

**EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF FORMAL FULL-SERVICE
RESTAURANT DINERS IN PORT ELIZABETH**

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Dissertation submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree

**MAGISTER TECHNOLOGIAE:
TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT**

at the
Hotel School
in the
Faculty of Management Sciences
of
Central University of Technology, Free State
2014

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DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENT WORK

I, **OSWARD MHLANGA**, passport number **CN 630730**, and student number **211151343**, do hereby declare that this research project, which has been submitted to the Central University of Technology, Free State for the Degree **MAGISTER TECHNOLOGIAE: TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT**, is my own independent work; and complies with the Code of Academic Integrity, as well as any other relevant policies, procedures, rules, and regulations of the Central University of Technology, Free State; and has not been submitted before by any other person in fulfilment (or partial fulfilment) of the requirements for the attainment of any qualification.

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT

DATE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To count a hundred million stars, he told me once, at the rate of one per second, sounds like a job that no-one could possibly complete in a lifetime. In reality, it would only take three years. The key is focus, a willingness not to be distracted.

Caldwell, I. & Thomason, D. 2005. The rule of four. London: Arrow Books, 9–10.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to the following people who have made the completion of the research study possible:

- Dr Zorada Hattingh, **my study leader**, for her excellent, consistent and kind mentorship. I am very appreciative for her advice, guidance and motivation and her role in making this journey a challenging, yet edifying and an extremely enriching experience. Her immense insight and passion for research inspires me.
- Dr Hermanus Johannes Moolman, **my co-study leader**, for his generous time, patience, assistance and guidance throughout the most challenging learning process of my life. One thing I will always carry with me is your passion for perfection. This is as much my study as it is yours. Thank you.
- The Central University of Technology, Free State, for the financial assistance to complete this study and for the ample resources afforded to me.
- Anesu Kuhudzai, for his time and invaluable input in assisting me with statistical analysis of this study.
- My parents, who raised me to believe that anything is possible and attainable through hard work and education; to my dad, who never

doubted that this document would become a reality; and to my mom, whose undying support and encouragement led to the completion of this study.

- My family, friends and colleagues, who were there to support, motivate, listen, provide assistance, show interest and who were my cheerleaders from day one up until the very end. Thank you for your patience while this study became my life. To my brothers, Norman and Plows – for your unwavering belief in my research abilities and for all your motivation, I am eternally grateful. You have both been, and continue to be, an inspiration to me on a daily basis!
- To God, who has, throughout my life, provided me with wonderful opportunities to learn, grow and make an impact on others.

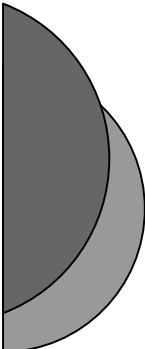
SUMMARY

The formal full-service restaurant industry in South Africa is undergoing a period of anaemic growth due to the after effects of the 2009 global economic recession. Since the recession, industry growth has been subdued as diners seek more for their money when spending at restaurants. Consequently, industry revenue declined 1.8% in 2013 as diners tightened their purse strings. It is for this reason that it was decided to investigate diners' expectations and experiences in selected formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth.

A pilot study was conducted among five diners in two formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth, and the empirical study was conducted in December 2011 and January 2012 among 400 diners of eight formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth. The research findings revealed that respondents with a tertiary diploma recorded the highest expectation score (4.25) whilst those who spoke languages other than Afrikaans, English, IsiZulu and IsiXhosa recorded the lowest (3.69). Respondents in the age group 55 to 64 years recorded the highest experience score (4.53) whilst those who spoke IsiXhosa recorded the lowest (3.84). Altogether 44.5% of the respondents frequented restaurants at different intervals two to four times in the previous six months whilst 51.2% spent on average, R200 to R299 per person and 18.5% held occupations in business, commerce and finance. Respondents who spent more than R399 had the highest expectation score (4.53) whilst those who frequented restaurants at different intervals more than 10 times in the previous six months had the lowest (3.97). Respondents with an occupation in education reported the highest experience score (4.36) whilst those who frequented restaurants at different intervals of nil to one time in the previous six months reported the lowest (4.04). A total of 22% of the respondents patronised restaurants because of good service. Restaurant B obtained the highest expectation (4.39) and experience (4.51) scores whilst restaurant C recorded the lowest expectation (3.71) and experience (4.03) scores. All diners' experiences were below expectations giving

an overall gap of -0.47. The strongest correlation with diners' expectations was level of service whilst the strongest correlation with diners' experiences was food quality. The regression model showed that the level of service was rated as the most important variable for diners' expectations whilst the quality of food was rated as the most important for diners' experiences. However, recommendations were made to improve diners' experiences in the selected formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth. The results of this study would help restaurateurs to identify areas of improvement and increase customer satisfaction.

Keywords: diners, expectations, experiences, formal full-service restaurants.



DECLARATION

I, **Osward Mhlanga**, hereby declare that the master's thesis entitled **“EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF FORMAL FULL-SERVICE RESTAURANT DINERS IN PORT ELIZABETH”** has been proof-read in accordance with the relevant academic norms and standards.

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Signature

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Date

Compiled By:
Ilze Holtzhausen de Beer – Language Practitioner

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Declaration of independent work	i
	Acknowledgements	ii
	Summary	iv
	List of abbreviations and acronyms	X
	List of figures	Xi
	List of tables	Xii
	Chapter 1: Background to the study	1
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Problem Statement	6
1.3	Expected Outcomes	7
1.4	Outline of Chapters	8
1.4.1	Chapter 2: Literature review	8
1.4.2	Chapter 3: Research design and methodology	9
1.4.3	Chapter 4: Results and discussion	9
1.4.4	Chapter 5: Conclusions, recommendations and evaluation of the study	10
1.5	Summary	10
	Chapter 2: Literature Review	11
2.1	Introduction	11
2.2	Expectations	12
2.2.1	The concept of expectations	12
2.2.2	Different types of expectations	14
2.2.3	Factors influencing diners' expectations	16
2.3	Experience	21
2.3.1	Food	22
2.3.2	Service	32
2.3.3	Ambience	34
2.4	Customer satisfaction	44
2.4.1	The concept of customer satisfaction	44
2.5	Theories on customers' expectations and experiences	46
2.5.1	The confirmation-disconfirmation model	46
2.5.2	Assimilation theory	47
2.5.3	Contrast theory	48
2.5.4	Assimilation-contrast theory	48
2.5.5	The generalised-negativity theory	49
2.6	Research on restaurant diners' expectations and experiences	49
2.6.1	The SERVQUAL model	50
2.6.2	The DINESERV model	58
2.7	Previous research on restaurant diner satisfaction	61
2.8	Dining expectation and experience framework	67
2.9	Summary	68
	Chapter 3: Research design and methodology	70
3.1	Introduction	70
3.2	Research questions and subquestions	70

3.3	Research design	71
3.3.1	Research approach	72
3.3.2	Research technique	73
3.4	Research methodology	73
3.4.1	Conceptualisation	74
3.4.2	Operationalisation	76
3.4.3	The sample	83
3.4.4	Data collection	86
3.4.5	Data coding and analysis	86
3.5	Ethical considerations	89
3.5.1	Protection from harm	89
3.5.2	Informed consent	90
3.5.3	Right to privacy	90
3.5.4	Honesty with professional colleagues	91
3.6	Summary	91
	Chapter 4 : Results and discussion	93
4.1	Introduction	93
4.2	Profile of the participating restaurants	94
4.2.1	Response rate	97
4.3	Demographics	98
4.3.1	Demographic profile of respondents	98
4.3.2	Non-demographics	107
4.4	Expectations and experiences of diners in the participating restaurants	116
4.5	Diners' satisfaction with the dining experience	119
4.5.1	Comparison of diners' experiences with their expectations	120
4.6	Correlation coefficient and regression analysis of diners' expectations and experiences	125
4.7	Diners' suggestions on improving restaurant experience	131
4.7.1	Suggestions on improving food quality	131
4.7.2	Suggestions on improving service quality	132
4.7.3	Suggestions on improving ambience	133
4.8	Reliability	135
4.9	Summary	135
	Chapter 5: Conclusions, Recommendations and Evaluation of the study	137
5.1	Introduction	137
5.2	Research objectives revisited	137
5.3	Recommendations	143
5.3.1	Dissemination of the findings	144
5.3.2	Recommendation to restaurateurs	144
5.4	Evaluation of the study	150
5.4.1	Value of the study	150
5.4.2	Limitations of the study	151
5.4.3	Future research	152
5.4.4	Research ethics	153
5.5	Concluding remarks	154
	References	156
	Addendum A: Covering letter for the questionnaire	184

Addendum B: Survey questionnaire	186
Addendum C: Checklist for observations	192

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

□: alpha

AJHTL: African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure

AJPHRD: African Journal of Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance

ANOVA: Analysis of Variance

DEAT: Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism

N: Sample size

NTSS: National Tourism Sector Strategy

p: Threshold for statistically significant results

r: Spearman Correlation Coefficient

R²: Coefficient of Determination

RSA NDT: Republic of South Africa National Department of Tourism

SAPSE: South African Post-Secondary Education

SD: Standard Deviation

%: Percentage

T-test: test statistic

V: factor attribute

√: Indicates a significant difference

X: Indicates a non-significant difference

*: indicates a significant difference

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1	Model of customer expectations	15
Figure 2.2	Illustration of garnish	25
Figure 2.3	Illustration of the colour of food	27
Figure 2.4	Illustration of a formal full-service restaurant's ambience	35
Figure 2.5	Illustration of snowy white linen tablecloths in a restaurant	43
Figure 2.6	Oliver's Confirmation-disconfirmation model of customer satisfaction	47
Figure 2.7	A conceptual model of service quality	51
Figure 2.8	Constructs of the dining expectation, experience and their outcome	68

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Composition of the questionnaire	81
Table 3.2	Composition of the observation checklist	83
Table 3.3	Sample size per restaurant	85
Table 3.4	Composition of the checklists for correlation analysis	88
Table 3.5	Summary of the research methodology	92
Table 4.1	Response rate per restaurant	97
Table 4.2	Expectations and experiences of respondents with different demographic variables	99
Table 4.3	Influence of demographic variables on diners' expectations and experiences	102
Table 4.4	Expectations and experiences of respondents with different non-demographic variables	108
Table 4.6	Reasons for selecting a particular restaurant	113
Table 4.7	Influence of reasons for selecting a particular restaurant on diners' expectations and experiences	115
Table 4.8	Expectations of diners in the participating restaurants	117
Table 4.9	Experiences of diners in the participating restaurants	118
Table 4.10	Influence of participating restaurants on diners' expectations and experiences	119
Table 4.11	Means and standard deviations for diners' expectations and experiences of food and beverages, service quality and ambience	121
Table 4.12	Correlation results of overall expectations and experiences	126
Table 4.13	Regression results for overall expectations and experiences	129
Table 5.1	Influence of demographic variables on diners' expectations and experiences	139
Table 5.2	Expectations and experiences of respondents with different non-demographic variables	140
Table 5.3	Influence of reasons for selecting a particular restaurant on diners' expectations and experiences	141
Table 5.4	Influence of restaurant choice on diners' expectations and experiences	141

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives the background to the study and introduces the salient concepts that are used throughout this study, namely formal full-service restaurants, expectations and experiences of diners. The chapter also provides the problem statement, the expected outcomes and research hypotheses of the study and concludes with an outline of the chapters.

Today's dining public presents a challenge to formal full-service restaurants, since they are now more sophisticated than ever (Heung & Gu, 2012:1172). They are increasingly frequenting restaurants for the experience provided first and for the food served second (Grobelaar, 2008:9). Understanding diners' expectations and experiences is crucial for restaurants, because the way diners perceive a restaurant will affect their future purchase decisions (Barsky & Nash, 2002:39). Repeat diners not only bring revenue into the business, they also provide predictability, security and enjoyment for those involved in the business (Kivela, Inbakaran & Reece, 2000:23).

It has become increasingly difficult to satisfy restaurant diners (Enz, 2004:327; Hu, 2009: Online; Reynolds & Biel, 2007:352). Restaurant diners progressively demand higher quality food (Hu, 2009: Online) and service (Quan & Wang, 2004:297) than before. In addition, restaurant managers also experience the pressure from steady increases in food and labour costs, small profit margins, the burden of complying with stringent legal requirements (Enz, 2004:319; Hu, 2009:Online) and fierce competition (Enz, 2004:324; Reynolds & Biel, 2007:353; Hu, 2009:Online). Consequently, the complexity and intricacies of diners'

expectations, makes it difficult for a restaurateur to predict how each diner will react to a particular dining experience (Pantelidis, 2010: 483).

Diners not only require services provided at dining venues, but also expect a memorable experience (Thorn, 2003:12). Following a memorable experience, come positive perceptions, word-of-mouth communication and customer satisfaction which are considered critical to the success of restaurant service (Ladhari, Brun & Morales, 2008:571). Customer satisfaction leads to positive behavioural intentions, such as return patronage or repeat purchase (Kivela, Inbakaran & Reece, 1999a:205).

While there is no guarantee of a satisfied customer's repeat business, it is almost certain that a dissatisfied customer will not return (Soriano, 2002:1057). For this reason, a memorable experience and positive expectations can directly affect customer loyalty, organisational profits, return patronage, complaint behaviour and word-of-mouth communications which tend to shape pre-dining expectations and post-dining experiences (Ladhari *et al.*, 2008:563).

Pre-dining expectations emanate from the fact that diners will have certain expectations of the dining experience before they are about to encounter the experience (Sukalakamala, 2004: Online) and can serve as a comparison standard for performance perceptions (Oh & Jeong, 2000:59). Sources of pre-dining expectations tend to be reputation, past experience, corporate image, formal and informal communication, personal need, promotional mix and the price (Quan & Wang, 2004:297). Cheng (2006:159) found that relatives and friends were major sources of information for restaurant consumers.

Post-dining experiences are diners' beliefs about the service received or perceived (Söderlund & Öhman, 2005:169). During and after dining, diners gain a perception of the restaurant's performance as they evaluate the dining experience (Kivela, Inbakaran & Reece, 1999b:276). Diners then compare the

restaurant's attribute performance with their prior experiences, standards or expectations (Barsky & Nash, 2002:44). Thus, a diner's post-dining perceptions and behaviour feeds back as experience to the customer's psychological field and serves to influence future related dining out decisions (Soriano, 2002:1065). Positive post-dining experiences tend to create emotional bonding to a product which is positively linked to future purchase intentions, thus discouraging switching to another service provider (Mattila, 2001:79).

The literature shows that measures of dining experiences, attribute importance, diner expectations and satisfaction have been diverse and dependent upon the domain of research, in both the number of attributes and level of abstraction (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:207). However, substantial disagreement appears in the level of specificity of the attributes investigated (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:207). Lewis and Pizam (1981:39) examined 24 restaurant attribute items in their study of diners' satisfaction. Knutson (1988:15) examined 20 items whilst Almanza, Jaffe and Lin (1994:69) identified 17 restaurant attributes. Oh and Jeong (2000:58) developed a 19-item fast food restaurant satisfaction instrument whilst Dube, Renaghan and Miller (1994:42) identified seven dining satisfaction attributes and Qu (1997:39) developed a 14-item instrument to measure the determinant factors and diners' experiences.

Restaurants tend to emphasise the provision of food, yet the literature shows that people are attracted to a restaurant by more than just good food (Soriano, 2002:1062). Diners are increasingly frequenting restaurants for the experience provided and then for the food served (Grobbelaar, 2008:11). Though important, good food is only a part of the total dining experience (Reynolds & Biel, 2007:353). Diners may be eating out not to satisfy hunger at all, although in most cases they will be, but to satisfy other needs such as maintaining social contact, status and satisfying their curiosity (Iglesias & Guillén, 2004:377). Despite disagreements, the main point researchers emphasise is that diners' expectations and experiences are determined by various restaurant attributes

(Grobbelaar, 2008:11). For example, the atmosphere (such as cleanliness, music, and lighting) can affect a diner's expectation and experience, which in turn influences the overall satisfaction with the service delivery process and outcome (Ladhari *et al.*, 2008:563).

The confirmation-disconfirmation model posits that diners patronise restaurants with pre-purchase expectations of dining experience (Kasapila, 2006:9). Once they have their dining experience, they compare it with their expectations (Grobbelaar, 2008:11). The compromise or interaction between pre-set expectations of diners and their perceptions of the dining experience leads to either confirmation or disconfirmation (Barsky & Nash, 2003:173). In less technical terms, confirmation occurs when the dining experience matches the diner's expectations, leading to diner satisfaction (Wong, 2004: 369). Conversely, disconfirmation occurs when there are differences between expectations and the dining experience (Kasapila, 2006:9).

Research confirms the strategic importance of diners' expectations of and experiences in restaurants (Söderlund & Öhman, 2005:169). Positive diner experiences have a direct impact on restaurants' financial performance (Bernhardt, Donthu & Kennett, 2000:168; Barsky & Nash, 2003:173; Chi & Gursoy, 2009:251), long-term survival (Soriano, 2002:1065; Iglesias & Guillén, 2004:377; Chi & Gursoy, 2009:245), and positive word-of-mouth communications (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006:4; Ladhari *et al.*, 2008:571).

On the contrary, negative expectations and experiences can have serious ramifications for a restaurant (Reynolds & Biel, 2007:353). Customers may resort to negative word-of-mouth communication as a means of returning (Wong, 2004: 369). A disgruntled diner can, thus, become a saboteur, dissuading other potential diners away from a particular restaurant (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006:4). Consequently, positive diner expectations and experiences are important to restaurants, since they depend on repeat diners (Soriano, 2002:1057).

Restaurateurs should not believe that merely meeting or exceeding what is anticipated will satisfy diners, but should understand that the actual performance will have a far greater predictive effect on diners' expectations and experiences (Susskind, 2002:84). Only restaurateurs who successfully manage expectations can contribute positively to restaurant success and gain a stronger competitive position in today's dynamic marketplace (Iglesias & Guillén, 2004:377).

To better understand diners' expectations it is necessary to examine and substantiate the connections between diners' expectations of restaurant attributes and their actual experience of the restaurants' attributes (Dhurup, Mafini & Malan, 284). Understanding the antecedents and consequences of diners' expectations and experiences is of the utmost importance to restaurant customer satisfaction (Ganesh, Arnold & Reynolds, 2000:66; Barsky & Nash, 2003:173; Cheng, 2005:99; Edvardsson, 2005:131; Söderlund & Öhman, 2005:169; Gupta, McLaughlin & Gomez, 2007:293; Han, Back & Barrett, 2009:563).

Tourism is one of the largest industries globally. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2014:4) reports that the tourism industry contributed 9.5% to the global economy in 2013 and expects tourists to spend more per trip and stay longer on their holidays in 2014. Despite tough global economic conditions, the South African tourism industry reached a record of 9.6 million international tourist arrivals in 2013 (Statistics South Africa, 2013:7). Consequently, the sector's contribution to gross domestic product in South Africa has risen gradually from 8.1% in 2007 to 10.3% in 2013 and is expected to reach 12% in 2014 (WTTC, 2014:4).

Restaurants are classified as one of the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes within the hospitality industry that make up the South African Tourism Industry (CATHSSETA, 2014:4). Statistics South Africa (SSA, 2013:11) estimates that restaurants provided for 93 000 jobs in 2013, while the total

income generated by restaurants was R1 728 million in September 2013 (SSA, 2013:3). It is therefore a modern day engine of economic growth (Matshediso, 2014:6).

The growth in the restaurant industry over the past years can be attributed mainly to a change in the modern way of life (Moolman, 2011:130). Consumers are nowadays experiencing an increasing scarcity of time. As a result, consumers prefer to eat out rather than to spend their scarce time cooking meals at home Dhurup, Mafini and Malan (2013:288). This triggered a tendency to consume food away from home (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006:3).

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The formal full-service restaurant industry in South Africa is undergoing a period of anaemic growth due to the after effects of the 2009 global economic recession (Forster, 2012:17). According to Statistics South Africa (2014:7), the average diner spent 28.3% of their food budget on formal full-service restaurants in 2013 compared to 30.0% in 2003. Since the recession, industry growth has been subdued as diners seek more for their money when spending at restaurants (Brennan, 2013:4). Consequently, industry revenue declined 1.8% in 2013 as diners tightened their purse strings (Forster, 2012:17).

Researchers such as Dhurup et al. (2013:288) and Khalilzadeh, Rajabi and Jahromi (2013: 17), identify restaurateurs' inability to satisfy their diners' expectations and experiences as one of the main reasons for low diner turnout. Despite lowering their prices and spending marketing funds on promotions, restaurants seem to be finding great difficulty in determining diners' expectations and experiences (Heung & Gu, 2012:1172; Ryu, Lee & Kim, 2012:209). As such, a study to determine the expectations and experiences of diners has been visualised. The results of the study could increase diner turnout and conceptualise restaurant diners' probability of intention to return to Port Elizabeth

restaurants. Port Elizabeth is considered as the gateway to the Garden Route and a well-known tourist destination in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.

1.3 EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The primary objective of this study was to determine the expectations and experiences of formal full-service restaurant diners in Port Elizabeth. In order to achieve the primary and literature objectives, the following secondary objectives were formulated:

- To conceptualise and explicate, by means of a literature study, the key constructs under study, namely the expectations and experiences of diners in Port Elizabeth formal full-service restaurants.
- To establish the influence of demographic variables on diners' expectations and experiences in Port Elizabeth formal full-service restaurants.
- To establish the influence of non-demographic variables on diners' expectations and experiences in Port Elizabeth formal full-service restaurants.
- To establish the influence of diners' reasons for selecting particular formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth on their expectations and experiences.
- To establish the influence of restaurant choice on diners' expectations and experiences in Port Elizabeth formal full-service restaurants.

- To establish if there is a significance difference between diners' experiences and expectations in Port Elizabeth formal full-service restaurants.
- To determine the influence of different dining attributes on diners' overall expectations and experiences in Port Elizabeth formal full-service restaurants.
- To draw conclusions and make recommendations to restaurant management regarding the expectations and experiences of diners in Port Elizabeth formal full-service restaurants.

1.4 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

In addition to the introductory chapter, this dissertation includes another four chapters, which will guide the reader through the research project. Brief details of the contents of each chapter are given to act as a route map of how the research unfolds. Chapter 2 provides the literature review, Chapter 3 the research design and methodology followed and Chapter 4 the results obtained from the research effort. Chapter 5 concludes the research report and makes some recommendations. Each chapter is introduced to the reader by showing how it is organised. Each chapter then concludes with a summary that recaps salient points made in the chapter.

1.4.1 Chapter 2: Literature review

In this chapter, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of this study are provided. The main constructs used in this study are provided and conceptualised. To give comprehensive insights into these constructs, the chapter attempts to explain applicable definitions of these constructs, different levels of expectations and also delineates the dining attributes of the meal

experience that will be measured in this study, namely experience with the quality of food, service and ambience in a restaurant. The complexity of service, customer satisfaction and relevant theories are explained. The following are put into perspective: (1) the SERVQUAL measuring instrument and the later developed DINESERV measuring instrument; and (2) previous research on restaurant diner satisfaction. The chapter concludes with a framework for the constructs of the dining expectations, experience and their outcomes.

1.4.2 Chapter 3: Research design and methodology

This chapter spells out the research design for this study, which encompasses the approach and techniques used to achieve the research objectives. In addition, the methodology employed in this study is presented which includes conceptualisation, operationalisation, sampling, data collection and data analysis. Measuring instruments are described and how these instruments were administered to ensure reliability and validity of the results. The chapter also spells out the sample of this study in terms of formal full-service restaurants and respondents and how they were selected and approached. An explanation on how data were collected and analysed is provided. The chapter concludes with the ethical aspects addressed.

1.4.3 Chapter 4: Results and discussion

This chapter establishes the influence of demographic and non-demographic variables on diners' expectations and experiences after which it spells out diners' reasons for selecting a particular restaurant and the influence of reasons for selecting a particular restaurant on diners' expectations and experiences. The chapter further delineates the influence of diners' reasons for selecting particular formal full-service restaurants on diners' expectations and experiences and establishes the influence of restaurant choice on diners' expectations and experiences in formal full-service restaurants. Gap analysis is then used to

establish if there is a significant difference between diners' experiences and their expectations in formal full-service restaurants. Thereafter correlation coefficient and regression analysis are used to determine the influence of different dining attributes on diners' overall expectations and experiences in formal full-service restaurants. The chapter also explicates diners' suggestions on improving restaurant experiences and concludes by evaluating the reliability of the results.

