

PERCEPTION OF NATIONAL AND FOREIGN TOURISTS OF THE SERVICE IN RESTAURANTS FROM TODOS SANTOS MAGICAL TOWN, MEXICO

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ABSTRACT

The magic town of Todos Santos is a strategic site for local development and is dependent on the tourist economy driven by national and foreign visitors. Restaurants in Todos Santos obtain raw materials locally to provide quality products for different food specialties. The quality of service (SQ) and customer satisfaction (CS) are two constructs that when evaluated are critical for any market. In this study, the perception and relationship between SQ and SC in the different restaurant specialties is evaluated, contrasting the perception between national and foreign tourists segments. Using 162 surveys, the constructs were evaluated using five dimensions: installations, accessibility, human capital, atmosphere, and food, where hypothetically food and human capital should be the main determinant. The results suggest that SQ and CS are perceived similarly between both segments, except in the Italian specialty in all its dimensions, and partially in Japanese. The food dimension was the highest value on average however, it was not significantly different from the rest of the dimensions. The SQ had a moderate positive impact on CS given the perception of diners by segment based on correlation analysis, the causal effect of which must be determined with detail.

KEYWORDS: Quality, Perception, Restaurants, Service, Satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

The magical towns are socio-strategic sites promoted by the Mexican federal government to develop the economy through sustainable and cultural tourism, with an emphasis on the value of local heritage (Rodríguez-Herrera et al., 2018). This policy implies the development of small restaurant establishments and hotel services. Todos Santos is a magical town located south of the Baja California Sur peninsula (Mexico) and is recognized for its microclimate that contrasts with the

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prevailing arid conditions in the region. This allows, on the one hand, the special cultivation of a variety of vegetables for a temperate and tropical climate, and due to its coastal condition, residents have access to marine resources such as sines and shellfish. These local resources are primary sources for various establishments offering a restaurant service. During the summer, the visits to national and foreign tourists increase in the town, impacting consumption in these local restaurants. Touristic consumption in restaurants is essential to sustain the local economy, therefore, service evaluation should be part of business strategy. However, the perceived quality of service (SQ) and customer satisfaction (CS) are two fundamental constructs that remain unexplored relative to these local establishments.

In the restaurant economic sector, the perception of SQ and the judgments about CS are relevant for decision-makers (Ryu, Lee, & Gon-Kim, 2012; Guzmán-López and Cárcamo-Solís, 2014; Vera and Trujillo, 2017; Kim, Seo, & Nurhidayati, 2019), because they lead to a desirable business profile based on the opinions of diners (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012). When experiencing a service, customers maintain a value judgment based on the different ways of perceiving and feeling during a process (Moliner-Cantos, 2001), in this way they form an opinion about companies, their products, and their services. Finally, customers respond to the loyalty of a restaurant and its recommendation, generating a positive impact on the company. The systematic analysis of the SQ and the CS allows evaluating from a strategic perspective the factors that beneficially impact an organization (Armstrong, 2012).

The relationship between SQ and CS has developed enormous attention within the marketing literature (Gacic et al., 2013; Muhamad, Hashim & Rozila, 2016; Monroy-Ceseña & Urcádiz-Cázares, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2019; Sartor, 2019) for their close and possibly direct relationship. Some authors consider that SQ has an impact on CS (Aaker & Jacobson, 1994; Gilbert et al., 2004; Gilbert & Veloutsou, 2006; Zárraga et al., 2018) and both constructions must be evaluated to establishments to recognize the service from the customer's perspective.

The SQ and the CS are two highly relevant indices that contribute to market positioning and help generate higher profits in any market. In this sense, the tourist restaurant market in the magical town of Todos Santos establishes an unprecedented scenario for the evaluation and comparison of both SQ and CS. The purpose of this work is to evaluate the customer's perceptions about SQ and CS in restaurants during the summer of 2018, comparing the segment of national and foreign tourists according to the type of food specialty of the restaurants.

