To Investigate Customer Expectations and Perceptions of Service in the Restaurant Sector

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To investigate customer expectations and perceptions of service in the restaurant sector

Michael O’ Connor

‘A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MSc in Hospitality Management’

‘Presented to the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism, Dublin Institute of Technology, Cathal Brugha Street’

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Lawlor

September, 2008.
Declaration

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of the MSc in Hospitality Management is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for an award in any other Institute or University.

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Date ……………………………..
Abstract

The principal objective of this dissertation is to investigate customer expectations and perceptions of service in the restaurant sector in Ireland.

Chapter 1:
Serves as an introduction to the dissertation, it outlines the research objectives, the rationale for the research while evaluating customer satisfaction. It also looks at service personnel while measuring the cost of quality and reviewing customer equity considerations.

Chapter 2:
Acquaints the reader with material from alternative sources, it describes the restaurant environment, identifies the implications and characteristics of service, examines the role of the service quality classification, it states the early approaches to service and looks at service expectations.

Chapter 3:
Outlines the research methodology the author went about to finalise the dissertation. Starting with the research objectives, examining the approaches to methodology, primary research, explores the survey structure and survey arrangements.

Chapter 4:
Present the conclusions of the primary research such as demographics, respondents spending power, the selection of the restaurants, perceptions and expectations of the dining experience.

Chapter 5:
Analyses the findings and proposes recommendations based on what the author has learned throughout his research and looks at the new driving forces facing the restaurant service industry.
Acknowledgements

I have described this expedition as a crossing, to obtain a greater understanding in the area of Hospitality Management. The journey set about was undertaken on a part time basis with the pinnacle of the course a dissertation, which I conducted in a subject matter that I have a great affection for, restaurant services.

I had no inclination the way that this thesis would be significantly alter and enrich my perspective on restaurant services and the hospitality industry. I am extremely glad of this opportunity to thank everyone who has given me support, encouragement and motivation throughout this endeavour, and in particular Dr. Jennifer Lawlor my supervisor for her overwhelming patience, time, advice, constructive comments, her enduring faith in me and her inspiration.

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List of Abbreviations

SSIAs - Special Savings Incentive Accounts
PAF - Prevention, Appraisal and Failure Costs
COQ - Cost Of Quality
AHP-SQ - Analytical Hierarchy Process for service quality
MOT - Moments of Truth
CEO - Chief Executive Officer
CSO - Central Statistics Office
RAI - Restaurant Association of Ireland
IHF - Irish Hotel Federation
Chapter One
General Introduction

1.1 Introduction

De Ruyter and Wetzels (2000) highlight that there is an increasing body of literature dedicated to the area of services. The distinctive features of services in comparison to goods has been highlighted widely by authors such as Voss and Zomerdijk (2007), Bicheno and Elliot (1997), Zeithaml and Bitner (1996), Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1991), Heskett, Sasser and Hart (1990), and Juran and Gryna (1988) which observes services marketing, understanding customer expectations of service, service breakthroughs and innovation in experiential services.

According to Bicheno and Elliot (1997) Joseph Juran is credited for developing the Japanese quality in the 1950s. Juran’s Quality Control Handbook (1988) has had a profound influence around the world, it is so wide ranging on quality it is difficult to highlight particular contributions from the many that have been made.

Juran and Gryna (1988) believe that quality is associated with product satisfaction and product dissatisfaction, which both require consideration. Juran and Gryna (1988) emphasise the necessity for ongoing quality improvement and maintains that this is only achieved through project by project improvements.

1.2 Pareto principle

According to Bicheno and Elliot (1997) Juran was the first to name the Pareto principle, which sets out to identify the vital few as opposed to the useful many and was also responsible for suggesting that the costs of not getting something right the first time, should be recorded and classified. De Ruyter and Wetzels (2000) also state that the service recovery or getting it right first time has been identified as a strategic issue in the services marketing and management literature.
1.3 Customer equity considerations

De Ruyter and Wetzels (2000) compiled an empirical study to access the impact of customer equity considerations on perceived quality, satisfaction, loyalty and trust with respect to service recovery. De Ruyter and Wetzels (2000) findings suggest that the effects of equity considerations in a service recovery situation are idiosyncratic, specific to hospitality service industries.

Bjorlin Liden and Skalen (2003) cite, to guarantee a service, simply means to present measures for the service quality and to offer compensation in cases where promised quality is not achieved. A service guarantee can thus serve as a means for service recovery. Tax and Brown (1998) state that an apology is imperative as fair procedure where a service has failed, however, it is important if the outcome of service recovery is going to be satisfactory and with the firming assuming responsibility for the failure.

According to Barnes (2003) the current organisational focus on customer justification and on customer service is depended on the application of technology. Barnes (2003) explains that the human relationship elements of customer satisfaction are special emotional constructs and not merely behavioural, but are more retention and repeat buying.

Barnes (2003) outlines that some customer relationships are closer, stronger and more meaningful than others, the development of strategies to create higher levels of meaning in relationships warrants the attention of service providers. Barnes (2003) also highlights to create real meaning for customers, operators must have a better understanding of the expectations of customers
1.4 Rationale for research

According to Fáilte Ireland (2007) domestic tourism expenditure amounted to €1.4 billion making Irish tourism a €6 billion industry in 2006, with the largest increase in the hotel and restaurant sector. Expenditure by visitors to Ireland was estimated to be worth €4.7 billion in 2006, while Fáilte Ireland estimate that the total number of people employed in the Irish tourism and hospitality industry in 2006 was 249,338, an increase of 1.4% on the numbers employed in 2005.

Devine and King (2008) states there has been continued employment growth, solid earnings and tax reductions that have allowed consumers to maintain robust consumption growth in 2007. Power (2007) states, that while the public finances continue to look good, the maturation of the Special Savings Incentive Accounts (SSIAs) did not blow the economy out of the water in terms of a consumer-spending binge.

According to Power (2007) consumer confidence has weakened somewhat on the back of rising interest rates and greater job uncertainty, and this has prompted a more cautious response to the SSIA maturation than might have been expected a year ago. This cautious spending further prompts a watchful strategy for restaurant service providers who wish to maintain a higher market share of customers, otherwise the demise of the smaller restaurant operators will erode from the marketplace in similar fashion to the small rural public houses.

Johnston (2005) identifies four stages in the development of service operations management, namely, ‘service awakening’, ‘breaking free from product based roots’, ‘the service management era’ and the ‘return to roots’. Johnston (2005) further suggests a fifth element involved in the process, namely, ‘productivity’. Johnston (2005) states that more work should be undertaken from an operational perspective, which requires underpinning and strengthening by operational tools and approaches. He identifies three obvious candidates for this treatment namely, core operational areas of productivity, quality and efficiency.
1.5 Research objectives

The primary objectives of this dissertation are to examine the following:

- Identify a range of decision features used by customers when deciding on a restaurant service experience,
- To critically evaluate the customers’ expectations and perceptions of a restaurant service,
- To evaluate the relationship between perceptions and expectations of a service encounter
- To examine the correlation between customer expectations and perceptions of a restaurant service offering.

1.6 Cost of quality

Ramdeen, Santos and Chatfield (2007) conducted research measuring the cost of quality in the restaurant industry by applying two specific models in their research, i.e. prevention, appraisal and failure costs (PAF) also known as the Crosby model. This model suggests that an enhanced investment in the quality of basic materials such as food and restaurant service personnel, consequently reduced costs in the fiscal year for the operator.

The second model adopted by Ramdeen et al. (2007) was the cost of quality (COQ) framework, whose main purpose was to identify the root causes of the COQ, in other words for the service provider to reduce the risk of complaints and increase the quality of the product. Ramdeen et al. (2007) state the disadvantage of this model, that it only looked at one service provider for a period of two years and did not take into consideration the staff turnover of the establishment.
1.7 Measuring the cost of quality

According to Chakrapani (1998) measuring the COQ can be very important when the lifetime value of a customer is also taken into consideration. For example, losing a customer who visits a hotel restaurant twice per month and spends approximately €80 per visit may not seem to be a great loss. However, if the same customer visits the hotel restaurant 25 times per year for five years the business worth of this customer would be €10,000.

Let’s further assume that this customer during the same period introduces ten other customers to the restaurant and they visit the restaurant for a similar time period (25 times per year for five years) with an average spending per visit of €80. This would represent a substantial amount of business to the restaurant of €100,000. Therefore, the lifetime value of a single customer can play a critical role in the long-term profitability of a restaurant.

1.8 Customer satisfaction

According to Conway and Andaleeb (2006) if full service restaurants want to deliver high levels of customer satisfaction, they should periodically track staff performance on the seven items that measure ‘responsiveness’, such as employee attentiveness, helpfulness, promptness, appearance, understanding, courageousness and knowledge. By doing so, supervisors and owners of restaurants can design targeted training programs that encourage employees to instil this dimension of service quality.

The area of staff performance has been analysed by Conway and Andaleeb (2006) who looked at customer satisfaction in the ubiquitous restaurant sector in the USA. Conway and Andaleeb (2006) study used the transaction-specific model that originally was founded by Teas (1993) and later expanded by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1994). It addressed the question how overall customer satisfaction can be explained by evaluating experiences with specific aspects of service quality and product quality.
According to Conway and Andaleeb (2006), it is important to develop appropriate programs and provide ongoing training on the various attributes of responsiveness to strengthen employees’ ability to improve customer service. Although easy to suggest, instilling these qualities in the frontline personnel and gaining their commitment can be challenging. Another interesting finding from Conway and Andaleeb (2006) research was that greater satisfaction was attributed to customer loyalty, whereby price varies according to the type of restaurant and if the price is high, the quality must also be high or a sense of being ripped off may be induced.

According to Conway and Andaleeb (2006) many customers have perceptions of what a restaurant is likely to charge, and if the prices are higher than they expect, customer satisfaction is adversely affected. Conversely, low prices could result in potential customers questioning the ability to produce the meal and service they require. It is important, therefore, for restaurants to assess competitive prices and customers’ reference prices for the selected segment in which they want to operate.

1.9 Conclusions

Conway and Andaleeb (2006) outline that restaurants must consider the extent to which they can conduct business. The food, of course, has to be enjoyable, well-presented and value-for-money; yet, important and essential as it is, the meal is no longer considered the primary reason why people visit a restaurant. The reason for the meal not being crucial in selecting where to eat may be that restaurants have been doing such a good job in food preparation that it is no longer a distinguishing factor between many of them. This dissertation seeks to explore the area of customer expectations of service and their perceptions of service within the restaurant sector in Ireland.

This dissertation will begin by explaining in detail, managing services, discuss the nature and implications of services in terms of restaurant service, evaluate the characteristics of services and review the findings of the research. The author will then discuss at length how each of these findings relates with respect to the hospitality industry. The dissertation will then end with a conclusion summarising the main body of the dissertation with reference to the opening introduction and make recommendations for future studies.
Chapter Two
Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the author will review the work of researchers in the areas of restaurant service, quality in luxury hotels, the effect of service guarantees on service recovery and the importance of waiting staff in restaurant service. The importance of quality service is that, to hold your place in the market, you must at least provide the same if not better restaurant service as the competition.

Service, then, is the competitive edge that employers look for in everyday business. The problem with this is that customers expect the providers of service to reproduce and further develop products and services at the same cost as previously experienced. Quality in the eyes of the customer is the extras, some of these extras are free such as courtesy and cleanliness while other extras cost money and cost will be the inhibiting factor as to how much service can be afforded.

However, if the competition increases its extras, then, the service provider, to hold their place in the market essentially will have to increase service just to keep their position. Once these extras are provided by one player in the market they can be copied by another, customers will take these for granted an example such as pre and post theatre menus, a lounge area for aperitifs, amuse bouche and hot napkins on arrival and will determine if the customer will return.

It is now up to companies to monitor customer satisfaction levels firstly before jumping ahead with new ideas, although companies can increase efficiency and productivity by taking advantage of technology and the development of new management techniques.
This chapter will examine literature on the alternative models used in considering competition and explores the characteristics of services and what makes services so unique when selecting a restaurant. The chapter differentiates service from other products in an attempt to draw on the relationship between service quality and perception. It explores concepts of restaurant service, quality, attitudes, service delivery and value while attempting to incorporate the intricacies of perceptions and perceptions with a restaurant selection.

2.2 The restaurant environment

According to Pratten (2003; 2003) the aim of a catering establishment is to make a profit by providing meals. To operate a successful restaurant demands that appropriate food be offered in decent surroundings at a sensible price. Certainly, these variables will change according to the nature of the establishment and the target market. Nevertheless, the basic principles are the same, whether the outlet offers fast food or Michelin-starred dining.

Pratten (2003; 2003) states the owner or an agent must decide on location and then on décor, seating arrangements, tableware and other material required to deliver the service. Menus must be agreed, the raw materials purchased, cooked and taken to the table to the satisfaction of the clientele. The success of a restaurant depends on ensuring that all of these factors reach a notional minimum standard appropriate to the price of the product. Iglesias and Guillen (2004) refer to the intensely competitive environment existing in the restaurant sector and that firms need to achieve high customer satisfaction in order to survive in the long term.

Iglesias and Guillen (2004) further state that obtaining customer satisfaction means customers repeat the experienced service and that they become an effective and efficient communication resource, at no cost to the firm. Prominent among the antecedents that determine the level of customer satisfaction are perceived quality and total perceived price.
According to Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2000) customer waiting time has often been regarded as one of the most important elements of service quality. Andaleeb and Conway (2006) support this when outlining that customer satisfaction is influenced most, by the responsiveness of the frontline employees, followed by price and food quality.

Shew (2003) suggests that consumers today are more constrained by time than ever before, where in an intensely competitive world the pressure, expectation and need to accomplish more in less time is unlikely to diminish. Dale, Wiele and Iwaarden (2007) propose that services are characterised as being different from products along a number of dimensions that have implications for the quality of service provided to customers.

Edvardsson, Thomasson and Ovretvit (1994) state that goods and services are often interrelated when they state an important trend in the breakdown of the traditional distinction between services and physical products and between manufacturing and service industries. Furthermore, Edvardsson (1994) charts the rapid development of the service sector which he believes is due to innovation and greater travel among customers and designers of existing and potential businesses.

Service management, according to Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2004), suggests that the role of the service operations manager should include the functions of both production and marketing in an open system, with the customer as a participant, which would give a greater understanding of the overall service process.

While many products are systems in which services such as consultation and customer staff training all play a major part. Edvardsson (1994) elucidates that with the emergence of a service society, it does not mean that manufacturing is no longer important, on the contrary, the role of industry is and will remain a crucial element.

Bohan (1991) states that hotel operations management advocate that the quality of service is essential in creating customer value and achieving competitive advantage, and that the desire to improve the quality of service must be taken into account with the cost of quality associated with continuous improvements necessary for customer satisfaction.
2.3 The nature and implications of services

Restaurant service operators acknowledge the premium that consumers place on time wasted while waiting for the delivery of their order. A customer waiting in line for service is potentially a lost customer as research conducted by Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2000) illustrate that up to twenty seven per cent of customers who cannot get through on the telephone will likely take their business elsewhere.

This can be worrying for service providers who need each and every customer in order to survive in the ultra competitive market. The intangible nature of services according to Parasuraman (1994) makes the management of expectations very important to service companies who seek to influence customers’ perceptions.