1.4.4 Chapter 5: Conclusions, recommendations and evaluation of the study

This chapter commences with a revisiting of the research objectives to indicate how each was achieved and summarises the main findings obtained in this study. Based on these findings, recommendations are made regarding the dissemination of the research findings. In addition, recommendations are made for future research projects and future research opportunities emanating from this research are presented. The chapter concludes with an evaluation of the study in terms of limitations, contributions to the restaurant industry and research ethics.

1.5 SUMMARY

In the effort to inform the reader about the central issues of this research, the introductory chapter served to provide the background to diners' expectations and experiences. It is evident from this chapter that diner expectations and experiences are important in the restaurant sector. The reader was informed about the problem statement, objectives and research hypotheses of this research. A route map to guide the reader through the dissertation was provided in the outline of the chapters. The next chapter focuses on the literature review which provides the theoretical background to this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter conceptualises and explicates the key constructs under study, namely the expectations and experiences of diners. To give comprehensive insights into these constructs, the chapter attempts to explain applicable definitions of these constructs, different levels of expectations and also delineates the dining attributes of the meal experience that will be measured in this study, namely experience with the quality of food, service and ambience in a restaurant. The chapter explains the complexity of service, customer satisfaction and relevant theories. The chapter also puts the following into perspective: (1) the SERVQUAL measuring instrument and the later developed DINESERV measuring instrument, and (2) previous research on restaurant diner satisfaction. The chapter concludes with a reference framework for the constructs of the dining expectations, experience and their outcome.

As a point of departure, Budhwar (2004:13) posits that many restaurateurs erroneously hold the intrinsic belief that merely having good food and service are the only requirements needed to be successful and perceive their food and service components as drawing cards and as their main revenue sources. Unfortunately, offering good food and service may not be adequate to attract and retain diners (Soriano, 2002:1058). Food and service elements can be referred to as complements rather than pillars of diners' experiences and expectations (Alonso & O'Neill, 2010:237).

Simply put, today's diners have become more sophisticated in their dining decisions mainly because of their willingness to expand their dining horizons and try new things (Markovic, Raspor & Segaric, 2010:182). They have become more

demanding and tend to vote with their money, cash or credit cards, for restaurants that provide service that meets or exceeds their expectations and experiences (Ebrahim, 2006:4). This might be one of the reasons why the restaurant industry and its analysts have long pondered the enigmatic question of why restaurants fail (Parsa, Self, Njite & King, 2005:304).

2.2 EXPECTATIONS

Despite extensive literature in the customer satisfaction area that incorporates the idea of expectations, the concept of expectations itself is seldom/rarely defined (Coye, 2004:2). Jordaan and Prinsloo (2001:71) 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 *et al.* (2010:182) assert that the term *expectation* is used to describe what customers believe about the capability of the service provider. Expectations represent what diners feel a restaurant should offer, affecting their reactions and decisions about food and services, although sometimes unconsciously (Kasapila, 2006:17). As such, it is important for restaurants to deliver service that meets or, even better, exceeds customer expectations (Markovic *et al.*, 2010:182).

2.2.1 The concept of 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 (Budhwar, 2004:9) for instance; a belief that the food will possess certain sensory attributes each at certain intensities (Kleynhans, 2003:17). It also includes factors such as presentation, the appearance and temperature of the food. These are significantly important variables in the diner's expectations.

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, 2010:3). Budhwar (2004:10) posits that diners 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 diner understands the “human” element of service. This prompts Kurtz and Clow (1998:75-77) to postulate the following points about the concept of expectations:

- Expectations are complex or difficult to understand since they are influenced by different factors that may be valued or considered differently by different diners.
- Expectations are dynamic since they are impacted by factors that change over time. In other words, the dining experience that satisfies a diner today may not be that satisfactory next week when the diner visits the restaurant with altered expectations.
- Expectations may differ from one diner to another on the same eating occasion depending on the specific factors that influence their expectations.

As such, to give insights into expectations, a number of authors (Kurtz & Clow, 1998:66; Jordaan & Prinsloo, 2001:71; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:60) discuss the levels of expectations using the model proposed by Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1993:3). This model of customer expectations is illustrated in Figure 2.1 and explained below.

2.2.2 Different types of expectations

According to Zeithaml *et al.* (1993:3) there are five levels (types) of customer expectations, ranging from ideal or desired expectations, normative expectations, experience-based expectations, acceptable or adequate expectations to predicted expectations (Figure 2.1).

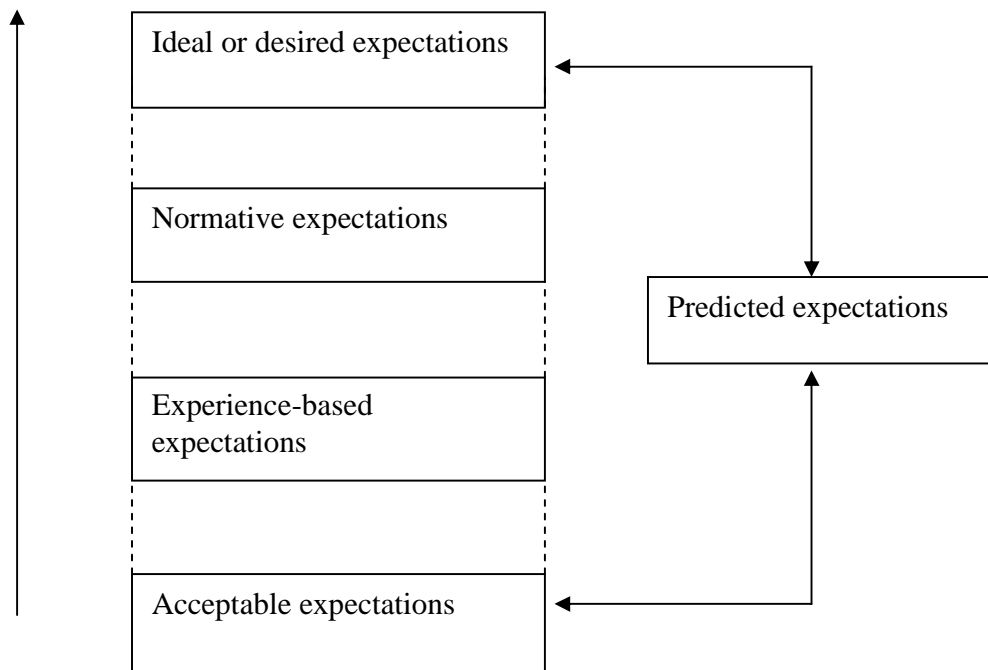


Figure 2.1: Model of customer expectations (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1993:3)

Ideal expectations are the level of service expectation diners wish for; namely what the diner wants to occur. Diners typically hold similar desired expectations of restaurants that they view as similar. Diners might for instance have heard from various sources that the restaurant is good and the ideal expectations will be good service. The ideal expectations of formal full-service restaurants are high quality food and service that are highly priced and offered in a relaxed atmosphere (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:63).

Conversely, normative expectations represent what diners ideally want and hope to receive from the service provider, it is what the diner believes should occur in a particular service encounter. For instance, when diners visit an expensive restaurant, they expect a certain level of service, one that is considerably different from the level they would expect in a less expensive restaurant (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:33).

In contrast, experience-based expectations are expectations that are rooted in diners' past experiences. These expectations can be characterised by the saying, "most times this restaurant is very good, but when it gets busy the service is slow". Alongside experience-based expectations are acceptable or adequate expectations, which are the minimal level of service that the diner will tolerate and accept without being dissatisfied. Services performed below the adequate level will not be acceptable. Acceptable expectations can be characterised by the phrase, "everyone expects terrible service from this restaurant, but comes because the price is low" (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:61).

Last but not least, predicted expectations are assumptions or predictions made by the diner about what is likely to happen during an impending dining experience. The model thus shows that predicted expectations and the other levels of expectations influence one another. For instance, diners may predict their dining experience based on their ideal, normative, experience-based and adequate expectations and vice-versa (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:61).

Nonetheless, despite these different levels of expectations, Walsh (2000:40) points out that diners are frequently not clear about what their own service expectations are. Simply put, diners may conclude only after their dining experience that what was received was not all they desired.

2.2.3 Factors influencing diners' expectations

Expectations play a critical role in the diner's evaluation of the dining experience hence the need to understand the factors that can influence diners' expectations (Jordaan & Prinsloo, 2001:6). As such, an understanding of the factors that influence diners' expectations ought to be useful in guiding restaurants to design and deliver the right offering (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006:3). However, for the purpose of this study these factors are classified into internal, external and situational factors as discussed below.

2.2.3.1 Internal factors

Internal factors that impact on diners' expectations include personal needs, personal philosophies of service and past experience (Calvert, 2001:734). Personal needs (or conditions essential to the well-being of the customer) are fundamental factors that shape what diners desire or expect in the dining experience. Personal philosophies of dining have an impact on the diner's expectations of the dining experience (Lillicrap & Cousins, 2006:11).

To illuminate on the influence of personal philosophies of service and past experience, diners, who for example, have been waiters or waitresses in a restaurant, is likely to have high standards for restaurant service shaped by their role as waiting staff. Such diners have high expectations of the dining experience and tend to be less tolerant of service deviations than diners who have not been part of waiting staff (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:67).

Furthermore, the past experience of diners with a particular restaurant or other similar restaurants will influence their expectations of the dining experience. Diners with broader experience are likely to develop different standards of comparison than diners with less experience, such that prior experience influences both focal brand expectations and product-category performance

norms (Ganesh *et al.*, 2000:67). In this regard, diners 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 (Kasapila, 2006:17).

Diners' expectations of the dining experience can be influenced by their physiological, social, psychological and/or functional needs (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:67). 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 (Lillicrap & Cousins, 2006:11).

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, 2007:606). 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 (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:43).

In the same vein of thought, expectations are also influenced by perceptions of fairness and equity (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:43). For instance, diners ask themselves whether they have been treated fairly compared to other diners. Psychological needs entail mood, personality and lifestyle. To illuminate on the influence of psychological needs, the mentioned authors posit that if diners are in a bad mood, they may overreact or respond negatively to any little problem. Conversely, diners 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 (Lillicrap & Cousins, 2006:11).

Various authors (Viljoen, 2002:369; Spears & Gregoire, 2004:61; Payne-Palacio & Theis, 2005:155-156) concur that diners' 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 diner desires and perceives as satisfactory (Kasapila, 2006:16). It is argued that women's impact on experiences is significant as these diners tend to have different expectations when compared to the expectations of men (Soriano, 2002:1058). In some scenarios, it has been found that women have the resources to make substantial expenditure and have a major impact on experiences when accompanying their partners (husbands, male friends, and so forth) (Alonso & O'Neill, 2010:242).

Furthermore, younger age groups have a strong and positive impact on expectations (Alonso & O'Neill, 2010:242). Many of these younger diners already have the resources (for instance, education and income) to afford eating out. In addition, younger diners 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 (Alonso & O'Neill, 2010:243).

2.2.3.2 *External factors*

External factors that influence diner expectations of the dining experience include the social context and word-of-mouth recommendations (Ladhari *et al.*, 2008:566). Diners' social context can have an impact on their expectations of the dining experience. Diners 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 (Kurtz & Clow, 1998:72). Hence, a potential diner may believe that the restaurant's food, service and ambience are as good as a friend says (Shiring, Jardine & Mills, 2001:25).

Diners may form expectations of the dining experience based on word-of-mouth recommendations from family members, friends and workmates (Calvert, 2001:734). To express the enormity of word-of-mouth recommendations Athanassopoulos, Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2001:694) contend that 44% of first-time restaurant diners are driven by positive word-of-mouth communication and that 10% of those diners are accompanied by someone who had previously visited the restaurant.

Statistics show that a satisfied diner will tell three other customers, such as relatives, friends and workmates, about his or her dining experience (Jordaan & Prinsloo, 2001:78). Conversely, one unhappy diner, on average, will tend to tell between 10 and 11 other people of a bad experience (Mueller, Palmer, Mack & McMullan, 2003:398). 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 *et al.* (2003:398) 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 accepts the results as business failure, without knowing the real reason.

However, when complaints are handled well, diners will return to the restaurant sometime in future (Mueller *et al.*, 2003:399). Some restaurants try to increase the frequency of first-time diners by offering incentives that target first-time diners. Offering incentives to diners tends to strengthen diners' emotional bond to the restaurant and thereby encouraging diners to spread positive word-of-mouth about their excellent service (Cullen, 2004:80; Jordaan, 2012:6). Some researchers (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:490-491; Davis, 2008:248; Jordaan, 2012:6) have found that positive word-of-mouth tends to increase the number of

first-time diners to repeat diners by 5%, it can raise its profits anywhere from 25 to 125%.

The importance of external factors to restaurants are summarised by Yu and Dean (2001:239) who claim that it is more expensive to attract new diners 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 (Mueller *et al.*, 2003:399). Consequently, repeat customers are the most desirable patrons because they tend to spend more than other customers (Lillicrap & Cousins, 2006:49; Zopiatis & Pribic, 2007:772).

2.2.3.3 *Situational factors*

Situational factors such as reasons for dining out, the weather and time constraints tend to impact on diners' expectations of the dining experience (Iglesias & Guillen, 2004:376). The expectations of a diner who is dining out for convenience purposes may not be the same as for a diner who is dining out to celebrate a birthday (Walsh, 2000:40). If diners 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, diners will tend to assign perceived value and subsequent decision making (Iglesias & Guillen, 2004:376). In such situations diners tend to have higher expectations.

Conversely, when diners 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, diners have no choice but to make their purchase decisions in accordance with variables, such as the proximity to their place of work (Iglesias & Guillen, 2004:376). Hence, the assigned perceived value will be less and diners 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 (Kurtz & Clow, 1998:75). Similarly, if a restaurant charges higher prices or uses white tablecloths, diners may have high expectations of the dining experience (Wall & Berry, 2007:61). Simply put, diners 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 diners may want to satisfy some or all of these three factors (Lillicrap & Cousins, 2006: 11). The factors that could have an impact on diners' experiences are discussed in the following section.

2.3 EXPERIENCE

The meal experience refers to a series of tangible and intangible events a diner experiences when eating out (Kotschevar & Withrow, 2008:22). It represents a moment in the everyday life of human beings (Makela, 2000:8) and individuals will have their own experiences of meals – whether they eat at home or in a restaurant (Warde & Martens, 2000:178). Any feelings diners may have when they arrive at the restaurant, and when they leave, should be taken into account and included as part of the total meal experience (Kotschevar & Withrow, 2008:22).

Although it is difficult to define exactly where the meal experience actually starts, and indeed ends, it is usually assumed that the main part of the experience begins when diners enter a restaurant and ends when they leave. Consequently, all events and activities before and after dining can generate total experience for diners (Jin, Lee & Huffman, 2010:2). Thus, the experience includes much more than simply eating (Kotschevar & Withrow, 2008:22).

The dining experience results from a confluence of several attributes (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:205). Knowing that one attribute is more important than another explains little of how purchase and repeat-purchase decisions are made, because these attributes interact (Dube *et al.*, 1994:42). These attributes collectively give the restaurant its particular identity and character which directly or indirectly intervene in the act of dining and post-purchase behaviour (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:205). However, one must keep in mind that these attributes are so interdependent and intertwined that restaurants do not normally have the luxury of dealing with them one at a time in their quest to satisfy their customers (Kasapila, 2006:7).

Therefore, a better understanding of the dining attributes affecting the dining experience and post-dining behavioural intentions in restaurants will provide important practical implications for restaurant operators (Liu & Jang, 2009a:343). For the purpose of this study, these attributes will be discussed under food, service and ambience since they all contribute to overall satisfaction with the dining experience (Sulek & Hensley, 2004:236).

2.3.1 Food

Food is the tangible or touchable component of the dining experience (Payne-Palacio & Theis, 2005:507) and is the central function of the meal (Soriano, 2002:1061; Sulek & Hensley, 2004:236; Andersson & Mossberg, 2005:177). Hyun (2010:16) reaffirms that in the restaurant industry, food is the most critical factor influencing diners' behaviour. As the core product of a restaurant, food plays a pivotal role in the restaurant experience (Liu & Jang, 2009a:344). Thus, if this attribute is not well prepared, the product cannot perform its basic function (Jaafar, Lumbers & Eves, 2010:11). This can be summarised by a classic phrase "get the food right if you want to see us again" (Sulek & Hensley, 2004:236).

However, there is no consensus about the individual attributes that constitute food quality, as diners evaluate multiple attributes when judging the quality of food (Sulek & Hensley, 2004:236) whilst many researchers focus on presentation, healthy meal options, taste, freshness and temperature (Namkung & Jang, 2008:144). In this study, food will be measured based on four dimensions spelled out by Spears and Gregoire (2004:600). These dimensions include the presentation and sensory characteristics of the food and beverages, the variety of menu items and value for money. These dimensions are delineated below.

2.3.1.1 *Presentation of food and beverages*

The general principle in food and beverage presentation is that people first eat with their eyes and the eye appeal of the food is the first enjoyment thereof (Davis, 2008:248). The presentation of the food is a key food attribute in modelling dining satisfaction (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:208). The best well-prepared food is short-changed if the plate presentation has not achieved or surpassed the same level of expected quality, particularly in formal full-service restaurants (Brown, 2004:133). Presentation of the food and beverages can be described in terms of combination of food on the plate and garnishes as described below.

i Combination of food on the plate

An artistic layout of food on the plate plays a vital role in satisfying the diner, whose first impression is based largely on sight (Brown, 2004:133). Appetite or satisfaction can be created through the variety of colours, shapes, sizes, textures and flavours in which the food is presented (Brown, 2004:133; Payne-Palacio & Theis, 2005:172). More than one strongly flavoured food, for instance cauliflower and onion, in the same meal is undesirable. It is equally important not to have all bland foods, for instance steamed fish, potatoes and vegetable marrow on a plate (Davis, 2008:249). Neither should food be repeated in the same meal, for

instance, tomato bredie and tomato salad or browned carrots and carrot salad (Davis, 2008:249).

By serving foods of contrasting flavours (for instance, roast leg of venison and quince jelly) together or combining ingredients widely different in flavour (for instance, vinegar and sugar in chutney) very interesting combinations of flavour are obtained (Davis, 2008:249). “Imagine a plate containing baked flounder, mashed potatoes, boiled vegetables and vanilla ice-cream compared to one that contains nicely grilled chicken breasts, sweet potatoes, green peas and blueberry cobbler; most people would arguably prefer the latter to the former” (Brown, 2004:3).

The size of the plate should be sufficient to not overwhelm food, but not too large that the food looks meagre or small in comparison (Brown, 2004:133). More than two starchy foods (for instance, potatoes, sweet potatoes, rice, macaroni, dried beans and a pudding made with flour or corn flour) overload a meal with starch and upset the balance and combination. Pork, roast potatoes, browned pumpkin, avocado salad and ice-cream are, again, all rich in fat and should therefore not be served in one meal (Davis, 2008:249).

ii Garnishes

Garnishing adds colour and design to the plate, making it more attractive to the eye (Figure 2.2). Garnishes are edible items used to decorate food and should generally be compatible with the food being served in terms of flavour, size and shape. A rosemary sprig would for example be appropriate for a rosemary-scented meat sauce (Brown, 2004:133). Only fresh and high-quality foods should be used for making garnishes. If the items on the plate are already harmonised, a garnish is not necessary (Brown, 2004:134).



Figure 2.2: Illustration of garnish (Adapted from Restaurant H)

2.3.1.2 *Sensory characteristics of food and beverages*

Brown (2004:2) states that most restaurant diners determine their satisfaction with food and beverages, consciously or unconsciously, based on sensory characteristics. Diners have a mental construct of what constitutes sensory perfection or appropriateness in any given food based on their knowledge, past experience and culture (Fieldhouse, 1995:196). The mental constructs diners hold serve as a point of reference in evaluating the sensory quality of food in order to determine their satisfaction (Brown, 2004:2).

Blades (2010:72) postulates that there is a large degree of agreement about the appropriateness of particular sensory attributes for specific foods within a given culture, which influences not only food choice, but also customer satisfaction. Despite this, sensory perceptions of food are highly individualistic among diners due to biological, cultural, social and other factors (Kronl, 1990:6). Differences between individuals in their perception of sensory attributes of food mean that not everyone may be satisfied with the sensory quality of a particular food (Shepherd & Sparks, 1994:205). Owing to the importance of the sensory attributes of food in restaurants, the section below deals with these attributes.

The colour of food and beverages does not only give eye appeal, but also denotes the degree to which food and beverages are cooked and helps to sell the food (Payne-Palacio & Theis, 2005:171). The colour of food affects diners' judgments and their perceptions thereof (Davis, 2008:248). For instance, orange juice may be rated sweeter when it has a bright yellow-orange colour than when it has a light yellow colour (Payne-Palacio & Theis, 2005:171). Even the appetite is stimulated by colour, and attractive colour combinations are important for everyday meals just as they are for meals served at special occasions (Davis, 2008:248).

Colourless vegetables (for instance, potatoes and gem squashes) combine very well with all other colours, while beetroot does not go well with tomatoes or carrots (Davis, 2008:249). A plate of food consisting of corned beef, mashed potatoes, cauliflower and parsnips is colourless and unattractive, no matter how well each dish is prepared whilst a sprig of parsley (green) with the potato and paprika (red) sprinkled over the cauliflower will transform a plate of food giving it an attractive colour combination (Davis, 2008:249). Thus, food and beverage intakes are to a large extent influenced by colour preferences as illustrated in Figure 2.3. Coloured preferences, for instance, may be expected to be more refreshing when clear, red or orange than when green or purple (Stroebele & De Castro, 2004:826).



Figure 2.3: Illustration of the colour of food (Adapted from Restaurant A)

ii Smell or odour of food and beverages

Smell is almost as important as colour when diners evaluate a food item for quality and preference (Brown, 2004:3; Payne-Palacio & Theis, 2005:172). Smell involves both pleasant and unpleasant odours. Pleasant odours of food and beverages include, but are not limited to: fragrant, spicy, burnt and foul depending on the ingredients used, preparation method used, and cooking time (Brown, 2004:3). The aroma of fresh brewed coffee, oven baked bread, fresh cut flowers and a pine-scented breeze can heighten the appetite (Payne-Palacio & Theis, 2005:172). In a nutshell, pleasant odours of food and beverages can stimulate appetite (Payne-Palacio & Theis, 2005:172).

iii Taste of food and beverages

Taste is usually the most influential factor in diners' selection of and satisfaction with the food and beverages (Spears & Gregoire, 2004:66). Food and beverages may taste sweet, salty, sour, bitter and/or mild depending on the ingredients and condiments or seasonings used (Payne-Palacio & Theis, 2005:172). It is important to note that not every person perceives the taste of food and

beverages in the same way. It is even said that the taste of the food expresses the character of a restaurant operation and is largely responsible for its reputation (Spears & Gregoire, 2004:45).

There is a considerable genetic variation among individuals in sensitivity to basic tastes. Tasting abilities may vary with the individual, depending on a number of outside influences. One such factor affecting taste is the temperature of the food or beverage. Very hot coffee, tastes less bitter, while slightly melted ice cream tastes sweeter. The variety of food and beverage items consumed together also affects taste. This can be observed when the taste or appetite for a favourite food eaten day after day starts to diminish or loses its appeal (Brown, 2004:4).

iv Texture of the food

A great deal of the pleasure derived from food is determined by the feel it has in the mouth (Davis, 2008:249) since the texture or structure of food and beverages is detected by the feel in the mouth as well as by fingers and eating utensils (Spears & Gregoire, 2004:66). For instance, something that should have a smooth texture, such as custard or white sauce but which is lumpy, is revolting. On the other hand, a meal consisting of soft dishes only is equally unappetising – minced meat, browned sweet potatoes, fried brinjal and finely grated carrot form just such a combination without a contrast in texture (Davis, 2008:249).

