

Scape Ghost: Creating an Authentic Restaurant Experience

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SENIOR CAPSTONE PROJECT

Scape Ghost: Creating an Authentic Restaurant Experience

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Abstract: The goal of this paper was to define authentic restaurant experiences and to create a restaurant authenticity measuring model (RAMM) in order to confirm our definition and test the model's effectiveness. 15 best (excellent) and 15 worst (terrible) TripAdvisor reviews of 20 fine-dining restaurants were read, analyzed and recorded by the author of this paper, counting 600 TripAdvisor reviews in total. Our definition of authenticity as a degree to which a restaurant matches what it says it is (its promise, what customers expected) and what it actually is (its delivery, perceived experience) in terms of the categories of food, service (staff), atmosphere and convenience was supported. Moreover, our findings not only supported our theory about authentic experiences being perceived as more holistic, but also that authenticity is ultimately assessed by the customers in terms of perceived value for money.

Key words: restaurant industry, authenticity, experience economy, word-of-mouth, expectation-perception gap, authenticity gap, value for money, restaurant authenticity measuring model (RAMM)

INTRODUCTION

The Importance of Restaurant Scape

It is assumed that it takes a person between seven to thirty seconds to form an impression. Much like assessing a person, the human brain analyses a certain environment based on data, the sensory stimuli acquired, and then classifies it into categories (Bednar, 2017). Therefore, physical surroundings impact people's impression about a specific place and the quality of experience they can expect there (Reimer & Kuehn, 2005). These impressions form feelings that people connect to a place, "vibes" they pick up from the environment on a subconscious level, which reflect on their behavior (Dijksterhuis, Smith, Baaren, & Wigboldus, 2008). Similar like in the novel authored by Marcel Proust *In Search of Lost Time*, sensory stimuli such as smell, taste or music can recall a specific feeling or memory in individuals, which process is completely automatic and does not depend on individual's will. Hence the so-called Proustian phenomenon is in essence an involuntary emotional mechanism bypassing the rational mind, while the revived feelings linger (Mace, 2007). Since human action is driven both by emotions and rational deliberations (Lobel & Loewenstein, 2005), the impressions and feelings impact and determine one's actions and it is known that environment and emotional states influence various dimensions of purchase behavior (Sherman, Mathur, & Ruth, 1998). Lewin (1946) created a model analyzing individual and social behaviors based on dynamic interplay of perception, experience and behavior postulating that behavior is a function of people interacting with the environment - or simply put in an equation $B=f(p,e)$. This means that people's behavior and reactions, both conscious and unconscious, can be manipulated through making alterations to the environment they find themselves in (Cufaude, 2008).

Why Authenticity?

According to Gilmore & Pine (2007), due to the progression of economic value driven by technological advancements, authentic experiences are nowadays high in demand. Since products and services became widely available, standardized and therefore commoditized, consumers started to look for something which will not only be memorable, but which will also bring them emotional value – experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). This is far from a trivial matter, because it cuts deeply in the customers perception of value. Hence, since all extractable value has been exhausted from products and services, and customers have been conditioned with a propensity for experiences, which must be personalized in order to be meaningful, this is exactly the realm where companies nowadays must compete (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) (Prahalad & Krishnan, 2008)

Pine & Gilmore (1998) explained that an experience consists of four elements: education, entertainment, aesthetics and escapism, which are determined based on two variables: participation (active or passive) and connection (immersion or absorption). They also claim that “the richest experiences (...) encompass aspects of all four realms, forming a ‘sweet spot’ around the area where the spectra meet” and are best staged when the borders of the four realms are blurred.

However, the problem with experiences arises from a simple fact that they, by definition, are staged and therefore are susceptible to fakeness. Customers have a “radar” to detect phoniness and make purchasing decisions based on their assessment of how real or unreal a particular offering is (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). Therefore, experiences without authenticity will fail, as customers, due to the high-tech, high-speed and high-stress lifestyles seek genuine solutions or experiences paired with authentic relationships with companies providing solutions and/or experiences (Naisbitt, Naisbitt, & Philips, 1999). Only if the condition of authenticity is met,

customers will perceive genuine value, make repeated purchase and thus establish a relationship (Gilmore & Pine, 2007).

Authenticity Defined

The notion of authenticity could be observed from many different angles. According to Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Varga & Guignon, 2017), Kierkegaard states that authenticity happens when something “becomes what one is”. Similarly, speaking mainly of businesses, Gilmore & Pine (2007) define authenticity through so-called “real-fake matrix” in terms of a relationship between these two aspects: whether something is true to itself and whether it is true to others.

