concretised the optimum research approach to adopt for this study, the researcher further conducted an in-depth literature study on qualitative research methodology as a modern scientific tool. These supportive issues will now be addressed contextually.

2.3 THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

A comprehensive literature review revealed a diversity of complementary and supportive facets that made the choice of a qualitative approach for the investigation more logical. These findings will be addressed, and thereafter, the specific qualitative methodology options are reviewed together with their relevant concurrent facets that need to be addressed in the research.

Sherry and Kozinets (2001 p. 165) propose that qualitative researchers elicit information in context, “as a gift”, rather less invasively than exercising it for examination out of context, as a fact. As the qualitative researcher’s quest is to enter the everyday lives and experiences of consumers, systematic introspection is used in an attempt to understand from “the actor’s perspective, and by striving to represent that understanding authentically, these (qualitative) researchers complement the work of their quantitative counterparts” (Sherry and Kozinets, 2001). Contextually, the same authors contend

that as a consequence of the methodological hegemony of oppositions between hard / soft; natural / social and qualitative / quantitative, our understanding of the “singularity of the particular” has been impoverished.

Qualitative techniques require a great deal of time, cognitive skills, emotional and physical energy, critical analytical capacity and high levels of creativity. In addition, it is a creative scientific process that necessitates an ability to deal with ideas and concepts and converting those to verbal form. This kind of investigation depicts scholarship at its pinnacle and typically emphasises constructivist approaches where there is a marginal distinction between objectivity and reality. As the task of the qualitative researcher is one of analysis and synthesis, it subjects the researcher to an intellectual rigour of thinking in terms of ideas and words, and consequently conversion and representation on paper (Cassell & Symon, 1994; Leedy, 1993; 1997). Distilled to its essence, it becomes evident that qualitative research is thus the collection and analysis of extensive narrative data to gain insights into a situation of interest not possible using other types of data.

2.3.1 Prime characteristics of qualitative research

A spectrum of prime features or characteristics of qualitative research can be isolated (Eisner, 1991; Leedy & Ormrod, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994):

- Qualitative studies tend to be field-orientated, where research is conducted through intense and/or prolonged contact in a real life situation that reflects the world of individuals, groups, societies or organisations.
- Descriptive data is gathered in naturalistic settings where an inductive analysis, generalised from collective specific instances is iteratively employed.
- Qualitative research considers the self as an instrument that engages the situation and makes sense of it. It involves perceiving the presence of phenomena and interpreting them through attentiveness and understanding, while the researcher suspends all preconceptions about the phenomenon under investigation. Further, the inquirer describes from the perspectives of the research participants.
- The interpretive character of qualitative research involves the inquirer trying to account for what he / she was given account of, coupled with the objective of delving into the meanings of events for those who experience them. A principal task is to explicate the manner in which people in a defined setting rationalise and manage day-to-day situations.
- Qualitative studies manifest the use of expressive language and the presence of voice in the text. Most of the analysis is done in

words that attempt to encapsulate the feelings, beliefs and meanings people attach to the object under study.

- There is great attention to detail in qualitative studies, and many interpretations of the material are possible. Therefore, an holistic approach is emphasised.
- Relatively little standardised instrumentation is used at the outset since it often evolves and unfolds during the research exercise.
- Qualitative research becomes credible and its success is adjudicated because of coherence, insight and instrumental utility.

2.3.2 Growth in the use of qualitative research

In a recent study of the worldwide marketing research industry, investigators discovered that ad hoc qualitative research comprises the largest growth segment of inquiry into consumer behaviour (Cantar Group, 1995). Innovative qualitative research is diffusing rapidly across companies and categories. Iacobucci (2001) cites a host of firms adopting and benefiting by forward-looking qualitative research. These operations range from high-tech organisations to a plethora of divergent fields of endeavour. Among those cited are: the motor industry, consumer packaging, electronic goods manufacturers and technology, white goods, fashion and clothing, media and entertainment and business-to-business marketers. Similarly, in support of demonstrating the acceptance of interpretative research, a

band of prestigious American Business Schools, professional journals and associations are evidentially enumerated.

Corroborating this finding that the proliferation of qualitative tools in the manager's toolkit is apparently accelerating, Pine and Gilmore (1999) clarify that as parity is achieved among products and services across more and more industries, and marketers are compelled to devote greater attention to understanding and enhancing the experiential dimensions of their offerings, one can expect qualitative research to undergo a renaissance. Therefore, how the psychic and emotional rationale of consumers affects choices and decision-making becomes incrementally more relevant. Contextually, Zaltman's (1997) poignant admonition to "rethink" market research by "putting people back" into research design may herald just such a rebirth.

2.3.3 Distinctive features of recent qualitative research

A literature scrutiny revealed a proliferation of techniques and approaches as well as adaptations to traditional methods of qualitative research in recent years. Within this milieu, it would have been absurdly reductionist to attempt to summarise, synthesise and integrate facets thereof coherently. Nonetheless, to achieve a sense of orientation, some of the key features of current enquiry are explored in the section that follows. Distilled through the viewpoints of Sherry

and Kozinets (2001), six distinctive features surfaced and are synoptically overviewed and discussed below:

- *Naturalistic observation* is the hallmark of recent enquiry which includes immersion in a field setting and prolonged engagement with informants or stakeholders becoming common practices. Researchers employ an emergent design in an effort to capture as comprehensively as possible, the minimal parameters of a phenomenon and investigation has an alternating expanding and contracting focus. Analysis is also hermeneutic and iterative and proceeds via a constant comparative method. Thus, data collection and analysis are conducted in tandem. A dialectical relationship between literature scrutiny and field research characterise the exploration. Researchers sample until saturation and redundancy are achieved, at which stage they either conclude their inquiry, or adopt different protocols that may permit the transcending of the limits of the researchers' habitual tools of choice.
- *Progressive contextualisation* is another important qualitative research strategy. Researchers grapple with the nesting and embedding of understanding and as meaning is always situational, a heightened attention to the context in which a phenomenon unfolds is amply repaid. Contextual inquiry, therefore, is a way to elicit some of the unarticulated, tacit knowledge, emotion, motivation and understanding

that people possess. As embeddedness is a critical concern, researchers will often strive to understand how behaviour will ramify beyond an individual to a household, a community, and ultimately, to a society itself.

- In keeping with their desire to probe a range of behaviour patterns, researchers attempt to make *maximised comparisons*. They use variation as a perspective for exploring similarities and differences among phenomena. Thus, researchers cross cultures, times, or situations to provoke variance. While the representativeness of a phenomenon is clearly of interest, researchers are equally concerned with outliers. Deviations (outliers) are embraced, rather than rejected, for the distinctive insight their marginality can contribute and a marginal perspective can often be highly illuminating.
- As qualitative inquirers quest for *sensitised concepts*, researchers are interested in the lived experience of their sources and in representing that experience authentically. Capturing the worldview of the respondents, (as distinct from an analytical framework imposed by the researcher), is at the heart of the inquiry. Such investigation is idiographic, the goal being for the researcher to develop systematic intuitions about informants' life-worlds. This perspective is supported by Radder (1997) who adds that qualitative research is more concerned with emergent themes and idiographic descriptions, and

less driven by very specific hypotheses and categorical frameworks. Sherry and Kozinets (2001) conclude that informants are increasingly regarded as collaborators and consultants in the research enterprise, which itself becomes a co-created, jointly negotiated undertaking. As Geertz, (1973) (in Iacobucci, 2001 p. 169) encapsulates the issue, the ultimate result of close attention to sensitised concepts is a so-called “thick description” of the phenomenon under investigation.

- Stein (1994) contends that perhaps the most controversial hallmark of qualitative research is the notion of *intraceptive intuition*. Simply stated, the researcher is the pre-eminent instrument of the research. Believing that it is both impossible and undesirable to eliminate the impact of the inquirer upon the phenomenon, researchers attempt to increase their own acuity as an instrument through a variety of strategies (multi-method training, broad reading, wide experiential exposure, interpersonal skills development, psychoanalysis, introspection that both exalt and harness their idiosyncrasies. As noted by Zaltman (1991), such researchers strive to develop both wide cognitive peripheral vision and broadly resonant emotional depth as indispensable aids to interpretation.
- The last distinctive feature of current qualitative research isolated by Sherry and Kozinets (2001) is the emphasis on *grounded theory*, which is rooted in the work of Glazer and Strauss (1967).

Simplistically stated, theory is expected to emerge from the data. Sherry and Kozinets (2001) explain that since a researcher cannot approach a project with no a priori theories or hypotheses, and as a consequence of the rejection of a so-called objective or disinterested fact, an enquirer strives to specify and disclose existing personal biases, but holds them in abeyance (in effect, bracket them) as the research regime unfolds. The posture adopted towards theory development is essentially an agnostic, eclectic one, which allows for the discovery and construction of broad rival hypotheses.

2.3.4 **Qualitative research is holistic and gestalten**

The researcher's ability to interpret and make sense of what is seen is critical for an understanding of any social phenomenon. In this sense, the researcher is an instrument in much the same way as a sociogram, rating scale or intelligence test is an instrument (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Noted researchers argue that although objective methods may be appropriate for studying physical events such as chemistry, black holes and chemical reactions, an objective approach to studying human events such interpersonal relationships and social structure "is neither desirable nor, perhaps, even possible" (Eisner, 1998; Leedy & Ormrod, 2001).

Qualitative approaches to research are thus premised on a world view which is holistic and has the following beliefs: there is no single reality

or truth; reality is based upon perceptions that are different for each person and change over time; and, what is known to have meaning only within a given situation or context. Therefore, the reasoning process underscoring qualitative research involves perceptually putting pieces together to make wholes. From this process meaning is produced. However, since perception varies with the individual, many different meanings are possible.

The reasoning process above can be further understood by exploring the formation of *gestalts*. A gestalt is a configuration or pattern of elements so unified as a whole that it cannot be described merely as a sum of its parts. The concept of gestalt is closely related to the holistic approach and proposes that knowledge about a particular phenomenon can be organised into a cluster of linked ideas, that is, a gestalt (Inde, 1997).

An example is used to illustrate the meaning of gestalt: When attempting to understand something new an individual might react by saying “Now that makes sense to me” or “Oh, I see.” Whatever the new phenomenon was that the individual was trying to understand has gelled for that personage. The individual now understands the concept through interpretation of a particular theory used to explicate it. It will, however, be difficult for such an individual to see the phenomenon outside the meaning given to it by the theory. Thus, in

addition to giving meaning, a theory can actually limit the meaning of a phenomenon. The purpose of qualitative research is to form new gestalts and sometimes to generate new theories (Inde, 1997).

To accomplish forming new gestalts, the researcher has to get outside of any existing theories or gestalts that explain the phenomenon of interest. The mind has to be open to new gestalts emerging through the abstract thinking process of the researcher during the personal experiences of the qualitative research process. When disciplines have strong traditional views that are entrenched, individuals are introduced to so-called sedimented views at an early stage in their careers, studies or experiences. The term sedimented means a long held belief that has become unshakeable, although it may be mistaken. Qualitative research provides a process through which a phenomenon can be examined outside of sedimented views (Inde, 1997).

The current research study was embarked upon within the purposeful mindset of being non-sedimented. The researcher did not wish to be bound by any current paradigms or preconceived notions that hamstrung and clinically explained either the perceptions, choices or behaviours of customers of the niche restaurant under study.

2.4 CONCLUSIONS

A systematic approach to research is essential to ensure that a project has credibility. Furthermore, the qualitative, non-numerical approach to gathering and manipulating information is dependent upon the judgement, subjective assessments, insight and maturity of the researcher. It is clear that the qualitative researcher does not follow a fixed set of procedures, and thus will have to develop a set of strategies and tactics to organise, manage and evaluate the research (Van Biljon, 1999). Clarity of thought and precise use of semantics then become essential prerequisites for success.

In Chapter 3 the second component of research design and methodology is addressed.

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CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY:
PART TWO

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the scene was set regarding the research design and the methodology that was adopted when conducting this study. This chapter presents reasons for selecting a qualitative approach, and more specifically, the relevance of a phenomenological stance. Because the intent of the study is to describe and contextualise phenomena in the selected unit of analysis, rich in-depth interviews are explored and justified as applicable data collection tools. The credibility of research, sample selection and data collection are also comprehensively addressed. The chapter concludes with a summary of the major research design decisions that were applicable for this investigation.

3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGNS

Having comprehensively determined that the investigation would merit a qualitative study, the appropriate specific research design had to be isolated. As cited in the previous chapter, a research design was designated as the conduit for the study.

Analysis of the research approaches showed that a qualitative research design may take a variety of forms, the commonest of which are: case study, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory and content analysis (Calder, 1977; Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). The distinguishing characteristics of these qualitative designs are represented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 **Distinguishing characteristics of different qualitative designs**

Design	Purpose	Focus	Methods of data collection	Methods of data analysis
Case study	To understand one construct, context or organisation in great depth	One case study or a few cases within its / their natural setting	Observations, interviews, appropriate written documents and / or audio-visual materials	Categorisation and interpretation of data in terms of common themes, synthesis into an overall portrait of the case(s)
Ethnography	To understand how behaviours reflect the culture of a group	A specific field site in which a group of people share a common culture	Participant observation, structured or unstructured interviews with 'informants', artefacts, document collection	Focus on significant events
Phenomenology	To understand an experience/s from the participants' point of view	A particular phenomenon as it is typically lived or perceived by human beings	In-depth, unstructured interview, purposeful sampling of between 5 – 25 individuals	Search for meaning units that reflect various aspects of the experience, integration of the meaning units into a typical experience
Grounded theory	To derive a theory from data collected in a natural setting	Human actions and interactions, and how they result from and influence one another	Interviews and any other relevant data sources	Prescribed and systematic method of coding the data into categories and identifying interrelationships, continual interweaving of data collection and data analysis, construction of a theory from the categories and interrelationships
Content analysis	To identify the specific characteristics of a body of material	Any verbal, visual, or behavioural form of communication	Identification and possible sampling of the specific material to be analysed coding of the material in terms of predetermined and precisely defined characteristics	Tabulation of the frequency of each characteristic descriptive or inferential statistical analyses as needed to answer the research question

Source: Modelled on Calder (1997) and Leedy & Ormrod (2001 p. 157)

Within the context of the study at hand and the related sub-problems defined in Chapter 2, it is evident that the phenomenological research design would be the most appropriate. This design approach selection is substantiated by the following logic:

- A major thrust of the research was to understand an experience from the participants' viewpoint and to describe the participants' perceptions in great detail.
- The focus of the research would be on the lived experience and not on a specific case *per se*.
- The use of a natural setting incorporating a triangulatory approach of observations, general preliminary interviews and multiple specific in-depth interviews.
- The use of both structured and unstructured discourse that would lead to data categorisation and interpretation into common themes, which could be synthesised into a generic portrait of perception and a typical experience.
- The holistic outcome of the investigation could result in the generation of or contribution towards new theory.

Section 3.3 below overviews the phenomenological research methodology.

3.3 PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Phenomenology is a 20th century philosophical movement dedicated to describing the structures of experience as they present themselves to consciousness, without recourse to theory, deduction or assumptions from other disciplines (Richardson, 1994). Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a research method, whose purpose is to describe experiences as they are lived in phenomenological terms. In other words, an attempt is made to “capture” the “lived experience” of study participants (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001). Simplistically stated, phenomenology is used in a general sense to refer to subjective experiences of various types. In a more specialised sense, it refers to a disciplined and systematic study of consciousness from a first-person perspective.

Epistemologically, phenomenological approaches are rooted in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, and emphasise the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. As such, they are powerful for understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into peoples’ motivations and actions, and cutting through the clutter of taken-for-granted assumptions and conventional wisdom (Lester, 2003). Lester (2003) continues by adding that phenomenological studies challenge structural or normative assumptions and add an interpretive dimension to research, enabling it to be used as the basis for practical theory to inform, support or challenge policy and action.

Pure phenomenological research seeks essentially to describe rather than explain, and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions. The research is made visible in the frame of research as an interested and subjective participant, rather than a detached and impartial observer (Plummer, 1983; Stanley & Wise, 1993).

Peoples' perceptions, perspectives and understanding of a particular situation or experience are explored in-depth, and by examining multiple perspectives of the same situation, the researcher can then make some generalisations of what something is like from an insider's view and how they interpret their experience (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001).

3.3.1 **Method**

Phenomenological approaches can be applied to a single case, random or deliberately-selected samples. A wide variety of methods can also be used, including interviews, conversations, participant observation, action research, focus meetings and analysis of personal texts. A general principle advocated by Lester (2003) is that of minimum structure and maximum depth. Lester further adds that the establishment of a good level of rapport and empathy is crucial to gaining information depth. Creswell (1998) suggests that phenomenological researchers depend almost exclusively on lengthy interviews with a carefully selected sample of participants. A typical

sample size can vary from five to 25 individuals, all of whom have had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied.

Throughout the data collection process, the researcher suspends any preconceived notions or personal experiences that may unduly influence what the researcher hears the participants saying. In an effort to hear the voice of participants, such suspension (sometimes called *epoche* or *bracketing*) is essential if the inquirer is to gain an understanding of typical experiences that people have had. In recognising the potential for a body of research to lose its freshness when written about over analytically, researchers have begun to tell the “voice” of participants using new methods called evocative representations, in which authors deploy literary devices and evoke emotional responses (Richardson, 1994 p. 521).

Eisner (1991) is of the opinion that there is not a single clear, easy way to represent voice in qualitative research. This author continues by adding that new ways must continually be sought to do so because all methods and forms of representation are partial, and because they are partial, they limit, as well as illuminate what through them is experienced. Therefore, whatever emerges from discourse with informants is a collaborative construction. Bateson (1995) comments contextually that the engagement between researcher and informant is built both on difference and similarity. It is, therefore, stressed that

so-called informants, interviewees or subjects are in the truest sense colleagues of the researcher. As a result, a symmetry as well as an asymmetry exists, in the sense that it is the researcher who collates the memory and perceptions of the participants of the phenomenological events under investigation.

3.3.2 Data analysis

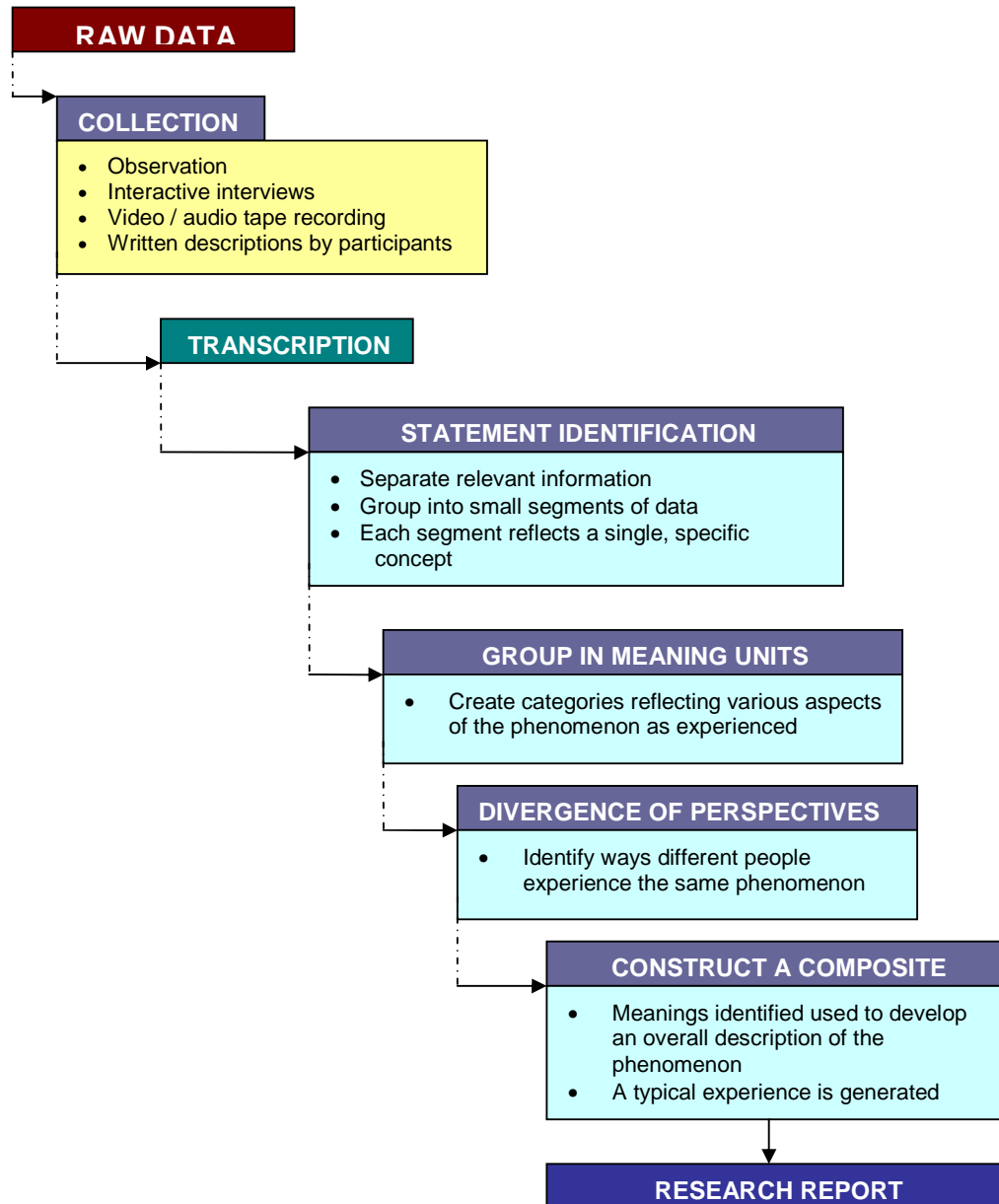
The central task during data analysis is to identify common themes in peoples' descriptions of their experiences. Data can be collected through a variety of means: observation, interactive interviews, videotape and written descriptions by the subjects. Typically though, data is collect by in-depth conversations with participants. After transcribing the interviews, the researcher typically takes the following steps (Creswell, 1998):

- *Identifies statements that relate to the topic.* The researcher separates relevant from irrelevant information in the interview and then breaks the applicable information into small segments (such as phrases or sentences) that each reflect a single, specific thought.
- *Groups statements into meaning units.* The segments are grouped into categories that reflect the various aspects meanings of the phenomena as it is experienced.

- *Seeks divergent perspectives.* The inquirer establishes and considers various ways in which different people experience the same phenomenon.
- *Constructs a composite.* The various meanings identified are used to develop an overall description of the event as people typically experience it.

Analysis begins when the first data is collected and the analysis then guides decisions related to further data collection. The final result is a general description of the phenomenon, as seen through the eyes of people who have lived it firsthand. The focus is on common themes in the experience despite the diversity in the individuals and setting studied. The data-analysis flow described above is depicted in Figure 3.1 below.

Figure 3.1 The data analysis flow



Source: Researcher's own construction, based on Richardson (1994) and Creswell (1998)

The above flow-diagramme essentially served as a template of the procedure that was followed for the empirical research conducted in this study.

3.3.3 The research report

There is no specific structure for reporting a phenomenological study.

For all such research (Polinghorne, 1989 p. 46):

- the research problem needs to be presented;
- the methods of data collection and analysis have to be described;
- the conclusion about the phenomenon being studied (through a composite of the participants' experiences) has to be stated;
- the findings are to be related to an existing body of theory and research; and
- the practical implications of the study are to be expounded.

Polinghorne (1989, p. 46) encapsulates the essence of the phenomenological report as: "Your report should be sufficiently vivid that your readers come away feeling that 'I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that'".

3.4 RESEARCH CREDIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

In its broadest sense, the validity of the research project as a whole centres around accuracy, meaningfulness and credibility. The research will have credence to the extent to which meaningful and defensible conclusions can be drawn from data (McCotter, 2001). Two fundamental questions need to be posed to assess the validity of a research study.

The first question relates to the internal validity of the data and revolves around establishing if the study has sufficient controls to ensure that the conclusions drawn are truly warranted by the data. Internal validity minimises alternative explanations for the results obtained from research. The second question pertains to external validity and addresses the issue whether what was observed in the research situation can be used to make generalisations about the milieu beyond that specific situation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). For research to stand the test of scrutiny and emerge as credible, these criteria should be entrenched in the research process.

The strict notion of internal and external validity of qualitative investigation is being mooted and questioned. It is debated that these concepts relate more specifically to experimental research, from which they originated. As an alternate descriptor when applied to qualitative research, it is suggested that terms such as: credibility, dependability,

confirmability, verification and transferability be used instead of validity (Crewell, 1998; Lather, 1991; Wolcott, 1994).

When employing qualitative research as a tool to describe and impute meaning in the world of participants, the researcher does not strive for objectivity or to distance the self from research participants. On the contrary, if this were to occur, good qualitative research would be hampered, since the interviewer's sensitivity to subjective aspects of a relationship with interviewees is a critical component of the research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001).

However, research bias is not ignored. Bias can be obviated by the inquirer explicitly recognising existing personal idiosyncrasies and pre-suppositions and by making a determined conscious effort to set them aside in analysing research data. Therefore, in research, a valid instrument is one which measures what it was designed to appraise (Leedy, 1993). As there is concern for the validity of interpretations, the involvement of other people such as colleagues, respondents and expert judges is crucial.

Specifically, reliability in research is generally concerned with accuracy and the extent to which, on repeated measures, an indicator yields similar results (Jackson, 1995a). It is, however, difficult to

achieve replication in qualitative projects, because the circumstances and individuals can never be the same at some future time-frame.

3.4.1 **Strategies to enhance credibility**

When gathering, analysing and reporting data in qualitative research, dependability can specifically be enhanced by mechanically recording interviews or events so that a verbatim record can be examined at leisure at a later stage, and if necessary, repeatedly and by a lengthy period of exposure to the data which gives the researcher the opportunity to cross-check observations and reconcile inconsistencies. The commonest tool used by qualitative researchers, however, is triangulation which involves comparing multiple data sources in search of common themes and obtaining evidence of the same phenomenon to support the cogency of their findings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001; Yin, 1994).

3.4.2 **Triangulation**

Triangulation is a compatibility procedure designed to reconcile different methodologies by eclectically using elements of each to contribute to a solution of the phenomenon under study (Leedy, 1993). Further, triangulation is designed to give a researcher greater flexibility and accuracy of investigation, in addition to improving the reliability and validity of the study (Jackson, 1995b). The necessity for triangulation also arises from the ethical need to confirm the validity of

research processes involved and to corroborate protocols used (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1984). When reduced to a simplistic concept, triangulation means a convergence of data, where multiple separate pieces of information sourced by different methodologies, point to the same conclusion.

Duffy (1998), Richardson (1994) and Van Biljon (1999) delineate several types of triangulation. Triangulation can take place from the perspective of:

- *Theory* – which involves the use of several frames of reference or perspectives in the analysis of the same set of data.
- *Data* – where an attempt is made to gather or observe through the use of a variety of sampling strategies, thus ensuring that a theory is tested in multiple ways.
- *The investigator* – where multiple observers, coders, interviewers / or analysts are deployed in the same study.
- *Methodology* – where two or more data collection procedures are employed within a single study to increase the confidence of interpretation.

Distilled to its simplistic basis, triangulation in qualitative research can be achieved by collecting data from multiple sources; in multiple ways,

and collecting different kinds of data in multiple ways from multiple subjects.

Mitchell (1986) cites specific methodological principles that must be heeded by researchers employing a triangulation technique. The research question must be clearly focussed; the strengths and weaknesses of each method or approach selected must be complementary; the methods adopted must suit the nature of the phenomenon under study; and the methodological approach being used should be evaluated throughout the study.

Leedy and Ormrod (2001) categorise the following additional strategies to help support the credibility of qualitative research conclusions:

- *Extensive time in the field.* The investigator could spend a long time engrossed in the practical arena of the research studying the particular phenomenon and continually seeking evidence upon which to build the case.
- *Negative analysis.* The researcher actively looks for cases that contradict existing hypotheses, then continually revises explanations and theories until all cases have been accounted for. (This methodology was not employed in the current research).

- *Thick description.* The situation is described in sufficient detail for readers to draw their own conclusions from the data presented.
- *Feedback from others.* The researcher seeks the opinion of colleagues in the field to determine whether they agree or disagree that the researcher has made appropriate interpretations and drawn logical conclusions from the data.
- *Respondent validation.* The investigator takes the study conclusions back to the participants of the study to get their verification of whether the conclusions made accurately reflect the experiences they had related.

3.4.3 The researcher-as-instrument

The issue of researcher-as-instrument also merits consideration as in qualitative research, issues of instrument validity and reliability are largely dependent upon the researcher. Radder (1997, p. 33) suggests that a good qualitative researcher-as-instrument has:

- some familiarity with the phenomenon and setting under study;
- strong conceptual interests;
- a multi-disciplinary approach, as opposed to a narrow grounding or focus in a single discipline; and
- good investigative skills.

Premised upon the information described above, the investigator in the current research project met the criteria as delineated by Radder (1997) and Leedy and Ormrod (2001). The researcher had first hand familiarity with the phenomenon under study and its setting; had a broad disciplinary background, both academically and from work experience; and possessed solid conceptual and investigative acumen.

For the study a mechanical device, namely, a tape recorder, was used to capture all dining experience interviews and serve as the primary tool for ensuring reliability. All group communications were transcribed and by checking and re-checking verbatim transcriptions of interviews, validity was raised. The use of triangulation in the form of selected personal interviews, besides in-depth focus interviews and communication with the restaurant proprietors further contributed to the dependability of the data. In addition, the researcher was personally responsible for data collection. The validity of study and the interpretation of data was further sought by involving respondents to verify the researcher's interpretations, and also by having regular consultations and critical discussion with the promoter.

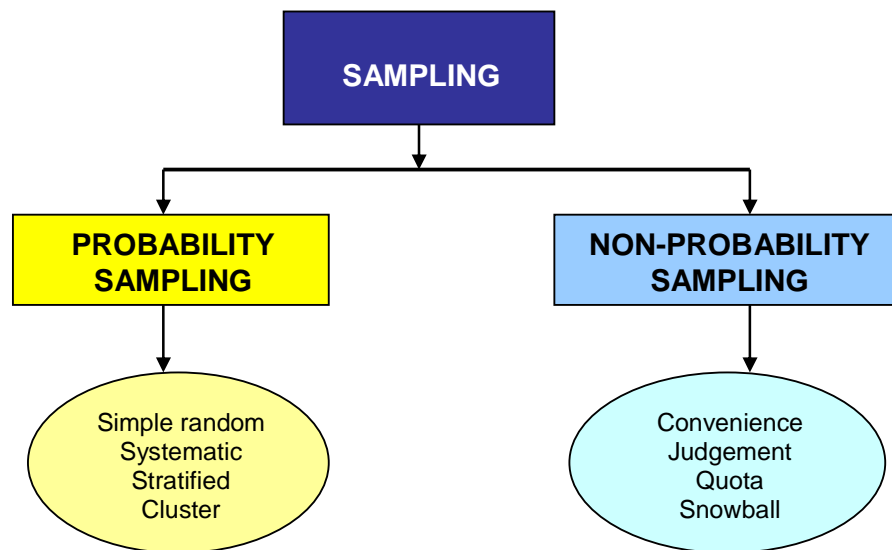
3.5 SELECTING THE SAMPLE

The researcher has to decide if it is necessary to survey the entire population of elements or only a sample of the constituents extracted from the population (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Therefore, definitive descriptors of the concept of a population and a sample are needed. A population can be regarded as a set of entities in which all the measurements of interest to the researcher are represented. Alternatively, a population depicts the total set from which the specific units of study have been selected. A sample thus constitutes the components of the population considered for actual inclusion in a study. Research data is then collected from samples because it is seldom possible or feasible to cover the total population. Time and resource constraints constrain an entire population from being tested and more accurate information is obtained from sampling a population (Crask, Fox & Stout, 1995).

Leedy (1997) contends that a sample should be carefully selected because it is the window through which the researcher is able to see characteristics of the total population in the same relationship and context had the entire population been inspected. Leedy (1997) continues by adding that all data lends itself to sampling and that this methodology is applicable when large populations have a semblance of homogeneity.

Sampling can be done by means of two broad approaches, probability and non-probability. A probability sample is one that involves some form of random selection so that every member of a population (sampling frame) has a non-zero chance of being selected and included in the sample. In a non-probability sample, every member of the sampling frame does not have a non-zero chance of inclusion (Crask, *et al.*, 1995). Figure 3.2 portrays the common options used with each methodology.

Figure 3.2 **Sampling methods**



Source: Adapted from Cant *et al.* (2003)

For the study at hand, because of the nature of the research and the intimacy of engagement with participants, it was deemed fitting to use

non-probability sampling. Specifically, a triad of convenience, judgement and quota sampling was employed. Informants were selected because of their accessibility (convenience sampling); because of their representativeness of the target population under study (judgement sampling); and a specified number of respondents was designated who were deemed to have the prerequisite characteristics of the typical customer of the niche restaurant under consideration (quota sampling).

3.6 **INFORMAL EXPLORATORY RESEARCH AND THE PILOT STUDY**

Winer (2000) contends that informal exploratory research can play a solid role in any study. It is asserted that it is often useful to collect information from friends, relatives, customers and informal observations. Although these sources may not be representative samples, such information helps the researcher in concretising a facet for study. Useful insights can be gleaned by simply observing and speaking to customers, and even by sometimes posing as a real customer without full disclosure of one's identity. In the context of this research project, the researcher spent much time informally talking with the niche-restaurant patrons and proprietors before concretising the problem statement delineated in a Chapter 1.

A pilot study was also used. A pilot study is a collective term for any small-scale exploratory research technique that uses sampling, but

does not apply rigorous standards. Pilot study methodologies include, among others, personal discussion, focus group interviews and depth interviews (Crask, *et al.*, 1995). The researcher has, since 2001, regularly conducted informal interviews with individuals and groups of patrons in niche restaurant settings in an effort to crystallise the problem statement and peripheral issues for the current research.

Since the choice of the prime method of data collection arose as a result of intimate engagement and discussion with informants both individually and collectively, some of the aspects of interviewing and the use of focus groups will be explained in the Section 3.7.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

It became evident during the exploratory stages of this research that qualitative data would give the most beneficial and pragmatic answers to the issues under investigation. It was obvious that the mathematical, linear modality of quantitative research were inappropriate.

By paying strict attention to and having casual conversations with patrons of the niche-market restaurant, it became evident that several customers had difficulty in articulating their thoughts, perceptions, experiences and emotions. Therefore, the current study was a phenomenological exploration geared at probing the inner needs and

psychic components of consumers' persona and interpreting the lived experience of participants. Consequently, specific data collection methodologies were selected. The focus was on a collage of unobtrusive observation, coupled with personal interactive and engaged communication. The modalities of observation, interviewing and moderation are discussed below.

3.7.1 Observation

Observations allow researchers great flexibility to shift focus as new data comes to light. They can be conducted from the perspective of being a relative outsider or as a participant player (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). A major constraint of this modality is that the very presence of the observer can prejudice the study. The proximity of the researcher could alter what participants say and do, and how significant events unfold. In recording events, extraneous influences and attempts to capture events holistically are also problematic. Similarly, the intrusion of tape recorders, video cameras and electronic equipment can place constraints upon and inhibit the freedom of informants' participation. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) provide a synopsis of key suggestions for observations:

- Prior to commencing the study, the recording strategies and devices must be experimented with. This will help identify the methods that work best, and in which context.

- As observations commence, the researcher should be introduced to the people being watched. The study must be described and permission must be sought to observe.
- Observation must take place quietly and as unobtrusively as possible. Further, rapport must be developed so that the confidence of players can be won.
- If field notes are taken, a page must be divided into two columns. One is used to record observations and the other for preliminary interpretations.

Leedy and Ormrod (2001) stress that actual observations should not be confused with the interpretation thereof. Any interpretations of what has been seen and heard are apt to change over the course of the investigation.