DEVELOPMENT

Background and theoretical framework

Quality of service

The quality of service (SQ) is a construction that has evolved in its definition and has been studied in various ways, however, it is a benchmark at the business level (Armstrong, 2012). The diverse use of multiple dimensions included in the constructs prevents a concise definition. The multidimensional definition of SQ (Buttle, 1996; Ladhari, 2009) has been widely used and adapted to different industries (Fujun et al., 2007; Ladhari, 2008, 2009) given the particular characteristics of each business and each region. The work of Cronin & Taylor, (1994) it's a worldwide benchmark, where quality is defined as a form of attitude that is related to satisfaction and originates from comparing expectations with quality perceptions, when a customer has a service experience (Akbaba, 2006; Wilkins et al., 2007). The perceived quality of the service can be used at a strategic level by companies, in such a way that it contributes to the structure and functionality at the organizational level according to the factors that customers consider among their expectations, perceptions, and needs.

Regarding observational studies in the restaurant sector, some dimensions such as food and human capital have been perceived as the main factor. Namin (2017), cites in his research that the determining factor in the quality of service perceived by diners is food. According to their main findings, the offer of a healthy menu and accompanied by tasty foods become impressive criteria in the search for the satisfaction of diners in that industry. On the other hand, the Human capital dimension serves as a preponderant factor to guarantee the quality of the service offered according to Hernández-de-Velazco, Chumaceiro, & Atencio (2009) and Ryu & Han (2011). In contrast, Voon (2012) argues, according to his study on the quality of service in fast-food restaurants, that one of the main factors that influence customer perception is the influence of human capital.

Customer satisfaction

When reviewing the literature on customer satisfaction (CS), it is possible to find several approaches, one of them considers satisfaction as the result or response of the consumer experience. Authors such as Westbrook and Reilly (1987) define CS as an emotional response to experiences related to the purchase of certain products and services. The feelings of pleasure and

the satisfaction of expectations provoke a state of satisfaction in the diners, this leads to the loyalty of consumption (Zairi, 2000; Namkung, Cheong and Choi, (2011) and, as a process, brings with it a judgment of value that underlies the experience of consuming (Yi, 1991).

Authors like Spreng and Olshavsky (1993); Spreng, MacKenzie, & Olshavsky (1996) consider satisfaction as a post-purchase response (that equals or exceeds the consumer's wishes) since it is a sensation that derives once the consumption is faced with the rewards, the costs, and their expected consequence. Similarly, Mano and Oliver (1993) define SC as a post-consumer evaluative attitude and judgment that varies along a hedonic continuum.

Another perspective considers CS as a specific or cumulative transaction. According to the first approach, authors such as Halstead, Hartman, & Schmidt (1994), Evrard and Aurier (2004) affirm that CS focuses on the responses of customers to a particular transaction of a product or service, establishing a resulting psychological state of the shopping and consumption experience (post-election). In the second approach, satisfaction is associated with a cumulative transaction where the consumer's judgment involves a global evaluation of experiences over time, that is, a history of individual experiences, whether satisfactory or unsatisfactory (Vanhamme; 2002; Aurier, Evrard & N'Goala 2004).

Although the CS construct is widely used, its definition is not concise (Oliver, Rust, & Varki, 1997) and implies a variation within the measurement instruments (Gardial et al., 1994; Yi, 1991). However, CS is an essential part of marketing and plays a fundamental role in decision-making in the market (Oliver, Rust & Varki, 1997). In this sense, if companies have satisfied customers with their service offerings, they could maintain a level of competitiveness and persist or improve in the market.

Objective and hypothesis

The objective of this work is to evaluate the perceptions of diners about SQ and CS in restaurants in Todos Santos magical town located to the south of the Baja California Sur Mexico, comparing national and foreign tourists, according to the food specialty of the restaurants.

In particular, this research proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: The SQ and CS averages perceived by national diners differ from foreign tourists, according to the specialties of the restaurants.

H2: Food and human capital dimensions should be the principal determinant on SQ and/or CS of the restaurant's perception between national and foreign diners.

H3: Perceived SQ mean values have a positive impact on CS by diner segment as estimated by a linear correlation $r \geq 0.7$.

