

The influence of demographic variables on customers' expectations in restaurants in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa

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Abstract

The restaurant industry in South Africa is undergoing a period of anaemic growth due to the after effects of the 2009 global economic recession. Despite lowering their prices and spending marketing funds on promotions, restaurants seem to be finding great difficulty in meeting customers' expectations. The purpose of the study was to determine the influence of demographic variables on customers' expectations in restaurants. The research sample included in the study entailed relevant data that were collected from 400 customers of the eight selected formal full-service restaurants. Descriptive statistical analysis, analysis of variance and t-tests were performed to reach the objectives of the study. The findings show that on a 5 point Likert scale, respondents' mean expectation scores varied between 3.69 and 4.25. Expectations of customers for food and beverages and service were influenced by their gender, age, monthly income and level of education. However, these demographic variables did not have an influence on the ambience expectations. The only demographic variable that did not influence customers' expectations was home language. None of the demographic variables had an influence on the ambience expectations of customers. From a managerial perspective, it is important for restaurateurs to focus on customers' gender, age, monthly income and level of education to meet and/or exceed customer expectations and gain a competitive advantage over other restaurant categories. The contribution of this article is unique in that, for the first time, the influences of demographic variables on customers' expectations are investigated from the context of restaurants.

Keywords and phrases: Customers' expectations, demographic variables, food and beverage, restaurants, service.

Introduction

After the global recession in 2009, restaurant industry growth has been subdued as customers expect more for their money when spending at restaurants (Brennan, 2013:4). According to Statistics South Africa (2014:7), the average customer spent 28.3% of their food budget on restaurants in 2013 compared to 30.0% in 2003. Consequently, industry revenue declined 1.8% in 2013 as restaurants failed to meet customers' expectations (Forster, 2012:17).

However, despite extensive literature in the customer satisfaction area that incorporates the idea of expectations, the concept of expectations itself is seldom/rarely defined (Coye, 2004:6). Jordaan and Prinsloo (2001:28) define customer expectations as pre-trial beliefs a

customer has about the performance of a product or service. Customers then use this as the standard or reference against which the product or service performance is judged. Markovic, Raspor and Segaric (2010:187) assert that the term expectation is used to describe what customers believe about the capability of the service provider. Expectations represent what customers feel a restaurant should offer, affecting their reactions and decisions about food and services, although sometimes unconsciously (Kasapila, 2006:58). Therefore, it is important for restaurants to deliver service that meets or, even better, exceeds customer expectations.

In a restaurant context, expectations include both tangible and intangible elements. The tangible expectations of a restaurant include the product elements of food and drink for instance; a belief that the food will possess certain sensory attributes each at certain intensities (Budhwar, 2004:29). It also includes factors such as presentation, the appearance and temperature of the food. These are significantly important variables in the customer's expectations (Kleynhans, 2003:39).

On the contrary, the intangible expectations relate to the ambience, lighting and several dining stages which include a greeting from the host, being assigned to a table, ordering, receiving, paying the bill and exiting (Namkung, Jang & Choi, 2010:6). Budhwar (2004:29) posits that customers tend to accept a certain degree of variation in the intangibles but are far less flexible when it comes to the tangible elements of the restaurant since the average customer understands the "human" element of service.

Factors influencing customers' expectations

Expectations play a critical role in the customer's evaluation of the dining experience hence the need to understand the factors that can influence customers' expectations. As such, an understanding of the factors that influence customers' expectations ought to be useful in guiding restaurants to design and deliver the right offering (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006:6). However, for the purpose of this study these factors are classified into internal, external and situational factors as discussed below.

Internal factors

Internal factors that impact on customers' expectations include personal needs, personal philosophies of service and past experience (Calvert, 2001:740). Personal needs (or conditions essential to the well-being of the customer) are fundamental factors that shape what customers desire or expect in the dining experience. Personal philosophies of dining have an impact on the customer's expectations of the dining experience (Lillicrap & Cousins, 2006:63).

To illuminate on the influence of personal philosophies of service and past experience, customers, who for example, has been waiters or waitresses in a restaurant, is likely to have high standards for restaurant service shaped by their role as waiting staff. Such customers have high expectations of the dining experience and tend to be less tolerant of service deviations than customers who have not being part of waiting staff.

Furthermore, the past experience of customers with a particular restaurant or other similar restaurants will influence their expectations of the dining experience. Customers with broader experience are likely to develop different standards of comparison than customers with less experience, such that prior experience influences both focal brand expectations and product-category performance norms (Ganesh, Arnold & Reynolds, 2000: 72). In this regard, customers who were dissatisfied with the service at a formal full-service restaurant

may probably choose another restaurant next time they dine out. It is likely that they will choose a different type of restaurant altogether.