Textural or structural qualities of food and beverages are especially important in food such as meat, potato chips, crackers, cereals and celery (Brown, 2004:5). If crisp lettuce, shredded, raw cabbage and vegetables not cooked until mushy are served with soft dishes, contrast in texture is obtained which helps to add value to a menu. Other examples are: toast with scrambled eggs and croutons with cream soup (Davis, 2008:249). The diner's choice of a rare, medium or well-done steak is partly derived from the influence of texture on the palate. Coarse, crisp,

fine, soft, dry, grainy, smooth, rough, sticky and chewy are among descriptions of food texture that should be varied in a meal (Resurreccion, 1998:210).

v *Temperature of food and beverages*

The temperature of a food or beverage item considerably affects diner satisfaction. Tasteful, wholesome food served at an appropriate temperature is essential to a positive dining experience (Wall & Berry, 2007:60). Diners are satisfied or pleased with food that is served at the correct temperature. This prompts Stroebele and De Castro (2004:827) to posit that hot food (for example entrée items) should be served hot and cold food or beverages (for example milk and lemonade) should be served cold. Although meals of which all the dishes are hot can often be served with success, meals consisting of cold dishes only soon become monotonous (Davis, 2008:249).

Salad with a main course of hot food is very popular, hot coffee to round off a cold meal, a cold pudding after a hot main course and a hot sauce with ice-cream are all examples of contrast in temperature which stimulate interest in a meal (Davis, 2008:249). Likewise, food that ought to be served either hot or cold (for example, coffee) should be served hot or cold depending on the diner's preferences. To maximise diner satisfaction, a hot plate should be selected for hot foods while a cold plate should be reserved for cold foods. Stroebele and De Castro (2004:827) further posit that people prefer certain food and beverages at certain familiar temperatures and dislike them at others. Therefore, deviations from normal or accustomed temperatures are not only noticed quickly, but also create diner dissatisfaction (Davis, 2008:249).

2.3.1.3 *Variety of menu items*

Variety of menu items refers to the options of food and beverages available on the menu. A wide selection of menu items is important to certain categories of

diners, especially with healthy eating being an important issue in society (Rande, 1995:66). Payne-Palacio and Theis (2005:155) explain that a wide variety of menu items is important, because restaurant diners are generally composed of individuals from different cultural, ethnic and economic backgrounds, most of whom have definite food preferences. In this regard, restaurants should offer a wide variety of menu items in order to accommodate varying dining preferences of their heterogeneous customers (Payne-Palacio & Theis, 2005:160).

2.3.1.4 *Value for money*

Yuksel and Yuksel (2002b:55) assert that the majority of diners visit restaurants frequently, because they are of the opinion that the food they order offers value for money. This prompts Oh (2000:58) to posit that although restaurateurs have recited the quality mantra and sought solace in satisfaction, diners are motivated by value for money. Thus, as dining out becomes an integral part of diners' lifestyles, experienced diners have raised their expectations with regard to quality, good service, well-prepared food and clean interiors, while seeking better value for their money (Klara, 2001:69).

What constitutes value to diners appears to be highly personal and the higher the value, the more positive the experience and the higher the expectations. According to Zeithaml and Bitner (2003:490-491) diners define value in four ways:

- Value is low price, implicating that what diners have to give up in terms of money is most salient in their perceptions of value. If the price is high, diners are likely to expect high quality, or it can induce a sense of being "ripped off" (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006:6).
- Value is whatever the diner wants in a food product. Rather than focusing on the money given up, some diners emphasise the benefits they receive

from a service or product as the most important component of value. In this value definition, price is far less important than the quality or features that match what the diner wants.

- Value is the quality diners receive for the price they pay. Other diners see value as a trade-off between the money they spend and the quality they receive.
- Value is what the diner receives for what the restaurant offers. Some diners consider all the benefits they receive as well as all the sacrifice components (money, time, effort) when describing value.

Zeithaml and Bitner (2003:491) point out that the four diner expressions of value can be captured in one definition: value is the diner's overall assessment of the utility of a service based on perceptions of what is received and what is given. Thus, what is received varies across diners (some may want volume, others high quality, still others convenience), as does what is given (some are concerned with only money expended, others with time and effort); value represents a trade-off of the give and get components. Restaurateurs must, therefore, elicit the value definition of their diners in the quest to create positive dining experiences (Kasapila, 2006:18).

Some restaurants try to increase the value for money to diners by introducing an up-selling concept to diners, whereby more expensive items are offered than the ones the customer originally ordered to boost restaurant profits (Ruggless, 2003:68). To increase the value for money to budget diners some restaurateurs implement a down-selling concept. Down-selling is a concept of offering diners low-end products in a restaurant so that such diners are kept in formal full-service restaurants instead of going to budget restaurants (Kimes & Wirtz, 2003:126).

2.3.2 SERVICE

The term *service* has been defined differently in literature on service quality. Du Plessis and Rousseau (2003:174) define service as separately identifiable and essentially intangible activities which provide want-satisfaction and which are not necessarily tied to the sale of a product or another service. The American Marketing Association in Du Plessis and Rousseau (2003:174) defines service as activities, benefits or satisfactions which are offered for sale or are provided in connection with the sale of goods. However, in a restaurant context, Payne-Palacio and Theis (2005:507) define service as the intangible (untouchable or inconsumable) aspect of the dining out experience. A cursory glance at these and other definitions reveals that the nature of service centres on the characteristics of intangibility and that it is this feature which predominantly distinguishes services from goods (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003:174).

As much as the definitions of service attempt to distinguish services from goods, one must remember that goods (food and beverages) and services are inseparable in the restaurant industry. To illustrate this point, a hamburger cannot be presented to a diner without the component of service – the preparation, cooking and delivery of the hamburger to the diner. This prompts Powers and Barrows (2003:64) to suggest that service is particularly a pivotal or fundamental element in the restaurant sector, bearing in mind that dining in restaurants is predominantly a social event. To elaborate on the importance of service, Kharasch (1999:4) explains that great service can make up for a bad meal and can take a great meal and make it an experience so incredible that diners can not wait to come back.

2.3.2.1 *Dimensions of service*

Zeithaml and Bitner (2003:491) identified five dimensions of service that are of utmost importance in maximising customer satisfaction, namely reliability,

responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. These dimensions will be used to measure service quality in this study. Below is a brief and separate explanation of these dimensions.

2.3.2.1.i Reliability

Reliability refers to the ability of an establishment to offer service dependably and accurately. In its broadest sense, reliability means that an organisation delivers on its promises – promises about delivery, service provision, problem solution and pricing (Jordaan & Prinsloo, 2001:83; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:95). In restaurants, reliability can, among others, be characterised by staff reserving tables as requested, adhering to customer requests regarding the preparation of menu items and accurate billing (Kasapila, 2006:18).

2.3.2.1.ii Responsiveness

Responsiveness refers to the willingness of service providers to help customers and to provide prompt service. This dimension emphasises attentiveness and promptness in dealing with customer complaints, questions and problems (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:97). Responsiveness is communicated to customers by the length of time they have to wait for assistance, answers to questions or attention to problems (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:9). Service quality may therefore be enhanced through responsiveness if, for example, diners are timely assisted with the wine list and menu, or if staff responds appropriately to a diner's request for prompt service (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:97).

2.3.2.1.iii Assurance

Assurance relates to the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence. This dimension becomes important when diners feel uncertain about the service offerings of a particular restaurant (Zeithaml &

Bitner, 2003:97). Assurance may be ensured if, for example, diners are able to trust the recommendations made by the waiter, feel confident that food is free from contamination and voice any concern without fear of insult or recrimination (Kasapila, 2006:35).

2.3.2.1.iv Empathy

Empathy refers to the caring and individualised attention an establishment provides to its customers – treating customers as individuals. The essence of empathy is to acknowledge, through personalised service, that diners are unique and special. They want to feel understood by and important to organisations that provide service to them (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:98). Employees in restaurants may show empathy to customers by greeting them by name, by knowing their dietary requirements/preferences and by being understanding or sympathetic towards their problems (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:98).

2.3.2.1.v Tangibles

Tangibles pertain to the appearance of the establishment's physical facilities, equipment and personnel. Tangibles are, therefore, used by restaurants to communicate their image and signal quality to customers (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:98).

2.3.3 Ambience

Ambient conditions refer to the intangible background characteristics of the environment, such as lighting, temperature, music and scent (Liu & Jang, 2009a: 339). To gain a competitive advantage in today's market, restaurants have to offer meals that offer good value in a favourable ambience (Soriano, 2002:1056). Research has shown that a satisfying ambience attracts diners' willingness to stay in the restaurant as long as possible and that the longer they stay in the

restaurant, the more money they are likely to spend (Yuksel & Yuksel, 2002b:54). Formal full-service restaurants strive towards creating a relaxing and enjoyable ambience for diners (Figure 2.4).



**Figure 2.4: Illustration of a formal full-service restaurant's ambience
(Adapted from Restaurant C)**

Ambience partly aims at pleasing diners enough to make them want to return to the establishment repeatedly. As such, it is important to remember that different diners will perceive the ambience of a particular restaurant different based on their expectations, purposes and moods. A restaurant's ambience should, therefore, be interestingly designed to match the characteristics of its clientele. Thus, common personality characteristics may cause certain groups of diners to respond to the restaurant ambience in a similar way (Jordaan & Prinsloo, 2001:296).

Wakefield and Blodgett (1994:67) identify three primary dimensions of quality of ambience in restaurants, which influence diner satisfaction and that this study will focus on in order to measure diner satisfaction. These dimensions are: (1) ambient conditions (2) spatial layout and functionality, and (3) signs, symbols and artefacts. Although these three dimensions will be discussed separately, it should be noted that people respond to the restaurant environment or ambience holistically. Zeithaml and Bitner (2003:297) explain that although patrons may experience discrete ambience factors, it is the total configuration of these factors that determines their evaluation of ambience in a particular restaurant. It is therefore important to recognise that the dimensions of ambience explained independently below, are perceived by diners as a holistic pattern of interdependent dimensions.

2.3.3.1 Ambient conditions

The conscious designing of space to produce specific emotional effects in diners enhances their purchase probability (Liu & Jang, 2009a:348). Ambient conditions include background characteristics of the restaurant environment such as exterior appearance, interior décor, temperature, lighting, noise, music and odour (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:297). These conditions have a powerful impact on the emotions, attitudes and behaviour of the individual (Liu & Jang, 2009a:348). Diners may not return to a restaurant if they are not satisfied with the ambient conditions. Ambient factors profoundly affect how diners feel, think and evaluate their experience of a particular restaurant. Owing to the importance of ambient factors, the section below briefly focuses on each of these factors.

i Exterior appearance

The exterior of the restaurant provides the first impression to the diner that will not only attract and invite guests to eat, but also influence their experience of the meal (Jordaan & Prinsloo, 2001:158). As diners approach the restaurant, they

will scrutinise the exterior in terms of location and parking area, which determine security of the restaurant. An outside sign with burnt-out lights and flaking paint or a run-down building, for instance, may cause the customer to think less of the entire operation. Diners are also concerned with the attractiveness and upkeep of the exterior of the restaurant (Jordaan & Prinsloo, 2001:158).

ii Interior decor

Once a diner has entered the restaurant, the interior decoration is evaluated. The interior decor of a restaurant may influence how long a diner stays in a restaurant and the environmental design has an impact on service satisfaction (Namkung & Jang, 2008:144). Diners often judge the interior decor in terms of colour schemes (Lillicrap & Cousins, 2006:49). Colours such as red, yellow and orange are classified as warm colours, while blue, green and violet are cool colours. Warm colours give diners the impression of a warm, comfortable service environment (Jordaan & Prinsloo, 2001:159). The following colour schemes are generally regarded as most acceptable: pink, peach, pale yellow, clear green, beige, blue and turquoise (Lillicrap & Cousins, 2006:49).

Liu and Jang (2009b:496) posit that warm colours were found to be psychologically and physiologically arousing and sometimes even stressful, whereas cool colours were relaxing and tended to decrease feelings of stress. The colour scheme should help to reflect the character of the restaurant (Lillicrap & Cousins, 2006:49). Cool colours tend to create a formal type of service environment. In the same vein of thought, Stroebele and De Castro (2004:826) argue that bright colours tend to arouse and stimulate, whereas warm and cool colours seem to promote relaxation. Thus, by properly using colours, a restaurant can create almost any type of environment that suits its clientele and also contribute to a feeling of cleanliness (Lillicrap & Cousins, 2006:48).

Ryu and Jang (2008:18) proposed a measurement scale named Dinescape for the internal dining environment of a restaurant. The Dinescape scale includes six dimensions, namely facility aesthetics, ambience, lighting, table setting, layout and service staff (Liu & Jang, 2009b:495). Other items that contribute to interior decor include the signs that are posted, the furniture and equipment, the level of lighting, as well as pictures and fixtures. If the dining environment in a restaurant is comfortable and attractive, the environment may positively affect diners' perceptions of the service quality and their overall evaluations of the dining experience (Liu & Jang, 2009b:494).

iii Lighting

Lighting sets any mood and provides an uplifted feeling in any place. It not only adds up to warmth and hospitality in a restaurant, but puts diners at ease and makes them feel at home (Gareth, 2011:6). According to Jordaan and Prinsloo (2001:157) lighting can help to set the mood, tone and pace of the service encounter. It is an environmental cue that can influence a diner's belief in the trustworthiness of the provider (Perutkova, 2010:2). The interior lighting scheme has a dramatic effect on the atmosphere and mood of the restaurant. Diners tend to talk more softly when lights are dim. Yuksel and Yuksel (2002a:317-318) point out that people are less inhibited and less self-conscious when lights are low and, therefore, eat more in dimmer light (for instance, at night). For this reason, it is vital to give equal importance to restaurant lighting and to the food being served (Gareth, 2011:6).

Lighting tends to influence diners' emotional states in specific settings (Liu & Jang, 2009b:496) and can be one of the most influential atmospheric factors in restaurants, especially in fine dining restaurants (Lim, 2010:20). Lighting is very important to the sensory organs especially in a restaurant since diners do not just eat with their hands and mouth. Imagine diners eating in very dim restaurant wherein they will have to exert all effort to know what kind of food is on their fork

(Gareth, 2011:6). Very low light can give the impression that the food served on the table is not good enough. Food also has the right to be seen. Pity the chef who used up all his artistry to garnish the meal when diners are not able to appreciate it because of bad lighting. The rule of thumb in restaurants is to keep diners from wanting more lighting and the correct restaurant lighting plays a pivotal role in this aim (Gareth, 2011:6).

As such, fast food restaurants tend to have bright lighting to symbolise quick service and relatively low prices. Brighter lights appear to subconsciously tell diners to eat more quickly and leave as soon as they have finished their meal. Bright lights are therefore the recommended way to illuminate for quick turnover and high volume throughput (Lillicrap & Cousins, 2006:49). On the contrary, upscale restaurants tend to have dark lighting to symbolise luxury and high price.

Based on the preceding points, lighting is an important factor, which can make or break an atmosphere more than any other design element. Restaurateurs might establish upward lighting to make the restaurant appear softer and more flattering (Namkung & Jang, 2008:151). Food may be made to look appealing by using blue-white light from fluorescent fixtures. For instance, warmer bulbs such as pink light make red meats look natural but salads unappetising. As such, a balance is usually needed for both warmth and good food appearance (Lillicrap & Cousins, 2006:48).

To sum up, dining unlike other acts is better performed when there is light but too much light does not qualify as restaurant lighting either. A restaurant is not a bus station bathroom for it to be lit that way (Gareth, 2011:6). Food is better enjoyed if it is seen and darkness does not equate romance. As such, a balance is usually needed for both warmth and good food appearance (Lillicrap & Cousins, 2006:48).

iv Temperature

The temperature inside a restaurant affects diners physiologically (Kurtz & Clow, 1998:222). If the temperature in the restaurant is too low or too high, diners will feel uncomfortable. Their discomfort will be reflected through their avoidance behaviours (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:297). They will likely choose another restaurant for the next visit and may even leave the current restaurant sooner than expected. Similarly, employees working under these conditions will become irritable and not provide the level of diner service they should (Kurtz & Clow, 1998:222).

v Noise

Undesirable noises can reduce or detract diners' enjoyment and satisfaction (Jordaan & Prinsloo, 2001:157) and should therefore be concealed. The level of noise acceptable to the ears is a function of age (Payne-Palacio & Theis, 2005:172). The older the age group, the less the intensity of noise which is acceptable will be. Unnecessary noise also affects diners' senses, often subconsciously (Wall & Berry, 2007:60) and can annoy diners and cause them to shorten their stays (Sulek & Hensley, 2004:236). The noise of an ice machine or the group at the next table may for instance interfere with diners who were looking forward to a quiet evening out (Rande, 1995:38). The noise level of conversations, serving staff, kitchen sounds and music also affect the ambience. Thus, the way the restaurant expresses this characteristic creates an expectation of the dining experience even before the diner is served (Sulek & Hensley, 2004:236).

vi Music

Music is a positive auditory cue for stimulating emotions and behaviours in service settings (Mattila & Wirtz, 2001:277). Zeithaml and Bitner (2003:297)

report a number of studies that have focused on the effects of music on diners. Musical tempo, pitch, mode and genre are all associated with positive or negative emotions and it tends to enhance the seasonal accents reflected in the menu (Sulek & Hensley, 2004:244). Faster tempo music is associated with positive emotions, such as happiness and excitement, whereas slower tempo music is associated with feelings of sadness (Liu & Jang, 2009b:496).

Jensen and Hansen (2007:605) assert that music tends to offer diners an opportunity for aesthetic experiences. Furthermore, diners tend to perceive that they spend less time in the restaurant when there is music than when there is no music. Background music in restaurants can actually affect diners' eating time and purchasing intention (Lim, 2010:20-21). Diners spend more time and money when the music matches their musical tastes (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:297). Restaurants must, therefore, be careful not to offend one group while trying to satisfy another with one type of music (Liu & Jang, 2009b:497).

vii Odours

The odours and scents that fill a restaurant influence diner satisfaction. The savoury aroma of food cooking is a welcome delight for diners and stimulates the appetite and satisfaction (Rande, 1995:38). According to Jordaan and Prinsloo (2001:155) pleasant odours help to enhance the overall ambience of the restaurant and increase lingering time. Odours evoke visceral reactions that influence purchase probability. For example, at Walt Disney World in Orlando the smell of chocolate chip cookies baking is piped from the underground to the park's Main street inside the front gate to greet customers, create warm feelings, and to whet the appetite for a treat (Wall & Berry, 2007:61).

Conversely, unpleasant odours due to poor ventilation in the restaurant and unsuitably placed trash containers create negative impressions in the mind of the diners. Unpleasant odours involve offensive kitchen odours, body odour, food

scraps on the floor and table, garbage and rancid grease (Payne-Palacio & Theis, 2005:172). Diners may probably leave early without ordering any food in response to unpleasant odours (Wall & Berry, 2007:61).

2.3.3.2 *Spatial layout and functionality*

Spatial layout refers to the way in which the facility, equipment and furnishings are arranged, the size and shape of these items and the spatial relationships among them (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:298). Functionality refers to the ability of the mentioned items to facilitate diners' enjoyment and comfort. An effective layout and functionality will provide for ease of entry and exit, and will enhance the accessibility of ancillary areas such as restrooms. When these service areas are more accessible, diners tend to spend more time enjoying the primary service offerings of a restaurant (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994:67-68).

2.3.3.3 *Signs, symbols and artefacts*

Signs, symbols and artefacts serve as explicit or implicit signals that communicate about a place to its users (Liu & Jang, 2009b:495). They are also used to enhance a certain image, or to direct diners to desired destinations. Signs, symbols and artefacts are particularly important in forming first impressions and for communicating new service concepts. When diners are unfamiliar with a particular restaurant, they look for environmental cues or signals (for instance style of decoration, tablecloths and lighting used) (Figure 2.5) to help them categorise the restaurant and begin to form their quality expectations (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:299-300).

Everything on a restaurant table potentially communicates to diners. This includes the table covering, if any, the use of paper or cloth napkins and their texture, and the cleanliness of the table. Even the snowy white linen tablecloths (Figure 2.5) and crystal chandeliers of an upscale restaurant communicate to

diners the type of food and level of service that make up a fine-dining experience. White tablecloths also convey symbolic meaning of a full-service restaurant and relatively high prices (Wall & Berry, 2007:60-61).



Figure 2.5: Illustration of snowy white linen tablecloths in a restaurant (Adapted from Restaurant F)

Signs displayed on the exterior and interior of a restaurant serve as explicit communication signals to guests. Signs may be used as labels (for instance, name of a restaurant), for directional purposes (for instance, entrances and exits), and to communicate rules of behaviour (for instance no smoking, children must be accompanied by adults and so forth) (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:299). Symbols and artefacts communicate less directly than signs, giving implicit clues to patrons about a restaurant.

2.4 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Customer satisfaction has been defined in various ways by different authors (Kivela *et al.*, 1999b:282; Spinelli & Canavos, 2000:31; Choi & Chu, 2001:290; Jordaan & Prinsloo, 2001:52; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:68). To exemplify, Zeithaml and Bitner (2003:86) define satisfaction as a judgement that a product or service feature (or service or product itself) provides a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilment. Choi and Chu (2001:280) considers satisfaction as an evaluation by customers that the food or service they have received is at least as good as it is supposed to be.

Satisfaction may also be associated with feelings of pleasure for the dining experience that make the customer happy or feel good. Nonetheless, the underlying fact is that customer satisfaction is critically important, because it reflects subjective customer evaluations of the attribute performance associated with the consumption experience (Namkung & Jang, 2008:143).

2.4.1 The concept of customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is influenced by a complex interplay of factors (Kasapila, 2006:16). This has prompted some authors (Kleynhans, 2003:17; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:87) to argue that customer satisfaction in a restaurant is influenced by food, the customer, restaurant experience and consumption. A customer who receives what he or she expected in a restaurant is most likely to be satisfied. If the customer expectations were exceeded, he or she may be extremely satisfied (Bowen & Shoemaker, 2003:33). However, if their experiences are not in line with their expectations diners tend to be dissatisfied. Thus, the customers' perception of satisfaction results from their evaluation of the dining experience and expected service (Markovic *et al.*, 2010:183).

Consumers judge satisfaction with a product by comparing previously held expectations with perceived product performance (Ganesh *et al.*, 2000:66). If performance is above expectations, an increase in satisfaction is expected whilst if performance is below expectations, a decrease in satisfaction is expected. According to Zeithaml and Bitner (2003:86) if a customer's experience is better than his or her expectations the dining experience tends to really surprise the customer in a positive way and such satisfaction may mean delight. A customer will perceive satisfaction only when the service provider exceeds his expectations (Soriano, 2002:1056).

If the experience is below expectations customers experience dissatisfaction. Kurtz and Clow (1998:383) even note that if the dining experience is below the adequate level of expectation, the customer will even be angry. For instance, it may be that the meal was delayed due to circumstances beyond the control of the restaurant, such as a power failure. However, if a dining experience is perceived to be below the predicted level of expectations customers will feel irritated. For instance, it may be that the silverware of a particular table was not clean or the waiting staff did not come often enough to fill their water glass (Kurtz & Clow, 1998:383). In other words, an irritated state of dissatisfaction is the low level of dissatisfaction (Kasapila, 2006:15).

In many cases, a dissatisfied customer may not switch restaurants immediately due to switching costs (for instance, lack of recognition or attention by the new restaurant). If the poor level of service occurs again or continues over several service experiences, the customer will switch. The more dissatisfied customers become, the quicker they will switch to another restaurant (Kasapila, 2006:15).

The need to keep up with diners' expectations as they continue to demand novel, inexpensive and intriguing experiences cannot be overemphasised, because keeping diners satisfied and coming back depend largely on the diner's expectations and experiences (Enz, 2004:315). Hence, it is not surprising that a

number of authors discuss expectations and experiences using various theories as presented below.

2.5 THEORIES ON CUSTOMERS' EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In order to provide insight into diner expectations and experiences, a number of authors (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:206-207; Jordaan & Prinsloo, 2001:71; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:60) discussed different customer satisfaction theories that were developed by consumer behaviourists. The most widely applied customer satisfaction theories in the restaurant sector are confirmation-disconfirmation, assimilation, contrast and assimilation-contrast theories (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:207). Among these, Oliver's (1980:463) confirmation-disconfirmation theory (Figure 2.6) has received the widest acceptance because of its broadly applicable conceptualisation (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:207; Weiss, Feinstein & Dalbor, 2004:32).

