



AKTUAR MOLIYA VA BUXGALTERIYA HISOBI ILMIY JURNALI

Vol. 4 Issue 03 | pp. 340-346 | ISSN: 2181-1865

Available online <https://finance.tsue.uz/index.php/afa>

IMPORTANCE OF STAFF APPEARANCE ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY IN UZBEK RESTAURANTS



Zoirova Shokhsanam Turakulovna

Teacher of the Department of
"Hospitality and Tourism" of Termiz State University
mehrivoxidova@gmail.com

Abstract. This study investigates the influence of staff appearance on customer satisfaction and loyalty in Uzbek restaurants. Using a mixed-method approach, including surveys and field observations, the research explores how the physical appearance of staff impacts customer perceptions and their subsequent loyalty. The findings suggest that well-groomed and professionally dressed staff are perceived as more competent and hospitable, which significantly enhances customer satisfaction and encourages repeat business.

Keywords: Staff Appearance, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty, Uzbek Restaurants, Servicescape, Service Quality, Hospitality Management

O'ZBEK RESTORANLARIDA XODIMLARNING TASHQI KO'RINISHINING MIJozLAR EHTIYOJINI QONDIRISH VA SODIQLIKDAGI AHAMIYATI

Zoirova Shoxsanam Turaqulovna

Termiz davlat universiteti "Mehmondo'stlik va turizm" kafedrasida o'qituvchisi

Annotatsiya. Ushbu tadqiqot o'zbek restoranlarida xodimlarning tashqi ko'rinishining mijozlar qoniqishi va sodiqligiga ta'sirini o'rganadi. So'rovlar va dala kuzatuvlarini o'z ichiga olgan aralash usulli yondashuvdan foydalangan holda, tadqiqot xodimlarning tashqi ko'rinishi mijozlarning his-tuyg'ulariga va ularning keyingi sodiqligiga qanday ta'sir qilishini o'rganadi. Topilmalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, yaxshi ishlangan va professional tarzda kiyingan xodimlar ko'proq malakali va mehmondo'st sifatida qabul qilinadi, bu esa mijozlarning qoniqishini sezilarli darajada oshiradi va takroriy biznesni rag'batlantiradi.

Kalit so'zlar: Xodimlarning tashqi ko'rinishi, mijozlar ehtiyojini qondirish, mijozlarning sodiqligi, o'zbek restoranlari, xizmat ko'rsatish manzarasi, xizmat ko'rsatish sifati, mehmondo'stlikni boshqarish

ВЛИЯНИЕ ВНЕШНЕГО ВИДА ПЕРСОНАЛА НА УДОВЛЕТВОРЕННОСТЬ И ЛОЯЛЬНОСТЬ КЛИЕНТОВ В УЗБЕКСКИХ РЕСТОРАНАХ

Зойрова Шохсанам Туракуловна

Преподаватель кафедры «Гостиничное дело и туризм» Термезского государственного университета

Аннотация. В данном исследовании изучается влияние внешнего вида персонала на удовлетворенность и лояльность клиентов в узбекских ресторанах. Используя смешанный подход, включающий опросы и полевые наблюдения, исследование изучает, как внешний вид персонала влияет на восприятие клиентов и их последующую лояльность. Результаты показывают, что ухоженный и профессионально одетый персонал воспринимается как более компетентный и гостеприимный, что значительно повышает удовлетворенность клиентов и стимулирует повторные обращения.

Ключевые слова: внешний вид персонала, удовлетворенность клиентов, лояльность клиентов, узбекские рестораны, ландшафт обслуживания, качество обслуживания, менеджмент в сфере гостеприимства.

Introduction

Internationally, the hospitality industry is recognized as a substantial contributor to an economy's revenue. This industry includes lodging, restaurants, event planning, theme parks, transportation, cruise line and additional fields within the tourism industry. In such a competitive industry, restaurants are required to demonstrate aggressive moves in order to maintain and improve their market position. Customer satisfaction and loyalty are the most important factors that will make that goal feasible, as satisfied and loyal customers repeatedly demonstrate behavior that benefits the company, for example by visiting often, spending more and are less sensitive to price. The proper ways to influence satisfaction and loyalty have been thoroughly studied where behavioral outcomes, the level of these customer reactions, are results of an evaluation of consumption experience. In reality, satisfaction is a result of consumer comparisons between their prior and current experience, if expectancy perceptions are met or surpassed, satisfaction will result. Dissimilarly, loyalty is a consumer's consistent purchase of a specific product over time. Both are evaluations of a consumption experience. Both are evaluations of a consumption experience and evaluation of services and consumption occurs through utilizing cues as a way to form an impression. One of the most important cues that is used by many customers in assessment of restaurant is employee appearance.