Dale (2003) articulates that service characteristics may be typified as being different from products along dimensions such as intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability which have implications for the quality of service provided to customers. It has been argued by Fitzsimmons (2003) that self-service allows for a greater customer acceptance in individual customer dependence, which has resulted from an increased opportunity for customisation, accuracy, convenience and speed and a elimination of labour costs.

According to Fitzsimmons (2003) services are typically intangible and there is little or no tangible evidence to suggest that the customers are satisfied other than the fact that they may obtain a souvenir menu or a receipt for his/her encounter at the latter stage of the meal experience. Fitzsimmons (2003) cites services have migrated from the traditional human interaction to the substitution of machines for service employees or, where feasible, to anywhere-anytime electronic service.
This intangibility has been viewed by Johnston (2005) when charting the changing development of service operations management development from the manufacturing roots. Johnston (2005) recognises services as being different to the development of service specific concepts, through to the more recent emergence of service management. Martin-Ruiz and Rondan-Cataluna (2008) illustrate there is a lack of specific tools to measure perceptions making it difficult for service providers to offer a consistent product similar to the competition.

Johnston (2005) states that academics involved in this new area came from several disciplines and functions, such as operations management, marketing, human resource management, with contributions from psychologists, and others who have developed and tested management concepts, frameworks and tools for service organisations.

According to O’ Connor (2002) education has also seen this service change. The practical service modules, which previously facilitated students with an introduction to all areas of hospitality service, prior to entering real life situations, were amended to recognise the movement towards international education models rather than the traditional the methods.

Amendments in teaching and learning strategies of hospitality management programmes were necessary to bring about the desired change and this significantly placed a greater emphasis on interpersonal and people management skills which are all requirements facing hospitality management education. Johnston (2005) stipulates the recent emergence of service management, sometimes referred to as service marketing and management as subjects in their own right.

It is also important to know the reasons that lead customers to acquire the services offered by restaurants. Among the results commented by Iglesias and Guillen (2004) consumers perform a greater information search when they wish to go to a restaurant for a family celebration than when they go to a restaurant for reasons of time.
An interesting finding by Kivela, Inbakaran and Reece (2000) was that males who dined out because of ‘business need’ were more likely to return to the restaurant than for the rest of the dining occasions, whereas only 7.6 per cent would return for ‘celebration’. Restaurateurs could capitalise on ‘male celebration’/return relationship by developing special products and services for male customers to return more frequently for celebratory purposes, and in effect, create a niche market.

To remain competitive and financially successful, a central concern for restaurateurs is therefore the provision of an innovative service to meet customers’ growing expectations. According to Goodman (2006) this creativity is transmitted at the Fat Duck restaurant in Bray, England, which facilitates guests with a music system to replicate the sound of the sea when having seafood.

This innovation is also supported by Ussn (2007) as he describes, during the commencement of the meal experience a waitress turned up with a cylinder of liquid nitrogen creating an amuse bouclé of lime and green tea at the tableside which was designed to prepare the taste buds for the remainder of the meal, this according to Ussn (2007) pg 1, was a piece of “food theatre”.

While chic establishments have traditionally provided superior facilities and services, Presbury, Fitzgerald and Chapman (2005) cite that over the past decade, consumers have increasingly demanded greater value for money, accompanied with demands for a better-quality level of service and facilities. This superior expectation has now placed a greater emphasis on restaurant service operators. The ever-increasing competition in the current restaurant environment has become a strategic issue for restaurant owners/managers with companies having to redefine themselves to reduce costs, enhance customer satisfaction and gain a competitive advantage by re-aligning their product offering.

Kandampully, Mok and Sparks (2002) outline that these service-quality components have a greater potential to create a distinction. This is especially true for competing restaurants that are in the same or similar service brackets. Fitzsimmons (2003) outlines a number of issues which cause concern for restaurateurs and meal providers in terms of how to measure self-service quality.
Fitzsimmons (2003) questions the extent to which the customer adoption of self-service follows a predictable pattern and how can to achieve continuous improvement when using self-service technology? The emergence of a self-service sector means that the growth in service jobs will be limited to highly skilled personnel (example: health care), intellectual (example: professional) and creative (example entertainment pursuits).

This trajectory according to Fitzsimmons (2003) is similar to the past experience in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors of the economy where human labor has been driven out of the production process relentlessly. It has been expressed by Fitzsimmons (2003) that the increase of self-service technology has implications for society which sees a reduced opportunity for interpersonal interaction.

2.4 Managing services

Dale et al. (2007) identify that managing service quality is concerned with understanding what is meant by service quality, what its determinants are, how they may be measured, identifying the potential shortfalls in service quality and how they can be recovered. Johnston (2005) gives prominence to his research in the area of service recovery indicating that the focus of service recovery tends to be mainly on customer recovery.

Dale et al. (2007) states that responsibility for quality service lies with the individual operator, marketing strategy, human resources and other management principles working together within a particular restaurant organisation. According to Dale et al. (2007), service quality issues have been of academic and practitioner interest and to marketers in particular for more than two decades, with companies trying to win a greater market share with increasing restaurant competition a more selective consumer.

According to Kandampully and Menguc (2000) measuring service quality is a challenging task due to the concept of service quality being inherently intangible in nature and difficult to define. Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1990) stipulate that measuring improvements in service quality are even more challenging. This view is shared by Chua Chow and Luk (2005), when using techniques for measuring service quality Analytical Hierarchy Process for service quality ‘AHP-SQ’, this involves five
steps which assists management to devise and maintain a relevant, competitive plan for ongoing improvements in service quality within an establishment.

The ‘AHP-SQ’ technique which was developed by Saaty (1994) uses a process of pairwise comparisons to determine the relative importance and the priority of alternatives in a multi-criteria decision-making problem. ‘AHP-SQ’ involves decomposing a complex and unstructured problem into a set of variables that are organised into a hierarchy, [Refer to Figure 2.1]. The first level – the service-dimension level – addresses the relative importance of various service dimensions in defining service quality.

According to Saaty (1994) customers were are asked to compare pairs of service dimensions such as, tangibles versus reliability and to indicate whether they felt that one dimension was equal to, more important than or less important than another dimension. The second level of the hierarchy – the choice level – compared the performance of service providers in this case, fast-food restaurants with respect to the service dimensions. The customers were asked to state their preference for the restaurants in a pairwise manner on a nine-point relational satisfaction scale.

**Figure 2.1 Service quality management: AHP framework**

![AHP framework diagram]

*Source: Chua Chow and Luk, (2005), 15, (3) p.281 “A strategic service quality approach using analytic hierarchy process”.*
2.5 The Characteristics of Services

The Oxford Dictionary (2005)p.1386 defines service as “a system that provides something that the public needs, organized by the government or private company”. According to Van Looy, Gemmel and Van Dierdonck (2003) producing a definition for a service is not always easy, as to what makes services so unique. Van Looy et al. recognise that several authors have tried to define the notion of service, but identify Kotler, who has a more positive and more substantive definition of service which depicts service as ‘any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything’. This definition suggests that services centre on intangibility while Gronroos (1990) provides a more wide-ranging definition by suggesting that:

a service is an activity or series of activities of a more or less intangible nature that normally, but not necessarily, takes place in interaction between the customer and service employee and/or physical resources or goods and/or systems of the systems of the service provider, which are provided as solutions to customer problems. (p.27)

Van Looy et al. (2003) portray the service definition further by revealing that services are activities or processes characterised by two central notions, intangibility and simultaneity, while citing the production and consumption of many services are simultaneous. Services may not be separable from the person of the seller, and the customer may be involved in the service performance, thus the service process, including restaurant staff at the customer interface, become integral to service quality. According to Edvardsson et al. (1994) improving quality in service depends on getting the right balance between techniques and methods for improving the process, systems, staff attitude, behaviours and the service culture.

According to Pratten (2003) food writers and food critics stress the importance of service. While the preparation of food successfully depends on a variety of factors, the most obvious is cooking and serving. Pratten (2003) states that chefs may leave the industry at an early age but at least the importance of their work is accepted and appreciated, however, the same cannot be said for the waiting staff. Pratten (2003) cites, few of these front line staff see themselves remaining in their respective posts.
For many they tend to use the industry for accumulating money to supplement other purposes. Pratten (2003) identifies this transition to be part of the industry, whereby employers agree on the importance of their work, but did not regard it as a higher order skill. The acquisition and retention of suitable staff at any level should be seen as vital in any organisation’s skills, yet front line employees are undervalued, due to the nature of the service industry intangibility and difficult to maintain consistent service standards.

2.6 Intangibility

According to Van Looy et al. (2003) the main difference between goods and services is intangibility. While goods are produced and services are performed, a service is an act or a deed that customers cannot take home. What consumers can take home is the effect and memories of the service. When a customer enters a restaurant, he or she cannot take home the service that he or she receives. According to Van Looy et al. (2003), there is no transfer of ownership involved in the delivery of the service as opposed to goods, for example, when the customer pays for lunch, it does not entitle him or her to take home the cutlery or crockery from the restaurant.

Van Looy et al. (2003) cite that not all services show the same degree of intangibility, few services are one hundred per cent, just as few goods are one hundred per cent tangible. Instead many offerings, both goods and services, have both tangible and intangible elements. They can be placed on a range from low to high. In a fast-food restaurant, for instance, the tangible component of the offering, the food, plays an important role, while in a three star restaurant there are more encounters with the restaurant service personnel such as the interaction of the employee making the customer feel welcome and appreciated.

Van Looy et al. (2003) highlight some implications regarding the intangibility of a service. This intangibility of services makes products difficult, and sometimes impossible, to evaluate before and sometimes even after purchase. How can a customer try out a service offering before it is purchased if it cannot be seen, heard, felt, smelt or tasted? Zeithaml (1981) has developed a framework to clarify and distinguishes
between three categories of qualities related to offerings, namely search, experience and credence qualities.

*Search Qualities* – these are attributes which a customer can determine prior to purchase. Thus, search qualities include attributes such as colour, price, feel and smell. Customers can smell food or can evaluate the colour or style of clothes and the decision as to which perfume or what clothes to buy, is based on these qualities. Bjorlin-Linden and Skalen (2003) state customers expectations of the service are subjective and based on the needs and desires they expect to fulfil using the service. However according to Bjorlin-Linden and Skalen (2003) is the difficulty of actually delivering service according to these expectations creates a need for a support system for service failures.

*Experience Qualities* – these are attributes such as taste which can only be discerned after purchase or during consumption. According to Voss and Zomerdijk (2007) experiential services are services where the focus is on the experience of the customer when interacting with the organisation, rather than just the functional benefits following from the products and services delivered. Companies in the leisure have traditionally focused on the experience of their customers, as an experience is their main offer, for example, skiing and theme parks.

Pine and Gilmore (1998) define experience design as an approach to create emotional connection with guests or customers through careful planning of tangible and intangible events. Examples of European companies which stress the importance of the customer experience include the Guinness Storehouse in Dublin.

According to Carbone and Haeckel (1994) it can also be argued that every touch point that the customer has with the organisation is an experience, no matter how mundane the product or service that is being delivered. This experience can be positive or negative, and to a greater or lesser extent, memorable. The restaurant selection falls into this category. Customers cannot evaluate a meal experience before the experience is complete. However once the meal has been paid for, then customers can evaluate the quality of the meal.
Credence qualities – these are attributes that the customer may find impossible to evaluate, even after the service encounter and consumption. The example cited by Zeithaml (1981) is when a customer picks up his/her car at the garage and the extent to which they have the skills to evaluate whether the brakes are properly aligned. Nevertheless, most customers for example, do not acquire the required skills to evaluate whether a doctor’s medical diagnosis is correct or not.

Edvardsson et al. (1994) convey a similar view when outlining that in service, quality appears in the behaviour of employees and has to do with fundamental values of getting the job done. Since the customer cannot evaluate before consuming the food or drink they are about to purchase, it is important to provide clues on the menu such as flambé, filleting, carving to mention a few restaurant tasks as to what can be expected during the service delivery process to allow customers make some kind of pre-purchase evaluation. According to Van Looy et al. (2003) the fundamental distinction of the intangibility of services is between credence and experience qualities is subjective.

The intangibility of services and credence qualities will tend to dominate, whereas search qualities dominate in the choice of tangible products. A fourth addition to this categorisation are dominance credence qualities have serious implications, especially in terms of marketing restaurant services.

The experiential service providers cited by Voss and Zomerdijk (2007) had dedicated design and product development departments for the tangible elements in the service or customer experience, but not for the intangible elements. Tangible elements included the products that are required for or support the service being delivered, such as the food at Le Pain Quotidien and the cruise ships of Royal Caribbean.

Voss and Zomerdijk (2007) cite that most companies have dedicated design departments, who work with external consultants, designers and architects who specialise in a particular area. For the intangible elements, however, the recruitment and training companies generally do not have dedicated design departments. Intangible aspects include the service provided by employees, the interaction with other customers and the service delivery process.
According to Gorb and Dumas (1987) the design and innovation of intangible aspects of service principally resided in the operational departments, namely silent design, design that is carried out by individuals who are not called designers and would not consider themselves to be designers. Gorb and Dumas (1987) outline several companies made a point of avoiding distinct design departments for the intangible parts of a customer experience. They argue that such departments might lose touch with reality and do not have the same understanding of customers’ needs and wishes as the people who are actually involved with delivering the service. Therefore, design and innovation were part of each functional area.

Furthermore, Gorb and Dumas (1987) cite that design agencies and consultancies emphasise the importance of including operational people in design teams. They stress that the client understands the business better than the agency does. Furthermore, a high degree of client involvement increases buy-in and makes successful implementation of new service changes more likely.

Finally, Gorb and Dumas (1987) highlight that several firms often include front-line employees in their projects, because of their detailed insight in the current customer experience and the opportunities for improvement. They form a great source of information and the firms emphasise the creativity that can be found inside an organisation, particularly with the people involved in daily interaction with the customer.

2.7 Simultaneity

According to Van Looy et al. (2003), a common characteristic of services is the simultaneity of production and consumption. Whereas goods are produced first and then consumed, services are produced and consumed at the same time. The customer takes part in the production process and consumes the service as it is being produced. For example, when a customer enters a restaurant and consumes the meal, he/she partakes in the service encounter at the same time as the service personnel because of this property, it is difficult to separate customer service.
As a consequence, customers’ purchase the service and part of the delivery system, however the degree of overlap can vary significantly from service to service, ranging from a small degree of overlap in a bank to a high degree of overlap in a small restaurant. Van Looy et al. (2003) conveys that the at least partial overlap between production and consumption means that there is personal contact during the service delivery process such as service employee and the customer interaction during the service delivery. This is not necessarily the case with goods, since goods can be produced and consumed separately, this makes the human factor in services so crucial.

Van Looy et al. (2003) place importance on the careful attention that must be paid to employees dealing with the customers, whereby, recognising that employees represent the company and where production and consumption occur simultaneously, clearly the customer has to be present at the place where the service is provided. This means that the service provider has to make the service accessible to the customer. Services are therefore ‘place dependent’ and not all services can be simply traded.

Dale et al. (2007) cite a basic or core service product, hotel accommodation with associated services, which are required to facilitate consumption of the main product and refer to supporting services which are not required but may enhance customer service and differentiate it from the competition.

The augmentative service identified by Lovelock (1999) refer how services are delivered, as part of the service process and the interaction between the company and its customers. The latter, hotel accommodation interaction includes the accessibility of the service, customer participation and the interaction between employees and customers, systems and customers, and the physical environment and customer.