Methodology

Research design

The restaurant industry of Todos Santos, Mexico specializes in Italian, Mexican, and Japanese cuisine, including general international and seafood restaurants as well and these were based on the classification of the National Chamber of the Restaurant Industry and Seasoned Foods (CANIRAC, Monroy-Ceseña & Urcádiz-Cázares, 2019). The study population included diners over the age of 18 classified within the specialties described above and we defined national diners as diners living in Mexico and foreign diners as diners living in another country. The number and cultural variation of diners in this population is unknown; however, a focus group with staff and management estimated a total number of diners at about 6,885 per week (see table 1 for specialty targeting).

For this study, we collected data from June to August 2018. From this population of restaurant patrons, a random sample of 162 diners were surveyed based on a 26 item set of questions based on four dimensions proposed and adapted by Monroy-Ceseña & Urcádiz-Cázares (2019). The evaluated dimensions were facilities (infrastructure), accessibility, human capital, and atmosphere in restaurants, and we assumed equal weight on dimensions. The responses allowed us to measure the mean perception of Service Quality (SQ), such as Customer Satisfaction (CS) by dimensions. The survey measuring attitudes is based on the Likert scale (Hernández-Sampieri, Fernández-Collado & Baptista, 2014), which consists of a certain number of items (or questions) where each item is valued on the same continuous scale that relates to ordinal categories as a robust approach that the respondent best defines. The survey used the next scale: the value 7 represents Totally agree and the value 1 represents Totally disagree (without any category within the scale).

Additionally, we also provided space for comments about the global service and satisfaction experienced in the restaurant. Because the variable is assumed to be continuous, a sample size of at least 30 would be sufficient to justify the central limit theorem (Anderson et al., 2018) and make estimates of the mean of each dimension. In this study, a random sample of 162 diners (from 49 restaurants) was obtained.

Pilot survey, reliability and data validity

Once the survey and valuation scales for SQ and CS were designed, the next step was to explore the internal consistency of the survey (Hernández-Sampieri, Fernández-Collado & Baptista, 2014). Consequently, a pilot sample of 15 surveys (three per specialty) was conducted to establish internal consistency by estimating Cronbach's alpha (α) (Bonnet, 2002):

$$\alpha = \left[\frac{k}{k-1} \right] \left[1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^k s_i^2}{s_t^2} \right]$$

where Cronbach's α , k = number of items, s_i^2 = variance of item i , s_t^2 = variance of the sum of all items. This statistic is used to demonstrate the validity and reliability of surveys based on the Likert scale. A Cronbach alpha is valued between 0 and 1, where values above 0.70 (or 70%) is interpreted as an acceptable measuring instrument (Hernández-Sampieri, Fernández-Collado & Baptista, 2014). Our pilot survey showed the reliability of the instrument was 0.90 and Celina & Campo (2005) indicates this value supports a strong internal consistency.

Finally, to validate a study like ours, Tristan (2008) proposes organizing an evaluation panel composed of specialists in the task to be evaluated. In this way, two tasks were necessary 1) a review of specialized literature, and 2) a survey of experts. For the latter requirement, three professors with a doctor's degree in economic-administrative sciences and two restaurant administrators reviewed and validated the survey.

Table N° 1. Distribution of surveys in restaurants by specialty. Diners per week by specialty estimated by working with a focus group of management professionals per specialty

SPECIALTY	TOTAL RESTAURANT	EVALUATED RESTAURANT	DINERS / WEEK	SAMPLE SIZE (SURVEYS)
Mexican	31	6	4,200	39
Italian	5	4	300	25
Japanese	3	3	225	32
Seafood	8	4	1,440	33
International	12	4	720	33
Total	49	31	6,885	162

Source: Own Elaboration

Statistical analysis

To evaluate SQ and CS, the data was processed through IBM SPSS Statistics Software (version 23) to calculate the means of each dimension and specialties. A series of two-sample t-test with (unequal variances assumed, Anderson et al., 2018) was performed under the hypotheses previously indicated. The tests were performed under the assumption of normality and using a

significance level of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$). This allows evaluating whether a restaurant specialty on each dimension differs significantly between national and foreigner diners mean perception. To compare dimensions for overall restaurants, we performed a one-way analysis of variances (ANOVA) using the QS and CS means of dimensions (as a factor) by segment (national and foreigner dinners). For the ANOVA, we used a significance level of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$) and assumed unequal variances (Anderson et al., 2018). This was followed if significant test by a Tukey post-hoc test.

