

Making “Sense” of the Middle of the Pyramid Consumer’s Dining Experience

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Abstract

It is assumed that fine-dining creates immersive experiences that could enhance the flavour of a meal or dish by leveraging a combination of multi-sensory stimuli. An exploratory hybrid-study identified multi-sensory dining experience stimuli from scientific literature, namely visual (eyes), haptic (touch), taste, olfactory (smell), auditory (hearing), and design and layout that affect restaurant choice. The purpose of this study was to investigate the important multi-sensory stimuli in the dining experience of middle of the pyramid (MOP) consumers. Data was collected from a convenient sample of 363 respondents representing MOP-consumers who returned an emailed questionnaire or those who completed the same questionnaire while dining at a full-service restaurant in Gauteng Province. The measuring instrument listed multi-sensory dining experience stimuli identified through a literature review. Additional items were generated via personal interviews and comments in dining-related websites that discussed multi-sensory dining. The results suggest that multi-sensory stimuli do contribute to the creation of a comprehensive dining experience. A high premium was placed on tasty and freshly prepared meals; the dining area; pleasant food odours; comfortable and spacious seating; attractive bathrooms; close-by and safe parking; and service staff (pleasant appearance, clean/neatly dressed, a professional attitude, and providing prompt service) that create sociable away-from-home family-orientated experiences. It is concluded that multi-sensory stimulation creates a memorable dining experience, which can create the opportunity to differentiate a restaurant from its closest competitors.

Keywords: Dining experience stimuli, multi-sensory stimuli, middle of the pyramid (MOP) consumers

Introduction

Dining in the sky or in a dark cave tends to contribute to the creation of a multi-sensory intrigue. Dining has become more than just consuming a meal – it has become a gastronomic experience that not only excites the taste buds but it impacts on all the senses to increase the pleasure of eating (Oliver, 2020). Traditional marketing draws consumers’ attention when they select a product (or service), and it creates emotional moments, by creating a connection between the product (or service) and the consumer (Krishna, Cian & Sokolova, 2016). Traditionally a consumer was regarded as a decision maker who focused on functional features and benefits,

but the twentieth century consumer is rational and emotional and like to have a pleasurable experience (Pentz & Gerber, 2013).

The restaurant industry (classified as a hospitality service), needs to establish a balance between chemical, instrumental and sensory measurements (Luca, Marzia, Stefania, Pietro, Giuseppe, Ana & Simona, 2018). A diversified approach is therefore required to address the unique challenge of promoting this type of service (Hinestroza & James, 2014). Restaurateurs must create appropriate emotions, where the consumer's senses are involved, and a subsequent favourable emotional response will influence their dining behaviour (Shabgou & Daryani, 2014; Kleinhans, Van Heerden & Kleynhans, 2019). The number of innovative chefs is rapidly growing, due to a fascination with the concept of multi-sensory dining as a source of culinary inspiration and the creation of unique menu designs (Spence & Jozef, 2019).

Restaurateurs need to be proactive and innovative, and the use of a multi-sensory marketing approach is an appropriate alternative to a traditional marketing approach (Moeslein, 2017). Krishna et al. (2016) confirm that a focus on multi-sensory stimuli is important to attract consumers. Stimulating as many senses as possible, to enhance the consumer experience in the hospitality industry (especially restaurants), is regarded as a unique way of differentiation (Keizer-Keijzer, 2017; Luca et al., 2018; Ngcwangu, Vibetti & Roberson, 2020). Research output on multi-sensory marketing places the spotlight on design and layout, social, and artistic stimuli (Luca et al., 2018) in relation to the consumer experience. Hoppa (2018) reported that recent trends in dining is multisensory in nature. Providing a meal is not sufficient any more. It is necessary to stimulate to create a memorable dining experience. Restaurant managers and culinary experts must understand how to involve all the senses to increase consumer appreciation of a dish that will ultimately create an environment that would enhance the dining experience (Oliver, 2020).

Literature review

Multi-sensory marketing

A classical study by Schmitt (1999) confirmed that consumers are rational and emotional beings, and will choose a product or service based on a unique experience. Due to fragmented media messages and clever free thinking on the side of consumers in the current era, marketing need to include as many senses as possible in sensory marketing to draw consumers (Pentz & Gerber, 2013). Moeslein (2017) confirms that the research field known as sensory marketing has the ability to heighten consumer attitude, and contributes to a wave of emotions and lasting memory. Therefore aiming at unique sensory experiences in consumer decision-making has become increasingly important, They are often not even consciously aware that more than one sense had been stimulated. The idea is to heighten consumer attention by targeting and evocation of their senses (Hinestroza & James, 2014). Krishna (2012) describes sensory marketing as marketing that engages the consumers' senses and affects their emotions, perception, memories, preferences and behaviour. The consumer's mind is subconsciously sensorially triggered, and these stimuli can assist marketers and specifically restaurateurs understanding unconscious sensations and conscious perceptions that are noted in consumer behaviour (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2015).