Customers' expectations of the dining experience can for instance be influenced by their physiological, social, psychological and/or functional needs. Physiological needs entail hunger, appetite and thirst (for example, hungry versus full; tired versus relaxed). These needs include the need to sate one's appetite or quench one's thirst or the need for special foods such as diabetic or vegetarian.

Social needs involve friends, family members and unknown guests for instance a reaction in situations where a customer is waiting in a queue and another customer does not follow accepted social norms of behaviour for a queuing context (Jensen & Hansen, 2007:617). Furthermore, when another customer's friend in the restaurant is frustrated, whether by problems with the service or by existing emotions unrelated to the service, his or her mood affects the experience for other customers who sense the negative mood.

In the same vein of thought, expectations are also influenced by perceptions of fairness and equity. For instance, customers ask themselves whether they have been treated fairly compared to other customers. Psychological needs entail mood, personality and lifestyle. To illuminate on the influence of psychological needs, the mentioned authors posit that if customers are in a bad mood, they may overreact or respond negatively to any little problem. Conversely, customers in a buoyant, positive mood may overlook delays in service. Psychological needs also entail the need for enhancement of self-esteem, fulfilling life-style needs and the need for variety.

Various authors (Spears & Gregoire, 2004:18; Payne-Palacio & Theis, 2005:28; Viljoen, 2006:366) concur that customers' demographics influence their expectation of a dining experience. Demographic variables such as age, gender, education and income tend to dictate the type of food service that the customer desires and perceives as satisfactory. It is argued that women's impact on experiences is significant as these customers tend to have different expectations when compared to the expectations of men (Soriano, 2002:1059).

Furthermore, younger age groups have a strong and positive impact on expectations (Alonso & O'Neill, 2010:241). Many of these younger customers already have the resources (for instance, education and income) to afford eating out. In addition, younger customers also tend to accompany family members and other potentially important consumer groups and can make suggestions and recommendations, or simply are the ones designated to choose a venue to eat out.

External factors

External factors that influence customer expectations of the dining experience include the social context and word-of-mouth recommendations (Ladhari, Brun & Morales, 2008:569). Customers' social context can have an impact on their expectations of the dining experience. Customers will often have high expectations of service when they are with significant others. The reason for this is that people always want to impress others through the way they make decisions and choices. Hence, a potential customer may believe that the restaurant's food, service and ambience are as good as a friend says (Shiring, Jardine & Mills, 2001:62).

Customers may form expectations of the dining experience based on word-of-mouth recommendations from family members, friends and workmates. To express the enormity of word-of-mouth recommendations, Athanassopoulos, Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2001:700) opine that 44% of first-time restaurant customers are driven by positive word-of-

mouth communication and that 10% of those customers are accompanied by someone who had previously visited the restaurant.

Statistics show that a satisfied customer will tell three other customers, such as relatives, friends and workmates, about his or her dining experience. Conversely, one unhappy customer, on average, will tend to tell between 10 and 11 other people of a bad experience. Thus, a dissatisfied customer may not only go elsewhere, but will likely become an active champion to persuade others to go elsewhere as well – negative word-of-mouth behaviour.

Mueller, Palmer, Mack and McMullan (2003:402) spell out three disturbing facts or statistics regarding dissatisfied customers. One out of 26 unhappy customers complains, while the other 25 customers (96%) will more than likely simply take their business elsewhere (organisation-switching behaviour). The management of these restaurants often passively accept the results as business failure, without knowing the real reason.

However, when complaints are handled well, customers will return to the restaurant sometime in future. The importance of external factors to restaurants can be summarised by Yu and Dean (2001:242) who claim that it is more expensive to attract new customers than to retain existing ones since it costs about five times as much time, money and resources to attract new customers as it does to retain an existing customer.

Situational factors

Situational factors such as reasons for dining out, the weather and time constraints tend to impact on customers' expectations of the dining experience (Iglesias & Guillen, 2004:375). The expectations of a customer who is dining out for convenience purposes may not be the same as for a customer who is dining out to celebrate a birthday. If customers have to select a restaurant for a family celebration, they will carry out a greater information search than they will when leisure or time are the main drivers. After this greater information search and subsequent evaluation of possible venues, customers will tend to assign perceived value and subsequent decision making. In such situations customers tend to have higher expectations.

Conversely, when customers experience a lack of time to go home, cook and eat, they tend to search less for information and the number of evaluated alternatives will therefore also be fewer. In such circumstances, customers have no choice but to make their purchase decisions in accordance with variables, such as the proximity to their place of work (Wagar & Lindqvist, 2010:511). Hence, the assigned perceived value will be less and customers will tend to have low expectations.