3.7.2 Interviews

Interviews can yield a great deal of useful information and the researcher can ask questions related to issues such as: biographical information, beliefs, feelings, motives, present and past behaviours, standards for behaviour and conscious reasons for actions or feelings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001; Tull & Hawkins, 1993). Interviews in qualitative research are seldom highly structured and generally only a few central questions form the fulcrum of interaction. The inquirer moulds the discourse in sympathy with the issues being proffered and

voiced by the respondents involved. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) caution that when asking informants about past experiences the information revealed may not always be accurate because of the foible nature of human memory.

(a) **Group interviews**

Group interviews were widely used in qualitative research. It is prudent to explicate this methodology in fuller depth. Kinnear and Taylor (1987 p. 380) define a (focus) group interview as “a loosely structured interview conducted by a trained moderator among a small number of respondents simultaneously.” Lamb, Hair and McDaniel (2004) contend that focus group participants must be representative and randomly selected and must number between seven to ten members. These authors also emphasise that more information is generally uncovered by this form of research than by individual interviewing. One of the essential postulates of group session usage is the idea that the response from one person becomes the stimulus for another, thereby generating an interplay of responses that may yield more information than if the same number of people had contributed independently.

Hess (1987) holds the seminal view that when compared with other data collection techniques, group interviews have the following specific advantages:

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- *Synergism.* The combined effect of the group will produce a wider range of information, insight and ideas than will the cumulation of the responses of a number of individuals when these replies are secured privately.
 - *Snowballing.* A bandwagon effect often operates in a group interview situation in that a comment by one person often triggers a chain response from another participant.
 - *Stimulation.* Usually after a brief introductory period the respondents get turned on in that they want to express their ideas and expose their feelings as the general level of excitement over the topic increases in the group.
 - *Security.* The participants can usually find comfort in the group in that their feelings are not greatly different from other players and they are more willing to verbalise their ideas and impressions.
 - *Spontaneity.* Since individuals are not directly required to answer any question in a group milieu, their responses can be more spontaneous, less scripted, less conventional, and should provide a more accurate picture of their perspective on specific issues.
 - *Serendipity.* It is more often in a group setting rather than during individual interviews that some idea will drop out of the blue.
 - *Specialisation.* The group interview allows the use of a more highly trained person to conduct a number of interviews concurrently.

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- *Scientific scrutiny.* The group interview lends itself to closer scrutiny of the data collection process in that several observers can witness the session and it can be electronically captured for later review and analysis.
 - *Structure.* The group interview affords more flexibility than the individual interview with regard to the topics covered and the depth with which they can be treated.
 - *Speed.* Since a number of individuals are being interviewed simultaneously, the focus group interview speeds up the data collection and analysis process.

(b) **Guidelines for conducting a productive interview**

Seasoned researchers offer specific guidelines and suggestions for engaging in productive interviews (Creswell, 1998; Eisner, 1998; Leedy & Ormrod, 2001):

- *Ensure that the interviewees are representative of the group.* People must be selected who will provide typical perceptions and experiences. Should any extremists be included in the fold, these are to be identified in the investigator's notes.
- *Ensure that the location is suitable.* The venue must be accessible, comfortable and free of distractions and potential interruptions.

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- *Establish an initial rapport.* The conversation should be cordial, polite and respectful and must commence with small talk to break the ice.
 - *Request the written and signed permission of informants.* The nature of the study must be explained and an offer must be made to provide an abstract of the report upon its completion.
 - *Focus on fact, rather than on the abstract or hypothetical.* More revealing information is likely to be disclosed when informants are asked what they do or would do in a specific situation. Philosophical debate is to be avoided.
 - *Avoid putting words into participants mouths.* People must be allowed to use their own words and descriptions. The researcher must be a good listener who allows participants leeway in expression.
 - *Record responses verbatim.* Irrespective of the recording device(s) used, everything said by participants must be noted. If there is any doubt about what was being said, the immediate feedback of the individual(s) involved must be sought so as to verify correct notation.
 - *Avoid manifestations of emotional reactions.* The more neutral voice and facial demeanour, the more accurate the responses elicited will tend to be.

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- *Be aware that the facts might not necessarily be disclosed.* As confident and convincing as participants may seem, the inquirer must be mindful that perceptions are being aired rather than fact.

3.7.3 Moderating

The moderator's skill is demonstrated by the ability to maintain a high degree of interaction among group members. Kinnear and Taylor (1987) concede that unskilled moderators typically find themselves conducting individual interviews with each participant rather than stimulating interaction among the group. Kinnear and Taylor (1987) continue by stating that interaction among group interviewees results in three phenomena, namely:

- a spontaneity in response by participants;
- the generation of an emotional involvement essential to produce depth level responses; and
- the kind and degree of rapport which facilitates a give-and-take exchange of attitudinal and behavioural information.

Kinnear and Taylor (1987 p. 383) suggest that the key qualifications for a moderator are:

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- *Kindness with firmness.* In order to elicit necessary interaction, the moderator must combine a disciplined detachment with empathy and understanding;
 - *Permissiveness.* While an atmosphere of permissiveness is desirable, the moderator must at all times be alert to indications that the group atmosphere of cordiality is disintegrating;
 - *Involvement.* Since a principal reason for the group interview is to expose feelings and obtain reactions indicative of deeper feelings, the moderator must encourage and stimulate intensive personal involvement;
 - *Encouragement.* Although the dynamics of the group situation facilitate the participation of all members in the interaction, there may be individuals who resist contributing and thus should be encouraged to participate;
 - *Flexibility.* The moderator should be equipped prior to the session with a topic outline of the subject matter to be covered. By committing topics to memory prior to the interview, the moderator may use the outline only as a reminder of content of areas omitted or covered incompletely; and
 - *Sensitivity.* The moderator must be able to identify, as the group interview progresses, the informational level on which it is being conducted, and determine if it is appropriate for the subject under discussion. Sensitive areas frequently produce superficial rather than deep responses. Depth is achieved when there is a

substantial amount of emotional response as opposed to intellectual information. Indications of depth are provided when participants begin to show how they feel about the subject, rather than what they say about it.

3.8 **CONSTRAINTS ENCOUNTERED IN THE STUDY**

Generally few problems were encountered with the study. From the logistical and empirical perspective, full and spontaneous participation was provided by all participants. From the literature scrutiny position, there was a proliferation of information on generic concepts relevant to the study, but limited sources on niche experience marketing *per se*. In this regard, the study served to explicate and generate new understanding of specific topics inadequately addressed in literature.

3.9 **CONCLUSIONS**

The research design serves as a guide for the investigator to optimally address the research problem. As has been argued, a qualitative approach, specifically using a phenomenological stance, was the most appropriate research strategy for this research project.

Observations and interviews were the main methods of data collection. The inquiry aimed to explain and describe the phenomena and to contextualise the findings in the chosen unit of analysis.

Generalisations about niche-market restaurant customers were possible and are addressed in the empirical study and conclusion of this thesis. The core research design decisions relevant to this research are summarised in Table 3.2.

The following chapter is one of two parts that address the dimensions of customer needs and their impact on restaurant patronage.

Table 3.2 Summary of core research design decisions

RESEARCH PROBLEM	
What are the dimensions of dining-out experience that speak to the inner needs and desires of customers of a niche restaurant, and how should these be addressed?	
Unit of analysis	Canton Restaurant
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	
<i>Research approach</i>	Qualitative
<i>Process logic</i>	Inductive
<i>Qualitative research method</i>	Phenomenology
<i>Type of case study design</i>	Singular-case design
<i>Sources of data</i>	Multiple sources: proprietors, customers, research reports, other general sources of information
<i>Primary data collection instruments</i>	Observation, individual, focus group and depth interviewing (triangulation)
<i>Data analysis</i>	Matrices and a pattern clarification strategy
<i>Format of research reporting</i>	Theory-building structure
RESEARCH GOAL	
Exploratory, descriptive and explanatory	
RESEARCH STRATEGY	
Contextualise within the unit of analysis. Possible later generalisation of the experiences to other niche restaurant customers	

Source: Researcher's own construction, modelled on Van Biljon (1999)

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CHAPTER 4

THE DIMENSIONS OF CUSTOMER NEEDS AND THEIR IMPACT ON RESTAURANT PATRONAGE: *PART ONE*

4.1 INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive literature survey indicates that there are a variety of generic reasons proffered by customers that support their choice, patronage and return to a restaurant. It further becomes evident that the restaurant sector in general is often strongly influenced by developments in tourism as well as by other cyclical and contextual factors such as demography, lifestyle, national or regional customs and, broadly, a country's economic situation (Soriano, 2002).

Customers appear to have their own reasons for returning to any establishment, and if management wish to unearth these and avoid subjective guesses, one of the best ways, according to Dailey (1998) and Soriano (2002), is to ask customers about their expectations. The information so gleaned is crucial to gain a competitive edge.

Superficially, the perspectives of Dailey (1998) and Soriano (2002), appear pragmatic. It seems that by asking people about their choices

and preferences, logical and rational responses will reveal their respective need structures. The ostensible result of patrons voicing these needs should culminate in enhancing the capacity of decision-makers to solicit building blocks of information that help them structure a collage of reciprocal need-fulfilling offerings. However, there is sufficient empirical evidence to demonstrate that offering good food and service *per se* is insufficient to attract and retain custom (Griffin, 1995; Raphael & Raphael, 1995). Among the attributes responsible for return support and patronage are psychic components which patrons sometimes are not even aware of, or find difficult to articulate and conceptualise.

Managers will have to excavate still deeper to uncover the mental processes and constructs that are too complex to verbalise and conceptualise as key dimensions in restaurant patronage. The challenge faced by niche restaurant marketers is to unearth the holistic rationale that drives consumer decision-making and engenders repeat patronage loyalty. Thus, simply knowing the needs of customers is insufficient. Kotler (2001) hints at this holistic approach to understanding consumers by advancing that marketers need to comprehend the totality of the emotional, intellectual, cognitive and fiscal elements of decision making. He encapsulates the task by stating that entrepreneurs and decision makers must get into the

“hearts, minds and pockets” of their target audiences to sustain long-term success (Kotler, 2001).

The high rate of failure reported in the food service industry tends to suggest that management is not successful in seeking and identifying holistic attributes that are responsible for return business and subsequent financial success (Dailey, 1998).

This chapter commences with an overview of the shifts in consumer’s perceptions and attitudes towards food and its role in their lives over the past two decades. Food has become commercialised, commodified and functional and the joys and pleasures traditionally associated with the preparation and consumption of a meal have been diluted owing to a host of modern predispositions and opinions. This is followed by a review of customer experience expectations and expectation zones. The chapter concludes with an investigation of specific dimensions affecting restaurant patronage.

4.2 THE COMMERCIALISATION OF MENTAL LIFE

In the 1980’s and 1990’s food became functional and commercialised - in the sense that consumers were faced with an invasion and proliferation of fast foods - that had their roots in the mistaken assumption that the time saved cooking would mean a few extra minutes of quality time with the ones they loved (Gray, Bell &

Ponsonby, 2003). Gray, *et al.* (2003) add that food became a commodity and the pleasure and enjoyment that accompanied preparing and eating a meal was diluted; the art of cooking was usurped with the advent of the microwave and TV dinners became commonplace despite the fact that most offerings tasted bland and insipid. Furthermore, health scares abounded as laboratory experiments on rats showed that almost all food was in some way harmful to human consumption.

Currently, in the new millennium, customers are becoming more cynical about scare-mongering and of the medical profession's confusing array of health warnings about food and its consumption (Gray *et al.*, 2003). Consequently, eating out has become the vogue, but when asked to give a definition of the term, most people tend to offer an explanation of eating in a restaurant. The tendency is to instantly focus on the more elaborate form of food consumption, purchased and eaten on commercial premises.

A mindset or attitude appears to permeate modern thinking, in the sense that consumers seem to have lost sight of the fact that 'eating out' could also be associated with having a meal at a parental home, at the work's canteen, or even in a local park or botanical garden. It is this phenomenon of connecting dining and food consumption as something that can easily be bought and which is a freely available

commodity that indicates the increasing penetration of commodified provisions. Warde and Martens (1998) refer to this perspective as “the commercialisation of mental life” and more specifically as an attitude or predisposition that is inexorably being injected into everyday life. They comment that the food system provides strong evidence of the phenomenon and that more stages of the food chain are encountered as market exchange: people grow less, preserve less and prepare less of the food they eat.

The growth of eating out is just one manifestation of the encroaching process of commodification and shift in consumers’ attitudes. Thus, in an increasing commercial culture, consumers have little option but to buy most of the items they require and thus develop a particular orientation towards modern living, which Bauman (1990) calls “the consumer attitude”. According to Bauman (1990:204) this phenomenon of the “consumer attitude” encompasses:

- Perceiving life as a series of problems that can be specified.
- Trusting that for every problem, already known or such as may arise in the future, there is a solution – a special object or recipe prepared by specialists.
- Assuming that such object or recipe can be obtained in exchange for money, and that shopping is the way of obtaining them.

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- Translating the task of learning the art of living as the effort to acquire the skill of finding such objects and recipes, and gaining the power to possess them when found.

Hence, in Bauman's (1990) perspective, the problem of obtaining fresh, tasty and satisfying food is regarded and addressed as a shopping problem, where the items selected, the price to pay and other perceived satisfiers can be commercially obtained. It is contended that the spread of the consumer attitude permeates common sense and inserts commercial culture into the core of everyday life. The question that arises in the present study of the niche restaurant in question is whether a psychic requirement can be purchased in the context of the commodification milieu?

4.3 THE NATURE OF DINING OUT

When contrasted with the domestic provisioning of food, there are symbolic associations coupled with the notion of dining out. Research conducted by Warde and Martens (1998) indicates that dining out has increased and that demand will continue to rise as factors predisposing people to eat out become more prevalent in the future. Some groups of people were also more likely to eat out than others. Positive associations linked to eating out were: having an higher than average household income, being highly-educated, being younger and being single. The study further revealed that people eat away from

home mostly with family and friends. The most common companions when eating out were other household members and kin, giving little reason to believe that increases in the rates of eating out undermine the familial bases of meal taking.

Analytic literature on eating out tends to be highly critical of the nature and quality of the experience. A great sense of pleasure and satisfaction is derived from all its aspects. The reliability of the gratification derived from eating out is in part a result of the popular understanding of the term eating out which of itself, connotes and prescribes a special journey (Waarde & Martens, 1998). A nuance of an investment of discretionary income, in order to eat a substantial meal, on a special occasion, in the company of others and without involving personal toil is also implied. Although the pleasure derived was almost universal, the means by which it is achieved were highly variable.

The reasons for and decisions governing eating out are varied and complex. It is not merely a matter of ability to pay or the degree of convenience, but also a matter of the texture of the social fabric of the home. Perceptions of treats and luxuries and sets of values and judgements about food and about eating out in public are differently distributed throughout a population (Warde & Martens, 1998).

There is a distinction in perception between evaluating a restaurant as a place to eat out or as a place to dine out. If a restaurant is considered an eat-out operation during the week (a substitute for cooking at home), customers will be more price conscious. If regarded as a dining-out venue, the visit is regarded more as a social occasion or entertainment and price diminishes in significance (Pavesic, 1989).

Literature (Warde, Martens & Olsen, 1997) indicates that restaurant venues are used disproportionately by customers with higher incomes, who work for long hours, and who live in households where a family meal is a comparatively infrequent occurrence. It is reported that there is almost always additional social variation in respect of age, education and income (holder of degree level qualifications are particular avid customers). Warde *et al.* (1997) contend that this was particularly pronounced with respect to “ethnic” restaurants. Many factors are associated with the propensity to try “ethnic” food, but it is suggested that the use of ethnic restaurants conveys a sense of sophistication or distinction. Since the unit of study for this research project is the Canton Restaurant, the above aspect of ethnicity will be significant.

4.3.1 The dining out milieu and its impact

Decision models in relation to eating out convincingly argue about the influence of experience on the evaluation and decision process used throughout the processes of familiarising oneself with, experiencing and becoming involved in a dining experience (Teare, 1990). When people eat out, they are part of the product itself and the search for attribute preferences by researchers normally concludes that the quality of food and the variety on the menu are salient. Yet what comes through, almost reluctantly, as being influential, are attributes such as atmosphere, mood, environment, and related terms that indicate that it is the holistic and intangibles that really matter (Auty, 1992; Bitner, *et al.*, 1990; Riley, 1994).

The question which arises is how a dining out venue and milieu can create an impact which produces this tendency towards holistic evaluation. To answer this question, it is useful to borrow a concept usually associated with tourism artefacts, that is, according to Cohen (1992) “*authenticity*”. The judgement of authenticity depends upon the clarity and authority of the message which an object sends and in common parlance it could be stated of an object that “it carries conviction” (Cohen, 1992). Environments thus tell a story and the clearer the narrative, the easier it is for consumers to make coherent sense of it within themselves and in the dimensions of their lifestyles.

The implication for restaurateurs is that the environment they create and manage must portray an unambiguous unified statement upon which consumers can evaluate their experiences. Should decision-makers neglect to orchestrate their dining environments, a consequence could be indifference, rather than dissatisfaction, which from a marketing perspective, is worse (Riley, 1994).

As an illustration of apathetic and indifferent consumer responses to an eating environment, the following mock scenario might suffice: good meat, ruined vegetables; poor wine, great coffee; good carpet, linen table clothe, but paper serviettes; meaningless artefacts on the wall, slow service, but very reasonable prices. Unable to uniformly process this environment into an holistic experience, the consumer's likely response is to shrug and mentally sigh, "Forget it!" – and be lost as a patron.

Contextually, the Canton Restaurant historically projected unorchestrated and ambiguous statements regarding the impact of its dining environs. Currently, the second generation proprietors have relocated and harmonised the authenticity of the dining venue narrative. The empirical findings will address the respective impacts of the dichotomous milieu of old and new venue experience on seasoned patrons.

4.3.2 **Pleasure and commodification**

Different types or sources of pleasure contribute to personal senses of happiness and contentment during a meal experience. Warde and Martens (1998) report that not only did people overwhelmingly enjoy eating out, they were even more pleased by occasions where they were guests in other people's homes. The reasons interviewees gave for their majority preference for eating as a private guest rather than in a restaurant were that such occasions were more relaxed, more convivial and more informal, carrying the implication that they had more control over the event than when dining in a restaurant.

It seems evident that the commodified service is surpassed in its attractiveness by those founded upon the reciprocal obligations of hospitality, which is a mode of provision which has several features which might, in principle, be unappealing, namely:

- The obligation to reciprocate, involving considerable labour;
- The value of the gesture is not precisely measurable and the nature of the incurred obligation is not certain;
- The possibility of complaining or asking for another dish should the food be disliked for whatever reason; and
- The lack of choice about what shall be eaten.

In the above context, it becomes clear that domestic entertaining is a largely unexplored form of social activity, with writing on the topic being mainly relegated to practical manuals like etiquette books. Yet, despite the many key conditions of consumer sovereignty being absent, people claim to be better pleased than in a restaurant. The liking for private hospitality further suggests some popular ambivalence about an increasingly commodified way of life (Warde & Martens, 1998).

Contextually, the Canton Restaurant is perceived by many patrons as a family or domestic type venue, where numbers are restricted and contact with and among diners is intimate and relaxed.

4.3.3 The quest for enchantment

In a jaded and hurried society, restaurant patrons seek to experience moments of enchantment (Moore, 1996). Enchantment is an enthrallment which encapsulates people and can originate in an event or experience that can be found everywhere – in food and wine, in a restaurant setting, in places visited and even the home or working environment. Enchantment is a condition of unending suspension of belief. It places imagination before information, and wisdom before intelligence (Moore, 1996).

Aune (2002) relates the account of a Norwegian artist and her husband who bought a very old house on a remote island on the North West corner of Scotland. They started a restaurant named *Althanarrie*, which currently has a two year waiting list. Customers have to go to extra ordinary lengths to get to a depot at Ulapool, where they are picked up by a wooden boat and ferried across the fjord. Patrons eat at the restaurant and stay the night before they are ferried back to civilisation and reality the following day. The food is of good quality, but ordinary and yet people come from all over the world to dine there. After waiting patiently for two years and overcoming the hardship of getting there, customers who finally sit at the table soak up the heritage, the ambience and the sheer joy of the occasion – and to discerning students of human nature, appear to be in a state of absolute rapture. It is as though ordinary people are transported out of the mundane milieu of daily life and are momentarily elevated into a world filled with delight. Pine and Gilmore (1999) refer to the same phenomenon, but have coined the term “transformation” to describe the ecstatic state consumers appear to transcend to.

This enchantment or transformation can be used to sell products and services in a highly competitive environment and independent restaurant and hospitality operations can benefit by thinking along such lines. Customers are willing to pay a premium price if they sense they are getting more than just a good meal. Further, it behoves

restaurateurs to use their ingenuity and creativity, coupled with cogent insight into intangible needs to get the attention and loyalty of customers (Aune, 2002).

In the new millennium, the notion that food is good for people is back and the intangible benefits of consumption are taking on a greater significance (Gray, Greenley, Matear & Matheson, 1999). In addition, patrons seek the extra ordinary and they want to be surprised and entertained. Hence, the modern consumer quests for a unique psychic, intangible and emotional experience that satisfies inner needs.

This does not mean that competitive prices and observable quality are no longer important product attributes. These elements are givens and serve as minimum standards that need to prevail for most restaurants to stay viable undertakings. But, in order to be competitive and especially in a niche market, food marketers need to *court* their customers if they are to truly satisfy them. This means putting them in the proper mood to enjoy a complete experience (Gray *et al.*, 2003).

The types of consumer value derived through the actual consumption of offerings are still poorly understood. However, it is evident that consumers seek beyond the tangible and that they reach for an enchantment and transformation that is difficult to rationalise,

concretise, explain or simplistically articulate (Holbrook, 1994; Ponsonby, 2001; Ritzer, 1999).

Consequently, when restaurateurs are sensitised to, are cognisant of and fulfil the perceived intangible need of their diners, they empower themselves beyond measure. By delighting their patrons in a sustained basis, prudent and insightful managers can initiate and harness a powerful bond of reciprocal loyalty.

In synopsis, since customer satisfaction in its most generic form is used as the indicator of whether consumers will return to a restaurant, the important question to ask is which attributes or dimensions are most responsible for sustained patronage at a restaurant. Exacting customer tangible and intangible demands means that restaurateurs must endeavour to deliver not only quality products and services, but also a high level of perceptual dining satisfaction that will lead to an increase in customer return rates and greater market share (Soriano, 2002).

The following section starts with a general synopsis of customer experience and expectations. Thereafter, a variety of literature sources have been collaged in an attempt to portray the array of specific dimensions that influence and impact upon the expectations

and perceptions of patrons when choosing, supporting and manifesting loyalty to restaurants.

4.4 **CUSTOMER NEED DIMENSIONS**

Customers have a multitude of need dimensions that encompass both the physical and intangible elements for which they seek gratification. The experiences they undergo embrace every aspect of what they see and feel on all planes of functional or emotional interaction. They also hold a particular holistic sentiment and frame of reference which results in a unique mode of interpretation of any interaction with a business (Gummesson, 2002).

4.4.1 **Experience expectations**

Customer experience and expectations pervade every aspect of a business, and once their construction can be understood, organisations will be in a position to cater for and fulfil them. In its essence, customer experience can be described as a blend of a businesses' physical performance and the emotions evoked, intuitively measured against customer expectations across all moments of contact (Shaw & Ivens, 2002).

This description has important connotations. Customer experience is a blend. It is, therefore, not just the physical or the emotional; it is both combined and coalesced. The experience is an amalgam of

components and during an engagement customers intuitively measure their experience against their expectations. They do this at whatever point they are in contact with a business, hence across all moments of contact. This means that the customer does not know and does not care about items such as a businesses' organisation structure and the problems they might be facing. What does count, is the permutations of perceptions and inferences that customers draw from every instance of contact with a business, be it its products, staff or services. Each encounter accumulates as a defining "moment of truth" (Carlzon, 1987).

The expectation setting as an element of customer experience is often overlooked by businesses. It is, however, essential to establish expectations. They are compounded and built around the perceptions gleaned resulting from talking with friends, seeing the brand, the advertising or from the impression gained by interacting with a sales person. An expectation is created regarding what is going to be delivered and at the end of the customer experience, individuals intuitively review the performance against their expectations and then reset them for a future frame of reference (Shaw & Ivens, 2002).

A tabular illustration will now be used to depict the hypothetical example of the expectations and perceptions that could be encountered with an intended visit to a restaurant. If the planned visit

is traced from its origin, consumers pass through various stages of activity and consequently inherent physical and emotional expectations are ignited. These points are elucidated in Table 4.1

Table 4.1 Customer expectations and perceptions

Stage	Physical expectation	Emotional expectation
You find the telephone number of the restaurant to call to make a reservation.	The telephone number will be easy to find.	Feel mildly excited / anticipation of a pleasant meal and evening out.
You make the call.	The call will be answered promptly.	You feel a little concerned; hoping they can fit you in.
The reservation is made.	They can tell you quickly if they can accommodate you.	You are treated with respect and address you by your name, which makes you feel important.
WHITE SPACE	No contact.	Anticipation of a good evening.
You discuss with colleagues where you will be eating.	They give their views.	The hope for confirmation that you have made the right choice.
You travel to the restaurant.	It is easy to find.	The journey will be pleasant and you will chat with your partner.
You arrive at the establishment and look for a parking place.	It is easy to park; near the restaurant and well lit.	You are concerned for your welfare and security.
You enter the restaurant.	You are greeted, the booking is checked efficiently.	They will smile and use your name and be welcoming and friendly.
You are shown to your table and seated.	Your seat is not near the front door. The server introduces herself.	The environment will be pleasing.
You are invited to order drinks.	They stock what you want.	The order will be taken in a pleasant manner. The server is knowledgeable and can recommend dishes.
You are given the menu.	The specials will sound fantastic, but you think they will be expensive.	The server engages you in an explanation of what is available.
Your drinks arrive.	It is the drinks you ordered.	The server smiles and is friendly.
You order your meal.	The meal choice is adequate.	The server engages you in discussion and you are excited by the meal choice.
WHITE SPACE	The length of time is appropriate.	I am given sufficient time to enjoy my meal leisurely.
You wait for your food to arrive.	It is the food you ordered and looks appetising.	The server is smiling.
You eat your meal.	It is the correct temperature.	The sensations are pleasant.
You ask for your bill.	This is not as important as serving other customers.	The server smiles and hurries to get the bill.
Your bill arrives.	It takes an appropriate length of time to be brought and there are no errors.	You expect it to be value for money.
You pay your bill.	The restaurant accepts all types of payment.	You will consider it value.
You leave the restaurant.	You are thanked for your patronage.	You have a good feeling they liked you being there.
You walk back to your car.	The car park is still well lit.	You feel safe.

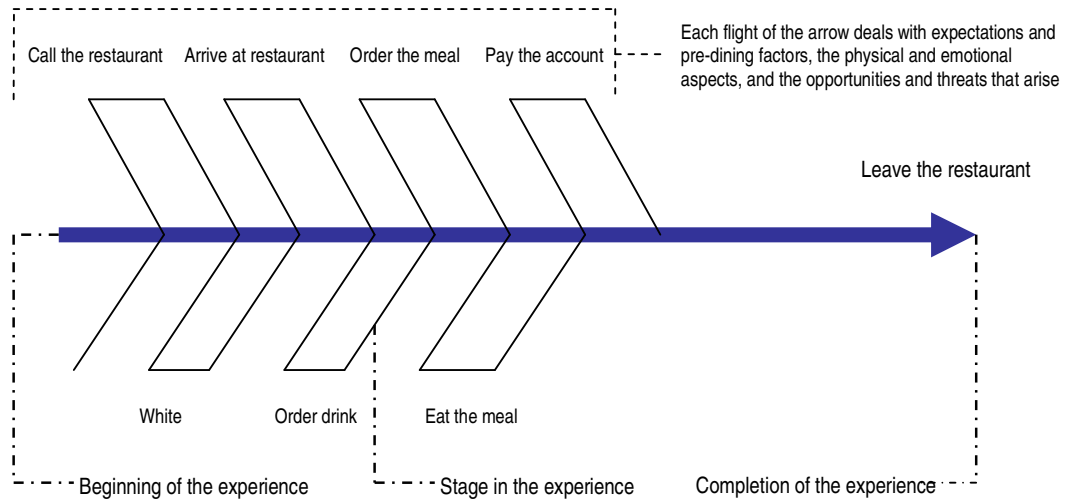
Source: Modelled on Shaw & Ivens (2002)

It is posited by Shaw and Ivens (2002) that when a customer experience is audited and reviewed, opportunities avail themselves to be capitalised upon as “moments of differentiation”. The so-called blank space is a situation that arises either to be harnessed as an opportunity, or if neglected, can turn into a threat and become debilitating. The white space is where the customer has entered the experience and this eventuality needs to be embraced and exploited.

Consequently, Shaw and Ivens (2002) developed a process to map customers as they travel through the customer experience, across all moments of contact.

The analogy of an arrow with feathers and flights, illustrated in Figure 4.1 is used to explain the concept. Each of the feathers is a stage the customer progresses through in the customer experience and determine the customer’s physical and emotional expectations and the opportunities and the threats with which to contend.

Figure 4.1 **Moment mapping**



Source: Modelled on Shaw & Ivens (2002)

To gain further insight into the mechanics and thinking of moment mapping the concept can again be emboldened in tabular format to elaborate the stage of the experience coupled with the hypothetical tangible and intangible expectations harboured by consumers planning their dining experience.

The table clearly shows how opportunities and emotions can be evoked and orchestrated when the customer's expectations, predispositions and intangible perceptions are explored and acted upon.

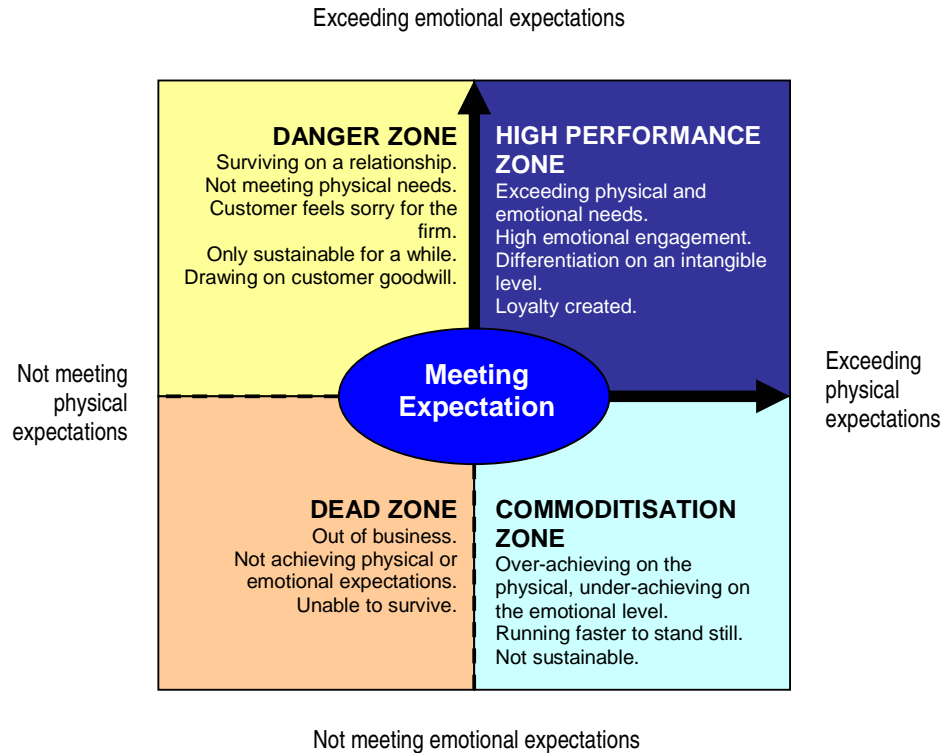
Table 4.2 **Moment map for a restaurant**

Step	Booking	White space	Travel	Arrive at car park	Enter restaurant	Place order
Expectation	I'll get through and they will have a place available.	Nothing is going to happen until I get to the restaurant on the night.	I am not going to be offered any form of directions.	The parking will be easy.	I will be greeted with a smile and they will be friendly and escort me to my table.	There will be sufficient choice – it will be presented in a friendly manner.
Threat	They are fully booked.	Nothing does happen – lost opportunity.	Customers don't know where the restaurant is.	There are no spaces when the diner arrives.	Customer is ignored because all the staff are busy.	There is nothing on the menu that the customer likes – restaurant runs out of advertised choice.
Opportunity to exceed physical expectations	Wow – when I made the booking they realised I had eaten there before, and knew what I had selected.	Wow – I have just received a letter confirming my reservation together with a copy of the menu.	Wow – the restaurant has sent me a map.	Wow – they have reserved a space for me.	Wow – they were waiting to greet us as we walked through the door.	Wow – the waiter gives us his personal recommendation about what is good.
Opportunity to exceed emotional expectations	They recognise me and can remember when we dined the last time.	The letter is personalised to me and suggests some dishes I may like. This makes me feel special.	I am reading the menu – it sounds great.	There is a sign outside the restaurant welcoming me personally.	We were greeted like long lost family.	They remember what I had last time, which shows they care. Long-term relationships established.
Emotion evoked	Surprise and anticipation	Surprise and anticipation	Care	Status	Secure	Importance

Source: Modelled on Shaw & Ivens (2002)

4.4.2 Expectation zones

Customers thus have physical and emotional expectations that are actually conditioned by their experiences and these have a big influence on dictating their future willingness to do business with a business. The zones of customer expectation, on both tangible and intangible levels are depicted in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 **Customer expectation zones**

Source: Modelled on Shaw & Ivens, 2002

In the danger zone, businesses exceed in fulfilling the emotional needs of customers but are not achieving their physical expectations. They are essentially living on their reputations and relationships with the customer and such a situation will only exist for a short while. Eventually, this condition will wear thin and the business will descend either into the dead zone, or if the business rectifies the status quo, it can elevate to the ultimate high performance zone by consistently exceeding the physical and emotional needs of its customer base. Should a business be in the commoditisation zone, they will be good

at doing physical activities faster, better and quicker, but there is no future in this state. Going forward is the only sustainable position and staying in the high performance zone will enable a business to capture the hearts of their customers on all levels of expectation and experience.

In Sub-section 4.4.3, literature sources of specific elements of expectation and experience as assumed important to restaurant patrons are identified and expounded.

4.4.3 Need dimensions affecting restaurant patronage

A literature survey, as shown in Table 4.3, revealed a diversity of authors and a spread of research focus relating to factors that impacted on service industries in general. However, as indicated in Chapter 1, there was a general paucity of information on consumer choice in the hospitality industry and even less on the niche market restaurant industry *per se*. Because of the broad band of factors emanating from the review, the researcher thought it prudent to categorise and tabulate a variety of need dimensions against their proponents. Key studies conducted over the past two decades have been traced and the relevant attributes that were analysed are reflected in Table 4.3. Selected dimensions of this collage of influences will now be elaborated and emboldened upon in terms of

their capacity to affect consumers' decisions concerning their return patronage at restaurants.

Table 4.3 Need dimensions affecting restaurant patronage

	Lewis (1981)	June & Smith (1987)	Auty (1992)	Dube, Renaghan & Miller (1994)	Martens (1997)	Ward & Martens (1998)	Clarke & Wood (1999)	Kivela, Reece & Inabakaran (1999a)	Soriano (2002)
Company during meal						√			
Convenience			√					√	
Food consistency				√					
Food controls					√				
Food quality		√	√			√	√	√	√
Food quantity					√				
Food tastiness				√					
Food type	√	√						√	
Gourmet restaurant	√								
Image/ atmosphere/ ambience	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	
Location / place		√							√
Menu variety/ range of food			√	√	√		√		
Opening hours		√							
Popular / family restaurant	√								
Price			√				√		
Recommendation		√							
Speed / quality of service							√	√	√
Total occasion						√			
Value		√							√
Waitron (Server) attentive				√					
Waitron (Server) helpful				√					

Source: Compiled by the researcher

- *Quality of food*

The most important reasons for customers returning to a restaurant appears to be the quality of the food (Auty, 1992). Soriano (2002) is of the opinion that this finding reflects the mindset of the general population in terms of significance or importance. A related aspect

to quality is the role of the freshness of ingredients used. Brumback (1998) confirmed this sympathetic element as a motivator for repeat customer support.