Bateson (1989) cites there is little point in McDonalds deciding to follow the lead of Ford or Proctor & Gamble and build a huge, capital-intensive factory. The ability to product one billion hamburgers a year in Michigan does not help consumers elsewhere in the world who are waiting for their food. Instead, place of consumption is vitally important when considering the service encounter within restaurants.
2.8 Heterogeneity

According to Van Looy et al. (2003) heterogeneity is related to the potential of variability in the performance of services, which by their nature, services are processes implying simultaneity. Therefore, they bear a larger risk of being different depending on circumstances such as the employee involvement, the particular customer, the physical setting or even the hour of the day.

Van Looy et al. (2003) outlines that there are three possible sources from where this heterogeneity instigates from, namely the service employee, the customer and the service provider. Van Looy et al. (2003) also highlight, that while most services involve an interactive role on the part of the restaurant service, employees, while human are not robots and are unable to repeat consistently the same action day in and day out without error. Therefore, a first source of heterogeneity is the service employee involved in the restaurant service delivery process. Humans, consciously or unconsciously, vary their actions and sometimes make mistakes. People can be moody, which may lead them to treat customers in a less favourable way. As a result, the outcome of the service delivery process is more susceptible to variation than in the case of goods.

According to Van Looy et al. (2003) the customer as another source, from where this heterogeneity initiates from. The state of mind or the personal situation of the customer strongly influences his or her behaviour, as well as his or her perception of the service. As a result, each customer will experience the service rendered differently. In addition, it should be mentioned that a particular customer might be influenced by the presence and behaviour of other customers.

Van Looy et al. (2003) identifies the service scope, which has several external factors that may influence the customer’s perception of the restaurant service. For example, where customers arrive for a wedding ceremony at a restaurant on a sunny or on a rainy day, whether there is a long or a short queue in the bank; or whether or not there is a lot or turbulence on a flight. These factors will make a big difference to the customer. However, the problem is that many of these factors are difficult, if not impossible, for the service provider to control.
According to Gronroos (1990), the heterogeneity of services creates one of the major problems in services management – that is, how to maintain an evenly perceived quality of the services produced and rendered to the customer. Even with a highly standardised service product, such as a McDonalds Cheeseburger, variability will inevitably occur. The complexity of the service does not allow for control of all the process parameters to ensure a consistent, high quality output, even if all the same ingredients and the same process parameters, such as time and temperature, are used all over the world, variability and human nature will allow for mistakes to occur.

Van Looy et al. (2003) states that the outcome of the service delivery process is variable which creates uncertainty and is a higher risk for the customer who wants to purchase a service. One option is to increase the quality control, just as manufacturing companies do, in order to detect bad service and prevent it from reaching the customer. This can be done by performing a service quality check where the service product is produced and checked but before it is delivered to the customer.

Levitt (1972) believes that these service quality checks would be virtually impossible to do this within the restaurant sector while suggesting that by performing quality checks when the service is produced but before being delivered to the customer, may reduce bad service. Firstly, restaurant service output is intangible so what should be checked, unless the server wishes to upset the chef’s presentation of the food, moreover disturb the customers who will have to pay for it.

Levitt (1972) also suggests, that the production and consumption of a meal experience occur simultaneously, making it difficult to check the quality before the service is consumed. However, better planning of the service encounter, which is the moment of interaction between service provider and customer, could reduce the degree of variability.
2.9 Perishability

According to Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1985), services cannot be stored and carried forward to a future time period, while, Donnelly and George (1981), state that unlike goods, services cannot be stored. Onkvisit and Shaw (1991) suggest that services are ‘time dependent’ and ‘time important’ which make them very perishable. This is not only due to their intangibility but also due to the limitations of simultaneous production and consumption. Once a service has been produced, it has to be consumed otherwise it is of no use. If a plane leaves the ground with empty seats, the potential for revenue, is lost forever.

The same applies to restaurants with empty tables, as described by Lovelock (1988), when he states unused capacity in a service organisation is rather like a running tap in a sink with no plug, the flow is wasted unless customers or possessions requiring servicing are present to receive it.

Van Looy et al. (2003) stipulate that if the demand for these services were constant, there would be no problem. If the number of passengers an airline had to fly from New York to Paris were 150 a day, every day, airlines would build planes that would exactly carry 150 seats and there would be no empty seats. But while we do not live in a world where demand is constant, demand for most services is rather volatile and cannot always be predicted.

Van Looy et al. (2003) outline that in restaurants, peaks of demand occur at noon and in the evening. The fact that services cannot be stored makes volatility of demand a bigger problem for service producers than for goods producers. When demand is lower than production, goods can be stored. According to Van Looy et al. (2003), if demand is higher than production, the accumulated stock of goods can be sold to accommodate surplus in demand. Thus, stock can be used as a buffer to demand variability. This is not the case for services. Managing supply and demand in services is therefore dependant on capacity management.
2.10 The Role Service Quality Classifications

According to Van Looy et al. (2003) services are different from goods, in respect to intangibility and simultaneity which implies heterogeneity and perishability. These elements pose specific challenges for the management of the service delivery process. Commercial policies, service employees and operational issues are all affected by these characteristics. However, not all services are alike. Van Looy et al. (2003) articulates the management of a hairdressing salon will be different from the management of a consulting firm, just as the management of a fast food restaurant will be different from that of a bank. Therefore, in developing a guiding framework to look at the managerial consequences of the different service characteristics, the employer needs to define insights into services to make it easier to deliver the service.

Van Looy et al. (2003) state the classifications of service are very helpful. There is a plethora of classifications schemes, depending of the particular combination on different dimensions. Dale et al. (2007) states the benefits of good services, outlining that without a focus on service quality, organisations will face problems from both employees and customers, and associated financial and other costs.

Furthermore, according to Kandampully, Mok and Sparks (2001), a proportion of displeased customers will complain and tell others, generating adverse word of mouth publicity and possibly accusations of blame between personnel within the organisation and some customers will ultimately switch to the competition. Service quality is the result of a complex network of several dimensions.

Kandampully et al. (2001) states that service quality emanates from a total service commitment. Kandampully et al. (2001) outlines that tourism, hospitality and leisure service providers must address service issues, by developing appropriate policies and procedures, by attaining a firm commitment from service employees, and by measuring the ongoing effectiveness of their service plan. Kandampully et al. (2001) state the development of service policies and procedure commitment commences with the establishment of service policies and procedures. However, these policies must be developed that are in line with the desired service image and customer target market.
2.11 Classifying services

According to Van Looy et al. (2003) services can be placed on scale from low to high intangibility, the higher the intangibility, the more difficulties customers experience when evaluating the offering. Intangibility also poses problems for the operation system since intangible things cannot be stored.

Bitran (2004) recounts an alternative aspect to the intangibility of services, which is the understanding of psychology. Bitran (2004) outlines that while services are intangible, they are at the level of thoughts or actions that it is unfamiliar to us, since we are more used to dealing with tangible items. Bitran (2004) explains that companies need to make the customer aware that we are worried about them. This requires us to understand psychology and manage effectively.

Bitran (2004) states that intangible objects are difficult to standardise, making quality much more dependent on the employee providing that particular service. This requires restaurants to understand psychology and manage it effectively. Bitran (2004) stresses the importance of physical aspects, because services tend to be intangible, the physical materials that support the service, therefore become important.

Bitran (2004) refers to a bank building or a lawyer’s office. The material items are very important for new customers, but are less important for existing clients. Bitran (2004) advises that it is very hard to get a patent in a service industry. When the first airline offered coupons for the next trip, other airlines offered coupons and accepted competitor’s coupons. When a restaurant introduces a new menu or a licensed premises’ offers a new type of cocktail, competitors copy quickly all trying to be the leader in the industry.

The dimensions in the nature of services as cited by Lovelock (1988) convey services can be attributed to capacity management, which may influence both the employees and the customers. Lovelock (1988) suggests that approaches may be adopted in order to reduce the shortening of waiting times for customers, but at the same time cause employees to adopt a more flexible approach. The more demand fluctuates, the more capacity management becomes important.
Lovelock (1988) states that in restaurants, for instance, the waiting times problem is more acute than it is in banks and insurance companies. Bitran (2004) recommends that companies need to extend the service encounter, present certain aspects of services in a way that people can consume it and get on board, for example, having customer select aperitifs in the lounge while waiting for their table to be ready. Otherwise, customers are paying for it without knowing it.

Chase (1981) identifies that one of the characteristics of high contact service organisations is the fact that demand for the service is often instantaneous and cannot be stored. Van Looy et al. (2003) states that while production and consumption can occur simultaneously, without the customer being present, for instance, telephone banking which allows the customer to consume the service without face-to-face contact with the service provider.

Chase (1981) outlines that the interaction between the employee and the customer means that the service employees have to be both competent and communicative. Therefore, it becomes even more important to select and train employees that fit these criteria in order to perform their jobs well as front of house employees.

Standardising the operation, according to Van Looy et al. (2003) may be a way to reduce this heterogeneity. This heterogeneity is closely related to the degree of intangibility and the degree of simultaneity, however, Van Looy et al. (2003) makes us aware that the lower the goods component in the offering, the more the consumption and production overlap. As a consequence, these offerings cannot be stored. Van Looy et al. (2003) outline that while both the employee and the customer are a source of heterogeneity, there will be more heterogeneity in high customer contact organisations such as fine dining restaurants.
2.12 The benefits of good service

Dale et al. (2007) states that the most frequent mentioned benefit of service is enhancing customer loyalty through satisfaction. Sustaining existing customers can generate repeat and increased business and may lead to the attraction of new customers from positive word of mouth communication. Dale et al. (2007) further outlines that good service quality enhances corporate image and may provide insulation from price competition, whereby some customers will pay a premium for reliable service quality in restaurants.

2.13 Moments of Truth

Czepiel, Solomon and Suprenant (1985) refer to a service encounters as the moments of truth (MOT) or a critical incident. The moments of truth, was popularised by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Scandinavian Airlines. The COE stated that all encounters or transactions where the customer interacted with the company (anyone representing it) were ‘moments of truth’. This moulded the customer’s opinion about the company and the CEO, further added that if these moments could be well-managed, the result would be a great service company, resulting in a happy customer.

A service encounter is any direct interaction between a service provider and a customer and may take varying forms. Some transactions could be done on the phone, like ordering a pizza from a restaurant. Lewis and Entwistle (1990) cite that these service encounters also have an impact on employees in relation to their vision, performance and job satisfaction and their rewards.

Consequently it is important that organisations need to manage these service encounters effectively for the benefit of the customer and employees. The greater the variety of encounters the greater impact of customer service and quality. Czepiel et al. (1985) cite that services can be customised, like a theme party at a hotel or restaurant, or standardised, like a standard meal at a Indian restaurant. Some services tend to be more customised, such as McDonald’s menu, ambience and service pattern.
2.14 Technology for the Service offering

According to Bitner, Brown and Meuter (2000) technology is an implement for employees to achieve organisational goals, impacting and improving service encounters. Mullins (2001) states that in order to achieve goals and objectives, the work of an establishment has to be divided among its members. The resulting structure shall be the most appropriate to the organisational objectives. This structure provides accountability for the areas of work undertaken by groups and individual members of staff, while involving the organisation of human assets and maintaining the correct design structure.

Bitner et al. (2000) states that to find expectations greater than performance, this implies that perceived quality is less than satisfactory, this is not to say that restaurant service is of low quality, rather quality is relative to initial expectations and important to take into account when measuring the service offering. Bitner et al. (2000) examined the ability of technology to effectively customise service offerings, also recover from service failures and spontaneously delight customers. While service quality is often defined, it is essentially to do with meeting customers’ needs and requirements and with how well the service level delivered, matches customers’ expectations.

Dale et al. (2007) outline that these expectations are desires/wants, for example, what the service provider should offer, and are formed on the basis of previous experience of a company. Dale et al. (2007) also suggests that the service quality becomes a consumer judgement and results from comparisons made by consumers of expectations of service with their perceptions of the actual service delivered. Dale et al. (2007) stipulates that service providers need consider that, higher levels of performance lead to higher expectations, ultimately deciding if the customer returns or not.
2.15 Early approaches of service

According to Hofman and Worsfold (1999), the early quality models concentrated on goods. The enormous growth of the service sector in western economies since the Second World War resulted in a growing literature on service quality. Hofman and Worsfold (1999), state that the service quality model created by Grönroos attempted to understand how the quality of a given service is perceived by customers. It divides the customer’s perception of any particular service into two dimensions:

1. Technical quality - what the consumer receives the technical outcome of the process.

Grönroos (1984), suggests that in the context of services, functional quality is generally perceived to be more important than technical quality, assuming that the service is provided at a technically satisfactory level [Refer to Figure 2.2]. He also points out that the functional quality dimension can be perceived in a very subjective manner.

**Figure 2.2 Grönroos's Service Quality Model**

![Grönroos's Service Quality Model](image)

According to Hofman and Worsfold (1999), the Grönroos model is important because it outlines service quality, which must include the manner in which it is delivered. A total of five ‘gaps’ regarding service quality were identified by Grönroos, and according to Parasuraman \textit{et al.} (1985) these gaps may be major hurdles in attempting to deliver a service which consumers would perceive as being of high quality. According to Parasuraman \textit{et al.} (1985), p.44. A set of key discrepancies or gaps exists regarding executive perceptions of service quality and the tasks associated with service delivery to consumers. It is this last ‘gap’ which has the most significance. The ‘Gaps’ model keeps a clear focus on the perceptions of the customer, and these are seen as paramount according to Parasuraman \textit{et al.} (1985).

The five gaps that were identified:

1. Between customers’ expectation and management’s perceptions of those expectations, i.e. not knowing what customers expect.
2. Between management’s perceptions of customers’ expectations and service quality specifications, i.e. the wrong service-quality standards.
3. Between service quality specifications and service delivery, i.e. the service performance gap.
4. Between service delivery and external communications to customers about service delivery, i.e. when promises do not match delivery.
5. Between customers’ expectation and perceived service (the total of the other four gaps).

Hofman and Worsfold (1999), highlight factors such as access, communication, security, competence and responsiveness, which may impact on consumer expectations and on the consumer perceptions of quality [Refer to Figure 2.3]. Anand, Choi and Grint (1993) states these factors in particular bring another level of subjectivity into the model, which may leave service quality definitions vulnerable to aspects of human behaviour and reduce customer satisfaction.
Figure 2.3 Determinants of Perceived Service Quality


2.16 Service Gaps

Distinguished researchers such as Dale et al. (2007), Van Looy et al. (2003) and Edvardsson et al. (1994) all conducted research in the areas of customer satisfaction, customer expectations, service quality and customer perceptions which has been further developed by Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry. Zeithaml et al. (1985) define service quality to be a function of the gap between consumers’ expectations of service and their perceptions of actual service delivery by an organisation, and suggested that this gap is influenced by several other gaps, which may occur in the organisation.

According to Parasuraman et al. (1985) the service quality model [Refer to Figure 2.4] offers an integrated view of the consumer-company relationship, and is a means of describing customer dissatisfaction in the context of service quality. The results are based on substantial research by a team from Texas A&M University, who carried out interviews with executives in U.S. firms and with consumers amongst a number of service providers.
Figure 2.4 Service quality model

2.17 Service quality

Johnston and Michel (2008) conducted research on investigating the impact of service recovery procedures, i.e. the way service recovery is managed and executed, based on three outcomes, namely, the customer, the process, and employee recoveries and their relative impact on an organisation’s financial performance.

