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The Effect Of Service Interaction Orientation On Customer Satisfaction And Behavioral Intention: The Moderating Effect Of Dining Frequency

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships among interaction orientation, customer satisfaction and behavioral intention, as well as the mediating role of customer satisfaction between interaction orientation and behavioral intentions. A self-administered survey was conducted with 628 convenience samples. The empirical results indicate that interaction orientation has positive influences on customer satisfaction in first-time and frequent diners, interaction orientation positive affects behavioral intentions in frequent diners, and customer satisfaction positive affects behavioral intentions in first-time and frequent diners. In addition to insights on how restaurant promotion strategies should fit the needs of individual with different dining frequencies, other ideas to enhance the dining experience are also offered.

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Keywords: Interaction orientation, customer satisfaction, behavioral intentions, dining frequency

1. Introduction

Developing high quality lodging and dining experiences is the main aim of restaurant managers with regard to attracting consumers (Jensen and Hansen 2007). If consumers are satisfied with the food or service in a restaurant, they are more likely to re-visit it and thus increase the profits (Gupta et al. 2007). Therefore, the importance of customer satisfaction and re-purchase behavior (i.e., customer loyalty) is widely recognized in the hospitality field.

Moreover, due to technological advances and increased interactivity between firms and customers (Yadav and Varadarajan 2005), individual consumers expect companies to increasingly customize products and services to meet his/her specific demands. Scholars thus argue that an interaction orientation can enable businesses to refine their knowledge about consumer tastes and preferences (Srinivasan et al. 2002). In addition, Urban (2004) proposed that an interaction orientation can improve customer satisfaction, strengthening repurchase behavior and leading customers to become a firm's trusted

advocates. Consequently, the effective and efficient management of such interactions and the interfaces at which these occur are increasingly being recognized as sources of lasting competitive advantage.

However, few empirical studies examine how interaction orientation may influence both customer satisfaction and loyalty. Ramani and Kumar (2008) indicated that future studies should empirically survey the relationships among the above mentioned variables across many firms within an industry. Therefore, this empirical research investigates the relationships among interaction orientation, customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions across firms in the hospitality industry.

Namkung and Jang (2009) indicated that the level of frequency should play a moderate role among service stimuli (e.g., value), customer affect (e.g., customer satisfaction) and response (such as customer loyalty), suggested that an in-depth examination of the moderating role of re-purchase frequency is needed. Little research has yet been conducted into how frequent diners perceive their restaurant experience in terms of consumer-provider interactions, and how their perceptions differ from those of first-time diners. This study thus investigates how the level of dining frequency (first-time vs. frequently diners) moderates the relationships between interaction orientation and customer satisfaction/behavioral intentions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The relationship between interaction orientation and customer satisfaction

The idea of interaction orientation was first developed by Kumar and Ramani (2006), who stated that it reflects a firm's ability to interact with its individual customers and to take advantage of the information obtained from them through successive interactions in order to achieve profitable customer relationships. Interaction orientation in this study represents restaurants' ability to interact with individual diners and obtain information from them to maintain profitable and long-term relationships. It is composed of four main elements, as follows: (1) The concept of the customer, (2) Interaction response capacity, (3) Customer empowerment, and (4) Customer value management.

Meanwhile, customer satisfaction is the consumer's fulfillment response. It is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product of service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under- or over-fulfillment (Oliver 1999). Consumer satisfaction is an attitude change resulting from the consumption experience (McCollough et al. 2000). Satisfaction in this study is thus conceived as a fulfillment response employed to understand and evaluate the consumer dining experience.

Kumar and Ramani (2006) proposed that interaction orientation leads to high levels of customer satisfaction. For instance, studies have shown that empowering individual customers to develop their own unique experience enhances their satisfaction (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004; Urban 2004). Ramani and Kumar (2008), in a survey of 211 samples in 107 firms, found that a superior interaction orientation is likely to result in greater customer satisfaction. In other words, conscious efforts by a restaurant to develop and enhance an interaction orientation will result in greater customer satisfaction, and thus we propose out first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. Interaction orientation positively influences customer satisfaction