Studies on multi-sensory stimuli hospitality

The hospitality industry is a very appropriate industry to test the application of the effects of multi-sensory stimuli, as the enjoyment of food is mostly multi-sensory in nature (Ballard, 2018). Multi-sensory marketing, as a construct, has been studied in hotels (Kim & Perdue, 2013; Nagarjuna & Sudhakar, 2015; Yozukmaz & Topaloğlu, 2016) and in terms of restaurant research output (Elangovan & Padma, 2017; Goswami, Hudlikar, Peter & Todi, 2017;

Hinestroza & James, 2014; Lu & Chi, 2018; Randiwela & Alahakoon, 2016). Globally a number of restaurants such as Dinner in the Sky in Belgium, The Fat Duck in the UK, El Celler de Can Roca in Spain and Ultraviolet in Shanghai, are recognised as having a focus on an unforgettable and appetising adventure through the senses (Goswami et al., 2017). A few restaurants in South African positioned themselves as providers of multisensory dining experiences, such as Camissa Brasserie and Avalon in Cape Town, Peermont D'Oreale Grande at Emperor's Palace, Babylonstoren in Franschhoek, Wolfgat in Paternoster and Hartford House in the Natal Midlands (Eatout, 2017).

Some studies have identified the use of multi-sensory stimuli: vision (sight), auditory (sound), haptics (touch), taste and olfaction (smell) as part of the dining experience (Barnes, 2017; Moeslein, 2017; Randiwela & Alahakoon, 2016). Ares and Varela (2018) elaborated on the rapid development of the food industry and thus the influence of sensory stimuli on consumers. Luca et al. (2018) indicated that the dining environment seems to influence food consumption. The expectations that consumers set with regard to food quality and dining experience should be fulfilled by the stimuli reflected in the dining environment. The dining environment thus consists of a multi-sensory stimuli: ambient (vision, auditory, touch, taste and olfaction), design and layout (restaurant interior and exterior design), social (interaction among consumers and restaurant staff) and artistic stimulus (live art performances) (Luca et al., 2018).

The process of multi-sensory marketing assists the restaurateur to gain consumers' trust and attention by pleasing all the senses. In this way, consumer interaction with a product or service can become more meaningful and compelling. It results in restaurateurs being in a position to better meet consumer needs (Harvard Business Review, 2015). According to Wright (2006) senses rarely operate in isolation, as all senses are targeted in sensory marketing. A more pleasurable dining experience gives consumers a more memorable experience through visual aids and other sensory additions. Restaurants provide a service that is much more than just a delicious meal; they are offering an opportunity to be moved and engaged (Sitwell, 2018). This raises the bar in creating and providing unique dining experiences, and making a dining excursion more memorable (Goswami et al., 2017). According to Shabgou and Daryani (2014:574) multi-sensory stimuli in the dining environment have a positive effect on "dining intention, time, understanding, going back, mood, time, satisfaction, spent money, product involvement, enjoyment and arousal".

The range of multi-sensory stimuli

The following stimuli have been recognised in literature. The *visual stimulus* is the most targeted sense in marketing (Shabgou & Daryani, 2014). The visual stimulus is energised before touch, because it allows the consumer to note the product that they want to touch and what they expect when "feeling" the product (Elangovan & Padma, 2017). Menu presentation with appetising variations should be considered (Hinestroza & James, 2014) and should reflect the atmosphere of the restaurant (Elangovan & Padma, 2017). Also the price of a menu item could be the reason for restaurants to experiment with specialised dishes. Consumers tend to pay more for such experiences, and thus expect value for money and quality for a specific experience (Ballard, 2018). Well-presented dishes and healthy food displayed to lighting arrangements result in the desire to eat (Randiwela & Alahakoon, 2016). Thus what the consumer sees and smells will influence their sense of taste. Therefore, consumers are prejudiced when entering a restaurant based on its atmosphere (Goswami et al., 2017).

The hygiene and neatness of the restaurant, are being seen by consumers, and influence their perception of quality and time spend dining out (Elangovan & Padma, 2017). Also the appeal of the staff in relation to their appearance and the way they behave in the restaurant and

around the customers is also part of the visual appeal of the restaurant (Randiwela & Alahakoon, 2016).