2.5.1 The confirmation-disconfirmation model

The confirmation-disconfirmation model posits that customers patronise restaurants with pre-purchase expectations of the dining experience (Oliver, 2010:14). Once they have their dining experiences, they compare it with their expectations. The compromise or interaction between preset expectations of customers and their perceptions of the dining experience lead to either confirmation or disconfirmation (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:207). In less technical terms, confirmation occurs when the dining experience matches the diner's expectations, leading to diner satisfaction.

Conversely, disconfirmation occurs when there are differences between expectations and the dining experience. When the dining experience is better than expected it creates positive disconfirmation, which results in diner satisfaction as illustrated in Figure 2.6.

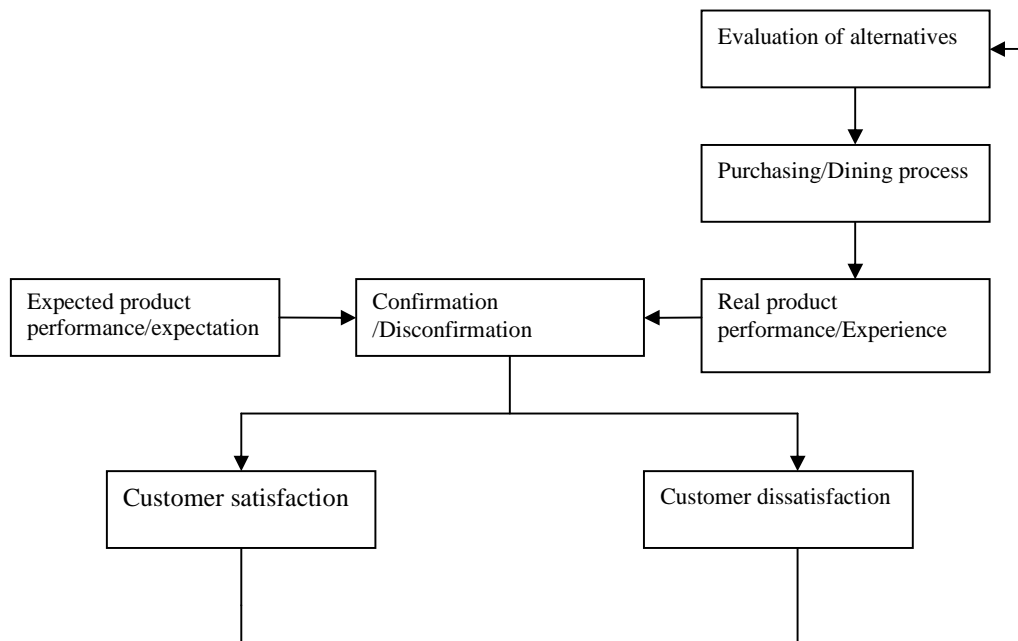


Figure 2.6: Oliver’s Confirmation-disconfirmation model of customer satisfaction (Loudon & Della Bitta, 1993:579)

A dining experience which does not meet customers’ expectations results in negative disconfirmation and diner dissatisfaction (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:207). That is to say, satisfaction is caused by confirmation or positive disconfirmation of diner expectations. Consequently, consumers’ post-purchase evaluation of products acts as feedback to their experience and serves to influence future decisions concerning suitable alternatives to buy (Loudon & Della Bitta, 1993:579).

2.5.2 Assimilation theory

The assimilation theory assumes that the perception or evaluation of the service received will match the expectations of the diner and that any discrepancy between perceptions and expectations will be minimised by the diner (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:207). This theory therefore posits that when there is a discrepancy

between expectations and experiences of the service, the diner will change his perception to bring it more in line with his expectations (Raats, Dailliant-Spinnler & Deliza, 1995:244).

Diners are assumed to be motivated enough to adjust either their expectations or their experiences to suit the quality of service received and seek to avoid dissonance by adjusting perceptions about the service received to bring it more in line with their expectations (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:207). If diners, for instance, receive poor service they will somehow adjust their expectations to be low and hence they are assumed to have low expectations despite the fact that they had high expectations before.

2.5.3 Contrast theory

Conversely, the contrast theory is a reverse of the assimilation theory. The theory predicts that the diner will magnify the disparity between the service received and the service expected. Therefore, if expectations and experiences of service do not correspond (when diners experience more or less than what they have expected) diners will evaluate the service less or more favourably than if they had no preset expectations about it (Cardello, 1995:166; Raats *et al.*, 1995:244; Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:207).

2.5.4 Assimilation-contrast theory

The assimilation-contrast theory is a hybrid form of the two theories discussed in 2.5.2 and 2.5.3 (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:207). The assimilation theory suggests that there are limits of acceptance or rejection in diner perception of the service experienced (Raats *et al.*, 1995:245). If the disparity between expectations and experiences of the service experienced is sufficiently small to be in the diner's limit of acceptance, the diner puts the service experienced more in line with his or her expectations, thus demonstrating assimilation effects (Kivela *et al.*,

1999a:207). However, if the service received differs significantly from expectations so that it falls into the zone of rejection, the contrast effect comes into play and the diner exaggerates the perceived disparity between the service received and her or his expectation (Cardello, 1995: 166; Raats *et al.*, 1995:245).

2.5.5 The generalised-negativity theory

The theory supposes that any discrepancy between expectations and experiences of service received will result in a generalised dislike state, causing the service experience to have a less favourable rating than if experience had coincided with expectations (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:207). Thus, if diners expect a particular quality from the service received, but a different quality is received, diners will judge the service to be less pleasant than if they had no previous expectation (Raats *et al.*, 1995:244-245; Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:207). Accordingly, dissatisfaction will occur if perceived performance is less than expectations or if perceived performance exceeds expectations.

2.6 RESEARCH ON RESTAURANT DINERS' EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

Research on restaurant diners' expectations and experiences helps to capture diners' feedback before they leave the restaurant in order to help in attracting and retaining diners (Enz, 2004:315). As such, several authors have concurred to provide restaurants with a quantifiable measure of expectations and experiences of diners by comparing the expectations of diners with their experiences (Markovic *et al.*, 2010:183). The section below discusses two of the well-tested research instruments available to measure service quality, the SERVQUAL and the DINESERV instruments. It also discusses other studies on restaurant diners' expectations and experiences.

2.6.1 The SERVQUAL model

Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1985:41) developed a service quality model, the SERVQUAL approach, after realising the significance of service quality for the survival and success of service companies and the need for a generic instrument which would be used to measure service quality across a broad range of service categories. The model identifies and measures the gap between customers' expectations of service and the performance they actually receive (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985:42). The model is based on the assumption that the smaller the gap, the better the quality of service provided (Figure 2.7).

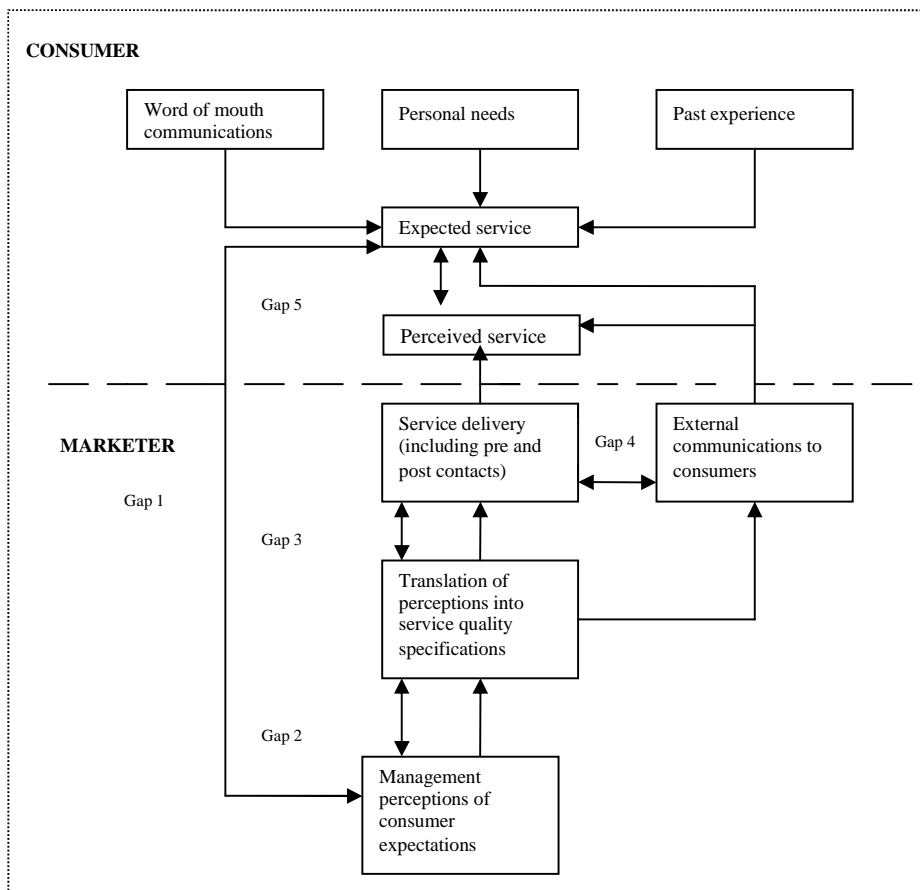


Figure 2.7: A conceptual model of service quality (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985:41)

The model has to some extent laid the foundations for quality service research and asserts that customer perceptions of quality are influenced by a series of five distinct gaps (the gaps model) occurring in organisations (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:11).

2.6.1.1 The Gaps model

Gap 1: Not understanding customer expectations

According to Zeithaml and Bitner (2003:11), not knowing what the customer expectations are, is one of the root causes in not delivering to customer expectations. Provider gap 1 is the difference between customer expectations and the organisations' understanding of the customer's expectations. An inaccurate understanding of what customers expect and what really matters to them lead to service performance that falls short of customer expectations.

Gap 2: Setting of poor standards

Although accurate perceptions of customer perceptions are necessary, this alone is not sufficient for delivering superior service. Provider gap 2 is described as the difference between a company's understanding of customer expectations and the development of customer-driven service designs and standards. Service designs and performance standards need to reflect accurate perceptions of customer expectations. Customer driven standards are based on pivotal customer requirements that are visible to, and measured by customers (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:12).

Gap 3: The service performance gap

Zeithaml and Bitner (2003:12) describe provider gap 3 as the discrepancy between the development of customer-driven service standards and actual

service performance by company employees. Unfortunately, according to the mentioned authors, even when guidelines are put in place for performing services well and treating customers correctly, high-quality service performance is not a certainty. Interestingly, even if employees, intermediaries and other contact personnel are 100% consistent in their service delivery, the customer can variably introduce heterogeneity in the service. If customers fail to fulfil their roles appropriately, service quality may be jeopardised.

Gap 4: Service delivery-communications gap

The fourth provider gap refers to differences between the service provider's external communication and the actual service delivery. External communication by the organisation through advertising, sales people and other communication may raise diner expectations. These higher expectations then become the standard against which the diner assesses service quality. The discrepancy between actual and promised service creates this gap. Thus, the greater the discrepancy, the broader the gap will be (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:12).

Gap 5: Perceptions-expectations gap

The perceptions-expectations gap refers to the external gap between the customer's perceptions and expectations. This gap can be referred to as "the moment of truth". In the restaurant context, service quality is only beneficial to the restaurant if it is profitable to both the restaurant and the diner. Positive results in sales, profits and market share will not be produced by service quality performance in areas of little importance to the customer (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:12).

By utilising the five dimensions of service quality, the SERVQUAL model attempts to establish the differences in customer expectations and their perceptions of the service. The model uses 22 questions that are transposed into

statements to measure customers' evaluation of service performance. The level of service quality is established by subtracting the perceived service score from customers' expected service score. Three possible outcomes are then possible, namely:

Condition 1: If the expectation score exceeds the perception score, the quality of service is poor and the customer is disappointed. This is referred to as a service quality problem.

Condition 2: If the perception exceeds the expectation, the quality is excellent and the customer is satisfied or delighted. This is referred to as service excellence.

Condition 3: If the expectations are equal to the perceptions, technical satisfaction is derived by the customer. This is referred to as technical satisfaction (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:11).

2.6.1.2 Criticisms against the SERVQUAL model

Buttle (1996:10) contends that, despite the model's popularity and wide application, the SERVQUAL is exposed to numerous criticisms, from both theoretical and operational perspectives.

i Theoretical criticisms

Theoretical criticisms are discussed under paradigmatic objections, gaps model, process orientation and dimensionality (Ladhari *et al.*, 2008:567).

a) Paradigmatic objections

Two major paradigmatic criticisms have been raised against the SERVQUAL module. Firstly, it is claimed that this model has been based on an expectation-disconfirmation model rather than on an attitudinal model of service quality (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml, 1991:359). Thus, it is based on an affirmation pattern rather than on the pattern of understanding. Secondly, the model fails to draw on an established economical, statistical and psychological theory (Buttle, 1996:11).

b) Gaps model

Babakus and Boller (1992:253) found the “gap” approach to service quality “intuitively appealing”, but argue that the differences in scores may not provide any additional information beyond that already contained in the perceptions section of the SERVQUAL scale. There is little evidence that the consumer evaluates service quality in the sense of perception-expectation gaps (Ladhari *et al.*, 2008:567).

c) Process orientation

The SERVQUAL model has been criticised for focusing on the process of service delivery alone and not the outcomes associated with the service (Buttle, 1996:14). Process and outcome is a better predictor of consumer choice than process, or outcome alone (Buttle, 1996:15).

d) Dimensionality

Buttle (1996:10) argues that the SERVQUAL’s five dimensions are not universal and that the number of dimensions comprising service quality is contextualised.

Furthermore, there is a high degree of inter-correlation between the five dimensions (reliability, assurance, tangible, empathy and responsiveness) (Daniel & Berinyuy, 2010:43).

ii Operational criticisms

Buttle (1996:11) raised the following operational criticisms against the SERVQUAL, namely expectations, item composition, moments of truth, polarity, scale points, two administrations and variance extracted.

a) Expectations

According to Gilmore (2003:41) some researchers argue that measuring expectations is unnecessary. The term *expectation* is polysemic, meaning it has different definitions and consumers use standards other than expectations to evaluate service quality (Buttle, 1996:11). Furthermore, it is claimed that SERVQUAL fails to measure absolute service quality expectations (Daniel & Berinyuy, 2010:43). Thus, if expectations and perceptions are to be measured they should be measured on a single scale (Gilmore, 2003:41).

b) Item composition

Each factor in the SERVQUAL scale is composed of four or five items. However, this is often inadequate to capture the variance within, or the context-specific meaning of each dimension (Buttle, 1996:21). Parasuraman *et al.* (1991:361) acknowledge that context specific items can be used to supplement SERVQUAL but caution that the new items should be similar in form to the existing SERVQUAL items. As such, Carman's (1990:34) study of hospital services employed 40 items whilst Babakus and Mangold (1992:780) used 15 items in their hospital research.

c) Moments of truth

Often, services are delivered over several encounters or moments of truth between service staff and customers (for example, hotel and hospital services). As such, Ladhari *et al.* (2008:569) claim that customers' perceptions may vary from "moment of truth" to "moment of truth" and cannot be loaded on a single responsiveness factor. In other words, the diner's rating of the service can vary from one to the next moment of truth (Gilmore, 2003:40).

d) Polarity

The SERVQUAL model contains statement pairs that are negatively worded and statement pairs that are positively worded. Some items are reversed to ensure that respondents do not fall into the habit of marking the same scale point for each question. However, this can cause confusion (Gilmore, 2003:41). Although this is accepted as good normative research practice, it has consequences for respondents, leading to more comprehension errors and making the research more time consuming (Ladhari *et al.*, 2008:569).

e) Scale points

The use of the 7-point Likert scale is criticised as it is flawed and has been criticised previously on numerous grounds (Lewis in Buttle, 1996:22). The mid-range numbers can only be vaguely related to varying degrees of opinions and many respondents may rate these differently (Gilmore, 2003:41). Thus, the Likert scale with seven ratings is inadequate (Ladhari *et al.*, 2008:569). As such, Babakus and Mangold (1992:773) opted to use the 5-point Likert scale on the grounds that it would reduce the "frustration level" of patient respondents, increase response rate and response quality.

f) Two administrations

Respondents appear to sometimes be confused by the administration of “E” (expectations) and “P” (perceptions) versions of SERVQUAL as well as being bored when completing the questionnaire (Buttle, 1996:11). Boredom and confusion tend to imperil data quality (Buttle, 1996:23).

g) Variance extracted

The level of variance extracted is a measure of construct validity. The higher the variance extracted, the more valid is the measure. Generally, the scales tend to produce higher levels of variance extracted. Furthermore, the overall SERVQUAL score accounts for a disappointing proportion of item variances (Buttle, 1996:11).

In the same vein, Andaleeb and Conway (2006:7) assert that not all five dimensions of SERVQUAL play an important role in determining diner satisfaction in the restaurant industry where the diner’s risk is low given the purchase price, the outcome of the service and the alternatives available. Hence, assurance is not as important in this industry.

Andaleeb and Conway (2006:7) further contend that elements of assurance, knowledge and courtesy are important, but may have contextually modified meanings whilst the dimension empathy may not be applicable in the restaurant industry context. Thus, empathy is defined in the SERVQUAL literature as provision of care and individualised attention that is displayed to each customer (Abdullar & Rozario, 2009:186).

Andaleeb and Conway (2006:8) conclude by claiming that full-service restaurants should focus on three elements, namely service quality (responsiveness), price and food quality (reliability) if diner satisfaction is to be treated as a strategic

variable. Nonetheless, despite its drawbacks, the SERVQUAL model has undoubtedly impacted on business and academic communities.

2.6.2 The DINESERV Model

After the SERVQUAL, the LODGESERV model was drafted to be used in defining and measuring service quality for lodging properties. However, both models failed to measure service quality from the food service arena (Stevens, Knutson & Patton, 1995:58). As such, adapting the instrument SERVQUAL to the restaurant industry and using the lessons learned in developing and refining LODGESERV, Stevens *et al.* (1995:58) drafted the DINESERV model to measure perceived service in restaurants. The essence of the model is that restaurant diners not only evaluate the quality of food, but also the service encounters during their dining experience. Since perceived service quality is seen as another core determinant of diner satisfaction and behavioural intention it is included in the DINESERV instrument (Liu & Jang, 2009b:498).

The instrument contains 29 statements and the dimensions of service quality remain as in the SERVQUAL instrument. It also comprises service quality standards that fall into five categories, namely 10 items pertaining to tangibles, five items pertaining to reliability, three items representing responsiveness, six items representing assurance and five items representing empathy.

Tangibles refer to a restaurant's physical design, appearance of staff and cleanliness. Reliability involves freshness and temperature of the food, accurate billing and receiving ordered food. Responsiveness in restaurants relates to staff assistance with the menu or wine list or appropriate and prompt response to diners' needs and requests. Assurance means that restaurant diners should be able to trust the recommendations of staff, feel confident that food is free from contamination and be able to raise any concern without fear. Finally, empathy refers to providing personalised attention to diners by anticipating special dietary

requirements, or by being sympathetic towards diners' problems (Markovic *et al.*, 2010:184).

Responses are then measured on a 7-point scale where "strongly agree" equals seven and "strongly disagree" equals one. The mean scores for the five dimensions are summed and then divided by five. Problem scores are then analysed and improvement strategies are developed. It is important to improve the perception score, as the higher the score, the more likely the chances are that the diner will return to the restaurant (Stevens *et al.*, 1995:60).

The DINESERV per interview

The first 10 items cover tangibles; items 11 to 15 reliability; items 16 to 18 responsiveness; items 19 to 24 assurance and items 25 to 29 empathy.

The restaurant.....

- 1 must have visually attractive parking areas and building exteriors
- 2 has a visually attractive dining area
- 3 has staff members who are clean, neat and appropriately dressed
- 4 has a decor in keeping with its image and price range
- 5 has a menu that is easily readable
- 6 has a visually attractive menu that reflects the restaurant's image
- 7 has a dining area that is comfortable and easy to move around
- 8 has restrooms that are thoroughly clean
- 9 has dining areas that are thoroughly clean
- 10 has comfortable seats in the dining room
- 11 serves you in the time promised
- 12 quickly corrects anything that is wrong
- 13 is dependable and consistent
- 14 provides an accurate guest check (bill)
- 15 serves you food exactly as you ordered it

- 16 has employee shifts during busy times to help each other maintain speed and quality of service
- 17 provides prompt and quick service
- 18 gives extra effort to handle your special requests
- 19 has employees who can answer your questions completely
- 20 makes you feel comfortable and confident in your dealings with them
- 21 has personnel who are able and willing to give you information about menu items, ingredients and preparation
- 22 makes you feel personally safe
- 23 has personnel who seem well trained, competent and experienced
- 24 seems to give employees support so that they can do their jobs well
- 25 has employees who are sensitive to your needs and wants rather than always relying on policies and procedure
- 26 makes you feel special
- 27 anticipates your individual needs and wants
- 28 has employees who are sympathetic and reassuring if something is wrong
- 29 seems to have the customer's best interests at heart

The instrument is proposed as a reliable and relatively simple tool for determining how diners view a restaurant's quality (Markovic *et al.*, 2010:184). It is also suitable for use by restaurant managers in gaining easily interpretable data. By administering the DINESERV questionnaire to customers, restaurant managers can get a reading on how they view the restaurant's quality, identify where problems are, and get an idea of how to resolve them (Namkung, 2008:184). Markovic *et al.* (2010:193) further assert that the measurement instrument also provides a quantified measure of what diners expect in a restaurant.

Nonetheless, despite its benefits the instrument has not been spared criticism. For instance, Namkung and Jang (2008:143) posit that one of the essential components of the restaurant experience, namely food quality is not included as part of the DINESERV measure. Just like most quality studies in restaurant settings which have concentrated on only a subset of quality, either atmospherics or employee services, the instrument does not comprehensively examine all the

vital components of restaurant quality. Hence, using the DINESERV may not appropriately capture the idiosyncratic nature of the restaurant experience (Namkung & Jang, 2008:143).

Furthermore, whilst the instrument predominantly aims to measure service quality dimensions, including reliability, responsiveness and tangibles, it does not consider the direct outcomes of the diners' experiences or expectations of service quality, including, notably diner satisfaction and reflections on the service experience received (Mohsin, McIntosh & Cave, 2005:116). Yet, it is these latter outcomes, and the nature of the perceived and expected service experience, that potentially may be the major determinants of repeat purchasing and diner satisfaction (Alonso & O'Neill, 2010:243).

2.7 PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON RESTAURANT DINER SATISFACTION

Previous research studies focusing on experiences and expectations of diners by Kivela *et al.* (1999a:205-222; 1999b:269-286; 2000:13-30), Markovic *et al.* (2010:181-195) and Soriano (2002:1055-1067) are briefly discussed below.

Kivela *et al.* (1999a:205) conducted consumer research in the restaurant environment in Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong. One of the aims of the study was to identify and measure the strength and direction of the relationship between dining satisfaction and return patronage.

A questionnaire listing 28 restaurant attributes was developed and divided into two sections, namely Section A and Section B. Section A was completed before the meal and Section B after the meal. A proportional sample of 22.5% of the total seating capacity per restaurant enabled the researcher to obtain the required sample size. Respondents were selected by a systematic sampling method, that is, every fourth diner who walked into the restaurant was targeted

for participation (Kivela *et al.*, 1999b:274) until the sample size for a particular restaurant was reached.

Factor analysis was then used for data analysis to reduce the original data to a manageable size and to obtain a relative small number of variables that explain most of the variances among the restaurant attributes (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:207). The following were then cited as factor labels: (1) First and last impressions; (2) Service excellence; (3) Ambience excellence; (4) Food excellence and feeling comfortable to eat there, and (5) Reservations and parking.

The first factor, "First and last impressions", had six significant loadings. It was composed of original variables with the highest factor loading on that dimension: dining privacy, restaurant's temperature, restaurant's appearance, restaurant that offers a new dining experience, restaurant that offers food of a consistent standard and restaurant that offers service of a consistent standard (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:207). The second factor, "Service excellence", had four significant loadings which were composed of four original variables: friendly, polite and helpful staff; attentive staff; staff greeting customers and staff who are willing to serve (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:207).