2.2. The relationship between interaction orientation and behavioral intentions

Behavioral intentions involve recommending the company to others, providing positive word of mouth (WOM), a willingness to behave as a partner with the organization, and remaining loyal to the company (Bowen and Shoemaker 1998; Reichheld and Sasser 1990). Customers who make a personal referral must not only believe that a company offers superior value, but also feel good about their relationship with it (Reichheld 2006). Kumar and Ramani (2006) indicated that firms develop an interaction orientation (such

as interaction response ability) in order to better plan marketing activities and maintain long-term customer relationships (i.e., increased loyalty). Ramani and Kumar (2008) proposed that an interaction orientation increases positive word of mouth by encouraging and enabling customers to refer the firm to new customers and new customers to the firm. Therefore, an interaction orientation is both specific and actionable, and can be adopted by firms to achieve superior performance with regard to factors such as loyalty. Consequently, we present our second hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2. Interaction orientation positively influences behavioral intentions.

2.3. The relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions

Customer satisfaction is also an important antecedent of behavioral intentions and actual behavior (Oliver 1999). It is generally believed that satisfaction leads to repeat purchases and positive WOM recommendations, which are the main indicators of loyalty. The marketing and hospitality management literature has paid much attention to the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty, and a number of studies have confirmed a significant positive relationship between them (Anderson and Sullivan 1993). Therefore, we assume that if consumers are satisfied with a product/service, they are more likely to continue to purchase it, and are more willing to spread positive WOM, and thus we propose our third hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3. Customer satisfaction positively influences behavioral intentions

2.4. The moderating effects: first-time customers versus frequent customers

Dining frequency in this study is how often a customer eats in a specific restaurant. Namkung and Jang (2009) indicated that the responses and perceptions of first-time customers should different to those of frequent customers when dining at a restaurant, such as when faced with unfair service or another unsatisfactory situation. For instance, frequent customers are more antagonistic with regard to unfair service and more likely to express an opinion. Lei and Mac (2005) surveyed 380 people and demonstrated that the frequency of using a bus services positively moderated the relationship between perceptions of the service evaluation (such as quality) and customer responses (such as loyalty). Ha and Jang (2010) examined 607 respondents and indicated that the level of familiarity was a moderator among customer value, satisfaction and behavioral intentions. They argued that familiarity implies dining frequency, as if consumers eat at a restaurant more often, they are more familiar with it. In other words, the higher the frequency of usage, the stronger the effect of service evaluation on dining experience, and we thus propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4. The relationships among interaction orientation, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions in first-time and frequent customer groups are different.

Fig. 1 shows the conceptual model of this investigation. It shows how customer evaluations of interaction orientation affect customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions.
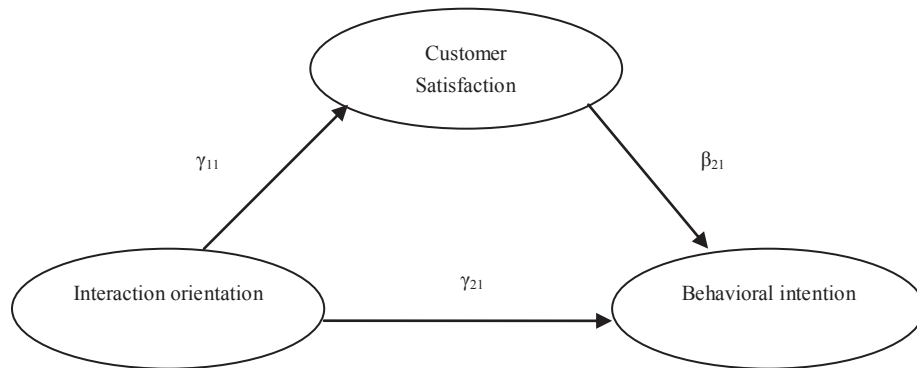
Figure 1 Research conceptual framework

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and data collection

This study examines the relationships among interaction orientation, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions based on full-service seafood restaurants in Penghu County (Taiwan). Ten popular restaurants were randomly chosen from 26 full-service local traditional seafood restaurants. After having obtained permission from each restaurant, a self-administered questionnaire was distributed based on convenience sampling by two research assistants to selected customers who were waiting for their checks after they had finished their meals. Each assistant distributed 10 questionnaires a day in one different restaurant for seven days, for a total of 70 questionnaires per restaurant, and each assistant visited five restaurants. A total of 700 questionnaires were thus obtained over a one month period (2009/7/1-2009/7/31). After eliminating incomplete and non-valid responses, a total of 628 questionnaires remained for use in this study, giving an acceptable response rate of about 89.71%. Subsequently, the sample was divided into two groups. One group was composed of respondents who were first-time diners (FT) (FT group, n=151), while the other group consisted of respondents who were frequent customers (FC) (FC group, n=477)[a].