In a restaurant, patrons’ overall impression is not solely based on the physical attributes of the space, since their perception of the value, which then consequentially determines the restaurant’s success, lies in a sum of various elements such as food, service (staff) quality, atmosphere, convenience and value for money (Haghighi, Dorosti, Rahnama, & Hoseinpour, 2012) (Pecotić, Bazdan, & Samardžija, 2014) and could also be impacted by other external factors - reputation and image influenced by word-of-mouth, word-of-web etc. The reputation, image and brand promise also form the guest’s expectations and to a degree perception (Ohtonen, 2015). Moreover, one could argue that there is an additional, “fifth element” that in a way encompasses all of these elements and binds them together in harmony, forming and fortifying the overall impression in guests’ minds – a restaurant’s personality, identity or authenticity which “hovers” and “ghosts around” in the consumer community as the word-of-mouth.

Hence, we propose an additional definition of restaurant’s authenticity and an evaluation model based on the mentioned concepts of authenticity formulated by Kierkegaard (Varga & Guignon, 2017) and Gilmore & Pine (2007), based on restaurant’s personality/identity, i.e. authentic experience which is a combine of food, staff quality, atmosphere and convenience determined

by customers and reflected in the word of mouth. Consumers, through a combination of deliberation and emotion, can quickly assess the authenticity gap, i.e. between what the restaurant truly is (in terms of food, service, atmosphere and convenience) and what it says it is. If there is no such gap, the restaurant will be labeled as authentic, since the customers' expectations have been satisfied, which they assess in terms of value for money. However, if authenticity gap exists, the guests will be confused and frustrated due to inconsistency between expectations and perception. In service industry, this gap is also referred to as "expectation-perception gap", was firstly introduced by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1988) and is now, to the best to our knowledge, used for the first time in order to define authentic restaurant experiences.

In this fashion, it is necessary to thoroughly examine customers' expectations, which are formed by the elusive "concordance of the four elements" reflected in the "fifth element", i.e. WoM. Consumer expectations are not only impacted by what a restaurant says it is, but also by the culture and society the customers are from, by their values, assumptions, beliefs, their previous experience, their own self-image, etc., all "hovering" in word-of-mouth. For example, when speaking of authenticity of a USA-based Mexican restaurant, local guests would assess the food element there on the basis of "how much does this food fit my expectation of what Mexican food is, based on growing up and having taco day at high school or eating at Taco Bell?" (Gan, 2015). Ultimately, when evaluating food, service, atmosphere and convenience, it is the customer who decides on what is authentic (Christ, 2015) - whether there is a discrepancy between "theory and practice", whether the authenticity (expectations- perceptions) gap exists or not. (Appendix, Diagram 1). The customer, based on his/her assessment of the validity of word-of-mouth, further feeds it with his online and offline contribution and sharing.

It was mentioned before that this discrepancy, these authenticity cracks or gap, lead to presumably mostly negative feelings - confusion and cognitive dissonance. However, if there

is such a thing as “dissonance”, it means that there is the opposite – harmony, concordance – which can be in some cases mathematically or “objectively” measured, for example in music. The listener can in most cases clearly hear when something is off tone because its frequency is different and does not match all the other surrounding frequencies. Thus, if authenticity is defined as harmony or consistency in what one says it is and what one actually is (from the point of view of customer expectations), it could then be said that the lack of authenticity is the absence of harmony in these elements.

However, quality measuring is not this simple or easy, particularly in a complex setting of a staged restaurant experience (Douglas & Connor, 2003) done for the purpose of extracting economic value.

Since Pine & Gilmore (1999) make analogy between business and staged theatric performance, a good analogy could be a ballet act. When such performance is well-rehearsed and coordinated, the spectators get immersed in the performance or experience, and do not notice particular production elements which were separately planned and enacted, but they rather observe it holistically. However, if one of the elements is faulty (for example, a clumsy or sloppily dressed dancer), this element can break the whole charm, bring the spectators back to reality and cause mixed feelings about the success of the performance. Even though the orchestra played extraordinarily, the costumes were beautifully designed, the lighting and scenography were just right – it does not matter, because the spell was broken.

To sum up, this could mean that authenticity, in terms of restaurant experience, could potentially be defined as harmony, concordance, smooth blending of the all the functioning elements, a seamless performance. The lack of authenticity in customer’s minds is caused by authenticity cracks, the service breakdowns which consequentially break the performance. We believe that customers evaluate authenticity based on their own experience of concordance vs.

dissonance in the staged business performance. Finally, they choose to reward the authenticity of their experience in terms of value for money.

The Goal

The goal of this paper was to firstly define authenticity in terms of restaurant industry which was achieved through secondary research. Secondly, it was to create an authenticity measuring model for the restaurant industry (in order to confirm our definition of authenticity) and test its effectiveness.