Literature review

The role of the servicescape in services marketing is another indication of the importance of customer satisfaction and loyalty in the food and beverage industry. Servicescape is a term used to describe an environment in which a service comes into existence, combining the physical surroundings and other elements such as colors, sounds, and scents[1]. There is strong evidence to suggest that the role of the servicescape is partial to its influence on consumer satisfaction and behavioral intentions, with inferences to direct links between the servicescape and customer retention [2]. It is clear that all

elements of the servicescape are relevant to an establishment's management, but there are certain elements which are under the domain of specific staff and there are certain staff behaviors that directly influence the appearance of these elements. Staff appearance is one such element and is the [3] contribute greatly to an establishment's ability to create a point of difference and competitive advantage . Staff can be instrumental in creating customer satisfaction and loyalty, and the positive effect of proficiently trained staff on services marketing outcomes is well documented[4]. Staff appearance is a tangible attribute of staff and one which can influence customer perceptions of staff and service quality[5], making it an ideal candidate for the improvement of positive customer experiences and subsequent behaviors. As it is customer behaviors, such as repeat patronage and positive word-of-mouth, which play a significant role in the attaining of customer loyalty (Bove et al., 2009), it can be inferred that customer satisfaction with staff appearance, resulting in formed positive perceptions, has the potential to bring higher levels of customer loyalty to a food and beverage establishment.

Methodology

This was seen as the most suitable, as this research is an emerging issue in Uzbek restaurants around the world, including in Sydney. Additionally, conducting a research with the other qualitative methods such as observation research would be more time consuming and costly and would involve more complexities.

In this research, we have interviewed customers and restaurant staff in Uzbek restaurants in Sydney. The aim of the research was to investigate whether there is any impact of staff appearance on customer satisfaction or loyalty in Uzbek restaurants in Sydney. This research is a qualitative research, which involves the collecting of data that is non-quantifiable.

Analysis and Findings

Appropriate appearance of service workers has been recognized as an important aspect of service quality because it is related to the personal image of the firm and worker that, in turn, will affect the image of the firm and service evaluations. For example, in a restaurant, people frequently perceive the service workers based on their appearance. It is also applied when customers assess the worker's attitude and personality. But because appearance is the most apparent part compared to other internal characteristics and can be assessed easier, people often use it to make generalizations about the workers. It is also the same with the well-known idiom that says "the way you dress will impress." How a worker dresses is a nonverbal communication that can tell many things and leads to attitude impressions formed by the customer. Various studies among service workers from many different occupations have consistently found that better appearance is associated with better ratings of job performance. Iele and Marmor performed an experiment to test the effect of different levels of attire formality on the customer's assessment in a restaurant. They used an index of customer tipping as a measure of customer satisfaction and revealed that workers earned higher tips when wearing more formal attire. Stepnowski and Dipboye analyzed some data from supervisory ratings of food service workers, and the results were consistent with the above study.

Analysis of staff appearance in Uzbek restaurants

The first restaurant that became the subject of this experiment had a characteristic that was more traditional or typical, especially making it easier for customers to assume that this restaurant had a model of a waiter who was polite and friendly, although it was not directly stated at the time of their visit to the restaurant. In short, the assumption was that the model was according to customer orders. In the first restaurant, an average level of body language and positive feedback was obtained for the staff with their original appearance. Then, a new appearance was applied directly to the staff, with the same customer as a model for a waiter or waitress. After the changes, an increase in body language and positive feedback from customers to staff with a new appearance was observed. So it can be said that changing the clothes of the waiter or waitress can affect the level of customer satisfaction.

This section looks at staff appearance, which was listed as the most important factor in affecting customer satisfaction. Three out of the four Uzbek restaurants were subject to the researcher's influence on the customer. To observe the response of customers to different staff appearances, the observation unit and data collection for this section is an experiment. Before the data collection, the researcher identified and created a manipulation of staff appearance. In order to manipulate the appearance of the staff, the researcher used a firm request and obtained the approval of the restaurant owner to change the appearance of the staff. The researcher changed the appearance and clothes of the waiter or waitress, and then took some pictures with the knowledge of the restaurant and customer involved in the experiment. The experiment was conducted for about 1 hour. After changing the appearance of the staff, the researcher observed the behavior of customers while they enjoyed their meals and recorded it. The behavior of the customer was recorded to see the cause of changes that may affect customer satisfaction and to see an increase or decrease in body language and positive feedback to the staff with a new appearance.