3.2. Instrument development

The survey questionnaire for this study was composed of four parts. The first three parts contained three constructs related to customer restaurant experience: interaction orientation, customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. To measure the interaction orientation, this work adapted Ramani and Kumar's (2008) multi-item scales. In addition, when we asked customers to answer the questionnaire, certain interaction orientation items needed to be modified to fit the specific setting and customer perspectives. Interaction orientation was measured with four dimensions (the customer concept, interaction response capacity, customer empowerment, and customer value management) using a five-point scale (from 1: strongly disagree to 5: strongly agree) and based on the question "How much do you agree or disagree

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[a]   In   a   2009   dining   frequency   survey   of   pollster.com (http://www.enews.com.tw/news_view.aspx?id=INF_INFORMATION000000119), they argued that diners (36%) ate out once past one month. Therefore, the separate standards in this study to divide samples into two groups: diners eat in the restaurant at first-time, we terms first-time customers; and then twice or above in past one month, we terms frequent customers.

with the following statements?" Overall customer satisfaction with the restaurant experience was measured by three items based on Oliver (1999) and Namkung and Jang (2009). Respondent behavioral intentions, such as willingness to return, intention to recommend, and intention to say positive things, were also measured on the same five-point scale based on Namkung and Jang (2009). The measurement items used for this study are presented in Appendix A. Part four of the questionnaire gathered demographic data about the respondents (e.g., age, gender, education, marital status, employment, and monthly income) and dining-out related behaviors (e.g., the main reason for dining-out and dining companion(s)).

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics of the sample

The demographic details of the respondents based on two different groups, first-time and frequent customers. The proportion of male and female customers was roughly evenly split in both groups. The largest group of respondents were single (61%) and aged between 21-30 years old (30.8%) in the FC group, and were married (55.7%) and aged between 31-40 years old (31.8%) in the FT group. In addition, most respondents had a university education or above in both groups, and about one-half of the participants had a monthly income of less than NT $30,000 (first-time customers group = 53.6%; frequent customers group = 57.4%).

4.2. Measurement model

Table 1 Reliabilities and confirmatory factor analysis properties.

Construct (α)	Items	Standardized factor loadings(t)	Error	Composite reliability(CR)	Average variance extracted(AVE)
Concept of customer(.77)	CC1	.65(17.36)	.57		
	CC2	.77(21.56)	.41	.775	.536
	CC3	.77(21.56)	.41		
interaction response capacity(.85)	IRC1	.82(24.14)	.33		
	IRC2	.78(22.56)	.39	.854	.595
	IRC3	.71(19.85)	.49		
	IRC4	.77(21.94)	.41		
Customer empowerment (.88)	CE1	.82(24.46)	.32		
	CE2	.85(25.51)	.28	.880	.710
	CE3	.86(25.89)	.27		
Customer value management (.86)	CV1	.86(26.00)	.26		
	CV2	.87(25.28)	.25	.870	.690
	CV3	.76(21.75)	.42		
customer Satisfaction (.90)	SA1	.83(24.91)	.26		
	SA2	.87(26.77)	.25	.901	.753
	SA3	.90(28.59)	.42		
Behavioral intention (.92)	RI1	.86(26.72)	.26		
	RI2	.93(30.01)	.14	.923	.800
	RI3	.89(28.25)	.20		

$\chi^2(137)=595.93$, p<0.001; χ^2/df=4.350; RMSEA=.073; NFI=.98; NNFI=.98; PNFI=.78; CFI=.98; IFI=.98; RFI=.97; RMR=.034;

SRMR=.04; GFI=.91; AGFI=.87; PGFI=.66

This study uses confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the measurement model[b], based on Anderson and Gerbing (1988). First, we evaluate the results of CFA[c] to confirm the overall adequacy of the two-group model. The analysis of the results includes uncovering the uni-dimensionality, reliability, and validity of the three-factor measurement model before testing the structural model. As shown in Table 1, the level of internal consistency in each construct was acceptable. The composite reliabilities, ranging from .78 to .92, were also considered acceptable. In addition, all variance extracted estimates, which ranged from .53 to .80, exceeded the recommended .5 threshold (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Convergent validity was also confirmed, because all confirmatory factor loadings were higher than .50 and lower than .90, and all these were significant at the p level of 0.001. Finally, all indices of the measurement model were also examined and matched the suggested acceptance level of Jöreskog and Sörbom (1989).