It was established that authenticity could be defined as concordance or harmony, smooth blending of the all the functioning elements, a seamless performance, that is, a degree to which a restaurant matches what it says it is (its promise) and what it actually is (its delivery) in terms of the categories of food, staff, atmosphere and convenience. Satisfying customer expectations, which are also impacted by various external factors, is ultimately reflected in terms of perceived value for money. For instance, if a customer had a positive experience with the elements of these four categories, their overall experience will be positive since it would mean that their expectations have been met or exceeded. Lastly, the customer will decide whether or not this experience was worth the monetary amount that has been charged.

This paper wanted to test this theory by analyzing 600 restaurant reviews found on TripAdvisor, and in order to achieve this purpose, our primary idea was to introduce a measuring model similar to DINESCAPE which would, instead of simply focusing on the physical environment and its elements such as facility aesthetics, ambience, lighting, service product, layout, and social factors (Ryu & Jang, 2008) , focus on customers' satisfaction with the entirety of their dining experience, which is eventually reflected in terms of their perception of restaurant's authenticity and rewarded in terms of value for money. Therefore, we developed Restaurant Authenticity Measuring Model (RAMM).

METHOD

Developing the Restaurant Authenticity Measuring Model

This hybrid model was constructed thanks to the inspiration found in several different research papers and books.

FOOD	STAFF (SERVICE)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ingredients (freshness, seasoning, compatibility of ingredients) • Presentation (aesthetic appeal of the meal) • Taste (flavors, individual liking) • Portion size • Food temperature (a cold dish, undercooked, well-cooked, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliability (ability to perform promised service independently and accurately) • Responsiveness (willingness to help customers and provide prompt service) • Assurance (knowledge and courtesy of employees and ability to convey trust and confidence in service provider) • Empathy (caring and individual attention provided by employees to its customer, listening to needs, good communication) • Attempt at service recovery (display of effort in fixing a service breakdown)
ATMOSPHERE	CONVENIENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interior design, seating comfort • Intangibles (music, smell, noise, commotion) • Other guests • Entertainment, education (was the meal/dining experience educational/entertaining, efforts done by staff to educate/entertain customers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location (establishment easily found, access to transportation/parking, easily reachable) • Reservations (simplicity and efficiency of the reservation process) • Menu design (variety of F&B offer, originality/innovation of meals, being able to accommodate dietary restrictions, understandable menu)
AUTHENTICITY	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value for money (was the experience worth the money) • Expectations (comparison of the experience with previously conceived notions) • Experience (was the experience positive/negative overall) 	

Proposed Restaurant Authenticity Measuring Model (RAMM)

The categories “Food”, “Staff”, “Atmosphere” and “Convenience” were chosen based on the findings of Haghghi, Dorosti, Rahnama & Hoseinpour (2012) (2012), Pecotić, Bazdan, and Samardžija (2014) and Khazaei, Samiey, Manjiri, & Najafi (2014). We decided to add the

fifth category, “Authenticity”, to this model in order to try to prove our theory that the degree of customer satisfaction with the aspects mentioned under other four categories is ultimately reflected in the elements of this final category.

Under the category of “Food”, we decided to put the attributes of “ingredients”, “presentation” and “taste” based on a model used in the research paper “Split Smart Casual Restaurants: Are We Doing the Real Thing” authored by Pavković (2018) since these attributes are deemed to be the key descriptors of the food category.

Under the category of “Staff”, we decided to put the attributes such as “reliability”, “responsiveness”, “assurance” and “empathy” based on SERQUAL questionnaire’s five dimensions of service quality established by Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1991) since this model is popularly used to determine guest satisfaction with the service provided.

Based on Pecotić, Bazdan & Samardžija (2014) we included “interior design/seating comfort” and “intangibles” in the category of “Atmosphere” since these two attributes are reported to embody the core aspects of a restaurant’s atmosphere.

Lastly, under the category of “Convenience”, we decided to add the attribute of “location” based on the research of Luo & Xu (2019) since their model is one of the few that features “location” as an important component impacting guest satisfaction with their restaurant visit.

In order to enhance and complete this model, after doing a prototype sampling of 40 restaurant reviews on TripAdvisor, we decided to add the following attributes to the four categories since it seemed they were frequently mentioned in the reviews but weren’t covered by our initial model.

Under the “Food” category we added “food temperature” and “portion size”.

Under “Staff” we added “attempt at service recovery”.

Under “Atmosphere” we added “entertainment/education” and “other guests”.

Lastly, we added “menu design” and “reservations” under “Convenience”.

