

Evaluation of Restaurant Consumers' Reviews in Social Media: The case of Foursquare

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Extensive Summary

Introduction

Emerging information systems and the internet offer a convenient venue for consumers to share their opinions and comments on products and services. Moreover, consumers can reach the experiences, opinions and assessments of other consumers without having to settle for advertising and marketing strategies at decision-making stage. In this regard, Foursquare is a popular comment-sharing site that hosts over 93 million places and is favored by millions of internet users (Foursquare, 2017).

Service quality is the difference between consumers' expectations and experiences (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The measurement of service quality is vital for the hospitality industry. Numerous studies have been carried out in the field of service quality measurement, and the opinions and model proposals followed a systematic development. DINESERV is one of the proposals used in food and beverage businesses and this study discusses social media and DINESERV service quality measurement model issues, and evaluates consumer reviews on first class tourism certificated restaurants in Eskisehir.

Methodology

This study was based on social media. The data consists of comments and opinions from consumers of first class tourism certificated restaurants in Eskisehir on the official website of Foursquare. Consumer comments included in the survey were determined by the criterion sampling methods included in the qualitative research approach. Consumer comments were selected according to the criteria of having commented on first class restaurants in Eskisehir between April 15, 2015 and April 15, 2016. A total of 734 comments on 10 restaurants were determined and a total of 569 comments were analyzed deductively by content analysis.

Findings

The results of the evaluation of restaurant consumers' comments resulted in six themes under the service quality dimensions of the restaurants. These themes were; *food quality, staff, service environment, service quality, price and confidence.*

Food quality

The sub-themes and codes found under the food quality theme were classified as: "flavor of the dishes" (122), "diversity of the dishes" (29), "presentation of food" (25), "portion size" (17), "freshness of the food" (10) and the "service temperature of the food" (7). The quality of the meal was by far the most commented theme by the consumers. When the codes that made up this theme were examined, it was seen that the subjects that consumers evaluated as the most important were the taste, variety and presentation of the dishes. This result, as mentioned in similar studies (Pettijohn et al., 1997; Qu, 1997; Mattila, 2001; Hume et al., 2002; Lee, 2004; Keith and Simmers, 2011; Kansen, 2014) suggests that the quality of food is a priority in evaluating the quality of the service of restaurant.

Staff

Sub-theme of "staff" (128) was further divided as: "relevance" (55), "irrelevance" (30), "being friendly" (22), "faulty booking" (6), "faulty service" (4), "using bad style" (4), "external appearance" (3), "insufficient number" (2), "lack of coordination" (1) and "incorrect order taking" (1). These findings suggest that relevance, irrelevance and smiling were the most important issues following the food quality in terms of consumers. In this context, it was seen that restaurant staff's behaviors, knowledge level, presentation, consumer approach were important elements in providing consumer satisfaction and creating loyal consumers (Tsai et al., 2007; Kansen, 2014).

Service environment

The sub-themes under the "service periphery" (110) were classified into two groups as "ambiance" (64) and "design" (46). Regarding the ambience, consumers indicated ""music" (30), "noise" (9), "ventilation" (8), "cleaning" (7), "refreshment" (4), "smell" (3) and "lighting" (3). On the other hand, their comments on design were "decor" (20), "landscape" (16), "location" (5), "menu" (4) and "color" (1). In similar studies (Yuksel and Yuksel, 2002; Tsai et al., 2007; Kivela et al., 2000; Kansen, 2014; Demiral and Özel, 2016), it has been found that restaurant characteristics that can be counted as physical evidence are seen as important by consumers.

Service quality

Regarding the "service quality" (74), it was seen that consumer comments focus on "service speed" (74). When the consumers evaluate the service quality of the restaurants, the most of the comments and opinions were about the service speed of food and drinks. In this context, consumers care about the speed of service. In the literature, the high rate of service rate (Tsai et al., 2007) indicates that consumers pay attention to service speed.

Price

The sub-themes under the "price" (39) were classified as "fair price" (20) and "high price" (19). When consumer comments were evaluated, it was seen that the price

paid for the service was evaluated as appropriate or high according to the quality of the service received. This finding suggests that consumers consider the price while assessing service quality. This result supports the view that "price is important and there is a significant effect on consumer preferences" which is also revealed in the literature in the study of Klassen et al. (2005). Price plays a crucial role in consumers' decision to purchase food and beverages. The consumers generally want to receive reasonably priced services. In the food and beverage sector, where price competition is intense, it is natural for consumers to be responsive to price and to expect a positive dining experience.

Confidence

Finally, when "confidence" (8) was examined; it was seen that the service guarantee offered by the proprietors was lacking or insufficient. Therefore, it was understood that the service quality was an important point when evaluating the quality of the reliable service. Because the consumer's trust in the business affects the purchase decision positively or negatively in the purchasing process. As a result, the confidence that the consumers have in businesses also reflects the quality of service.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to evaluate the reviews of restaurant consumers in Eskisehir. The results of the study revealed six main themes. Accordingly, the food quality, the staff, the service environment, the quality of service, the price and the confidence were found to be the most important dimensions of service quality. The study findings also suggested that the consumer reviews on social media were consistent with the results of the previous studies (Almanza et al., 1994; Qu, 1997; Pettijohn et al., 1997; Kivela et al., 2000; Matilla, 2001; Yüksel and Yüksel, 2002; Hume et al., 2002; Lee, 2004; Klassen et al., 2005; Tsai et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2009; Markovic et al., 2010; Kılıç and Bekar, 2012; Keith and Simmers, 2011; Kim et al., 2012; Kansen, 2014; Bekar and Kılıç, 2015). The results of the study not only give important results in terms of restaurant service quality but also provide information for first class restaurants in Eskisehir. This study shows that it is necessary for the food and beverage companies to be able to serve better, to ensure the quality of the staff, to improve the service speed and quality, to enrich the menus, and to adapt the ambience to the business concept. It is important for food and beverage companies to operate for providing customer satisfaction and meeting requests and expectations.

Social media offers a convenient venue for customers to share their experiences in restaurants and to learn the critics, comments and evaluations made by other customers. On the other hand, businesses need to know how their customers evaluate their restaurant experiences. This may help businesses to evaluate their service quality, to increase positive word of mouth and to promote the restaurant by supplying services that exceed the consumer expectations. For this reason, businesses need to check platforms like Foursquare. The information gathered from the social media may also help businesses develop strategies and goals to achieve service quality. As such, the study findings suggest that businesses should focus on increasing the quality of service, improving the quality of the staff and the service speed by enriching the menus. They should also create an atmosphere which will help them to reach their target markets in accordance with their service quality.

This study is limited to customer comments posted in Foursquare about restaurants in Eskisehir. Therefore, further studies are needed on other restaurants in other places and posts in other social media. Moreover, studies focusing on other types of tourism businesses have the potential to deepen our understanding in the use of social media in tourism.