This study performed discriminant validity analysis based on the recommendations of Anderson and Gerbing (1988) by limiting the correlation coefficient of the paired dimensions to 1, then performing a chi-square variance test of the limited and unlimited measurement patterns. If the chi-square value of the limited pattern exceeds that of the unlimited measurement pattern and reaches a level of significance, then both dimensions have discriminant validity. The results in table 2 shows that the chi-square values of the limited patterns did not exceed those of unlimited patterns and reached a level of significance, indicating that the discriminant validities among all dimensions were acceptable.

Table 2 Correlation matrix.

Construct	CC(SE)	IRC(SE)	CE(SE)	CV(SE)	SA(SE)	BI(SE)
CC	1					
IRC	.90(.02)	1				
CE	.80(.02)	.79(.02)	1			
CV	.76(.03)	.73(.02)	.78(.02)	1		
SA	.53(.04)	.45(.04)	.41(.04)	.45(.04)	1	
BI	.49(.04)	.46(.04)	.40(.04)	.45(.04)	.87(.04)	1

SE: standards deviation between dimensions

4.3. Structural equation modeling

Both the reliability and validity of all dimensions in this study were acceptable, and thus using a single measurement indicator rather than multiple ones should be viable. The dimension scores of the interaction orientation dimension measurement patterns during the first stage were averaged, and then the first stage dimensions were used as the multiple measurement indicators during the second stage. Goodness-of-fit indices demonstrated that the two group structural model fit the data reasonably ($\chi2(64)$=288.34 (p<0.001); $\chi2/64$=4.51; GFI=.92; NFI=.97; NNFI=.96; CFI=.97; IFI=.97; RMR=.027). The model's fit, as indicated by these indexes, was deemed satisfactory, and thus it provided a good basis for testing the hypothesized paths.

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[b] Based on Harman's single factor test result, six dimensions extracted from 19 items with exploratory factor analysis of principal component analysis method, accumulated variation explained is 22.53%, thus this study didn't have serious common method variance problem.

[c] Based on the argument of reviewer, the additional CFA was used to measure interaction orientation. The statistic results indicated that: (1) the item's t value (17-26.27) of each dimension (including concept of customer, interaction response ability, customer empowerment, and customer value management) was significant, (2) the range of CR (.76-.81) and AVE (.53-.71) were higher than the suggestion of the scholars, (3) the index (e.g., $\chi^2_{(59)}$=4.21; RMSEA=.072; NFI=NNFI=.98; RMR=.037; GFI=.94; AGFI=.91$\chi^2_{(137)}$=595.93, p<0.001; χ^2/df=4.350; RMSEA=.073; NFI=.98; NNFI=.98; PNFI=.78; CFI=.98; IFI=.98; RFI=.97; RMR=.034; SRMR=.04; GFI=.91; AGFI=.87; PGFI=.66) of the measurement model fit the argument of the scholars.
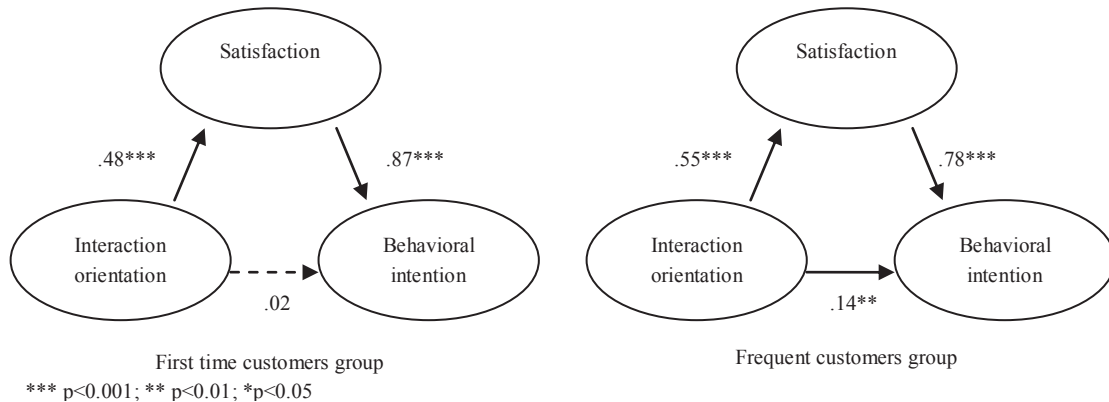
Figure 2 Results of structural equation model for first-time and frequent customers