Choice of Data

For the purpose of this research, we chose to focus on 20 USA-based, fine dining gourmet restaurants, randomly picked out from a list at the end of the book “Smart Casual: The Transformation of Gourmet Restaurant Style in America by Alison Pearlman (2013). We chose the book “Smart Casual” as our starting point since its author brings a proven quality sample of high-end dining establishments - the restaurants in question are not only known as leaders in the restaurant industry, but also known for delivering authentic experiences to their customers in one of the most mature markets worldwide. For instance, out of those 20 restaurants, 10 of them happened to have Michelin stars and 5 were featured as Michelin Guide restaurants. Since they are already a part of the experience economy model and serving a mature market, we believe that analyzing such type of restaurants would best help our research in order to explore our definition of authenticity.

Data Analysis Process

After picking out 20 restaurants from Pearlman’s book, we looked at 15 best (excellent, 5*) and 15 worst (terrible, 1*) TripAdvisor reviews for each restaurant, counting 600 TripAdvisor reviews in total. The reviews were written in English and did not have to originate from a specific time period since that variable was irrelevant for this research.

Having read and analyzed each review individually, we then assessed each review’s overall impression for every attribute of the five categories from the model. We then attributed remarks such as "positive", "negative" or "n/a" (not applicable) depending on whether this particular attribute was mentioned in the review in a positive or a negative light, or not mentioned at all. For the attribute of “expectations”, we attributed remarks such as "exceeded", "met", "not met", "n/a" (not applicable).

These remarks were recorded in two separate Google Sheets; one was designated for the group of the best reviews (people who had a 100% excellent experience), while the other one contained the worst reviews group (people who had a 100% terrible experience). Data collection had been done during the period from the 9th of March, 2020 until the 19th of April, 2020. All the reviews have been read, analyzed and recorded by the author of this paper. Finally, the data was later combined in one general MS Excel sheet and analyzed using Minitab statistical software.

RESULTS

General Impressions

After obtaining results, it was interesting to observe that, across both groups, the total number of the attributes mentioned was greater by 669 mentions when it comes to the worst reviews group compared to the best reviews group (2782 vs. 2113 mentions).

Likewise, the total of not-mentioned attributes (“not applicable”) was greater by 669 mentions when it comes to the best (excellent) reviews (3587 vs. 2918 not mentioned). Another interesting find was that the best reviews did not fail to mention negative attributes and similarly, the worst reviews did not fail to mention positive attributes of people’s dining experience. However, the number of positively mentioned attributes in the worst reviews group was 388, while that number was only 99 when referring to negative attributes in the best reviews. (See Table 1 and Table 2 under “Appendix”).

Overall Negative Attribute Ranking

Furthermore, out of 600 reviews overall, “expectations” and “value for money” were the attributes that had the greatest number of negative mentions (45.17% for expectations and 43.16% for value for money). Interestingly enough, they were followed by “assurance” with 35.33% negative mentions. Then continued “reliability” with 34.83%, “taste” with 31.33%, and “responsiveness” and “empathy” with 30.83% for both. They were followed by “ingredients”

(24.5%), “menu design” (17.83%), “entertainment /education” (16.83%), etc. (Appendix, Table 4).

Overall Positive Attribute Ranking

On the other hand, the attribute that was the most praised overall was “taste” (57% of mentions), followed by “reliability” (40.83%) and “expectations” (38%). Then, “entertainment/education” got the fourth place with 29.5% of overall positive mentions, was followed by “Interior design” (28.33%) and then “assurance” (27%) and “empathy” (24.83%), etc. Here it was interesting to see that, compared to negative mentions, “expectations” got the third place and “value for money” did not even manage to get in the top 10 most frequent positive mentions (Appendix, Table 5).

Overall N/A Attribute Ranking

The attribute that was the most frequently neglected in the reviews was “Other guests” (91.5% of comments), followed by “food temperature” (90.33%), “location” (85.33%), “portion size” (83.17%) and both “attempt at service recovery” and “reservations” at 82.5%, etc. “Value for money” and “expectations” got 34% and 16.84% respectively which puts them in top 5 attributes from the bottom of the not-mentioned attributes list, signifying they were substantially mentioned in the reviews. (Appendix, Table 6).

The Relationship Between Expectations and Value for Money

When examining the relationship between expectations and value for money, 59% of reviews mentioned both “expectations” and “value for money” whether in positive or negative terms, and 9% of reviews did not mention them at all. 117 reviews (19.5%) mentioned both attributes in a positive way, while 209 (34.83%) reviews mentioned them both in a negative connotation. 24.66% of reviewers only reflected on their “expectations”, without mentioning “value for money”, and vice versa, this was the case for 7.5% of instances that have mentioned “value”

and not “expectations”. This means that 91% of reviews did evaluate their experience in terms of either “value for money” or “expectations” or both.