Johnston and Michel (2008) stated that many organisations and academic researchers have focused their efforts on customer recovery and have, to some extent, ignored the potentially higher impact outcomes of process and employee recovery. Johnston and Michel’s (2008), main finding was that service recovery procedures have a greater impact on employees and process improvement than on customers. Furthermore, while many organisations appear to be concerned with service recovery few seem to be good at it or gaining the benefits of recovered customers, improved processes or recovered employees.

Tsang and Qu (2000) state that research on service quality has been carried out within the framework of the service quality model developed from the extensive research of Parasuraman et al. (1985). The service quality model was derived from the magnitude and direction of five ‘gaps’ [Refer to Figure 2.4] which are:

1. Understanding: the difference between consumer expectations and management perceptions of consumer expectations.
2. Service standards: the difference between management perceptions of consumer expectations and service quality specifications.
3. Service performance: the difference between service quality specifications and the service actually delivered.
4. Communications: the difference between service delivery and what is communicated about the service to consumers.
5. Service quality: the difference between customer expectations of service quality and customer perceptions of the organisation’s performance.
Tsang and Qu (2000) state that the first four gaps (Gap 1, Gap 2, Gap 3 and Gap 4) affect the way in which service is delivered, and the existence of these four gaps leads to the extended Gap 5. In other words, the scope of Gap 5 depends on the size and direction of the first four gaps which can vary significantly in the restaurant industry with alternative methods for restaurant classification and a different client structure.

Conversely, Gap 2, Gap 3 and Gap 4 are not as relevant to the research scope of the present study because the Gap 4 contains the external communication which includes pre and post contracts of the service delivery, where the author has decided to look and the expectations and perceptions. The principal focus of this present research is Gap 5, Gap 1 and the two additional gaps (Gap 6 and Gap 7) which are identified in the model. Each of these gaps (Gap 5, Gap 1, Gap 6 and Gap 7) is discussed and elaborated in the following sections.

Gap 5: The customer perception of service quality:

Measurement of the gap (Gap 5) between consumers’ expectations and their perceptions of restaurant service quality delivery has become the principle centre of this research. Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) cite, that in order to manage service quality, it is important to manage the gaps between expectations and perceptions on the part of management, employers and customers. This analysis may present restaurateurs and facilitators in education with important insight about how well actual service performance compared with the expectations of the consumers.

Tsang and Qu (2000) suggest that an examination of Gap 5 is a tremendously useful tool for management in monitoring the service delivery in consumer expectation and perceptions of service. Thus it is important to test customers’ perceptions (actual experience) to see whether service quality provided by the restaurant was meeting, exceeding or falling below customer expectations. According to Zeithaml & Bitner (1996) it is the gap 5, which has the most significance. The ‘Gaps’ model keeps a clear focus on the perceptions of the customer, and the gap 5 is seen as playing a crucial part of Zeithaml & Bitner (1996) in evaluating service quality.
Gap 1: The management’s perceptions of customer expectations:

Tsang and Qu (2000) articulates that this gap is pertinent to a critical question. Do restaurants understand what customers expect from service quality in the restaurant service industry? Management perceptions about what customers expect from service quality should ideally be congruent with the expectations expressed by customers. Tsang and Qu (2000) outline that most senior management executives have the authority and responsibility for setting service priorities and for designing and developing service quality standards, so, if they do not fully understand what customers expect, they might trigger a chain of bad decisions, resulting in poor perceived service quality.

Studies by Lewis (1987) have shown that there were considerable differences in expectations of service quality between customers and management in the hotel industry. Lewis (1987) measured the service quality gap in the hotel industry, comparing management perceptions of guest expectations and the actual expectations of the guests themselves, and found that, for the most part, management believed that guests expected more than they in fact did.

According to Lewis (1987), there are two additional gaps in the service quality model apart from the original five gaps proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1985). These two additional gaps that have been identified but were not included in the original service quality model and are labelled as Gap 6 and Gap 7, [Refer to Figure 2.4].

Gap 6: The difference between consumer perceptions of service delivery and what management believes they deliver:

According to Tsang and Qu (2000), this gap is pertinent to the simple question, do managers overestimate their organisation’s service delivery in meeting customer expectations of service quality in restaurant service setting? Research conducted by Coyle and Dale (1993) found that managers in the hotel industry tended to be very self-assured and they believed they knew best. Thus, they perceived their service delivery as being more successful than customers perceived it to be, in most cases.
Gap 7: the management’s perception of consumer expectations and management’s perception of its service delivery:

Tsang and Qu (2000) question the difference between management’s perception of consumer expectations and management’s perception of its service delivery. This gap measures the internal situation. Do management believe they deliver as much as they believe customers expect?

According to Tsang and Qu (2000) measuring management perceptions of service quality is just as important as measuring consumers’ perceptions, because management perceptions of service quality directly affect service quality standards. Measurement of the gap (Gap 7) between management perceptions of consumer expectations and management perceptions of an organisation’s service quality delivery could help to know whether or not management has confidence in meeting customers’ expectations.

These four gaps (Gap 5, Gap 1, Gap 6 and Gap 7) could provide better insights for restaurant managers to evaluate and identify service quality problems. By understanding the extent and direction of these three gaps, managers would be able to identify whether their service was exceeded, meeting or falling below customers’ expectations, and would gain clues about how to close any gaps, if they were to arise.

According to DeWitt and Brady (2003) recovering the customer will have a significant impact on customer loyalty and their re-purchase intentions. Furthermore, it is suggested by McCollough and Gremler (2004) that the service recovery can lead to higher levels of satisfaction than is achieved through normal good service, which Bjorlin Liden and Skalen (2003) refer to, as the service paradox.

Tax and Brown (1998) argue that the relationship between service recovery and profit can be clearly seen by examining the end result. Tax and Brown (1998) argue that profit is affected by customer loyalty, which results from customer satisfaction generated from good service procedures.
Zeithaml & Bitner (1996) identify ten key categories which they called ‘service quality determinants’, and noted that despite the different types of service analysed, consumers used fairly similar criteria when evaluating services. The ten Service Quality Determinants listed by Zeithaml et al. (1990) pp. 21-22 were the following:

- Tangibles - Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials.
- Reliability - Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
- Responsiveness - Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
- Competence - Possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the service.
- Courtesy - Politeness, respect, consideration, and friendliness of contact personnel.
- Credibility - Trustworthiness, believability, honesty of the service provider.
- Security - Freedom from danger, risk or doubt.
- Access - Approachability and ease of contact.
- Communication - Keeping customers informed in language they can understand and listening to them.
- Understanding the customer - Making the effort to know customers and their needs.

2.18 Service measurement

According to Hubbert, García Sehorn and Brown (1995) expectations for performance represent a priori standard which consumers bring to a consumption experience. Consumers compare perceived performance against this preconceived, often subconscious, standard when evaluating a product. According to Hubbert et al. (1995), many routine service encounters, such as the production and consumption of the service product occur simultaneously and comprise two sides of the same exchange goal.
This leads to the expectation that participants of a service encounter which will have the same subgoals. Yet, participants within a service encounter perceive the interchange from different perspectives. According to Hubbert et al. (1995) individuals considers a service encounter to be in process once they activate the role for a routine encounter.

There is general agreement according to Hubbert et al. (1995) that expectations represent the consumer’s expectations about what will happen in their next interaction, measuring performance expectations in service contexts has been problematic. Expectations and perceived performance are often measured at the same point in time, following product consumption, even when a difficulty has arisen.

According to Carman, (1990) research on expectation and perceptions can be further confounded because it is likely that expectations assessed after the service encounter may be swayed by the perceived level of product performance. Bearden and Teel, (1983) cite information be made obtainable when expectations are measured prior to service exposure. Unfortunately, this constraint drastically limits the accessibility to meaningful measurement of consumer expectations, especially within the restaurant service setting, where patrons are there for food and beverages only.

An alternative methodology has been proposed by Smith and Houston (1983) for assessing expectations of service experiences. Smith and Houston (1983) suggests that consumer scripts provide an operationalisation of will be expectations, a standard against which future service interactions can be compared. Scripts have been described as expectation bundles according to Smith and Houston (1983) and are especially appropriate for evaluating service encounters because they incorporate both the outcome and process dimensions of the event, but fail to realise the intrusion of the customer.
2.19 Zone of Tolerance

According to Dale (2007) customers’ expectations with respect to dimensions of service are generally reasonable, for example, they expect luggage to arrive with them on an aircraft and the plane to arrive on time most of the time. They also expect basics from a hotel in terms of security and cleanliness. However, expectations may vary depending on a host of circumstances and experiences, furthermore, an experience with one service provider (a hotel or a doctor) can influence expectations of others.

Parasuraman *et al.* (1991) refers to the zones of tolerance which is the difference between what is desired and what is considered adequate. The desired level of service is what the customer hopes to receive, a blend of what ‘can’ and ‘should’ be.

Singh and Sirdeshmukh (2000) state the effect of doubt is presumed to be greater than the effect of trust. Trust can broaden the zone of tolerance with the occasional inconsistency in service performance, which will not necessarily lead to distrust. Singh and Sirdeshmukh (2000) cite if ample explanation for a mistake is given and accepted, the consumer will be more understanding and may increase customer loyalty.

The adequate level is what service providers find acceptable, which is based partly on the customer’s assessment of what the service will be and depends on the alternatives that are offered. Parasuraman *et al.* (1991) outline that tolerance levels vary between individuals, between service aspects and with experience. If there are alternatives available to the customer, such as the choice of restaurants in a city, the tolerance zones are more limited for the provider, as a result of more choices for the customer.
2.20 Conclusions

This literature review has examined the intricacies of the moments of truth, analysed various models of service quality as underlying elements in the expectations and perceptions of service in the restaurant sector. The review identified that good restaurant service quality enhances corporate image, which provides insulation from price competition as a key factor in customers’ perception.

The review further stated that customers are willing to pay a premium for reliable service quality in restaurants, the review also considered the performance nature of the restaurant service, the service delivery and the interaction between the service provider and customer. The literature review underlined the importance of front line staff and stressed, that these play a pivotal role in encouraging repeat business.

However, the review worrying highlighted that some operators did not deem front line restaurant staff as paramount to the overall success of the business and when it came to training the restaurant staff, business operators felt these employees were secondary to the overall business strategy maintaining they were much younger, less qualified and more transitory in their nature.

The review differentiated service from other industries and found support for the contention that restaurant attributes are an important influence in consumers perceptions thus making a link between perception and the consumer selection of a restaurant based on a prior visit, a recommendation or influenced by a family social occasion.
Chapter Three
Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and describes in detail the research methodology employed by the author in conducting this dissertation. The chapter commences with an introduction to research methodology, approaches to methodology, then an outline to the secondary research, objectives, the approaches and examination of the research methodology that assists in evaluating consumer expectations and perceptions. Each research decision undertaken is analysed to show their usefulness for this dissertation and to outline how the perceptions and expectations interconnect.

Secondary data sources in the form of books, periodicals, journals, newspapers, magazines and reports formed the basis for the literature review, please refer to Figure 3.6, and primary data was utilised in conjunction with this review to address the research questions. This chapter also provides a justification for the research method selected and explains both the research strategy and how the practical implementation of each method was conducted.

According to Sumser (2001:69) the purpose of research ‘is to enable us to convince a sceptical audience that what we have found is valid and accurate’. According to Lucas (1995) research is part of an overall strategy for persuasion and that persuasion is a strategic activity, just as a business person or military commander plots a strategy to gain a big sale or to be victorious in battle. Lucas (1995) also remarks that a persuasive speaker must have a strategy to win the audience to his or her side.

According to Radford and Goldstein (2002) research methods are not only the tools for collecting information, they also form the basis of strategic decisions in the creation of influential messages. Reinard (2001:12) states, that ‘research is an argument’ in which claims are made on the basis of evidence, research is a way of articulating and supporting particular knowledge claims, research is a way of making an argument affective and for gaining a desired response from a constituency.
Figure 3.5 Secondary Research Plan

Radford and Goldstein (2002) cite that research methods are not simply adding statistics as ornamentation to a message, nor is it simply conducting a survey and reporting the results. Reinard (2001) describes research methods, as part of an overall rhetorical and communication strategy that it is not being rhetorical. Conclusions derived from research, as opposed to speculation or opinion, are perceived as being objective and factual. They are associated with the scientific ideals of facts, proof, and the truth. Sumser (2001:71) summarises research methodology as an antirhetorical strategy, which is itself a rhetorical strategy. As researchers, we are saying, in effect,

‘You should not believe what I am saying because I can wrap it up in fine flowery phrases. You should not believe what I tell you because I can bamboozle you with subtly shifting definitions and overly convoluted terminology. Instead, you should believe what I say because I can show you, plainly and clearly, what I have done and the basis from which my conclusions follow’.

3.2 Approaches to Research Methodology

According to Grix (2001) there are difficulties with understanding the term ‘methodology’ as it is used interchangeably with ‘research methods’. Grix (2001) states the term ‘research methods’ refers to the choice of research strategy taken by a particular scholar, as opposed to other, alternative research strategies. Radford and Goldstein (2002) cite that research is first and foremost a way of articulating and supporting knowledge claims, but it is also an important means of adjudicating between competing knowledge claims. Amaratunga, Baldray, Sarshar and Newton (2002) refer to research as imperative in both business and academic activities and there is no consensus in the literature on how it should be defined.

Amaratunga et al. (2002) describes that research is conducted in the spirit of the inquiry, which relies on facts, experience and data, concepts and constructs, hypotheses and conjectures, and principles and laws. Carson, Gilmore, Perry and Gronhaug (2001) refer to the justification for a research problem which stems from the broad area of the topic itself and the choice of research naturally depends on the defined research problem, the data and information needed for solving this problem.
Amaratunga et al. (2002) explain that research may be categorised into two distinct types: qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative research implies an emphasis on the quality of entities and on process and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quality, amount, intensity or frequency.

According to Amaratunga et al. (2002) quantitative research are statistical methods used to analyse the collected data, the approach grows out of a strong academic tradition that places considerable trust in the numbers that represent opinions or concepts and provides informed observations to be made. Amaratunga et al. (2002) state that it is necessary to approach the gathering of information in a coherent and original manner, if any research is to be truly objective, it must take into account any previously published studies and relevant data available within the subject area. These secondary sources are usually studies or research data available within the subject area.

3.3 Research Strategy

The researcher decided to adopt an online approach for the dissemination of the survey. According to Malhotra (2007), web surveys offer several advantages as compared to email surveys. The questionnaire offered participants anonymity which according to Hague and Jackson (1998) obtain a higher response rate that with those who identify themselves. Hague and Jackson (1998) state that it is possible for online questionnaires to construct buttons, check boxes and data entry fields that prevent respondents from selecting more than one response where only one is intended. Internet surveys offer an advantage over email surveys because they can also provide graphics and sound if desired and can be sent over a server and provide real time feedback.

On completion of the survey design structure, the next decision was to select a method which was best to conduct the research. The researcher considered the approach adopted by Kivela et al. (2000), which interviewed customers that dined out in restaurants over three month period. The researcher firmly believed that this time was not personally feasible for the existing research to enter any restaurant due to time constraints and work commitments.
3.4 Rationale Background

According to Kivela et al. (2000) the measures of dining experiences, attribute importance on consumer decision making, customer expectations and satisfaction are diverse. In the hospitality and tourism context, numerous service quality research instruments have been used to measure customer satisfaction. However, in the restaurant context, the survey instrument mainly used by restaurants is customer comment cards, mainly because, restaurant industries have a distinct product structure that is differentiated by price, location, theme, ambience, service level, cuisine and style, which at the same time demand a wide variety of market segments for the same products. This uniqueness inspires the researcher to seek and obtain the respondents’ views on expectations and perceptions of a restaurant service in Ireland.