- *Quality of service*

Research supports that quality of service tends to be rated second in importance to ensure customer return. Restaurateurs, therefore, have had to convert plate-carrying waiters into salespeople. Waiting staff who are given a sense of empowerment are better employees to serve customers than those kept on a short leash. Thus it can be expected that when food quality is good and service levels are high, customers will tend to return (Ursin, 1996).

- *Technology*

Innovation and technology are regarded as contributors to food quality. Examples cited are the use of state-of-the-art computer chips in equipment such as refrigerators, fryers and ice makers. Modern sophisticated digital timers help chefs keep track in busy kitchens with the result that over-cooked food and wastage is considerably reduced and meals are prepared to exacting high standards (Durocher, 2001; Frable, 1998).

- *Food tastiness and consistency*

In a study conducted by Dube, *et al.* (1994), food flavour, taste and repeat uniformity were rated highly as key determinants to repeat a purchase.

- *Design of menu*

The design of the menu and the range of food choices is often the first way a consumer evaluates food quality, because the menu is generally the selling tool in the restaurant industry (Bowen & Morris, 1995).

- *Cost / value of the meal*

In the consumer's mind, the price to be paid for a service determines the perceived level of quality to be expected. As dining becomes an integral component of modern lifestyles, experienced consumers have raised their expectations with regard to quality and good service while seeking better value for their money. Offering good service and food may not be good enough to attract and retain customers, therefore, to gain a competitive advantage, restaurants must offer value for money as well (Klara, 2001).

- *Image/ atmosphere/ ambience*

Studies indicate that restaurants need to update their concepts concerning ambience and mood if they wish to remain competitive.

The maintenance of a comfortable atmosphere is an increasing demand being placed by patrons on management. Disputative opinions reign regarding the simplicity or complexity of décor in providing a winning edge (Dulen, 1998). An example of the contentiousness of findings is the study of Belman (1996), where it is stated that although customers still want decent service as a reason to return to a restaurant, design and concept, today, sometimes rank as more important in priority than food.

- *Social interaction*

Goldstein (1998) reports that a communal table in a restaurant can make a difference to the customer's total dining experience. Sharing a meal in the company of relative strangers can be an energising event. It can be an enjoyable option and fun occasion for patrons who are gregarious, people-orientated, are open to new experiences and have a spirit of adventure.

- *Internet activity*

A modern amenity being more commonly used to attract and induce return customers is some form of internet activity (Susskind & Chan, 2000).

- *Age*

When targeting post-baby-boomers, restaurateurs need to search for unique strategies. Each restaurant needs to develop a unique niche to attract and sustain a return customer base. Dependent upon the type of restaurant, this uniqueness is enhanced if the profile of employees in the restaurant correlates with the age of customers (Bell, 1993; Siudzinski, 2001).

- *Gender*

In a study where 3872 respondents were used to gauge intentions to repeat restaurant patronage, it was generally shown that male customers did not rate attributes differently from women (Soriano 2002).

- *Dining occasion*

To establish whether the restaurant chosen varied according to dining occasion, Auty (1992) categorised four such occasions from a pilot study, namely: a celebration (such as a birthday or anniversary); a social occasion; convenience / need for a quick meal; and a business meal. Regardless of the dining occasion, food quality was still the most frequently cited choice variable.

Elements of the Auty's (1992) study were corroborated by Dube *et al.* (1994), where the connection between business versus

pleasure dining was tested. The connection between specific attributes and return patronage in a small up-scale, independently owned restaurant were investigated. The relative importance of food quality, service quality and atmosphere were explored under various sub-dimensions. No significant difference between business and pleasure dining occasions was found. Table 4.4 depicts a summary of the relative importance of the criteria in a decision to repeat a visit as *per* the Dube *et al.* (1994) study.

Table 4.4 **The importance of specific attributes and return patronage**

Attribute	Business Occasion	Pleasure Occasion
Food Quality: <i>Food tastiness, consistent food quality, menu variety</i>	50%	55%
Service Quality: <i>Waiting time, attentive and helpful server</i>	35.3%	31.8%
Atmosphere:	15.2%	13.1%

Source: Compiled from Dube *et al.* 1994

- *Other elements*

A spectrum of further peripheral elements traced in literature that are generally reported to influence dining and restaurant selection in varying degrees include: the price of the food, speed of service, liquor price and availability, trading hours, parking facilities, ablution facilities, recommendations from others and the location of the outlet.

4.5 CONCLUSIONS

Synoptically, much has been published, debated and defended in the domain of generically satisfying consumer needs and wants. In the milieu of the niche restaurant industry, current investigation appears to hone in on attempts to identify and quantify tangible artefacts of evidence and aspects of the dining experience. More specifically, in the domain of the ethnic niche restaurant industry, there is a general limited writing which is focussed on either the quantitative or qualitative study of unearthing the impalpable aspects of diners' needs. This chapter has set the scene for a more comprehensive inquiry into specific elements of dining satisfaction and return patronage. Theories in the above regard will be explored in the following chapter as will the concept of customer loyalty.

Chapter4Complete

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CHAPTER 5

THE DIMENSIONS OF CUSTOMER NEEDS AND THEIR IMPACT ON RESTAURANT PATRONAGE:

PART TWO

5.1 INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive literature scrutiny in the previous chapter showed that there are a variety of *generic reasons* proffered by customers that support their choice, patronage and return to a restaurant. These were investigated and expounded to form the basis for this chapter. In this chapter, a literature overview is provided on factors that influence the perceptions and the resultant satisfaction consumers derive from visiting a restaurant. The relevance of these dimensions as indicators of post-dining behaviour such as return patronage and sustained loyalty is also explored. Further underpinning philosophy of the dynamics of customer satisfaction and loyalty is also comprehensively scrutinised.

The chapter concludes with a summary which relates the unit of study contextually to the content of the chapter and specific anomalies that the study will address.

5.2 DINING SATISFACTION AND RETURN PATRONAGE

Having identified need dimensions that influence consumers' perceptions and their subsequent selection and support of restaurants, the holistic concept of customer-dining satisfaction and return patronage was explored.

Customer-satisfaction research is important because it is directly linked to return behaviour. A variety of studies have been undertaken that apply consumer behaviour satisfaction theories to food service (Johns & Tyas, 1996), lodging (Barsky & Labah, 1992; Danaher & Mattsson, 1994) and *services* (Bitner, 1992; Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1988; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). These studies have posited the notion that customer satisfaction leads to positive behavioural intentions, such as return patronage or repurchase, but the paucity of studies specifically concerned with dining satisfaction and return patronage is of concern (Oh & Jeong, 1996).

It is argued that the customers' post-dining decision whether to return or not to return to the restaurant is the moment of final truth for the restaurateur (Kivela, Inabakaran & Reece, 1999b). If the postulation in literature is to be accepted that return or repurchase is a consequence of satisfaction, then the decision to return to a restaurant signifies whether or not the restaurant's performance met or exceeded customer expectations. For the restaurant marketer, this may also

confirm whether the marketing strategy has lived up to its expectations and effectiveness, or whether it was ill-conceived. Hence, restaurateurs and restaurant marketers should be expressly interested in customer satisfaction-return relationships (Lowenstein, 1995).

5.2.1 Expectancy-disconfirmation theories

Studies concerning customer satisfaction in restaurants have investigated overall service quality and satisfaction, rather than *dining satisfaction*, and most have focussed on fast food operations (Bojanic & Rosen, 1994; Lee & Hing, 1995). There appears to be a profound lack of understanding about pre-dining perceptions, dining satisfaction and post-dining perceptions and their attendant influences on consumer behavioural intentions.

Several theories relating to customer satisfaction have emerged and most are anchored in cognitive psychology because of the narrow definition of customer satisfaction in earlier studies. The most widely noted and accepted of these theories are: expectancy-disconfirmation; assimilation or cognitive dissonance; contrast; assimilation-contrast; equity; attribution, and comparison level (Kivela, Reece and Inabakaran, 1999a). Lewin's (1988) expectancy-disconfirmation theory has received the widest acceptance, perhaps because of its broadly applicable conceptualisation.

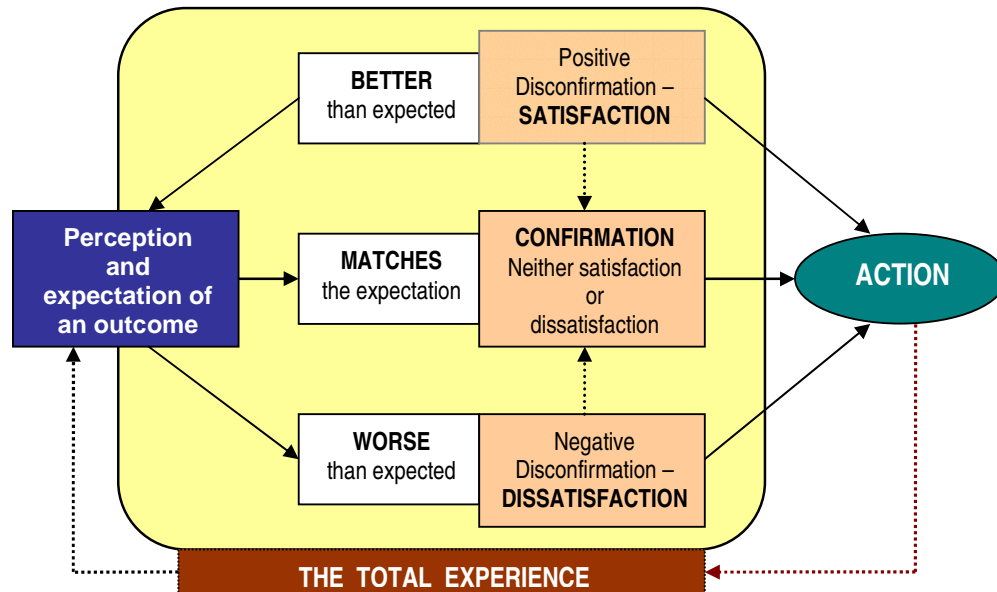
Expectancy-disconfirmation theory asserts that individuals make purchase decisions premised on their expectations of the outcomes of a specific action (Webster, 1991). Positive disconfirmation takes place if the product or service is better than expected, whereas a performance worse than the expected results in a negative disconfirmation. A match between the two leads to confirmation, that is, neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction. Figure 5.1 illustrates this phenomenon.

Oliver (1981:27) summarised satisfaction as:

Evaluation of the surprise inherent in a product acquisition and/or consumption experience. In essence satisfaction is the summary of a psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with the consumer's prior feelings about the consumption experience.

Prior research in the fields of social and applied psychology, almost without exception, suggests that satisfaction is a function of an initial standard and some perceived discrepancy from the initial reference point. Individuals make summary comparative judgements apart from, and as an input to, their feelings of satisfaction (Locke, 1969; Locker & Dunt, 1978; Kivela, *et al.*, 1999a).

Figure 5.1 A simplified model of expectancy-disconfirmation theory



Source: Compiled by the researcher

Disconfirmation is a critical intervening variable, arising from discrepancies between prior expectations, relative importance and actual performance, and the magnitude of the disconfirmation effect that generates satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Churchill and Surprenant (1982) further suggest that disconfirmation is determined jointly by a combination of expectations and performance manipulations.

What the customer thus believes about a restaurant is developed by previous experiences relative to the importance, attitudes and perceived expectations or standards proportional to the dining occasion being fulfilled. These elements interact and contribute

towards the formation of an evaluative mindset about dining satisfaction. Consequently confirmation, satisfaction or dissatisfaction transpires as a result of the dining event either meeting, exceeding or not meeting the customer's expectations. The confirmation-disconfirmation theory therefore embraces four components: expectations, perceived performance, disconfirmation, and satisfaction (Kivela, *et al.*, 1999a).

The simplified expectancy-disconfirmation model depicted in Figure 5.1 shows that resultant action taken by consumers is founded on a psychological state as a consequence of prior expectation and perceptions about the outcome of an event.

With the exception of expectancy-disconfirmation, most customer satisfaction theories define the customer satisfaction judgement process narrowly. Most of the previous customer satisfaction studies in hospitality literature have focused on identifying the sources of customer satisfaction, such as attributes and on discovering effective ways to determine customers' wants and needs (Kivela, *et al.*, 1999a). However, Kivela, *et al.*, (1999a) continue to state that substantial disagreement appears in the level of specificity of the attributes investigated. While these studies have divergent levels of attribute specification, it appears that most researchers agree with the concept of measuring guest satisfaction based on multi-attribute scales that reflect the multi-functional nature of hospitality services.

Um (1987) suggests that satisfaction is a complex human process involving extensive cognitive, affective and other undiscovered psychological and physiological dynamics. Therefore, it may be prudent to measure customer satisfaction more broadly. By so doing, the interplay between cognition and emotion in processing stimuli may be better reflected. Contextually, the above supports the rationale and quest by the researcher to unearth the intrinsic psychic satisfiers that come into play when satisfying niche-restaurant diners.

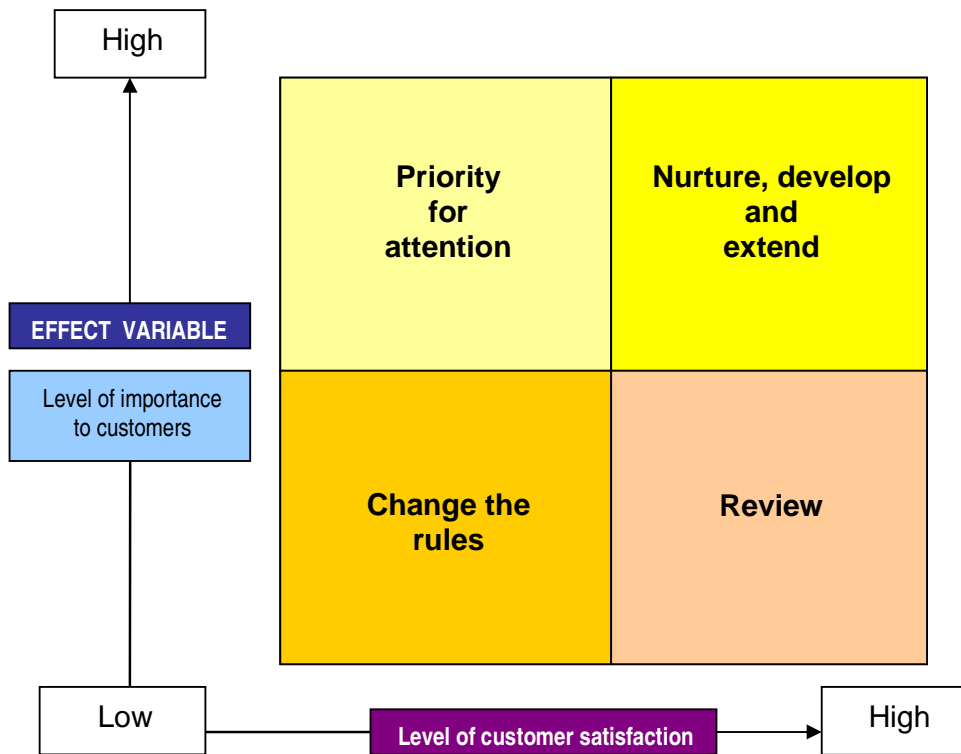
5.2.2 **Satisfaction as a bipolar construct**

The level of satisfaction a customer derives is purported to be influenced by an effect variable and its relative significance to the consumer. One conceptualisation about satisfaction and consumer response is that they are bipolar constructs, which is a dominant feature of literature. This philosophy is founded on the assumption that customer satisfaction takes on a value on a single dimension with end-points of high and low. (Soderlund, 1998).

This viewpoint is confirmed by Hausknecht (1990) who comments that the majority of customer satisfaction measurement scales are of a bipolar type. With this bipolar view, the relationship between satisfaction and an effect variable, (namely loyalty) can be depicted in a two-dimension plain. This form of relationship is defined as the amount of score difference between a dependent variable, associated

with a score change in an independent variable. If a linear approximation of the relationship is used, for example, loyalty, then the extent of the relationship is different between measures of high and low satisfaction.

Gould (1995) used the bipolar stance of measurement as a management audit instrument. He claims that if management identify key questions that are crucial to an organisations customer loyalty programme, and establish the relative level of importance such issues hold for customers, businesses will be in a better position to take proactive decisions and keep future focus. The result of such an assessment can be reflected diagrammatically as illustrated in Figure 5.2 which indicates management activity and response options to such insights.

Figure 5.2 **The satisfaction effect**

Source: Compiled by the researcher and modelled on Gould (1995) and Soderlund (1998)

It is prevalent in literature to find substantial generic studies of consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Most tend to use some form of quantitative or semantic rating instrument in an attempt to codify and capture the responses provided by their informants. Complex mathematical and linear models are also common-place tools used to interpret, extrapolate and interpolate findings. A concern facing the researcher for this study was the issue of the validity of interpretation

and specifically, how exact and explicit thinking could be measured. This matter is addressed briefly in Sub-section 5.2.3.

5.2.3 The measurement of exact thinking

Since the majority of consumer investigation tends to be conducted using traditional survey research involving rating scales, Clark and Wood (1999) point out that such instruments require respondents to convert qualitative judgements into a quantitative or semi-quantitative value. Rating scales are reductionist, and as such, reductionism necessarily obscures the complexities of the respondents' approach to logic. The very satisfactory response of person A cannot be assumed to be coterminous with very satisfactory of person B.

The conundrum that exists is how exact thinking can be measured. The problem is especially acute in areas dealing with emotive topics or basic needs such as food preferences and choice. Questions are raised as to the range of interpretations that may be put on terms such as quality of food and friendliness of staff by respondents to survey research. This has consequences for the interpretation of results, highlighting the traditional tensions between detailed qualitative investigation of attitudes, values and feelings, and the more summary pseudo-quantitative approach implied by the use of questionnaires.

The meanings which consumers attach to certain factor labels are conditioned at least twice: once at the macro-level in their interaction

with the market place in general, and once in the specific cases of explicit choices of services or products (Finkelstein, 1989).

It is cited that any researcher in the general domain of the social sciences who uses rating scales as measuring instruments, tends to face a dilemma. Survey methods employing rating instruments are useful in eliciting trend data, but in the specific arena of consumer choice of, and loyalty to restaurants, they of necessity embrace a set of a priori assumptions about the consistency of consumer judgements when using factor labels. The salience in consumer research lies in those multi-layered complexities of the social order that are filtered at the level of general perception before being deployed in specific responses to particular phenomena (Campbell, 1987).

By atomising the psychic components of customer choice and coupling them with concomitant satisfaction and patronage driving forces, essential building blocks may be revealed. These foundational elements will provide a richer and more profound base upon which to construct an holistic model of the dining experience.

5.3 **CUSTOMER LOYALTY**

The idea of customer loyalty has been linked to customer satisfaction, and synonymous terms used are re-purchase, brand loyalty or repeat purchase. Loyalty or repeat purchase is the focal point of long-term

customer / seller relationships and the rationale enshrouding loyalty should be of considerable concern to restaurant marketers.

Research into customer satisfaction has generally lead to a valuable and richer understanding of customer service and customer expectations. However, as businesses worked towards increased levels of customer satisfaction, the concomitant results of higher profitability have not always followed as expected. There is still confusion in attempting to explain why satisfied customers switch providers, while at times, dissatisfied customers still support businesses. In trying to understand the linkage between satisfied customers and the long-term success of a firm, attention has turned to customer retention and loyalty (Jones & Sasser, 1995; Reichheld, 1996).

Managerial and academic concern is evolving from a focus on customer satisfaction to a realisation that retaining customers and developing loyalty are essential to organisational success. In addition, accumulated data attests as strong evidence of the benefits of increased customer retention (Reichheld & Scheffer, 2000).

5.3.1 **The marketing concept**

The rediscovery of the marketing concept in the 1980s and the pioneering research on service quality by Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, (1990) lead businesses to focus their efforts on understanding

customer expectations and to recognise the importance of satisfying customers. As managerial concern in this regard grew, so did marketing research activities tracking customers' satisfaction. Models of customer satisfaction were developed along with a variety of scales for its quantification. Businesses increased their measurement of customers' attitudes, examining an array of company characteristics including quality of goods and services as well as the organisation's staff and facilities, hoping to better comprehend the elements giving rise to customer satisfaction. From the mid-1980s until the latter part of the 1990s, the concern for and study of customer satisfaction was an important priority of both marketing practitioners and academics (Johnson, 1998; Oliver, 1999).

On closer scrutiny, researchers found that satisfaction alone could not explain customers' decisions to repurchase. Interest in customer loyalty and retention as variables that contribute to the nexus between satisfaction-profitability began to grow in both academic and practitioner literature by the mid-1990's (Griffin, 1995; Mittal & Lassar, 1998).

5.3.2 Causal relationships

It is generally accepted that there is a causal relationship between satisfaction, repurchase, loyalty and profitability (Barsky, 1995). The logic supporting the retention-loyalty-profitability linkage is intuitively appealing and broadly discussed. Generally research has shown that

the profit associated with serving and retaining current customers is significantly higher than the profits coupled with the acquisition of new customers. Data further indicates that this higher profitability is attained through lower costs of serving experienced customers and higher revenues from increased purchases of satisfied customers, as well as the compounding effect of customer retention over time (Johnson, 1998; Kotler, 2000, Oliver, 1999; Richheld, 1996). Revenues can go up in a number of ways if customers are both happy and loyal according to (Gould, 1995) because:

- Long-standing customers are likely to be less price sensitive. They perceive that there is an exit cost to changing patronage, and, therefore, within reason, will not shop around.
- Understanding lifetime value of customers is an important exercise and if the duration of the customer relationship can be extended, sales are increased.
- Attracting new customers costs outweigh those of retaining existing clients.

Besides revenues and profits increasing because of loyal customers, Gould (1995) gives the following reasons for cost reduction:

- Firstly, because the retention rate is higher and less money is expended on constantly replacing lost customers; and

- Secondly, they act as emissaries for the firm and punt its products or services to other people, which will further reduce marketing budgets geared at targeting new users.

5.3.3 Loyalty levels or phases

The analogy of a ladder can be used to depict a continuum of bonded loyalty relationships which develop between customers and the providers of offerings which satisfy their needs. These connections take time to evolve and are reflected differently over time. Figure 5.3 portrays this ontogenesis relationship.

Figure 5.3 **The traditional “Customer Loyalty Ladder”**



Source: Adapted from Cant, Brink and Brijball, 2002

In essence, the relationship marketing approach views customer loyalty as a progression of relationship strengths as they germinate

over time, and is purported to distinguish between the various degrees of bonding between consumers and providers (Cant, Brink & Brijball, 2002).

However, in the context of the current study, the focus and emphasis was to understand the specifics and dynamics of the need dimensions of diners. After extensive in-depth engagement with participants, respective loyalty levels emerged and became the foundation upon which a typology of niche-restaurant diners was proffered. The holistic need structure of the service consumer was thus the object of study, rather than a traditional classification of the phases of loyalty.

5.3.4 Customer retention and loyalty

Built on the work on brand loyalty, the thinking and study of customer loyalty has evolved and matured (Day, 1969; Oliver, 1999). Early research equated customer retention with loyalty by focussing on and measuring behaviour. Examining the reported purchase behaviour of consumers was thought to provide evidence of customer preferences, but as Day (1969) asserted, repurchase behaviour may not indicate an attachment to a particular brand. Two additional considerations were needed to understand customer loyalty more comprehensively, namely, the effect of the attitudes of consumers, and the choices available to them. With these caveats in mind, it behoves asking the question: What then, is 'loyalty' can be asked?

The idea of loyalty embraces broad opinions and according to the Online Dictionary the concept can be defined as: feelings of allegiance; the act of binding yourself (intellectually or emotionally) to a course of action; unwavering in devotion. Loyalty thus embodies feelings of intense commitment towards something. However, this generalised semantic definition seems inadequate and lacks substance in the context of the study.

When the constructs of attitude and choice are added to the equation, two other definitions may be forwarded that contain a behavioural component as well as a consideration for customer attitudes. Dick and Basu (1994:100) define loyalty as “the relationship between the relative attitude towards an entity (brand, service, store, vendor) and patronage behaviour”. By considering the relative attitude, Dick and Basu (1994) make implicit the consideration that consumers have a choice available. More comprehensively, Oliver (1999:34) defines loyalty as

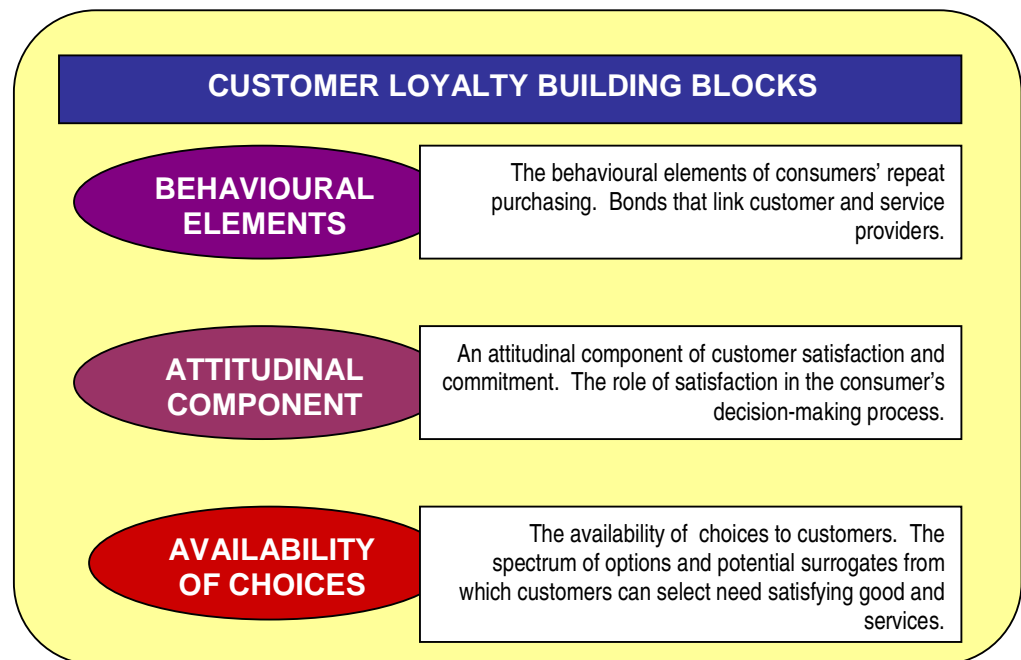
“a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronise a preferred product / service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchases, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour”.

Therefore, according to the above definitions, in order for customer loyalty to be extant, the customer exhibits repurchase behaviour and has a relatively positive attitude or commitment regarding the services of a business. This attitude is relative to the choices available to the consumer. It thus becomes evident that there is a subtle distinction

between repeat buyers (who are customers who exhibit repurchase behaviour), and loyal supporters.

The concept of loyalty can be still further unbundled and more broadly defined in the context of a triad. The triadic constituents are: behavioural elements, attitudinal components, and choice factors (Curasi & Kennedy, 2002). These are illustrated in Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4 **Elements of customer loyalty**



Source: Modelled on Curasi and Kennedy (2002)

5.3.5 Loyalty in a restaurant context

The mechanics of the dining experience and its relationship to loyalty are complex. As shown in Figure 5.4, loyalty is built on a variety of building blocks. Finkelstein (1989) and Wood (1995) add that an

examination and substantiation of the connections between the individual's expectations of the restaurant attributes, their important beliefs about the restaurant attributes, and their actual experience of the restaurant attributes is also necessitated.

Haywood (1988) suggests that it is no longer adequate to attract customers, but that they need to be cultivated. Restaurateurs must be mindful of their need for and dependency on repeat patronage because regular customers not only affect revenues, they also provide predictability, security and enjoyment for those involved in the service encounter. Loyal and happy customers push revenues in a variety of ways, as have already been alluded to by Gould (1995).

Gould (1995) continues by emphasising that in a world bent on technology that continues to put distance between businesses and their customers, it is important to realise that lifelong loyalty can be built by emphasising the emotional and psychic component of human interaction. Customers can be tapped for high levels of allegiance - to such an extent that they not only gladly use and frequent a business (restaurant), but become staunch unpaid advocates who recommend an undertaking with passion. By whatever name the phenomenon is named, be it repurchase, brand loyalty or repeat purchase, the focal point of long-term customer / seller relationships and consequently the rationale enshrouding loyalty should be of considerable concern to restaurant marketers (Barsky, 1995).

There is indicative evidence from studies to suggest that it is relatively concrete factors that are important in the consumers' choice of restaurant (Clark & Wood, 1999). Clark and Wood (1999) argue that the meal experience although important, is not the primary holistic factor determining choice of restaurant. Additional elements only become significant in the consumers' experience if the central, tangible aspect of dining out, that is food, is construed as acceptable. This notion is confirmed by Finkelstein (1989) who emphasises that the customers' dining needs are often linked with the restaurant's attributes. This implies that the elements of ambience, food and service quality, location, type of cuisine and service staff attitudes provide the foundational initial setting for the formation of the diner's experience of the event. These attributes, collectively give the restaurant its particular identity and character which directly or indirectly intervene in the act of dining and post-dining behaviour, and manifest in loyalty or not.

It is the researcher's opinion that the right kind of experience in a restaurant can create a tremendous sense of belonging and camaraderie that leads to customer loyalty. Customers have loyalty to give, but marketers who simply try rewarding patrons on a superficial level will only rent loyalty transiently. However, when emotional-based experiences fulfil needs, marketers own the loyalty of their customers (Robinette, Brand & Lenz, 2002).

In the literature surveyed, positive associations abound between customer satisfaction and loyalty, and customer satisfaction and the propensity to recommend a restaurant to other customers (Soderlund, 1998). Customers who are merely satisfied do not behave as advocates and proponents of a business. A loyal customer is the ultimate consumer and is the cheapest form of word-of-mouth recommendation, which is the most targeted and segmented form of marketing. Most people mix and socialise with persons of like mind who have a relatively high degree of commonality. When such an individual recommends something to another, it carries greater power, credibility and plausibility (Gould, 1995).

The specific role of friendly staff has also been debated as a contributory factor to engendering loyalty. Clark and Wood (1999) researched the impact of staff friendliness on customer loyalty and concluded that customer loyalty flowed as a result of staff attitude, rather than causing it. Clark and Wood (1999) hold the hypothesis that intangible, rather than tangible factors are generally more significant in gaining customer loyalty.

On reflection, it becomes evident that the phenomenon of loyalty *per se* is complex to understand. Visceral skills are needed to absorb and comprehend the myriads of inflections and components embedded in the phenomenon. But restaurateurs who succeed in tapping into the

psyches of their patrons and keep aligned with their mute needs will ensure strong bonds and allegiances with their diners.

However it is prudent to stay aware of a caveat by Mittal and Lassar (1998). They stress that marketers must be mindful that customers are fickle and have no reason to remain loyal. Marketers must create reasons for patronage because competitors will go to great lengths to poach supporters away. Therefore niche-restaurant marketers need to become exceptional in their delivery of service and quality if they are to succeed in their quest of retaining customers.

Finally, it is evident that the current literature scrutiny has revealed a variety of elements that are equated with and are regarded as causative factors for consumer loyalty. There remains, however, scant specific material anchored in identifying the deep-seated and innate psychic needs that can help ingrain a consumer's allegiance and loyalty to a niche restaurant. The current study addresses this scarcity of information.

5.4 **CONCLUSIONS**

A relatively sparse band of theories exist that attempt to isolate and expatiate the needs of customers when engaging in an holistic dining experience. It is apparent that being able to specifically identify intangible and holistic dining needs is a complex phenomenon as customers are often unable to articulate and give voice to inherent

factors that impel them return to and stay loyal to an eating establishment.

Contextually, it is the intent of this study to expose and understand the intangible satisfiers that result in the current long-term associations and loyalty which is highly prevalent among the patrons of the study's restaurant. This will be achieved by means of rich, comprehensive personal interviews with diners and management, by observation and by the lived experience of the researcher. The methodology selected for the research is presented in the next chapter, and the exposition thereof is reported in Chapters 7 and 8.

Chapter5Complete

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CHAPTER 6

THE EMPIRICAL STUDY: *PART ONE*

SAMPLE COMPOSITION AND METHODOLOGY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The researcher's association with the Canton Restaurant goes back thirty years. As a regular patron of the establishment, he has had first-hand experience and an affable engagement with the proprietors and many of their diners over the period. Specifically, since 2001 the researcher has been actively interacting and talking to patrons who consistently support the restaurant. The intent of this meshing was to establish what it was that repeatedly attracted people back to the establishment, despite the fact that direct new competitors had entered the marketplace.

As the restaurant has a very familial and informal setting, it was common knowledge that many of the diners either socially knew or had become acquainted with other patrons over the years. As a frequent diner, the researcher found it very genial and informative to strike up a casual conversation with fellow patrons while they were having their meals. In addition, as the restaurant is relatively small with an open-plan layout and a seating capacity of 25-30 patrons, it was not difficult to observe, and at times, overhear conversations from

diners sitting in close proximity.

The issue that intrigued and prompted this research study was that despite the competitive milieu of the Chinese restaurant market in Port Elizabeth, the core of the Canton's customer base repeatedly returned and appear to demonstrate exceptional allegiance and patronage. Despite this strong loyalty, the Canton's owners at times ostensibly seemed to flout or disregard fundamental tenets of marketing practice (see Chapter 1) which, in theory, would be detrimental to their business and detract customers from returning.

Consequently, the fundamental question that arose as the focus area of this study was: *What are the dimensions of dining-out experiences at the Canton Restaurant that speak to the inner needs and desires of its patrons and how are they addressed by the proprietors?*

After discussing the possibility of using their restaurant as a unit of study for a formal academic research project, the owners of the Canton Restaurant consented.