Another interesting part was that 22 reviews (3.66%) reported negative “value for money” but met/exceeded “expectations”, and it was the other way around for 3 reviews (0.5%).

(Appendix, See Table 7).

DISCUSSION

When we compared the difference between the number of mentioned attributes across both groups of reviews, the result showed that there were 669 more mentions related to the worst review group (2782 mentions for terrible reviews vs. 2113 mentions for excellent reviews). Also, we found that excellent reviews did not fail to mention negative attributes (99 mentions), as the worst reviews did not fail to mention positive attributes (388 mentions) of people’s dining experience. These results would mean that indeed people who had a positive experience tend to look at the entire experience in more general terms (more holistically), and people who had a negative experience tend to dissect it in order not only to explain what was done right, but also to state where exactly the authenticity spell was broken, that is, where a restaurant failed to deliver on their promise and meet or exceed the patrons’ expectations.

Findings related to a difference in placement of attributes across overall positive, negative and n/a rankings would support Gilmore & Pine’s (2007) theory of people’s desire for authentic, holistic experiences. It would mean that diners in up-market restaurants are educated, sophisticated and informed who are attracted and are willing to pay for the entire “performance”. They do not only want to be wowed by the food and to be treated nicely and respectfully by their service providers, but they also want to have a fun, transformational learning experience and taste a variety of ingredients and their innovative, creative combinations.

It is no wonder then that patrons are frustrated when some attributes of the performance package have not been delivered according to their expectations and that, conversely, they were satisfied when their expectations have been fulfilled, especially since they are charged steep prices. Sometimes, even if their overall experience was positive (i.e. when the reviewer left an excellent review), patrons do mention value for money in a negative context, often referring to a feeling of guilt associated with spending so much money on a meal, which they would then somehow try to justify to themselves and to the person reading the review. For example, they would use terminology such as “to splurge”, “to spoil oneself”, “an investment”, “dig deep into one’s wallet”, or they would openly say things such as “I was feeling guilty about spending that much money on a meal when there are so many hungry people out there”, “it was pricey”, “expensive”, “overpriced”. This could perhaps help to explain those 22 reviewers who said their expectations were met or exceeded, but that value was negative.

Also, what we noticed when reading terrible restaurant reviews was that reviewers often mentioned Hans Christian Andersen’s tale “The Emperor’s New Clothes” when referring to their negative dining experience. This could mean that their expectations were not met, that they were let down and felt like “the emperor was naked”, that something was not right (i.e. they noticed authenticity cracks). On the contrary, when commenting on their excellent dining experience, people used vocabulary which could normally describe spiritual and transformative experiences, e.g. “heaven/heavenly”, “out of this world”, “magic moment/magical”, “I can’t explain it”, “life-changing”, “unforgettable”, “a dream”. The choice of words and metaphors not only imply the elevated or “metaphysical” aspects of their expectations and perceptions, but also support Gilmore and Pine’s (2007) description of the nature of authentic experiences as being transformative and almost spiritual. Hence the drama when the performance spell is broken.

Moreover, the attributes of “expectations and “value for money” were ranked the highest overall by customers in terms of evaluating negative experience. On the other hand, when looking at the number of positive comments in regards to “value for money” and “expectations”, we noticed that they were not at the very top of the list as it was the case with these negative mentions. Also, when considering the number of reviews which included both “expectations” and “value for money”, there were more results that mentioned them in a negative way compared to the cases when both attributes were deemed to be positive.

These results would support our theory that customer satisfaction (in terms of these functional attributes, having a seamless, holistic experience and having customers’ expectations fulfilled), is eventually reflected in customers’ assessment of value for money. After seeing such results, we got the impression that the more expensive a restaurant is, the more the patrons expect from the entire experience in terms of its excellence in order to justify incurred cost. This would mean that high prices therefore make patrons more sensitive to any authenticity cracks, any breakdowns in the whole experience, because, when their expectations have not been met, they feel cheated. On the contrary, when the overall experience was well-executed, patrons do not seem to mention these two attributes as much.

Furthermore, it was interesting to see that the main source of customer’s dissatisfaction were the attributes related to “Staff”, namely “assurance” and its runner-up (by only 3 mentions) “reliability. This would point out to us that the guests not only mostly resented not being able to feel confident in and to trust their service providers, the staff, but that they also resented their inability to perform promised service independently and accurately. This was a particularly interesting discovery since this lack of trust could be directly related to “smelling” phoniness, i.e. the lack of trustworthiness, being genuine and true to oneself – authentic. Since “reliability” got the second place, it would mean that patrons appreciate when staff makes effort to meet and exceed customer expectations and do notice when this is not the case.