3.5 Research Hypothesis

According to Domegan and Fleming (2003) a hypothesis can be defined as a statistical procedure that uses data to determine whether or not a statement about the value of the population parameter should be rejected or accepted. Following the extensive literature review in chapter two, the researcher has arrived with the hypothesis which is outlined below.

**Hypothesis 1** High relationship levels between dining out frequency and return patronage.

**Hypothesis 2** High relationship levels between customer dining out and positive restaurant review.

**Hypothesis 3** High relationship levels between the male and female views on food quality.

**Hypothesis 4** High relationship levels between the dining out occasions and family event.

**Hypothesis 5** High relationship levels between customers’ expectations and overall perceptions when dining out.
Domegan and Fleming (2003) states that the general approach adopted in the hypothesis testing is to take a random sample from the population of interest. If this sample information is not inconsistent with the statement in the null hypothesis then such a statement cannot be rejected. However, if the sample information is inconsistent with the null hypothesis, then it can be rejected.

3.6 The Research Process

The secondary research was adapted from the bibliographical framework research strategy by Hart (1998). Please refer to Figure 3.6. The process was structured after initial exploratory research had provided valuable insights into the essential nature and purpose of the investigation required. This process provided the necessary understanding of the problem area and supported a focused approach to secondary data collection, resulting in several advantages as follows:

- The research plan helped formulate the research problem,
- The research plan identified an alternative course of action where problems materialised,
- The research plan identified the key variables and relationships for examination,
- Offered insights for developing an approach to the problem,
- Established priorities for the secondary research,
- Guided the qualitative and desk research, making information easily accessible and relatively inexpensive by reducing the search time.

The researcher decided to use the internet as the main research tool for this dissertation. www.SurveyMonkey.com was selected as the internet provider for a monthly fee of twenty euros, this website allowed the researcher to devise the survey online and filter results, the survey was posted for a period of six weeks and the research questionnaire was based on an Irish perspective. The company, Survey Monkey, started in 1999 provides a twenty-four hour online survey tool which enables people of all experience levels to create their own surveys quickly and easily. Every day, Survey Monkey (2008) provides thousands of people the feedback they need to make more informed decisions, including more than 80% of the Fortune 100.
According to Hague and Jackson (1998) respondents want to feel that their efforts in completing the questionnaire are valued. Legitimacy influences response rates in all types of surveys and the researcher decided to contact the Restaurant Association of Ireland (RAI), Irish Hotel Federation (IHF), Ireland’s Blue Book of Country Houses & Restaurants Guide, to inform them, that if they forwarded the survey link to their members and customers, the findings of the research would be returned to them on completion and course validation. The researcher believed that this offer would be accepted and as a result was a contributing factor in receiving numerous responses.

3.7 Secondary Research

According to Malhotra (2007), secondary data is data that has already been collected for the purposes other than the problem at hand. Secondary data can be collected quickly, inexpensively and in a short time. Although it is rare for secondary data to provide all the answers to a non-routine research problem, such data can be useful in a number of ways.

However, Steward and Kamins (1993) advises that the regular user of secondary information often develops a healthy scepticism about information provided by others. There are many ways that data may be misleading if they are not evaluated carefully.

Steward and Kamins (1993) state that data collection is usually purposive, and that purpose for which information is obtained and analysed may influence the conclusions drawn, the data collection procedure employed, the definition of terms and categories, and even the quality of the information. According to Malhotra (2007), the examination of secondary data is a prerequisite to the collection of primary data.

Marshall (1995) outlines that secondary data enters two broad categories, public and private. The former is usually collected by government agencies and readily accessible, for example, government statistics published free, from the Central Statistics Office (CSO). This information is usually of high quality, but Marshall (1995) conveys the general nature of the data is not always appropriate to marketing decisions and this is where the latter, private market research industry has a role to play in providing specific tailored research for the customer.
Marshall (1995) cites that this information provides market-specific information, and often draws on the above-mentioned public sources supplemented with trade and consumer interviews. Marshall (1995) explains that access is usually restricted to those who can pay for the privilege and state that much of this specialist information is captured using consumer panels, retail audits and tracking studies. Marshall (1995) states that these continuous market research techniques are used to collect data repeatedly from the same representative sample of a defined survey population allowing one to monitor changes in consumption over time.

Marshall (1995) stipulates that secondary data can also be accessed via library searches or information direct from source such as in-house information and online database. These searches can offer a wealth of information and occasionally they might actually offer a solution to the problem, but this is unlikely. They can be helpful in clarifying particular issues, providing an insight into appropriate methods, and alerting the researcher to problems or difficulties likely to be encountered.

Domegan and Fleming (2003) state that the researcher should never assume that primary data will provide the absolute answer to everything, and outlines the stages of the secondary research process, please refer to Figure 3.5. Secondary data is not to be underestimated, in such a situation, the researcher analyses the secondary data and writes up the results. Domegan and Fleming (2003) highlight that once the decision had been made to collect secondary data, it needs to be judged or evaluated objectively before its inclusion into any dissertation.

According to Domegan and Fleming (2003) questions about how particular scientific secondary data was originally collected and included in research journals should be noted. Domegan and Fleming (2003) expresses that, to judge the validity and reliability of the original research plan was, the following questions must be asked of all secondary data, how was it collected, why was it collected, when was it collected, why was it published and how dependable is the data source. Domegan and Fleming (2003) outline another criterion for judging secondary data which relates to comparability with the current project.
Domegan and Fleming (2003) advises that measurement units and classification schemes used in alternative research methods may be different and can be a serious drawback to the use of the secondary source, while stating that traditional boundaries are becoming blurred in domestic and international marketplaces and their definitions are constantly changing. Domegan and Fleming (2003) state that this detracts from the objectivity and comparability of data emanating from different sources and hence its usefulness to the researcher.

**Figure 3.6 The role of secondary data in the research process**


### 3.8 Research Statement

The following research objectives have been established in an attempt to satisfy the research problem in this dissertation.

- To determine the level of understanding of service quality and perceptions of service quality in the Irish restaurant sector;
- To develop a range of decision features used by customers when deciding on a restaurant service experience;
- To critically evaluate the customers’ expectations and perceptions of a restaurant service;
- To identify a range of decision attributes which could influence or alter a person’s perception of a restaurant;
- To list the top three most influential attributes identified by customers when selecting a restaurant:
3.9 The advantages and roles of secondary data in the research process

Malhotra and Birks (1999) state the central advantages of conducting secondary research is to reduce time and the identification of the most appropriate approach of conducting primary research. Finn, Elliott-White and Walton (2000) state that secondary data analysis appeals for many practical reasons, not at least of which is the fact that it requires less time and effort to collect the data, but making it much cheaper than most primary data. Secondary information has distinctive advantages as previously mentioned which related to time and cost. This is true even when there are costs associated with obtaining the secondary data. Steward and Kamins (1993) cite that when questions are required quickly, the only practical alternative is to consult secondary sources as they provide a useful starting point.

According to Malhotra and Birks (1999) secondary data analysis offers a more flexible approach in that, subject to any deadlines, it can usually be carried out as and when it suits the researcher, and over longer periods. A less obvious advantage is offered by Steward and Kamins (1993) is fortune, which plays a valuable role in the secondary data analysis. According to Steward and Kamins (1993) the analysis of existing data can provide an opportunity to establish relationships that were entirely unforeseen at the time of data collection.

Finally, Malhotra and Birks (1999) state it is rare for secondary data to provide all the answers to a non-regular research problem, while Worcester and Downham (1988) state that secondary data can provide a background to primary research and if the research has already been conducted by come one else, why repeat it, if the current research objectives are met. According to Malhotra and Birks (1999) even if the current research does not fulfil exactly what is needed, it will help in determining sampling methods and alert researchers to keep personnel in the environment and illustrate active trends.
3.10 Primary Research

According to Malhotra and Birks (1999) primary research is data collected or produced by the researcher to specifically address the research problem at hand. Primary data may be qualitative or quantitative research in nature, please refer to Figure 3.7. Malhotra and Birks (1999) state the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research, qualitative research provides insights and understanding of the problem setting, while quantitative research seeks to quantify the data and, typically, applies some form of statistical analysis.

Hague and Jackson (1998) outlines that desk research is a very important data collection technique while primary research, through field work may be used in order to fill the gaps. Domegan and Fleming (2003) cite that there are two basic methods used to obtain information from individuals, to ask them or to observe them, collectively known as descriptive research.

Figure 3.7 Marketing Research Date

Source: Malhotra (2007), p143 “A classification of Marketing Research Date”.

Malhotra (2007) cite that there are many reasons to use qualitative research, it is not always possible, or desirable to use fully structured or formal methods to obtain information from respondents. People may be unwilling to answer certain questions. People may also be unwilling to give truthful information about themselves that invade their privacy.
Green (2000) states that ethics are seen as the rules governing what is considered to be good and bad practice in the field of research. To behave unethically during the research process is to behave badly when dealing with the views and contributions of others. Green (2000) outlines that research ethics involves responsibility and as researchers, we have to have a responsibility to anyone taking part in this study not to invade on their privacy unnecessarily or without their specific direction and permission.

3.11 Survey Structure

Hague and Jackson (1998) outline that once desk research has been completed, and assuming that it does not yield all the information required, primary fieldwork can be planned to fill in the gaps. The elements of the research design may include sampling methods, size of numbers required, the nature of information sought and whether it is qualitative or quantitative.

Domegan and Fleming (2003) states that sampling is to deciding upon whether a sample or census is to be undertaken. The population of interest need to be defined and a sampling of all the relevant parties has to be organised. The most common research surveys are cross-sectional, that is to say surveys of cross-sections of populations.

According to Domegan and Fleming (2003) states that a survey methodically gathers information from respondents by communication, the survey may be conducted in person or by post and the survey is the most extensively utilised method of data collection used in research. Domegan and Fleming (2003) also stress that there is no best method of data collection and each research problem must be examined to determine the most appropriate way to collect the data.

Domegan and Fleming (2003) state that the use of questionnaires is not intrinsic to surveys and accept that there are three sources of error that impinge upon survey work, namely sample error, response error and non-response error. Non-response is problematic because those who respond refuse to be interviewed or cannot be contacted and it is also a problem because those who respond are likely to differ from those who do not respond. Another form of non-response is item non-response (where respondents choose not to answer certain questions).
3.12 Sampling Size

According to Malhotra (2007) the objective of most market research is to obtain information about the characteristics or parameters of a population, a population is the aggregate of all the elements that share some common set of characteristics and that comprise the universe for purposes of the market research problem. Chalmer and Whitmore (1986) cite population as the entire set of individuals which researchers are interested in and refers to data from these individuals on one or more variables.

Malhotra (2007) states that a sampling design process includes five steps that are shown sequentially, please refer to Figure 3.8. These steps are closely interrelated and relevant to all aspects of the research project, from problem definition to the presentation of the results. Malhotra (2007) explains that defining the target population commences by specifying the target population. The target population is the collection of elements that possess the information sought and about which conclusions are to be made. The next stage in the sampling design process is determining the sampling frame.

Malhotra (2007) cites that the sampling frame is a representation of the elements of the target population. It consists of a list or set of directions for identifying the target population such as, the inclusion in the telephone book, restaurant association listing or a map. Malhotra (2007) states that if this list cannot be compiled, then at least some direction for identifying the target should be specified. According to Malhotra (2007) the third stage of the process is selecting a sample technique. The fourth element in the process is determining the sample size which refers to the number of respondents to be included in the study, determining the sample size is complex that involves several qualitative and quantitative considerations.

The final stage of the process is the execution of the sampling process. According to Malhotra (2007) this requires a detailed specification of how the sampling-design decisions, with respect to the population, sample frame, sampling unit, sampling technique and the sample sizes which are to be implemented.
The Bayesian approach was adopted for this dissertation, whereby respondents are selected sequentially. According to Malhotra (2007) the Bayesian approach explicitly incorporates prior information about population parameters as well as the costs and probabilities associated with making wrong decisions. Malhotra (2007) states that the nature of the research also has an impact on the sample size. For exploratory research, such as this dissertation or those using qualitative research, the sample size is typically small. For conclusive research, such as those using qualitative research larger samples are required.

3.13 Survey Design

According to Malhotra (2007) an interview, whether it is called a schedule, interview form or measuring instrument is a formalised set of questions for obtaining information from respondents. Domegan, and Fleming (2003) explain that the survey process by which respondents are questioned may appear deceptively simple. The veracity however is probably best represented by Oppenheim (1996) citing that questioning people is more like trying to catch a particularly elusive fish, by hopefully casting different kinds of bait at different depths, without knowing what is going on beneath the surface.
According to Oppenheim (1996) a questionnaire is only one element of a data-collection package that might also include fieldwork procedures, such as instructions for selecting, approaching and questioning respondents. Hague and Jackson (1998) cite the questionnaire is a structured sequence of questions designed to draw out facts and opinions from respondents and stipulate that questionnaires must fulfil certain purposes.

Malhotra (2007) cautions that a great weakness of questionnaire design is lack of theory as there are no scientific principles that guarantee an optimal or ideal questionnaire and that the questionnaire design is acquired through experience. Hague and Jackson (1998) cite if a questionnaire fails, it is usually because they are dashed off with insufficient thought, questions missed out, badly constructed, too long, complicated and sometimes unintelligible.

Questionnaire design is a redefining process, whereby a rough draft is eventually converted to a precise and formatted document and according to Hague and Jackson (1998) it would be unusual and dangerous to design a questionnaire without at least three edits. The design of the questionnaire for this dissertation is based on the studies conducted by Ramdeen, Santos and Chatfield (2007), Presbury, Fitzgerald and Chapman (2005) and Kivela et al. (2000) as it compared similar aspects of consumer behaviour, perception and expectations of a restaurant service, although this dissertation asked respondents after their meal experience in comparison to Kivela et al. (2000), who conducted their research in the restaurants during the meal experience.

Kivela et al. (2000) conducted research in Hong Kong while subjects were already seated in the restaurant. The difficulty encountered by Kivela et al. (2000) was that they were advised by most restaurant managers to survey every fourth or fifth customer, and not each one. The restaurants reason was that it was better to be discreet so as to avoid annoying other diners who were not participating in the survey. Initially, their research identified 15 survey sites which were randomly selected from a listing of about 900 theme/ambience restaurants in Hong Kong. However, when their respective restaurateurs were approached about conducting the survey in their restaurants, nine refused the request. At a second attempt in the random selection, 11 restaurants declined the request.
This proved to be very time consuming for Kivela et al. (2000) which discouraged a third attempt. According to Kivela et al. (2000) this prolonged the survey schedule because not every fourth customer wanted to participate in the survey, in which case the next fourth customer was the sampling target.

It is from this survey, Kivela et al. (2000), that the current researcher based his decision not to approach the restaurants in Ireland on such a formal basis to question or interrogate patrons of any restaurant. The researcher believed that patrons attending fine dining or Michelin star restaurants would not like to be interrupted or inconvenienced without some financial or tangible benefit to them, which the research could not provide. Instead, the researcher decided to seek the response from all customers, in all restaurants sectors in Ireland to participate in the questionnaire which was distributed to friends, family members, colleagues and various trade members. According to Domegan and Fleming (2003) once the content has been decided the researcher needs to decide what type of questions to use. In the development of the questionnaire, there are three basic types which may be used, open ended, multiple-choice (multichotomous) and dichotomous.