The third factor, "Ambience excellence", had three significant loadings, which were composed of three original variables: level of comfort; level of noise in the restaurant and view from the restaurant (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:207). The fourth factor, "Food excellence and feels comfortable to eat there", had four significant loadings. It was composed of four original variables: menu variety; nutritious food; tastiness of food; food quality; and feels comfortable to eat there (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:207). The last factor, "Reservations and parking", had two significant loadings, composed of two original variables: handling of telephone reservations and parking (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:207). These factors were then used in subsequent regression analysis and probability-of-return modeling.

The results highlight that customers' first and last impressions (pre-dining and post-dining perceptions) have a positive effect on return patronage particularly for customers who had dined at the restaurant before, which supports the argument that dining satisfaction is the customer's psychological state and is an aggregation of his/her dining experience at the restaurant. The results also confirm that service and food quality are strong contributory factors for return. Whilst satisfaction with reservations and parking arrangements may not be the more obvious predictors of return for diners, satisfaction with reservations and parking arrangements might prompt them to return (Kivela *et al.*, 2000:29).

The overall findings of this study suggest that satisfied diners are important, but not necessarily loyal diners. Thus, in conclusion, there is no single factor that stands out as being the determinant for loyalty, because loyalty, or return patronage, is seen to be the result of the interplay between several factors (Kivela *et al.*, 2000:29).

Markovic *et al.* (2010:181) attempted to determine restaurant service quality in Opatija Riviera, Croatia, using a modified DINESERV approach. The aims of the study were to: (a) assess customers' expectations and perceptions, (b) establish the significance of difference between perceived and expected service quality, (c) identify the number of dimensions for expectations and perceptions scales of the modified DINESERV model, and (d) test the reliability of the applied DINESERV model.

Markovic *et al.* (2010:191) used the modified DINESERV model to assess customers' expectations and perceptions and to establish the difference between perceived and expected service quality. Customers' expectations and perceptions were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale, where the higher the score, the greater the expectation (perception) of restaurant service. The lowest expectation item was "paying more than planned", which indicated that customers did not expect to pay more than they planned to.

On the other hand, customers' highest expectations were "accurate bill", "clean rest rooms", "clean, neat and appropriately dressed staff" and "clean dining areas". Thus, cleanliness is an important attribute that should be considered in meeting the customers' expectations. The overall mean score for service quality expectation items was 5.85. This score indicates rather high expectations of restaurant customers regarding the service quality (Markovic *et al.*, 2010:191).

Customer perceptions were then measured and the lowest perception items were "paying more than planned" and "expensive food items", which indicate that customers did not pay more than they planned to and that prices in restaurants were not high. On the other hand, customers' highest perceptions were "accurate bill", "easily readable menu", "error-free served order (food)" and "lean, neat and appropriately dressed staff". The overall mean score for service quality perceptions items was 5.49 which indicate high perceptions of customers regarding service quality. However, restaurant customers' expectations (5.85) were higher than their perceptions (5.49) of delivered service (Markovic *et al.*, 2010:191).

In another vein, the DINESERV gap was negative for all restaurant attributes. The narrowest gaps were for the attributes "expensive food items" and "returning to the restaurant". These low negative gap scores imply that there was a small difference between perceived and expected service. Thus, these restaurant attributes were close to the expected service quality. However, the widest gap was for the item "clean rest rooms", indicating that customers expected much cleaner rest rooms than they actually were. The overall DINESERV gap was -0.36 implying that restaurant service quality should be improved, because all restaurant attributes assessed were below customers' expectations (Markovic *et al.*, 2010:191).

Using factor analysis Markovic *et al.* (2010:191) concluded that customers' expectations and perceptions of restaurant service quality are best explained by

the following seven factors - “cleanliness and appearance of facilities and staff”, “assurance”, “individual attention”, “satisfaction and loyalty”, “basic demands”, “responsiveness” and “reliability”. The implication is that restaurant managers should consider clean and attractive restaurant facilities, timeliness of service, employees’ empathy and competence, personalised treatment of customers, accurate billing, error-free service and customer satisfaction and their positive recommendation to others when trying to meet customer expectations.

However, managers should not ignore the restaurant attributes that were assessed with the lowest expectations scores. These items might be less important when compared to other attributes but if the service price and staff empathy meet the expected minimum, customers will focus on other dimensions in the service quality evaluation process. Hence, managers should maintain at least this expected minimum of restaurant service (Markovic *et al.*, 2010:191).

From the preceding points, it can be concluded that the modified DINESERV instrument provides a quantified measure of what customers expect in a restaurant and captures the measurements of both expectations and perceptions attributes. As such, by administering the modified DINESERV questionnaire to restaurant customers, managers can get information on how customers view the restaurant’s quality and identify where the problems are (Markovic *et al.*, 2010:191).

Soriano (2002:1055) examined the attributes that influence customers’ decisions to return to a restaurant for another meal in Spanish restaurants. The objective was to identify customers’ expectations factors in restaurants. The Spanish restaurant sector was selected as an object of analysis because in the past decades, the restaurant sector in Spain has been growing consistently. This was largely due to the growth of the tourism sector which in turn created the demand for more restaurants and the need for restaurants to anticipate the future expectations of diners.

To determine the attributes mostly responsible for customers' return to a restaurant the study focused on four factors, namely (1) quality of food, (2) quality of service, (3) cost/value of the meal and (4) place. To determine the customers' decision to return to a restaurant, multiple range tests at 95 percent confidence interval were performed comparing the average composite total ratings of each of the four attributes. T-tests at 95 percent confidence interval were performed to determine the extent to which the four factors are a function of age (Soriano, 2002:1065).

A questionnaire was devised to measure customer expectations of a restaurant. Findings show that food was significantly more important than any of the other attributes; service, cost or place. After quality food, quality service and cost/value of the meal were the next two important reasons for customers' return to the restaurant. Place/ambience was rated last. However, similar significance did not show up in all age groups (Soriano, 2002:1062).

Food did not stand out as the most important reason for customers under 18 years of age. Thus food, service, cost and place were not significantly different from one another (Soriano, 2002:1062). Customers aged between 19 and 25 years showed more distinctive differences than customers under 18 years of age with food being more important than any of the remaining attributes. For customers between 26 and 39 years old food and service were not significantly different from each other though food was slightly more important than other attributes. Service and cost were not significantly different from each other, but service was more important than place. Cost and place were not significantly different from each other (Soriano, 2002:1062).

For customers between 40 and 59 years old, food, service and cost were not significantly different from one another, but food was significantly more important than place. All other comparisons showed no significant differences. Customers over 60 years of age showed the most distinct differences in their ratings, food

being the most important reason for customers' return to a restaurant. Male customers did not rate the attributes differently from the female customers (Soriano, 2002:1064).

In a nutshell, all four attributes, namely food, service, cost/value of the meal and place/ambience were significantly important for customer satisfaction. However, the food was the most important reason for customers to return to the restaurant since it is the most essential component of the restaurant experience. This is consistent with the traditional concept that food is the most important attribute for customers to visit a restaurant. Service was the next important reason, followed by cost/value of the meal and then lastly the place/ambience of the restaurant (Soriano, 2002:1065).

2.8 DINING EXPECTATION AND EXPERIENCE FRAMEWORK

Based on the literature presented above, a framework (Figure 2.8) has been developed to portray the constructs of the expectations and experiences of diners (the main concepts of this study) in formal full-service restaurants and how they interrelate to influence diner satisfaction in a restaurant. Customer experience in a restaurant is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, namely; food, service and ambience. If the experience exceeds expectations, customers experience satisfaction (return behaviour, loyalty and recommendations). If the experience is below expectations customers, experience dissatisfaction (dissonance behaviour, disloyalty, negative word of mouth). A cursory glance at the framework will help to give a clearer understanding of the concepts of dining expectations and experience.

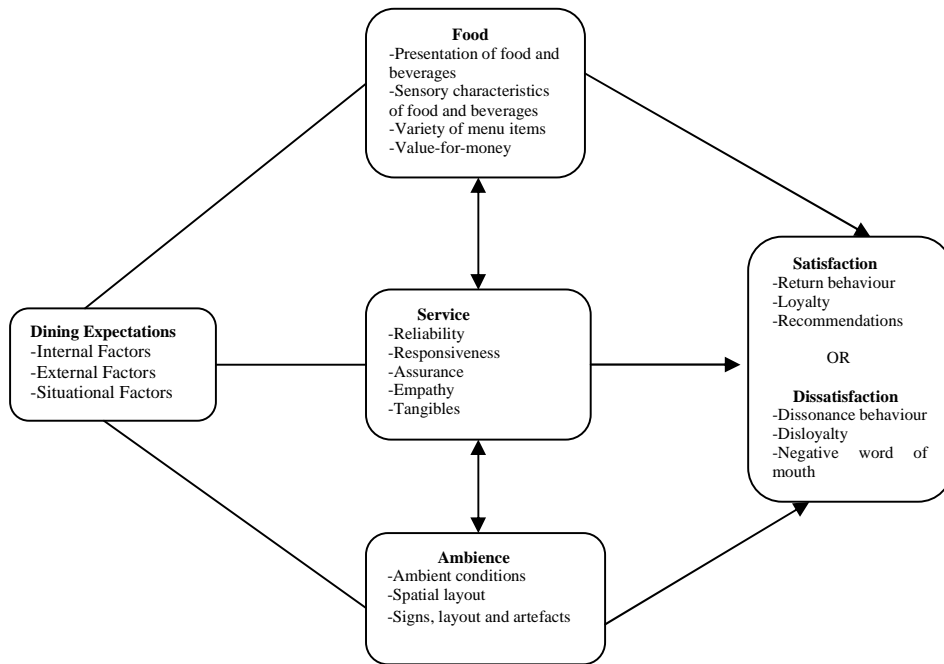


Figure 2.8: Constructs of the dining expectation, experience and their outcome

2.9 SUMMARY

In this chapter, a theoretical background to diners' expectations and experiences was presented. In this regard, ideas, theories and approaches postulated by other researchers were explained. The chapter points out that expectations and experiences of diners are complex constructs which involve numerous variables/attributes that are multifaceted. For instance, the meal experience is influenced by an array of factors that do not only relate to the food itself, but also to the individual diner and the context of eating in the restaurant. The chapter further highlights the relative importance of customer satisfaction in diners' experiences in restaurants and also reveals that past research agree that the experience provided to diners has an impact on restaurants as it is directly related to diner satisfaction and in some cases diner retention. To this effect, this

chapter has not only provided theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guide this study, but has also put previous research in context.

In the next chapter the research design and methodology employed in this study will be addressed.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter spells out the research design for this study, which encompasses the approach and techniques used to answer the research question. In addition, the chapter presents the methodology employed in this study which includes conceptualisation, operationalisation, sampling, data collection and data analysis. In this regard, the chapter does not only explicate the concepts used in this study, but also provides a description of the measuring instruments and how the instruments were administered to ensure reliability and validity of the results. The chapter also spells out the sample of this study in terms of formal full-service restaurants and respondents and how they were selected and approached. The chapter explains how the data were collected and analysed in order to answer the research question for this study. Finally, the chapter explicates the ethical considerations of the study. To this effect, it is clear that the point of departure in this study is the primary objective of the study; hence, it is addressed first in this chapter.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTION AND SUB-QUESTIONS

It is clear from the primary objective of the study in Chapter 1 that this study attempts to answer the question: what are the expectations and experiences of formal full-service restaurant diners in Port Elizabeth? To elicit comprehensive answers to this question, the researcher employed the sub-questions spelled out below. These questions are presented in line with the order used in the questionnaire (Addendum B).

- What is the influence of demographic variables on diners' expectations and experiences in Port Elizabeth formal full-service restaurants?
- What is the influence of non-demographic variables on diners' expectations and experiences in Port Elizabeth formal full-service restaurants?
- What is the influence of diners' reasons for selecting particular formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth on their expectations and experiences?
- What is the influence of restaurant choice on diners' expectations and experiences in Port Elizabeth formal full-service restaurants?
- Is there any significant difference between diners' experiences and expectations in Port Elizabeth formal full-service restaurants?
- What is the influence of different dining attributes on diners' overall expectations and experiences in Port Elizabeth formal full-service restaurants?

Based on the defined research questions, the study objectives are to: (a) assess diners' expectations and experiences, (b) establish the significance of the difference between expected and experienced service quality, (c) identify the number of dimensions for expectations and experiences scales of modified DINESERV model and (d) test the reliability of applied DINESERV model.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a plan of how to proceed in determining the nature of the relationship between variables (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000:46). It is a master plan that identifies the specific techniques and procedures that will be used to

collect and analyse data about a problem (Zikmund & d'Amico, 2001:133). In order to meet the researcher's main goals, the research design must be carefully compared to the research objectives to ensure that the sources of data, the data collected and the scheduling and costs involved are relevant (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000:46). For the purpose of this study, it is divided into research approach and research technique.

3.3.1 Research approach

This study is mainly quantitative with some qualitative elements. In quantitative research, an investigator relies on numerical data to test the relationships between the variables (Charles & Mertler, 2002:11). Quantitative research attempts to measure the precise count of some behaviour, knowledge, opinion or attitude (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:216). It involves looking at numbers or quantities of one or more variables of interest (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:94). Quantitative measures (survey) were used to gather data to test the responses to questions (Creswell, Ebersohn, Eloff, Ferreira, Ivankova, Jansen, Nieuwenhuis, Pietersen, Clark & Van der Westhuizen, 2007:255). In quantitative research, the data are collected using existing or pilot-tested, self-developed instruments (surveys, tests, scales) intended to yield highly reliable and valid scores (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:94).

Babbie and Mouton (2001:80) posit that descriptive studies use a quantitative research approach to elicit answers to the research questions and sub-questions. Descriptive studies may be employed to conduct a survey of people who have had practical experience of the problem to be studied (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:80-81). A descriptive study establishes only associations between variables (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:255) and in this study it will be used to establish the relationship between diners' expectations and diners' experiences.

The study incorporated elements of a qualitative research design by conducting personal observations. Although personal observations can enhance in-depth understanding, they sometimes tend to be subjective (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994:70).

3.3.2 Research technique

A field survey was used to collect data for analysis and interpretation. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:602) define survey research as the assessment of the current status, opinions, beliefs and attitudes by using questionnaires or interviews from a known population. In survey research, researchers select samples of respondents before administering questionnaires or conducting interviews to collect information about their attitudes, values, habits, ideas, demographics, feelings, opinions, perceptions, plans and beliefs (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:601).

Basically, surveys are performed to generate original information from a sample (Dooley, 1990:130; Babbie & Mouton, 2001:232). The purpose of a survey is to generalise from a sample to a population so that inferences can be made about some characteristic, attitude or behaviour of the population (Creswell, 2003:154). Several researchers (MacLaurin & MacLaurin, 2000:78; Oh, 2000:59; Spinelli & Canavos, 2000:30; Choi & Chu, 2001:280) have found surveys to be a powerful technique for eliciting information on diner research. The section below focuses on the research methodology.

3.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology can be defined as the analysis of the principles of methods, rules and postulates employed by a discipline (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:256). It is the systematic study of methods that are, can be, or have been applied within a discipline and the study or description of methods. It is a way to

systematically solve the research problem. It is generally a guideline for solving a problem, with specific components such as phases, tasks, methods, techniques and tools (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:256).

Below are specific components that were employed with regard to the research methodology of this study.

3.4.1 Conceptualisation

Figure 2.8, presented in Chapter 2, was used as the conceptual framework in this study. This framework and the research question attempt to portray that six attributes were measured in this study, namely (1) expectations of the quality of food (2) expectations of the quality of service (3) expectations of the ambience (4) experience with the quality of food (5) experience with the quality of service, and (6) experience with the ambience. Therefore, this section conceptualises the terms *food*, *service* and *ambience* to enable the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions about the diner's experiences of these attributes.

Food, in this study, refers to the tangible or touchable component of the dining experience (Payne-Palacio & Theis, 2005:507). In this regard, food includes prepared items as indicated on the menus of the participating restaurants. Expectations of, and experience with the quality of food were measured on the dimensions as spelled out by some authors (Clark & Wood, 1999:320; Brown, 2004:133-134; Spears & Gregoire, 2004:600), namely

- i. the presentation of the food and beverages, which includes decoration of the food and beverages on the plate or tray served to the diner;
- ii. sensory characteristics, which include elements such as colour, taste, smell, texture and temperature of the food and beverages;

iii. variety of the menu items or the food and beverage options available on the menu of the participating restaurants; and

iv. value for money, which refers to portion sizes of food and beverages offered at a particular price.

Service, in this study, refers to the intangible (untouchable or inconsumable) aspect of the dining-out experience. Expectations and experience with the quality of service in this study were measured using the dimensions of service identified by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985:47). These dimensions include:

i. Reliability: the ability to perform the promised service dependably.

ii. Assurance: knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence.

iii. Responsiveness: willingness to help diners and provide prompt service.

iv. Empathy: caring and individualised attention.

Ambience entails those elements that cause diners to relax and enjoy themselves during their visit to the participating restaurants. Ambience was measured based on the dimensions identified by Wakefield and Blodgett (1994:67). These dimensions are:

i. Ambient conditions (for example external and interior decor of the participating restaurants, background music and temperature, lighting as well as odour in the restaurant).

ii. Signs, symbols and artefacts (for example types of table decorations, linen, tableware, fixtures, furnishings, menu design and signage).

iii. Spatial layout and functionality (for example arrangement of chairs, entrances and exits, comfort of furniture, layout of walkways, tidiness in the restrooms, parking areas and location of the participating restaurants).

3.4.2 Operationalisation

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:98), operationalisation is the development of specific research procedures which result in empirical observations which represent concepts in the real world. As such, it involves the identification of characteristics making up the concept for purposes of measurement. Operationalisation deals with the question: “How will the researcher actually measure the concepts (variables) under study?” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:98). Operationalisation, therefore, delineates the measuring instruments used, namely questionnaires and a checklist for observations.

3.4.2.1 Observations

Personal observations can be used to gather data. In this study, to complement the self-administered questionnaires, the researcher also engaged in simple observations. In this regard, a checklist (Addendum C) was used to capture certain attributes of the aforesaid formal full-service restaurants such as seating capacity, hours of operation, type of clientele and patronage/turn-up over the study period. These observations were used to make recommendations to improve diners’ experiences. Composition of the checklist is shown in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Composition of the observation checklist

Observations	Concepts measured
Items 1 to 2	Seating capacity of restaurants and turn-up of diners
Items 3 to 6	Menu variety, prices of food and beverages, payment method and plate waste
Items 7 to 10	Cleanliness and behaviour of the staff, readiness of the manager and hours of operation of the restaurants
Items 11 to 15	Walkways, signs, menus and composition of restaurant diners

3.4.2.2 Questionnaire

Development of the questionnaire. A questionnaire was developed bearing in mind the research question and sub-questions of this study. The questionnaire consisted mainly of closed-ended questions and three open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions are structured questions that provide for a set of responses from which the respondent has to choose one or sometimes more than one response whilst in open-ended questions, a question is asked and space is provided for a word, phrase or even a comment (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:105). Bell (2005:17) distinguishes between the following six types of closed-ended questions: list, ranking, category, quantity, grid and scale, all of which were used for this study. Closed-ended questions were used mainly because data obtained from the administration of closed questions are easier to analyse since they guarantee uniform responses whilst open-ended questions were included to allow respondents to give their views and opinions about the dining experience (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:161).

A 5-point Likert scale was then employed to illustrate the degree of expectations. The scale ranged from “very low expectations – (1)”, “low expectations – (2)”, “indifferent – (3)”, “high expectations – (4)”, to “very high expectations – (5)”.

To be able to measure experiences a 5-point Likert-type scale was also employed in the questionnaire. The scale ranged from “very dissatisfied – (1)”, “fairly dissatisfied – (2)”, “unsure – (3)”, “fairly satisfied – (4)”, to “very satisfied – (5)”. The 5-point Likert-type scales for measuring expectations and experiences were drawn from DeVellis (1991:68-70).

DeVellis (1991:68) emphasises that the response options in a Likert-type scale should be worded in such a way that the difference in agreement between any adjacent pair of response options should be about the same as for any other adjacent pair of response options. Several authors (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994:19; Kivela *et al.*, 1999b:274; MacLaurin & MacLaurin, 2000:79; Choi & Chu, 2001:283; Park, 2004:93) find a Likert-type scale to be a useful tool in measuring customer experiences in a restaurant.

The questionnaire items were phrased in English, not only because the majority of diners were expected to be quite conversant in English, but also because it is one of the main languages spoken in the Eastern Cape province apart from IsiXhosa and Afrikaans. The questionnaire items formulated were clear, precise and short. Struwig and Stead (2001:38) point out that a questionnaire should be phrased in the language that the respondents will easily understand and should be precise to maintain interest and to ensure reliability of the responses. Respondents should be able to read and comprehend items in a questionnaire quickly and select or provide an answer without difficulty (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:237; Struwig & Stead, 2001:38).

Due to the use of the questionnaire positivism components were incorporated. Positivism sees social science as an organised method for combining deductive logic with precise empirical observations of individual behaviour in order to discover and confirm a set of probabilistic causal laws that can be used to predict general patterns of human activity (Neuman, 2000:66).

Validity. The validity of a measurement instrument is the extent to which the instrument measures what it is actually intended to measure (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:92). Validity refers to the degree to which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure (Creswell, 2007:34). In this study, three forms of validity, namely face, content and interpretive validity were incorporated into the questionnaire.

To incorporate face validity, the questionnaire was compiled based on the framework of this study and with reference to questionnaires used in previous studies (Dube *et al.*, 1994:42; Stevens *et al.*, 1995:59; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2001:31; Kivela *et al.*, 1999b:274; Oh, 2000:63; Choi & Chu, 2001:287; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2002b:62; Mohsin, 2003:27-28). Face validity is the extent to which, on the surface, an instrument seems to be measuring a particular characteristic (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:92). Face validity was useful in ensuring the co-operation of diners who were participating in the research study.

To incorporate content validity, the questionnaire was submitted to three subject experts in Hospitality Management at the University of Johannesburg after which it was pilot-tested among five diners in two formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth to ensure readability. The pre-test subjects comprised people to whom the questionnaire was at least appropriate to ensure content validity of the questionnaire (Babble & Mouton, 2001:244-245). Content validity connotes the extent to which a measurement instrument is a representative sample of the content area being measured (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:92). By utilising the content validity approach, the researcher measured the validity of the results obtained during the study by determining whether the questionnaire measured the characteristics it was supposed to measure.

Interpretive validity was incorporated by integrating expertise from the Department of Statistics at the University of Fort Hare during data analysis and

interpretation. Interpretive validity, according to Struwig and Stead (2001:144), refers to whether the information for a study is accurately analysed and reported.

Reliability – The reliability of a measurement instrument refers to the consistency with which a measuring instrument yields a certain result when the entity being measured has not changed (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:235). It is the extent to which an experiment, test or any measuring procedure yields the same result on repeated trials (Creswell, 2007:34). Without the agreement of independent observers able to replicate research procedures, or the ability to use research tools and procedures that yield consistent measurements, researchers would be unable to satisfactorily draw conclusions, formulate theories or make claims about the generalisation of their research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:92).

The researcher ensured reliability by using measures that have proven their reliability in previous research (Kivela *et al.*, 1999b:274; Cohen *et al.*, 2001:31; Oh, 2000:63; Choi & Chu, 2001:287; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2002b:62; Mohsin, 2005:56). Babbie and Mouton (2001:122) posit that one way to help ensure reliability in getting information from people is to use measures that have proven their reliability in previous research.

Reliability was also built in through the use of more than one method of data collection: questionnaires and observations. Babbie and Mouton (2001:122) contend that the use of multiple sources of data collection or triangulation in research is likely to increase the reliability of the study. The underlying assumption is that, because various methods complement each other, their respective shortcomings can be balanced out (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:122).