To sum up, it appears that the attributes that patrons care about the most are “taste” (the restaurant’s core product - food), then “reliability”, “assurance”, “empathy” and “responsiveness” (staff/service). Then follow “ingredients”, “entertainment/education”, “interior” and “menu design” (the attributes linked to educational and transformational part of customers’ dining experience). These attributes are then judged by the customers in terms of whether they have or haven’t satisfied their expectations and are deemed deserving or undeserving of the monetary value that was paid for them.

Ultimately, besides the restaurant’s core product, the food, this would mean that undeniably it is the people (the staff), the performers of the illusion, who can make or break the spell, the entire dining experience, and that educational and innovative parts of this experience add to its value.

Moreover, another finding worth mentioning would refer to a personal impression of the author formed while collecting data from TripAdvisor reviews. Namely, we would read a certain amount of customers’ reviews (word-of-web) for each restaurant and then, as it happens with any other customer, this would help us form a general impression about the restaurant’s personality/ identity. Then, we would research this restaurant’s photographs, websites and social media accounts to find proof which would support our initial hunch. We have realized we were not wrong in a vast majority of cases which could confirm that authenticity, as restaurant’s personality or identity, does “hover” and “ghost around” in word-of-mouth, or in this case “word-of-web”.

Finally, we believe it is worthy to reflect on the Restaurant Authenticity Measuring Model (RAMM). This research initially had two goals: defining authenticity in terms of restaurant industry which was, as it was mentioned in “The Goal” paragraph, achieved through secondary research and was now confirmed through primary research, and to test Restaurant Authenticity Measuring Model and its effectiveness in evaluating restaurant authenticity. Based on the

obtained results after using this model, we believe RAMM has adequately served us in finding support for our initial theories about authentic experiences in the restaurant industry, i.e. that authenticity can be defined as concordance or harmony, a seamless performance, smooth blending of the all the functioning elements of a restaurant (food, service, atmosphere and convenience). More precisely, that authenticity could be described as a degree to which a restaurant matches what it says it is (its promise, what customers expect) and what it actually is (its delivery, customer perception of the experience they had) in terms of those four categories. Moreover, our findings not only support our theory about authentic experiences being perceived as more holistic, but also that authenticity is ultimately rewarded by the customers in terms of value for money, i.e. if the performance of the dining experience was seamless, value for money was either brought up less frequently or it was assessed as positive. However, it was interesting to see that some of the attributes such as “other guests”, “portion size”, “food temperature”, “attempt at service recovery”, and “reservations” , which were later added to the RAMM after our prototype sampling of 40 restaurant reviews, were actually ranked among the top ten least frequently mentioned attributes. Therefore, even though this model has adequately served us for the purpose of this particular research, we would propose its further exploration and development and that of its attributes.

LIMITATIONS

TripAdvisor reviews have been used as data source for the purpose of this research. Even though TripAdvisor is a commonly used public platform when it comes to making an informed decision on where to dine, there is a possibility of questionable validity of the data from this platform. Although TripAdvisor has recently made their rules stricter, no one can actually guarantee that a person who has left a review on the platform has also dined in that reviewed restaurant. Another limitation would be the author’s subjective assessment and interpretation

of these reviews - we had to work with the data that was available to us and we tried to interpret it to the best of our ability.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

It would be interesting to see the restaurants' perspectives on this topic – what efforts do restaurants invest in managing customers' expectations, what is their opinion on excellent online reviews in terms of their impact on potential new customers and setting their preconceived notions.

Another possible topic would be to examine the language used in online restaurant reviews to describe patrons dining experiences and to analyze the difference in terminology with regards to the best and the worst reviews across different attributes of a dining experience.

Another suggestion would include the implementation of a 5-point Likert-scale when it comes to the assessment of category attributes since this would lead to more in-depth results with regard to determining a degree of patron's satisfaction with a certain aspect (instead of having it simply marked as "positive", "negative" or "not applicable"). Additionally, we believe that exploring guests' satisfaction by giving them a 5-point Likert scale survey (based on RAMM) immediately after their dining experience would significantly decrease "not-applicable" group of answers and again, would provide the researchers with more accurate data.