The questionnaire format of this dissertation (see Appendix A) was structured based on the findings of the secondary research. It was designed to draw out the facts and opinions from respondents based on extensive review of the relevant consumer behaviour literature. Following a number of draft questionnaires, the researcher placed the final questionnaire online. This allowed consumers to have more time to consider their respective responses. The surveys were made available to the respondents online who had already dined at a restaurant of their choice. The procedure for the respondents was to log onto an internet link and follow a four page step-by-step process to complete the survey.

The questionnaire contained four broad areas, a welcome page, general questions page, perceptions and expectations page and finally the respondent’s recent dining experience page. The first page provided an introductory letter which introduced the researcher, it stated the third level course undertaken by the researcher, it outlined that the dissertation undertaken was a partial fulfilment of the programme and concluded with a thank you to the respondents for their time in responding to the questionnaire.
The second page of the survey, the general questions page, used dichotomous questions, which according to Domegan and Fleming (2003) is an extreme form of multiple-choice. It asked the respondent’s general information, gender, age brackets, how often they dined out and employment status. This page also contained sensitive information regarding disposable income through offering a range of response categories, rather than asking specific direct questions which may result in having questions not answered and deeming the questionnaire void.

According to Malhotra (2007) the difficulty with using dichotomous questions is that the respondent is forced to choose between yes or no, even if they feel indifferent and outlines to include a neutral response level.

The third page, perceptions and expectations page provided the respondent with questions which contained ordinal and interval scales. According to Malhotra (2007) an ordinal scale is a ranking scale in which numbers are assigned to objects to indicate the relative extent to which some characteristic is possessed. Thus it is possible to determine whether an object has more or less characteristic than some other object.

An interval scale according to Domegan and Fleming (2003) includes all the requirements of an ordinal scale, plus the equality of difference, characteristic of the number system. They make use of a constant unit of measurement or equal interval between scale values. The difference between 1 and 2 is the same as 2 and 3, but only half the difference between 2 and 4. However, Domegan and Fleming (2003) state this unit of measurement is arbitrary. The interval scale has no fixed or absolute zero point where none of the characteristics being present, i.e. zero does not denote absence of the attribute.

The fourth and final page, the respondent’s recent dining experience page, contained dichotomous questions, ordinal and interval scales, a filter question and rank order scales. Rank order scales, according to Malhotra (2007) is a comparative scaling technique in which respondents are presented with several objects simultaneously and asked to order or rank them to some criterion. This questionnaire contained a six point
scale ranging from poor, excellent to not applicable. The filter is an initial question that screens potential respondents to ensure they meet the requirements. According to Malhotra (2007) filters can also be used to screen respondents who are not adequately informed. The scales rating included the options of ‘other’ to please specify’, to allow for the fact that the respondents did participate in the survey, they may have had superior knowledge or the attitude towards a particular topic. These options which were selected, greatly contributed other values which were unknown in the secondary research.

3.14 Conclusions

This chapter has described the conceptual framework within which the study has developed, providing details on the research design and details of the methodology used to carry out the research. The methodology used in this dissertation included both primary, secondary information sources, quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to gather that information. Exploratory research resulted in several advantages to the study [Refer to section 3.5].
Chapter Four
Presentation of the Primary Research

4.1 Introduction

According to Coye (2004), it is frequently stated that customers assess satisfaction and judge overall service quality by comparing their expectations with their perceptions, the process through which this occurs continues to be unclear. Coye (2004) states that in many published accounts it is not made explicit whether we are concerned with what customer’s desire from the service or what they expect.

Research conducted by Kivela et al. (2000) suggest that the first and last impression, pre dining and post dining perceptions, have a tremendous effect on return patronage, particularly for customers who had dined at the restaurant previously. Robledo (2001) explains that if a company does not know at what level customer expectations are, it will be impossible to find out the exact reason why they are not matching them. On one hand, it could be that the customer expectations are adequate but performance is not. On the other hand, it could be that the performance is correct but the customer expectations are simply too high for the company to be able to match them.

4.2 Null Hypothesis

Sprinthall (1987) state that in testing means the null hypothesis outlines that there is no difference between the population mean represented by the sample and the assumed mean of the population at large. A null hypothesis is a scenario set up to be nullified or refuted statistically in order to support an alternative hypothesis.

According to Reilly (2006) the null hypothesis is presumed true until statistical evidence, in the form of a hypothesis test, indicates otherwise. Reilly (2006) also states that there are three corresponding issues with hypothesis testing. Delta, where looking for a difference between the hypothesised value of a parameter and its actual value. Reilly (2006) outlines that the researcher must decide on a minimum difference, delta, which is of practical importance.
Sigma, this is the standard deviation of the population, which may be known from previous experience. Power, as a rule of thumb we select a power of 80 per cent for detecting a difference of size delta. This gives a good chance of detecting a practically significantly difference if one exists.

According to Reilly (2006) we could use the word research to refer to this activity of looking for a difference. On other occasions, our objective is to prove that there is no difference, which is referred to as validation. We are trying to make an assertion of innocence, rather than an assumption of innocence. In summary a power of 80 per cent is recommended for research and 95 per cent for validation.

4.3 Results summary

The following sections will provide a summary of the statistical analysis based on the Survey Monkey frequencies which were used as the main analysis tool. According to Harris and Millet (2006) this website offers a synthesis of the literature and survey statistics, it also provides frequency counts, percentages and cumulative percentages for the values of each variable.

The Survey Monkey research tool also provided the questionnaire design for Murphy and Ledwith (2007) at the Enterprise Research Centre, University of Limerick, Ireland. For this dissertation, frequencies were used to establish customer’s expectations and perceptions of the service they encountered. Cross tabulation identified the relationships that existed between the service encounter in the questionnaire and the consumer’s choice of restaurant.

It starts with a summary of the demographics of the population providing information on gender, age, occupations and income groups. It then presents the findings as per the questionnaire in a section-by-section format and identifies the highlighted issues.
4.3.1 Demographics

- 52 per cent of the sample population were male and 48 per cent of the respondents were female

Graph A: Frequency of responses

- The age profile for the respondents varied considerably, the category of up to 25 years of age reached 12 per cent of the respondents, the 26 to 34 age group were second with a 29 per cent share, the largest portion of the respondents were the 35 to 44 age bracket which received 32 per cent of the survey, third place was the 45 to 54 year olds range achieving 17 per cent while the 55 to 64 age bracket achieved 9 per cent and finally the over 65 category reached 1 per cent of the total respondents.

Graph B: Overview of age profile
• Age had an influence in the responses for example, 100 per cent of the respondents between the age 45 and 54 considered, from the categories offered that the quality of food was always the most important factor when selecting a restaurant, opposed to the 32 per cent of respondents between 26 to 34, with 86 per cent for the 35 to 44 year category.

• Contrastingly, to these results 85 per cent of the respondents between 35 and 44 always believe the quality of service was important compared to 75 per cent of respondents between the ages of 26 and 34 with only 67 per cent for respondents between the ages of 45 and 54.

• A good balance of occupation is achieved in the results with most categories of the economic social class represented in the survey. 18 per cent of respondents were self employed, 35 per cent of respondents were currently in education and the retail/hospitality sector accounted for with 40 per cent of the total with the rest made up in others such as science and medicine, engineering and business.

4.3.2 Respondent’s disposable income

• 17 per cent of female respondents stated they have an average weekly spending power of 251 to 400 euros while 35 per cent have 101 to 250 euros compared to their male counterparts who achieve a 35 per cent for 101 to 250 euros and 29 per cent for the 251 to 400 euros sector.

Graph C: Overview of total spending power/disposable income
• 36 per cent of male respondents dined out less than once a week compared to 11 per cent of females for the same frequency. 37 per cent of males dined out more than once a week in comparison to 33 per cent for females.

Graph D: Dining out frequency

• When asking the respondents about their dining out preferences, the researcher wanted to establish if there is relationship between time and money when respondents dined out. 15 per cent of the female respondents dined out because they have extra time opposed to 10 per cent for their male counterparts however, 33 per cent of the males state that they dined out because they have extra money to spend while the same reason for female respondents achieved only 19 per cent.

• While the survey only provided three possible options for the time and money question a number of respondents provided additional remarks in the ‘other field’. These remarks varied from ‘Convenience’, ‘to socialise with family/friends’, one respondent stated that it was a ‘celebratory’ and was solely interested ‘in how food is created’.

• These results have placed another emphasis on why consumer decided to dine out. One common nuance found in the responses, was that respondents enjoyed dining out because of social reasons, other interesting rationale included were ‘we enjoy it and make a point of eating our’, ‘in the business’, ‘for the love of restaurants and because it’s my trade’ and included ‘checking out competitors’.
Graph E: Respondents dining out preference

4.4 Reasons for dining out

Question seven on the survey asked respondents’ which of the statements best describe them when visiting a restaurant. The researcher was adamant to be specific and highlight only one area of choice although if respondents wanted to add further details, this was reluctantly possible in the ‘other field’ of the question.

- The social occasion feature was central with 32 per cent of the male respondents dining out as a normal weekly activity compared to just 4 per cent for female respondents. 44 per cent of female respondents go out for a meal with family or friends as opposed to 36 per cent for males. 5 per cent of male respondents stated that it was convenient for them to eat out in comparison to 9 per cent for females. Respondents did highlight that they ‘would like to have been able to choose more than one response’ and wanted to select ‘many of the above’ for this question.
18 per cent of respondents between the age of 26 and 34 said that they dined out as part of their normal weekly activity compared to 14 per cent of respondents between 35 and 44 and 20 per cent for respondents between 45 and 54 age groups.

4.5 Selecting the restaurant

A total of 17 preferences were offered to the respondents in order to seek the most important deciding factor for consumers when selecting a restaurant to dine in. The first preference for both male and female respondents with 57 per cent was the quality of food. The quality of service was second which had 47 per cent, the cleanliness of the restaurant was third with 39 per cent, the restaurants ambience was fourth with a total 24 per cent and the type of food was fifth with 22 per cent.
96 per cent of all female respondents stated the quality of food was ‘always’ the most important element when selecting a restaurant to dine out compared to 85 per cent for all males.

86 per cent of all female respondents selected the cleanliness of the restaurant was ‘always’ the most important deciding factor compared to 54 per cent of all male respondents.

71 per cent of all female respondents cited the quality of service was ‘always’ important compared to 66 per cent for all male respondents.

48 per cent of all female respondents stated that the ambience was ‘always’ important when selecting a restaurant to dine out compared to 35 per cent for all male respondents.

63 per cent of all males stated that the menu selection was frequently used as a deciding factor when selecting a restaurant comparison to 36 per cent for females.
• 50 per cent of all males state that brand recognition was sometimes a deciding factor when selecting a restaurant compared to 53 per cent for females.

• Both all male and all female respondents stated that social status or parking facilities as ‘never’ having a deciding factor when selecting a restaurant, males responses were 59 per cent for parking and 44 per cent for social status, while females respondents had 52 per cent for parking and 38 per cent for social status.

• Both male and female respondents in the age category of between 26 and 34 stated 82 per cent for quality of food and 71 per cent for cleanliness was ‘always’ a deciding factor when selecting a restaurant. 59 per cent of the same age bracket stated that the cost of food was a frequent deciding factor for restaurant selection with 44 per cent of respondents stated the parking facilities were never a deciding factor.

• 86 per cent of both male and female respondents within the age category of between 35 and 44 stated for the quality of food as always a deciding factor when selecting a restaurant, 69 per cent of respondents stated that a restaurant which lives up to a previous expectation was frequently a deciding factor in why respondents returned there. 54 per cent of respondents stated that the speed of service was sometimes a deciding factor with 54 per cent stating that parking facilities were never a deciding factor.

• Both male and female respondents within the age category of between 45 and 54 state 100 per cent for the quality of food and 67 per cent for ambience as always being deciding factors for restaurant selection. The location of the restaurant achieved 56 per cent with 67 per cent stating that the speed of service was sometimes a deciding.
4.5.1 Fast food

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of food presentation, menu variety, food nutrition, taste of food, freshness of food and temperature of food when deciding to dine in a fast food restaurant.

- 56 per cent of all male and 43 per cent of female respondents said the freshness of food was the most important feature when selecting a fast food as a dining experience. 72 per cent of female and 60 per cent of male respondents stated that the nutrition of fast food was least important.

- 36 per cent of female respondents stated that the presentation was of medium important with 20 per cent for males. Only 36 per cent of male respondents said the temperature of the food was of high importance compared to 29 per cent for female. 36 per cent of male and 9 per cent of female respondents said the taste of food was of moderate importance.

- Males and female respondents between the age of 26 and 34 stated nutrition of food as the least important feature when selecting a fast food encounter with 56 per cent of the same age group citing the freshness of food as high importance.

- 69 per cent of male and female respondents between the age of 35 and 44, and 67 per cent of male and female respondents between the age 45 and 54 said that the freshness of food was the most important, with nutrition being the least important feature.

4.5.2 Bistro/bar

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of food presentation, menu variety, food nutrition, taste of food, freshness of food and temperature of food when deciding to dine in a bistro/bar when dining out.
• 62 percent of all male and 54 per cent of all female respondents said the freshness of food was the most important, while 39 per cent of all female and 42 per cent of male respondents’ state menu selection was of medium importance when dining out in a bistro/bar.

• 27 per cent of male respondents state that the food nutrition was the least importance compared to 9 per cent of female respondents who cite food quality as least important.

• 80 per cent of male and female respondents between the age of 45 and 54 state the taste of food as most important and 50 per cent of respondents state menu variety was important.

• 70 per cent of male and female respondents between the age of 35 and 44 cite the freshness of food as most important with 54 per cent of respondents say that the presentation of food of moderate importance with 16 percent of respondents deeming menu variety the least important.

• 63 per cent of male and female respondents between the age of 26 and 34 cite the freshness of food for bistro/bar being the most important with 57 per cent stating menu variety being moderately important with 18 per cent stating food nutrition being the least important.

• 52 per cent of female and 56 of male respondents state freshness of food highly important with 59 per cent of female 48 of male respondents citing the presentation of food medium importance when dining out in a Bistro/bar.

• 14 per cent of female and 37 per cent of male respondents state that the nutrition of food the least important while 48 per cent of male and 59 per cent of female state the presentation of food to be of medium importance.

• 69 per cent of male and 67 per cent female respondents state the freshness of food to be the most important factor when selecting a brasserie to dine out with the temperature of food coming second for both male and female respondents with 58 and 46 per cent respectively.
4.5.3 Coffee shop

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of food presentation, menu variety, food nutrition, taste of food, freshness of food and temperature of food when deciding to dine in a Coffee shop when dining out.

- 56 per cent of all male and 53 per cent of all female respondents stated the freshness of food the most important when selecting a coffee shop. 59 per cent of all female respondents and 48 per cent of all male respondents cite the presentation of food being medium importance with 37 per cent or male and nutrition of food being the least important factor when selecting a coffee shop.

- 63 per cent of male and female respondents between the age of 45 and 54, 64 per cent of male and female respondents between the age of 35 and 44, and 56 per cent of male and female respondents between the age of 26 and 34 state the freshness of food as the most important factor.