Likewise, expectations of service on a bad-weather day when a restaurant is faced with labour constraints are likely to be different from those of a good-weather day. Similarly, if a restaurant charges higher prices or uses white tablecloths, customers may have high expectations of the dining experience (Wall & Berry, 2007:63). Simply put, customers hold different expectations based on the situation at hand.

Based on the preceding points, it is clear that all three factors (internal, external and situational) are linked to expectations and their importance cannot be overemphasised since customers may want to satisfy some or all of these three factors.

Demographic variables and restaurant expectations

Demographic variables play a decisive role in influencing customers' dining expectations, such as the way customers evaluate a food item for texture, the sympathetic handling of

complaints and the spatial layout and functionality (Geissler & Rucks, 2011:11). They provide a powerful determinant of consumer behaviour which affects the meal experience in a restaurant (Chung & Kim, 2011:36). In restaurant literature, demographic variables are one of the major factors determining consumer expectations and subsequent behaviours (Tinne, 2012:126). Consequently, demographic variables significantly determine the level of restaurant expectations (Lee, 2011:661).

Restaurateurs tend to emphasise the influence of food on restaurant expectations (Rahman, 2012:81). Besides food, the restaurant expectations also tends to be influenced by demographic variables (Mitchell & Walsh, 2004:340). Though important, food is only a part of the total dining experience. Therefore, the restaurant expectations are not only influenced by food but by demographic variables such as age, income, educational level, marital status, ethnicity and gender (Walsh & Mitchell, 2005:286).

However, researchers have been reporting contradictory findings on the influence of demographic variables on restaurant expectations. For example, Ozimek and Zakowska-Biemans (2011:144) studied the influence of demographic variables on restaurant expectations. He argued that expectations of customers were influenced by their levels of education. He found that customers with higher levels of education tend to have higher expectations.

Huang, Ho and Lee (2003:796) found that expectations of customers for food were influenced by their gender. Thus, gender differences can affect consumers' approaches to decision making. Gareth (2011:26) assert that gender differences were also found for appearance-related attitudes and behaviour. Mhlanga, Hattingh and Moolman (2013:1114) posit that there are differences between men and women in their reactions to the same marketing stimuli. Men and women seem to want different products, and they are likely to have different ways of thinking about obtaining these (Shaw, 2012:48). Therefore, customers with different demographic characteristics tend to have different restaurant expectations.

Based on the preceding discussion, it is evident that in restaurants, a relationship exists between demographic variables of customers and restaurant expectations. However, investigations on the influence of demographic variables on customers' expectations in restaurants context have, to date, received limited attention (Jordaan, 2012:6). They appear to be a void of empirical studies that investigate the influence of demographic variables on customers' expectations in restaurants in South Africa in spite of the widely recognised fact that it is one of the fastest growing sectors with the potential of contributing to economic growth and employment generation (CATHSETTA, 2014:4). This study seeks to fill in this identified research gap.

Furthermore, many of the academic literature to-date is western in orientation and the principles and methods that emerged may need revision in light of findings beyond the developed world (Blakey, 2012:52). Conspicuously, hardly can one find studies on the same in the African context. Perhaps, it might not be judicious to assume a-priori that the findings from the developed parts of the World can apply in the African context. The current study seeks too, to confirm or disconfirm the previous findings from developed countries in the African context – in particular, using South Africa as a case in point. Therefore, it is important to investigate the influence of demographic variables on customers' expectations in formal full-service restaurants.

Problem Statement

Despite the increasing popularity of eating out (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006:6) restaurants in South Africa have shown a negative growth rate, as customers opt to eat home

(Datamonitor, 2013:7). Researchers such as Dhurup, Mafini and Malan (2013:288) and Khalilzadeh, Rajabi and Jahromi (2013:17), identify restaurateurs' inability to determine the influence of demographic variables on customers' expectations as one of the main reasons for low customer turnout. Despite lowering their prices and spending marketing funds on promotions, restaurants seem to be finding great difficulty in meeting customers' expectations (Heung & Gu, 2012:1172; Ryu, Lee & Kim, 2012:209).

As such, a study to determine the influence of demographic variables on customers' expectations in restaurants has been visualised. The results of the study could increase customer turnout and conceptualise restaurant customers' probability of intention to return to Eastern Cape restaurants. The Eastern Cape Province is considered as the gateway to the Garden Route and a well-known tourist destination in South Africa.

Expected Outcomes

The primary objective of this study was to determine the influence of demographic variables on customers' expectations in full-service restaurants. In order to achieve the primary objective, the following secondary objective was formulated:

- To determine expectations of customers with different demographic variables.
- To determine the significant differences in the means calculated for expectations of customers with different demographic variables.
- To draw conclusions to restaurant management regarding the expectations of customers in formal full-service restaurants in the Eastern Cape Province.