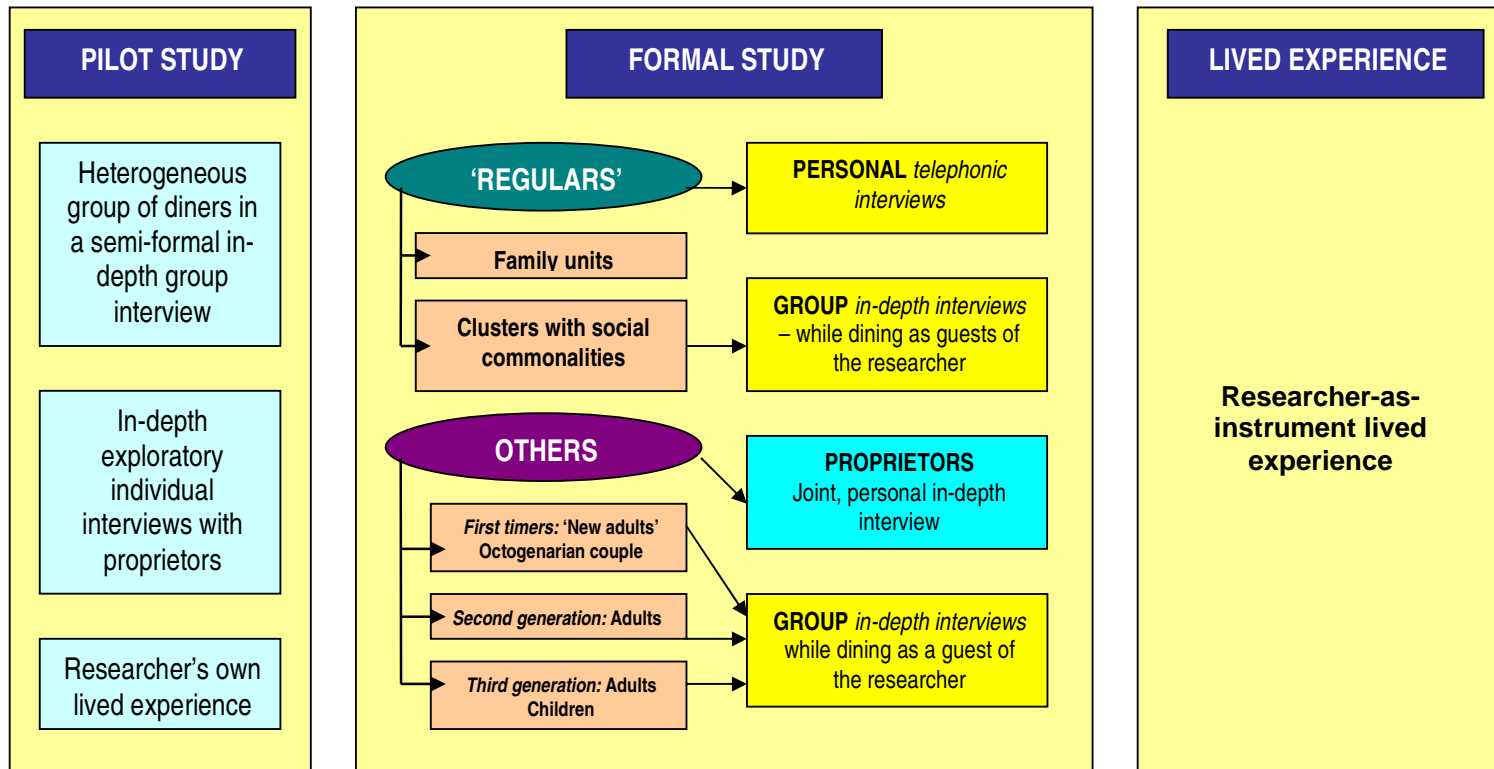
The researcher decided to adopt a two-pronged approach to the empirical investigation. An exploratory pilot study would form the foundational premise upon which a more formalised and semi-structured in-depth inquiry would be based.

6.2 INFORMATION SOURCES AND SAMPLE COMPOSITION

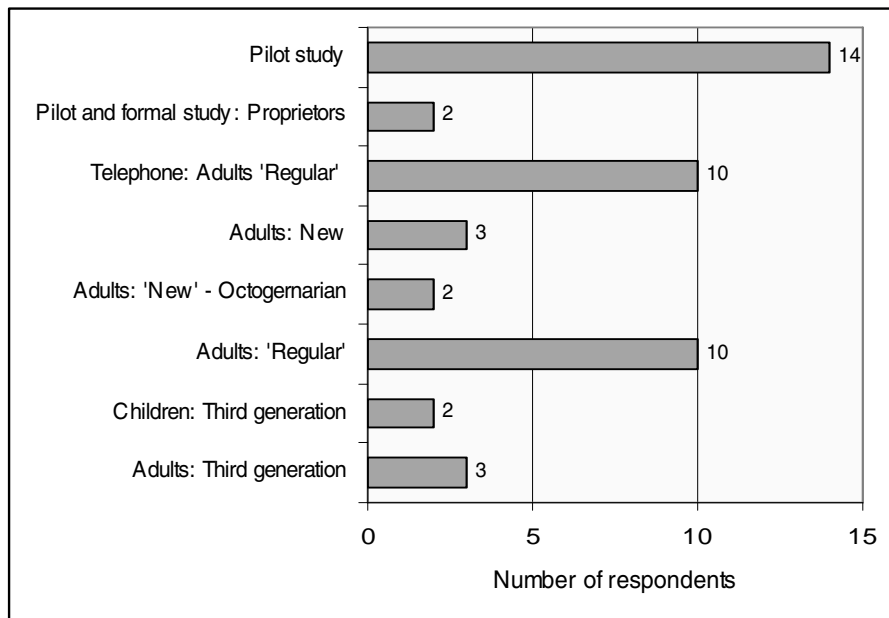
In conjunction with the proprietors, a judgement sample was used for the pilot study. This was done through a network of diners who visit the Canton Restaurant on a frequent basis. Regular diners, who were regarded as being articulate and outgoing by the proprietress, were identified and approached concerning their willingness to share information and to participate in the pilot study interviews. The diners in question were principally white adult men and women who had no direct genealogical relationship with the owners of the Canton Restaurant.

The holistic sample composition is depicted in both qualitative and quantitative format in Figures 6.1 and 6.2 respectively.

Figure 6.1 Holistic sources of information



Source: Compiled by the researcher

Figure 6.2 **Total sample composition**

Source: Compiled by the researcher

6.2.1 The pilot study

A heterogeneous group of fourteen adults were interviewed in a semi-formal depth interview. There were nine women and five men present. The Canton Restaurant was used as a venue and the respondents were invited to a Sunday afternoon tea. Many of the informants knew each other, either from previous dining occasions at the restaurant or as social acquaintances. The participants were introduced to people they had not met before and were then seated randomly at tables that had been organised in a horse shoe style. The researcher sat at the head of the table arrangement to be able to clearly make eye contact with and hear all the respondents. After formal introductions, the researcher explained his association with the restaurant and set the scene by explaining the purpose of the interviews and the overall

study. The respondents' permission was also requested to use any information forwarded during the discussion. The proprietress served tea and refreshments and then left the venue. She and her husband, who is the proprietor and chef, were jointly interviewed at a later stage.

The fundamental purpose of the exploratory study was to establish and explore what the nebulous it was that drew diners back to the restaurant on a regular basis and concomitantly, to establish what the needs of the informants were that the Canton Restaurant satisfied. Neither of the owners was present during the focus group exploratory study. The researcher used a loosely structured list of possible topics (gleaned from the literature study as reported in the previous chapters), that could be used to instigate discussions. Examples of typical potential discourse items are also reflected in the exploratory study interview guide. (See Annexure A).

In line with the qualitative approach adopted for this research, snowballing was used as the basis of creating a linkage between one topic that may have been prompted and another that arose pursuant to open discourse. As opinions were voiced, so supportive information or ancillary sub-aspects were engendered, which in their own turn, were discussed and debated. Participation was animated and the mood was convivial. The respondents willingly, openly and candidly voiced and shared their sentiments. When there was major consensus on any

specific aspect of discussion, a chorus of supportive aahs and umms ensued.

When significant insights were proffered, such as particularly rich descriptions by articulate respondents concerning the intangible satisfiers met by the Canton Restaurant, the researcher adopted a synoptic mode of verbal recapitulation to ensure that he had captured the essence of what had been vocalised. An example would be: “So let me summarise what has been stated, ...then this is how you feel about, ...so in essence you are saying...”.

Throughout the interviewing process, the researcher took notes and made comments about the mode of interaction and the responses that were being solicited. Example of such self-notes were:

- *Lady in blue dress gets up and hugs Verna (the proprietress) after being served her tea.*
- *Couple at table one share joke with group at table three.*
- *Gent in red shirt pops into kitchen to greet Peter (the proprietor and chef).*
- *Last lady to arrive as respondent warmly smiles and greets four different individuals with words: “Hey — the gang are here”.*

On numerous previous occasions in the researcher’s association with the establishment, the topic of customer patronage, loyalty and

differentiation had arisen and had been superficially broached in casual conversation with the proprietors. However, as a specific component of the pilot study, they were also questioned more fully, albeit in an unstructured manner for the researcher to establish if they had consciously given the topic any deep thought.

The researcher questioned them as to what they thought the dimensions of dining were that had resulted in repeat business. It was important to establish whether they could articulate the rationale which their diners might offer for patronage support. It became evident that neither had purposefully nor cognitively explored what the magnetic it was that had resulted in patronage loyalty. The owners were, however, very insistent on not in any manner compromising on the quality of their food. Neither had given the intangibles and emotional aspects inherent in diner's needs much thought. The proprietress, who most regularly deals with diners directly, seemed to feel that she got to know her customers and that by so doing, she was able to develop a familial bond and dialogue with them over time.

6.2.2 The formal study

Based on the exploratory pilot study information which had emerged, the researcher was able to reassemble and semi-structure a bank of potential topics and themes that were used to fashion a quasi template to guide the subsequent interviewing processes.

The formal empirical study took place over approximately a three-month period. With the assistance of the owners, random regular diners were contacted and asked if they would participate in the study. A series of individual and group interviews were conducted using convenience sampling. Group depth interviews were generally limited to a maximum of six participants to ensure full involvement and that informants did not feel intimidated by more vocal individuals. All depth interviews were digitally recorded in their entirety.

Where a family or an extended family group was identified, the researcher formally invited the group to a meal at the restaurant as his guests. Where smaller units of study or individuals were located, they were grouped by the proprietress into clusters deemed to have similar attributes such as age or interest so that they would get along well and interact amicably while sharing a dining occasion.

In cases where the researcher knew the diner either in person, by name or had made the acquaintance at the restaurant on previous occasions, telephone interviews were conducted. Besides regular diners being interviewed, it was thought important to witness the responses of neophyte first time diners.

On separate occasions, the following diner permutations were interviewed while having a meal at the restaurant as guests of the researcher:

- A first-time octogenarian couple together with a seasoned couple;
and
- Three new adults with a third generation diner in his early 30s.

Both the above occasions transpired over the durations of a full evening. In addition, the perspectives of two third generation children, a boy of eight and a girl of ten years old respectively were sought. The children were individually interviewed by the researcher while they were dining with their parents at the establishment.

During the formal empirical study, the proprietors were jointly depth interviewed over the duration of a full afternoon. At that encounter, they gave more concrete suggestions as to their success at attracting return patrons. This may be ascribed to the fact they had had sufficient time to consider the issue in the interim. In addition, since the time they were initially approached by the researcher to gain permission to use their business as the unit of study, they had possibly become more sensitised to both the emotional and the physical aspects of satisfying the needs of their supporters. These reasons might have come to mind without their cognitive volition.

In synopsis, the holistic sample was in excess of forty diners. Generally, engagements lasted from a forty-minute telephone conversation to spending an entire evening or lunch time having a

discussion over a meal. Interviews were semi-formally structured, and the researcher used a checklist of items as a rough guideline to ensure that the communication was holistic. The draft framework instrument is replicated in Annexure B. However, where topics meandered to new domains of relevance, such new issues were also pursued and expounded.

When the owners were interviewed, the same checklist was used, but the perspective was changed to focus more on their opinions on the topics enumerated.

6.2.3 Researcher-as-instrument

Over the years of association with the restaurant, including both the first and second generation proprietors, the researcher has made copious mental notes and observation and asked many silent questions about the modus operandi and protocols used by its owners. The researcher has always been intrigued by what it was that differentiated the Canton from other such venues. However, since 2001, as a regular and seasoned diner, whether on a week night, weekends or for a Sunday luncheon, the researcher has made a conscious point of striking up conversations with random patrons as well as the owners. All observations were jotted down and events, comments or issues of interest that were seen, experienced first-hand or volunteered by diners being interacted with were recorded. Consequently, an extensive and rich repository of researcher-as-

instrument information has been assembled and assimilated and served as a strong anchor point and foundation upon which to explore a qualitative study of this nature.

6.3 DATA ASSEMBLY AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Notes were taken by hand during telephone discussions and one-on-one casual conversations with diners, whereas all depth interviews during the dining experience were digitally tape recorded in their entirety. As the researcher incrementally became more familiar with the data, a picture emerged of the dimensions that held significance to respondents. As these were assimilated, additional characteristics were appended and all interviews were again examined for those additional emerging dimensions. It was only by conducting an holistic scrutiny of information that descriptors of the dining experience could be extracted (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1994). The researcher then considered each interview at length to reflect on the various perspectives that had emerged. These were sifted for common themes that had been either directly alluded to or implied by respondents.

Analysis procedures thus focussed on understanding common structures in the respondents' interpretations of their experiences of dining at the restaurant. The process entailed the copious repetitive reading of notes and the replay of digital recordings.

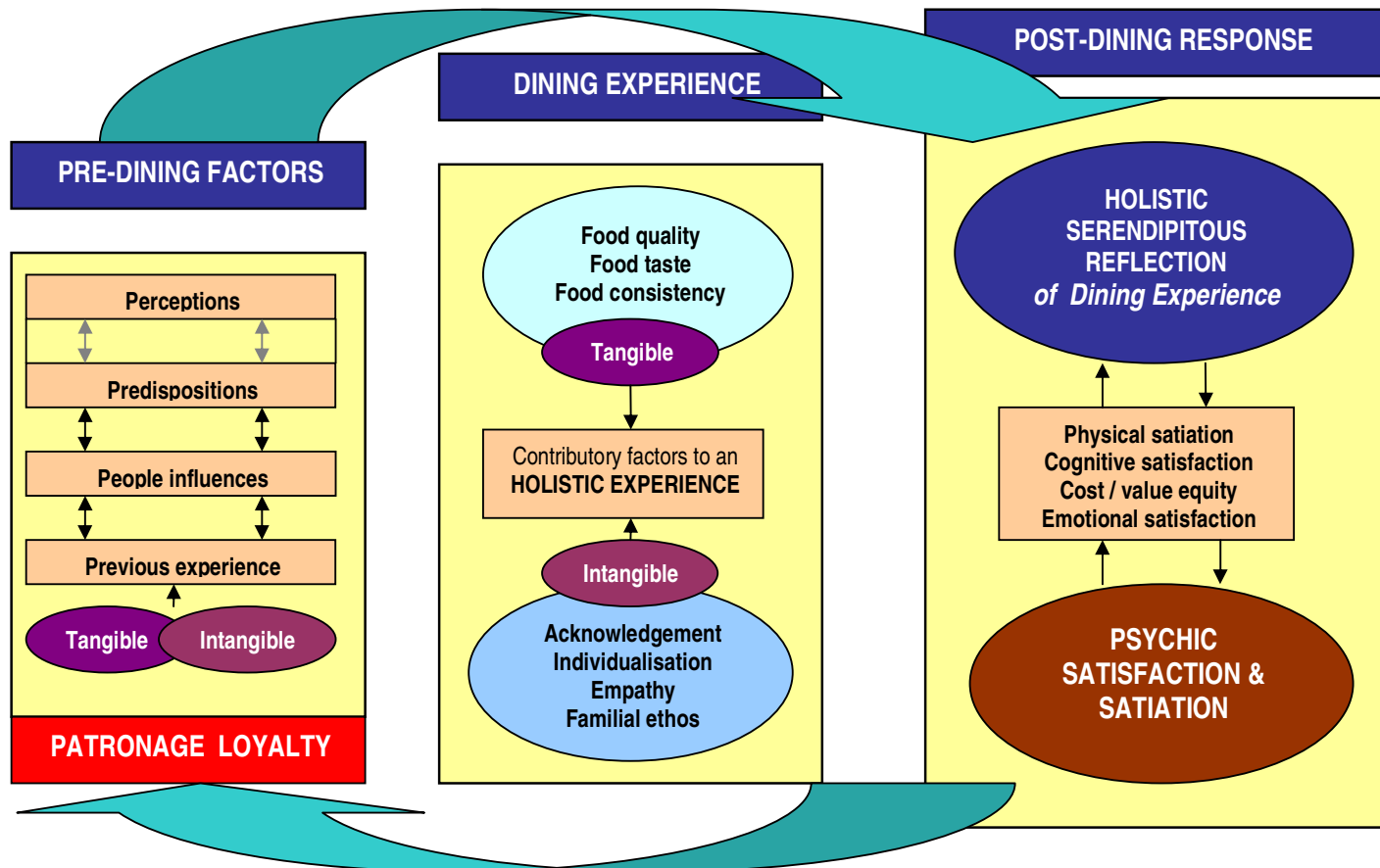
The iteration exercise reinforced the fact that at times in the interviews a complex mental process was involved in putting adequate words to thought. No matter how articulate some of the respondents were, there were occasions when simply attempting to capture suitable linguistic expression for the deep seated emotional, intellectual and psychic elements being explored were very difficult.

Another interpretative issue that the researcher had to contend with was the emphasis placed on specific words, phrases, nuances and voice inflections of respondents. When reduced to words decoded in black and white, they may have appeared mundane, but seen in the interview context, where there were gesticulations and facial expressions involved, the milieu was distinctively more complicated. Expressions and opinions that spontaneously emerged during engagements were melded with the nonverbal clues displayed by speakers to crystallise into unique information bundles. The collective aggregated thus evolved as the final basis for data coding, sorting and categorising.

Entire interviews thus took the form of a thematically coherent unit of discourse and were examined in their entirety. The narratives related during each engagement provided illuminating information upon which to assemble clusters of related data. Based on a strong foundation provided by literature (Gwinner, Gremler & Bitner, 1998), it was clear that data analysis would result in the emergence of descriptors which

would become the themes and distinct categories of content. These were collated and grouped to harmonise with the respective elements of a dining model as shown in Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.3 The dining model



Source: Compiled by the researcher

The research methodology and analysis protocol that evolved were in a sense organic. The system was autogenic and self feeding and, in hindsight, it is apparent that a quasi template analysis emerged as the instrument to assemble and analyse the data that was collected in the investigation. The technique used is located between content analysis and grounded theory. Based on the review of literature on customer patronage, loyalty, and satisfaction, and the lived experience of the researcher, the investigation was started with minimal a priori ideas of themes or definitions of codes as suggested by Symon and Cassell (1994). Premised upon a retro-view of the investigation as a whole, it was thus possible to categorise diners in terms of generic and common attributes, coupled with specific dining predispositions and frequenting patterns. These factors were also used to structure the typology profiles that emerged and which are expatiated in Chapter 9.

Before the empirical findings are related to the respective model stages, their specific elements will be contextually explained. By so doing, a more coherent and consolidated picture can be melded that will form a solid foundation upon which to integrate the practical findings of the research. Each sub-dimension of the proposed dining model (see Figure 6.3) will be handled in this dual fashion in Chapters 7 and 8.

6.4 SUMMARY

The empirical enquiry was premised on a pilot study excursion designed to establish the general milieu of the restaurant patrons. This was followed by a formal investigation where semi-structured in-depth interviews were deployed to probe specific aspects of relevance. Respondents were animated and freely voiced their opinions concerning the issues raised during interviews. The data gleaned was recorded, transcribed, analysed and sorted into common themes and units which correlated with the defined elements of the dining model that was developed by the researcher.

The empirical findings relating to respective components of the dining model are discussed in the following chapter.

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CHAPTER 7
THE EMPIRICAL STUDY: *PART TWO*
THE PRE-DINING DIMENSIONS

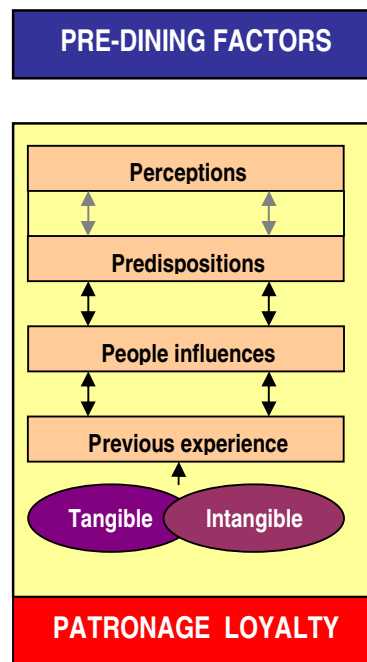
7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the empirical findings relating to the components of the first element of the Dining model are discussed. It will be shown how the perceptions and predispositions of both new and stalwart diners can pre-influence their meal experience. Further, the impact of the historical association that diners have with the restaurant will be illustrated and explained. It will be described how the fledgling diner develops a generic frame of reference spirally over time, and concurrently, how the regular patrons has a bank of psychic impressions and viewpoints reinforced with each moment of contact with the establishment. Finally, the role of referencing, opinion formation and previous compounded experience is reported upon as elements that support, sustain and embed patronage loyalty.

To establish order and harmony in the transcribed interview records and notes taken during the field work process, data was repeatedly sifted to extract comments, nuances or inflections. Clusters of related data were then assimilated and themes were isolated. This categorisation and sorting was done to harmonise with the specific

elements of each stage of the model. The results are fleshed out under the respective headings which are diagrammatically represented for the sake of context in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1 **Pre-dining factors**



Source: Compiled by the researcher

7.2 PRE-DINING FACTORS CONTEXTUALISED

Before any diner actually enters an establishment for the meal experience *per se*, a variety of pre-dining factors can affect the mindset and prevalent attitudes. These dimensions act as precursors and foundational constructs upon which the actual meal will be judged. The contextual meaning and interpretation assigned to each

dimension will briefly be expounded before they are coupled with the empirical findings. All descriptor definitions cited below have been formulated by the researcher or have been modelled from the *Wordweb* on-line dictionary, except where otherwise explicitly indicated.

7.2.1 **Perceptions**

Perceptions and pre-dispositions are inextricably interwoven. They can be distinctly intellectualised in terms of definitions and descriptions, but the common thread that unites them is that they are strongly related to the psychic and cognitive facets of individuals and act as intrusive factors upon judgements and decision-making. For the sake of description, they are initially separated, but when related to the empirical findings, they will be collectively addressed. Thus, perception is a subjective process where individuals assign selective meanings and explanations to stimuli according to schema or heuristics. Perceptions are simple rules or networks of beliefs and feelings derived from fundamental tenets and experiences which group similar phenomena (Gabbot & Hogg, 1998). Stated alternatively, perceptions are part of the cognitive processes involved in obtaining and storing knowledge. They serve as a representation of what is perceived and forms the basic component in the formation of a concept.

7.2.2 Predispositions

As the semantics of the word implies, it is a *pre*, namely, beforehand inclination to interpret things in a particular way. Predispositions serve as an attitude of mind, especially one that favours one alternative over another; they also reflect a general direction or propensity to do, look upon or judge something. Predispositions thus involve the performance of some composite cognitive activity or operation, which in turn, affects mental contents. Simplistically stated, predispositions are the instinctive points of view, behaviour stances or mindsets that consumers intrinsically adopt towards any given situation or event.

7.2.3 People influences

People influences refer to the power which individuals or groups have by virtue of their prestige, position, opinions, social status, experience and so on to sway the behaviour or perspectives of others. They further reflect the possession of the qualities (especially mental qualities) required to inform, persuade or even coerce others to see things through the same cognitive domain. When distilled to its essence, people influences relate to the controlling and regulatory impact that exists among and between humans.

7.2.4 Previous experience

Experience is the accumulation of knowledge or skill that results from direct participation in events or activities. The involvement might be in

real time or belong to some prior occasion. It is the total of the package of knowledge or beliefs as apprehended pursuant from the content of direct or vicarious engagement in a particular issue. Previous experience can be premised on taking part in both tangible and intangible activities.

In the context of a restaurant dining experience, the tangible component will relate to the consuming of the food and refreshments that accompany a meal, whereas the intangible elements could refer to the emotional or psychic factors such as the hospitality of the hosts, the influence of ambience and the general mood of the environment.

Contextually, any tangible or intangible previous episodes of any Chinese eating occasion, albeit real or vicariously experienced, plus the milieu and dynamics of that specific situation, are inexorably juxtaposed with an interrelated collage of the perceptions and predispositions held by such an individual. This consolidated cognitive frame of reference is further influenced and swayed by the viewpoints of other people who might act as reference groups. For example, family members, friends, associates and colleagues might directly or tacitly taint the individual's stance and posture towards a particular restaurant venue, its food, ambience and so on.

7.3 DINER STATUS

Considering diner status, it was possible to regroup the elements of the pre-dining component of the model in a dichotomous fashion. The construct and flow of relationships between the elements would be sequentialised differently, dependant upon whether the diner had had a generic Chinese meal experience or not.

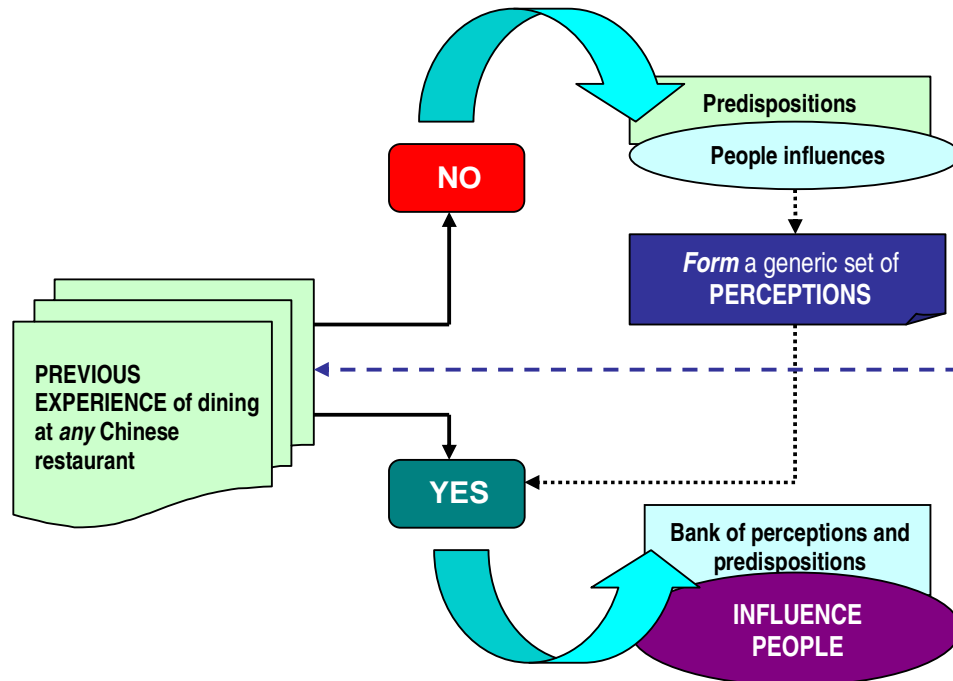
7.3.1 The neophyte diner

Figure 7.2 illustrates the difference in the permutation of the variables. There would thus be a subtle, but important difference for neophyte diners at the Canton Restaurant when compared with seasoned patrons.

The anomaly depicted in the diagramme will be briefly explained. The first time or freshman Canton Restaurant diner has a different mental construct of the pre-dining experience than those who have had a meal at the restaurant before. A person who has ever eaten Chinese food previously has no real frame of reference against which to peg or measure perspectives. Any opinion which such a diner may hold would have been synthesised from personal viewpoints plus possibly those injected by associates and acquaintances. The basis for belief could be founded on fact or conjecture, and because visiting the Canton Restaurant is a new experience, the diner thus enters without a generic set or orientation. The predispositional basis is more

susceptible to influence from other people who have a track record of experience. The generic set can thus be manipulated and moulded, dependent upon the outcome of the meal experience itself. This represents a make-or-break situation for the proprietors, since their performance in its entirety will form the benchmark upon which such a neophyte patron will tend to judge all future engagements.

Figure 7.2 **Pre-dining experiences at any Chinese restaurant**



Source: Compiled by the researcher

The first-time consumer is actively or tacitly involved in constructing an internalised interpretation of events and experiences as part of the cognitive processes involved in obtaining and storing knowledge about being a Chinese food eater. These serve as a representation of what

is perceived and form the basic component in the formation of a concept or frame of reference for all future contact with the Canton Restaurant or any other Chinese restaurant. A groundwork is being laid which now becomes the point of reference and landmark for successive cognitive, emotional and subjective decision-making and for the opinions that will be espoused and propagated by the diner.

7.3.2 **The seasoned diner**

The seasoned diner has an existent cognitive benchmark founded upon a bank of previous experience. This database of direct involvement and cumulative insights thus feeds and expands the already held propensities, perceptions and predispositions of the patron. The enhanced and reaffirmed stance of the satisfied diner consequently directly impacts upon the expectations garnered for the current meal and the manner and degree to which such individuals in turn relate to and influence other people in the future.

The regular patron's expectations and responses thus become embedded and iterative by nature. The ultimate influence is that each future engagement and dining experience at the restaurant positively reinforces the elements of the pre-dining component of the model in anticipation of the successive visit.

7.4 PERCEPTIONS AND PREDISPOSITIONS

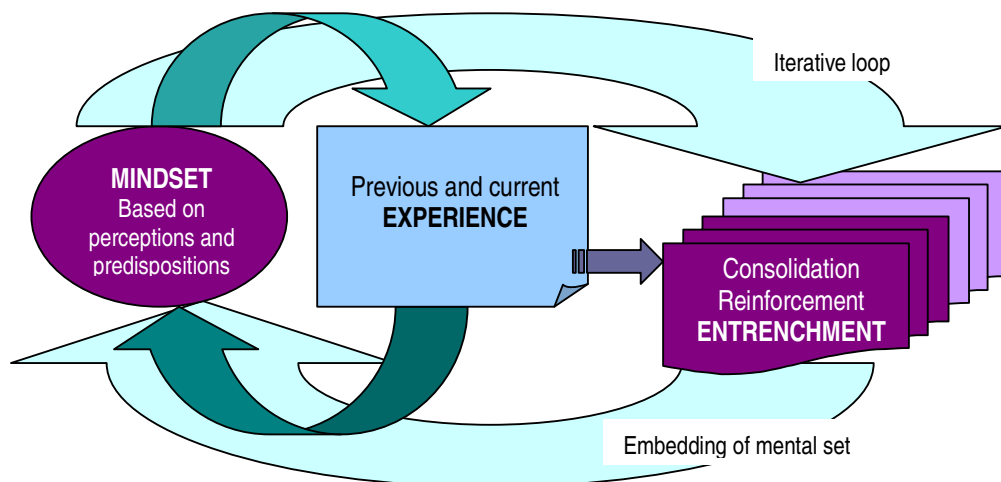
A rich and thick description of empirical data will be related, sometimes verbatim, to demonstrate the powerful impact of this element of the model. The viewpoints of diner will be cited, and where relevant contextually, the perspectives of the owners will be contrasted. As has been elucidated, perceptions are an integral constituent in the development and building of a conceptual frame of reference against which any new information gained by an informant would be bench-marked. Within a similar construct, predispositions can be delineated as an existent frame of mind; one that is pre-set in a particular stance or attitude and which is not easily modified. The researcher noted that predispositions also impinge upon temperament and there is an inclination to naturally and habitually respond to a milieu with a defined and characteristic cognitive set.

Within the context of the pre-dining component of the dining model, the implication of the above is that regular diners at the Canton Restaurant have already assigned meaning and built their own foundational perceptual and predispositional base. This entrenched premise of opinions acts as a benchmark against which to set cognitive standards for any new information which they might need to process in the context of dining at a Chinese restaurant. Schooled diners already possess a bank of judgements and already formed

mindsets about the establishment. This repository of latent, inherent and intuitive attitude serves as a foundation upon which their entire decision process and judgemental system is skewed. This phenomenon of shaping and amalgamating a set of psychic determinants as a result of lived experience and engagement at the Canton Restaurant, coupled with the consolidating, reinforcing and retrenching aspects of the phenomenon is depicted in Figure 7.3.

Regular diners seem to have become habituated and routinised in the full stratagem of pre-dining elements, to the extent that some even voice the sentiment that new patrons will have to be patient and need to learn what it is that they ought to do to have the privilege of supping at the Canton Restaurant.

Figure 7.3 **The mindset entrenchment loop**



Source: Compiled by the researcher

It thus became patently evident that the perceptions and predispositions of seasoned diners are fused and strengthened with each successive encounter and engagement with the restaurant.

Emergent themes and comments which emanated from the respondents include:

- General comments about the restaurant as a generic establishment *per se*.
- Feedback about the proprietors — their attitudes towards diners relationships that prevail and the fastidiousness of their sourcing, preparation and presentation of the food.
- Perspectives on diner patronage and their loyalty.
- Insights concerning the uniqueness and fraternal ethos of the diner corpse and the collegial nature of their affiliation.
- Subtle and astute sagacity regarding neophytes knowing the rules and the set-up at the establishment.
- Dilemma of whether the restaurant should advertise or not.
- Comments on recommending and advocating the establishment to a diversity of possible audiences; and
- Issue of the Canton Restaurant being an unlicensed venue.

The above themes will now be elaborated and contextually discussed.

The subjects will specifically be broached from the perspectives of the diners, and where applicable, through the eyes of the proprietors.

7.4.1 **The restaurant *per se***

According to respondents there is a distinct and a unique ethos, atmosphere and spirit which energises the restaurant. The Canton Restaurant is perceived as a low key place where patrons feel at home and comfortable. The ambience lends itself to shutting out mundane daily cares while having a respite in a convivial social atmosphere. It is a place where they feel they can sit down and, at their own pace and leisure, enjoy themselves without being rushed and harassed. They know that when they reserve a table, it is at their disposal for the whole afternoon or evening. Typical verbatim respondent comments include:

- *It is not commercialised — it is a real place.*
- *It's that family thing you know.*
- *It is not just a restaurant — it is like being home from home.*
- *When I feel like Chinese — this is the only place I consider.*
- *When you walk in here, and whether you are in a bad mood — or whatever — you mellow.*
- *Besides the food, the mood here is what makes it so pleasant to visit.*

Regular diners further emphatically add that they feel spoiled by being patrons and that they use the restaurant as a benchmark against which they judge other eating establishments. The exceptional standard of the cuisine is taken as a given and it never enters any debate as an issue of contention. Diners feel special and are highly sensitised to the fact that the establishment tends to be a family-orientated, intimate venue, where friends, loved ones, family and close associates congregate on a frequent basis.

Diners describe a camaraderie and unity that binds the patrons at any moment. The Canton Restaurant is regarded as a familial fulcrum for social interaction and engagement. Being a regular patron appears to empower diners to strip themselves of any pretentious airs and graces and to experience an authentic, down-to-earth occasion in an enriching, cultured and mature environment surrounded by selective people who share a filial bond. The following verbatim transcripts support the descriptions provided:

- *It is a selective issue here you know, not really snobbery, but like we are so lucky to know of the place and have regular access.*
- *I have never complained at Canton, because there is not ever a reason to do so.*
- *The company I keep here is of absolute importance. I know the*

food will always be good, that is a given you see, but I also want to share the full experience with special friends. I want my guests to share that too — it is just special.

- *We feel spoiled by being able to come here you know.*
- *They don't play that offensive music here, perhaps some discrete background sound ... not that awful stuff you get at other places.*
- *I can just chill and be so real here — like being at home or with very special friends.*

The viewpoint of the proprietors appears to strongly parallel that of their patrons. They report that they do not consciously try to differentiate their establishment as such. Their mode of operation is distinctly hands-on and highly personalised. The owners sense a strong reciprocal bond and affiliation with the diner corpse and regard them all as elements of an holistic family. Corroborative verbatim comments that reflect this cohesivity are:

- *Diners are more friends than patrons. People are incredible – when you are friendly to them – and they sense and feel the same way about you, it is easy to talk to them.*
- *I enjoy their company.*
- *We have little diners here too – and I relate well to them and vice versa. Kids feel they can talk to me, as do the regulars.*
- *The children of our regular diners have virtually grown up in front*

of us. They know us.

- *It is definitely like one big extended family. Oh yes, definitely.*

7.4.2 **Feedback about the proprietors**

Being inherently regarded as an establishment that caters for kinfolk, diners strongly identify with the persona of management. There appears to be a sense of mutual reciprocity, in that because patrons feel they are so well catered and cared for, they have a collateral reason to similarly care for and help the owners succeed. Distinct allusions to levels and degrees of bonding emerge. It is voiced that the deeper entrenchment of the relationship between diner and management, the greater the cohesivity of relationship. This in turn leads to the unique needs and requests of regulars being acquiesced to and at times even being pre-empted by the owners. Supportive verbatim comments in this regard are:

- *He (the owner) is a dying breed of chef.*
- *I am diabetic — they make special food for me — even without my asking or suggesting it.*
- *There is a very personal touch by the owners, they know what I like to eat.*
- *I really know the people who own the restaurant.*
- *The owners take a personal interest in me. I am not just a source of money, it is like being a member of a family. For example, when*

my daughter died of cancer, they of their own volition and kindness, brought a complete meal to our home.