- 45 per cent of male and female respondents between the age of 45 and 54 state food quality as of medium importance while 54 per cent of male and female respondents between the age of 35 and 44 deem the presentation of food medium importance. 56 per cent of male and female respondents between the age of 26 and 34 state the freshness of food as the medium important factor when selecting a coffee shop to dine out.

4.5.4 Michelin star restaurant

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of food presentation, menu variety, food nutrition, taste of food, freshness of food and temperature of food when deciding to dine in a Michelin star restaurant.
• 96 per cent of all male respondents stated that the freshness of food was the most important factor. The presentation of food, taste of food and the quality of the food all achieved 93 percent as the second most important feature. 73 percent of the respondents stated that the temperature of the food was the third most important feature with menu item variety next at 62 per cent and finally food nutrition, seventh on the list with 31 percent.

• 96 per cent of all females cite the quality as the most important factor. The presentation and freshness of food both received 91 per cent. The taste of food was the third most important factor with 86 per cent followed by the temperature of food and finally menu variety which achieved 50 per cent.

• 100 per cent of all male and female respondents between the age of 45 and 54 stated that the taste of food was the most important factor and 50 per cent state of respondents citing food nutrition as being of medium importance.

• 92 per cent of all male and female respondents between the age of 35 and 44 state the presentation of food the most important factor when selecting a Michelin star restaurant.

• 85 per cent of respondents state freshness of food and food quality as the second most important factor with 70 per cent citing temperature and taste of food as the next most important factors.

• 100 per cent of male and female respondents between the age of 26 and 34 declare the presentation of food, food quality and the freshness as the most important factors. 94 per cent of respondents cite the taste of food the second most important factor with the temperature of food at 81 per cent in third place.
4.5.5 Fine dining restaurant

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of food presentation, menu variety, food nutrition, taste of food, freshness of food and temperature of food when deciding to dine in a fine dining restaurant.

- 100 per cent of female respondents cite food quality and the freshness of food as the most important factor. 87 per cent state the presentation of food as the second most important, with 86 per cent for the taste of food and 75 per cent for the temperature of food as the fourth most important factor.

- 96 per cent of all males state food quality as the most important factor with the freshness of food at 85 per cent. 82 per cent of respondents state the presentation of food and taste of food as the joint third most important factor.

- 100 per cent of male and female respondents between the age of 45 and 54 cite the taste of food as the most important factor with the presentation of food and food quality the second most important factors with 90 per cent.

- 100 per cent of male and female respondents between the age of 35 and 44 cite the quality of food and the freshness of food as the most important factor with the presentation of food at 86 per cent.

- 94 per cent of all male and female respondents between the age of 26 and 34 state food quality as the most important with the presentation of food, taste of food and freshness of food as the second most important factor when selecting a fine dining restaurant to dine out.
4.6 Deciding factors of service

Respondents were asked to rate the following deciding factor(s): friendly, polite and helpful staff, attentive staff, staff greeting customers, efficient service, staff that are willing to serve, staff who have a good food and beverage knowledge and staff that are sympathetic when handling of complaints, when selecting from the following establishments: Fast food, Bistro/bar, Coffee shop, Brasserie, Michelin star restaurant and fine dining restaurant.

- 43 per cent of all female respondents state that efficient service and staff who were willing to serve as the most important deciding feature when selecting a fast food outlet. 57 per cent of all female respondents identify employees that have a good food and beverage knowledge as being the least important deciding feature. 50 per cent of all male respondents deem efficient service as the most important deciding feature while 42 per cent of all male respondents cite the food and beverage knowledge of staff as being the least important.

- 50 per cent of all female respondents’ state that efficient service staff, willing to serve as the most important deciding feature when selecting a bistro/bar. 14 per cent of all female respondents state that staff greeting customers as the least important. 50 per cent of all male respondents deem that friendly polite staff the most important deciding feature with 12 per cent of all male respondents stating staff being sympathetic to handling complaints as being the least important.

- 38 per cent of all female respondents state efficient service staff, willing to serve as the most important deciding feature when selecting a coffee shop. 19 per cent of respondents state that staff greeting customers as the least important. 50 per cent of all male respondents deem efficient service staff, willing to serve as the most important feature while 23 per cent of all male respondents deeming staff being sympathetic to handling complaints as being the least important.
• 55 per cent of all female respondents state that staff being sympathetic to handling complaints as the most important deciding factor when selecting a Brasserie, while 19 per cent of respondents state polite and helpful staff as the second most important factor. 52 per cent of all male respondents deem that staff being sympathetic to handling complaints as the most important feature while 23 per cent of all male respondents deem friendly and polite staff as being the second most important deciding factor.

• 91 per cent of all female respondents state that staff being sympathetic to handling complaints as the most important deciding factor when selecting a Michelin star restaurant, while 86 per cent of respondents state staff willing to serve and staff who have a good food and beverage knowledge as being the second important deciding factors. 100 per cent of all male respondents deem that staff who have a good food and beverage knowledge as the most important deciding factor while 92 per cent of all male respondents deem friendly and polite staff as being the second most important deciding factor.

• 91 per cent of all female respondents state that staff being sympathetic to handling complaints as the most important deciding factor when selecting a fine dining restaurant, while 86 per cent of respondents state, staff willing to serve and staff who have a good food and beverage knowledge as being the second important deciding factors. 93 per cent of all male respondents deem friendly and polite staff as the most important deciding factor while 84 per cent of all male respondents deem that staff willing to serve and who have a good food and beverage knowledge as being the second most important deciding factor.

4.6 Restaurant experiences for atmosphere

Respondents were asked how important were each of the following factor(s): level of comfort in the restaurant, level of noise in the restaurant, view from the restaurant, cleanliness of the restaurant, dining privacy, restaurant’s temperature, restaurant’s appearance and staff appearance when respondents had already been to the following establishments: Fast food, Bistro/bar, Coffee shop, Brasserie, Michelin star restaurant and fine dining restaurant.
• 60 per cent of all female and 52 per cent of all male respondents cited that the cleanliness of the Fast food restaurant was the most important factor when respondents dined out. 79 per cent of male respondents and 80 per cent of female respondents stated that the privacy of the restaurant was least important.

• 60 per cent of male and 67 per cent of female respondents cite that the cleanliness of the Bistro/bar establishment to be the most important factor while 48 per cent of female and 28 per cent of male respondents stated the view from the restaurant was the least important.

• Both all male and all female respondents, 54 per cent and 65 per cent respectively, stated that the cleanliness of the coffee shop to be the most important factor while 16 per cent of all female and 23 per cent of male respondents stated staff appearance to be the second most important factor.

• Both all male and all female respondents, 75 per cent and 64 per cent respectively, stated that the cleanliness of the Brasserie restaurant to be the most important factor while 32 per cent of all male stated the restaurants appearance to be the second most important factor with 42 per cent of all female respondents stating staff appearance to be the second most important factor.

• For Michelin star restaurants, 95 per cent of all female and 88 per cent of all male respondents stated that the cleanliness of the restaurant to be the most important factor while 84 per cent of male and 81 per cent of female respondents state the level of comfort to be the second most important factor.

• Both all male and all female respondents, 85 per cent and 95 per cent respectively, stated that the cleanliness of the fine dining restaurant to be the most important factor while 73 per cent of all male stated the staff appearance to be the second most important factor and 81 per cent of all female respondents stating the level of comfort to be the second most important factor.
4.7 Respondent experience on food

Respondents were asked how important were each of the following factors’, nutritious food, farewell, limited menu choice, discount for party, smoking area, noise/loud music, bar area when you are waiting, handling of telephone reservation and car parking when respondents had already been to a particular establishment.

- 33 percent of all male respondents stated that the food nutrition was moderately important while 35 per cent of female respondents stated that food nutrition was important. 35 per cent of all female respondents deemed a farewell moderately while 39 per cent of male stated it important.

- 37 per cent of male and 47 per cent of female respondents stated that a limited choice menu was moderately important. 35 per cent of all females and 44 percent of all males stated that a discount was a least important feature, so too was a smoking feature with female respondents at 52 per cent and male respondents with 82 per cent.

- A bar while patrons waited was moderately important for both male and females with 35 and 44 per cent respectively. Car parking facilities was also a least important factor with both male and female respondents 41 and 35 per cent correspondingly.

4.8 Perception and expectations of the dining experience

Respondents were asked to state their perceptions and expectations when deciding to dine in a particular restaurant. 44 per cent of female respondents stated it was moderately important compared to 30 per cent of male respondents who state perception of a restaurant which offers a new dining experience as important. 48 percent of female respondents stated that their expectation were higher while their male counterparts also cited higher expectations to be 37 per cent.
57 per cent of all female and 59 per cent for male respondents stated their perception of a restaurant that offers a consistent standard was extremely important, although 44 per cent of female and 59 per cent of male respondents stated they both had very high expectations which indicates female expectations were met with male participants just satisfied.

48 per cent of all female and 56 per cent of male respondents stated their perception of a restaurant that feels comfortable to eat in was extremely important. 56 per cent of male respondents stated that they had very high expectations so for the male population both expectations and perceptions were met while 50 per cent of females had high expectation which is two per cent short of the 48 per cent resulting in expectations not being met.

63 per cent of all male and 57 per cent of all female respondents judge a restaurant that offers a consistent service standard to be extremely important. For both male and female respondents, expectations were not met as 35 per cent of female and 67 per cent of male respondents both had very high expectations.

4.9 Recent Dining Experience

Respondents were asked by using their last dining experience as an example, had they dined in that restaurant previously? 37 per cent of male and 35 per cent of female respondents stated that they had not been to that establishment before while 65 per cent of female and 63 per cent of male stated that they had been.

41 per cent of male and 39 per cent of female respondents had been to that location on one previous occasion, with 15 per cent of male and 39 per cent of female citing they had been there on one or two occasions. 37 per cent of male and 22 per cent of female cited that they frequented these establishments on three or four times while just 7 per cent of males stated that had been there on more than four occasions.

93 per cent of male, 87 per cent of female respondents and 90 per cent of the male and female respondents between the age of 45 and 54 stated that they would revisit that particular restaurant again. Interestingly, 82 per cent of male and 83 per cent of female
respondents would select a restaurant that has received a negative comment from a food critic, however some respondents said ‘critics were always biased’ and ‘it depend on the reviewer’ if they would visit the restaurant.

4.10 Respondents view on expectations

Respondents were asked about their expectations of food following their recent experience in a food service encounter. 57 per cent of female and 52 per cent of male respondents stated that their expectations were met with the presentation of food. Both male and female expectations were met in food nutrition and menu variety.

Both female and male respondents gave the freshness of food an ‘excellent’ response. Male expectations in the areas of taste of food, food quality and the freshness of food were ‘excelled’. The female respondents had only one clear ‘excellent’ category while was at 44 per cent for the freshness of food. On a positive note, there were few very negative remarks in relation to the level of ‘poor’ or ‘fair’ expectations of food and most respondents expectations were above satisfactory.

Respondents were asked about their expectations of service following their recent encounter. Both male and female respondents said the establishment was ‘satisfactory’ with respect to children friendly facilities, however over half of the respondents mentioned that this was not an issue. 41 per cent of female respondents rated ‘good’ their expectations towards polite and helpful staff, and towards staff food and beverage knowledge and with efficient service.

Female respondents stated that expectations were ‘excellent’ when welcomed to the establishment and with attentive staff. Both male and female respondents cited that staff sympathetic to handling complaints were not applicable although they did dine out mainly in bistro, fine dining and brasserie settings.

All expectations for male respondents were ‘excellent’ when dealing with polite and helpful staff, attentive staff, staff greeting customers, relaxed service, staff willing to serve and staff who have a good food and beverage knowledge.
Respondents were asked about their expectations of restaurant atmosphere following their recent encounter. 61 per cent of female and 44 per cent of male respondents stated that the provider had good restaurant temperature. 48 per cent of male respondents stated that the restaurants appearance and staff appearance was excellent.

70 per cent of female respondents stated that the staff appearance was ‘good’ and 39 per cent deemed that the dining privacy was ‘satisfactory’ compared to 44 per cent of male respondents. 57 per cent of female stated that the level of noise was ‘good’ compared to 32 per cent ‘satisfactory’ for male respondents.

Respondents were asked about their expectations of restaurant convenience following their recent encounter which included the handling of telephone reservations and car parking. 17 per cent of female and 8 per cent of male respondents states ‘excellent’ for handling telephone reservations, while 35 per cent of female and 56 per cent of male respondents deemed it not applicable. 22 per cent of female and 20 of male stated parking convenience as ‘good’ while 39 per cent of female and 44 per cent of male respondents deeming parking not applicable.

Respondents were asked about their expectations of the overall restaurant following their recent encounter. 35 per cent of female respondents believe that their expectations were met satisfactorily in being offered a new dining experience. 33 per cent of male respondents believe that their expectations were good towards being offered a new dining experience and 60 per cent believe their expectations to be excellent when offered food of a consistent standard. Both male and female respondents deemed good their expectations when offered service of a consistent standard.
Chapter Five
Discussion and Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

This chapter assesses the results of the primary research presented in chapter four. It draws on the desk research reviewed in chapter three to assemble and present the consumers’ expectations and perceptions of restaurant services. The chapter identifies a strong correlation between consumers selecting Fine dining and Michelin star restaurants with a common similarity for both food quality and with fresh produce. The chapter closes by identifying research implications, limitations and makes recommendations for further research.

According to Devine and King (2008) the increased media attention focusing on the slowdown in the Irish economy or recession, as some have brandished it, will be interpreted as spelling the end of the Irish economy. Devine and King (2008) state that services now account for approximately two-thirds of employment in Ireland thus productivity gains in this sector are vital to economic growth in the future. Productivity in the services sector is often cited as being way behind that of the manufacturing sector.

Devine and King (2008) outline a key to the growth in the Irish economy is to keep improving productivity in the services sector and the economy more generally. In the hospitality sector, productivity levels are in line with the EU and US averages, but growth rates are low. High rates of job losses and job gains have been a feature of the Irish economy over the last decade or so and have resulted in a shift in employment to the hi-tech and services sector.

Devine and King (2008) cite that over two thirds of the hours worked in the Irish economy are worked in the services sector but the common perception that all service sector jobs are less productive than manufacturing jobs is incorrect.
5.2 Top deciding features of restaurant selection

According to Hubbert, García Sehorn and Brown (1995) there are differences in the expectations of consumers and service providers which are one of the major misunderstandings in the service encounter. Groth and Dye (1999) state that perceptions rather than reality dictate potential and actual human behaviour, and perceptions may differ significantly from reality. Differences between perceptions and reality influence perceptions of quality and increase the risk or erroneous expectations.

Following the research findings there had been a reasonable share of both male and female respondents to the online questionnaire, which achieved a favourable age category of respondents in the age bracket of 35 to 44, with the over 65 age category being the least responding age bracket. The employment status of respondents was mainly, retail hospitality, education and self employed whose disposable income was over 100 euros. Both the male and female respondents dined out at least once a month with extra revenue being cited as the main factor with some respondents, stating time as being the least. The research identified that up to 50 per cent of respondents cited a social occasion as being the most popular reason for dining out.