Research Methodology

A list of local registered restaurants was obtained from the Nelson Mandela and Buffalo City metropolitan municipality and also from the Restaurant Directory of South Africa (2014:7). Only formal full-service restaurants were selected. For this study, a formal full-service restaurant refers to an up market restaurant that offers table service with complete, varied menus and multiple entrees for each meal period which may include soups, salads and/or desserts (Statistics South Africa, 2014:9). Most formal full-service restaurants will provide customer seating with gastronomy, sophisticated service, elegant ambience and liquor service. Usually, these restaurants will not permit casual wear (Feinstein & Stefanelli, 2008:11).

Only 10 formal full-service restaurants complied with the criteria, of which two were used for the pilot study. The remaining eight restaurants were included in the main study. These restaurants complied with the criteria set by Statistics South Africa for classification as a formal full-service restaurant. The research sample included in the study entailed relevant data that were collected from 400 customers of the eight selected formal full-service restaurants in the Eastern Cape Province. A sample of 400 was adequate, since the total population of formal full-service restaurant customers in the Eastern Cape Province exceeds 5 000 customers (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:17). A descriptive quantitative study design was followed. Probability sampling was used since it is based on the principles of randomness and the probability theory, to accurately generalise to the population (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:11).

A five-point Likert scale was used. Since each point in the five-point Likert scale had a descriptor, a fully anchored rating scale (Johnson & Christensen, 2004: 171) was applied. The five response alternatives for customers' expectations were; very low expectations (1),

low expectations (2), indifferent (3), high expectations (4), and very high expectations (5). The advantages of a five-point Likert Scale are that it is the most universal method for survey collection, therefore it is easily understood. The 5 point Likert scale with its balanced keys reduced acquiescence bias since acquiescence on positively keyed items tend to balance acquiescence on negatively keyed factors. Also, the responses presented accommodate neutral or undecided feelings of participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2004: 171).

In order to guarantee equal representation of each of the restaurants, proportional stratified random sampling was used to find the sample size for a particular restaurant taking into cognisance the restaurant's seating capacity (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:35). A proportional sample of 22.5% of the total seating capacity per restaurant enabled the researcher to obtain at least 400 completed questionnaires. Table 1 reflects how the total sample size of 400 formal full-service restaurant customers was calculated.

Systematic sampling, which is a probability sampling method, was then used to select respondents by systematically moving through the sample frame and selecting every *k*th element. This method is useful in situations where the population elements arrive at a certain location over time (Maree, 2005:26). As such, respondents were selected by systematically targeting every fourth customer who walked into the restaurant until the sample size for a particular restaurant was reached.

Table 1: Response rate per restaurant

Restaurant	Seating capacity	Respondents	Response rate per restaurant
Restaurant A	200	45	22.50%
Restaurant B	300	68	22.67%
Restaurant C	240	54	22.50%
Restaurant D	200	45	22.50%
Restaurant E	280	63	22.50%
Restaurant F	180	41	22.78%
Restaurant G	180	41	22.78%
Restaurant H	220	43	22.72%
Total	1800	400	22.22%

It was better to target every fourth customer so as to be discreet and avoid annoying other customers who were not participating in the survey (Kivela, Inbakaran & Reece, 1999:274). The restaurant manager from each mentioned restaurant was approached for permission to conduct the study. Data were collected in November and December 2012 during weekdays, weekends and across these two months during lunch and dinner as recommended by various researchers (Akinyele, 2010:85; Kivela *et al.*, 1999:274; Sulek & Hensley, 2004:242). This enabled the researcher to maximise chances of eliciting information from customers of different lifestyles, occupation, income, age and gender.

The following procedures were used to collect data. The researcher systematically approached every fourth customer who walked into the restaurant after they were seated in the restaurant or as they were scanning/perusing the menu. The researcher explained the aim of the study to the customers and requested them to participate. It was emphasised that the researcher would treat the information provided as confidential and anonymous.

Customers who were willing to participate in the study received a questionnaire. Completed questionnaires were collected, checked and discussed with the respondents in case of any queries. Data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences which is a statistical analysis software programme (SPSS, 2014: Online).

Findings

Reliability and validity

Reliability in quantitative studies can be defined as the extent to which test scores are accurate, consistent or stable (Struwig & Stead, 2001:130). Taking into account that McMillan and Schumacher (2010:182) regard the Cronbach α coefficient as the most appropriate method to investigate the reliability of survey research where there is a range of possible answers and not only a choice between two items, internal reliability was tested using this measure. A Cronbach's α coefficient of higher than seven is acceptable (Pietersen & Maree, 2007:216). The Cronbach's α coefficient for the total index was high (0.7638), while moderate to high reliability coefficients were calculated for food and beverages (0.8281), service (0.7209), ambience (0.8810) and overall expectations (0.8219). The high alpha values indicate good internal consistency among the items. Pietersen and Maree (2007:216) describe validity as the extent to which an empirical instrument "measures what it is supposed to measure". In order to ensure content and face validity (Babbie & Mouton, 2008:122), a literature study was undertaken and the survey instrument was scrutinised by academic and restaurant experts before the instrument was finalised.