A Pearson linear correlation analysis was performed to compare the mean CS (dependent) and SQ perceptions (independent) consider the five specialties given each dimension ($n=25$) by segments (national and foreigner dinners).

Results and discussion

The mean values of SQ and CS perceived by both national and foreign diners are shown in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. National diners perceived SQ values range from 5.36 to 6.47, whereas foreign diners perceived SQ ranged from 5.64 to 6.58 (Table 2). According to the hypothesis test, all Italian specialty dimensions perceived by national diners were significantly ($p<0.05$) lower than perceptions from foreigner diners. Additionally, the accessibility dimension from Japanese restaurants had a significant lower value ($p<0.05$; Table 2) for national compared to foreign diners. Regarding the CS, national diners received a mean score range of 5.53 to 6.67, whereas foreign diners mean scores ranged from 5.66 to 6.82 (Table 3). Four dimensions (accessibility, human capital, atmosphere, and food) of CS of national diners for the Italian specialty were significantly lower than foreign diners (Table 3) and the mean food dimension was higher for national compared to foreign diners (Table 3). Two dimensions (facilities and food) of the Japanese specialty resulted in a significantly higher mean perception by national and foreign diners (Table 3). Regarding hypothesis H1, results suggest a partial acceptance.

Despite the socio-cultural and economic differences of the segments, the results reveal that SQ and CS of restaurants in Todos Santos magical town have been valued similarly, except where documented for the Italian specialty and partially of Japanese specialty. With the available information, it is difficult to determine precisely the reason why foreign diners perceive both SQ and CS with greater value. Some comments on this specialty made by national diners mention that the characteristics of the flavor ($n=5$), the price ($n=3$), and the portion size ($n=3$) are generally reasons for improvement for the restaurant. These characteristics could intervene in the average valuation

of the specialty. In contrast, comments from foreign diners (n=4) indicated an excellent or good service distinction.

Table N° 2. Comparing mean service quality (SQ) perceptions of national and foreign diners in restaurants from Todos Santos. Food specialties: MEX=Mexican, ITA=Italian, JAP=Japanese, SEA=seafood and INT=International. Significant differences within means (p<0.05) performed by two sample t-test*

	NATIONAL DINERS					FOREIGN DINERS				
	MEX	ITA	JAP	SEA	INT	MEX	ITA	JAP	SEA	INT
Facilities	6.28	5.69*	5.62	5.67	5.94	6.26	6.37*	5.70	5.91	6.22
Accessibility	6.22	5.80*	5.97*	5.64	6.42	6.21	6.40*	6.39*	5.70	6.14
Human capital	6.25	5.36*	6.04*	5.58	6.47	6.25	6.54*	6.35	5.64	6.20
Atmosphere	6.26	5.65*	6.10	5.98	6.35	6.39	6.36*	6.29	5.83	6.28
Food	6.18	6.08*	6.06	6.43	6.32	6.18	6.58*	6.07	6.38	6.46
Mean	6.24	5.72*	5.92	5.86	6.30	6.26	6.45*	6.16	5.89	6.26

Source: Own Elaboration

Concerning the hypothesis H2 about comparing the dimension perceptions for each segment, the ANOVA results indicated that there was sufficient statistical evidence to support that there was no significant difference between the average value of the dimensions under a confidence level of 95% ($p < 0.05$) both SQ and SC for each segment. This result allows us to reject the H2 hypothesis, and to clarify that the value of the mean both food and human capital dimensions are not higher than the rest of the dimensions. A salient point in this analysis is that each dimension is assumed to have the same weight. According to Dagger and Sweeny (2007), the weighting of the dimensions should not be considered equally, in this case, in the restaurant industry, the dimension of food should have more weight (or importance) than accessibility. In this study, we did not implement a different weight to allow comparison in the ANOVA, although, for future studies, the data is available for weighting.