In *auditory stimulation* music, sound, silence, background music, sounds we make while eating or conversations among people will trigger stimuli, and tends to affect consumers perception of the passage of time (Spence & Shankar, 2010; Yozukmaz & Topaloğlu, 2016). The noise levels of the restaurant include consumer noise; moving furniture; and sounds from the kitchen, doors and music (Fiedler, 2012). Certain sounds have a positive effect on consumer mood, preferences and behaviour (Shabgou & Daryani, 2014). Most consumers prefer a calm environment (Randiwela & Alahakoon, 2016). The use of music tends to reduce the negative effect of waiting for service, stimulate consumer's emotions, and can bring about a positive behavioural reaction (Nagarjuna & Sudhakar, 2015).

The *sense of touch (haptic stimulus)* is substantiated by textures and cleanliness of cutlery, tables, seating arrangements, convenience in movement within the dining area and restaurant temperature. Thus by touching the product, person or object consumer behaviour and emotions will be influenced (Elangovan & Padma, 2017; Shabgou & Daryani, 2014). The sense of touching in a restaurant includes "softness, smoothness, ambience and weight" (Nagarjuna & Sudhakar, 2015). The haptic sense also includes how the consumers feel emotionally about the waiter and the restaurant ambience (Fiedler, 2012; Randiwela & Alahakoon, 2016). The employee friendliness, professional competence, helpfulness and service thus influence the consumers' decision in gathering information of the products and they would appreciate the dining experience on a different level (Elangovan & Padma, 2017). The *taste stimulus* is seen as the most important aspect in restaurants, and has a direct effect on the consumer choice of restaurant and will influence the ability to compete with other restaurants (Nagarjuna & Sudhakar, 2015; Randiwela & Alahakoon, 2016). As mentioned by Spence, Okajima, Choek, Petit & Michel (2016), taste is a construction of the mind more than the mouth, and food taste is always affected by our surrounding. The level of background noises, music and different lighting would subsequent influence the perception of flavour (Ballard, 2018). Gustatory stimulation happens when the consumers experience the flavour of food and the ingredients of dishes (Yozukmaz & Topaloğlu, 2016). Muñoz-Leiva & Gómez-Carmona (2018) state that the visualisation of restaurant menus tends to activate emotions that remain during the choice of a dish. However, the way the food and beverage are being served also contributes to the taste experience (Shabgou & Daryani, 2014). The use of fresh ingredients and new menu items also influence taste (Hinestroza & James, 2014).

The *olfactory stimulation* in a restaurant is created through smell, food, freshness, cleanliness and flavour (Yozukmaz & Topaloğlu, 2016). The smell of food at the time of cooking is important and sense of smell enhances consumers' emotions and affects their behaviour (Elangovan & Padma, 2017; Nagarjuna & Sudhakar, 2015; Shabgou & Daryani, 2014). However, the smell of the bathroom or bins outside the restaurant can create the opposite effect (Randiwela & Alahakoon, 2016).

The *design and layout stimulation* of the restaurant combines how the interior and exterior being co-create unique dining experience. This tends to reflect the image or personality of the restaurant (Nagarjuna & Sudhakar, 2015). Han & Ryu (2009) confirm that the design appeal of a restaurant can increase positive consumer assessment, and that investigating consumers' responses to such stimuli can improve the understanding of dining consumer behaviour (Lu & Chi, 2018; Nagarjuna & Sudhakar, 2015; Yozukmaz & Topaloğlu, 2016). The design and layout stimulation is also enhanced by topical and appropriate restaurant décor that contributes to a pleasant ambience. This can be achieved via lighting, art works, decoration, logos and presentation (attractive shapes) (Hinestroza & James, 2014; Yozukmaz & Topaloğlu, 2016).

The restaurant layout should allow consumers to move easily around and combine with spacious seating arrangement that allow for privacy and eliminating any feelings of overcrowding. Easily accessible bathrooms and parking facilities are also of importance (Elangovan & Padma, 2017).

The *social stimulation* indicate that consumers enjoy experiencing social bonding in an environment away from home. *Artistic stimulation* includes the display of artworks and life music performances during a dining experience – creating a unique ambience. Music could change the way the brain interprets the entire sensory experience. Meals tend to taste better and flavour experiences are enhanced - These artistic stimulations also bring consumers socially together (Lift-Resto-Lounge, 2019; Spence et al., 2016).

Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were chosen, as Yoo, Lee & Bai (2011) confirm the suitability of using a hybrid methodology design and multiple diverse data analysis techniques for service marketing in order to assess the importance and significance of the consumer multi-sensory dining experience stimuli under investigation in this study. The measuring instrument aimed to determine the multi-sensory stimuli of importance of the dining experience of MOP-respondents at full-service restaurants. The population of interest in this study is MOP consumers in Gauteng. The specific criteria for the inclusion of respondents in the sample were followed as set by SAARF (2012) as discussed under MOP consumers. South African marketers, especially the hospitality industry tend to focus on the growing segments such as MOP consumers, as seen in similar trends in the emerging markets of developing countries (Mashaba & Wiese, 2016). Kolk, Rivera-Santos & Rufin (2014) noted that the South African middle class consumers are known as the middle of the pyramid (MOP). Originally these emerging “black middle class” consumers were known as “black diamonds” in the University of Cape Town’s (UCT) Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing and TNS Research Surveys (Ndanga, Louw & Van Rooyen, 2010). The South African MOP market segment is regarded as one of most lucrative to have emerged during the last decade, and they have grown as the strongest consumer buying influence in the economy (Lappeman & Neethling, 2017). The disposable income of the MOP market accounts for a third of the total consumption expenditure of the country (Goldberg & Jansen Van Rensburg, 2013). According to Simpson and Ramogase (2014), the spending power of the MOP market increased from R300 billion in 2007 to R400 billion in 2014, and is growing at a rate of 15% a year. This has contributed to an upturn in their dining-out behaviour (Chickweche & Fletcher, 2014). According to Mashaba and Wiese (2016), and Petzer and Mackay (2014) there has been limited research on the factors that influence MOP consumers’ dining behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa.

Staff at a university of technology were targeted according to their salary distribution (which is an important grouping variable to identify respondents that meet the criteria of being a member of the MOP-segment. Thereafter as a convenience sample was drawn by following a snowball technique. Henning, van Rensburg, and Smit (2011) confirmed this technique as having acceptable reliability. The initial group of staff members were asked to recommend at least five friends outside of the institution who display similar dining behaviour. The questionnaire was emailed to these respondents. An alternative method of data collection had to be implemented to achieve a reasonable number of returns. Full-service restaurants were identified and the questionnaires were distributed by restaurateurs who were willing to engage with their patrons while they were seated in their restaurants. The selection of these restaurants were based on previous research that indicated that full-service restaurants are frequented by diners who fall into the MOP-segment (Chickweche & Fletcher, 2014; Kruger & Saayman, 2016; Naudé & Rudansky-Kloppers, 2016). These type of restaurants are defined as an

establishment where “the guest is cared for by a waiter for both food and drinks, from the moment they sit down until the moment they leave, they can order from a broad range of menu items and meals are paid for after they have been consumed” (Hospitality and Tourism Management Training, 2018). Over 800 questionnaires were distributed and an eventual total of 363 responses were retrieved. Van Voorhis and Morgan (2007) suggest the following guide for sample size: 50 is poor, 200 is fair, 300 is good and 500 is very good.

A comprehensive literature review of research output in the field of hospitality, in general, and restaurants, in particular, was undertaken to identify the most important multi-sensory dining experience stimuli. Terms used in the search included “multi-sensory dining experience stimuli” and “consumer expectations for sensory restaurants”. EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Elsevier BV, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Sage, and Scopus provided the most applicable sources on multi-sensory dining experience stimuli for restaurants. This literature review unveiled a few studies that had investigated sensory marketing in the hospitality industry, and confirmed that visual (sight), auditive (hearing), haptics (touch), taste, olfactory (smell), design and layout, social and artistic are the multi-sensory stimuli relevant to dining expectations (Elangovan & Padma, 2017; Goswami et al., 2017; Hinestroza & James, 2014; Lu & Chi, 2018; Luca et al., 2018; Randiwela & Alahakoon, 2016). Structured interviews (qualitative) was used to refine the first draft of the quantitative measuring instrument that was constructed from previous studies found in the above-mentioned databases and also items from popular media. It must be emphasised that the final measuring instrument combined the multi-sensory dining experience dimensions from literature (Elangovan & Padma, 2017; Goswami et al., 2017; Hinestroza & James, 2014; Krishna & Schwarz, 2014; Lu & Chi, 2018; Luca et al., 2018; Randiwela & Alahakoon, 2016) and the results of the interviews. The measuring instrument required that respondents must indicate the importance of certain stimuli that represent a sensory dining experience stimuli items on a six-point Likert scale that varied from ‘not at all important’ (1) to ‘extremely important’ (6). A six-point scale was preferred above a five-point Likert scale, because of concerns raised about rote-selection of the mid-point that could result in misrepresentation in the data gathered (Garland, 1991). The preliminary questionnaire was pilot-tested with five respondents from Gauteng province according to the set criteria for MOP consumers (Saarf-Amps, 2012). A trial run was used to determine the appropriateness of the questionnaire to this study to measure and analyse the validity of the measuring instrument (Maxwell, 2013; Strydom, 2017). Prior to analysis, the data was screened to ascertain whether there were any violations with respect to the validity of the measuring instrument (incomplete, incorrect, and inaccurate) as it was tested on a new market segment.

