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Restaurant rankings factors in gastronomy tourism

Abstract

Factors that affect rankings of restaurants are not clearly known despite the importance of these businesses in promoting the cuisine and local foods within the scope of gastronomy tourism. Restaurants need to be rated in order to encourage and award restaurants as well as to help consumers. The aim of this study is to reveal the factors that affect restaurant ranking. With this purpose, content analysis was conducted on data gathered through document reviews and interviews. The results of the content analysis revealed 5 themes: ranking according to food and beverage, ingredients, personnel, atmosphere and service. The most important theme in the ranking of restaurants within the scope of gastronomy tourism was revealed to be food and beverage. Food and beverage was followed by ingredients, personnel, atmosphere and service respectively as the most emphasized factors. If they want to succeed in gastronomy tourism by fulfilling certain standards, to receive the attention they deserve and to become a gastronomic reference, restaurants need to place importance on the themes of food and beverage, ingredients, personnel, atmosphere and service.

Key words: gastronomy; gastronomy tourism; restaurant; restaurant establishments; restaurant ranking

1. Introduction

Food, the quality of food, atmosphere, performance, satisfaction, service and value play an important role in ranking of restaurant establishments which are increasing in number every day as an important component of tourism and in the decision making processes of consumers (Ryu, Lee, & Kim, 2012; Jeong & Jang, 2011; Zhang, Jiang, & Li, 2013; Oh, 2000; Soriano, 2002; Gupta, McLaughlin, & Gomez, 2007; Liu, Su, Gan, & Chou, 2014, p. 61; Law, To, & Goh, 2008; Hwang & Zhao, 2010; Sulek & Hensley, 2004; Namkung & Jang, 2007; Namkung & Jang 2008; Ryu & Han, 2010; Pantelidis, 2010; Haghighi, Dorosti, Rahnama, & Hoseinpour, 2012). Among other factors playing a role in ranking restaurant establishments as well as their general impressions are taste, presentation, ambiance, illumination, lay-out, aesthetics, atmosphere, decoration, music, hygiene, sound volume, temperature, smell, color, environment, quality of food and service, decorations, pictures, flowers, table clothes, napkins, floorings and furniture (Ryu et al., 2012; Han & Ryu, 2009; Sevtap, Akkuş, & Akkuş, 2014; Ayazlar & Gamze, 2017).

With the increasing number of people who look for different attractions other than taste in recent years, restaurant establishments have to work on and improve themselves (Liu et al., 2014, p. 53). In the fierce competition between restaurant establishments, ranking systems provide guidance for restaurants in terms of self-development and quality (Liu, Chou, Gan, & Tu, 2015; Kaviya, Roshini, Vaidhehi, & Sweetlin, 2017). There are numerous ranking systems that influence consumer choices (Çavuş, Şengül, & Özkaya, 2018); however, factors that are influential for restaurant establishments within the scope of gastronomy tourism have not clearly known in these ranking systems. This study aims to reveal factors that are important in restaurant rankings within the scope of gastronomy tourism.

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2. Literature review

Although there are many ranking systems and forums related to food experiences at restaurant establishments, the most important one comes forth as the Michelin guide (Christensen & Pedersen, 2011; Aubke, 2014). As an important indicator of kitchen success, Michelin star is the most popular and prestigious information source and ranking system for restaurant establishments (Aubke, 2014; Johnson, Surlemont, Nicod, & Revaz, 2005; Liu et al., 2014; Çavuş et al., 2018; Akoğlu, Çavuş, & Bayhan, 2017). Michelin guide was first published by the tire company of the same name in 1900 as a guide for attractions to see in France in order to increase tire demand (Christensen & Pedersen, 2011; Çavuş et al., 2018).