- *There is a personal bond between the owners and the customers.*
- *I feel tremendous empathy for them, it is almost like being in partnership with them.*
- *They are prepared to meet you if you want odd dining hours or different menu requests. But if you throw a curved ball request at the chef, you must understand that you will have to wait a little longer- that is a given of course.*
- *They will do what you want. As you get to know them - they are very accommodating.*
- *The service is very friendly. The owners are observant, attentive and personalised. I feel they care for me and they see that my needs are catered for.*
- *This restaurant is very personalised. It is almost like you accumulate points. You are recognised, you are appreciated and well cared for and given the exact same treatment and hospitality shown to you.*
- *When you bring new people here, they can feel the special way you are handled and they also want that. Because in future they will potentially become regular diners themselves.*
- *I genuinely care for them.*
- *I want them to succeed.*
- *I want to help them.*

The confirmatory reciprocity between diners and owners is further illustrated by the narration of instances where during times of staff shortages or unforeseen mishaps in the kitchen, patrons have voluntarily stepped in to help serve at tables, wash dishes and even peel vegetables for the chef. Diners also have the predisposed mindset that the care foisted by management starts with the acquisition of base ingredients and cascades throughout the preparation, cooking, serving and consumption phases of a meal. Comments in this regard include:

- *The caring starts when they buy the ingredients - they know where to go to get the best quality.*
- *They only use the best ingredients you know.*
- *I have seen Peter (the owner and chef) at Woolworths (an up-market chain of stores) you know.*
- *A huge amount of love and devotion and effort goes into preparation.*
- *Look at the precision of the cuts and content. You must study it. You can see for yourself how beautiful it looks.*
- *He takes care and precision in his cooking - it is always so consistent.*
- *They are very discerning and fussy about what goes into the food*

On the occasion when regular diners have to be declined access to the restaurant because of accommodation reasons, a very sympathetic and conciliatory stance is adopted by patrons. They appear to take no umbrage and in the restaurateurs' defence, sigh and acknowledge that someone else also has to have a turn to dine there. As an eloquent respondent nonchalantly echoed: *"Often I sense disappointment in Verna's (the proprietress) voice when she says she cannot cater for us on a specific evening, but I understand that the chef can only do so much. We are just patient and wait our turn again."*

The owners have very strong sentiments regarding the way they run their business and the high standard they place on their cuisine. Their focus appears to be centric, yet with the interest of their diners at the fulcrum of their philosophy. The owners' verbatim transcripts illustrating this psyche follow:

- *You have to get to know your diners, just as they have to learn to get to know you.*
- *The diner must learn to communicate with you.*
- *We choose to run our business this way because we do believe in quality. It is all about standards.*
- *That is how we do things and if people do not like our way, we are not going to change and serve inferior food.*

-
- *I (the chef) just do my own thing. I do not compare myself with other Chinese restaurants. We are very particular about our standards, quality and the like – so we do our best – and oh yes, our customers know and are very aware of this.*
 - *We feel that if the food is not good enough for us – then it is not good enough for anyone else.*
 - *I (the chef) do not make any conscious effort to differentiate myself – it is just my style, but Verna (the proprietress) is very conscious of the food.*

Another aspect of their operation that the owners are mindful of is the feedback they receive from diners concerning the food. Patrons inform the Whitely's that they, in turn, have told other restaurants that the food served by such establishments does not compare with the Canton Restaurant. The Canton Restaurant's proprietors are amused at such information and term it cheeky and even audacious on the part of their supporters. Typical exact comments from the owners include:

- *They (their stalwart diners) come back and tell Peter that he has spoiled them.*
- *Some even go as far as telling other restaurants they visit that their food is not on par with ours.*
- *We just laugh and think how cheeky it is to say such things.*

7.4.3 Diner patronage and loyalty

Repeat diners tend to be unanimous in their affirmation of not even considering a surrogate restaurant venue when seeking to have a Chinese meal. They hold a mental picture as part of their predispositional construct, where they have stored the memories of their accumulated emotional and holistic previous dining experiences. They have a strong measure of assurance and reassurance that they can intuitively rely on the same pleasurable psychic elements to be evoked at each successive dining occasion. Should the more venturesome regular diner perhaps on the very odd occasion, dine at another Chinese restaurant, this behaviour is not regarded as disloyalty. Rather, such action is justified as being an instrument to reaffirm the Canton Restaurant's status in their own perception as the only Chinese establishment to support. This kind of confirmatory behaviour further substantiates the mindset entrenchment loop as was depicted in Figure 7.3. Diners' verbatim comments reflecting their support include:

- *You don't necessarily have to feel guilty if you support another Chinese restaurant on the odd occasion, but you must have an extremely good reason to drop your support.*
- *We do not even consider trying others, because we know what we have got here.*

-
- *It is like you have your very own private chef - a home from home, that is why I come back again and again.*
 - *I don't go to other Chinese restaurants, I don't care how many there are, I only go to the Canton.*
 - *There is no other Chinese place to eat at – anywhere.*
 - *I keep a mental picture of what I experienced last time — and know I can rely on the same to happen again. I can actually close my eyes and see the people, see and smell the food - it is just great.*
 - *If I do try another place, I don't feel guilty - all it does is confirm my resolve to stay with Canton.*

The owners are mindful of high levels of loyalty from their diners and are conscious of how important these individuals are to the long-term success of their operation. The owners provided comments such as the following:

- *There are people who are our ombudsmen. I think some people are not even conscious of the fact that they are punting our business. That is important to us.*
- *I suppose our name crops up when restaurants are mentioned and our address and phone numbers are passed on.*
- *Word-of-mouth is a very powerful part of building our patronage.*
- *They (patrons) share their experiences when they were here. Their enthusiasm sets others off.*

-
- *Without our loyal regulars we have no business.*

7.4.4 The uniqueness and cohesiveness among patrons

Veteran diners appear to embrace an intriguing notion of filial, social and privileged exclusivity as an associational link with the Canton Restaurant. Embedded either consciously or subconsciously, and voiced directly or by nuance and implication, is the perception and predisposition that the establishment is not a place for anyone. A sense of ownership tends to exist, where diners feel a strong bond with other patrons, albeit not known by name, but by association and sharing of the same experience. The analogy of being part of a family and making social contact was repeatedly proffered by respondents. Similarly, the aspect of the establishment having an element of exclusivity or selectivity was also raised. What was further evident was the perception that relatively fledgling diners voiced regarding regular and repeat patrons. Illustrations of a sense of family are reflected by statements such as:

- *I am sure that people who come here regularly get treated differently, it is like they are all one extended family and can sort of have privileges that new people haven't yet earned.*
- *Its like part of your extended family.*
- *It's that family thing you know.*
- *This is a very complex place - it is the whole family thing about it - I*

am new to it and I don't understand it - but to my partner- who is a third generation diner - it is so cool.

- *This is like a family where no one member is more important than another; you take turns. Like if they are fully booked, we wait our turn, because we know the situation here.*

Being a place where people become family and close friends, it became apparent that most diners held a preconceived opinion that they were sure to meet up with a familiar face any time they frequented the Canton Restaurant. This was regarded as a strong plus factor for patronage and for potentially extending and embroidering the clan mentality with each visit. Diners frequenting the establishment were regarded as family, and it was reported that new diners were easy to spot. The new diners did not have the same at home aura and presence, as did stalwarts.

Typical comments regarding the social milieu of the Canton Restaurant were:

- *You never know who you are going to meet when you come here to dine, but you know it will be someone who is or will become a friend.*
- *We look forward to coming here - most times we meet old friends, or other regulars. Some we know personally, and others we know*

by association.

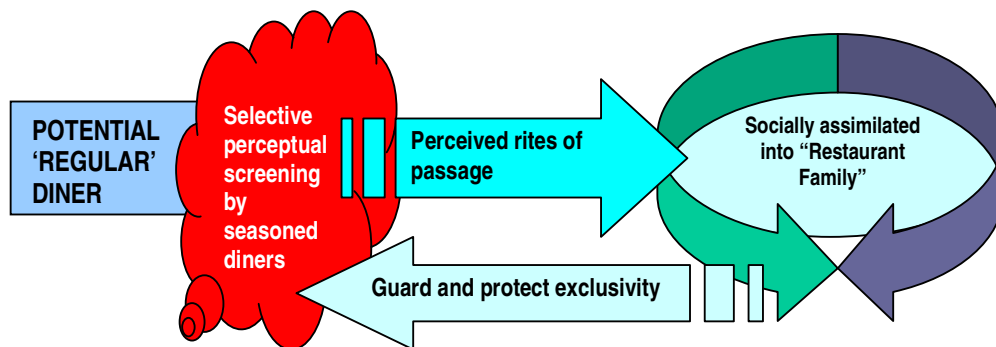
- *This is a place to meet friends, old and new.*
- *People talk to other people here, and that is how we make friends.*
- *Social people come here. It is easy to strike up a conversation with people at another table. That is how the family grows you know.*
- *I like chatting up people at other tables near me; that is how the family grows. You meet them again or at some other place and immediately you have something in common. You share the secret hey?*

As already stated, a strong sentiment of exclusivity appears to abound when the comments of regular supporters is dissected. These patrons come across as being coy, but none-the-less vociferously and sometimes tongue-in-cheek, defend their stance that the restaurant is their place and that they do not wish to change the status quo. The following verbatim quotes corroborate this frame of reference:

- *You need a password to get in here you know.*
- *But I am very careful of who I let know about the place. I don't want them spoiling it for me. In my private capacity this is my place. Not so much for professional or business purposes, but close times.*
- *People have sometimes hear of the place, but are unable to find it. If I feel the need, I will reveal address and location to them.*

A contradictory dichotomous perception concerning new diners emerged at times. Once a new diner had gained access, almost as a rite of passage, such an individual or group of individuals were seen as being absorbed and included into the collective mindset of diners. They became part of the extended family. Concomitantly, there was a strong voice by respondents that not too many new people ought to be admitted because their own status quo as privileged diners could be jeopardised. The custodial role of the newly admitted family member was now to protect perceived privileges. This aspect is illustrated in Figure 7.4.

Figure 7.4 **Perceptual rite of passage**



Source: Compiled by the researcher

The proprietors also allude to the kinship and camaraderie that reigns among their diners. They are cognisant of the fact that the Canton Restaurant is a family type restaurant where an emphasis is placed on communing with relatives and friends. The owners made typical

retorts such as the following to support their family image:

- *Ours is a place where old friends and family can come and relax and enjoy the evening or afternoon together.*
- *It is just like one big extended family. Many diners know each other here.*
- *Their kids grew up in front of us – we know them all.*

7.4.5 **Knowing the rules and the setup**

A chorus of admonitions were freely forwarded by established diners to new and potential diners. It was obvious that strong paternalistic predisposition and perceptions were rooted in the mindsets of seasoned diners. At times neophytes were seen in a very provincial light and it was discreetly suggested that part of the rite of passage alluded to above, included learning the rules of the establishment. An unwritten protocol and etiquette appeared to emerge from discourse with regular diners. There were pre-and proscriptions embedded in the Canton Restaurant dining culture that had to be ferreted out, understood and conformed with. Typical examples of direct quotations include:

- *If you have been socialised in the Canton system you know the rules - the caveats and procedures. Not all people know that and have to be helped to understand the place. But I think they will get the hang of this - for example, like ordering prawns in advance.*

-
- *This stuff is passed on from generation to generation.*
 - *Have you ever had the crumbed steak? Well you need to let them know way in advance for that. It is not on the menu by the way.*
 - *They must understand the situation here you know.*
 - *You should get to know the situation here, you know — Peter (the chef) can only do so much.*
 - *Most diners know Peter is the only chef - newcomers don't know that - they will have to learn about it.*
 - *I know their rules you see, but if other people came here on their own, it would be disastrous. They would not know you can only pay cash here or that they should bring their own tippie.*
 - *They do not advertise. They are not asking for everybody's business. It is a word of mouth thing. So the fact that it is a cash only basis kind of business, and that you must bring your own wine is not important at all because you tell your friends about those aspects in advance. They will get to know the set-up here.*

Besides the general tendency by regulars to be quasi-nonchalant about their affiliation, understanding and association with the restaurant, they are mindful of espousing the trouble that the business will go to in meeting the needs of diners. Traditional consumer sovereignty principles thus appear to be inverted at times, and for special requests, appear to be built upon an understanding of the caveats and prescriptions of dining. Verbatim insights of the diners in

this regard include:

- *Although they are officially closed on weekday afternoons, Peter will do a special meal for a group on a weekday. You see, new people must know the rules. The same applies to the nights they are generally closed. But they will get to know about these things.*
- *If the restaurant is busy, diners should realise that they will have to wait. Verna (the proprietress) will tell us when we book, or we can even see for ourselves that they are busy, so we are patient.*
- *You can't expect to come here as a customer and just get anything you want; you must know there is a limited menu - so you know what you are getting. You don't really need a wider choice.*
- *You must understand that if they give a wider selection, they will take longer and so the smaller menu is good. However, you can have other things and combinations if you like - on condition that you just tell them well in advance.*

The owners are aware that certain caveats have to prevail if they are to run their operation their way and in their style. Snippets of references allude to this mindset in the examples cited below:

- *But total first timers will have to order from the menu. Once they have been here, if they ask for other dishes, they will then learn to know to request in advance.*

- *Diners realize that your style of cooking is personal, freshly prepared and made. New diners will understand that we can only offer the set menu on certain nights.*
- *We do things on request now. We are more flexible now. As long as they let us know beforehand – there is no problem - say sweet and sour fish, we need advance notice.*
- *If for example, they (diners) want to go somewhere after the meal, and if they let us know, we will speed things up for them.*
- *The onus is really on them to let us know.*
- *We get to know our customers and they learn to communicate with us and tell us what they want.*
- *A group at a table might want a certain flow of food and then a break – I take time to see how they want it. They learn too though.*
- *We expect the customer to let us know and then we can accommodate them.*
- *When new people book – Verna will say, do you want prawns, spring rolls etc? Then we can cater for them. We tell first timers this and let them know the rules.*

7.4.5 The advertising dilemma

The spontaneous response from informants when queried about the merits of the restaurant advertising or using exterior signage was a significantly overwhelming no. Some were emphatic and insisted that the prestige, exclusivity and selectivity of long-time diners would be

besmirched. Other respondents, upon reflection, admitted to their retort being defensive of their turf. Another group debated the current status and relative ease of access for known diners, versus extending the patronage base to newcomers and having to put up with potential obstacles to admittance. Remarks such as the following were recorded:

- *They should definitely not advertise or have any signage.*
- *No. In retrospect, they must stay anonymous as they are because it adds to the exclusiveness and I like that. This place is not for everybody you know.*
- *People will make it their business to find them.*
- *That is a tricky thing – maybe - maybe not. I suppose the new referrals may battle, but if they are clever enough they will find the place.*
- *If people you screen and recommend battle to find the place, you can always choose to reveal address and location to them if they forget or get lost.*
- *If people get lost then they deserve to do so. You don't need signage for people who don't really know what they want.*
- *Even I sometimes still get lost or ride past the house, but that is all part of the fun.*
- *If they extend their trading hours, they will have to increase staff numbers and the whole thing is going to change - and it won't be*

the same. Only Peter cooks. He will not let someone else do it.

- *Peter (the chef) has given clientele so there is absolutely no need to signpost or advertise.*
- *People come here, they don't look for customers, so advertising will be a total waste, and it will spoil the whole set-up.*
- *They will have too many people coming there if they were to advertise. I suppose that is just me being somewhat selfish.*

The owners have very specific ideas on signage, advertising and promotion. They see these communications tool not as draw-cards to the restaurant, but rather as a means to identify the location to new supporters. They provide the following insights in this regard:

- *If we do use any form of signage it will not be as a draw-card – but to identify location to new people who need to find the place.*
- *Maybe we will consider just a small signpost at night and then bring it back in when we close. Nothing permanent though.*
- *Some people still can't find us. A small temporary sign will be used mainly for people who have made reservations so that they can locate and identify our place.*
- *We must keep a check on the numbers. We will get more business – but we cannot cope then.*
- *We like to keep our business low key – I don't think I would want to advertise.*

7.4.6 Referral to other people

A distinct selectivity is extant with pockets of diners regarding letting people know about the restaurant. They feel that their sanctum will be invaded by outsiders and thus exercise discrete caution when advocating the establishment to others. Viewpoints such as the following reflect this predisposition:

- *I am very selective about who I tell about the Canton. It is my credibility on the line and I am letting them into the circle - you know - so I am very discerning of who I invite.*
- *But I am very careful of who I let know about the place because I don't want them spoiling it for me. This is my place. It is not so much for colleagues and outsiders.*
- *This is word of mouth referral system. You make sure that when you recommend friends that you tell them what is expected of them and how the place works in advance. You must be careful who comes here because the wrong people can mess things up.*
- *Just look at these people. You can feel the mood is good. There is no commercial rush and churning diners out like sausages. I let the odd close friend in on the secret when I feel beneficent. Isn't that awful to say – but it is true you know.*
- *When we inform newcomers about the restaurant, we generally let Verna know so that she can make them feel welcome.*

It can be extrapolated from the comments provided that it seems as though certain current patrons have ostensibly designated themselves as self-imposed censors and the gatekeepers of who should and should not be given the right of entry. This perceived custodial mindset is further tempered when regular diners state that, in fairness, people who seek admission ought to be encouraged to *keep on trying, hang in there, and be patient.*

It was also commonly stated that when seasoned diners acted as advocates to newcomers, they would provide sufficient information to secure locating the restaurant and being able to enjoy real Chinese food. Some comments appear enigmatic and contradictory. Certain regulars profess letting new people know of the restaurant and of boldly advocating it, yet simultaneously seem to take delight in the secrecy and almost conspiratorial role they play when disseminating such data. Comments as transcribed below reflect this almost condescending predisposition on behalf of some current supporters of the establishment.

- *When I tell new people I tell them they will not see a sign and that it is in a private home, and I make sure I give them the information they need to find him.*
- *People who have never eaten Chinese food have expectations,*

and I would hate them to be disappointed when they do so. Then I recommend the Canton so that they can have the real, authentic experience.

There are also those diners, mostly from the ranks of the third generation, who profess to punt the restaurant at every possible occasion. Their motivation seems to stem from the sheer joy they derive from the dining experience and their wish to share it with all who express any interest in oriental food.

Second generation diners appeared to be more reticent than their offspring to act as full-blown advocates. They harbour the disposition that they have inherited something good and wish to retain the traditions and a measure of elitism. However, the third generation diners who were interviewed were mostly inclined to opt for inclusiveness. Typical comments by such diners who have literally been socialised since birth into the ways of the restaurant were:

- *I frequently tell people and when Chinese comes up, I rant and rave and ask if they remember the old shop. I tell that they have moved and I give them the address. The place and the food are tops.*
- *I tell them because I love it. Every time you come here you have the same food, and you know the menu. But it is still wonderful. It*

is like a new experience each time. I will never get tired of their food.

- *I remember eating here when I was a child in pre-school. My grand parents brought the whole family here regularly.*
- *I always like coming home. That is what this place is like.*
- *It is a place my Dad still brings the whole family to.*
- *I recommend, to everyone: I want people to experience something nice — and why not tell them.*

The proprietors are cognisant of the chain of referencing that transpires among diners among their personal social sets. It is further clear to them that the referential role of their loyal supporters is of key significance to the long-term sustenance of their business.

Comments such as those cited attest to this understanding:

- *We have very few first-time diners who come here on their own. Most times new diners come with old hands who bring them.*
- *They (new patrons) tend to visit with second generation diners who are bringing friends, and by so doing, they are expanding our new base of diners.*
- *New friends then start their own chain of references. This is starting to grow at the new venue. More so than we expected.*
- *Seasoned couples bringing sets of new friends serve as a way of growing our business.*

7.2.7 Liquor license

The final element clustered under the umbrella of perceptions and predispositions as elements of the pre-dining component of the dining model, was whether the restaurant should apply for a liquor license. There was unanimous consensus that diners preferred to bring their own liquor.

Having a liquor license would detract from the ambience and appeal of the restaurant. Besides the inflated costs involved in purchasing wines and spirits from licensed establishments, respondents commented that:

- *I know my wines. I love my wines and I want to bring what I like, not what they have on their list.*
- *Peter will never consider it. He knows what his diners should have.*
- *The money I would save on the wine will pay for the cost of a full meal here.*
- *The place would become too commercial and lose some of its charm if it had a liquor license.*
- *Why waste money on a license - people who dine here know that they are not licensed.*

When the owners were asked about their stance on whether the restaurant ought to be licensed or not, an almost dismissive attitude was prevalent. It was felt that the efforts involved in acquiring and servicing the sale of liquor would not be worthwhile. In support of their diners, it was also voiced that their core and regular patrons preferred to bring their own liquor. Extracts from transcripts illustrate this stance:

- *Having a liquor license will tend to detract from the restaurant and we have not really given it much thought.*
- *People – our diners - generally like to bring their own wines and spirits.*
- *A very small minority of new diners who phone to book go elsewhere because we are not licensed. That does not bother us.*
- *The business we might lose because we do not have a liquor license is not important.*

The latter elements of the pre-dining component of the model, namely the sway and influence of people and the impact of previous experience will now expounded contextually.

7.5 PEOPLE INFLUENCES AND PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

The perceptions, attitudes and predispositions held by respondents can work as internal blocking mechanisms in their consumer decision

making process. In the search for information, external factors can also influence their judgements. Others who have cumulative experiences of the phenomenon in question, can have a powerful external impact on buyer cognition and behaviour (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 1999). Thus, should an entrant to the Canton Restaurant clientele base have information voids concerning protocol or perceived formats of etiquette and expected behavioural response as a diner, such an individual will tend to seek out information and credible sources to rectify the status quo.

Since the neophyte is still in the process of acquiring and developing an adequate internal information base upon which to make future judgements, counsel may well be sought from or offered by more seasoned respondents. A knowledgeable diner will have been socialised and inducted into the ways of meal experience and the anomalies of the restaurant milieu as a whole. Such an experienced individual would have built multiple layers of moments of memories over a substantial period of time.

For the schooled diner, these positive atomised parts of the greater scheme of the dining event would have become compacted, embedded and solidified in their psyches. They then act as the autonomous benchmark against which subjective judgements and recommendations about Chinese cuisine consumption are

disseminated.

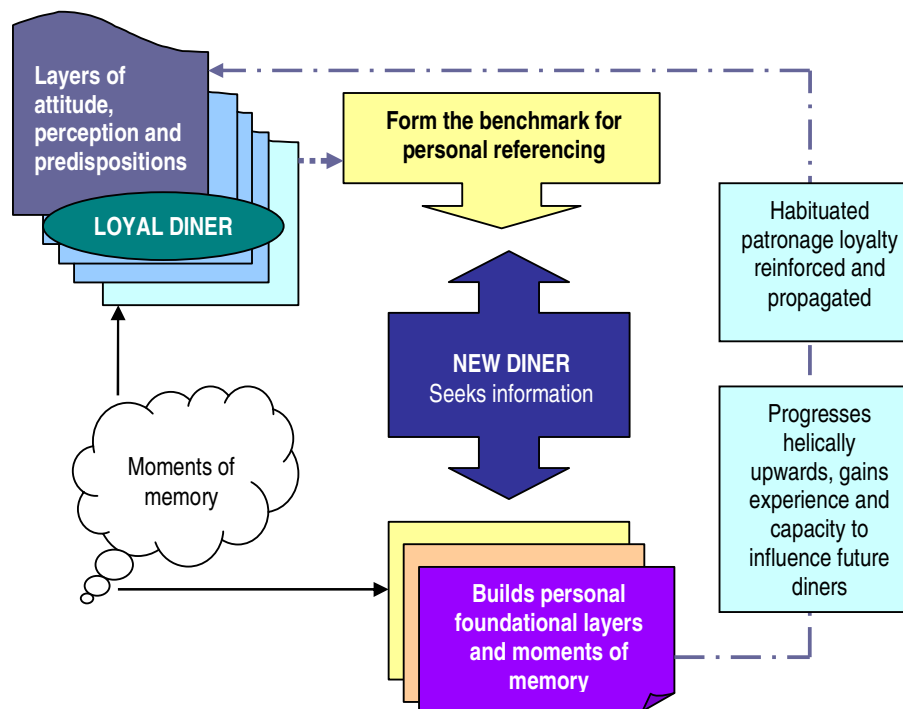
All advice or opinions voiced by regular patrons thus stems from an internalised repository of amalgamated historic experience. Further, it is possible that these perspectives would have been moulded, shaped, distorted and possibly even exaggerated by the passage of time.

Thus when influencing others by way of referral, opinion or whatever means, the moments of memory are evoked and serve as the platform for the advice being punted. The concept of embedded elements of experience serving as information and influence sources is shown in Figure 7.5.

A further aspect related to swaying others premised on previous physical and non-physical experiences is the diner's frequency of association with the restaurant. There appears to be a correlation between the strength of association and the resultant familial intimacy. Newcomers sense that with the passage of time, and with the building of bonds between the owners and diners with vested interests in the establishment, they too will acquire the same perceived status. With an accumulation of experience, such greenhorns, in their own turn, will filter up into the Canton Family in a helical fashion. They too then will

take upon themselves the self imposed perceived role of heralding and guardianship of the restaurant.

Figure 7.5 **Embedded moments of memory**



Source: Compiled by the researcher

In synopsis, it became evident that staunch diners played a profound role in perpetuating the traditions associated with the restaurant. Their passion and conviction about the totality of the establishment served as a powerful testimonial to any new-comer deemed fitting enough to know the secrets.

It was further evident after probing the viewpoints of second and third generation diners, that they too, had acquired a sincere attachment to

the restaurant. These respondents relied heavily upon and proudly related their own rich tangible and intangible experiences and engagements with the Canton Restaurant. Their testimony and selective influence had been sedimented over substantial periods of time, become embedded, and was iteratively used to influence the mindsets and predispositions of initiates to the fold.

Patronage loyalty was thus sustained in a cyclical manner as successive generations of diners, as well as newcomers were inducted, socialised and schooled into the ways of the establishment. Respondents perceived the diner base at the restaurant as essentially organic and dynastic by nature. It was propagated internally and new growth was grafted on as and when deemed fitting by the matriarchal and patriarchal corpse of supporters. The collegial ethos that evolves among diners thus dynamically serves as the collective basis upon which their personal perceptions and predisposition are founded. An alliance subsequently develops that also acts as the anchor for future referential influence. Holistically, the collective melding of the previous experience base serves to compound the patronage and loyalty demonstrated towards the restaurant, its owners and fellow diners.

7.6 **SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the findings regarding the first component of the dining model, namely pre-dining factors were discussed. When the specific

factors were categorised and codified it was evident that respondents held firmly to their perceptions and favourable predispositions that had evolved during their linkage with the Canton Restaurant. Similarly, the influence diners had on others was largely premised on their personal or familial experiences as patrons. Verbatim feedback demonstrated the specific insights and mindsets prevalent that served as the driving force and ethos that pervades the business.

For regular diners at the establishment, the notion of having another Chinese meal evokes a set of positive associations and rich memories of prior engagement. These pre-dining factors include perceptions, predispositions, viewpoints of people and the actual tangible and intangible elements of consumption. The diner thus enters the restaurant attuned and preconditioned by historic events. Another successful dining experience is anticipated and the social milieu of the meal experience itself and the food consumption ritual is enjoyed and savoured. Thereafter, the psychic nodes of attachment coupled to the recollection of the event filters and sediments in the memory of the individual.

In the case of the newcomer, a new block of information is being cast, whereas with the regular patron, this serves as a reinforced moment of experience.

Each subsequent engagement is compacted and amalgamated with the previous bank of memory layers held by the diner. This incremental layering of positive experiences leads to diners developing strong emotional attachments to every aspect of the establishment. The result is that behaviour and predispositions become habituated and routinised, thus forming an iterative cycle constituting: memory, experience, consolidation and embedment. Patronage loyalty is thus built, sustained and consolidated.

The perceptions, as seen through the eyes of the owners, was provided contextually throughout the chapter.

In the following chapter the remaining elements of the dining model, namely the dining experience and post-dining response are discussed.

Chapter7Complete

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CHAPTER 8

THE EMPIRICAL STUDY: *PART THREE*

THE DINING EXPERIENCE AND POST DINING RESPONSE

8.1 INTRODUCTION

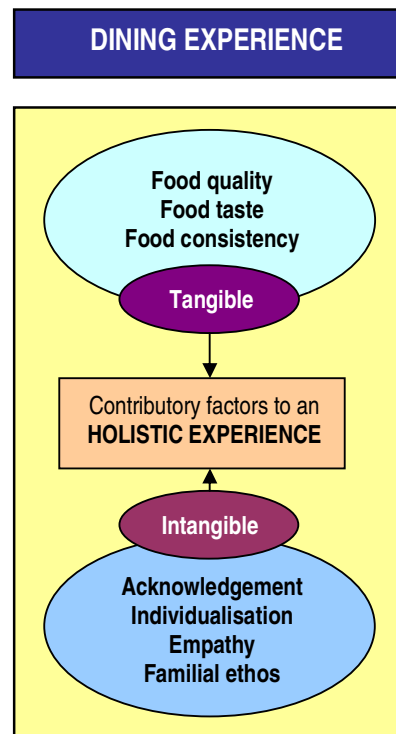
During an holistic dining event a variety of contributory tangible and intangible factors merge, meld and conjointly become the premise upon which the success of the meal is judged by a participant. As discussed in Chapter 7, this composite of the dining experience is stored by diners as a building block of memory and further serves as the basis for post-dining response for future visits.

Pursuant to in-depth interviews with patrons and the sequential analysis of transcribed data, it became evident that components of the comprehensive triad of the dining model needed modification. The archetype model was organic and autogenic by nature. Although it was stable and served as a sound anchor upon which to build principle, the dining experience component needed alteration. As depicted in Figure 8.1, the *tangible* contributory factors to the holistic experience were originally postulated as consisting of the elements of food quality, taste and consistency. Upon scrutiny of the empirical findings an additional factor was regarded as very important by respondents, and hence it was added. The food options available,

that is, the menu design, drew much comment and debate.

In line with the previous chapter, the format of reporting the findings and the descriptions and viewpoints of diners is first presented, and thereafter, where applicable, the stances of the proprietors is reflected.

Figure 8.1 **The original dining experience component**

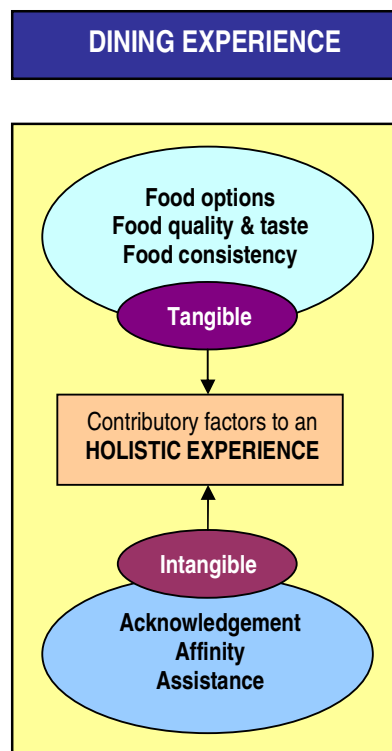


Source: Developed by the researcher

In the same vein, when dissected and assembled into orderly, logical, and aesthetically consistent relationships, the initial intangible elements of acknowledgement, individualisation, empathy and familial ethos were also amended and re-orchestrated. The researcher will

refer to this dimensional sub-group as the intangible three A's, namely: acknowledgement, affiliation and assistance elements. Figure 8.2 reflects the adjustments to the model's composition and nomenclature. Within the framework of the updated dimensions, the empirical results for each categorisation will now be addressed.

Figure 8.2 **The amended dining experience component**



Source: Compiled by the researcher

8.2 TANGIBLE CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS TO THE HOLISTIC DINING EXPERIENCE

The restaurant currently offers a standard or traditional seven course menu, consisting of four common dishes, namely, golden chicken

soup, fried rice, egg fu yong, and sweet and sour pork. This set combination is coupled with two elective permutations of choices from a chicken or steak medley. The meal is followed by jasmine tea and either an almond cookie or a Chinese bow tie. Generally, the above set menu is the only selection available on Friday and Saturday evening. On week nights, the same menu is offered, but the establishment then also offers al la carte meals, where items from the set menu can also be ordered as stand-alone dishes. Special dishes such as crispy fried prawns or customer designed offerings are available, but because of their time consuming preparation, the chef insists on having advance notice.

8.2.1 Menu options

The findings revealed that, without exception, all diners regarded the limited options available as a good thing. There were highly animated and specific comments concerning the support for simplicity and a bounded selection of dishes. Examples of feedback were:

- *It (the limited menu) is all right for us.*
- *I don't have to have a broad menu.*
- *We don't need fancy dishes.*
- *I don't need a huge choice – I know what I am getting.*
- *I have never heard adverse comments from people we have advocated to that they had too little choice. They are happy with*

the menu options – just as we are.

- *What do you want rows and rows of choices for? This menu makes good sense.*
- *I prefer a limited variety – too many choices actually confuse me.*
- *The menu is selected – the chef knows what his patrons like best.*
- *The menu is dead right as it is. We don't want too wide a spread.*

Further, among the more popular supportive reasons for the above stance is the high level of suspicion with which diners view a prolific band of options on any menu. Selected verbatim comments that back this perception include:

- *A big menu makes me suspicious — because I don't believe that they can have all the stuff fresh if the choice is so large. Here we know what we are getting — and it is all freshly made daily.*
- *We expect the serving staff at a restaurant to know what is on the menu and to be able to explain it to us. When they have these arm-length menus often the waitrons themselves cannot describe dishes. Here it is short and sweet. It is just fine.*
- *I am not impressed with huge menu varieties — they are window dressing to hide superficial variants to create different nuances and give the illusions of large choices — whereas here — you get what you see and know.*
- *I don't like a big menu — it is too confusing — you know what you*

are getting here — that is why you come back here.

- *If it is on the menu he (the chef) must be able to prepare it all.*

What is apparent from some of the above perspectives is that diners stress that they know what they are getting. This knowledge appears to provide a reassurance and a sense of comfort and reinforces the iterative elements of the pre-dining factors of the dining model. As was stated in a previous Chapter 7, the perception, predisposition and previous experience elements of the holistic experience become embedded and compacted with moments of memory. During the dining event itself, these elements evoke the psychological assurance within diners that they will routinely experience a resurrection of previous pleasurable sensations. The span of choices available thus seems to diminish in significance because they responded within a bounded frame of reference which, in their perspectives, is totally adequate and satisfying for that occasion.

Another issue that exacerbated the patron's insistence on a small, but creative menu, was the feeling that the wider the choice selection, the longer and more complex the preparation task of the lone cook became. Participants seemed defensive of the role of the chef and the inordinate exasperations that would accompany too liberal a spread of dish variants. In addition, there was a strong united voice by stalwart diners of the advance warning caveat for any foreign cuisine requests. Typical verbatim resorts such as the following enunciate

this perspective:

- *Peter (the chef) must be given a chance to prepare, so he cannot give his customers too wide a list of choices.*
- *You can't expect to come here as a customer and just get anything you want — you must know there is a limited menu — and of course you know what you are getting.*
- *If you want fancy items Verna will ask Peter to see if he can accommodate you — but you will have to wait a little extra. He personally has to prepare any different dishes you know. But it is far more courteous to give him good notice of your preferences.*
- *If we want something special — like prawns — we order in advance - to give them way enough time for preparation.*
- *We have learned that we must order in advance if we want anything special.*
- *We tell people if they are new to the Canton that it has a small menu — and that if they want different items — they must book in advance or they will not get what they want. They must understand the situation here you know.*
- *You must understand that if they give a wider choice — they will take longer and so the smaller menu is good. You can have combinations if you like, but then it is up to you to tell them — or ask. They will do their best as you get to know them — they are very flexible.*

Encased in such comments one senses that respondents have a strong allegiance, affinity and empathy with the chef and his role in their meal experience. They fully comprehend and profess to understand the realities of one man preparing quality food for a large family. When deviant members move outside the traditional limitations of meal choices, they are expected to conform with the rules of the household. They are admonished to exercise courtesy, discretion and patience if they have alternative cuisine in mind.