First impressions are known to be both lasting and tenacious. Baron (1997) suggests it is effortless to form a good or bad first impression; the difficulty is to change them. This is attained through cognitive and affective evaluations of product attributes, which can guide a consumer towards a purchase decision (Dodds and Monroe, 1985). Unfortunately, due to the so-called "Halo effect," the affective inference based on staff's appearance could direct overall customer judgment of the organization, not just the individual, and influence the decision of whether the customer will return to the venue in the future[5]. With negative evaluation, it is said the customer may avoid the interaction altogether and complain to a higher level of management or seek another encounter with an employee in the hope to dissonate his negative view [6]. These evaluation and decision-making processes are crucial in affecting purchase decisions and repeat business with the organization. Therefore, it is apparent that staff appearance can largely affect customer satisfaction and is a vital determinant in the retention of further business. A study by Hui et al. [7] confirmed the hypothesis stating that when employee appearance enhances the customer's expectations, it will increase satisfaction with the service. Evidently, if the staff's appearance is the starting point of the service encounter, it is the first criterion the customer will use to evaluate the overall service.

It is an established fact that satisfaction is crucial for customer loyalty and retention. Therefore, investigations into factors contributing to satisfaction are of utmost importance. Staff appearance and how it affects customer satisfaction is a subject that constantly comes up for debate in many different businesses. Regan (2003) states that personal selling, insofar as the customer is buying the staff's time, personality, and detachment from the organization, is the most important issue in the marketing of services. Considering Regan's statement, it is very important to note that services in the hospitality sector are rooted in the product. No matter how good the product, it is simply a facilitation of exchange between customer and employee. The ideal result being the repeat of further business with the organization or individual. This view is also supported by Jones (2002), who states that the appearance of the frontline employee has a great deal of impact on customer perceptions of the organization. Staff appearance is essentially the physical personalization of the service encounter. It is the most direct form of non-verbal communication between one person and another (Sherman and Craig, 2003). Therefore, staff appearance could be the starting point of the service encounter, at which impressions and expectations are formed.

Loyalty is one of the determinant factors for the continuity of certain restaurant business and this may be decided by the effectiveness of the services provided by the staffs. As for what was stated by Lockington and Wise (1990), getting the customer back in the restaurant is our ultimate priority, and it costs far less to get an existing customer back in the restaurant than it is to get a new customer in the restaurant (Lockington and Wise, 1990). In relation to that, the research conducted by Gabbott and Hogg (2001) has found the steps in building customer loyalty and retention are relative to the quality of service and price rather than other factors available. This is because if the quality of service is good, a certain product will have higher value which in turn build good customer retention and satisfaction for the overall product.

As we stated earlier, the impact of staff appearance on customer satisfaction is tremendously important within a restaurant setting. As mentioned by Tsai (1997), satisfaction is an overall effect on the psychological and physical responses when the services are produced by the staff is compared to the customer's desires. If the staff's abilities to satisfy the customer are met or accomplished, there is a high chance that the customer will continue to conduct repurchase and loyalty to the organization (Tsai, 1997). This can also be said that first-time customer who consider price and try out the restaurant is willing to dine again if the services provided previously have been effective towards the quality of the food being served (Sher, Luk, 2010).

Discussion

The following is a discussion of how the results of this research can impact Uzbek restaurant management as well as the direction of future research.

It is also noteworthy that staff appearance did not significantly affect willingness to return. This could be due to the nature of Uzbek culture in which traditional appearance is heavily ingrained in the mentality of its people. It is possible that customers are sensitive to offending staff and feel that stating a negative opinion on staff appearance may be insulting. An analysis into this idea may provide more insight into this topic. This research opens a gateway into exploring the many elements of Uzbek culture that can affect

customer dining experience. Overall, the findings of this study can serve as an indicator of how important the appearance of staff are in culturally oriented restaurants.