When outlining the objectives for this dissertation the researcher wanted to list the top three most influential attributes identified by customers when selecting a restaurant service experience from the respondents. Following this research, it is fair to say that the top three most important factors for respondents when selecting a restaurant are:

1. The quality of food
2. The quality of the service
3. The cleanliness of the restaurant
5.3 Analysis of expectations and perceptions

This dissertation analysed customer expectations and perceptions for the restaurant service industry using an online survey, which was based on the primary research and analysed in this chapter. The results suggest that customer expectations and perceptions of service differ slightly for male and female respondents, giving both restaurant service owners and managers more focus on the following elements, namely, food quality, service quality and customer interaction to enhance overall customer service. The dissertation provides an extensive literature review for consumer perceptions and expectations of service and outlines a wide-ranging research methodology.

The researcher wanted to critically evaluate the customers’ expectations and perceptions of a restaurant service. It is evident from the research, that respondents deem the nutrition of food to be the least important factor when selecting a fast food restaurant, despite the large revenues each year promoting healthy food from these branded establishments. It was also apparent that the respondents expect more when selecting restaurants with more menu choice, better presentation, fresher food and better quality produce. The quality and freshness factor was more evident from the Michelin and Fine dining restaurants.

Respondents were asked, how important was a restaurant that offers a consistent standard, over 55 per cent of respondents stated that it was extremely important, however, only 50 per cent stated that the restaurant had just met with these expectations. The respondents’ expectations were also left short for a restaurant that offers food at a consistent standard and for a restaurant, which feels comfortable.

35 per cent of respondents had stated that it was their first time to visit that particular restaurant, citing that the restaurant was recommended to them by a friend, they had heard the restaurant was good, the restaurant was a central meeting point, it was suggested to them by a friend and the food was supposed to be good were the main comments by respondents.
It is also very interesting to note that 65 per cent of respondents had dined in the particular restaurant on a previous occasion, with just over 29 per cent of respondents dining there 3-4 times in the previous two months and even more significantly, 90 per cent of respondents advised that they would return to the restaurant again. This is certainly great news for restaurant operators who have an excellent client base as it reduces advertising costs for the existing restaurants, while new entrants to the marketplace will have a greater difficulty in attracting new customers and more important keeping them.

5.4 Decision features

According to Coye (2004) it is frequently stated that customers assess satisfaction and judge overall service quality by comparing their expectations with their perceptions, the process through which this occurs continues to be unclear, and in some cases, we are not sure whether we are concerned with what customers desire from the service or what they expect.

The researcher wanted to identify a range of decision attributes that may influence or alter a person’s perception of a restaurant. The respondents for the bistro/bar, Michelin star and Fine dining restaurant cited the cleanliness of the restaurant as the most important factor, followed by the level of comfort offered and the staff appearance when respondents decided to dine out.

It was also noted, following a recent experience with a food service encounter, respondents’ expectations were exceeded for the taste and freshness of food, which is further supported by Kivela et al. (2000) when they cite food and service quality were strong contributory factors for return patronage.

Finkelstein (1989) concluded that dining satisfactions are often influenced by the customers’ psychological rather than physical needs, that is, food consumption often invokes a feeling of comfort, and these feelings often influence customers’ choice of restaurant and their subsequent return.
This psychological need is also a feature of this research, for example, when respondents were asked about their recent dining experience, the respondents stated that they were either holiday and it was a special treat, restaurant was a friend recommendation, respondents were offered an invitation and it was a new restaurant in the area. All these answers provided positive characteristics, which made the restaurant selection and re-selection much easier once a positive image or impression have been offered.

5.5 Research Contribution

This dissertation does not expect to fill the gap between customer expectations and perceptions of service, it does, nevertheless explore previously under developed key areas of restaurant services. The subject of expectations and perceptions have also been evaluated in other areas such as psychology, Postman and Bruner (1949), which looked at expectations which were violated and the resulting behaviour. This current research, however, may be used for educational purposes or may even assist researchers in establishing a better understanding of restaurant services.

5.6 Summary of Research Conclusions

This dissertation has received a large proportion of questionnaires from respondents who select a restaurant for alternative reasons. It is clear that respondents’ can be divided into two main categories, firstly, respondents who dine out for an experience linked to a social occasion, such as, family, friends or on holiday and secondly, respondents that select a restaurant for convenience.

The research evidence suggests that the respondents who dine out for social occasion have less expectations to be fulfilled because respondents are more focused on the company interaction rather than examining the finer points of service such as the temperature of the food, noise from the restaurant, dining privacy and view from the restaurant.
Respondents who dine out for convenience, whether, working too many hours at work or have had such a long day, select a bistro/bar, brasserie or coffee shop for the following reasons, it is a central meeting point, it is easy quick food that's not too expensive, as a change from cooking, do not like to cook and can afford to eat out. These respondents are more relaxed and have dined out many times to new and existing restaurants recently with more focus on the overall package such as the ambience, prompt handling of complaints, brand recognition, and speed of service offered.

5.7 Research Limitations

The questionnaire was placed exclusively online for ease of distribution, however, this medium may have also facilitated the unintentional or incorrect data input from respondents without allowing them to go back and edit the fields. Domegan and Fleming (2003) advises that when respondents are unable to articulate their responses, they are likely to ignore that question and refuse to co-operate with the remainder of the survey. The questionnaire was rather extensive which may have also urged respondents not to complete the questionnaire in total.

The questionnaires were administered to members of the RAI, members of the bluebook guide, students, work colleagues and friends to complete with the intention of them being a consumer. A deeper investigation into the influence of pricing may reveal some evidence to suggest that customers may be influenced by a restaurants selection or image. The researcher did not have the financial nor human resources to investigate a larger number of customers while they dined in restaurants. This decisions, not to pursue customers while they dined without interruption, was based on limitations faced by Kivela et al. (2000).
5.8 Conclusion

Following this dissertation, the researcher believes that there is a high relationship between the dining out frequency and return patronage with 60 per cent of respondents dining out on two or more occasions in the past two months. There was no relationship between customer dining out frequency and a positive restaurant review. 42 per cent of respondents cited that there was a high relationship between the dining out occasion and a family event. 81 per cent of respondents stated that they would visit a restaurant if it were to receive a negative review, while some respondents citing, that they may be looking for an alternative product to the critic and that critics are always biased.

There was a high relationship between customers’ expectations and overall perceptions when selection a restaurant to dining out. Both male and female respondents achieved similar results when asked to outline the most important factors when dining out, male respondents cited the freshness of food while female respondents stated food quality as their most important deciding factor. However, female respondents’ did have higher perceptions and expectations than their male counterparts.

5.9 Research Recommendations

The researcher believes that more studies be conducted in the area of customer expectations and perceptions of service. If the researcher were to conduct this or similar research in this field again, it would be more focused in one restaurant bracket opposed to a wider field and be conducted within the establishments. The researcher has no regrets from conducting this research and has gained a valuable insight into the field of service, perceptions and expectations.
Bibliography


Hofman, P. and E. Worsfold (1999). *DESIRE - Development of a European Service for Information on Research and Education* Bristol, University of Bristol


Expectations and perceptions


APPENDICIES
APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE
**General Information Section**

1. What gender are you?

   Male
   Female

2. Which of the following age groups do you belong to

   26-34
   35-44
   45-54
   55-64
   Over 65

3. What is your employment status?

   Business, commerce, finance
   Self employed
   Education
   Sciences and medicine
   Engineering and technology
   Legal
   Sports, leisure and recreation
   Government
   Retail, hospitality
   Other (please specify)

4. Which of the following represents your average weekly spending power/disposable income?

   Less than 100 Euros
   101 - 250 Euros
   251 - 400 Euros
   401 - 550 Euros
   Greater than 551 Euros
5. How often would you dine out?

   - Less than once a week
   - More than once a week
   - At least once a month
   - More than once a month

6. Which one of these statements best applies to you?

   - I am dining out because I have extra money to spend
   - I am dining out because I have extra time
   - Other

**Expectations and Perceptions Section**

1. Which one of these statements best applies to you when you visit a restaurant?

   - Family activity
   - Special occasion
   - Friend (s)
   - Group social outing
   - Normal daily activity lunch or dinner
   - Normal weekly activity
   - Annual event
   - Suggestion by a family or friend
   - Business activity
   - I am celebrating
     - of a business need
     - of a social occasion (just going out for a meal with friends/family/associates)
   - it is convenient
   - Other
2. Which of the following do you feel most appropriate when selecting a restaurant?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of establishment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cleanliness of restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New meal experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social status/prestige</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompt handling of complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed of service offered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menu selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lives up to previous expectation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfilment of promises</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. How important to you was each one of these factors when you decided to dine in a particular restaurant. Please select a number in each box below by clicking on the downward arrow, with 1 = Low and 5 = High.

Fast-food

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>presentation of food</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>menu item variety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nutritious food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taste of food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>freshness of food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>temperature of food</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Coffee shop**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>presentation of food</th>
<th>menu item variety</th>
<th>nutritious food</th>
<th>taste of food</th>
<th>food quality</th>
<th>freshness of food</th>
<th>temperature of food</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Brasserie**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>presentation of food</th>
<th>menu item variety</th>
<th>nutritious food</th>
<th>taste of food</th>
<th>food quality</th>
<th>freshness of food</th>
<th>temperature of food</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Michelin star restaurant**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>presentation of food</th>
<th>menu item variety</th>
<th>nutritious food</th>
<th>taste of food</th>
<th>food quality</th>
<th>freshness of food</th>
<th>temperature of food</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
**Fine dining restaurant**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presentation of food</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Menu item variety</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutritious food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste of food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food quality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshness of food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperature of food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Please rate the following decision factors on a scale of 1 to 5, when dining out. Please select a number in each box below by clicking on the downward arrow, with 1 = Low and 5 = High.

**Fast-food**

| Friendly, polite and helpful staff |  |
| Attentive staff                  |  |
| Staff greeting customers         |  |
| Efficient service                |  |
| Staff are willing to serve       |  |
| Staff have good food/beverage knowledge |  |
| Sympathetic handling of complaints |  |

**Bistro/Bar**

| Friendly, polite and helpful staff |  |
| Attentive staff                  |  |
| Staff greeting customers         |  |
| Efficient service                |  |
| Staff are willing to serve       |  |
| Staff have good food/beverage knowledge |  |
| Sympathetic handling of complaints |  |
**Coffee shop**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>friendly, polite and helpful staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attentive staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff greeting customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>efficient service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff are willing to serve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff have good food/beverage knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sympathetic handling of complaints</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Brasserie**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>friendly, polite and helpful staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attentive staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff greeting customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>efficient service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff are willing to serve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff have good food/beverage knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sympathetic handling of complaints</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Michelin star restaurant**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>friendly, polite and helpful staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attentive staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff greeting customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>efficient service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff are willing to serve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff have good food/beverage knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sympathetic handling of complaints</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. How important were each one of these items when you decided to dine in a particular restaurant. Please select a number in each box below by clicking on the downward arrow, with 1 = Low and 5 = High.

### Fine dining restaurant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>friendly, polite and helpful staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attentive staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff greeting customers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>efficient service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff are willing to serve</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff have good food/beverage knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sympathetic handling of complaints</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Fast-food

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>level of comfort in the restaurant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>level of noise in the restaurant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>view from the restaurant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cleanliness of the restaurant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dining privacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>restaurant's temperature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>restaurant's appearance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff appearance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Bistro/Bar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>level of comfort in the restaurant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>level of noise in the restaurant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>view from the restaurant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cleanliness of the restaurant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dining privacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>restaurant's temperature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>restaurant's appearance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff appearance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Coffee shop**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>level of comfort in the restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>level of noise in the restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>view from the restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cleanliness of the restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dining privacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>restaurant's temperature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>restaurant's appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff appearance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Brasserie**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>level of comfort in the restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>level of noise in the restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>view from the restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cleanliness of the restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dining privacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>restaurant's temperature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>restaurant's appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff appearance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Michelin star restaurant**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>level of comfort in the restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>level of noise in the restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>view from the restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cleanliness of the restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dining privacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>restaurant's temperature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>restaurant's appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff appearance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Fine dining restaurant**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items in the restaurant</th>
<th>Level of comfort</th>
<th>Level of noise</th>
<th>View from the restaurant</th>
<th>Cleanliness of the restaurant</th>
<th>Dining privacy</th>
<th>Restaurant's temperature</th>
<th>Restaurant's appearance</th>
<th>Staff appearance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

6. How important were each one of these items when you decided to dine in a particular restaurant, with 1 = Least important and 5 = extremely important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nutritious food</th>
<th>Farewell</th>
<th>Limited menu choice</th>
<th>Discount for party</th>
<th>Smoking area</th>
<th>Noise/loud music</th>
<th>Bar when you are waiting</th>
<th>Handling of telephone reservation</th>
<th>Car parking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

7. How important were each one of these items when you decided to dine in a particular restaurant, with 1 = Least important and 5 = extremely important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offers a new dining experience</th>
<th>Offers food of a consistent standard</th>
<th>Feels comfortable to eat there</th>
<th>Offers service of a consistent standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
8. What are your expectations of each of these items when you decided to dine in a restaurant? With 1 = Low expectations and 5 = High expectations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>offers a new dining experience</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>offers food of a consistent standard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feels comfortable to eat there</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>offers service of a consistent standard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Your Recent Dining Experience Section**

By using your last dining experience as an example, have you dined in that restaurant prior to your last visit? If you answer YES (please continue to next question) If you answer NO (please see next sentence below)

Yes
No

If you have not dined there previously, can you give a brief reason why you decided to do so on this occasion?

How many times have you dined in the restaurant in the past two months?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Once</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2 times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 4 times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Would you return to that restaurant again?

Yes
No
Following this recent experience in a food service encounter, did the provider meet with your expectations for food?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>presentation of food</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>menu item variety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nutritious food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taste of food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>freshness of food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>temperature of food</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following this recent experience in a food service encounter, did the provider meet with your expectations for service?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>children friendly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>friendly, polite and helpful staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attentive staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff greeting customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>efficient service/unfussed/relaxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff are willing to serve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff have good food/beverage knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sympathetic handling of complaints</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following this recent experience in a food service encounter, did the provider meet with your expectations for atmosphere?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>level of comfort in the restaurant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>level of noise in the restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>view from the restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cleanliness of the restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dining privacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>restaurant's temperature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>restaurant's appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff appearance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Following this recent experience in a food service encounter, did the provider meet with your expectations for convenience?

- handling of telephone reservations
- parking convenience

8. Following this recent experience in a food service encounter, did the provider meet with your expectations for the restaurant?

- offered a new dining experience
- offered food of a consistent standard
- felt comfortable to eat in
- offered service of a consistent standard

Would you select a restaurant that has received a negative review from a food critic?

- Yes
- No
APPENDIX B: COVER LETTER FOR QUESTIONNAIRES
Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Mike O' Connor and a lecturer within The School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology at the Dublin Institute of Technology. I also completing a MSc in Hospitality Management (part-time) and as part of the course I am undertaking a dissertation as partial fulfilment of the programme.

I am presently conducting research on customer expectations and perceptions of a restaurant service.

I would be grateful for your co-operation in answering the following questionnaire, which will help me determine the factors that influence consumer behaviour when making a decision on which restaurant to select.

Any individual responses will be strictly confidential to the research process and I would like to sincerely thank you for your time and consideration.

Should you wish to contact me directly, you may do so at the following e-mail address mike.oconnor@dit.ie or by phoning 086 3540760

Sincerely,

Mike J O’ Connor
Lecturer, DIT,
Cathal Brugha Street Dublin 1