A further revelation from diners was that many in fact knew the menu so well that they actually visualised their meals in advance and could describe each course meticulously. Such avid descriptions were often accompanied by salacious mock drooling, facial nuances and ostentatious gesticulations. To an observer outside the interview situation, the body language and expressions used signified diners who might be besotted with an intense passion for the culinary occasion in which they were about to engage. The following descriptors illustrate the point:

- *I think in advance of each dish before I get here. I know the menu so well. Like the soup, the egg and the rice. Oh, I delight in what I know I am going to get!*
- *I have a mental picture of what I experienced last time — and know I can rely on the same to happen again.*

- *We can actually smell the food and see the beautiful simplicity of the presentation and arrangement in advance.*

In synopsis, this sub-element of the tangible aspects of the dining experience can be summed up by stating that respondents (both neophyte and regulars) emphatically feel that a popular condensed menu is ideal for such an establishment. There is a definite measure of misgiving coupled with restaurants that punt extensive cuisine permutations and prolific choices. This is regarded as a definite sign that the food cannot be fresh and that the wide selection is a ploy to create an illusion of grandeur and pompousness.

Further, in the niche milieu of the unit of study, it is common knowledge that a single chef does the bulk of the catering for the full dining corpse. Defensively the chef is backed and sided with when dishes outside the traditional fare are sought. It is accepted and understood that Peter Whitely needs time to prepare and cook specialised foods with the consequence that in a full restaurant meal setting, other patrons will be required to bear the brunt and exercise undue patience. Finally, since diners are mindful of and know the menu and its substance, they tend to be content to generally stick with standard options and combinations.

The proprietors maintain that the current menu has shrunk slightly in terms of the options offered to diners in the original restaurant. This

reduction in choices was based on a analysis of typical items that were regularly requested by patrons. Besides the elimination of infrequently demanded cuisine, the variety is substantially the same as it was previously. The management state that they are currently more flexible in offering permutations of dishes. However, the underlying caution for new diners and regulars to give notice of non-traditional dish requests, is still manifest. The statements below will illustrate this viewpoint of the proprietors:

- *The menu is essentially the same as it was before and has not changed much.*
- *The menu now is mainly on demand for popular dishes. We have actually reduced the menu since dad's time.*
- *I feel a selected menu, with a combination of dishes is satisfactory.*
- *When we are very busy, like December and January, we will say we only have the menu available – although the menu lends itself to different permutations of courses. I cannot cope in the kitchen if I offer more choices.*
- *We generally do not cater for special request during our busy months. Customers understand that. Although, we will try and accommodate some requests.*
- *New people will get to know that they have to order from the menu. They have quite a choice and can have combinations.*
- *Once they (neophyte patrons) have been here and they see our style*

of dining, they ask for other dishes, and then know to request in advance when they book.

- *We do things on request now. We are much more flexible now. As long as they let us know beforehand – we have no problem.*
- *It is our personal style of cooking. We do not do a mass catering style of cooking. That matters a lot to us and to the diners.*
- *Peter is tied to the wok – he has not got time to chat with the diners. We keep the small but creative menu so he can cope.*

For the sake of retaining context, the fundamental isolated factors of the menu elements of the model are collectively depicted in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1 **Menu option elements**

Menu Options	Limited choice
	Suspicion of large menus
	Advanced warning for non-routine dishes
	Knowledge of current options

Source: Compiled by the researcher

8.2.2 Food quality and taste

What palpably emerged from the data analysis was the undisputed consensus by diners that the quality and taste of the food served at the restaurant was an exceptionally powerful draw-card for sustained patronage. This aspect of the meal experience was regarded as a given by all informants and was never doubted, questioned or became an issue of contention. However, the respondents' perceptions of quality originated further back in the food value chain. It started with a

sound understanding of the effort expended by the owners in the sourcing of ingredients, their meticulous preparation, and then filtered through to the aesthetics and the presentation of the meal, and finally, to the act of consumption – where taste and satisfaction came into play.

These food quality factors will be discussed in the above sequence; namely, buying, preparation, aesthetics and presentation.

Respondents repeatedly alluded to the reputable suppliers from which all of the ingredients used by the establishment were sourced. Some diners reported with pride actually having seen the chef buying provisions, and alternatively, others stated that they had, by hearsay, been informed that only the best foodstuffs were purchased. Typical statements in this regard were:

- *They are very discerning and fussy about what goes into the food.*
- *The beautiful food you see here starts when they buy the ingredients — he (the chef) knows where to go to get the best.*
- *They buy most ingredients from up-market suppliers you know.*
- *I have never known this place to skint on good raw materials.*
- *They only use good quality ingredients.*
- *The chef takes fastidious care and precision in his choice of ingredients and their cooking.*

- *A huge amount of love and devotion and effort that goes into preparation. Look at the precision of the cuts and content. You can see for yourself how beautiful it looks.*
- *It is always hot, freshly prepared.*
- *This food is not mass produced. Each dish is individually made.*
- *There is no mass precooking you know.*

The aesthetics and presentation of the dishes were also regarded as important factors that enhanced the enjoyment and overall satisfaction of a meal. Not only did diners eat with their eyes but the simplistic elegance appeared to appeal to patrons. Eloquent descriptors in this regard are:

- *Look at what you have in front of you right now — look at that precision cutting and the gloss of the sauce — it is magnificent.*
- *The presentation here is so simple, yet so lovely.*
- *The food is so attractive.*
- *I have to force myself to stop — that is good food for me — it sort of winks at me and makes me want to eat it — this is what the food does to me.*
- *The food is magnificent. It just looks so nice.*
- *You can be away in another town for months, but come back here and just look at that food - the food is still wonderful to look at and to indulge in.*

Having indulged their visual and olfactory senses, diners further showed a united front concerning the *taste* and gastronomic pleasure they derive from consuming each course of the menu. Excerpts of opinions describing this phenomenon follow:

- *The flavours are great stuff man.*
- *I could quite happily devour everything he puts in front of me — anything man.*
- *Just the best. There is no other way to describe it.*
- *If people have not tasted the Canton's food — they have not lived.*
- *Not fatty, not oily, not greasy — delightful cuisine.*
- *The food brings them (diners) back — that's what does it.*
- *The food brings me back time and time again. It is actually more than that you know. It is this place — it has to be.*
- *The food tastes absolutely wonderful.*
- *It is simple — which is the ultimate essence of the way food must be prepared and served. Number one man.*
- *It makes a wonderful meal.*
- *No comparisons. Just perfect. The flavours are unique.*

The satisfaction derived from partaking in the physical substance of the meal is thus regarded by the respondents as very important. It was clear that despite the stress placed on the taste, flavours, aroma

and eating itself, an almost hedonistic stance is adopted to the full spectrum of the dining event. The more eloquent and seasoned diners expressed their epicurean joys with statements such as:

- *I never get tired of this place — never — it is just magic — that is all I can say —the food, the people, the other diners — it is like we are joined in some way — I don't know how to say it.*
- *It is definitely a combination of things. The food, the personal touch and the people who come here. It is hard to actually find the right words – but it is like being absorbed into the whole experience.*

Diners grappled with the complex cognitive concepts that they were attempting to frame into accurate descriptive language. Most respondents were rendered linguistically frugal in their attempts to express the tangible sensations they experience in meaningful syntax. They struggled to articulate and graphically convey the pleasures they gained from the fellowship, fun and enjoyment which the meal embodied. Hence it was often with mundane colloquialisms and almost an admittance of descriptive defeat that they shrugged and resorted to stock phrases such as: *you know; I don't know how to say it; you do understand of course; you have been here, you must know.*

The restaurateurs had extremely strong sentiments concerning their standards of culinary excellence. They were fastidious in the sourcing, preparation and serving of the meal. A specific pride was voiced concerning the high personal standards they set, coupled with the awareness that they did a lot of self-censoring on behalf of their diners as regards quality standards. The points listed below demonstrate this ethos:

- *The quality of our food ranks high as an anchor for our business.*
- *We are especially particular about the standards, quality and such things because our customers depend on this. They often say Peter spoils them. I feel that if the food is not good enough for us – then it is not good enough for anybody else.*
- *Diners realize that your style of cooking is personal, freshly prepared and made. Nothing is just pulled out of the freezer.*
- *There is no mass cooking here – every meal is tailor made to their (the diner's) taste. And that they do appreciate it.*
- *So you see, that is why we never mass prepare. I think that big restaurants have to mass produce otherwise they cannot turn out the food. That is why we have to watch numbers.*
- *You have to be there in your business to make it work – that is important to your customer. You can teach someone else to cook your food, but the customer wants to know that when he wants Chinese – he is getting Chinese – authentic custom made Chinese*

food. That is important.

- *We chose to run our business our way because we do believe in quality. It is all about standards. That is how we do things.*

The quality and taste elements are visually encapsulated in Table 8.2.

Table 8.2 **Quality and taste elements**

Quality and taste	Sourcing and preparation
	Aesthetics
	Taste and satisfaction

Source: Compiled by the researcher

8.2.3 Consistency

The final tangible element of the dining experience component is food consistency. Respondents at times waxed eloquently and euphorically when relating their pleasure at anticipating the same holistic satiation with the physical prospects of a meal event. It was taken for granted that the food quality, taste and related sensory aspects would be replicated with each dining occasion.

Some diners reported picturing themselves in advance at the repast - of imagining the same milieu materialising. Further, it is reported that diners always anticipated and expected a fine meal experience and saw the Canton Restaurant's food as a benchmark to which their systems were accustomed. The following examples elucidate the point:

- *I can just close my eyes, at any time and in my mind step in here.*
- *They are absolutely dependable and reliable to get consistent magnificent food and care.*
- *Every time you come here you have the same food.*
- *You know you are going to walk in here and nothing will change.*
- *Everything is so very consistent.*
- *We come back repetitively – the food is so consistently good.*
- *We compare all other eating places with Peter and Verna. Even when we do go to another restaurant, we say it would be better at the Canton.*
- *It is like a habit. You know exactly what you are going to get – and that the food, service and everything will be the same.*
- *You are not disappointed — know what we are going to get. They are so consistently good.*

Some of the protagonists and second generation diners went as far as voicing a distinct craving for the food at times. To a disinterested party such opinions may even have appeared to be tainted with pseudo-addictive overtones. However, as anomalous and dysfunctional as it may have appeared, such was the authentic voiced which emanated from the enquiry. Typical verbatim and expressive magnifications in this regard include:

-
- *This food cannot be beaten — it is like craving.*
 - *I have a craving when I have missed Canton food for a long time.*
 - *Sometimes I have got to have (Canton) food when I need it.*
 - *If I could afford to eat out more regularly —I would be here once a week.*
 - *If I go for more than ten to fifteen days I become irritated if I do not have Canton food.*
 - *Like am feeling now — I have not been here for about three weeks, I need the food.*
 - *What will we do if they were to close down?*
 - *I have a low level of tolerance to do without this place.*

The owners were vigilant and mindful of the expectations of diners. Patrons arrived at the restaurant with the anticipation of a meal that would match their previous experience, hence consistency in every aspect of the meal event was paramount. When needed, the owners tend to use reciprocal quality check and balance mechanism between themselves. The direct comments listed below reveal these insights:

- *I don't really have to tell Peter – he knows if something is not right. People expect the same enjoyment of the meal each time they visit. But if something is not right I tell him (the chef). You have to make sure that everything is right.*
- *If the decoration for the plate is not ready, and we are busy, I (the*

chef) would tend to say take it out but she (the proprietress) will insist that the plates are garnished.

- *I don't think Peter is conscious of the consistency of his cooking. That is just his style. He is meticulous about standards.*
- *She (the proprietress) is fussier. She is like a quality control agent. That is why we keep tabs on suppliers, their products and the quality. Peter mainly does the shopping for supplies – Verna to a lesser degree.*

Patrons further report back to the owners that their food is of such a consistent standard that they propagate this opinion to other restaurants they might frequent from time to time. Comments cited below show this vantage point.

- *They (diners) will come back and say Peter you have spoiled us – they have gone elsewhere and come back and say it is not the same as here. They will actually go to another restaurant and tell them that Peter does not cook like they do. His food is better.*

To retain context, Table 8.3 shows the sub-dimensional elements which bond to form the factors which impact upon the tangible dining experience.

Table 8.3 **Consistency elements**

Consistency elements	Expectations and visualisation
	Consistency
	Cravings

Source: Compiled by the researcher

In synopsis, the tangible component of the holistic meal occasion is tempered by a permutation of three distinct factors. Various weights and degrees of significance are assigned to each of the elements and their respective constituents by both diners and the owners of the restaurant respectively.

The fundamentals of tangible influence are the band of menu options, the quality and taste of the food and the assurance of consistency and dependability. Table 8.4 depicts the fusion of the collective components and their expounded composite elements.

Table 8.4 **The tangible components of the holistic dining experience**

Menu options	Taste and quality	Consistency
Prefer limited options	Sourcing and preparation	Expectations
Suspicion of large menus	Aesthetics	Visualisation
Non-routine dishes	Taste	Consistency
Familiar with current menu	Satisfaction	Cravings

Source: Compiled by the researcher

8.3 INTANGIBLE CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS TO THE HOLISTIC DINING EXPERIENCE

Although the physical aspects relating to food, its consumption and subsequent enjoyment are very important elements of a dining experience, there were also a host of non-physical contributory factors that respondents cited as enhancing and emboldening their delight with a meal. The researcher has categorised them as the three A's, namely, acknowledgement, affinity and assistance and will now each be contextually amplified and expounded. The viewpoints of diners are fully expatiated under the sub-sections below.

However, for the sake of cohesivity, the perspectives of the owners will be provided at the culmination of describing all of the sub-sections cited.

8.3.1 Acknowledgement

Diners reported that a key contributor to their patronage and loyalty to the restaurant was that they always felt that they were being treated as individuals and not as commodities out of which to make profit. They intuitively sensed that a sincere and genuine personal interest was taken in their welfare and when catering for their needs. In essence, they were acknowledged as individuals who mattered and were important to the proprietors. Feedback examples include:

-
- *Their body language shows concern, as do their facial expressions. They reflect a personal interest in me as an individual.*
 - *They practice a caring, hands-on relationship approach with customers.*
 - *The personal touch is important to me. It makes me feel like an individual.*
 - *The owners take a personal interest in me – I am always aware of that.*
 - *The staff are very caring and aware of me as a person – and always try to meet my needs as far as possible.*
 - *I like the visible management style here. Verna does walk-about regularly. That shows they care for and acknowledge us as diners.*
 - *I know we are important to this business – and I like that.*

It was also stressed by diners that the management took effort to get to know their patrons and their respective wishes. Comment went as far as statements to the effect that their favourite table and night of the week were remembered and noted by the staff. The proprietress used discretion and knew when to approach supporters for casual conversation, and when to leave them be. Stock phrases such as the following support these responses:

- *If you come here six months later — they know you and even tend to*
-

remember things you talked about and ordered. That impresses me and shows I am important.

- *At a birthday function we held here, they just took over and made a fuss of us.*
- *They know and read their customers at this place.*
- *The owners' attitudes are very relaxed and informal and they get to know you. They make it their business to do so.*
- *They can sense if my visit is personal or business and professional and they treat me accordingly. I appreciate that kind of acknowledgement and courtesy.*
- *They make it a point to get to know you on a personal basis (I really like that).*
- *The food is very important – but it is the unspoken things they also do here. They treat you as a valued person – and not just to take your money.*
- *They strike up a casual conversation, and the next time you visit they remember the discussion. That shows they care about me.*

Besides taking a bona fide interest in and getting to know diners, it was further reported that the behaviour that the staff manifested was always consistent and affable. The staff were dependable and reliable, as was the meal itself. Typical verbatim transcripts relating to this aspect are as follows:

- *They always have the same nature and are consistent people.*
- *Invariably I can rely on the same warm response and attitude. They do not vacillate or get moody. They care about pleasing me.*
- *You know you are going to walk in here and nothing will change.*
- *It is unreal how consistently kind and thoughtful they are. Very caring people.*

Because of the ethos of caring and nurturing their diners, it seemed that strong emotional responses were evoked in patrons. The familial ties and reciprocity cited under the amplification of the pre-dining component of the model again tend to surface during the meal activity. Stalwarts tended to make particular mention of a rich ambience and mood that set the tone for comments like:

- *There are feelings of comfort and peace here. It makes the meal so much better. Not that the food itself is not always great.*
- *There is a personal bond between the owners and the customers. I appreciate a lovely meal and the warmth that accompanies it.*
- *They are very embracing of you here.*
- *You feel so special here – not like a number at other places.*
- *You can't buy this sort of vibe – it just adds to the whole meal.*

The last element under the dimension of acknowledgement was the sentiment voiced by certain new-comers concerning the pecking order

of supporters of the establishment. Although stated tongue-in-cheek, the intent seemed legitimate enough to pursue. It was said that some patrons feel or sense that regulars were placed higher on the hierarchy of significance to the owners than initiate diners. It was accentuated that this was not an accusation but merely an observation – that of course, could not be verified. The following comments will illustrate this perception of acknowledgement priorities:

- *If there is a clash on demand for a table, I am sure that a partisan will be moved up in the pecking order if there is a waiting list — they will deny it — but I am sure it exists.*
- *Verna gives preference to regulars, albeit subconsciously — and they (the stalwarts) know it.*
- *I have a friend who had booked and then had his reservation postponed until a later date because his uncle, a loyalist of the restaurant, was given priority. And he accepted the situation quite gracefully and with a good spirit.*

In summary, patrons acknowledge that when recognised as valuable people in their own rights, and accorded due social deference on a sustained basis, a strong feeling of sympathetic empathy is evoked. They feel a sense of worth and humanity that bonds them still further with the restaurant. This sincere appreciation of their patronage and personal recognition makes them feel genuinely wanted, cared for and

heightens the holistic meal event.

Table 8.5 reflects a summary of the acknowledgement elements of the dining experience.

Table 8.5 Acknowledgement elements

Acknowledgement elements	Personal interest and individualised attention
	Take effort to get to know patrons
	Consistency in behaviour
	Emotions evoked
	Perception that regulars enjoy preferential treatment

Source: Compiled by the researcher

8.3.2 Affinity

Being recognised in a dignified manner simply for one's humanity is a positive hallmark in social relationships that is ascribed by patrons to the establishment. Beside this powerful contributor towards savouring dining moments of pleasure, a further permutation of statements emerged that reflected a modality of social interaction posited on a deep-seated, yet unspoken affinity and camaraderie that prevailed in the overall restaurant milieu. This intangible kinship reigned among and between frequenters and also significantly embraced the owners in their individual rights.

There is a distinct rapport that is kindled between diners. This phenomenon appears to be extant even between total strangers and often has its root when people from adjoining tables sow the seeds of

fellowship and strike up conversation with their fellow diners. The mood within the establishment lends itself to inclusively and collegiality, and since most diners are mature people, they feel at ease and comfortable in taking the initiative to engage in small talk and conversation.

This familial mindset appears to come naturally and spontaneously and informants report it to be an important part of the experience of the restaurant. An example of a narrative shared by a diner will add substance to this camaraderie feeling.

- *I have already helped a stranger at the next table with a bottle of wine. They did not realize that I had overheard them when they joked that they were experiencing a drought because they had only brought one bottle of wine. I had an extra bottle and gave it to them — the newcomers — and they were flabbergasted. I have seen them many times since then – and that gesture on my part still astounds them. We chat regularly now when they are here at the same time as us.*

Other statements and comments extracted from the transcribed data mirrors the above sentiments. Cameos such as the following add substance to the point and attest to further factors that improve the meal experience:

- *I feel like we are all joined in some way here. I feel I can relate to people here.*
- *This is a real place – where people are genuine.*
- *It is like being on holiday for a few hours – with people you really get along with.*
- *The rapport here will not happen at any other restaurant — it is amazing.*

Because of the rapport engendered among diners, there is unified consent that the climate in the establishment represents a place replicating a home from home. An ease of association and authentic behaviour is described. Samples of statements supporting this perception include:

- *There is a homely feel here.*
- *It is like you come home and got a sense of comfort — I know this place.*
- *We feel spoiled by being able to come here- it is like going back to my parent's home.*
- *We feel comfort and peace here.*
- *It is like we are all part of an extended family.*

The last categorisation under the umbrella of affinity relates to the appreciation and gratitude which supporters show towards the chef and his wife, and specifically in the manner in which it is verbalised after each visit. Although they are paying for their meal, regular diners stress that they always make a conscious effort of personally thanking the chef after they have supped. This courtesy is articulated in fashions such as:

- *We always go in (to the kitchen after the meal) and greet him and say goodbye and thank him.*
- *Oh yes, I always greet and thank him for the lovely meal. I am sure it also makes him feel appreciated.*
- *You know, I am loathe to interfere — it is his working place, and I don't want to distract him with small talk. But nonetheless, I still do greet and thank him in any case. It is the right thing to do.*

In summation, the second contributory factor that elevates the overall pleasure of dining at the restaurant consists of an affinitive bundle of constituents. This phylogenetic relationship is borne of a strong rapport and a familial ethos that manifests itself among patrons, and is coupled with a sense of appreciation and gratitude towards their hosts which diners make a stated point of articulating. This triad of elements is depicted in Table 8.6

Table 8.6 **Affinity elements**

Affinity	Rapport among diners
	Feeling of homeliness
	Articulating appreciation and gratitude

Source: Compiled by the researcher

8.3.3 Assistance

The perceptions of informants regarding the intangible assistance and service elements of the dining experience were grouped into three categories of comments. The first was a knowledge or an awareness of a distinct intuitive, unspoken and reciprocal protocol that seemed to be evident. Further, dependent upon whether the assistance was viewed through the eyes of the proprietors or of that being rendered by the diners, a distinct orientation and frame of reference for remarks ensued. Lastly, the notion of how delays in service were handled by frequenters was evaluated. These items are now sequentially reported on.

When supporters wanted to opt for a take-away meal instead of physically visiting the restaurant, it was stated that protocol dictated that, since diners knew the situation, they definitely could not expect to telephone a meal request during the traditional dining times. This had to be done earlier in the evening, to give the chef time to prepare.

Should newcomers feel disappointed because their requests could not be met because of inadequate advanced warning, this was seen as

part of their learning curve in getting to know and understand the rules.

In addition, for diners having a sit-down meal, should they be in a hurry or want a special sequence in which they wished the courses to be served, it was their responsibility to voice this request – especially if it was on a weekend when the restaurant was generally fully-patronised. Specific viewpoints with regard to the purported protocol were:

- *If they are busy and cannot get you out in a hurry —that is your problem — you should know that Peter cannot be all things to all men. They should have been told when you booked.*
- *You cannot for example phone here at 18h15 and ask for a take-away at 19h00 — it is like a learning curve — you must get to know the situation and play the game.*
- *Sometimes you want to have breaks between courses — others you don't —so here you must tell them that — and they will meet your requests. You cannot expect them just to know that.*

The orientation with which diners aligned themselves to the meal experience showed that, from their perspectives, the management did a sterling job of establishing and meeting their needs. The assistance they received and the levels of service satisfaction were praised.

Feedback such as the following reflects this mindset:

- *There is always friendly service — and they see that my needs are catered for.*
- *They get to know and understand their customers and look after their needs.*
- *When new people come here and don't know the menu, they take time to explain each dish and are of good service to diners.*
- *You are not rushed and forced fed here. I like that.*
- *We don't complain of the service. There is no need to because the service is fine.*

The orientation component is further manifested in a dual fashion. Besides the viewpoints given above regarding the focus of the staff, it became apparent that, as frequenters, patrons took it upon themselves to adopt a spectrum of tolerant attitudinal shifts unique to their relationship with the restaurant. An extra-ordinary grasp of the realities of the mechanics of the restaurant as a whole was also appreciated. Insights such as the following were revealed:

- *They are very discreet when they serve you. They can see when you are ready to order. Also, while you are eating, Verna knows when you are ready for the next course. But sometimes you have to wait a little while though, but it is always worthwhile.*

- *They are very service orientated here and are generally always accommodating. Sometimes when they are fully booked things are different. So the attitude we adopted is to order the set menu on busy nights. We know how chaotic it must be in the kitchen.*

The culminating intangible factor that comes to bear on the dining experience is the tandem issue of delays and waiting between courses. This has been alluded to above in some of the statements but merits specific separate mention. A healthy level of reconciliatory acceptance prevails regarding the stance adopted by diners relating to waiting-time for subsequent courses. It at times appears that the chef is absolved in his individual right, and that the preparation time is held accountable for delays. Facile retorts provided by diners in this regard were:

- *It (the delay) is not because of the staff — it is because it takes such a long time to prepare in the kitchen.*
- *You know that Peter starts to prepare very early in the morning – and he does his very best to see that we get good service. So we must do our part and exercise patience.*

In summation, and from the perspective of the diners, the assistance and service levels provided by the restaurant are regarded in a special light. There appears to be an emphatic mindset regarding the

perceived protocol issues with which diners are expected to conform. Concomitantly, it is acknowledged that because the owners provide what is regarded as good service, a reciprocal courtesy ought to be displayed by diners. Knowing and empathising with the set-up in the kitchen finally seems to act as a potent moderating influence before consumers proclaim negative judgements about hold-ups and delays in the meal experience. This is tolerated and regarded as *par for the course*.

Seen through the eyes of the owners a multiplicity of viewpoints emerge in an attempt to articulate the intangible factors that contribute towards the success of their establishment. What surfaces after a meticulous analysis of transcriptions, is the repetitive awareness by the proprietors of the importance of communication and sensing the needs of patrons.

In addition, the viewpoint is expressed that diners are friends and family who have a home to come back to. These opinions arise spontaneously and appear not to be part of any grand, all-encompassing schema or of an explicitly orchestrated strategy. The voice which emanates from the restaurateurs is one of authentic and outgoing care for a community of diners with whom they have forged relationships. Equally, they wish to elevate strong reciprocal service-orientated bonds with new entrants to their restaurant.

Communication is seen as the tool of dialogue between the owners and their patrons. It is the two-way weapon used to encourage a reciprocity between the two parties. One path is the diner asking or seeking the style and rules of the Canton Restaurant and this is counter-balanced with management nurturing and supplying information in a way that will enhance the patrons' dining experiences. Mutually-aligned dialogue is thus seen as the conduit by which knowledge is acquired and the protocols and operational parameters of the restaurant are conveyed. Comments such as the following were recorded in this regard:

- *Without our customers we have no business. We have not really thought of categorising people.*
- *I am lead by their needs.*
- *Communication very important.*
- *You need to know your customers.*
- *I take effort to understand our diners.*
- *You must be vigilant and it is very individualised in sensing needs.*
- *It is a very personal thing. We are a team.*
- *Diners are more our friends than patrons.*
- *It (the restaurant) is another home to come back to.*
- *We want diners to enjoy the meal properly in our company – that is our style of dining. So with us, they have to sometimes wait quite a*

while.

- *Other places rush people of their feet and are super efficient and try to make more profit – at our place it is more relaxed and mellow.*
- *There are those people we will keep captive because of our cooking, the style of food and the way we handle them. We know their needs and we will keep them for a long, long time – oh definitively – otherwise we would not be here.*
- *I really enjoy their (the diner's) company.*
- *We are part of their lives, as much as they are part of our lives.*
- *Verna communicates verbally with Peter as to the speed at which he must serve each table. If diners say they want to leave by a certain time, she tells the chef and he keeps pace at her prodding.*
- *A lot of the regulars though go in and have a chat and say hello.*
- *It is all about communicating and knowing your customers. When new diners are introduced or find us, I usually make it my business to let them know of things.*

To retain context, the respective composite elements of the assistance component of the dining experience are shown in Table 8.7.

Table 8.7 Assistance elements

Assistance elements	The unwritten and expected protocol
	The reciprocal orientation of assistance
	Perceptions of delays

Source: Complied by the researcher.

To illustrate the totality of the collective elements of the intangible component of the dining experience, Table 8.8 has been formulated.

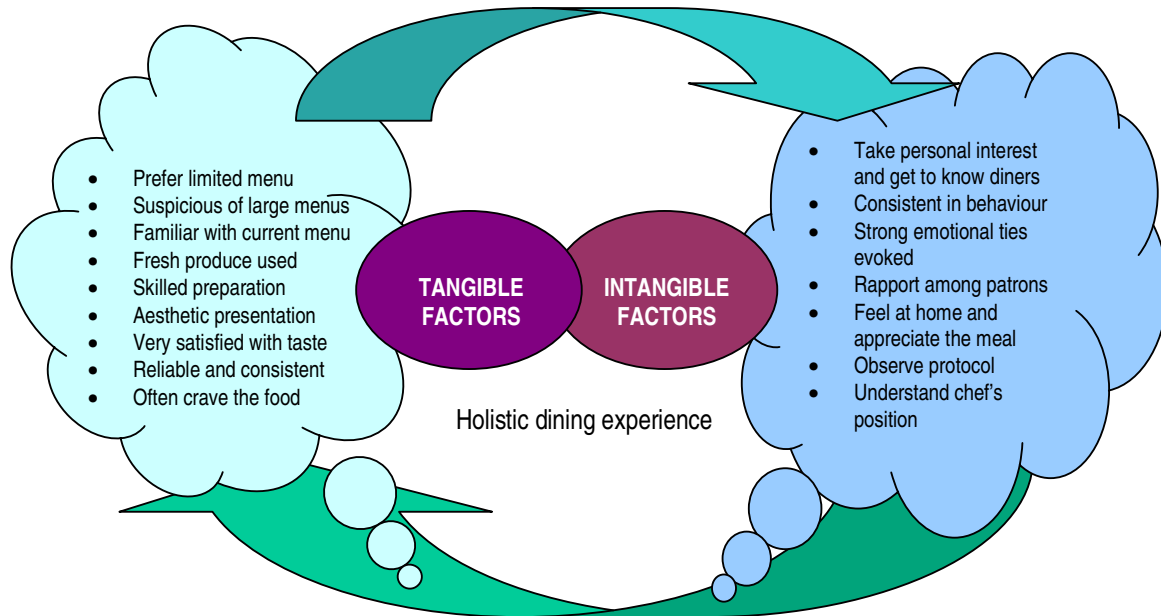
Table 8.8 The intangible components of the holistic dining experience

Acknowledgement	Affinity	Assistance
Personal interest and individualised attention	Rapport among diners	The unwritten and expected protocol
Take effort to get to know patrons	Feeling of homeliness	The reciprocal orientation of assistance
Consistency in behaviour	Articulating appreciation and gratitude	Perceptions of delays
Emotions evoked		
Perception of regulars preferential treatment		

Source: Compiled by the researcher

To sustain the overall context of the dining experience component of the dining model, a visual depiction of the salient tangible and intangible contributory elements is provided in Figure 8.3.

Figure 8.3 **Holistic elements of the dining experience**



Source: Compiled by the researcher

The research enquiry shows that within the context of the specific niche restaurant in question, when the factors portrayed are melded diners perceive the meal event as holistically complete. When the physical components of the meal outcome is alloyed with the non-physical, a fusion transpires in the form of psychic repletion. This fusion of body and mind fulfilment is again stored as an embedded moment of memory and influences both the pre-and post-dining dimensions of the consumer's perceptions of a dining experience. The post-dining response is broached in the following section.

8.4 POST-DINING RESPONSE

Kotler (2000) stated that the ultimate quest of any marketer in the current harried, technocratic age was to gain a foothold, or imprint in consumers' hearts, minds and pockets. When that has been achieved, the foundational elements of entrenched loyalty and support have been laid. In other words, when businesses became adept at building emotional, intellectual and fiscal bonds with their client bases, they would have achieved a large measure of marketing success.

The reports provided by frequenters of their after-meal responses mirror the Kotler's (2000) triad. However, in the dining or restaurant milieu, an extra dimension can be added, namely physical satiation. A diner who is charged with positive pre-dining dispositions and then thoroughly revels in the holistic dining experience *per se* goes forth with a rounded sense of wellbeing, contentedness and strong package of restaurant specific beneficent emotions. A total perceptual and physical sufficiency is extant.

The post-dining experience is reflected in Figure 8.4 at the end of the chapter, where the focal elements of the holistic reflection and psychic satiation are shown as an interaction among physical, emotional, intellectual and financial dimensions of influence. Physically the diner has partaken in a fare of food that was individually designer prepared and presented. The emotional anchors of affiliation, camaraderie and

kinmanship surrounded the meal event. Further, the intellectual and cognitive rationale for selecting the establishment is again reinforced with each successful meal, and financially diners do not feel extorted. It becomes evident that holistic experiences such as those partaken by diners at the Canton Restaurant provide opportunities for people to maintain points of stability within the ever-evolving lives. Familial rites of passage, traditions, social engagements, bonding with loved ones and the like can all be woven into the framework of a new pace of life to help people to hold on to parts of the past and to normalise life as it is know (O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1999).

8.5 **SUMMARY**

As the dining model shown in Figure 8.4 shows, the three components are inter-active and inter-dependent. The mindset prior to a dining event has an impact on the meal itself. These pre-dining influences are an amalgamation of perceptions, pre-dispositions and experiences of both a psychical and non-physical nature. They are further moulded and fashioned owing to the referential impacts of the people with which diners socialise and cohabit.

The actual dining experience is, of itself, more than simply partaking in a well-prepared and satisfying meal. From a physical and sensory perspective, patrons tend to focus on the food itself, but multiple intangible and psychic factors also infiltrate and bestow greater

pleasure to the occasion. The acknowledgement of the persona of diners and the affinity and collegial alliances that prevail among and between them and the staff are important. Further, the degree to which the owners and frequenters appear to reciprocally give and take in the nomenclature of relationships all tend to merge into a double win situation.

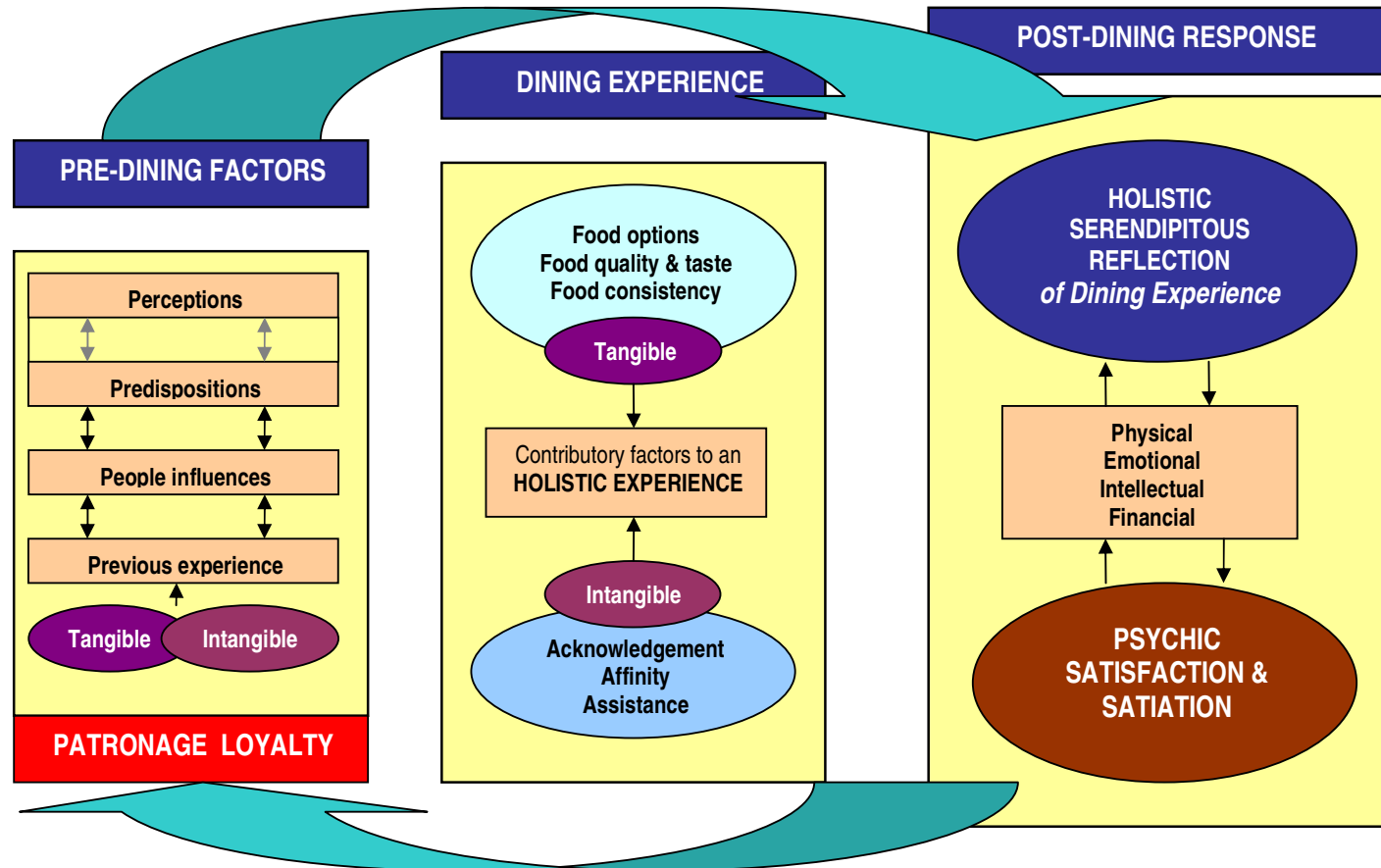
The culmination of the holistic dining experience is that the patron is left fully gormandised, physically and psychically. This mellifluous and serendipitous mode of response loops back in the iterative cycle and once again reinforces patronage loyalty and compacts still more moments of memories.