Results

Demographics

In the biographical profile of the selected MOP just over half (50.7%, n=184) consisted of respondents younger than 36 years. Close to equal representation in terms of gender was observed- female (49.3%, n=179) and males (50.7%, n=184). The larger proportion of the respondents (73.8%, n=286) had children. Average monthly household income was divided into seven income levels - 27.5% (n=100) earn between R10 000 and R14 999; 15.4% earn between R35 000 and R50 000, 15.2% earn between R15 000 and R19 999, 12.9% earn more than R50 000, 12.1% earn between R20 000 and R24 999, 8.5% earn between R25 000 and R29 999 and 8.3% earn between R25 000 and R29 999. Almost 205 of the respondents (18.2%, n=66) spent R2 000 or more on fine dining per month. The profile of the respondents, in terms of income fits well into the general parameters that describe MOP-consumers.



The relative importance of multi-sensory dining experience stimuli

Mean scores, standard deviations and percentage scores were computed for the multi-sensory dining experience stimuli items. These calculations shed light on the respondents’ expectations of the relative importance of the various multi-sensory dining experience stimuli items. The 50 multi-sensory dining experience stimuli items of importance were rated on a six-point Likert scale, with 1=not at all important and 6=extremely important. The mean scale value cannot be interpreted as an indicator of importance, as it is merely an indication of the average of the respondents’ rating of statements on the scale of 1 to 6. The mean value should thus be interpreted relative to the scale; for example, a mean value of 4 for the statement is an indication that on average the respondents tended towards rating it as “more important” than “not important”, since this mean scale value is higher than the middle value (3) of the scale. The standard deviation (SD) is an indication of agreement among respondents regarding their responses. A smaller SD means that there is more agreement among the respondents, and a larger SD means that there is less agreement (more variance) among the respondents regarding their responses.

Table 1 Mean Percentage for Dining Experience Stimuli Items (N=363)

Dining experience stimuli items	Not at all important	Low importance	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important	Mean	SD
TASTE AND DINING CONSUMPTION STIMULI							5.33	
Food tastes good to you	0.3	1.7	1.4	4.4	37.2	55.1	5.42	0.818
Your meal is exactly what you ordered	0.8	1.4	0.6	6.3	37.5	53.4	5.39	0.854
Food is freshly served	0.8	1.1	1.9	7.5	34.8	53.9	5.36	0.892
Food choice is value for money	0.6	0.3	3.9	12.1	36.1	47.1	5.24	0.896
Temperature of the meal is acceptable	0.3	1.7	3.3	11.3	40.2	43.3	5.19	0.914
Price of the meal is clearly indicated	0.8	1.1	4.1	13.5	35.5	44.9	5.17	0.978
Variety of food options on menu	1.7	1.9	7.2	19.8	35.3	34.2	4.88	1.119
Amount of food is what you expected	1.1	1.7	5.8	23.8	39.6	28.0	4.83	1.026
Menu explains dishes	1.1	3.9	7.5	22.7	37.6	27.3	4.74	1.122
Meal is made from scratch	3.1	7.2	11.7	13.3	33.6	31.1	4.61	1.378
Restaurant serves healthy food	3.3	11.3	11.8	18.5	29.2	25.9	4.37	1.438
Menu includes low kilojoule options	5.2	12.2	17.1	26.8	20.4	18.2	4.00	1.438
VISUAL STIMULI (eyes)							5.07	
Bathroom is clean	0.3	0.8	3.6	5.3	28.6	61.4	5.45	0.853
Parking is safe	0.3	0.8	2.5	8.3	29.6	58.4	5.42	0.846
Restaurant interior is clean and neat	0.6	0.8	2.5	10.8	30.1	55.2	5.35	0.897
Bathroom is easily accessible	0.6	2.2	4.7	18.2	37.0	37.3	5.01	1.016
Restaurant’s inside surroundings is pleasing to the eye	1.4	1.7	6.1	25.3	43.3	22.3	4.74	1.013
Parking is close by	1.7	4.2	9.1	21.9	35.5	27.7	4.68	1.186
Restaurant exterior image is attractive	1.4	3.9	9.4	23.2	37.6	24.6	4.65	1.143
Lighting compliments the dining experience	1.7	1.9	6.1	33.2	37.4	19.7	4.62	1.034
Waiter is clean and dressed neatly	0.6	1.4	2.5	8.0	34.0	53.6	5.34	0.902
Waiter has knowledgeable about menu items	0.3	0.6	5.2	12.7	33.9	47.4	5.21	0.927
Waiter is dependable and consistent in service	0.8	0.0	4.4	12.1	39.1	43.5	5.19	0.911
Food is attractively presented	0.0	1.4	5.8	11.8	40.8	40.2	5.13	0.929
HAPTIC STIMULI (touching)							5.08	
Waiter does not keep you waiting (prompt service)	0.0	1.4	2.8	12.7	35.8	47.4	5.25	0.880
Waiter is professional in service	0.8	0.8	3.6	10.8	37.1	46.8	5.23	0.937
Waiter willing to serve the consumer	0.0	0.8	2.8	15.5	34.9	46.0	5.22	0.867
Waiter attends to consumer’s needs and wants	0.6	0.3	3.9	13.6	34.7	46.9	5.22	0.909
Waiter is friendly	1.1	1.7	1.7	15.7	32.0	47.8	5.19	0.996
Waiter respects consumer privacy	1.4	1.1	2.5	14.0	36.4	44.6	5.17	0.990
Waiter communicates well	0.0	1.7	3.6	16.3	34.8	43.6	5.15	0.934
Timeliness of service acceptable	0.8	0.0	5.0	14.6	42.4	37.2	5.09	0.918
Seating is comfortable	0.6	2.5	3.6	15.4	43.0	35.0	5.03	0.980