In the first-time diners group, interaction orientation had a positive influence on customer satisfaction ($\gamma 11=.45$; $t=5.33$; $p<0.001$). However, interaction orientation did not have a significant and positive influence on behavioral intentions ($\gamma 21=.02$; $t=.36$; $p>0.05$). In addition, customer satisfaction had a significant and positive influence on behavioral intentions ($\beta 21=.87$, $t=9.74$; $p<0.001$). These findings indicate that for the first-time customers group, interaction orientation is a significant determinant of customer satisfaction, but it is not a significant predictor of behavioral intentions in a restaurant setting. For the frequent diners group, the proposed relationships among the constructs were all supported. Interaction orientation significantly influenced customer satisfaction ($\gamma 11=.55$; $t=10.65$; $p<0.001$) and behavioral intentions ($\gamma 21=.14$; $t=3.74$; $p<0.01$), and thus Hypothesis 1 was supported and Hypothesis 2 was partially supported. In addition, customer satisfaction ($\beta 21=.78$, $t=15.75$; $p<0.001$) was also found to be a significant predictor of behavioral intentions, and thus Hypothesis 3 was supported. These results demonstrate the importance of interaction orientation as a determinant of behavioral intentions, especially for the frequent diners group.

4.4. The moderating effects

This study tested the differences between first-time and frequent customers, as well as dining frequency's association with customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Chi-square differences ($\triangle\chi 2$) with one degree of freedom were used to compare the two models, constrained and unconstrained, for each of the three path coefficients ($\gamma 11$, $\gamma 21$, $\beta 21$; as Fig. 1). The $\chi 2$ value of the unconstrained model (the coefficients in each group were allowed to be freely estimated) was subtracted from the $\chi 2$ value of the constrained model, while the path coefficients were the same for both groups. The results of the moderating effect of dining frequency are shown in Table 3, and hypothesis 4 was supported.

Table 3 Moderating effects of first-time group versus frequent customers group.

Hypothesized path	Unconstrained model Chi-square(df=64)	Constrained model Chi-square(df=65)	Chi-square difference($\triangle$df=1)
H1: Interaction orientation → Customer satisfaction ($\gamma11$)	288.34	303.17	14.83
H2: Interaction orientation →Behavioral Intentions ($\gamma21$)	288.34	385.47	97.13
H3: Customer satisfaction →Behavioral Intentions ($\beta21$)	288.34	457.04	168.7

5. Discussion And Conclusions

The analytical results demonstrate that interaction orientation significantly influenced customer satisfaction for both the first-time ($\gamma11$=.45) and frequent customer groups ($\gamma11$=.55). The findings correspond to those of previous studies (Ramani and Kumar 2008; Urban 2004) that identified the positive relationship between customers and service providers as a determinant of customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Furthermore, interaction orientation significantly affected behavioral intentions for the frequent customer group ($\gamma21$=.14), yet no such effect was observed for first-time diners ($\gamma21$=.02). The weaker association between interaction orientation and behavioral intentions suggests that loyalty behavior (for example positive WOM) reduces with frequency, and that first-time customers may rely more on satisfaction level for loyalty formation than the frequent customer group.

Additionally, dining frequency positively moderates the relationship among interaction orientation, customer satisfaction and loyalty, which accepts the research suggestion of Namkung and Jang (2009). Consequently, it seems reasonable to suggest that more resources should be allocated to serving more frequent customers, since such customers are more likely to become loyal or satisfied if they experience good service.