Results

Table 2 reflects the expectations of respondents with different demographic variables. The table also reflects the means and standard deviations for respondents with different demographic variables.

Table 2: Expectations of respondents with different demographic variables

Demographic variables	n	%	Overall expectations	
			Mean	SD
Gender				
Male	183	45.75	4.14	0.76
Female	217	54.25	4.02	0.86
Age				
≤24	10	2.50	4.17	0.81
25-34	27	6.75	3.91	0.92
35-44	63	15.75	3.96	0.74
45-54	201	50.25	4.20	0.83
55-64	86	21.50	4.01	0.87
≥65	13	3.25	3.89	0.73
Monthly income				
≤R6000	59	14.75	3.91	0.92
R6001-R11999	221	55.25	3.86	0.85
≥R12000	120	30.00	3.99	0.92
Education				
No schooling	10	2.50	3.93	0.80
Primary school	7	1.75	4.01	0.77
High school	93	23.25	4.07	0.84
Tertiary Diploma	171	42.75	4.25	1.03
Tertiary Degree	96	24.00	3.96	0.70
Other,	23	5.75	3.82	0.63
Home language				
Afrikaans	27	6.75	3.86	0.81
English	221	55.25	3.94	0.84
IsiXhosa	121	30.25	3.98	0.64
IsiZulu	8	2.00	3.76	0.32
Other,	23	5.75	3.69	0.47
All	400	100	3.96	0.77

In this study, of the 400 respondents, 45.75% (n=183) were male whilst 50.25% were in the age group 45 to 54 years (see Table 2). A total of 55.25% of the respondents used English as home language whilst 30.25% used IsiXhosa. Of the respondents, 42.75% had a tertiary diploma whilst 55.25% earned a monthly income in the R6 001 to R11 999 range.

Table 2 further depicts the variable mean scores and standard deviations for the demographic sample. An initial glance at the data reveals that respondents' overall mean expectation scores varied between 3.69 (customers who spoke a home language other than Afrikaans, English, IsiZulu and IsiXhosa) and 4.25 (customers with a tertiary diploma), with five being the highest possible score. Respondents with a tertiary diploma recorded the highest overall mean expectation score (4.25) whilst those who spoke other languages recorded the lowest overall mean expectation score (3.69).

Furthermore, the fact that half of the customers in this study fell in the age group 45 to 54 years (see Table 2) means that they were born between 1959 and 1968 which is part of Generation X. In a study by Siegel (2002:57) most of the customers were part of Generation X and the mentioned author posits that this age group (Generation X) tends to be married couples. Generation X has a high propensity to dine out and tend to prefer dining at full-service restaurants. Consequently, Generation X tends to spend more money than younger and older adults when dining out leading to higher expectations (Noble & Schewe, 2003:51).

On the other hand, Generation Y, or those born after 1978, tends to eat more often at quick-service and pizza restaurants (Schewe & Noble, 2000:136). The low number of customers (15.75%) in the 35 to 44 and 65 years and older category (3.25%) could possibly be explained by the "life cycle" model. The "life cycle" model postulates that 35 to 44 year-olds are likely to have a heavy financial burden rearing their school children; hence they have less disposable income for eating out (Kivela, Inbakaran & Reece, 2000:24).

Furthermore, retired people (aged 65 years and older) have lost their regular incomes and often find it necessary to budget their expenditure, resulting in fewer dining-out and return activities. Hence, it is not surprising that there were only 3.25% of the respondents who were over 65 years of age in this study. As such, together with common life experiences, an individual frame of mind and aims in life, diners from different age groups may express different intentions and behaviour according to their desires, favours and influencing factors.

Consequently, because of its importance to various restaurant attributes such as food, service and ambience, age is a frequently used variable in marketing research and is commonly included in questionnaires concerning restaurant selection or satisfaction (Harrington, Ottenbacher & Way, 2010:7). Hence, its significance to customers' expectations cannot be overemphasised (Zheng, 2010:84).

In order to determine whether the differences in demographic variables were significant in food and beverage choice, service, ambience levels and overall expectations in restaurants, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for gender and t-tests for age, monthly income, education and home language were calculated. Table 3 reflects the t-tests and one-way ANOVA performed to determine whether there were any significant differences ($p < 0.05$) in food and beverage, service, ambience levels and overall expectations reported by the different demographic categories.