The owners appear equally mindful of their role in making the stay of their guests as familial and congenial as possible. Although not intellectualised nor specifically articulated, the collective voice which they espouse reflects an ethos of genuine concern for establishing and satisfying of the needs of their patrons. From the time an ingredient is sourced, prepared and served, a self-censoring quality mechanism locks into the mindsets of the proprietors.

As a duo they focus on serving their customers with a meal of exceptional quality, in an environment that lends itself to camaraderie, relaxation and familial interaction.

Laced with a deep-seated and inherent predisposition to comprehend and serve their family, the restaurateurs have, without superficial engineering, managed to create an holistic milieu that sets their operation aside from other traditional niche restaurants. Their deliberate and unconscious actions collectively serve to engender, build and sustain fulfilling and rich moments of memory for their charges. They appear to intuitively and inherently understand the diverse needs of their diners, and hence, besides proving an exceptional meal experience, automatically fulfil the inner psychic needs of their supporters.

Figure 8.4 The amended dining model



Source: Compiled by the researcher

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CHAPTER 9

FINALISATION, CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH POTENTIAL

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This culminating chapter commences with a description of the patron structure that has emerged as being extant within the unit of analysis. Resultantly, the prime groups and sub-groups of diners have been categorised and described. Concurrently, in addressing the problem statement and peripheral facets of this research study, the foundational pillars upon which the psychogenic dimensions of dining-out experiences rest have been isolated and expounded. Premised on the categorisations and the engendered pillars of psychic and mental need satisfiers, a typology for each class of diner is presented. The chapter concludes with reference to potential areas that might warrant further research.

9.2. THE PATRON STRUCTURE

Since the term family has emerged regularly as a descriptor used both by the proprietors and supporters to depict the comprehensive collage of diners at the restaurant, this notion has been used to depict the patron structure and montage of the restaurant.

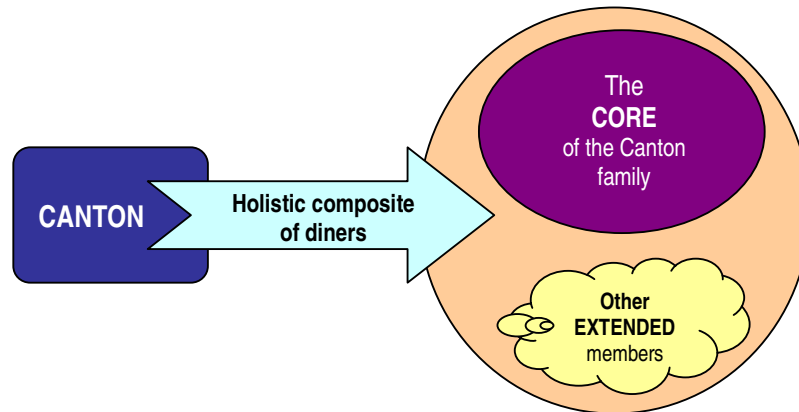
Firstly, the broad grouping and sub-division of the diners is addressed. Thereafter, the triad of relationships that exists between themselves, the principal group, and the owners is expounded.

As an holistic social structure, the supporters of the Canton Restaurant form a multi-composite entity. When the overall customer base is analysed and dissected it can initially be sorted into two broad categories. These two fundamental groups that were isolated are:

- The patrons who collectively constitute the nuclear or core family, and
- the collective extended family.

This generic architecture is illustrated in Figure 9.1. These primary groupings, in their respective turns, consist of a co-mingling of sub-groups. The diners can be unbundled and more specifically regrouped according to their lineage and patronage relationships with the restaurant. Ultimately, within the two fundamental groups, a total of five distinct profiles of patrons can be identified. Although they can be independently sketched, they are interwoven and meld to form the global family architecture.

Figure 9.1 **The generic architecture of the family of diners**



Source: Compiled by the researcher

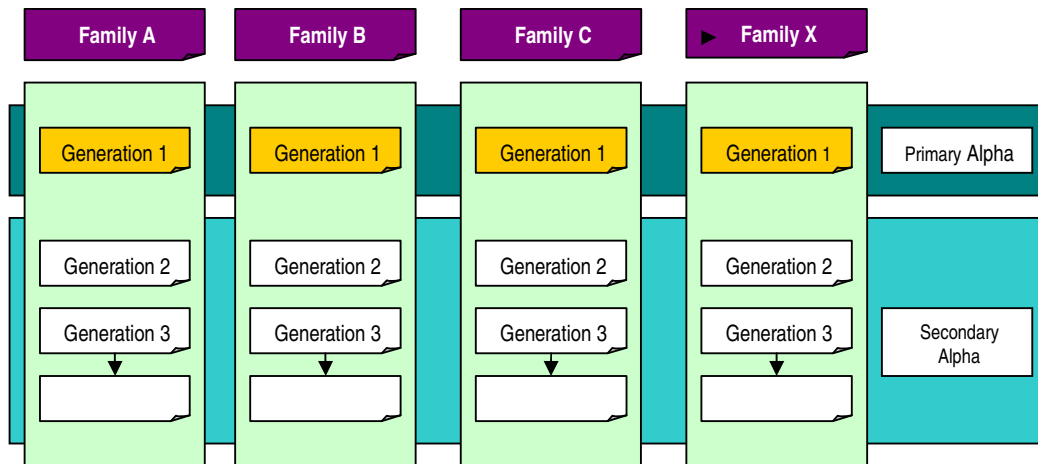
9.2.1 The core diners

The core members constitute the nuclear and pioneer diners. They are the patrons who are the stalwarts, the backbone and the ultimate fulcrum of the family of diners. This core or alpha group in turn consists of a dichotomous stratum of primary and a secondary supporters.

- The primary alpha group is composed of the loyal and staunch regular diners.
- The further sub-cohorts of loyal diners encompassed within this pioneer band are called the secondary alpha members. This latter composite consists of the second and successive generations of

the offspring of the regular diners. This relationship can be illustrated as shown in Figure 9.2.

Figure 9.2 **Core family relationships**



Source: Compiled by the researcher

9.2.2 The extended family

This sector is an amalgam of three groups of patrons. These will be individually isolated for the sake of clarity and contextual description.

- Within the extended family of patrons is a band of diners who have strayed from the fold or who, for some reason, had lost contact with the establishment after it relocated to the new domain. This collection of customers has been classed as the beta group.
- There is a further spread of diners who, at some stage, were an element of either the primary or secondary alpha group. For

various economic or social reasons they no longer reside in the city and thus have somewhat lost regular contact and social engagement with the restaurant. They have been grouped as the gamma members.

- The final group of patrons in the Canton Restaurant's extended family nomenclature are fledgling supporters who have discovered the Canton and have begun a rite of passage and assimilation into the family construct. This neophyte set of diners has been capped as the delta supporters of the restaurant.

The global diner structure can be illustrated by means of tabular description, as shown in Table 9.1 below.

Table 9.1 **The descriptive nomenclature of the family**

Descriptive nomenclature	Family status	Cohesiveness
Primary alpha	Primary core	Powerful emotional bonds, primacy of lineage and intimate connectedness
Secondary alpha	Secondary core	Inherited strong emotional ties, part of dynastic line and strong connectedness
Beta	Extended	Strong retrospective bond with the first generation owners, varying degree of lineage, and are reconnecting relationships
Gamma	Extended	Strong emotional coupling, varying degrees of lineage and rekindling relationships on a regular basis
Delta	Extended	Newcomers who are forging bonds and connectedness and who currently have no or minimal lineage association with other diners

Source: Compiled by the researcher

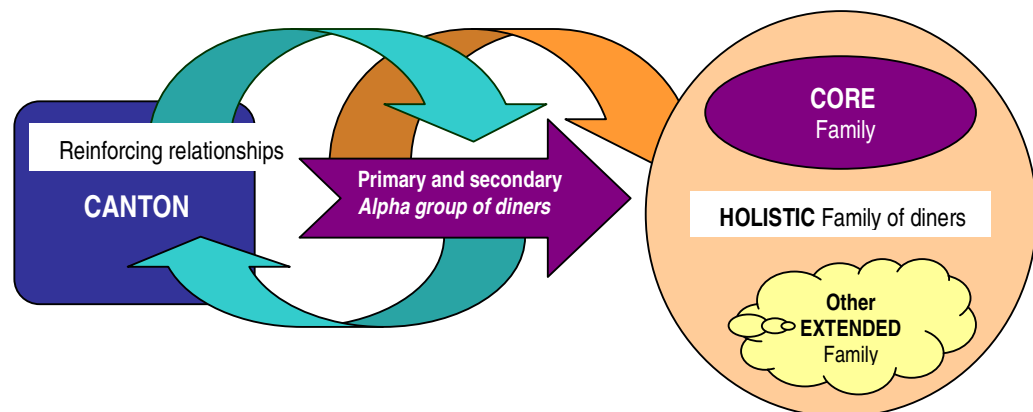
9.3 COHESIVITY AND DYNAMICS

The cohesivity and dynamics of the various strata within the diner base as a whole will now be described.

9.3.1 The core family

The current circle of primary alpha patriots, together with their dynastic line of progeny, the secondary alpha group, serve as the stalwarts and custodians of the Canton Restaurant's way. They perceive themselves to be the guardians and gatekeepers who, to some measure, regulate the admission of new members to the family. When collaged the above two groups thus form the nuclear patrons of the restaurant. Figure 9.3 illustrates this association and the cyclical relationships that prevail with this association.

Figure 9.3 **The nuclear patrons of the restaurant**



Source: Compiled by the researcher

As can be seen in Figure 9.3, the engagement of core diners within the Canton Restaurant is founded upon a reciprocal connection which reinforces and embeds their patronage, loyalty and patriotism. There is thus an iterative relationship that exists between this stalwart group of consumers and the proprietors of the establishment. These diners have been fully socialised into the style of the Canton Restaurant, and a cycle of mutual reinforcement of relationships transpires with each engagement and dining experience.

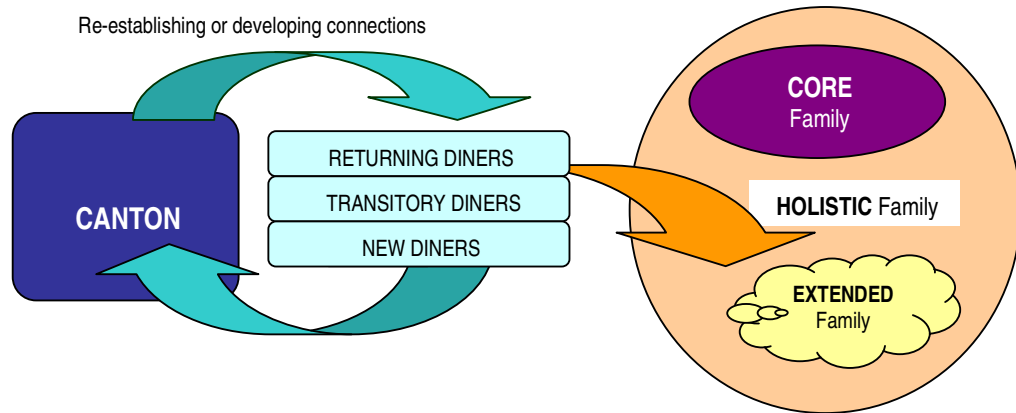
9.3.2 **The extended family**

This association consists of three categories of consumers. The first is diners who once were well linked with the original Canton Restaurant, lost contact and are currently reconnecting with the second generation owners.

The second stratum of supporters is the individuals and families who are also loyal patrons, but because of they no longer reside in the city, they only visit the restaurant when they are back on holiday.

The third band of diners are new patrons who are discovering the establishment, making connections and are in the process of being socialised into the Canton Restaurant style. Figure 9.4 shows this extended family relationship with the restaurant.

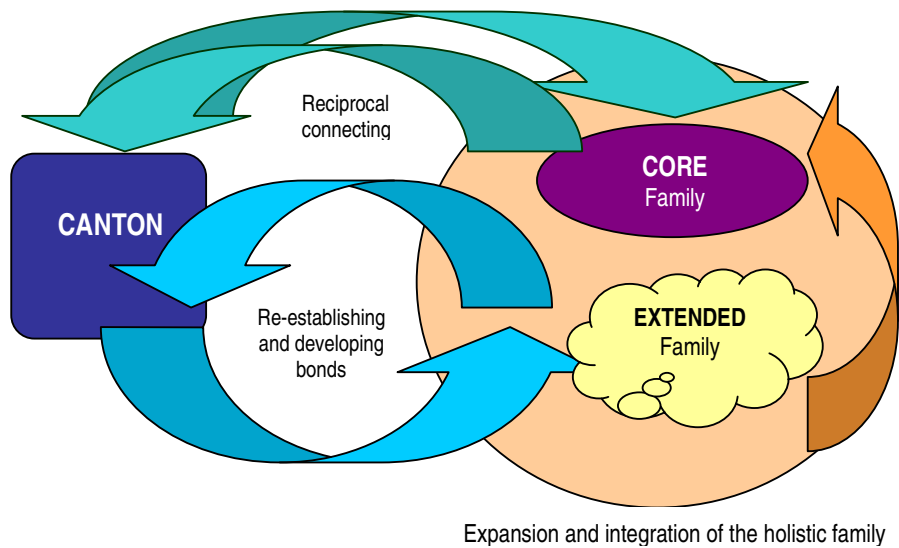
Figure 9.4 **The extended family composition**



Source: Compiled by the researcher

When grouped into an holistic montage the dynamics of the complete diner corpse of the restaurant can be visualised as shown in Figure 9.5.

Figure 9.5 **The holistic montage of diners**



Source: Compiled by the researcher

9.3.2 Cohesivity and relationships

As has been described, the Canton Restaurant family of diners orbits around the two broad bands of patrons: the alpha and extended members. Similarly, as analogous to the human-family construct, varying degrees of intimacy, bonding and cohesivity exist among and between members.

As has been mentioned, the primary alpha members are the vintage diners with long-established roots with the restaurant and both of the sets of owners. Their current dynastic offspring, the secondary alpha members, currently reach into fourth generation status in some families. Because this group has been intimately socialised and naturally assimilated into the restaurant's ways a powerful filial bond exists between them and the owners.

Concurrently, the respective extended family members are involved in either re-establishing their former status, or forging elementary bonds. With the efflux of time and as the fellowship of the extended family matures and grows, these members commence their helical ascent and are, in their turn, elevated into the ranks of the core alpha band of patrons. In such a fashion, the nuclear family is consistently rejuvenated, expanded and cohesively-knitted.

The extended family component of the holistic group thus serves as the nesting and nurturing place where beta, gamma and delta inductees are, over time, socialised and prepared for passage in the pecking order of patrons. The entire iterative cycle is operationalised and maintained via a conduit of pre-and proscriptive mechanisms which regulate a steady flow of new extended family members as they are absorbed into the holistic growing montage of Canton Restaurant diners.

9.4 **CORNERSTONES OF PATRONAGE MOTIVATION**

Without exception, all of the informants who participated in this research endeavour voiced glowing accolades for the holistic dining experience. The exceptionally high standard of the cuisine was taken as a given physiological satisfier of diners' needs. However, in keeping with the rationale and quest of this enquiry, the fundamental intent was to uncover what the illusive it was that fulfilled the psychogenic voids within niche-restaurant supporters.

Flowing from the analysis of the constructs provided in the former illustrations and copious analysis of transcribed interview materials, it became apparent that besides the physical meal, an additional, more subtle form of perceived satisfaction seemed to reside within the designated patron samples. This heightened contentment was

dependent upon a permutation of associational variables. The researcher proceeded to extricate and filter out the essential generic pillars and cornerstones that formed and underpinned this complementary psychic satiation. These elements are expounded in section 9.4.1.

9.4.1 **The foundational pillars of the experience relationship**

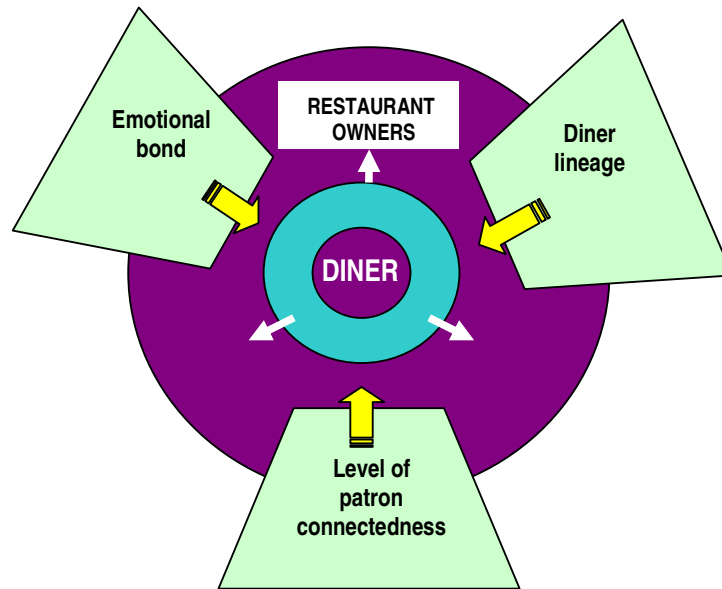
Upon reflective analysis, three distinct foundational pillars emerged as the constructs that constitute the intangible it that the niche restaurant in question satisfies for its target market. These primary relationships distinguish the experience levels and the connectedness of patrons with the establishment.

Further, they form the bedrock upon which all associational bonds are founded and critically influence the perceptions and mindsets of the diner fraternity of the restaurant. The consumers' mainstays of the linkage are:

- their emotional bond and alliances;
- their lineage, and
- their level of patronage and connectedness with the owners.

This primary permutation of building blocks is illustrated in Figure 9.6.

Figure 9.6 **The foundational pillars of the experience relationship**



Source: Compiled by the researcher

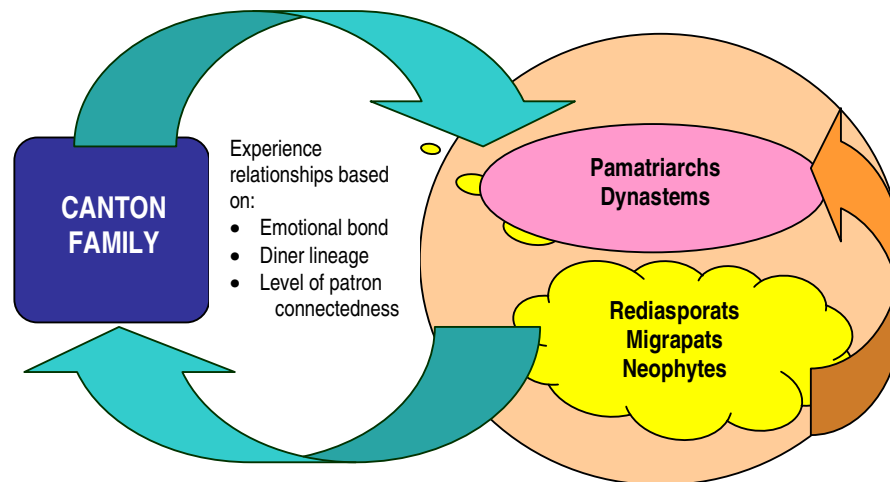
Premised upon these three anchors of attachment, a typology for the various groups designated in the above sections has been developed and is presented in section 9.5.

9.5 A TYPOLOGY OF DINERS

Taking all of the empirical data into account, and specifically focusing on the above categorisation, structure and relationships, a formal typographical designation within the family structure of the restaurant was developed. It must be noted that when creating specific descriptive typologies, the researcher deemed it fitting to generate original and creative concepts that involved root words, their marriage

and semantic juggling. The permutations and linkages of concepts and their respective relationships among and between typology groups is shown in Figure 9.7, and explained below.

Figure 9.7 **The holistic diner typology**



Source: Compiled by the researcher

9.5.1 Pamatrical loyalists (Patriarchal and matriarchal loyalists)

This group represents the primary alpha level of diners identified previously. They represent the matriarchal and patriarchal reference figures in the social structure of the restaurant family. Thus the term pamatrical is a fusion of the word patriarch and matriarch respectively. The initial letter 'p' further encompasses the first letter of the word primary.

As revealed in the study, the pamatriarchs are the staunch loyalists who symbolically represent the aristocracy of the Canton Restaurant

diners. These are the protagonists who were the pioneering band of customers who had strong emotional and associational ties with the chef and his parents. In terms of their Chinese restaurant patronage, their deep-rooted bonds and loyalty linkages with the Canton Restaurant have long been concretised and embedded as components of their conscious and sub-conscious decision-making criteria.

This filial group hold keys and passwords to access and are the dominant or alpha members. They are regarded as captives by the owners, who intuitively understand their entire spectrum of tangible and intangible dining needs. They selectively and discreetly evangelise for the restaurant, and as far as management are concerned, without this group there is no restaurant.

9.5.2 **Dynastems (Dynastic emissaries)**

The root word dynasty has been manipulated to include elements of the word emissary, resulting in the combination concept: dynastems. These cohorts are the progeny of the primary alpha, or pamatrical group. Because these second and successive generations of patrons have grown up in the Canton Restaurant, they are privileged and are thus fully conversant with the owners, the protocol and the caveats of association.

Fledgling alpha diners, who have naturally progressed through the rites of passage, perpetuate the perceived custodial and guardianship of core association.

As part of their lineage, they thus have status within the hierarchical structure of the holistic family organisation. They are also loyalists by default, but enthusiastically take on the role of envoys and emissaries of the Canton Restaurant style. It is reported that this lineage already is in its fourth generation. They thus see their role as progenitors of the dynasty and family *per se*. They quest to bring new members into the fold and do a lot of evangelising, advocacy and emissarial work for the establishment. They contribute the most towards the expansion the extended family component of the holistic diner base. These diners will continue their association and as long as the restaurant survives and, in their turn, will socialise their progeny into the Canton Restaurant ethos.

9.5.3 **Rediasporats (Returning diaspora)**

The nomenclature of this typology rests with the association and linkage of two concepts. The first is with the words return or riposting, which implies a coming back. The second concept is of dispersion and scattering, as was the case in the biblical times when the Jews from Palestine were diffused after the Babylonian exile in 358 BC. This co-mingling of supporters represents the return of the scattered members who were lost to the new restaurant for a variety of reasons.

They are now found and are returning to the fold and are to be nurtured, developed, restored and once again acculturated into the family. This group is multi-composite and is generally still broadly conversant with the rules and prescriptions of association. The reciprocal tasks of this assembly and that of the owners, is to resurrect, or forge and build new linkages. Being regarded as lost generations of diners, they are dissociated from the second generation owners of the Canton Restaurant and are in the process of re-connecting and re-establishing relationships. More of this group are incrementally finding the Canton Restaurant and are actively engaging and building associational bonds and regular patronage profiles.

9.5.4 **Migrapats (Migrating patriots)**

This descriptive label has been created by joining to words: migrating and patriots. As loyal diners, they have, because of forced social or economic reasons, migrated to other geographic locations within the country. Although having lost regular physical contact and engagement with the restaurant, they are still strongly emotionally bonded. They make a specific point of visiting the restaurant while sojourning back in the city. Because of spatial separation and the possible dilution of the emotional coupling they have with the proprietors, they tend to make up for this disparity in a unique manner. When they are in the city, this stratum of patrons compacts a number of visits to the restaurant during their sojourn. They patronise the

Canton Restaurant as individuals, in social groups, or some have contact with other regulars and use the event as an occasion to unite and rekindle old friendships.

9.5.5 Neophytes

These diners are new to the restaurant and have discovered access either by pure chance or more likely they have been given keys to entry by other established groups, who act as reference patrons. They would have been cautiously screened by the primary alpha group or alternatively enthusiastically been evangelised by other connected diners.

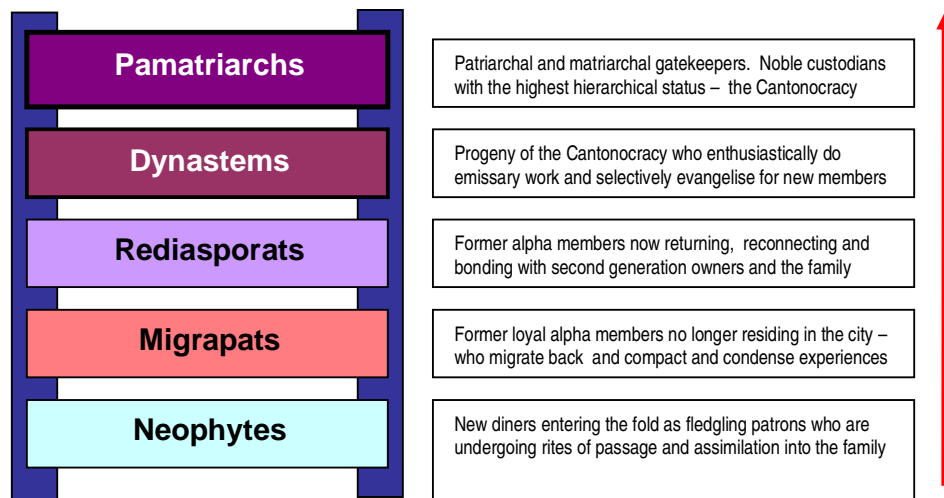
As newcomers, they are still being socialised and inducted into Canton Restaurant style, and are learning the rules as they progress through the perceived rites of passage.

As has been previously illustrated, the neophytes, in their turn, will be absorbed into the family and will, with the efflux of time, helically ascend in status dependent upon their cohesivity and connectedness within the holistic milieu of the restaurant.

The status that each typology group holds within the family unit can be hierarchically arranged in a typical ladder of ascension. This primacy

of perceived position, with annotated descriptions is shown in Figure 9.8.

Figure 9.8 **The typology status ladder**



Source: Compiled by the researcher

9.6 SUMMARY

The principle intent of this investigation was to use an in-depth qualitative approach, with comprehensive and rich voice to unearth the dimensions of dining-out experiences that fulfilled the unarticulated intangible inner needs of niche-restaurant customers.

The specific unit of study selected was unique in character and diner composition. As with their predecessors, the current owners do not commercialise nor actively promote the establishment. It is tucked away in an up-market residential area and has no signage or

identification – yet consistently attracts a host of dedicated, loyal and committed patrons. The restaurant has, since its inception in August 1965, thrived by ostensibly flouting traditional marketing consumer sovereignty rules. The traditional focus of marketing philosophy demands that the consumer be king and that businesses do obeisance to every whim of the customer. Despite the fact that the Canton Restaurant does not adhere to certain theoretical marketing caveats, its supporters are tolerant, understanding and its strongest advocates.

It was this intimacy of association among and between diners and the management that sparked the research study. The custom-prepared cuisine served by the establishment was beyond question a major draw-card for all patrons, yet other powerful psychogenic motivators appeared to have had an equally magnetic attraction.

This research has shown that people need moments of memory as part of their holistic dining engagement. They quest for experiences that provide an opportunity to maintain points of stability within their dynamic lives. It has been manifested that individuals value experiences over objects, and self expression over self-orientation. It has been shown that experiences speak to the inner needs and desires of people.

Besides the meal *per se*, this inquiry further revealed the pillars or cornerstones upon which the niche restaurant in question anchored its psychic need satisfiers. The bedrock of the dimensions that serve as psychic satisfiers are constituted upon a fusion of three factors. These are:

- the interaction of the powerful inter and intra emotional bonds, ties and allegiance extant between diners and the owners;
- the status of the lineage and familial heritage of patrons; and
- the perceived level or degree of patronage and connectedness that diners have with the owners.

This investigation has thus succeeded in resolving the initial core research question. Further, it has also fulfilled identifying and addressing the peripheral areas of focus that flowed from the outset:

- The needs and desires of customers of niche market restaurants have been expatiated.
- The development of a dining model has addressed the predisposing factors affecting their choice of a restaurant, the dining experience *per se* and the post dining response of patrons.
- It has been established that the owners of the restaurant intuitively understand their supporters, from both their tangible and intangible

need perspectives. Hence, the three cornerstones of patronage for niche market restaurants have been codified.

- Lastly, the question as to whether a typology of diners could prevail was addressed. Two distinct bands of diners, each with sub-dimensions could be profiled. Premised on the triad of patronage cornerstone dimensions, distinctive unique typological descriptors were coupled to each class of patron.

It was made evident that experiences call out to people who want to become involved in such a way that they will take elements of that participation away with them either for the moment or a lifetime. The study has adequately reflected that emotional and psychological needs can be tracked and directly linked to understanding consumer buying and consumption conduct in the context of the unit of analysis.

9.7 **POTENTIAL AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

The following aspects merit consideration for further research:

- Having identified specific tangible and intangible need satisfying dimensions for the unit of study, it would be useful to establish if the principles applied equally to similar establishments or to other eating establishments in general. Similarly, what other pillars might prevail in different kinds of niche markets.

-
-
- Further research may also reveal ways in which entrepreneurs could develop and refine their current marketing and business strategies so as to keep pace with the unarticulated, yet vital psychic needs of their clients.
 - The knowledge gleaned from this study might serve as a useful point of departure in expanding and contributing to the evolution continuum of marketing philosophy and practice.
 - Further investigation might also enable a unique new orchestration of marketing elements to be developed that cater more specifically to meeting intangible needs which service providers purport to satisfy.

ANNEXURE: A

EXPLORATORY STUDY INTERVIEW GUIDE

- How long have you been a customer at the Canton?
- How did you get to know about the restaurant?
- Why do you patronise this restaurant — top three reasons?
- Do you ever interact with the Chef personally?
- Do you ever visit *other* Chinese restaurants on a regular basis?
- Do you talk about the Canton to other people? What do you say about it?
- Do you ever meet people you know when you dine at the canton?
- Have you ever been turned away from the Canton because they were fully booked? How did you respond to such a situation?
- Have you ever been disappointed by the Canton? In what way?
- Do you ever talk about your 'disappointments' to other people?
- Have you ever seen an advertisement by the Canton?
- Do you think that they should advertise?
- Describe the 'mood' at the canton.
- Describe the typical 'customer' at the Canton.
- Do you prefer to have a sit-down meal or take-away?
- Do you have a favourite 'seating place' in the restaurant?
- What you do think of the decor of the Canton?
- Who are the Canton's major competitors?
- Should they get a liquor license?

- Are the facilities adequate?
- Is the location suitable?
- Is it safe?
- Other elements as they arose from the discourse.

ANNEXURE: B

FORMAL STUDY INTERVIEW GUIDE

- Do you ever eat at other Chinese restaurants?
- For how long have you been a diner at the Canton? Please tell me about your history.
- Please tell me of any special or memorable occasions that you have experienced at the Canton?
- Picture the day or evening - what stands out even now?
- What happened and why do you remember it?
- Have you discussed the Canton with friends or acquaintances?
- What do you tell them about the place?
- Do you regard yourself as a loyal diner / patron?
- For what reason do you regard yourself as a loyal diner?
- Are there degrees of 'loyalty'?
- Do you know other people who regularly dine at the Canton?
- Why do you think people keep coming back to dine here? Why do you keep returning?
- What makes the Canton different from other places?
- What do you feel is special about the Canton?
- Why is it important to you?
- Do you ever inter-act with Peter (the proprietor and chef)?
- Have you ever complained at the Canton? What was the response?

-
-
- Have you ever been turned away from the Canton?
 - Do you buy take-aways or prefer a sit down meal?

Please comment on:

- Quality of food
- Quality of service
- Price of the food
- Speed of service
- New-comers to the restaurant
- Technology — personal cooking versus microwave etc.
- Food tastiness and consistency
- Design of menu — options and range
- Cost / value of the meal
- Image, atmosphere, ambience
- Social inter-action and the odds of meeting a friend or acquaintance
- Age: peer age group, family, friends, number of generations
- Dining occasion — birthdays, anniversaries, business lunch, or when feel like it
- Liquor licensing
- Trading hours
- Parking facilities

- Ablution facilities
- Location of the outlet
- Whether the Canton should advertise?
- Whether the name of the restaurant should be sign-posted outside?