Dining experience stimuli items	Not at all important	Low importance	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important	Mean	SD
Inside temperature of the restaurant is pleasant	0.8	1.4	4.1	18.7	41.0	33.9	4.99	0.975
Seating is spacious	1.1	1.4	7.2	18.4	42.3	29.5	4.88	1.030
Dining area is not crowded	2.2	3.6	8.5	28.4	36.1	21.2	4.56	1.151
OLFACTORY STIMULI (smell)							5.30	
There are no unpleasant food odours	0.6	0.8	1.1	11.8	34.2	51.5	5.33	0.857
Air is not smoky	1.1	1.4	5.5	12.4	29.8	49.9	5.18	1.056
AUDITORY STIMULI (hearing)							4.59	
Restaurant's noise level allows for comfortable conversation	0.8	1.1	5.8	22.1	38.7	31.5	4.91	0.997
Kitchen is separate from dining area	1.1	5.0	9.1	21.5	29.8	33.4	4.74	1.215
Seating is private from other diners	3.6	4.1	12.7	28.7	28.7	22.1	4.11	1.274
SOCIAL STIMULI (social)							3.46	
You are made to feel like family at the restaurant	7.2	6.1	11.6	25.4	22.1	27.6	4.32	1.495
Restaurant feels like a "home away from home"	7.7	11.3	19.1	27.1	18.2	16.6	3.86	1.474
You have a sense of belonging to the restaurant	9.4	14.4	21.3	26.5	19.3	9.1	3.59	1.425
Waiter know what you like to eat/drink without you having to tell them	16.5	14.9	23.7	20.7	14.6	9.6	3.31	1.543
Restaurant waiters have a sense of what is going on in life	15.5	18.5	19.6	21.3	16.0	9.1	3.31	1.545
You do feel out of place	18.5	15.2	21.8	19.0	16.5	9.1	3.27	1.579
You know the restaurant's waiters' names	18.6	16.9	19.4	23.0	12.5	9.7	3.23	1.570
Restaurant waiters know your name	18.2	18.5	21.5	17.9	13.2	10.7	3.22	1.596
Other consumers in the restaurant are like you	21.1	18.8	23.3	18.0	13.3	5.5	3.00	1.499

Table 1 illustrates the results of respondents' expectations related to multi-sensory dining experience stimuli as *taste and dining consumption, visual (eyes), haptic (touch), olfactory (smell), auditory (hearing), design and layout, and social* stimuli. The average expectations for multi-sensory dining experience stimuli items had a mean score of 4.53, with mean expectation scores ranging between 5.45 and 3.00. The item with the highest score for expectation was "cleanliness of the bathroom". The means for the multi-sensory dining experience stimuli items were found to be above 4.0. This is consistent with previous findings where consumers chose a restaurant based on the multi-sensory dining experience stimuli mentioned above (Elangovan & Padma, 2017; Hinestroza & James, 2014; Randiwela & Alahakoon, 2016). The items with the lowest expectations were still in the range above 4.0 and thus met the expected minimum, although consumers paid more attention to other multi-sensory dining experience stimuli as part of a quality evaluation process. According to Wright (2006) the dining experience stimuli cannot operate in isolation, but multi senses play a role in explaining the overall dining experience, as supported by (Elangovan & Padma, 2017; Goswami et al., 2017; Hinestroza & James, 2014; Lu & Chi, 2018; Randiwela & Alahakoon, 2016). The restaurant industry should thus consider multi-sensory stimuli when offering a restaurant service (Elangovan & Padma, 2017).