Generally awarded to SMEs, privately owned establishments and family businesses, Michelin star is an important factor in the decision making processes of consumers (Lane, 2010; Harrington, Fauser, Ottenbacher, & Kruse, 2013). Used in international comparisons, Michelin guide provides guidance for the field of gastronomy and increases the rate of guests (Lane, 2010; Boka & Kovacs, 2015). Michelin star also provides the opportunity for more effective promotional works and is coveted by chefs and restaurant owners (Lane, 2010). The process starts with the observation of the area, continues with reviews conducted on blogs, forums, publications related to food and beverage and reader opinions, and then rankings are determined by secret auditors based on one or more visits to the restaurant, also taking into account the experiences at the restaurant (Christensen & Pedersen, 2011; Michelin Guide; Liu et al., 2014). Restaurants which are assessed secretly in every 1.5 or 2 years are classified as follows: one-star: "high quality cooking, worth a stop;" two-star: "excellent cooking, worth a detour;" three-star: "exceptional cuisine, worth a special journey." Since 1955, there is a classification for "good quality, good value cooking" restaurants called Bib-Gourmand (Liu et al., 2014; Lane, 2010; Aubke, 2014; Christensen & Pedersen, 2011). Other than Michelin star, the list of top 50 restaurants of the world which is prepared by a restaurant magazine in England since 2002 is based on a voting system (Christensen & Pedersen, 2011). With a panelist group of 40 people consisting of professional chefs and restaurant owners (34%), food critiques (33%) and traveling gourmets (33%) with one president for every region in a geography of 26 regions, they vote secretly for max. 6 restaurant establishments in their own region and minimum 4 restaurant establishments outside of their region; voted restaurants are visited at least once in 1.5 years; each year one fourth of the panelists are renewed and they cannot vote for restaurants they work for, they own or have a financial interest in (Özdoğan, 2014; The World's 50 Best Restaurants; Çavuş et al., 2018; Christensen & Pedersen, 2011). Another French restaurant ranking guide is Gault Millau in which food quality, service and atmosphere are taken into account with a 20-point rating; rank 19th corresponds to 4 chef's hats (exceptional), ranks 17th and 18th correspond to 3 chef's hats (excellent), ranks 15th and 16th correspond to 2 chef's hats (very good), ranks 13th and 14th correspond to 1 chef's hats (good) while ranks of 10, 11 and 12 are considered as the ranking averages and the ones below 10 points are not taken into the list (www.gayot.com). The Good Food Guide ranks restaurants in England since 1951 through feedbacks of consumers as well as the assessments of experts such as restaurant owners, chefs, authors and food critics each year and rating criteria ranges between 1 and 10 points.

3. Methodology

In this study, factors that are important in ranking restaurant establishments within the scope of gastronomy tourism will be identified. With this purpose, document review and interview were utilized as data collection methods. Due to the character of the research problem, maximum variation and

snowball sampling methods were used. First of all, document review was conducted in order to analyze the materials related to the ranking of restaurant establishments. In the document review, comment websites were reviewed, transferred into the computer program and notes were taken. Semi-structured interview questions were created in the light of the information gathered from documents. In the interview form, it was indicated that the interview will take 70 minutes and that the interview was conducted with the purpose of identifying the factors that influence the ranking of restaurant establishments. In addition, permission was asked to record the interview, it was indicated that the information they give would remain confidential and interviewees were asked whether they had a question before starting the interview. A pilot test was conducted first on 14 restaurant owners. Reactions of the interviewees to the questions were examined and their levels of understanding the questions were taken into account. Interviews were conducted with food critics, gourmets, chefs and restaurant owners. During the interview, detailed questions were asked in order to obtain more explanation and information (Merriam, 2015) and interviews lasted 70 minutes on average. Other interviews were conducted with different persons in line with the suggestions of interviewees given during the interviews as well as with food and beverage managers in hotel establishments.

Interviews were conducted between May 1st and September 29th, and were continued until they started showing a pattern of repetition. Content analysis was conducted on data gathered through document reviews and interviews. First, data were organized, significant statements were coded, common aspects were identified by taking their meanings into account, the interrelated ones were put together and a code chart was drawn (Creswell, 2013; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Data set was reviewed a few times, variances that emerged in codes were taken into account and these were rechecked by different researchers (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999; Krippendorff, 2004). Codes were put together according to their themes by ensuring that these were at the same level in terms of the scope (Merriam, 2015). Data analysis was conducted beginning from the data collection stage.

4. Results and discussion

Table below shows distributions of the words related to themes in the ranking of restaurant establishments within the scope of gastronomy tourism. Codes falling under the same theme were put together and these revealed 5 themes: ranking according to food and beverage, ingredients, personnel, atmosphere and service.