In another vein, reliability was ensured by attempts to combat sources of error such as researcher effects, respondent effects and context effects during data collection (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:122). To this effect, diners were requested to complete Section A of the questionnaire before the meal and Section B after the

meal since experiences can be better expressed immediately after a meal when diners still feel the afterglow of the meal (Oh, 2000:66). While some researchers suggest that there should be a sufficient time lag in measuring these constructs so as to minimise any confounding effects, the research to date supports the reliability of the sampling method (that is, sampling diners directly after the meal) (Kivela *et al.*, 1999b:274). For this reason Section B of the questionnaire was positioned on the back page.

Reliability was also incorporated by collecting data on weekdays, over weekends and across the month for a two-month period. This allowed to check variations in various attributes of the participating restaurants such as turn-up of diners, payment methods and seating capacity just to mention a few.

The questionnaire (Addendum B) consisted of section A and section B (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Composition of the questionnaire

Section of the questionnaire	Concepts measured
Section A: Questions 1–6	Demographics of the respondents
Section A: Question 7	Frequency of visits to the restaurants
Section A: Question 8	Reasons for choosing this restaurant
Section A: Question 9	Average rand spent per person at this restaurant?
Section A: Questions 10 and 11	The number of guests at the table and their relationship
Section A: Questions 12-41	Expectations with the quality of food, service and ambience
Section A: Questions 42-45	Overall perception with the quality of the food, level of service, ambience and the overall dining experience.

Section B: Questions 46-75	Experience with the quality of food, service and ambience
Section B: Question 76	Future behaviour of the respondents
Section B: Questions 77-80	Overall experience with the quality of the food, level of service, ambience and the overall dining experience.
Section B: Question 81	Recommendations on improving restaurant experience

3.4.2.2.i Pilot study

A pilot study is an excellent way to determine the feasibility of a study in order to test particular procedures, measurement instruments or methods of analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:111). However, the right size for a pilot study depends on how novel the research design and measure is (Katz, 2006:128). Even small pilot studies can be invaluable in designing a full-scale project. For this study, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with five diners in two formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth not included in the main study, to ensure comprehension and readability. The pilot study saved time by letting the investigator know the most effective approach in helping to solve the overall research problem (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:111).

In this regard, the respondents were requested to complete the draft questionnaire based on their dining expectations and experience in the specific restaurant. The respondents were requested to indicate whether or not they understood the instructions, the meaning of the questions and the meaning of words in the questionnaire. The suggestions made on the draft questionnaire were implemented in the final questionnaire. Below are assumptions that were employed about the completion of the questionnaire.

3.4.2.2.ii Assumptions made about the completion of the questionnaires

Firstly, the researcher assumed that the respondents would not only be honest, but that they would also understand the questionnaire items and provide accurate responses. To this effect, the researcher assumed that the respondents would be well conversant in English and the restaurant terminology used in the questionnaire. Secondly, the researcher assumed that the questionnaire of this study, which was compiled based on the questionnaires of previous studies (conducted in other countries), would be applicable to South Africa which is a multicultural and multi-ethnic country. Thirdly, the researcher assumed that the attributes identified in this study (food, service and ambience) would be evaluated similarly, where applicable, by different respondents. Thus assuming that, different individuals would have similar tastes and judgements of a particular food, service or ambience.

3.4.3 The sample

A sample is a group of subjects or respondents from whom the data are collected; often representative of a specific population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:11). It is a special subset of a population observed for making inferences about the nature of the total population itself. As such, a description of the sampling of formal full-service restaurants and sampling of the respondents is presented below.

3.4.3.1 Restaurants

A list of local registered full-service restaurants was obtained from the Nelson Mandela metropolitan municipality and also from the restaurant directories of South Africa contained on the websites: <http://www.dining-out.co.za> and <http://www.restaurants.co.za>. There were 34 registered full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth at the time of the study and the selection of survey restaurants

was based on the formality of service offered, that is, only formal full-service restaurants were selected.

For the purpose of 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. Most formal full-service restaurants will provide diner seating with gastronomy, sophisticated service, elegant ambience and liquor service. Usually, these restaurants will not permit casual wear (Feinstein & Stefanelli, 2008:19).

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. The names of the eight participating restaurants are not exposed for ethical/confidentiality reasons and are referred to as Restaurants A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H.

The restaurant manager or food and beverage manager from each mentioned restaurant was approached for oral permission to conduct the study at their premises among guests.

3.4.3.2 *Respondents*

The research sample included in the study entailed relevant data that were collected from 407 diners at the eight selected formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth. A sample of 407 was adequate (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:214), since the total population of formal full-service restaurant diners in Port Elizabeth exceeds 5 000 diners. Probability sampling was used since it is based on the principles of randomness and the probability theory, to accurately generalise to the population (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:172). With this method each element of the population had a known probability of being selected for the sample (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:183).

In order to guarantee proportional representation of each of the restaurants, proportional stratified random sampling was used to find the sample size for a particular restaurant taking into account the restaurant's seating capacity. A proportional sample of 22.5% of the total seating capacity per restaurant enabled the researcher to obtain at least 400 completed questionnaires (Table 3.3). The table below reflects how the total sample size of 407 formal full-service restaurant diners was calculated.

Table 3.3: Sample size per restaurant

RESTAURANT	SEATING CAPACITY	TOTAL RESTAURANT SAMPLE
Restaurant A	200	45
Restaurant B	300	68
Restaurant C	240	54
Restaurant D	200	45
Restaurant E	280	63
Restaurant F	180	41
Restaurant G	180	41
Restaurant H	220	50
TOTAL	1800	407

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 (Akinyele, 2010:85). As such, respondents were selected by systematically targeting every fourth diner who walked into the restaurant (Kivela *et al.*, 1999b:274) until the sample size for a particular restaurant was reached. It was better to target every fourth diner so

as to be discreet and avoid annoying other diners who were not participating in the survey (Kivela *et al.*, 1999b:274).

3.4.4 Data collection

Data were collected during December 2011 and January 2012 on weekdays, weekends and over these two months during lunch and dinner as recommended by various researchers (Akinyele, 2010:85; Kivela *et al.*, 1999b:274; Soriano, 2002:1060; Sulek & Hensley, 2004:239). This enabled the researcher to maximise chances of eliciting information from diners of different lifestyles, occupation, income, age and gender.

The following procedures were used to collect data. The researcher systematically approached every fourth diner 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 diners and requested them to participate. It was emphasised that the researcher would treat the information provided as confidential and anonymous. This was supported by a covering letter to the questionnaire (Addendum A).

Diners 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.

3.4.5 Data coding and analysis

The researcher coded the completed questionnaires and the data was entered on a spreadsheet and screened them for errors. Creswell *et al.* (2007:105) define coding as marking the segments of data with symbols, descriptive words or unique identifying names. Coding enables researchers to quickly retrieve and collect all the text and other data that they have associated with some thematic

idea so that the sorted bits can be examined together and different cases compared in that respect (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:105).

Then, the statistical analysis software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 22, 2013: Online) was used to analyse the data. Mayan (2001:21) provides the following explanation of data analysis: the process of observing patterns in the data, asking questions of those patterns, constructing conjectures, deliberately collecting data from specifically selected individuals on targeted topics, confirming or refuting those conjectures, then continuing analysis, asking additional questions, seeking more data, furthering the analysis by sorting, questioning, thinking, constructing and testing conjectures. The data entry and analysis were conducted by the Department of Statistics at the University of Fort Hare.

Descriptive statistics are commonly used in social science research to present quantitative data (Vaughan, 1998:5; Babbie & Mouton, 2001:459; Struwig & Stead, 2001:158). The numerical data were described by frequency-distribution using measures of central tendency (mean, median and mode scores and standard deviations). Each of these represented a summary of many individual observations that enabled the researcher to have a convenient and simple way to think about and present data (Struwig & Stead, 2001:158). This boils down to the fact that descriptive statistics are an appropriate method of analysis in this study since the results obtained will not be generalised following the use of the sampling criteria (Vaughan, 1998:5).

According to Malhotra (2004:426), frequency-distribution is a mathematical distribution with the objective to obtain a count of the number of responses associated with different values of one variable and to express these counts in percentage terms. A frequency distribution is a convenient way of looking at different values of a variable. A frequency table is easy to read and provides basic information, but sometimes this information may be too detailed and the

researcher must summarise it by using descriptive statistics (Malhotra, 2004:426).

For quantification or testing of the relationship between diners' expectations and experiences a statistical method known as correlation analysis was then used to determine whether or not a relationship, other than chance, existed between diners' expectations and experiences. Correlation analysis quantifies the degree of correlation between two or more variables and is normally performed to test the association/relationship of the joint frequency of two or more variables in a study (Kivela *et al.*, 1999b:277). Expectations of food were correlated with experiences of food, expectations of service were correlated with experiences of service and expectations of ambience were correlated with experiences of ambience (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4: Composition of the checklists for correlation analysis

Variable	Experiences (food)	Results
Expectations (food)	Pearson Correlation, r Sig.(2-tailed) N	Accept/Reject

Variable	Experiences (service)	Results
Expectations (service)	Pearson Correlation, r Sig.(2-tailed) N	Accept/Reject

Variable	Experiences (ambience)	Results
Expectations (ambience)	Pearson Correlation, r Sig.(2-tailed) N	Accept/Reject

The main result of a correlation is called the correlation coefficient (or 'r') and ranges from -1 to +1 (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:220). The closer r is to +1 or -1, the more closely the two variables are related. If r is close to 0, it means there is no relationship between the variables. If r is positive, it means that as one variable

gets larger the other also gets larger. If r is negative it means that as one gets larger, the other gets smaller (often called an “inverse” correlation). Generally, correlations above 0.80 are considered high (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:218).

For quantification or testing of the relationship between diners’ expectations and experiences a statistical method known as regression analysis was then used to determine whether or not a relationship, other than chance, existed between diners’ expectations and experiences. Regression analysis is a method of data analysis that may be appropriate whenever a quantitative variable (the dependent or criterion variable) is to be examined in relationship to any other factors (expressed as independent or predictor variables). Relationships may be nonlinear, independent variables may be quantitative or qualitative, and one can examine the effects of a single variable or multiple variables with or without the effects of other variables taken into account (Cohen, Marion & Morrison (2011:39).

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Whenever human beings or other creatures with the potential to think, feel and experience physical or psychological distress are the focus of investigation there is a need to look at the ethical implications of what we are proposing to do (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:101). This study was conducted according to the research ethics guidelines as given by Leedy and Ormrod (2010:101) and the following ethical issues were considered: protection from harm, informed consent, right to privacy and honesty with professional colleagues.

3.5.1 Protection from harm

The researcher did not expose research participants to unnecessary physical or psychological harm. When a study involves human beings, the general rule of thumb is that the risk involved in participating in a study should not be

appreciably greater than the normal risks of day-to-day living. Respondents should not risk losing life or limb, nor should they be subjected to unusual stress, embarrassment or loss of self-esteem (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:101). Thus, during the study the researcher endeavoured to be honest, respectful and sympathetic towards all respondents. Furthermore, the study did not include sensitive questions that could cause embarrassment or uncomfortable feelings to respondents.

3.5.2 Informed consent

Respondents were intentionally recruited for participation and they were told about the nature of the study to be conducted and given the choice of either participating or not participating. Permission was obtained from restaurants and consent was obtained from respondents. Therefore, the restaurants and respondents engaged were only those that expressed interest to participate in this study. In a nutshell, participation in this study was voluntarily since it was based on oral consent.

3.5.3 Right to privacy

Any research study involving human beings should respect respondents' right to privacy (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:102). Both the researcher and respondent had a clear understanding of the confidentiality of the results and findings of the study (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:220). As such, all respondents' information and responses shared during the study were kept private and the results were presented in an anonymous manner in order to protect the identities of the respondents. Thus, the researcher kept the nature and quality of respondents' performance confidential since it was not necessary to identify the name or surname of the respondents on the questionnaire.

3.5.4 Honesty with professional colleagues

The researcher reported the findings in a complete and honest fashion, without misrepresenting what was done or intentionally misleading others about the nature of the findings. Under no circumstances did the researcher fabricate data to support a particular conclusion, no matter how seemingly “noble” that conclusion was.

3.6 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the research design and methodology used in this study were explained. In terms of the research design, the chapter points out that the survey technique was employed to elicit answers to the research questions, bearing in mind that this study is quantitative in nature. Regarding the research methodology, this chapter conceptualised the salient concepts of this study and described the instruments (questionnaire and checklist for observations) used. In addition, the chapter spelled out how the data were collected and analysed. As part of the summary, the researcher presents (in Table 3.5 below) the salient concepts of this study as well as the conceptualisation, operationalisation, data collection and data analysis to be able to draw meaningful conclusions.

In the next chapter, the results that were obtained are presented and discussed.

Table 3.5: Summary of the research methodology

Key Attributes	Conceptualisation	Operationalisation (Measuring instruments)	Data Collection
Food and Beverages	Tangible component of the dining experience which includes prepared food items as indicated on the menu of the participating restaurants and relates to the concept quality of the food	Questionnaire- section A: Questions 12 to 25 Questionnaire- section B: Questions 46 to 59 Checklist – items 3, 4 ,5 and 6	The respondents completed questionnaires The researcher observed menu variety, prices, payment method and plate waste
Service	An intangible aspect of the dining experience, which includes preparation of the food and behaviour of the restaurant staff. Service in this study relates to the concept quality of service.	Questionnaire - section A: Questions 26 to 32 Questionnaire - section B: Questions 60 to 66 Checklist - items 7,8,9 and 10	The respondents completed questionnaires The researcher observed the appearance and behaviour of staff, presence of the manager and hours of operation of the restaurants
Ambience	The atmosphere in which the food is served	Questionnaire – section A: Questions 33 to 41 Questionnaire – section B: Questions 67 to 75 Checklist – items 11, 12 , 13 and 14	The respondents completed questionnaires The researcher observed walkways, menu design as well as signs for smoking sections and restrooms.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the results obtained in the study and the discussion thereof. The chapter starts with a description of the profiles of the participating restaurants and the response rate of respondents, after which descriptive statistics are used to establish the relationship between overall expectations and experiences of diners with different demographic and non-demographic variables. The chapter also determines the influence of demographic and non-demographic variables on diners' expectations and experiences by performing t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) after which it spells out diners' reasons for selecting a particular restaurant and the influence of reasons for selecting a particular restaurant on diners' expectations and experiences by performing t-tests and one-way ANOVA. The chapter further delineates the expectations and experiences of diners in the participating restaurants and the influence of participating restaurants on diners' expectations and experiences by also performing t-tests and one-way ANOVA for the different restaurants. In addition, gap analysis is used to compare diners' experiences with their expectations to establish customers' satisfaction after which correlation coefficient and regression analysis are used to investigate the relationship of overall expectations with the three dining attributes and the relationship of overall experiences with the three dining attributes and overall expectations. The chapter also explicates diners' suggestions on improving restaurant experiences. Finally, the chapter concludes by evaluating the reliability of the results.

The results are presented in the form of frequencies and percentages as well as mean and standard deviation scores, as applicable. The frequencies and percentages of the results are presented in data table format. Data tables are

often convenient and helpful to present and clarify information (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:41). They allow the reader to rapidly identify what information is available and quickly see where important results are located (Durbin, 2004:1234).

The names of the eight participating restaurants are not exposed for ethical/confidentiality reasons and are referred to as Restaurants A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H (see section 3.4.3.1).

4.2 PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPATING RESTAURANTS

The profiles of the restaurants presented here are based on the checklist for observations (Addendum C) and include seating capacity, turn-up/patronage of diners, menu prices, methods of payment, location, appearance and behaviour of the staff, the manager's readiness to assist diners, hours of operation of the restaurant, spacing of aisles or walkways, signs for smoking and non-smoking diners, signs for restrooms, menu variety and design, and composition of diners in terms of ethnicity/type. The locations of restaurants were obtained from the Nelson Mandela metropolitan municipality and also from the restaurant directories of South Africa (see section 3.4.3.1).

Restaurant A is located three kilometres north from the city centre and the airport and two kilometres from the Blue Flag beaches. The restaurant has a seating capacity of 220. The restaurant is five kilometres south of Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium, Schotia Safaris Private Game Reserve, Green Acres Shopping Centre and Boardwalk Casino and Entertainment Complex. The menu includes chicken served with dumplings, roast leg of lamb, roast potatoes, beef tongue, beetroot jelly, pumpkin fritters, lemonade and a selection of desserts.

Restaurant B is located in Summerstrand on the south beachfront. The restaurant is located three kilometres from Algoa Bay. It has a seating capacity of 180. The restaurant has a menu which includes a tiramisu mix and pre-roasted

almonds. However, the restaurant specialises in vegetarian recipes especially pasta dishes.

Restaurant C is located in the opposite outskirts of Green Acres Shopping Centre. It has a seating capacity of 180 and mainly specialises in seafood especially fish.

Situated 3 kilometres away from the Paxton Hotel above Humewood road is Restaurant D. The restaurant has a seating capacity of 280. Most of the clientele are corporate diners and those visiting the restaurants to celebrate. The restaurant mainly serves steaks, venison, fresh line fish, prawns and crayfish.

Restaurant E is located a kilometre from Port Elizabeth airport and 500 metres from the main Port Elizabeth beaches. It has a seating capacity of 200. It is a colonial style restaurant with a timber ceiling and flooring. The restaurant is equipped with a gas fire place where it prepares gourmet South African dishes with international flare, complimented with local and international wines. Jazz is often performed on Sunday evenings.

Restaurant F is nestled on the shores of Nelson Mandela Bay, between the Indian Ocean and the Humewood Links Golf Course. The restaurant has a seating capacity of 300. It has Asian artefacts with sand blasted glass screens between tables, carved wooden panels and Chinese embroidered lanterns filling the large interior. The menu includes calamari in three different sauces with ginger and garlic.

Situated in the suburban side of central Port Elizabeth, Restaurant G is an Indian restaurant with a seating capacity of 200. The interior walls are blue in colour. The restaurant has check tablecloths with blue, gold and green colours. The restaurant bar offers wines displayed in baskets. The menu includes curries and seafood as well as several meat dishes. There is also a selection of salads and

Sole Bon Femme, topped with prawns and asparagus. The location of Restaurant G close to the rail road poses a security concern/threat, especially at night. This might be the reason why this restaurant closes earlier at night (20:30 pm) unlike other restaurants that operate until 23:00 pm.

Right in the centre of Richmond Hill on the corner of Stanley and Bain streets, is Restaurant H. The restaurant has a seating capacity of 240 and mainly specialises in grilled menus. The restaurant is close to the police station; hence, security is not a major concern.

In spite of different hours of operation, the menus of the participating restaurants offer breakfast, lunch, dinner and a variety of snacks and beverages (alcoholic and non-alcoholic). Prices of food and beverages vary among these restaurants depending, among others, on the cost of production, the characteristics of the target clientele and what other restaurants are charging for the same type of food.

However, prices of food and beverages at Restaurant B are higher compared to the other seven restaurants. Diners pay either by cash, credit or debit cards at all eight restaurants. Diners who patronise the eight restaurants are from different walks of life; manifested from the way they behave, dress, talk, purchase and make payments.

In all eight restaurants, turn-up or patronage of diners was high over week-ends and month-ends compared to weekdays and mid months. The majority of diners may be exempted from work over week-ends and are likely to have more disposable financial means over month-ends.

4.2.1 Response rate

In total, 407 respondents filled in the questionnaires. Four hundred respondents returned complete questionnaires, while seven respondents returned incomplete questionnaires. In this regard, the results of this study are based on 400 questionnaires which concur with the targeted sample size (see section 3.4.3.2). Table 4.1 depicts the response rate in different restaurants.

Table 4.1: 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%

The researcher handed out questionnaires and was therefore in a position to get first-hand information about 18 respondents who were unwilling to complete the questionnaires. The reasons for the reluctance to complete the questionnaires were due to respondents either being not sober or rushed, or because they felt the questionnaire was too long, despite the fact that it was explained to them that it could be completed in about eight minutes as established in the pilot study.

In addition, some respondents argued that they only had beverages, and did not order any food to be able to complete the questionnaire containing a section on the quality of the food. Other respondents indicated that they were at the restaurant to relax and not to complete the questionnaire.

4.3 DEMOGRAPHICS

4.3.1 Demographic profile of the respondents

The demographic characteristics of diners can influence the type of restaurant and food they choose (Bowie & Buttle, 2006:68). As such, restaurateurs have to be familiar with the demographic characteristics of their clients in order to make effective marketing, promotional and operational decisions to raise customer expectations (Kotler & Keller, 2006:55). In view of this, Table 4.2 reflects the demographic composition of the respondents. The table also reflects the means and standard deviations for respondents with different demographic variables.

Table 4.2: Expectations and experiences of respondents with different demographic variables

Demographic variables	n	%	Overall expectations		Overall experiences	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Gender						
Male	183	45.75	4.14	0.76	4.41	0.56
Female	217	54.25	4.02	0.86	4.33	0.69
Age						
≤24	10	2.50	4.17	0.81	4.33	0.63
25-34	27	6.75	3.91	0.92	4.26	0.76
35-44	63	15.75	3.96	0.74	4.37	0.62
45-54	201	50.25	4.20	0.83	4.41	0.57
55-64	86	21.50	4.01	0.87	4.53	0.51
≥65	13	3.25	3.89	0.73	4.17	0.44
Monthly income						
≤R6000	59	14.75	3.76	0.79	4.01	0.64
R6001-R11999	221	55.25	3.86	0.85	4.19	0.63
≥R12000	120	30.00	3.99	0.92	4.25	0.68
Education						
No schooling	10	2.50	3.93	0.80	4.28	0.62
Primary school	7	1.75	4.01	0.77	4.04	0.76
High school	93	23.25	4.07	0.84	4.39	0.45
Tertiary Diploma	171	42.75	4.25	1.03	4.21	0.53
Tertiary Degree	96	24.00	3.96	0.70	4.39	0.67
Other,	23	5.75	3.82	0.63	4.45	0.51
Home language						
Afrikaans	27	6.75	3.86	0.81	4.08	0.65
English	221	55.25	3.94	0.84	4.26	0.66
IsiXhosa	121	30.25	3.98	0.64	3.84	0.72
IsiZulu	8	2.00	3.76	0.32	4.18	0.59
Other	23	5.75	3.69	0.47	3.91	0.49
All	400	100	3.96	0.77	4.24	0.61

Descriptive statistics form the basis of quantitative data analysis and describe subject data information in a manner that can be less subjectively evaluated by others (Durbin, 2004:1234). They also provide a powerful summary that may enable comparisons across people and/or units (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:41).

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 4.2). 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 4.2 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 (diners who spoke a home language other than Afrikaans, English, IsiZulu and IsiXhosa) and 4.25 (diners 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).

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 (2005:4) who found that respondents with a tertiary qualification recorded the highest expectations. Furthermore, tertiary educated people are much more likely to patronise restaurants than their less educated counterparts (Mehta & Maniam, 2002:42). Hence, 42.75% of the respondents had a tertiary diploma in this study (see Table 4.2). Consequently, determinants in restaurant selection vary across the level of education of the consumer (Spielberg, 2005:4).

Average standard deviations varied between 0.77 (overall expectations) and 0.61 (overall experiences). As such, respondents' expectation and experience scores

for gender, age, monthly income, education and home language were clustered closely to the average overall expectations and overall experiences means for these demographic variables.

In the same vein, respondents' overall mean experience scores varied between 3.84 (diners who spoke IsiXhosa) and 4.53 (diners in the age group 55 to 64 years). Respondents in the age group 55 to 64 years recorded the highest overall mean experience score (4.53) whilst those who spoke IsiXhosa recorded the lowest overall mean experience score (3.84). Respondents with a high school qualification and those with a tertiary degree reported the same overall mean experience score (4.39). The findings regarding respondents in the age group 55 to 64 years recording the highest overall mean experience score well syncs with the findings by Siegel (2002:19) who found that respondents in the age group 55 to 64 years recorded the highest experience score.

Furthermore, the fact that half of the diners in this study fell in the age group 45 to 54 years (see Table 4.2) means that they were born between 1959 and 1968 which is part of Generation X. In a study by Siegel (2002:19) most of the diners 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 (Siegel, 2002:19) and tend to prefer dining at full-service restaurants (Noble & Schewe, 2003:983). Consequently, Generation X tends to spend more money than younger and older adults when dining out leading to higher expectations (Siegel, 2002:19).