Table 3: Influence of demographic variables on customers' expectations

Demographic variables	p-values			
	Expectations			Overall expectations
	Food and beverage	Service	Ambience	
Gender	0.0232*	0.0473*	0.3001	0.4538
Age	0.0341*	0.2644	0.2167	0.0096*
Monthly income	0.0484*	0.0165*	0.1759	0.0079*
Education	0.0247*	0.0195*	0.4200	0.0460*
Home language	0.4110	0.3720	0.6518	0.5877

*Indicates a significant difference (p<0.05)

It is clear from Table 3 that customers of different genders rated their expectations of food and beverage (p=0.0232) and service (p=0.0473) significantly differently (p<0.05). However, there were no significant differences in the mean expectations of ambience (p=0.3001) and overall expectations (p=0.4538) calculated for customers of different genders.

Table 3 further shows that customers from different age groups rated their expectations for food and beverages (p=0.0341) and overall expectations (p=0.0096) significantly differently (p<0.05) and customers in the 45 to 54 age group had higher expectations than customers in other age groups. Customers from different monthly income groups rated their expectations of food and beverage (p=0.0484), service (p=0.0165) and overall expectations (p=0.0079) significantly different (p<0.05) and customers in the monthly income group equal to or above R 12 000 had higher expectations than customers in other monthly income groups.

Table 3 further shows that customers with different levels of education rated their expectations of food and beverage (p=0.0247), service (p=0.0195) and overall expectations (p=0.460) significantly different (p<0.05). It is clear from Table 3 that there were no significant differences in the means (p<0.05) calculated for customers who made use of different languages. However, 42.75% of the respondents had a tertiary diploma in this study (see Table 2).

Discussion

Gender

The results of customers of different genders rating their expectations of food and beverage and service significantly differently tone with the findings of Kivela et al. (1999:274) Soriano (2002:1062) and Upadhyay, Singh and Thomas (2007:72), who found no significant difference (p<0.05) in the overall expectations calculated for customers of different genders. Chow, Lau, Lo, Sha and Yun (2007:700) also found no significant difference in overall expectations for customers of different genders in Chinese restaurants. The reason for the significant differences might be attributed to the fact that some personality specialties combined with masculinity and femininity account for the diversification among the behaviour of male and female customers (Blackwell, Miniard & Engel, 2001:19).

Mohsin (2005:53) and Kotler and Keller (2006:19) found that customers of different genders rated their expectations of food and beverage and service significantly differently (p<0.05). Kivela et al. (1999:274) also found a significant difference in expectations of food and level of service calculated for customers of different genders in Hong Kong in which females were more cautious about spending money on dining out. Females were the keepers of the family's expenditure and were consequently conditioned to be prudent with their money when dining out hence they were more concerned with budgeting and frugality which tend to

affect their expectations of food and expectations of the level of service. Female customers tend to have a low budget or/income when dining out and they therefore also tend to alter or lower their expectations. As such, customers' expectations of food and beverage and service vary according to gender.

Age

The results of customers from different age groups who rated their expectations for food and beverages and overall expectations significantly differently ($p < 0.05$) and customers in the 45 to 54 age group who had higher expectations than customers in other age groups are similar to the studies by several authors (Auty, 1992:327; Kivela, 1997:117; Meredith, Schewe & Karlovich, 2002:29; Folkman & Bellenger, 2003:57; Mohsin, 2005:53) who found significant differences in the mean expectations of food and beverage and service ($p < 0.05$) calculated for customers from different age groups with customers in the 45 to 54 age group having higher expectations.

The significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in the mean expectations of food and beverage and service calculated for customers from different age groups may be attributed to the fact that customers in the 45 to 54 age group (Generation X) tend to have more disposable income than other age groups and therefore tend to have higher expectations (Meredith *et al.*, 2002:29; Folkman & Bellenger, 2003:57; Mohsin, 2005:53). As these customers spend more money they tend to expect more value for money leading to a significant difference in the means for food and beverage and overall expectations (Kivela, 1997:117; Meredith *et al.*, 2002:29; Folkman & Bellenger, 2003:57). Consequently, determinants in food and beverage, service and overall expectations vary across age groups.

Monthly income

The results of customers from different monthly income groups who rated their expectations of food and beverage, service and overall expectations significantly different ($p < 0.05$) and customers in the monthly income group equal to or above R 12 000 who had higher expectations than customers in other monthly income groups are in line with previous studies that found expectations of food and beverage, service and overall expectations to vary according to income (Auty, 1992:327; Yüksel & Yüksel, 2002:326). Turgeon and Pastinelli (2002:251) also noted that customers from different monthly income groups rated their overall expectations significantly different in full-service restaurants. Kivela *et al.* (1999:274) assert that high income groups are more inclined to dine out because of quality, comfort, prestige and personalised service perceived in full-service restaurants. High income groups have more disposable income and, presumably, some of the greater disposable income is spent on pleasure-seeking activities such as fine dining restaurants.