Discussion

The main aim of this study was not to conduct inferential statistics but to compare the results with output generated in scientific journals up to 2018 in terms of the importance of multi-sensory stimuli in a specific target market, namely MOP consumers in Gauteng. The results of the study revealed that a quality dining experience should include multi-sensory stimuli. The findings of the present study with respect to *olfactory stimuli* the smell of the food and dining

environment are similar to Shabgou and Daryani (2014) and Nagarjuna and Sudhakar (2015), who found “pleasant odours” to be important. The smell of food in the restaurant is very important, especially at the time of cooking as they positively trigger the consumer’s memory and senses and is effective in adding value to the dining experience (Randiwela & Alahakoon, 2016). The cleanliness of the restaurant and the bathrooms were also prioritised by the respondents, as confirmed by the above mentioned researchers. The way the waiter serves the consumer is part of the *haptic stimuli* as an emotional interacting with the consumer (Fiedler, 2012). The item of most importance was “prompt service without being kept waiting”, “waiter is professional in service” and “willing to serve the consumer”. Elangovan and Padma (2017) confirmed that the waiter enables the consumer to experience dining on a different level, that would lead to positive emotions and feelings. This finding is different from those in studies conducted by Hinstroza and James (2014) and Randiwela and Alahakoon (2016).

The items “seating is spacious” and “seating not to be crowded” are also acknowledged on a lower level as a haptic stimulus or touching an object or person, even when discussed under design and auditory stimuli. This concludes that the respondents enjoy a closer seating space and enjoy human contact. As Nagarjuna and Sudhakar (2015) mentioned and confirm that the skin is the receptor organ for touch, thus when consumers touch each other in restaurant environment it has a positive influence on their dining experience. In this study the respondents did not indicate the “pleasant temperature of the restaurant” as important. This finding differs from Randiwela and Alahakoon (2016), who emphasised the importance of the ambience of a restaurant during the dining experience.

The *visual (sight) stimuli* is highlighted in the food presentation up to even the level of the waiter visual. The way the food is attractively presented as ordered was important. The visual stimuli of seeing the plate of food before eating/touching it, is important to ensure what they expect from the meal when “feeling” the product’s qualities are being met, which support the findings of Elangovan and Padma (2017). The respondents acknowledge the effect of lighting on the appearance of the food, but of less importance. However, the price of the meal is not a stimuli, the quality of food presentation also influenced the respondents’ visual acceptance of a meal. As mentioned by Ballard (2018) diners are willing to pay for a dining experience that takes them on a journey. Creating a clean and tidy environment is appealing to the respondents, with special mention of the restaurant bathroom and interior. The respondents mentioned the importance of the waiters’ “cleanliness” and being “dressed neatly”. Thus cleanliness standards (as visually perceived) should also be applied to staff and the restaurant environment (Elangovan and Padma, 2017; Randiwela and Alahakoon, 2016). Similar findings were made by Nagarjuna and Sudhakar (2015), and they also mentioned that all these visual stimuli could be used during restaurant promotion activities.

The *taste stimuli* consist mainly of the gastronomic experience. It was clear that the “taste of food” was the most important stimulus in restaurants. This result was similar to the findings of studies by other authors who state that taste is the main factor influencing diners’ memories and ultimately their behaviour intentions to return, or share via word-of-mouth, or comment in a review (Randiwela & Alahakoon, 2016). To experience the flavour of food and the ingredients of the dishes, the respondents noted that food should be served “fresh”. Also the respondents indicated that the way food appeared on the menu or menu description should be the same as what they receive. This finding was confirmed by Spence and Shankar (2010), who stated that in consumer expectations in terms of what is served have an effect on their “perception of flavour identity and their preference judgement”. Therefore the taste they remember from a certain dish at a previous experience or seen on the menu should be similar during consumption of the meal served. Shabgou and Daryani (2014) confirmed that the way food and beverages are being seen on the menu and eventually served is part of the taste

experience. As mentioned by Spence (Ballard, 2018) and confirmed in this study - the respondents acknowledge the effect of lighting, the noises in the background, and even the comfortable seating. It all has some influence on how the respondents experienced the food taste (Ballard, 2018). The consumption of healthy food and the option of “low kilojoule options on the menu” are of the least importance when dining out, although there is more variation ($SD=1.438$) in responses on this item than for the other items. Thus health does not necessarily influence the taste stimuli.