On the other hand, Generation Y, or those born after 1978, tends to eat more often at quick-service and pizza restaurants (Schewe & Noble, 2000:138; Noble & Schewe, 2003:983). The low number of diners (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 *et al.*, 2000: 23).

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 (Kivela *et al.*, 2000:24). 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 (Schewe & Noble, 2000:138).

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, 2010:11). Hence, its significance to diners' expectations and experiences cannot be overemphasised (Zheng, 2010:85).

In order to determine whether the differences in demographic variables were significant in food and beverage choice, service, ambience levels, overall expectations and experiences in formal full-service restaurants, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for gender and t-tests for age, monthly income, education and home language were calculated. Table 4.3 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, overall expectations and overall experiences reported by the different demographic categories.

Table 4.3: Influence of demographic variables on diners' expectations and experiences

Demographic variables	p-values							
	Food and beverage		Service		Ambience		Overall expect	Overall experi
	Expect	Experi	Expect	Experi	Expect	Experi		
Gender	0.0232*	0.1271	0.0473*	0.0292*	0.3001	0.1836	0.4538	0.5164
Age	0.0341*	0.0120*	0.2644	0.0441*	0.2167	0.2150	0.0096*	0.0123*
Monthly income	0.0484*	0.0288*	0.0165*	0.0374*	0.1759	0.3210	0.0079*	0.0324*
Education	0.0247*	0.0310*	0.0195*	0.0101*	0.420	0.2499	0.0460*	0.0406*
Home language	0.4110	0.1946	0.3720	0.5536	0.6518	0.4837	0.5877	0.5772

*Indicates a significant difference ($p < 0.05$)

Key

Expect represents expectations

Experi represents experiences

4.3.1.1 Gender

It is clear from Table 4.3 that diners of different genders rated their expectations ($p=0.0232$) of food and beverage, expectations ($p=0.0473$) and experiences ($p=0.0292$) of service significantly differently ($p < 0.05$). The results vindicate the findings of Mohsin (2005:54) and Kotler and Keller (2006:55) who found that diners of different genders rated their expectations of food and beverage, and their expectations and experiences of service significantly differently ($p < 0.05$). 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 diners (Blackwell, Miniard & Angel, 2001: 29). Consequently, men and women tend to have different attitudinal and behavioural orientations in their buying behaviour (Homburg & Giering, 2001:48; Noble, Griffith & Adjei, 2006:27).

Kivela *et al.* (2000:25) also found a significant difference in expectations of food and expectations and experiences of the level of service calculated for diners 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 and experiences of the level of service (Kotler & Keller, 2006:55). Female diners tend to have a low budget when dining out and they therefore also tend to alter or lower their expectations (Kivela *et al.*, 2000:25). As such, diners' expectations of food and beverage and expectations and experiences of the level of service vary according to gender (Kotler & Keller, 2006:55).

However, there were no significant differences in the mean experiences ($p=0.1271$) of food and beverage, expectations ($p=0.3001$) and experiences ($p=0.1836$) of ambience, overall expectations ($p=0.4538$) and overall experiences ($p=0.5164$) calculated for diners of different genders. The results tone with the findings of Kivela *et al.* (2000:27), Soriano (2002:1065) and Upadhyay, Singh and Thomas (2007:19), who found no significant difference ($p<0.05$) in the mean experiences of food and beverage, ambience and overall expectations and experiences calculated for diners of different genders. Chow, Lau, Lo, Sha and Yun (2007:705-706) also found no significant difference in overall expectations for diners of different genders in restaurants in China.

4.3.1.2 Age

Table 4.3 further shows that diners from different age groups rated their expectations ($p=0.0341$) and experiences ($p=0.0120$) of food and beverage, experiences of service ($p=0.0441$), overall expectations ($p=0.0096$) and overall experiences ($p=0.0123$) significantly differently ($p<0.05$) and diners in the 45 to 54 age group had higher expectations than diners in other age groups. The results are similar to the studies by several authors (Auty, 1992:336; Kivela, 1997:121; Meredith, Schewe & Karlovich, 2002:63; Folkman & Bellenger, 2003:57; Mohsin, 2005:54) who found significant differences in the mean expectations and experiences of food and beverage and service ($p<0.05$) calculated for diners from different age groups with diners in the 45 to 54 age group having higher expectations.

The significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in the mean expectations and experiences of food and beverage and service calculated for diners from different age groups may be attributed to the fact that diners 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.*, 2002:63; Folkman & Bellenger, 2003:57; Mohsin, 2005:54). As these diners spend more money they tend to expect more value for money leading to a significant difference in the means for food and beverage, service experience and overall expectations and experience (Kivela, 1997:121; Meredith *et al.*, 2002:63; Folkman & Bellenger, 2003:57; Mohsin, 2005:54). Consequently, determinants in food and beverage, service, overall expectations and experiences vary across age groups (Siegel, 2002:19) and diners from different age groups often have different service expectations (Davis, 2008:248; Jordaan, 2012:6).

4.3.1.3 *Monthly income*

Diners from different monthly income groups rated their expectations ($p = 0.0484$) and experiences ($p = 0.0288$) of food and beverage, expectations ($p = 0.0165$) and experiences ($p = 0.0374$) of service, overall expectations ($p = 0.0079$) and overall experiences ($p = 0.0324$) significantly different ($p < 0.05$) and diners in the monthly income group equal to or above R 12 000 had higher expectations than diners in other monthly income groups. The results are in line with previous studies that found expectations and experiences of food and beverage, service and overall expectations and experiences to vary according to income (Auty, 1992:337; Yüksel & Yüksel, 2002a:326). Turgeon and Pastinelli (2002:251) also noted that customers from different monthly income groups rated their overall expectations and experiences significantly different in full-service restaurants.

In their study on formal full-service restaurants, Liu and Jang (2009a:346) and Bowie and Buttle (2006:58) found a significant difference in overall expectations and experiences of diners from different monthly income groups. Diners 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 and experiences of diners from different monthly income groups (Liu & Jang, 2009a:346).

Kivela *et al.* (1999b: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 (Liu & Jang, 2009a:346). Consequently, determinants in diners' expectations and experiences of food and beverage, service, overall expectations and experiences vary across income levels (Kivela *et al.*, 1999b:274).

4.3.1.4 Education

Table 4.3 further shows that diners with different levels of education rated their expectations ($p=0.0247$) and experiences ($p=0.0310$) of food and beverage, expectations ($p=0.0195$) and experiences ($p=0.0101$) for service, overall expectations ($p=0.0460$) and experiences ($p=0.0406$) significantly different ($p<0.05$). Diners with a tertiary degree had higher overall expectations than diners with other levels of education. The results are in line with studies by Zheng (2010:85) and Bowie and Buttle (2006:58) who found significant differences in expectations and experiences of food and beverage, service, overall expectations and experiences of diners with different levels of education.

Spielberg (2005:4) posits that education influences people's expectations and shapes their values, beliefs, attitudes, interests, activities and lifestyle. As diners 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 (Bowie & Buttle, 2006:58).

The preceding points show that as people's level of education increases so do their expectations and experiences of food and beverage and level of restaurant service (Turgeon & Pastinelli 2002:251). Consequently, determinants in diners' expectations and experiences of food and beverage, service, overall expectations and experiences vary according to diners' level of education (Spielberg, 2005:4).

4.3.1.5 *Language*

It is clear from Table 4.3 that there were no significant differences in the means ($p < 0.05$) calculated for diners who made use of different languages. The results are similar to the studies by Bowie and Buttle (2006:58) who assert that home language has no significant influence on diners' expectations and experiences. As such, diners' expectations and experiences do not vary with diners' home language (Spielberg, 2005:4). However, the results deviate from the findings of various scholars (Josiam & Monteiro, 2004:19; Verma, Pullman & Goodale, 1999:82) who found restaurant selection behaviour to vary according to home language and cultural groups.

Nonetheless, Xuemin and Xining (2006:169) assert that it is not only the demographic variables that can influence diners' expectations and experiences. Non-demographic variables also tend to influence diners' expectations and experiences (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2003:16). By understanding non-demographic characteristics of customers, restaurants can better deliver customer satisfaction (Bowie & Buttle, 2006:55).

The next section presents the non-demographic information of respondents and the influence of non-demographic variables on diners' overall expectations and experiences.

4.3.2 Non-demographics

4.3.2.1 Non-demographic profile of respondents

Non-demographic information is important when analysing consumer behaviour (Bowie & Buttle, 2006:58). It can help to explain attitudinal and behavioural responses such as dissatisfaction, complaining and switching to other providers (Xia, Monroe & Cox, 2004:8). In view of this, Table 4.4 reflects some non-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The table also reflects the means and standard deviations for respondents with different non-demographic variables.

Table 4.4: Expectations and experiences of respondents with different non-demographic variables

Non-demographic variables	n	%	Overall expectations		Overall experiences	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Frequency in the past six months						
0-1	108	27	4.47	1.14	4.04	0.55
2-4	178	44.5	4.27	0.61	4.21	0.68
5-7	65	16.2	4.23	0.72	4.19	0.63
8-10	19	4.8	4.17	0.68	4.14	0.61
>10	30	7.5	3.97	0.53	4.07	0.60
Average rand spent per person						
R101-R199	71	17.8	4.14	0.71	4.26	0.66
R200-R299	205	51.2	4.26	0.79	4.19	0.74
R300-R399	102	25.5	4.45	0.73	4.28	0.64
>R399	22	5.5	4.53	1.03	4.34	0.71
Occupation						
Business, commerce & finance	74	18.5	4.05	0.69	4.13	0.58
Retail, tourism & hospitality	36	9	4.16	0.73	4.26	0.67
Education	23	5.7	4.22	0.63	4.36	0.52
Science & medicine	76	19	4.11	0.85	4.29	0.72
Engineering & technology	45	11.2	4.33	0.57	4.06	0.69
Legal	24	6	4.26	0.78	4.22	0.61
Sports, leisure & recreation	35	8.8	4.01	0.81	4.29	0.77
Pensioner	13	3.3	4.42	0.94	4.35	0.86
Government	28	7	4.14	0.65	4.15	0.73
Student	12	3	4.49	1.11	4.35	0.91
Self employed	20	5	4.35	0.64	4.22	0.68
Other,	14	3.5	4.18	0.77	4.12	0.63
All	400	100	4.25	0.77	4.22	0.68

An initial glance at the data reveals that 44.5% of the respondents frequented restaurants at different intervals two to four times in the previous six months and

51.2% of the respondents spent on average, R200 to R299 per person. Table 4.4 further shows that 18.5% of the respondents held occupations in business, commerce and finance.

The non-demographic information shows that respondents' overall mean expectation scores varied from 3.97 (diners who frequented restaurants at different intervals more than 10 times in the past six months) to 4.53 (diners with an average rand spent per person of more than R399). Those who spent more than R399 had the highest overall mean expectation score (4.53) whilst those who frequented restaurants at different intervals more than 10 times in the previous six months had the lowest overall mean expectation score (3.97).

Average standard deviations varied between 0.77 (overall expectations) and 0.68 (overall experiences). As such, respondents' expectation and experience scores for frequency in the previous six months, average rand spent per person and occupation were clustered closely to the average overall expectations and overall experiences means for these non-demographic variables.

In the same vein, respondents' overall mean experience scores varied between 4.04 (diners who frequented restaurants at different intervals nil to one time in the past six months) and 4.36 (diners who held occupations in education). Respondents with an occupation in education reported the highest overall mean experience score (4.36). Pensioners and students reported the same overall mean experience score (4.35).

In order to determine whether the differences in non-demographic variables were significant to food and beverage, service, ambience levels, overall expectations and experiences in formal full-service restaurants, t-tests and one-way ANOVA were calculated for the different non-demographic categories of respondents. Table 4.5 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, overall expectations and overall experiences reported by the different non-demographic categories.

Table 4.5: Influence of non-demographic variables on diners' expectations and experiences

Non-demographic variables	p-values							
	Food and beverage		Service		Ambience		Overall expect	Overall experi
	Expect	Experi	Expect	Experi	Expect	Experi		
Frequency in the past six months	0.0201*	0.0237*	0.0055*	0.0100*	0.8031	0.7056	0.0198*	0.0316*
Average rand spent per person	0.0413*	0.0228*	0.0107*	0.0192*	0.0491*	0.0354*	0.0481*	0.0360*
Occupation	0.0274*	0.3006	0.0176*	0.1859	0.6925	0.4382	0.0304*	0.4131

*Indicates a significant difference ($p < 0.05$)

Key

Expect represents expectations

Experi represents experiences

4.3.2.1.i Frequency in the past six months

Table 4.5 reveals that diners who frequented restaurants at different intervals in the previous six months rated their expectations ($p=0.0201$) and experiences ($p=0.0237$) of food and beverages, expectations ($p=0.0055$) and experiences ($p=0.0100$) of service, overall expectations ($p=0.0198$) and experiences ($p=0.0316$) significantly different ($p < 0.05$). Diners who frequented restaurants nil to one time had higher expectations than diners who frequented restaurants at different intervals more than nil to one time whilst those who frequented restaurants at different intervals two to four times had higher experiences than other diners that frequented restaurants other than two to four times.

The results are similar to studies by Yu and Dean (2001:239) and Bowie and Buttle (2006:58) who noted significant differences in expectations and experiences of food and beverages, level of service, overall expectations and experiences of diners who frequented restaurants at different intervals in the previous periods. The significant difference in the mean expectations and experiences of food and beverages, service, overall expectations and

experiences for diners with different frequencies at different intervals in the previous six months might be attributed to the fact that diners frequenting restaurants for the first time tend to have artificial hopes and high expectations (Yu & Dean, 2001:239). Diners frequenting restaurants for the first time tend to raise their expectations with regard to quality, good service and quality of food, clean interiors, while seeking a better value for money (Klara, 2001:22).

However, repeat diners tend to form more realistic expectations of the restaurants' offerings over time through direct experience thereby lowering their expectations (Geissler & Rucks, 2011:9). Repeat diners also tend to be more forgiving about the service when they experience a failure (Namkung *et al.*, 2010:2). Consequently, determinants in diners' expectations and experiences of food and beverage, service, overall expectations and experiences depend on how frequently diners visit a restaurant (Kivela *et al.*, 1999b:274).

4.3.2.1.ii *Average rand spent per person*

Table 4.5 further depicts that diners who spent different rand values rated their expectations ($p=0.0413$) and experiences ($p=0.0228$) of food and beverage, expectations ($p=0.0107$) and experiences ($p=0.0192$) of service, expectations ($p=0.0491$) and experiences ($p=0.0354$) of ambience, overall expectations ($p=0.0481$) and overall experiences ($p=0.0360$) significantly different ($p<0.05$). Diners who spent more than R399 had higher expectations and experiences than diners who spent less than R399.

The results are similar to the findings by Bei and Chiao (2001:133) who found that diners whose average rand spent values varied rated food and beverage, service, ambience, overall expectations and experiences significantly different. The significant differences in expectations and experiences of food and beverage, expectations and experiences of service, expectations and experiences of ambience, overall expectations and overall experiences might be

attributed to the fact that if the price is high, customers are likely to expect high quality food and beverage, service and ambience, or else it can induce a sense of being “ripped off” (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006:6). Likewise, if the price is low, customers may question the ability of the restaurant to deliver product and service quality (Geissler & Rucks, 2011:9). This means that the higher the average rand spent per person the higher the expectations (Bei & Chiao, 2001:133).

Some restaurants use a premium pricing strategy to charge higher prices to raise diners’ expectations. 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).

As such, the price charged by the restaurant needs to be in accordance with what the market expects to pay to avoid negative deviation. In other words the actual price is higher than the expected price because the average rand spent per person can significantly influence diner expectations and experiences (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006:5). Consequently, determinants in diners’ expectations and experiences depend on the average rand spent per person (Siegel, 2002:19).

4.3.2.1.iii Occupation

Table 4.5 further depicts that diners with different occupations rated their expectations ($p=0.0274$) of food and beverage, expectations of service ($p=0.0176$) and overall expectations ($p=0.0304$) significantly different ($p<0.05$). Students had higher expectations than diners from other occupations whilst diners with an occupation in education had higher experiences than diners from other occupations.

The results are similar to the findings by Bei and Chiao (2001:133) who found that diners with different occupations rated restaurant expectations significantly different. This might be attributed to the fact that diners from different occupations tend to have different expectations of food and beverage and level of service (Geissler & Rucks, 2011:9). Consequently, determinants in diners' expectations and experiences depend on diners' occupation (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006:5).

The next section presents the reasons for selecting a particular restaurant and the influence of reasons for selecting a particular restaurant on diners' expectations and experiences.

4.3.2.2 Reasons for selecting a particular restaurant

Restaurant diners are generally composed of individuals from different cultural, ethnic and economic backgrounds most of whom have definite and conflicting restaurant preferences (Payne-Palacio & Theis, 2005:155). As such, they have different characteristics; hence, they tend to use different criteria in selecting restaurants (Kotler *et al.*, 2003:18).

In this study, diners were requested to indicate the main reasons for selecting to dine at a particular restaurant. The results obtained are presented in Table 4.6 and discussed.

Table 4.6: Reasons for selecting a particular restaurant

Reasons	Restaurants																	
	A		B		C		D		E		F		G		H		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Convenience	2	4	3	4	3	5	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	2	11	2.75
To relax	0	0	2	3	1	2	0	0	3	5	1	2	1	2	0	0	8	2.00
Been here before	3	7	1	2	4	7	2	4	7	11	5	12	2	5	4	9	28	7.00
Celebration	3	7	5	7	0	0	3	7	2	3	1	2	3	7	4	9	21	5.25
Business need	2	4	1	2	2	4	3	7	3	5	1	2	5	13	1	2	18	4.50
Social occasion	6	14	3	4	2	4	5	11	3	5	4	11	1	2	4	9	28	7.00
Quality food	8	18	16	24	15	28	11	25	8	12	6	15	9	22	5	12	78	19.5
Good service	11	24	20	29	13	24	9	20	11	17	7	17	7	18	7	17	85	21.25
Good ambience	7	16	13	19	8	14	5	11	9	14	11	27	6	15	5	12	64	16.00
Quite/Peaceful	1	2	1	2	2	4	2	4	1	2	2	5	0	0	8	19	17	4.25
Recommendations	2	4	3	4	2	4	3	7	15	24	3	7	5	12	4	9	37	9.25
Others	0	0	0	0	2	4	1	2	1	2	0	0	1	2	0	0	5	1.25
Total	45	100	68	100	54	100	45	100	63	100	41	100	41	100	43	100	400	100

Table 4.6 depicts that 21.25% of the respondents patronised restaurants because of good service whilst 19.5% patronised restaurants because of the quality of food and 16% because of the ambience; 2% of the respondents patronised restaurants to relax and 1.25% because of other reasons such as invitations, winning vouchers and so forth.

Table 4.6 further depicts that the reasons for selecting a particular restaurant differed between restaurants. For instance, 24% of the respondents selected Restaurant A and 29% selected Restaurant B because of good service. Conversely, 28% selected Restaurant C, 25% selected Restaurant D and 22% selected Restaurant G because of the quality of food whilst 24% selected Restaurant E because of recommendations by others. A total of 27% respondents selected Restaurant F because of good ambience whilst 19% selected Restaurant H because of the restaurant being quite.

The peace/quietness of restaurant H might be attributed to its proximity to the police station where security is not a major concern (see section 4.2). However, it is interesting to note from Table 4.6 that there was no respondent who patronised

Restaurant G because of quietness which might also be attributed to its proximity to the rail road which poses a concern/threat to the security of diners especially at night (see section 4.2). The results vindicate the findings by Kokko (2005:182) who claims that restaurants such as Applebee’s and, Blimpie Subs and Salads select quietness for franchisees. Consequently, peace/quietness is very important when diners select a restaurant (Mariani, 2001:20).

In order to determine whether the reasons for selecting a particular restaurant were significant to food and beverage, service, ambience levels, overall expectations and experiences in formal full-service restaurants, t-tests and one-way ANOVA were calculated for the various reasons for selecting a particular restaurant. Table 4.7 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, overall expectations and overall experiences reported for the various reasons for selecting a particular restaurant.

Table 4.7: Influence of reasons for selecting a particular restaurant on diners’ expectations and experiences

Influence	p-values							
	Food and beverage		Service		Ambience		Overall expect	Overall experi
	Expect	Experi	Expect	Experi	Expect	Experi		
Reasons for selecting a particular restaurant	0.0121*	0.0094*	0.0160*	0.0521	0.2086	0.7332	0.0375*	0.6127

*Indicates a significant difference ($p < 0.05$)

Key

Expect represents expectations

Experi represents experiences

Table 4.7 reveals that there were significant differences in the means ($p < 0.05$) for expectations ($p = 0.0121$) and experiences ($p = 0.0094$) of food and beverage, expectations of service ($p = 0.0160$) and overall expectations ($p = 0.0375$) calculated for diners’ reasons for selecting a particular restaurant. The results vindicate the findings of other scholars. For example, Sulek and Hensley

(2004:235), Mehta and Maniam (2002:42) and Akinyele (2010:86) in a study that investigated reasons for selecting a particular restaurant found a significant difference in expectations and experiences on the quality of food. In a study that investigated reasons for selecting a particular restaurant in Korea, Park (2004:93), reported significant differences in diner expectations on the quality of food, cleanliness, kindness of staff, quickness of service, facilities and variety of menu whilst Pedraja and Yagüe (2001:317) found significant differences in overall customer experiences.

In this study, the significant difference in the means ($p < 0.05$) for expectations and experiences of food and beverage, expectations of service and overall expectations calculated for diners' reasons for selecting a particular restaurant might be attributed to the fact that diners are very particular about the quality of food and beverage, and service of full-service restaurants hence tend to have high overall expectations (Upadhyay et al, 2007:9). Consequently, the food and beverage and level of service expected influence diners when selecting a particular restaurant (Xia *et al.*, 2004:8).

However, the results deviate from the findings by Kivela *et al.* (1999b:274). In investigating reasons for eating out in restaurants, Kivela *et al.* (1999b:274) noted a significant difference in expectations on ambience factors. Auty (1992:329), Bitner (1992:66) and Finkelstein (1989:32) suggest that this might be due to the fact that diners from different age groups tend to look for ambience or atmosphere type restaurants that provide a more suitable social environment.

Nonetheless, Yuksel and Yuksel (2002b:62) posit that the reasons for selecting a restaurant may vary depending on the type of restaurant patronised and the geographical area. In view of the above-mentioned, the reasons for selecting a particular restaurant remain a complex matter that varies due to several factors within the restaurant industry (Pedraja & Yagüe, 2001:317).

The next section presents diners' expectations and experiences in the participating restaurants and the influence of diners' expectations and experiences in the participating restaurants.

4.4 EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF DINERS IN THE PARTICIPATING RESTAURANTS

Diners' expectations of food and beverage, service quality, ambience and overall expectations in the eight formal full-service restaurants are provided in Table 4.8. The table depicts the variable mean scores and standard deviations calculated for diners' expectations of food and beverage, service quality, ambience and overall expectations in the respective restaurants and also for all the restaurants.

Table 4.8: Expectations of diners in the participating restaurants

Restaurant	Dining attributes						Overall expectations	
	Food and beverage (Expectations)		Service quality (Expectations)		Ambience (Expectations)			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
A	4.19	0.71	4.29	0.57	4.28	0.87	4.25	0.72
B	4.57	0.62	4.54	0.68	4.52	0.93	4.54	0.74
C	4.01	0.92	3.99	0.83	4.06	0.65	4.02	0.80
D	4.25	0.88	4.38	0.94	4.40	0.56	4.34	0.79
E	4.16	0.76	4.11	0.78	4.18	0.59	4.15	0.71
F	4.41	0.79	4.47	0.89	4.48	0.52	4.45	0.73
G	4.17	1.03	4.22	0.72	4.25	1.08	4.21	0.94
H	4.48	0.89	4.41	0.86	4.63	0.77	4.51	0.84
Total	4.28	0.83	4.30	0.78	4.35	0.75	4.31	0.78

Table 4.8 depicts that Restaurant B obtained the highest mean expectation scores for food and beverage (4.57), service quality (4.54) and overall expectations (4.54) whilst Restaurant H obtained the highest mean expectation score for ambience (4.63). Restaurant C recorded the lowest mean expectation scores for food and beverage (4.01), service quality (3.99) and ambience (4.06).