Some works related to SQ and CS suggest the food dimensions are the main factor in service perceived. Namin (2017) cites in his research that, the main significant determinant in the quality of the service perceived by the diners is the food. According to their main findings, the offer of a healthy menu and accompanied by tasty foods, these become criteria of enormous relevance in the search for the satisfaction of diners in the industry. For the fast-food industry, one of the most important factors in any service process is related to human capital. Voon (2012) mentions in his study on the quality of service in fast food restaurants that one of the main factors affecting the perception of customers is the influence of human capital in its continuous interaction with customers, as well as the sale price assigned to the food offer. In contrast, this research shows the

food and human capital dimension is not the highest factor of the perception of the SQ and CS offered by people in restaurants in the Todos Santos magical town, and overall dimension were perceived similarly (keeping out that it is not fast food).

Table N° 3. Comparing mean customer satisfaction (CS) perceptions of national and foreign diners in restaurants from Todos Santos. Food specialties: MEX=Mexican, ITA=Italian, JAP=Japanese, SEA=seafood and INT=International. Significant differences within means ($p<0.05$) performed by two sample t-test*

	NATIONAL DINERS					FOREIGN DINERS				
	MEX	ITA	JAP	SEA	INT	MEX	ITA	JAP	SEA	INT
Facilities	6.47	6.13	5.67*	5.67	6.58	6.41	6.36	6.36*	5.96	6.10
Accessibility	6.41	5.60*	6.33	5.83	6.17	6.23	6.70*	6.55	5.58	6.33
Human capital	6.24	5.60*	6.29	5.58	6.50	6.55	6.60*	6.55	5.66	6.29
Atmosphere	6.59	5.53*	6.14	5.92	6.58	6.36	6.80*	6.27	5.76	6.57
Food	6.06	6.53*	5.81*	6.67	6.42	6.45	6.40*	6.82*	6.58	6.76
Mean	6.35	5.88	6.04	5.93	6.45	6.40	6.56	6.51	5.91	6.41

Source: Own Elaboration

According to hypothesis H3, about the impact of SQ on SC, Pearson's linear correlation coefficient was $r=0.80$ for national diner perception and $r=0.72$ for foreigner diner perception. Following Celina & Campo (2005), Hernández-Sampieri, Fernández-Collado & Baptista (2014) and Anderson et al. (2018), these values indicate a moderate positive correlation between both variables, in this case, the perceptions made by diners in the different specialties on each dimension. In this sense, the correlation indicates a positive impact of SQ on SC, although it is not necessarily strictly rooted in causality (Sureshchandar, Rajendran & Anatharaman, 2002; Anderson et al., 2018). Because the analysis is correlational in nature, it is recommended to carry out more specific studies that help to understand the possible causal relationship between both constructs. However, other correlational studies support the results of our study using similar techniques (Sureshchandar, Rajendran & Anatharaman, 2002; Muhamad, Hashim & Rozila, 2016) and in the same study region (Monroy-Ceseña & Urcádiz-Cázares, 2019). The results of this research can be used to guide companies to maintain and improve their services in the magical town of Todos Santos.

CONCLUSION

This work is a starting point for the strategic analysis of restaurants in the tourist destination of the magical town of Todos Santos, Mexico. In an unprecedented way, the perception of service quality (SQ) and customer satisfaction (CS) by segment is presented, between national and foreign tourists, which contributes both to future research and information for the development of restaurants.

The results show that both the SQ and the CS perceived among national and foreign tourists are similar, with the exception of Italian and partially Japanese food. In this item, hypothesis H1 is partially accepted. On the other hand, assuming that the dimension of food and human capital should be the main determinant in the perception of service and diner satisfaction, our results show that this dimension is not the main one (the most valued on average). The analysis of variance maintains that there is no significant difference between the dimensions. This perception was consistent in both domestic and foreign tourists. In this sense, hypothesis H2 is rejected. Finally, the correlation analysis indicates that the perceived SQ has a moderate positive impact on the CS in both segments surveyed, although it should not have a strictly linear causal relationship.

REFERENCES

Please refer to articles in Spanish Bibliography.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ABSTRACT

Please refer to articles Spanish Biographical abstract.