The *design and layout stimuli*, is regarded as the appeal and features of the restaurant. In Table 1, the scores for the “parking is safe”, “bathrooms easily accessible” and “comfortable seating” were the most important items. Elangovan and Padma (2017) only mentioned the availability of parking facilities. The safety of the parking area may not be an obvious predictor of return for MOP South African diners, but the crime rate in this country is visibly high, and thus even when experiencing a leisure activity, consumers will consider the parking area to be an important predictor of their safety.

As part of the layout of the restaurant, the respondents would like to ambulate to the bathroom easily. The respondents indicated that they do not need complete privacy during the dining experience but prefer a layout and seating that is comfortable to their needs. This is similar to the view of Elangovan and Padma (2017) that portrayed the table laying as a functional desire for the consumer boundaries during dining.

Auditory stimuli (hearing) tested lower, as respondents indicated that sound, kitchen noises and background music are not crucial in their dining experience. Thus, the respondents react positively on intervening sounds, and this does not seem to affect their mood. This is different than the views of Randiwela and Alahakoon (2016), and Nagarjuna and Sudhakar (2015) who found that background noise levels create a negative experience.

In terms of *social stimuli*, the respondents indicated that they enjoyed experiencing social bonding in an environment away from home. As noted by Barnes (2017) consumers reacting to and being influenced by the sensation of others evoke a pleasant sensory experience (Goswami et al., 2017). Three social stimuli items were important to respondents, namely: “you are made to feel like family at the restaurant”, the restaurant feels like a “home away from home” and “you have a sense of belonging to the restaurant”. The mean values were lower than for all the other multi-sensory dining experience stimuli items, but were still important.

Conclusion

The multi-sensory dining experience stimuli profile that emerged from this study indicated that MOP consumers deploy multi-senses when expecting a good dining experience. They tend to prioritise how well their meal tastes, it is exactly what they ordered and it must be freshly served. The presence of pleasing food odours in and around the restaurant seems to enhance a memorable dining experience. The bathroom should be easily accessible designed as well as be clean and neat. Further safe parking is also important. The employees should be clean and dressed neatly. The offering of prompt and professional service would have an influence on the restaurant image. A close and comfortable seating arrangement should make it easy for the consumers to move around and enjoy a relaxing dining experience. The kitchen noises, sounds and background music in the restaurant and from other consumers is not crucial in their dining experience. They enjoy experiencing social bonding in a different environment than at home, and would like to feel like family at a restaurant.

As mentioned in the literature review, previous researchers confirmed that MOP consumers’ prioritise *visual, haptic, taste, olfactory, auditory, design and layout, and social* senses relation to a quality dining experience. The study demonstrated that there is an association between multi-sensory stimuli and the restaurant industry. With specific regard to

the MOP consumer, we recommend that restaurateurs should specialise in a unique meal offering in terms of taste and presentation of food that indicates that it is freshly prepared and served. Also of importance is an appetising food smell (aroma) in the restaurant. A well-dressed and clean employee presentation would contribute to the atmosphere of the restaurant. The offering of a prompt and professional service by waiters would also be a contribution factor. The hygiene of the bathrooms should be maintained throughout the day, and safe parking facilities nearby available. Restaurants should offer their diners an open seating space where they can comfortably communicate with one another. This will contribute to their feeling like a family during a dining experience. It can be concluded that multi-senses play an important role in awakening their dining experience. If restaurateurs would like to attract more consumers from this segment, they need to stimulate all the senses in the dining environment for a heightened experience and an (emotionally) enjoyable meal. The approach followed in this study could be extended more generally to MOP consumers by drawing a larger sample size from a wider range of geographical areas.

Restaurateurs should not underestimate the multi-sensory dynamic of a dining experience. The perceived sensory experience of consumers should constantly be monitored and compared for the long-term sustainability of the business. In order to create a memorable dining experience, managers should focus both on consumers' needs and carefully think through the selection of the important multi-sensory stimuli items based on how it will enhance the overall dining experience. The results of this study should be useful for restaurateurs who aims to manage their mix of multi-sensory stimuli to attract new and retain current MOP consumers. The findings of this study should be regarded as highly exploratory in nature as it provides a broad overview in one context, namely fine dining at restaurants in Gauteng, and one market segment, namely Middle of the Pyramid consumers in Gauteng. It could provide a basis for more complex studies on multi-sensory stimulation in a variety of dining and catering types (even take-outs) and it could be applied to multi-sensory investigations in tourism establishments and leisure events of all descriptions in Africa. In order to target MOP consumers efficiently, the restaurant industry has to understand the influences of the expected multi-sensory dining experience stimuli of this market segment. If the sensory stimuli could attract or retain more consumers' experience of dining, it could enhance a positive perception in the mind of the MOP consumers and create dining loyalty.

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