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APPENDIX

Diagram 1 – Authenticity (Expectation – Perception) Gap

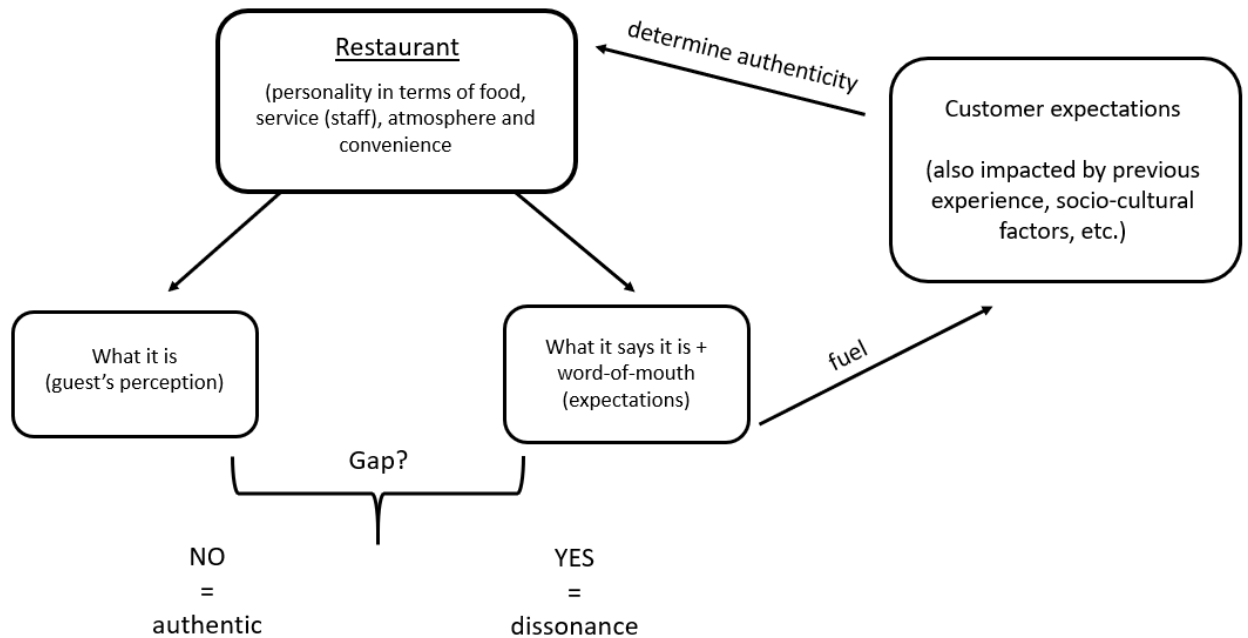


Table 1 – Best (Excellent) Reviews

BEST (EXCELLENT) REVIEWS	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	N/A	P %	N %	N/A %		
Ingredients	112	1	187	37.33	0.33	62.33		
Presentation	59	0	241	19.67	0	80.33		
Taste	286	0	14	95.33	0	4.67		
Portion size	19	7	274	6.33	2.33	91.33		
Food temp	9	0	291	3	0	97		
Reliability	206	4	90	68.67	1.33	30		
Responsiveness	108	3	189	36	1	63		
Assurance	129	5	166	43	1.67	55.33		
Empathy	112	3	185	37.33	1	61.67		
Attempt at service recovery	4	0	296	1.33	0	98.67		
Interior design/seating	132	6	162	44	2	54		
Intangibles (music, smell, noise, commotion)	114	6	180	38	2	60		
Other guests	10	4	286	3.33	1.33	95.33		
Entertainment/Education	164	1	135	54.67	0.33	45		
Location	47	5	248	15.67	1.67	82.67		
Reservations	16	16	268	5.33	5.33	89.33		
Menu	123	6	171	41	2	57		
Value for money	135	32	133	45	10.67	44.33		
Experience	300	0	0	100	0	0		
Expectations	EXCEEDED	MET	NOT MET	N/A	EXCEEDED %	MET %	NOT MET %	N/A %
	126	102	1	71	42	34	0.33	23.67

Table 2 – Worst (Terrible) Reviews

WORST (TERRIBLE) REVIEWS	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	N/A	P %	N %	N/A %		
Ingredients	31	146	123	10.33	48.67	41		
Presentation	27	94	179	9	31.33	59.67		
Taste	56	188	56	18.67	62.67	18.67		
Portion size	3	72	225	1	24	75		
Food temp	0	49	251	0	16.33	83.67		
Reliability	39	205	56	13	68.33	18.67		
Responsiveness	36	182	82	12	60.67	27.33		
Assurance	33	207	60	11	69	20		
Empathy	37	182	81	12.33	60.67	27		
Attempt at service recovery	13	88	199	4.33	29.33	66.33		
Interior design/seating	38	75	187	12.67	25	62.33		
Intangibles (music, smell, noise, commotion)	32	84	184	10.67	28	61.33		
Other guests	1	36	263	0.33	12	87.67		
Entertainment/Education	13	100	187	4.33	33.33	62.33		
Location	18	18	264	6	6	88		
Reservations	3	70	227	1	23.33	75.67		
Menu	6	101	193	2	33.67	64.33		
Value for money	2	227	71	0.67	75.67	23.67		
Experience	0	300	0	0	100	0		
Expectations	EXCEEDED	MET	NOT MET	N/A	EXCEEDED %	MET %	NOT MET %	N/A %
	0	0	270	30	0	0	90	10