Table 1
Distribution according to themes

Food and beverage (2.75-0.39)		Atmosphere (1.14-0.20)	
	• Creative		• Elegant
	• Innovative		• Artsy
	• Traditional		• Aesthetic
	• Local		• Music
	• Presentation		• Natural
	• Unforgettable		• Simple
	• Tasty		• Magical
	• Unique		• Themed
	• Harmonious		• Authentic
	• Perfect		• Illumination
	• Cooking		• Color
	• Wine		• Local
	• Visual		• Harmony

Table 1 **Continued**

Ingredients (1.95-0.35)	• Seasonal • Natural • Local • Fresh • Supply • Usage • Amount • Additives • Recipe • Storage	Service (1.26-0.14)	• Reservation • Tasting menus • Innovative • Perfect • Value • Transparent • Informative • Different • Balance • Quality • Loyalty • Hygiene • Welcoming • Order
Personnel (1.21-0.32)	• Investigative • Team • Innovative • Explorative • Experienced • Adaptable • Happy • Competent • Knowledgeable • Different • Respectful • Tolerant • Good-humored • Hospitable • Caring • Reliable • Education • Communication		

The most important theme in the ranking of restaurants within the scope of gastronomy tourism was revealed to be food and beverage. Food and beverage was followed by ingredients, personnel, atmosphere and service respectively as the most emphasized factors. When words related to food and beverage was analyzed, creative, innovative, traditional, local, presentation, unforgettable, tasty, unique, harmonious, perfect, cooking, wine and visual quality were found to be emphasized. The importance of creativity, originality of recipes and originality in traditional tastes with innovative approach was underlined in the ranking of restaurant establishments within the scope of gastronomy tourism. In addition to these, providing unforgettable, tasty, unique and perfect experiences by featuring local foods with a good presentation was revealed to be important. Cooking styles, wine compatibility and visual quality were also listed among factors that require attention. The second theme following the theme of food and beverage was ingredients in ranking restaurant establishments in scope of gastronomy tourism. When words related to ingredients that are used in these restaurants were analyzed, seasonal, natural, local, fresh, supply from local producers, usage, right amount, without additives, conformance to recipe and storage conditions were found to be among the emphasized words. The importance of using seasonal, natural, local, and fresh ingredients and easily supplying ingredients from local producers was emphasized for restaurant establishments to be included in the ranking systems. Using the right amount of ingredients and the conformance of products without additives to the recipe as well as the storage conditions were also among the underlined points. Third theme was identified as personnel. The words emphasized in relation to personnel were investigative, team, innovative, explorative, experienced, adaptable, happy, competent, knowledgeable, different, respectful, tolerant, good-humored, hospitable, caring, reliable, education and communication. For restaurant establishment to be included in ranking systems, their personnel need to be investigative, adaptable to team work, innovative, explorative, experienced, easy going people who love their jobs, who are also competent and skilled in their fields,

knowledgeable (about menu etc.), respectful, tolerant, good-humored, hospitable, caring, reliable, able to create difference with professional education as well as communication skills. Fourth important theme in the ranking f restaurant establishments was atmosphere. The theme of atmosphere included words such as elegant, artsy, aesthetic, music, natural, simple, magical, themed, authentic, illumination, color harmony, local character and harmony. For restaurant establishment to be included in the rankings, they need an atmosphere that is elegant, artsy, aesthetic, natural, simple, magical, themed and authentic. In addition, the illumination should to be adequate, music and color harmony as well as traces of local character should be present, and the ambiance needs to be compatible with the cuisine, guest types and the concept. The final theme in the ranking of restaurant establishments was service. Words related to the service theme were reservation, tasting menus, innovative, perfect, value (relation between paid price and received service), transparent, informative, different, balance, quality, loyalty, hygiene, welcoming and order. For restaurant establishments to be included in ranking systems, it was emphasized that they should have tasting menus as well as a reservation system, and that they should also be innovative and perfect in terms of service. Other emphasized requirements were transparent service, being informative about the menu and dishes, creating balance between service time and service style, placing importance on hygiene and a proper welcome.

5. Conclusion

When concepts related to restaurant establishments within the scope of gastronomy tourism were analyzed, 5 themes consisting of food and beverage, ingredients, personnel, atmosphere and service were found in relation with ranking. The most important theme was emphasized to be food and beverage, followed by ingredients, personnel, atmosphere and service.