In their study on formal full-service restaurants, Liu and Jang (2009:340) and Bowie and Buttle (2006:17) found a significant difference in overall expectations of customers from different monthly income groups. Customers with high levels of income tend to expect high levels of quality, comfort, prestige and personalised service, hence there tends to be a significant difference in overall expectations of customers from different monthly income groups. Consequently, determinants in customers' expectations of food and beverage, service and overall expectations vary across income levels.

Education

The results of customers with different levels of education who rated their expectations of food and beverage, service and overall expectations significantly different ($p < 0.05$) are in line with studies by Zheng (2010:84) and Bowie and Buttle (2006:29) who found significant

differences in expectations of food and beverage, service and overall expectations of customers with different levels of education. Spielberg (2005:39) posits that education influences people's expectations and shapes their values, beliefs, attitudes, interests, activities and lifestyle. As customers get more educated they develop analytical and intellectual competencies and learn a wide range of transferable skills, and they study restaurant etiquette and concepts in greater detail.

Customers with a tertiary degree had higher overall expectations than customers with other levels of education. As people's level of education increases so do their expectations of food and beverage and level of restaurant service. Consequently, determinants in customers' expectations of food and beverage, service and overall expectations vary according to customers' level of education. Furthermore, tertiary educated people are much more likely to patronise restaurants than their less educated counterparts (Mehta & Maniam, 2002:40). Consequently, determinants in restaurant selection vary across the level of education of the consumer.

Language

The results that there were no significant differences in the means ($p < 0.05$) calculated for customers who made use of different languages are similar to the studies by Bowie and Buttle (2006:39) who assert that home language has no significant influence on customers' expectations. However, the results deviate from the findings of various scholars (Josiam & Monteiro, 2004:21; Verma, Pullman & Goodale, 1999:83) who found restaurant selection behaviour to vary according to home language and cultural groups. The findings in this study regarding respondents with a tertiary qualification recording the highest overall mean expectation score well syncs with the results by Spielberg (2005:28) who found that respondents with a tertiary qualification recorded the highest expectations.

Table 4 provides a summary of the influence of demographic variables on customers' expectations.

Table 4: Influence of demographic variables on customers' expectations

Demographic variables	Significant differences in means			
	Expectations			Overall expectations
	Food and beverage	Service	Ambience	
Gender	√	√	X	X
Age	√	X	X	√
Monthly income	√	√	X	√
Education	√	√	X	√
Home language	X	X	X	X

√ Indicates a significant difference

X Indicates a non-significant difference

It is evident from Table 4 that the expectations of customers for food and beverages and service were influenced by their gender, age, monthly income and level of education. However, these demographic variables did not have an influence on the ambience expectations.

The only demographic variable that did not influence customers' expectations was home language. None of the demographic variables had an influence on the ambience expectations of customers.

Conclusion

It is usually difficult to obtain the support of restaurateurs for studies of this nature, but cooperation from the restaurateurs was more likely in this study. This article offers the South African restaurant subsector increased insight into the influence of demographic variables on customers' expectations in restaurants. It provides a clear understanding that expectations of customers for food and beverages and service were influenced by their gender, age, monthly income and level of education.

Restaurateurs should continuously strive to meet or exceed customer expectations by emphasizing the four demographic variables that influence customers' expectations for food and beverages and service, namely; gender, age, monthly income and level of education. However, these demographic variables did not have an influence on the ambience expectations. The only demographic variable that did not influence customers' expectations was home language. Therefore, restaurateurs must not only measure customer expectations, but also the influence of gender, age, monthly income and level of education on customers' expectations because these demographic variables play a substantial role in predicting customer's behaviour as well. Finally, the research supports the strategic objectives of the National Tourism Sector Strategy to deliver a world-class experience to consumers (RSA NDT, 2013:6).

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions presented above, since customers' expectations of food and beverage and expectations of the level of service vary according to gender some scholars (Homburg & Giering, 2001:48; Noone, Kimes, Mattila & Wirtz, 2007:231) argue that men and women tend to have different attitudinal and behavioural orientations in their buying behaviour. Consequently, restaurants could segment their level of service on the basis of customers' gender and metro sexuality by using gender segmentation, differentiation and positioning strategies to target a specific gender.

Furthermore, since customers from different age groups rated their expectations of food and beverage and overall expectations significantly different participating restaurants may find it useful to tailor their offerings based on the age groups of customers. Customers from different age groups often have different service expectations (Davis, 2008:248; Jordaan, 2012:6). Restaurant managers could therefore use different market segmentation strategies for different age groups. When a restaurant targets a specific group of customers differently it is likely to exceed their expectations and ensure customer satisfaction in an accumulating manner (Shaw, 2012:51).