Table 3 – Overall Results

OVERALL RESULTS (600 reviews)	Positive	Negative	N/A	P%	N%	N/A %		
Ingredients	143	147	310	23.833	24.5	51.67		
Presentation	86	94	420	14.333	15.6666667	70		
Taste	342	188	70	57	31.3333333	11.67		
Portion size	22	79	499	3.6667	13.1666667	83.17		
Food temp	9	49	542	1.5	8.16666667	90.33		
Reliability	245	209	146	40.833	34.8333333	24.33		
Responsiveness	144	185	271	24	30.8333333	45.17		
Assurance	162	212	226	27	35.3333333	37.67		
Empathy	149	185	266	24.833	30.8333333	44.33		
Attempt at service recovery	17	88	495	2.8333	14.6666667	82.5		
Interior design/seating	170	81	349	28.333	13.5	58.17		
Intangibles (music, smell, noise, commotion)	146	90	364	24.333	15	60.67		
Other guests	11	40	549	1.8333	6.66666667	91.5		
Entertainment/Education	177	101	322	29.5	16.8333333	53.67		
Location	65	23	512	10.833	3.83333333	85.33		
Reservations	19	86	495	3.1667	14.3333333	82.5		
Menu	129	107	364	21.5	17.8333333	60.67		
Value for money	137	259	204	22.833	43.1666667	34		
Experience	300	300	0	50	50	0		
Expectations	EXCEEDED	MET	NOT MET	N/A	EXCEEDED %	MET %	NOT MET %	N/A %
	126	102	271	101	21	17	45.16666667	16.83333

Table 4 – Negative Mentions (Ranked)

Aspects	Number of negative mentions out of 600 reviews	Negative mentions percentage %
Value	259	41.17
Assurance	212	35.34
Reliability	209	34.83
Taste	188	31.33
Responsiveness	185	30.83
Empathy	185	30.83
Ingredients	147	24.5
Menu Design	107	17.83
Entertainment/Education	101	16.83
Presentation	94	15.66
Intangibles	90	15
Attempt at Service Recovery	88	14.66
Reservations	86	14.33
Interior Design	81	13.5
Portion Size	79	13.17
Food temperature	49	8.17
Other Guests	40	6.67
Location	23	3.83

Table 5 – Positive Mentions (Ranked)

Aspects	Number of positive mentions out of 600 reviews	Positive mentions percentage %
Taste	342	57
Reliability	245	40.83
Expectations	228	38
Entertainment/Education	177	29.5
Interior Design	170	28.33
Assurance	162	27
Empathy	149	24.83
Intangibles	146	24.33
Responsiveness	144	24
Ingredients	143	23.83
Value for Money	137	22.83
Menu Design	129	21.5
Presentation	86	14.33
Location	65	10.83
Portion size	22	3.67
Reservations	19	3.17
Attempt at Service Recovery	17	2.83
Other Guests	11	1.83
Food Temperature	9	1.5

Table 6 – Not-mentioned Aspects (Ranked)

Aspects	Number of not-mentioned aspects out of 600 reviews	Percentage % of N/A
Other Guests	549	91.5
Food Temperature	542	90.33
Location	512	85.33
Portion Size	499	83.17
Attempt at Service Recovery	495	82.5
Reservations	495	82.5
Presentation	420	70
Intangibles	364	60.67
Menu Design	364	60.67
Interior Design	349	58.17
Entertainment/Education	322	53.67
Ingredients	310	51.67
Responsiveness	271	45.17
Empathy	266	44.33
Assurance	226	37.67
Value for Money	204	34
Reliability	146	24.33
Expectations	101	16.83
Taste	70	11.67

Table 7 – Expectations v.s. Value for Money Relationship Matix

Rows: Value for Money Columns: Expectations

	Met	Exceeded	N/A	Not met	All
Positive	52 8.667	65 10.833	17 2.833	3 0.500	137 22.833
N/A	33 5.500	56 9.333	56 9.333	59 9.833	204 34.000
Negative	17 2.833	5 0.833	28 4.667	209 34.833	259 43.167
All	102 17.000	126 21.000	101 16.833	271 45.167	600 100.000

Cell contents: counts

% of total