Regarding the association between customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions, both groups supported the proposed positive relationship. As suggested in past research (Oliver 1999), high satisfaction ensures favorable behavioral intentions. Furthermore, dining frequency (first-time versus frequent customers) was observed to moderate the relationship between satisfaction and behavioral intentions. The significant chi-square differences demonstrated that customer dining satisfaction with the restaurant impacts favorable customer behavioral intentions significantly more in the first-time group ($\beta21$=.87) than in the frequent customer group ($\beta21$=.78). This result echoes the argument of Oliver (1999) that high satisfaction ensures positive behavioral intentions, such as WOM or repeat patronage.

5.1. Managerial implications

The findings suggest that restaurant managers should treat first-time and frequent customers in several different ways. First, in the relationship between interaction orientation and behavioral intentions, high perceived interaction orientation is associated with high dining frequency. Frequent customers who encounter high quality service interactions in a restaurant are likely to exhibit stronger behavioral intentions or more positive word of mouth with regard to that restaurant. Second, first time customers base their repurchase intentions mostly on their satisfaction with the overall restaurant experience. This finding indicates that restaurant managers should consider how to offer improved and more satisfying dining experiences to first time customers (including local foods, a party atmosphere, excellent service, and so on.), and thus strengthening their repurchase intentions. Therefore, considering the difference between

first-time and frequent customers allows restaurants to determine the unique needs of different groups and customize their service strategies accordingly.

5.2. Limitations and future research

As with any research, this study has certain limitations. First, data were collected from full-service dining restaurants only. Second, this study surveyed a relatively small number of respondents, drawn from restaurants in a single city, which may also reduce the generalizability of the findings. This study examines only one service industry, but future studies should consider other high contact service environments, such as hotels and retailers, and the study findings should be tested in these contexts. Third, the customer satisfaction is a cumulative valuation of prior transactions, first time and frequent customers might measure their satisfaction in different ways, thus future studies should clarify this potential problem. Fourth, common method variance might exist in this study, future studies should measure variables in different roles (e. g., interaction orientation could measured by managers and satisfaction measured by customers). Furthermore, the interaction orientation scale used in this study was adapted from Ramani and Kumar (2008). However, the scale of Ramani and Kumar was based on a business, rather than a consumer perspective, and future research should confirm the reliability and validity of this scale via a different empirical study.

6. Appendix A

Constructs		(Operational definition) Items
Interaction orientation	Concept of customer	(Every marketing activity in the restaurant and customers' reaction are all based on individual customer, and thus efforts should always be focused on people as individuals.)
		CC1 — 1. This restaurant provides diversity food and service to satisfy individual customer need.
		CC2 — 2. This restaurant consciously seeks to identify and acquire new customers individually.
		CC3 — 3. This restaurant observes customers' reactions to marketing activity at the individual customer level.
	interaction response capacity	(The ability to dynamical incorporating feedback from specific customer and other customers dining experience.)
		IRC1 — 4. This restaurant has systems in place that record each customer's dining experience.
		IRC2 — 5. This restaurant can identify all dining experience pertaining to each individual customer.
		IRC3 — 6. This restaurant analyzes previous consumer dining experiences at the individual customer level to predict future transactions from that customer.
		IRC4 — 7. This restaurant possesses dining information on individual customers at all times.
	Customer empowerment	(The degree of restaurant to encourage customers to provides suggestion or opinions for restaurant and others.)
		CE1 — 8. This restaurant encourages customers to provide suggestions of its products or services.
		CE2 — 9. This restaurant encourages customers to share opinions of its products or services with other customers.
		CE3 — 10. This restaurant encourages customers to participate interactively in designing products and services.
	Customer value management	(The extent to which the restaurant identifies and measure individual customer value.)
		CV1 — 11. This restaurant identify each individual customer has been contributing to its profits.
		CV2 — 12. This restaurant predicts what each individual customer will contribute to its profits in the future.
		CV3 — 13. This restaurant calculates the revenue generated as a result of every marketing activity from individual customer.
Satisfaction		(The degree to which customers' overall psychological state after dining in the restaurant.)

	SA1	14.	Overall, I am satisfied the dining experience at this restaurant.
	SA2	15.	I have really enjoyed the dining experience at this restaurant.
	SA3	16.	I am pleased to dining at this restaurant.
Behavioral intention		(The likelihood to which customers' come back, recommend and say positive evaluation to this restaurant.)	
	RI1	17.	I will come back to this restaurant in the future.
	RI2	18.	I will recommend this restaurant to my friends or others.
	RI3	19.	I would say positive evaluation about this restaurant to others.

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