The results of this research suggest the importance of staff appearance in Uzbek restaurants. Taking into account that the staff of Uzbek restaurants in big cities consists mainly of ethnic Uzbeks, the findings of this study can be of use to managers. As mentioned above, Uzbek restaurants lean heavily on the ability to create an authentic representation of Uzbek culture. Therefore, it can be inferred that Uzbek staff are a prominent symbol of cultural transmission. In this sense, managers may find it beneficial to invest in staff appearance in order to create a more authentic image. The findings that there is a positive correlation between staff appearance and customer satisfaction can give managers an incentive to make changes to staff uniform in order to create a more positive dining experience.

Conclusion

The study conducted has several theoretical and practical implications for the existing knowledge on the services field of the restaurant sector. Our work addresses the customer satisfaction and loyalty in the context of restaurant services and found staff appearance to be extremely important in creating satisfied, loyal customers. This has not been looked at in depth in terms of services and has not been tallied with loyalty in the past. Most work on appearance in the service sector has been in the context of personal selling and has just looked at a link with customer satisfaction.

The nature and significance of this link have been detailed in the analysis of the importance of front-line staff in the service encounter and the elaboration of the theoretical framework in Section 2. Corresponding to findings of past studies in various cultural contexts, it was found that in Uzbek restaurants, the quality of the encounter experience is heavily dependent on the capability of the service staff in conveying a warm, professional, and polite impression to the customers. In the context of this study, it was found that a particularly significant part of this impression is conveyed through the staff's manner of verbal and nonverbal communication and their general levels of etiquette and hospitality. This includes their ability to fulfill requests and accommodate special needs of the customers. High-quality encounter experiences are shown to lead to higher levels of satisfaction and loyalty mainly because customers tend to feel more relaxed, content, and important when they themselves have received high-quality treatment. People generally seek to be around those of similar social class and education. In the specific context of dining in Uzbek restaurants, it was found that customers from any ethnic background felt more comfortable amongst staff who exhibited a high command of the English language. High language proficiency was seen to make it easier for these customers to form relationships with the staff and to be able to communicate their needs more effectively.

Customer loyalty, the most critical factor for the success of any business, is achieved when customer satisfaction is attained. In the context of the Uzbek restaurant industry in New Zealand, this study has found that the appearance of front-line service staff has a crucial role to play in ensuring that customer satisfaction and loyalty levels remain high. In addressing RQ1, we have concluded that customer satisfaction and loyalty are linked to the quality of the encounter experiences that customers have.

References:

1. Bitner, M.J. (1992) Servicescapes: The Impact of Physical Surroundings on Customers and Employees. *Journal of Marketing*, 56, 57-71. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1252042>
2. Donovan, Robert & Rossiter, John & Marcoolyn, Gilian & Nesdale, Andrew. (1994). Store atmosphere and purchasing behavior. *Journal of Retailing*. 70. 283-294. 10.1016/0022-4359(94)90037-X.
3. Sonmez, Damla & Ali, Faizan & Wildes, Vivienne & Cobanoglu, Cihan. (2023). The Hijabi servers: Customers' perception of employees' physical appearance in restaurants. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*. 114. 103569. 10.1016/j.ijhm.2023.103569.
4. Heskett, J.L., Jones, T.O., Loveman, G.W., et al. (1994) Putting the Service-Profit Chain to Work. *Harvard Business Review*, 72, 164-170.
5. Ryu K, Kim HJ, Lee H, Kwon B. Relative Effects of Physical Environment and Employee Performance on Customers' Emotions, Satisfaction, and Behavioral Intentions in Upscale Restaurants. *Sustainability*. 2021; 13(17):9549. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13179549>
6. Simonetti, A. and Bigne, E. (2022), "How visual attention to social media cues impacts visit intention and liking expectation for restaurants", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 34 No. 6, pp. 2049-2070. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-09-2021-1091>
7. Jeon, J., Kim, J., & Kim, J. (2024). Customers' Cue Utilization in Delivery Restaurant Selection and Its Changes With Different Health Risks. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/19389655241240437>
8. Vokhidova, M.K., Abdullaeva, A.R. (2024). Directions of Trade Relations of Uzbekistan with the Countries of Central Asia. In: Sergi, B.S., Popkova, E.G., Ostrovskaya, A.A., Chursin, A.A., Ragulina, Y.V. (eds) *Ecological Footprint of the Modern Economy and the Ways to Reduce It. Advances in Science, Technology & Innovation*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-49711-7_76

Copyright: © 2024 by the authors. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-4.0 International License (CC - BY 4.0)