In another vein, since customers who spent more than R399 had higher expectations than customers who spent less than R399, restaurants could carefully consider their pricing structures. Restaurants could implement a "premium pricing" strategy by targeting high income customers and having high-priced menu items that are related to the value expectation of customers. Sulek and Hensley (2004:240) posit that customers already expect formal full-service restaurants to have high-priced menu items.

In a "premium pricing" strategy a high price is used as a defining criterion (Burke & Resnick, 2001:352). Such pricing strategies work in segments and industries where a strong competitive advantage exists for the company, for example upmarket restaurants (Ruggless, 2003:68). By implementing a "premium pricing" strategy restaurants will concentrate on value and not volume of customers (that is, high value low volume strategy) (Jordaan, 2012:8). Therefore, restaurants could charge high prices while offering varied menus and multiple entrees with unique gastronomy, sophisticated service and elegant ambience to

distinguish full-service restaurants from other restaurant categories, while also meeting/exceeding customers' expectations.

To further increase the restaurant experience of customers, restaurateurs could introduce an up-selling concept to customers who spend more than R399 whereby more expensive items are offered than the ones the customer originally ordered to boost restaurant profits (Ruggless, 2003:68). This will ensure that customers spend more than R399 and hence increase their restaurant experience since the study showed that customers who spent more than R399 had higher restaurant expectations.

To attract customers who spend less than R399 the researchers recommend restaurateurs to implement a down-selling concept. Down-selling is a concept of offering customers low-end products in a restaurant so that such customers are kept in formal full-service restaurants instead of going to budget restaurants (Kimes & Wirtz, 2003:126). With time, these customers may upgrade or expand their average rand spent to become a more valuable and lucrative customer (Noone *et al.*, 2007:231).

The researchers recommend that restaurants introduce revenue management strategies such as early bird specials to influence demand. The goal of revenue management is to maximise revenue by means of variable pricing and duration controls (Noone *et al.*, 2007:231). Revenue management is the application of information systems and pricing strategies to allocate the right capacity to the right customer at the right price at the right time (Kimes & Wirtz, 2003:126). The determination of "right" entails achieving both the most contribution possible for the restaurant, while also delivering the greatest value or utility to the customer (Burke & Resnick, 2001:352).

Therefore, restaurants could set prices according to predicted demand levels so that price-sensitive customers who are willing to purchase at off-peak times can do so at favourable prices, whereas price-insensitive customers who want to consume at peak times will be able to do so (Kimes & Wirtz, 2003:126). The use of demand-based pricing implies that higher prices should be charged during high-demand periods (Burke & Resnick, 2001:352). Based on this principle, restaurants could charge more for weekend customers (when there is typically higher demand) than for weekday customers.

To improve the level of service, restaurateurs could develop appropriate training and empowerment programmes for all employees with specific emphasis on the development of waiters. Waiters transfer most of the value of the restaurant product to customers when they interact (Barta, 2008:7). Waiters are therefore responsible for the "moment of truth" or "critical fail point" when customers evaluate the restaurant as a whole (Moolman, 2011:138). Restaurants could pay attention to the development of frontline characteristics such as emotional intelligence and creativity (Namasivayam & Denizci, 2006:385).

Limitations of the study

Although the researchers took great effort to enhance the trustworthiness and the validity and reliability of the research processes, as with any study, there remained certain limitations. These limitations expose weaknesses of this study, which could help researchers in future to design and conduct their customer expectations research in the restaurant sector more effectively. Firstly, the research was based on the influence of demographic variables on customers' expectations in restaurants in the Eastern Cape Province only. Caution is, therefore, required when generalising the findings of this study to other geographic areas of South Africa, considering that a replication of this study in other geographic areas may reveal different results on the influence of demographic variables on customers' expectations in restaurants despite a representative sample.

Secondly, obtaining permission from the restaurants was time consuming and some customers refused to participate in this study. The viewpoints of customers who refused to participate in the study are lacking. Thirdly, the sample was drawn from formal full-service restaurants only probably at the expense of customers from other restaurant categories. Consequently, the findings of this study represent only the expectations of formal full-service restaurant customers. The findings can therefore not be generalised to other restaurant categories, in particular to convenience and fast-food categories, or to customers who frequent other restaurants.

Fourthly, the assessment of customers' expectations was limited to 34 restaurant attributes. Even though these attributes were included in other studies and the content validity of these attributes tested, there could be other relevant restaurant attributes that are likely to influence customers' expectations. Last but not least, expectations can only be estimated through indicators and cannot be measured as clearly and precisely as profits (Vilares & Coelho, 2003:1708).

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