Other factors

- When you think about it, besides the food, can you please describe the non-physical things that draw you back to this restaurant?
Please try and find words and tell me.
- How would you describe yourself, or your social unit that regularly dines at the Canton? Can you give a special kind of label or description to yourself?
- How 'loyal' would you describe yourself as a diner at this restaurant?
- *Other elements as they emerged from the interview.*

ANNEXURE: C

VERBATIM TRANSCRIPTION: COLLAGE OF DINERS INTERVIEWS

- **Do you ever eat at other Chinese restaurants?**
 - Never
 - Very long ago – I cannot remember
 - No, never
 - Very seldom
 - I may try take-aways on very odd occasion
 - Take-aways when Canton closed – like lunch time on odd occasion
 - Yes, the one in Kabega – went as a guest of another person – they sell traditional Chinese and other food

- **For how long have you been a diner at the Canton? Tell me about your history**
 - First visited 1967
 - Three generations
 - Last 30 years
 - Over 25 years
 - Been to Canton before – known about it since I was a child – about 25 years ago
 - Been going there before since I was a baby – I am a second generation diner

-
- It was 'old' and almost 'kitch' – like it was in china town in USA in Manhattan – it did not detract – I had been briefed before
 - Our family unit was new to Port Elizabeth and wanted to go to a Chinese restaurant– we asked friends – and they told us about the old Canton – they 'warned' us about table cloths etc. They said it was most authentic. Would get as close to home cooked food and service. No contriving of setting or menu.
 - Totally authentic experience – décor made the old place
 - This one (new) I think is a little too neutral – neither Chinese nor western – ambiance kind of neutral here
 - Know you are going to walk in here and nothing will change – it will be a wonderful meal. At old shop you got a whiff of the smell of the kitchen as you went upstairs
 - Like being on holiday for a few hours – like a new experience each time
 - Like you were 'home' and got a sense of comfort – so you go back to what you already know
 - Had a unique Chinese kitchen smell. The place has a special aura
-
- **Please tell me of any special or memorable occasions that you have experienced at the Canton?**
 - Birthdays
 - Celebrations: graduation, pregnancy
-

-
- Sunday lunches
 - No special occasion – I need it / crave it
 - If I could afford it, it will be once a week
 - 70th birthday – had restaurant to ourselves – family gathering of 40 people
-
- **Have you discussed the Canton with friends or acquaintances?**
What do you tell them about the place?
 - I recommend it to everyone
 - We invite people as guests and bring them
 - People ‘heard’ of it – unable to find it – reveal address and location to them
 - Our visitors (from other cities) still talk about it – the time we brought them here. We regularly bring them here when they are on holiday
 - They make regular pilgrimages here when they visit Port Elizabeth
 - We use canton as standard and benchmark to compare any other Chinese food places
 - We have a passion for the food
 - Other places give ‘quasi’ Chinese food
 - First timers that we know are ecstatic about the experience
 - Absolutely dependable and reliable to get consistent magnificent food and care
-

-
- I don't tell business friends – I tell intimate friends – business people won't come here to lunch – because they have to pay cash – and that could be embarrassing for them if they have credit cards
 - I frequently do – when Chinese comes up – it rant and rave – I ask if they remember old shop – and I tell they have moved, it is value for money and the food is tops
 - I tell them because I love it – every time you come here you have the same food – but it is still wonderful – a new experience each time
 - You want people to experience something nice – and why not tell them
 - If you have a large group of people you want to tell it is often disappointing – because they get declined – they don't know Peter well enough
 - People tell us they could not get in – and I respond that they must be very busy
 - It is not a good thing when people are turned down
 - Anything of quality becomes aspirational – so the owners should make a plan to cater for new people
 - We just tell people to keep on trying. The place should not become and 'old boys' club – there is enough of that in Port Elizabeth already – it can give a bad connotation – especially if you are not from Port Elizabeth originally

-
- Entrance to the restaurant must not be tied to affiliations

 - **Do you regard yourself as a loyal diner / patron?**
 - That is a difficult concept
 - Once I have found good place I continually go back
 - Don't go anywhere else
 - I / we have never been tempted to try another place
 - If do try another place, don't feel guilty – all it does is confirm my resolve to stay with Canton
 - Canton acts as a benchmark for other places
 - Want to know what the kitchen is like - know about it here. Been in kitchen. It is hygienic
 - Yes, I am very loyal
 - Habituated because you know exactly what you are going to get when you come here
 - We don't go to other Chinese restaurants – only to the Canton
 - Do not even consider trying others – 'know' what I get here
 - No
 - Yes I am definitely loyal – because I am a second generation diner

 - **For what reason do you regard yourself as a loyal diner?**
 - They are good friends and this relationship has been built up over years
-

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- Because the food is good
 - The company is good
 - Meet friends (old) and have an opportunity to make new ones
 - I know their family
 - Because I recommend it to others – I could not do so if I did not have first hand experience myself
 - If I find something wrong, it can tell Peter or Verna about it – and they don't take offence
 - I (am loyal) because I want them to succeed
 - We (are loyal) because we want to help them
 - I care for them
 - I / we have empathy for them – it is like being partnership with them
 - I am diabetic – they make special food for me – even without my asking
 - I come back repetitively – even if you have a bad meal on the very odd occasion (I have never had a bad meal here ever though)
 - Feel comfortable here – I can sit down and relax here – at my own leisure – I feel at home and can do what I like – they don't rush me. I have the table for the night and can chill out
 - You are close to others – yet still have your privacy
 - They don't play offensive music that detracts you
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- They are not set on turning tables with that awful tinny music – here there is not even any music. Maybe now and again they will discretely play soft background music

 - **Are there degrees of ‘loyalty’?**
 - I suppose so.
 - See most diners here regularly
 - Get impression most diners are loyal too
 - There is a clan mentality
 - It is like there is an inner sanctum
 - I’d call it an Inner circle
 - It is like you need a password to get in here
 - They are in the directory now – so I suppose that makes them a little less exclusive?
 - This restaurant is like a club
 - We will feel guilty if we supported other Chinese restaurants – you must have an extremely good reason to drop your support for the Canton
 - Once I had car problems and could not get to Canton – the proprietress brought food to my home – that is a big reason for my commitment
 - Yes, absolutely – it applies to different kinds of restaurants
 - Loyalty for me is being a frequent diner – not necessarily at specific routine intervals – but I know when I want Chinese –
-

This is the only place to come to. I like the atmosphere and the vibe

- Friendly service – owners are observant, attentive and personalised – I feel they care for me – and see that my needs are catered for
- This restaurant is personalised – it is like you accumulate ‘points’ and you are recognised. You are appreciated and well cared for – and given the exact same treatment and hospitality shown to you – so they taste the ‘special’ way you are handled and potentially become diners themselves in the future
- They are very embracing of you here
- They can sense if my visit is ‘personal’ or ‘business / professional’ and they treat me accordingly
- They make it a point to get to know you on a personal basis (I really like that)
- If you go here six months later – they still know you

- **Do you know other people who regularly dine at the Canton?**

- I can easily name four to five or more other people or groups of people
- Yes, the Friday night ‘lot’
- I have met ‘regulars’ here and now know them
- I / we strike up conversations with other diners and introduce myself / ourselves

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- There is a very friendly atmosphere
 - Yes, my father – my dad has been coming here for ‘yonks’ – they dust him off as part of the furniture
 - My Dad’s status changed when he moved here – he had a very big boost - but he never went ‘upstairs’ and dropped the Canton for a ‘posher’ place – this is his comfort zone
-
- **What makes the Canton different from other places?**
 - For the personal touch
 - This is not just a restaurant
 - We know the people who own it
 - The owners are visible
 - They are hands on
 - I have a mental picture of what I experienced last time – and know I can rely on the same to happen again
 - In old shop we apologised about décor and environment – warned them beforehand
 - You don’t eat the environment – the food is phenomenal
 - New people have expectations – and I don’t want them to be disappointed – before had the real (Chinese meal) experience
 - Table clothes in the old shop had holes in them, generally it was a ‘tatty’ environment
 - There is no other place to go out to at night to eat
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- The owners take a personal interest in me – not just as a source of money – also like a family member – e.g. when daughter died of cancer, they brought us a complete meal to our home
 - On my 70th birthday they made a special meal just for my family – they were not asked to do so – and that was so nice
 - It's like part of your extended family
 - One night we were served a duck dish – did not ask for it – the Whitely's were having that for their dinner and made one extra for our table
 - There is a personal bond between the owners and the customers here
 - We feel 'spoiled' by being able to come here
 - The food brings them (customers) back – it has to be
 - It is not commercialised – it is a 'real' place
 - There is a homely feel here
- **What do you feel is special about the Canton?**
 - A dying breed of chef
 - He takes care and precision in his cooking
 - It is not like a B grade movie – it is the real thing
 - This is my first time at this new venue – and I kind of miss some of the 'authentic' décor and vibe of the old shop

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- The food is still magnificent – but I would like to see some traditional clothing and stuff around

 - **As a business venue for dining – what is your view?**
 - They have good food and environment
 - I / we bring my family here – but not my customers
 - Would not use this as a corporate venue – this more family type place – it is a social restaurant
 - People don't come here to get drunk and disorderly
 - This culture does not lend itself to bad behaviour – it is very respectful
 - It is strictly cash here – this the biggest obstruction to bring business people here. They carry credit cards.
 - Very embarrassing if they don't accept cards – some business people are not even prepared to use their own money to pay for business lunches
 - Social culture today happens with a signing and an order payment
 - Won't be caught in position where don't carry cash – too much risk to carry cash
 - Want to portray your own personality when you entertain business wise – so this is the pace for close friends and family.
 - This is not a professional venue – I override that idea when I use for myself and my family
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- It would be nice to bring business people here though
- They (the owners) will not sacrifice quality food with venue considerations
- I don't personally know Peter and have never met him – why does he not do work about – I did not know he did all cooking and preparation
- It does not bother me who is cooking – as long as it (the food) is consistent and good
- If you know are told about exclusivity of Peter - that enhances the reputation of the restaurant

- **Do you ever inter-act with Peter?**

- I always go in and greet him and say goodbye and thank him
- Sometimes I feel he doesn't want me too – but I do so in any case
- Sometimes I socialise with them – they come to us for meals
- Oh yes, always greet and thank him
- I am loathe to – it is his working place, and I don't want to detract him – no small talk. But I do greet him in any case
- No – I don't know him

- **Have you ever complained at the Canton? What was the response?**

- I told Verna the rice was not same as before
 - I have never had reason to do so
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- Soup did not have enough salt in it – but that was in beginning when Peter took over – he had to find his feet too
 - When was taking over from his Dad, the Hong Kong sauce was too thin – so we told him
 - Did not want to be negative – because I wanted to help him
 - He took no offence and welcomed my comment when I ‘complained’
 - Never complained at Canton – I have no need to
- **Have you ever been turned away from the Canton?**
 - Yes, when they are full
 - Yes, but it does not often happen
 - They generally squeeze us in
 - If are turned away – we don’t go somewhere else
 - If we are - we cook something at home
 - If they are fully booked, I don’t mind standing queue till another night – the chef can only do so much
 - No – heard comment on phone other day when diner told place was full: ‘do you know who you are talking to?’ – I will not stand for opinionated people trying to bully Peter into admission
 - This is like a family – no one member is more important than another – you take turns – because we know the situation here

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- If you know it is a night that might be fully booked – out of courtesy and good manners you make sure you book well in advance
 - You should get to know the situation here, you know – Peter can only do so much
 - We don't take offence if turned down
 - I do chance my arm some weeknights – and most times get in
 - I often sense a disappointment in her voice when Verna says she cannot cater for you on a specific evening
 - Yes – Peter gave my uncle preference to me – he turned me down – but I took it in my stride – I knew the system
 - I will never come back again if someone else gets preference over me
 - I think you will lose patrons if you turn them away – I would bad mouth them if that happened to me
 - I know their rules you see – if I had other people who were going to join me – it would have been disastrous
 - This is a very complex place – it is the whole family thing about it – I am new to it and I don't understand it – but to my partner – who is a third generation diner – it is so cool
 - It's that family thing you know. Where I come from I don't know. People who come here regularly get treated differently – like they are all one extended family

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- If you have been socialised in the canton 'system' you know the rules – the caveats and procedures you know. Not all people know that – and have to be help to understand the place
 - But I think I am now getting the hang of this – like ordering prawns in advance ... it is passed on from generation to generation
 - They are not advertising – they are not asking for everybody's business – it is word of mouth basis – so the fact that it is a cash only basis and that you must bring your own wine is not important. You TELL your friends about those aspects in advance – when I refer people here – I make a point of telling them how the place works
 - You know what happens if people do come here and forget to bring cash – Verna tells them to drop the money off the next day or when you get the chance. It is no big deal
 - They trust people you know. I suppose it is brave or irresponsible on their part
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- **Do you buy take-aways or prefer a sit down meal?**
 - We prefer to sit down
 - We want to share time with friends
 - Depends if have small kids – then we do take-away
 - I think take-ways are not the same as eating here – doesn't taste the same
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- We prefer sit down meals
 - I did not know they do take-aways – (New diner)
 - Sometimes if they are fully booked on weekends we will do takeouts – but it is nicer to sit down though, the vibe and people are nice. It is like home from home you know. You can relax here. It is like a fuzzy feel good feeling
 - I / we prefer to sit down – I did not know they do take-aways – wow – now I know
 - It is the old story you know – now we can understand it
 - We were here last week and saw someone coming in to get a take-away – only then we realised they do that sort of service

Please comment on:

Quality of food

- It is hot, freshly prepared
- There are good quality ingredients
- They don't skint on good raw materials
- They buy most ingredients from Woolworths you know
- It is not fatty, oily, greasy
- It is just great stuff
- You can't beat it – it is like a craving
- It starts when they buy the ingredients – (Peter) knows where to go to get the best
- They are very discerning and fussy about what goes into the food

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- A huge amount of love and devotion and effort that goes into preparation. Look at the precision of the cuts and content. You can see for yourself how beautiful it looks
 - It is not mass produced. Each dish individually made. No mass pre-cooking you know – that is why you must understand the situation here – and sometimes be patient
 - It is very enjoyable – I like good food – presentation is not all that important
 - Look at what you have in front of you right now – look at that precision cutting and the gloss of the sauce – it is magnificent
 - It is simple – which is the ultimate essence of the way food must be served. Great stuff man
 - It is so attractive. I have to force myself to stop – that is good food for me – it ‘makes’ me want to eat it – and this food does that to me
 - I could quite happily devour everything he puts in front of me – anything man

Quality of service

- I don't complain of the service
 - When Verna and I talk about things – she asks what I think patrons feel
 - It is not their strongest point
 - When you come here you know you will have to wait
-

- If I know they are fully booked, I am tolerant and know that I will have to wait longer between courses but that is par for the course
- The service is slow sometimes - not because of staff – because it takes long to prepare in the kitchen
- You know that Peter starts very early in the morning to prepare
- You cannot for example phone here at 18h45 and ask for a take-away at 19h00 – it is like a learning curve – you must get to know the ‘situation’ and play the game
- Service is many things – time based – going that extra mile – you don’t pay just for your meal. You pay for the environment, service and atmosphere
- Meal and service must match – it is time and place. Sometimes you want to have breaks between courses – others you don’t – so here you must tell them that – and they will meet your requests. If they are busy and cannot get you out in a hurry – that is your problem – you should know that peter cannot be all things to all men
- They know and read their customers

New comers

- Most diner know Peter is the only chef – newcomers don’t know that – they will have to learn about it
 - You can see the new ones from the old patron
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- Old patrons are very relaxed, unpretentious, spontaneous – among and between tables
- Newcomers normally are quieter, on their best behaviour – and must still learn the ropes
- It is easy. If I have not seen them here before – they are new. Their behaviour is a bit subdued – as if they are sassing the place out
- There are diners who have their set, routine nights – and they stick to them
- Can sense newcomers – they seem to finding their feet
- They peruse menu at length – and they ask a lot of questions – and battle to make up their minds
- They are getting themselves orientated – establishing their comfort zone you see

What is service?

- They staff should see when to clear the table and when to bring the next course
- We have already helped ‘stranger’ at next table with a bottle of wine. They did not know we overheard them when they said they were experiencing a ‘drought’. I had extra bottle of wine and gave it to them – the ‘newcomers’ – were flabbergasted
- That sort of thing will not happen at any other restaurant – it is amazing

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- New guests said this is the 'lekkerste plek om te kuier'
 - The service is not rushed here
 - You are given a reasonable time to browse the menu – and when have ordered food, you don't wait ages – although sometimes you do
 - Body language shows concern, as do facial expressions – personal interest in me as an individual
 - Have waited here a couple of times for considerable duration. But we don't mind – we know they are busy – and we know what we are getting
 - We tell our friends there is only one man in the kitchen – so we must sometimes be patient and expect slow service – we are patient because we know what we are getting
 - If a restaurant is busy – staff should tell clients so – and ask if they mind waiting – just common courtesy – Verna tells us – or we can even see for ourselves that they are busy – so we are patient
 - We expect staff to know what is on the menu and to be able to explain it to us

Technology – personal cooking

- They might use a microwave to warm rice. I asked Verna if they did – and after that they stopped doing so

Food tastiness and consistency

- I / we get a craving when we have missed Canton food for a long time
- Like I am feeling now – we have not been here for about three weeks
- I have got to have food (Chinese) when I need it
- We are not disappointed – know what we are going to get
- His food is like a benchmark that your system is used to
- What will we do if they were to close down?
- The food is very consistent
- Everything else (at other restaurants) is compared with Peter. Even when we do go to another restaurant, we say *it would be better* at Canton

Design of menu – options and range

- Very good
- It is alright for us
- You don't need fancy dishes
- Customers don't need huge choice
- (The chef) must be able to prepare it all
- With a selected menu they do it well
- I think in advance of the dish before I get here. Like soup, egg, rice – and I know what I am going to get

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- If we want something special – like prawns – we order in advance
 - to give Peter change to prepare
 - Nobody makes prawns like Peter – can go anywhere
 - I / we like a limited variety
 - We know that we must order in advance if we want anything ‘special’
 - You must understand that if they give a wider choice – they will take longer and so the smaller menu is good – but you can have combinations if you like – you must just tell them – or ask. They will do what you want. As you get to know them – they are very flexible
 - You can’t expect to come here as a customer and just get anything you want – you must know there is a limited menu – and you know what you are getting
 - If want ‘curved ball’ items – Verna asks peter – he says he can accommodate you – but you will have to wait a little extra. He personally has to prepare any ‘foreign’ dishes you know
 - But almost every time the menu is wide enough – I don’t have to have a broad menu
 - We tell people if they are new to the Canton that it has a small menu – and that if they want different items – they must book in advance or they will not get what they want. They must understand the situation here you know
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- I have never heard adverse comments from people we have advocated to
 - I don't like a big menu – too confusing – you know what you are getting here – that is why you come back here
 - A big menu makes me suspicious – because I don't believe that they can have all the stuff fresh if the choice is so large. Here we know what we are getting – and it is all freshly made daily
 - I am not impressed with huge menu varieties – they are window dressing to hide superficial variants to create different nuances and give the illusions of large choices – whereas here – you get what you see
 - It is dead right as it is. We don't want to wide a spread

Cost / value of the meal

- Excellent
- Tremendous
- Benchmark against – like going to another place – like say a Spur – get very good value from Peter
- Can't afford to eat out too often, so when we do, we know we get value for money
- Very good value for the variety you get
- Compared with other eating places – it is very fine value
- Very reasonable – in fact extremely cheap

Image/ Atmosphere/ Ambience

- Relaxed
- Not pressurised
- You can be yourself here
- You can enjoy the evening, afternoon
- Very relaxed
- People who come here are nice
- The owners attitudes are very relaxed and informal
- It is a contagious thing you know
- There is a definite spirit in here
- When you walk in here, and whether you are in a bad mood – or whatever – you mellow
- It slows you down
- It calms you
- You can chill here – and take stock
- You can get out of the bustle here – like therapeutic vibes
- Physical environment is nice here, nicer than the old shop – but that is not really all that important – the new garden and so on is also nice – but the mood here is what makes it so nice
- The Canton can open in a squatter camp – the food is excellent
- I was never embarrassed to take friends there (the old restaurant)– we told them – it was amusing to watch their reactions – as they settled down, they did not even notice the holes in the table cloths and so on

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- This new place could possibly have a few lanterns – but it is not important – you know what you are getting
 - The new venue is a big improvement. The security risk not as bad
 - It is very central and convenient
 - Feel I can come here any time – night or day

Social inter-action and odds of meeting a friend or acquaintance

- Very, very good odds
 - Almost always
 - Every time we come here, we are sure to ‘meet’ someone we know or have met before
 - This is a place to meet people
 - I / we look forward to coming here – look forward to meeting old friends
 - Ja, and you never know who you are going to meet
 - A surprise each time
 - This place is open, not in cubicles where you are locked away
 - Feel as though you are part of one group
 - When I overhear people, I have no compunction to chatting to other people ‘strangers’ at other tables
 - There is a good vibe in this place
 - People are friendly here
 - We know the place – if we want to get out early, we get here early to avoid the rush
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- People talk to other people here
 - Almost always we will know someone here – especially on weekends – sitting at their same place and ‘territory’
 - I like chatting up people at other tables near me – that is how the ‘family’ grows – you meet them again or at some other place – and immediately you have something in common. You share the secret hey

Age: peer age group, family, friends, number of generations

- For more mature people
- Younger people would not tend to come here of their own choice – they will come with family – and enjoy it though
- I can relate to the managers (owners)
- Young waiters here don’t bother me though – if they knew what they were doing – I would be happy
- They cater for middle age and mature people
- Not teens – although sometimes they come here for a group lunch etc
- Mainly cater for 30 and upwards
- Most people come as a family setting or as their own group
- A second generation diner has been ‘indoctrinated’ so they might come here on their own (teens I mean)
- Exposed to the people, diners, the food, like coming from home to home

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- I always feel welcome
 - They (owners) take time to get to know you more and more each time – take a lot of effort – Verna is genuinely concerned – and I enjoy it
 - Close friends and family mostly
 - Target market is not teenyboppers and social thirty-somethings. It is for intimate groups and family stuff
 - I refer the people here – top and highly professional people - and they rave about it to me afterwards

Dining occasion: When do you come here?

- For birthdays, anniversaries, business lunch, or when we feel like it
- When we need it
- You don't have to wait for an occasion
- When I am not in mood to cook
- On impulse – like today I need Canton's food
- I don't even wait until I crave their food – I come at least once a week
- If I can afford to eat more regularly – if I could, I would be here once a week
- It is all to do with appropriateness – the right food, for the appropriate social group and the tight social occasion – the Canton is for my very close friends and family – it is a selective issue here – not snobbery – but I am very careful of who I let know about the place – I don't want

them spoiling it for me – in my private capacity this is my place. Not so much for professional or business purposes

Liquor licensing – not licensed

- Good thing
- Bring bottle of wine you really like, make own choice
- Cheaper
- Not going to be ripped off here
- It is wonderful – it makes it cheaper
- They don't even charge for corkage
- I know my wines – I love my wines and want to bring my own favourites – the difference I save is the cost of my wife's meal here
- I prefer to support unlicensed places
- Don't need a licence – don't charge corkage

Trading hours

- The hours are good
- They should open - like lunchtime during week – but then again, you (Peter) cannot prepare two good meals a day
- If they extend their trading hours, will have to increase staff numbers and the whole thing is going to change – and it won't be the same
- They will lose the personal touch if they open for longer hours

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- I think they may lose potential guests because they do not open for lunch generally
 - But Peter will do a special meal for a group on a weekday – you see – new people must *know the rules*
 - If Peter knows you he will do so. You see – going back to the club thing
 - If you are in the know, you can organise it – to get in at ‘different’ hours
 - For 70th birthday – Peter served unique meal specially made for us. He surprised us. He would not accept payment – it was a meal for five people. Duck, prawns, absolute magic dish made that Chinese eat at celebrations
 - They just took over and made a fuss of us
 - Unreal, very kind
 - Very caring
 - You feel so special here
 - We met strangers here one night at a party. We did not originally know them, but we joined in
 - We often sharing drinks and bantering with others tables
 - They are in line with our hours – we are not late eaters – that suits us perfectly
 - Fact that don’t open every night (close Sunday evening and Mondays) is fine . They need a break too you know
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- They will open in the week or on off nights if you ask them and have enough people – about ten
 - All of their known customers are aware that they can ask
 - If he cooks privately for you – he cooks too much food
 - There are prepared to ‘meet’ you if you want odd dining hours
 - No problems
 - The company I keep here is of absolute importance – I know the food will always be good – that is a given you see – but i also want the full experience and want my guests to share that – it is just special

Parking facilities

- No problem
- They are fine - and safe

Ablution facilities

- They are clean
- They are hygienic
- The facilities are totally acceptable

Location of the outlet

- It is much better here
 - This is a good location
 - I / we like the new location
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- It is better than the old place – it is safer here

Do you feel the Canton should advertise?

- No
- Do you need others in here?
- Maybe they should now and again, if business is down, then again, I don't know ...
- It is like having a private chef – makes us feel good
- But the Sunday Club aren't here today
- I want them to do well – so maybe they should advertise?
- I also want them to keep it exclusive. So my spontaneous reaction is for them not to advertise, but I suppose it is being unfair on my part... oh
- He will disturb the other 'club' members
- No if he does, he will have to get help and that will detract from Peter's food. I don't think he will bother with another chef – he knows what he is doing and he is too fussy to have to worry about other people cooking
- He spoils us with his food you know – so why let too many people know about it
- No never – why must they – we do the advertising for them

Should the name of the restaurant be sign-posted outside?

- I suppose they could put name outside – sometimes when you give your friends or guests the address they battle to find it and get lost – especially if they are meeting people here
- Just a little sign
- Even a little sign - but that would be advertising!
- But they should definitely not advertise
- No
- You will have too many people going there – I suppose I am being selfish
- I don't think they can cope with too many customers
- No – do put up notices and banners
- If people get lost – they can phone and ask for directions
- I quiet enjoy getting 'lost' at times – part of the fun of visiting for the first time
- Peter has a given clientele so there is no need to signpost
- We don't want to detract form the neighbourhood with little neon signs all over the place
- He need never advertise – his dynasty of customers from generation to generation will find him
- People will make it their business to find him
- When I tell new 'brethren' I tell them they will not see a sign – that it is in a private home – and I make sure I give them the information they need to find him

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- I am selective about who I tell about the Canton. It is my credibility on the line – I am letting them into the circle – you know – so I am very discerning of who I invite
 - I don't want riff raff destroying this place
 - That is a tricky thing – maybe – maybe not – i suppose the 'new' referrals may battle – but if they are clever enough they will find the place
 - No – in retrospect – they must stay 'anonymous' as they are – it adds to the exclusiveness and I like that - this place is not for everybody you know

INTANGIBLES?

What are the non-physical things that draw you back to this restaurant?

Please try and find words and tell me

- Always the same nature
- Consistent people
- Our friends
- Their way of operating
- It is a combination of the food, the personal touch and the people who come here. Hard to actually find the right words
- I don't eat egg, so I always have something special made instead – you see how they cater for you specially? They know when I book - I don't have to remind them
- Consistent people – care about pleasing me

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- Location is a good thing
 - Ambiance – the subtle décor here
 - Feel of comfort
 - Remember how we used to ‘warn’ people about the old place – don’t need to ‘warn’ any more. Do tell them that they must pay cash
 - Customers who ‘left’ old shop – because of safety and security reasons – and did not know they have reopened – have shopped around – and now see how ‘spoiled’ they have been – and want to come back
 - I never get tired of this place – never – it is just magic – that is all I can say – the food, the people, the other diners – like we are joined in some way – I don’t know how to say it

Are there any other general viewpoints you would like to add?

- If I go for more than 10 days I become irritated if I do not have Canton food. I am addicted to Canton’s food
- I have a low level of tolerance to do without this place
- I don’t like to categorise people into groups – they are all diners who have different needs and traits
- Verna gives preference to addicts – albeit subconsciously – and they know it
- If here is a clash on demand for a table – I am sure that an addict will be move dup in the pecking order if there is a waiting list – they will deny it – but I am sure it exists

ANNEXURE: D

VERBATIM TRANSCRIPTION: JOINT INTERVIEW WITH PROPRIETORS

History of canton

- My father opened the original restaurant in August 1965
- My father died in January 1994
- Help from early childhood – 1972
- In 1982 I ran the shop while my parents went to visit relatives in China
- I picked up my style of cooking from dad. I do a lot of what Dad would turn in his grave if he saw it
- My dad never 'forced' me to cook in any special manner
- We (Peter and Verna) closed the old shop in April 2000 and re-opened in new location October of same year
- Verna been involved with the restaurant on and off for in excess of 15 years. She now works full-time with me. She is a great help, although we still struggle when we have lot of people

How many 'regulars' at the new restaurant would you say visit regularly?

- Quite high
- Our business is based very much on repeat custom
- There are new ones (diners) coming in too
- We also lost customers too because now we are too far away for them to get there (to the restaurant) – and they go somewhere nearer to them

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- We are also regaining 'lost' customers. These are people who stopped because of the old location – now coming back – regaining customers
 - There are people now 'rediscovering' the Canton – after almost 20 years. We 'lost' them because of the criminal factor of old main street where the restaurant was located
 - Other diners were 'lost' and left Port Elizabeth and now they tend to 'discover' the Canton again – mainly by word of mouth, or invited as part of a group for a function
 - We have some new 'first timers' – but they are a minority of diners – some come on their own and others are brought by 'old hands' who
 - Our 'new' diners mainly also come with second generation diners who are now bringing friends – so we are expanding the 'new' base of diners
 - People in this area are also starting to visit – by word of mouth
 - The new venue a big draw-card and the location is important
 - Seasoned couples are also bringing set of 'new' friends when they come to dine. The new friends then start their own chain of references – so we are starting to grow at new venue. More so than we expected

Do you try to differentiate yourself purposefully

- We thought about décor etc – but was not a powerful determinant – we preferred to keep décor simple – had professional help from a friend
- We wanted a simple and stylish feel and yet still wanted to have an oriental nuance – that was the theme. We decided not to bring in lanterns and so on
- We took great conscious awareness of lighting and the effects it has on the ambiance, we do not consciously try to differentiate ourselves

Please tell me about the menu

- The menu is essentially the same – it has not changed much
- We selected the menu on a combination of factors. Mainly on demand for popular dishes – in fact, thinking about it we have actually reduced menu since dad's time
- We do things on request now. We are a little more flexible now – as long as they (diners) let us know beforehand – no problem. Say sweet and sour fish. I need advance notice
- I assume people (diners) know we can do it (customize the menu) – and we will do it
- Total first timers will have to order from the menu. Once they have been here, if they ask for other dishes, they will then know to request in advance

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- When 'new' people book – Verna will ask if they want prawns, spring rolls etc and then we can cater for them. The onus on diner. We tell this to first timers – to let them know the rules

What makes your restaurant so unique? Why do you have such high return patronage and successive generations?

- Quality of food – ranks high – an anchor
- We are very personal in the way we handle our diners
- Diners are more friends than patrons
- It is part of my (Verna) nature
- People are incredible if you are friendly to them – and they sense that I feel the same way about them
- I am easy to talk to. I enjoy their (the diner's) company
- We have little (children) diners here too – and I relate well to them and vice versa
- Kids feel they can talk to me (Verna) - as the 'regulars' also do
- With most of our 'regulars' their kids have virtually grown up in front of us. They know me. It is definitely like an extended family. Oh ja. Definitely

How many people know that Peter 'lives' in the kitchen?

- He very, very seldom waits on tables – but I suppose people get to hear of him

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- I suppose some diners have never seem him. A lot of the regulars though go in and have a chat and say hello
 - Peter is too busy to make a conscious effort to get to know diners. He is tied to the wok. But I know what you mean

People's patience

- Some diners like to eat fast, others like to have one course then socialize more before they have the next course
- Verna communicates verbally with Peter as to the speed at which he must serve each table. If diners say they want to leave by a certain time, she tells the chef and he keeps pace at her prodding
- It is very difficult when you are busy – but nine out of ten times we are able to help in such cases
- it is part in getting to know your customers and the diner learning to communicate with you
- When we are very busy, like December and January, we will say we only have the menu available – although the menu itself lends itself to different permutations of courses
- Diners realize that your style of cooking is personal, freshly prepared and made. Nothing is just pulled out of the freezer
- There is no mass cooking – every meal is tailor made to their taste. And that they do appreciate
- You can hear the feedback when they (the diners) say that 'that was so special' or ' that was magnificent' or 'that is how I like my food'

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- We never mass prepare. I think that big restaurants have to mass produce otherwise they cannot turn out the food
 - With us, they (diners) have to sometimes wait quite a while
 - We chose to run our business our way because we do believe in quality. It is about standards
 - That is how we do things. If people do not like our way, we are not going to change and serve 'inferior' food

So you feel that you are benchmarking the Canton as the basis for diners to compare other Chinese dining experiences?

- Peter is not conscious of this
- That is just my (Peter speaking) style
- Verna is conscious of it
- They (diners) will come back and say 'Peter you have spoiled us'
- They (Diners) have gone elsewhere and come back and say it is not the same elsewhere
- They will actually go to another restaurant and tell them that Peter does not cook like they do.
- Verna: I just laugh about that and think how cheeky it is to say such things
- Peter: I just do my own thing. I don't compare myself with other chefs
- We are very particular about standards, quality and things – so we do our best – and oh yes, our customers know and are aware of this

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- I (Verna) feel that if it is not good enough for us – then it is not good enough for anybody else

What else besides the food makes the place special?

- Verna's role: The effect of the business will be diluted – it will not be the same

What has Verna got that is unique?

- I had better not say the wrong thing! You should have asked me this in private! We are a team. She knows how to deal with customers
- I am in the kitchen. I would really not be able to cope without Verna
- She is a great help - she is the person who helps the people (diners) and works with them
- Verna is now also getting involved in the preparation
- Verna: If Peter was not there we would have nothing to sell
- I can be the hardest critic of Peter. If something is not right I tell him. That is the only way to make everything is not right. For example, if the decoration for the plate is not ready, and we are busy, I would tend to say 'take it out' but she will insist that the plates are garnishes
- She is fussier. For me it is fine – she is like a quality control agent
- That is why we keep tabs on suppliers, their products and the quality
- Peter mainly does the shopping for supplies – Verna to a little degree
- I don't really have to tell Peter – he knows if something is not right

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- You have to be there in your business to make it work – that is important to your customer
 - You can teach someone else to cook your food , but the customer wants to know that when he wants Chinese – he is getting Chinese. So we will never have someone else cooking here

Have you ever thought of categorizing your ‘regulars’ (or ‘loyal’) customers?

- There are different forms of loyalty and regularity of visits
- We have not consciously tried to group diners – no, not really
- Some visit weekly, some bi-weekly and others monthly
- Out-of-towners – we see them year in and year out – two or three times while they are on vacation
- Diners come here for celebrations
- Some go away and come back again
- We are part of their lives, as much as they are part of our lives
- Other communal times – such as when they have lost a member of the family - the only place to go is to the Canton, where the family all come together to reminisce and comfort each other
- The Canton is another ‘home’ to come back to
- They (diners) feel comfortable and because the person who has died was also part of our family

Do you feel your staunch diners are advocates for the restaurant?

- There are people who are our ombudsmen
- I think some people are not even conscious of the fact that they are punting our business
- Word-of-mouth is a very powerful part of building our patronage
- They share their experiences they had when they were here
- Their enthusiasm sets others off. I suppose our name crops up when restaurants are mentioned
- Diners pass our phone numbers on

Do you get complaints and how do you handle them?

- Mainly because pauses between the courses is too long
- They (diners) verbalize this during the meal
- (Complaints) can come from new and regular diners
- but it seldom happens really
- Communication very important. We tell diners if there is a delay – and we assure them that their food on the way. They feel happy about it
- I don't think we lose customers because of it
- But if they (diners) want to go somewhere after the meal, and if they let us know, we will speed things up for them. You see they must know how we operate
- Most times diners are just very patient and understanding. We only have one sitting – so they know they can spend the whole evening

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- Other places rush people of their feet and are super efficient and try to make more profit – at our place it is more relaxed and mellow
 - Our diners enjoy the meal properly and the company – that is our style of dining
 - We expect the customer to let us know and we accommodate them
 - New customers – we get to pace them and ask if ready for next course
 - They might want a certain flow of food and then a break – I (Verna) take time to see how they want it. They learn too though. Sometimes they like to go and have a smoke between courses
 - I am lead by their needs. Some eat faster than others so you must be vigilant and it is very individualized in sensing needs

Tell me about take-away versus sit down diners

- Some only prefer dining. Others do both. Some just take-aways – lifestyles govern those choices
- Most regulars who like to sit down and have a meal
- People who come to dine know that Chinese food is best when served hot at a meal. That is not to say that take-outs are not – but the ‘regular’ diners tend to be more discerning I suppose
- Knowing and getting to know needs of customers is very important.
Definitely

How will having or not having a liquor license affect your business?

- It will tend to detract from the restaurant and I (Peter) have not really given it much thought
- A very small minority of new diners who phone to book go elsewhere because we are not licensed
- People generally like to bring their own wines and spirits

Anonymity of the restaurant and advertising

- We like to keep our business low key – I don't think I would want to advertise
- We will get more business – but we cannot cope then
- As it is now, when we get a lot of diners and there are a lot of take-aways people can't wait
- We serve between 30 -36 diners. The normal sitting about 30 people. I don't want more than this
- Advertising will bring 'other people in' i.e. extra people
- We are very aware of the fact that people have to wait longer the more people we cater for. Thus we must keep a check on the numbers
- It is our personal style of cooking. We do not do mass catering style of cooking. That matters a lot

Signage

- Maybe a small signpost at night and then we will bring it back in when we close. Nothing permanent though

- Some people still can't find us
- A sign will mainly be for new people who have made reservations to see and identify our place
- Signage is not used as a draw-card – but to identify location to 'new people' who need to find the place

Are there any overall or general things you would like to share?

- We have not given any conscious specific deep thought to marketing or competitiveness
- We see the Canton as a home from home. Friends gather and feel at ease. They have the whole night to themselves
- People come here to savour the food and company. We are very strict on quality. Very.
- It is our style and we want to share it with a patron base I suppose we they regard as 'family'

Annexures

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