Being innovative and creative in food and beverage as well as preserving the traditional recipes, and presenting and trying to discover local tastes that are about to be lost are found to be important for restaurant establishments to be included in ranking systems within the scope of gastronomy tourism. Today, tourists want to experience the local tastes in the destinations they travel to due to the increasing interest in local food together with innovative and creative approaches, and therefore establishments that serve local food are preferred increasingly (Aslan, Güneren, & Çoban, 2014; Erdem, Mızrak, & Kemer, 2017). Increasing the market share and entering into new markets are easier now for restaurant establishments thanks to innovative applications (Albayrak, 2017). Aroma of food and beverage together with visual components are seen as important factors in providing unforgettable, unique taste experiences together with harmonious beverages and cooking methods that appeal to the taste buds. Restaurants need to use seasonal, natural, local and fresh ingredients in right amount in their recipes in order to be included in the ranking systems within the scope of gastronomy tourism. What's more, supplying ingredients from producers with a focus on sustainability was underlined as an important factor along with buying products from the producers themselves, especially from local producers, absolutely rejecting to use ready-to-use products and being attentive about the storage conditions of these ingredients. Freshness, price, the proximity of the producer, the region, season's characteristics, weather conditions and product availability are quite important in restaurant establishments' decisions to buy local products (Çulha & Dağkıran, 2016). Local producer will be supported by preferring local products (Çavuş et al., 2018). Restaurant establishments need to employ people with certain qualities in order for them to be included in ranking systems; these qualities may be listed as investigative, self-improving, respectful, tolerant, good-humored, hospitable, caring, educated, constantly learning, creating difference, adaptable to team work, trying to create the cuisine of the future by

showing respect for traditional tastes, innovative, explorative, experienced, easy going, happy in their work life, knowledgeable about food and beverage, and able to communicate in a reassuring way. To be successful in today's conditions with increasing competition, different products are presented by restaurants to differentiate themselves from their competition rather than serving similar products, and there is an increasing number of restaurants using innovative applications along with increasing efforts from chefs to be innovative (Aksoy & Üner, 2016; Albayrak, 2017; Türksoy & Türksoy, 2007). Chefs have emphasized the importance of creating difference to be successful and they also indicated that they place much importance on research and development (Çavuş et al., 2018). Restaurants need an elegant atmosphere, playing a suitable music, decorated with artworks in an aesthetic way with color harmony and adequate illumination as well as including natural materials in a simple, magical, local, themes and authentic atmosphere in order to be included in the ranking systems in scope of gastronomy tourism. The first thing the guests feel when they enter a restaurant is its atmosphere and the factors of decoration, music, temperature, hygiene, smell, illumination, etc. could cause them to spend more or less time in the restaurant establishment (Sevtap et al., 2014). An innovative approach must be adopted such as e-menus where ingredients and stories of the dishes are written on cards for the restaurants to be included in ranking systems in scope of gastronomy tourism. It is important to have tasting menus, transparent and informative service while presenting different taste experiences, product differentiation and an effective reservation system. In the success of restaurant establishments which promote local foods and cultures (Zagralı & Akbaba, 2015), product differentiation was emphasized to be an important factor (Çavuş et al., 2018, Akoğlu et al., 2017). In addition, the balance in the relation of paid price and received service, the time of orders and properly welcoming guests are also quite important. Restaurant owners are innovating in areas such as taking orders, and guests' waiting and billing times (Birdir & Kale, 2014; Demirçiftçi, Akova, & Mamadi, 2016).

Data were organized in an efficient way and the themes of food and beverage, ingredients, personnel, atmosphere and service were created constituted. Data obtained through documents were confirmed and supported by the interviews. Findings were summarized and conveyed to the interviewees, their feedback and agreement on these results were received.

In this study, the factors that are effective in the rating of restaurant establishments are revealed. In this way, the activities of restaurant managers were determined in order to encourage, reward, and be preferred by consumers. Restaurant business managers need to consider food and beverage, ingredients, staff, atmosphere and service.

By taking these factors in account, gastronomic reference points will be identified for restaurant establishments and this will contribute in gastronomy tourism. A menu with local food and beverage, dishes with local products which change every day, a good planning from selecting ingredients to preparing dishes and chefs who are owners of the establishment have great importance in ranking restaurant establishments. Future research may be conducted with a wider sample through a questionnaire form that would be created by leaving out the factors which are insignificant in terms of concepts and percentages found in the themes. Since a rather subjective perception is involved due to differences in restaurant experiences, new ranking systems may be constituted by taking into account both comments and scores given by auditors.

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