The highest mean expectation scores for food and beverage, service quality and overall expectations of Restaurant B might be attributed to the fact that it is the most expensive (see section 4.2) and popular restaurant in Port Elizabeth

(Jordaan, 2012:6). Diners normally have higher expectations of expensive and popular restaurants (Bowie & Buttle, 2006:55). The highest mean expectation scores for food and beverage, service quality and overall expectations of Restaurant B might also be attributed to the fact that this restaurant tend to 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 tend to increase diners' expectations (Kimes & Wirtz, 2003:126).

Average standard deviations varied between 0.75 (ambience) and 0.83 (food and beverage). As such, respondents' scores in all the restaurants were clustered closely to the average mean for expectations of food and beverage, service quality, ambience and overall expectations.

In the same vein, diners' experiences of food and beverage, service quality, ambience and overall experiences in the eight formal full-service restaurants are provided in Table 4.9. The table depicts the variable mean scores and standard deviations calculated for diners' experiences of food and beverage, service quality, ambience and overall experiences in the respective restaurants and also for all the restaurants.

Table 4.9: Experiences of diners in the participating restaurants

Restaurant	Dining attributes						Overall experiences	
	Food and beverage (Experiences)		Service quality (Experiences)		Ambience (Experiences)			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
A	4.20	0.67	4.38	0.74	4.11	1.01	4.23	0.81
B	4.47	0.59	4.68	0.60	4.45	0.64	4.53	0.61
C	3.61	0.73	4.05	0.66	4.61	0.72	4.09	0.70
D	4.33	0.65	4.55	0.61	4.39	0.87	4.42	0.71
E	4.32	0.68	4.39	0.89	4.71	0.62	4.47	0.73
F	4.08	0.85	3.86	0.54	4.08	0.66	4.01	0.68
G	4.42	0.81	4.03	0.52	4.19	0.53	4.21	0.62
H	4.41	0.64	4.13	0.57	4.28	0.84	4.27	0.68
Total	4.23	0.70	4.26	0.64	4.35	0.74	4.28	0.69

Restaurant B recorded the highest mean experience score for food and beverage (4.47), service quality (4.68) and overall experiences (4.53) whilst Restaurant E recorded the highest mean experience score for ambience (4.71). The highest mean experience score for Restaurant B might be attributed to the popularity of the restaurant (Jordaan, 2012:6). In popular restaurants diners normally give high marks to only one attribute that may actually have a major effect on overall dining experiences (Sulek & Hensley, 2004:237).

The other possible reason might be the presence of a celebrity chef in Restaurant B (Jordaan, 2012:6). A celebrity chef's presence brings with it added drama, intrigue and excitement to a restaurant and consequently improves diners' experiences (McGill, 2013: Online).

Furthermore, celebrity chefs typically influence the menu in the restaurant (Namkung & Jang, 2007:403). As such, Restaurant B has a unique menu which includes a tiramisu mix and pre-roasted almonds which are layered on the panettone (an Italian cake) and the panettone has a unique flavour which is difficult to copy and hence improves diners' experiences (Jordaan, 2012:6).

Average standard deviations varied between 0.64 (experiences on service quality) and 0.74 (experiences on ambience). As such, respondents' scores in all the restaurants were clustered closely to the average mean for experiences of food and beverage, service quality, ambience and overall experiences.

In order to determine whether the expectations and experiences of diners in the participating restaurants were significant for food and beverage, service, ambience levels, overall expectations and experiences in formal full-service restaurants, t-tests and one-way ANOVA were calculated for the different restaurants. Table 4.10 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, overall expectations and overall experiences reported by different restaurants.

Table 4.10: Influence of participating restaurants on diners' expectations and experiences

Influence	p-values							
	Food and beverage		Service		Ambience		Overall expect	Overall experi
	Expect	Experi	Expect	Experi	Expect	Experi		
Different restaurants	0.0130*	0.0302*	0.0427*	0.0450*	0.6158	0.5946	0.0107*	0.0388*

*Indicates a significant difference ($p < 0.05$)

Key

Expect represents expectations
Experi represents experiences

Table 4.10 reveals that diners in different restaurants rated their expectations ($p=0.0130$) and experiences ($p=0.0302$) of food and beverage, expectations ($p=0.0427$) and experiences ($p=0.0450$) of service, overall expectations ($p=0.0107$) and overall experiences ($p=0.0388$) significantly different ($p < 0.05$). The significant differences might be attributed to the high prices charged in formal full-service restaurants compared to other restaurant categories (Jordaan, 2012:6).

The higher the price charged the higher the expectations of the restaurants' offerings leading to a significant difference (Geissler & Rucks, 2011:9) (see section 4.3.2.1). Consequently, diners' expectations and experiences of food and beverage, service, overall expectations and overall experiences vary in different restaurants (Yu & Dean, 2001:239).

The next section presents descriptive and bivariate analysis to determine customers' satisfaction with the dining experience.

4.5 DINERS' SATISFACTION WITH THE DINING EXPERIENCE

Customer satisfaction is generally viewed as a subjective evaluation of the gap between expectations and experiences, where negatively disconfirmed expectations lead to dissatisfaction (Namkung *et al.*, 2008:2). As such, the ability to satisfy a customer is vital for a number of reasons (see section 2.5.1).

4.5.1 Comparison of diners' experiences with their expectations

Various authors (Susskind, 2002:81; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2002b:56; Coye, 2004:9) posit that customers compare their experiences with their expectations to determine their levels of satisfaction (see section 2.22). As such, descriptive and bivariate analysis was used to compare diners' experiences with their expectations to establish customers' satisfaction with their dining experience.

In this view, Table 4.11 shows the results for the diners' expectations and experiences of food and beverage, service quality and ambience. The table also reflects the means and standard deviations for food and beverage, service quality and ambience as well as the gaps and t-values for food and beverage, service quality and ambience.

Table 4.11: Means and standard deviations for diners' expectations and experiences of food and beverages, service quality and ambience

Attributes		Expectations		Experiences		Gap	t-value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
	Food and beverages						
V1	Presentation of the food	4.59	0.74	4.13	0.76	-0.46	9.75*
V2	Combination of food on the plate	4.66	0.86	4.30	0.85	-0.36	6.23*
V3	Garnishing	4.65	0.92	4.33	0.89	-0.32	5.35*
V4	Colour of food	4.56	0.99	4.27	1.02	-0.29	4.53*
V5	Colour of beverages	4.74	0.94	4.28	0.93	-0.46	7.40*
V6	Smell or odour of food	4.68	1.01	4.22	1.02	-0.46	6.99*
V7	Smell or odour of beverages	4.66	1.05	4.29	0.95	-0.37	5.36*
V8	Taste of food	4.81	0.99	4.39	1.00	-0.42	7.03*
V9	Taste of beverages	4.73	1.03	4.38	0.96	-0.35	5.50*

V10	Texture of the food	4.64	0.97	4.14	0.95	-0.50	8.09*
V11	Temperature of food	4.59	1.00	4.26	0.94	-0.33	4.97*
V12	Temperature of beverages	4.63	0.99	4.23	0.90	-0.40	6.47*
V13	Variety of menu items	4.74	0.91	4.24	0.86	-0.50	9.15*
V14	Value for money	4.85	0.79	4.37	0.71	-0.48	12.2*
V15	Overall quality of food and beverages	4.73	0.78	4.29	0.74	-0.44	11.5*
	Service						
V16	Friendliness and politeness of staff	4.43	0.72	4.28	0.72	-0.15	3.61
V17	Attentiveness of staff	4.76	0.82	4.19	0.86	-0.57	9.87*
V18	Staff greeting diners	4.80	0.97	4.19	1.05	-0.61	9.06*
V19	Efficient service	4.63	0.97	4.10	1.01	-0.53	8.10*
V20	Management presence	4.66	0.90	3.96	0.96	-0.70	11.7*
V21	Staff have food and beverage knowledge	4.62	0.93	4.02	0.90	-0.60	10.6*
V22	Sympathetic handling of complaints	4.77	0.83	4.05	0.91	-0.72	15.3*
V23	Overall quality of service	4.52	0.95	4.00	0.89	-0.52	9.33*
	Ambience						
V24	Attractiveness of exterior appearance	4.54	0.62	4.09	0.71	-0.45	11.6*
V25	Attractiveness of interior décor	4.48	0.87	4.02	0.89	-0.46	7.77*
V26	Subdued lighting	4.62	1.01	4.10	1.04	-0.52	7.34*
V27	Comfortable temperature	4.56	0.97	4.09	0.99	-0.47	7.59*
V28	Desirable level of noise	4.53	1.00	4.02	0.95	-0.51	7.33*
V29	Rational music	4.52	0.99	4.03	1.01	-0.49	7.13*
V30	Pleasant odours	3.42	1.01	2.96	0.97	-0.46	6.87*
V31	Spatial layout and functionality	3.68	0.93	3.08	0.93	-0.60	8.25*
V32	Effective signs, symbols and artefacts	4.60	0.84	4.14	0.87	-0.46	8.53*
V33	Overall quality of ambience	4.60	0.99	3.98	0.94	-0.62	11.1*
	Experience						
V34	Overall satisfaction with the dining experience	4.51	0.81	4.03	0.73	-0.48	12.4*
	Overall mean for 34 attributes	4.57	0.92	4.10	0.91	-0.47	-

*V: Factor attribute; * t-test (2 tailed Significance.) $p < 0.05$; *SD: Standard deviation $p < 0.05$

Diners' expectations and experiences were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale. An initial glance at the data reveals that the overall mean scores for expectations and experiences items were 4.57 and 4.10 respectively, indicating rather high expectations and experiences of restaurant diners regarding food and beverage, service quality and ambience (Markovic & Raspor, 2010:205).

A further investigation of Table 4.11 shows that diners' mean expectation scores ranged between 3.42 and 4.85. Items with the highest expectation scores were; "value for money" (V14), "taste of food" (V8) and "staff greeting diners" (V18). The results in this study reveal similarities to studies conducted by other researchers. For example, Zopiatis and Pribic (2007:772) noted "value for

money”, “taste of food” and “staff greeting diners” as items with the highest expectation scores. Stevens *et al.* (1995:59) reported “error free service (food)”, “value for money”, “comfort and cleanliness” and “accurate billing” as items with the highest expectation scores.

Markovic *et al.* (2010:191) found “accurate bill”, “clean rest rooms”, “clean, neat and appropriately dressed staff” and “clean dining areas” as items with high expectation scores. On the other hand, in the study conducted by Lee and Hing (1995:309), items with the highest expectation scores were “staff providing information about menu items, their ingredients and method of preparation”, “anticipation of customers’ individual needs and wants” and “quick correction of wrong service”.

Items with the lowest expectation scores were “pleasant odours” (V30) and “spatial layout and functionality” (V31). The results vindicate the findings by Lee and Hing (1995:309), who noted that the lowest expectation scores were for the items “pleasant odours”, “visually attractive menu”, “spatial layout and functionality” and “restaurants’ decor typical to its image and price range”.

In the same vein of thought, diners’ mean experience scores ranged between 2.96 (V30) and 4.39 (V8). Items with the highest experience scores were; “taste of food” (V8), “taste of beverages” (V9) and “value for money” (V14). The results in this study are similar to the findings presented by Lee and Hing (1995:303) who concluded that in French fine dining restaurants the highest experience scores were; “taste of food” and “value for money” while in Chinese restaurants the highest experience scores were; “excellent service” and “taste of food”.

Furthermore, Liu and Jang (2009a:345) reported the highest experience scores as, “error free served order (food)” and “accurate guest check”. Markovic *et al.* (2010:192) noted “accurate bill”, “easily readable menu”, “error-free served order (food)” and “clean, neat and appropriately dressed staff” as the highest

experience scores. In examining food quality in restaurants, Namkung and Jang (2007:400) reported that food presentation, taste and food temperature had higher experience scores and a significant effect on customers' experiences.

The reported differences in the studies mentioned above might have occurred due to different sample characteristics, for example customers of different types of restaurant settings in the study by Markovic *et al.* (2010:192). The other reason might be the different modifications of the Dineserv instrument used in each of the studies mentioned (Markovic *et al.*, 2010:192). For example, Markovic *et al.* (2010:192) and Namkung and Jang's (2007:400) versions of DINESERV contained 35 items, measured on a 7-point scale whilst in this study the DINESERV contained 34 items measured on a 5-point scale.

Average standard deviations of 0.92 for expectations and 0.91 for experiences were calculated. As such, respondents' expectation and experience scores for food and beverage, service quality and ambience were clustered closely to the average expectations and experiences means for these dining attributes. After investigating the expectation and experience scores and standard deviations on different restaurant attributes, a gap analysis was performed.

Gap analysis refers to the difference between the mean experience and the mean expectation score for each restaurant attribute. It indicates discrepancies between diners' experiences and expectations (Nasution & Mavondo, 2008:207). The gap scores for each attribute were calculated by subtracting the expectation means from the experience means.

Positive scores show that experiences were higher than expectations while negative scores show that experiences were lower than expectations (Ha & Jang, 2010:527). A zero score implies that experiences were equal to expectations. However, in this study, all the mean experience scores were less than the mean expectation scores giving an overall gap of -0.47 for the entire 34

restaurant attributes. The findings well sync with the results of Markovic et al. (2010:191) who found that all the mean perception scores were less than the mean expectation scores giving an overall gap of -0.36 for the entire 35 restaurant attributes which had a negative effect on customer satisfaction (see section 2.8).

The narrowest gap (-0.15) was the “friendliness and politeness of staff” (V16) meaning that diners’ expectations were almost met. Thus, diners did not expect staff to be more friendly and polite than they actually were which had a positive effect on customer satisfaction. The widest gap (-0.72) was the “sympathetic handling of complaints” (V22) meaning that diners expected restaurants to be much more sympathetic when handling complaints than they actually were and this represents serious shortfalls which may cause customer dissatisfaction.

The effect of the widest gap might be a dissatisfying experience, with less return visits and negative word-of-mouth communications (Geissler & Rucks, 2011:7). Customers who are dissatisfied with a dining experience are likely to tell someone about that dining experience whether good or bad and may respond differently (Susskind, 2002:75). They may, for instance, act as follows: quietly exit, defect or switch to another restaurant, continue to patronise the restaurant even though their experience does not meet their expectations, never return to the same restaurant in future, or they can voice their concern to the manager in the hope of putting matters right on the spot (Susskind, 2002:75).

Furthermore, a comparison of diners’ experiences with their expectations of the 34 examined restaurant attributes, using the paired samples t-test, indicated a statistically significant difference on 33 restaurant attributes meaning that these attributes required more attention in terms of making improvement efforts. Only one restaurant attribute the “friendliness and politeness of staff” (V16) was not statistically significant (Sig. 0.1837) meaning that this attribute did not require more attention in terms of making improvement efforts.

In a nutshell, diners experienced less than they expected since they tend to expect a high level of experience in formal full-service restaurants. Diners typically hold certain desired expectations of formal full-service restaurants. This represents ideal and normative expectations (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:63). Ideal expectations are the level of service expectation that diners wish for. It is what the diner wants to happen. Conversely, normative expectations represent what diners ideally want and hope to receive from the service provider; it is what the diner believes should occur in a particular service encounter (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:63).

The next section presents the correlation coefficient and regression analysis of diners' expectations and experiences.

4.6 CORRELATION COEFFICIENT AND REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF DINERS' EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

Susskind (2002:77) posits that because the quality of food, level of service and ambience constitute the three primary drivers of a restaurant's long-term success, separating food, service and ambience is important when investigating the relationship of customer expectations and experiences with restaurant attributes. As such, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient and regression analysis were used to investigate the relationship of overall expectations (dependent variable) with the three dining attributes (independent variables) and the relationship of overall experiences (dependent variable) with the three dining attributes and overall expectations (independent variables). The results of the correlation analysis are depicted in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12: Correlation results of overall expectations and experiences

Variables	Overall expectations		Overall experiences	
	Correlation coefficient (r)	Significance (p-value)	Correlation coefficient (r)	Significance (p-value)
Food quality	0.73	<.0001*	0.54	<.0001*
Level of service	0.76	<.0001*	0.37	<.0001*
Ambience	0.58	<.0001*	0.33	<.0001*
Overall expectations	-	-	0.46	<.0001*

* indicates significant correlation (p<0.05).

The data reveal that all three of the dining attribute variables showed a moderate to strong positive correlation ($r > 0.5$) with overall expectations. All three dining attributes had a significant correlation ($p < 0.05$) with overall expectations. The strongest correlation with overall expectations was level of service ($r = 0.76$), followed by food quality ($r = 0.73$).

The results are not consistent with the studies by previous researchers (Pun & Ho, 2001:239; Soriano, 2002:1065; Aigbedo & Parameswaran, 2004:894; Weiss *et al.*, 2004:40) who note that in restaurants the strongest correlation with expectations is the quality of food. The results by Kivela *et al.* (2000:34) also confirmed that service and food quality were strongly correlated to diners' expectations. Restaurant customers tend to expect high quality food more than any other attribute (Aigbedo & Parameswaran, 2004:894; Sulek & Hensley, 2004:243).

However, in research conducted by Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal and Voss (2002:135) the level of service had the strongest correlation with customers' expectations. Yuksel and Yuksel (2002b:61) suggested that service quality had the most significant effect on dining expectations at an aggregate market level, and particularly for adventurous or healthy food seekers. In research conducted by Kim, Moreo and Yeh (2004:108), service quality had the strongest relationship with customer expectations. Similarly, it has been well established by a number of studies that service quality is an antecedent of customer expectations (Chow *et al.*, 2007:702).

The reason for the difference in results in this study and other scholars might be the different types of restaurant categories targeted. It might be that in full-service restaurants the strongest correlation with expectations is the level of service whilst in other restaurant categories the strongest correlation with expectations is the quality of food. In formal full-service restaurants diners expect far more than food unlike other categories of restaurants where food is valued most (Ladhari *et al.*, 2008:569). Although good food is an essential component of a satisfying meal, good service plays a pivotal role in full-service restaurants (Cheng, 2006:159).

In a formal full-service restaurant good service can save a bad meal, but a good meal cannot save bad service (Sulek & Hensley, 2004:236). Even though the food at a formal full-service restaurant may not be as tasty as in other famous restaurants, if the service is excellent the diner will recognise the restaurant and tend to be satisfied (Cheng, 2006:159). Consequently, should any other dining attribute (for example, food quality and ambience) not meet the expectations of the diner, good service can compensate for that shortcoming (Oh, 2000:65).

A similar examination of the relationship between the four independent variables and diners' overall experiences showed that all the variables had a weak to moderate ($r \leq 0.5$) positive correlation with diners' overall experiences. The weakest correlations with overall experiences were calculated for the ambience ($r=0.33$). All four independent variables had a significant positive correlation ($p < 0.05$) with diners' overall experiences. The strongest correlation with overall experiences was food quality ($r=0.54$), followed by overall expectations ($r=0.46$).

Based on the results of this research which is in accordance with past research, food quality has the strongest correlation with customer experiences. For example, Bartlett and Han (2007:9) stated that food quality had the strongest impact on customer experience. Andaleeb and Conway (2006:10) and Kim *et al.* (2004:110) indicated that food quality had the most significant relationship with

customer experience. Hensley and Sulek (2007:173) and Raajpoot (2002:109) noted that food quality had the strongest relationship with customer experience.

However, unlike the research conducted by other researchers, Abdullah and Rozario (2009:189) noted that food had the lowest relationship with customer experience. The reported differences might have occurred due to different sample characteristics, for example customers of different types of restaurant settings in the study by Abdullah and Rozario (2009:189). The other reason might be the different modifications of the questionnaires used in each of the studies mentioned.

Nonetheless, most research (Kim *et al.*, 2004:110; Andaleeb & Conway, 2006:10; Bartlett & Han, 2007:9; Hensley & Sulek, 2007:171) support the idea that the quality of food has the strongest correlation with diners' experience. Susskind (2002:78) also found that the quality of food had the strongest correlation with customers' experiences. This implies that the quality of food plays a pivotal role in increasing diners' experiences. As such, diners offer the following message to full-service restaurant operators: get the food right if you want to see us again (Sulek & Hensley, 2004:236).

However, the possibility of co-linearity among the dining attributes should not be ignored. Conversely, Susskind (2002:76) state that restaurant customers usually evaluate the components of the dining experience (for example, food quality, service quality and ambience) in isolation. Susskind states that this type of attribute evaluation is demonstrated by the following classic phrase: "the food was good, but the service was terrible". As such, consumers typically evaluate the restaurant attributes individually (such as food, service and ambience) rather than as a collective (Susskind, 2002:76).

Full regression models were run for each of the two dependent variables. The first full model regressed the three dining attributes against overall expectations,

while the second full model regressed the three dining attributes and overall expectations against overall experiences. Both full regression models are depicted in Table 4.13.

Table 4.13: Regression results for overall expectations and experiences

Independent variables	Model 1: Overall expectations		Model 2: Overall experiences	
	t-value	p-value (p)	t-value	p-value (p)
Food quality	9.14	<.0001*	7.51	0.0386*
Level of service	10.73	<.0001*	2.03	0.0274*
Ambience	6.20	<.0001*	0.85	0.1085
Overall expectations	-	-	4.26	<.0001*

*indicates significant relation (p<0.05).

The first full regression model showed that all three dining variables were significantly related (p<0.05) to diners' overall expectations. The t-values in Table 4.13 indicate the relative importance of each attribute in predicting overall expectations. Respondents rated the level of service (t=10.73) as the most important variable for overall expectations, followed by the quality of food (t=9.14) and ambience (t=6.20).

The results are in line with previous researchers (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2002b:52; Andaleeb & Conway, 2006:8; Chow et al, 2007:706; Jaafar *et al.*, 2009:7; Wu & Liang, 2009:591) who found that service quality had a significant impact on restaurant customers' expectations. However, a study performed by Sulek and Hensley (2004:242) found that food quality ranked the highest among the factors that had an impact on restaurant customer expectations whilst Andaleeb and Conway (2006:8) found that food quality ranked third highest.

The three dining attributes had a coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.5048 and thus explain more than 50% of the variability in overall dining expectations. As such, the regression results of this study identified food quality, level of service and ambience as significant predictors (p<0.05) of restaurant diners' expectations, which explain 50% of restaurant diners' expectations. This explanation of the variability in overall expectations is almost similar to the study

by Sulek and Hensley (2004:240). The regression results of a study performed by Sulek and Hensley (2004:240), identified food, ambience and seating order as significant predictors ($p < 0.05$) of restaurant customers' expectations, which explain the 51% of restaurant customers' expectations.

The second full regression model depicted in Table 4.13 shows that the quality of food ($p = 0.0386$), the level of service ($p = 0.0274$) and overall expectations ($p < 0.0001$) were significantly related ($p < 0.05$) to overall experiences. The t-values of the second model indicated that respondents rated the quality of food ($t = 7.51$) as the most important variable in rating their overall experience, followed by overall expectations ($t = 4.26$) and the level of service ($t = 2.03$).

Previous research studies confirmed the important role of the quality of food, expectations and the level of service (Ganesh *et al.*, 2000: 66; Soriano, 2002:1057; Susskind, 2002:84; Barsky & Nash, 2003:173; Iglesias & Guillén, 2004:373; Sulek & Hensley, 2004:243; Cheng, 2005:99; Söderlund & Öhman, 2005:169; Gupta *et al.*, 2007:293; Han *et al.*, 2009:563; Markovic *et al.*, 2010:192) in restaurant customer experience. Although it might seem surprising that ambience was found not to be a significant contributor to diners' experiences, similar studies by Namkung and Jang (2008:151) and Andaleeb and Conway (2006:8) confirmed that ambience is not a significant contributor to diners' experiences.

Furthermore, the three dining attributes and overall expectations had an R^2 of 0.1928% and thus explain just more than 19% of the variability of restaurant diners' experiences. As such, the regression results of this study identified food quality, level of service, ambience and overall expectations as significant predictors ($p < 0.05$) of restaurant diners' experiences, which explain 19% of diners' experiences. However, the regression results of a study performed by Sulek and Hensley (2004:242) identified only food quality as a significant

predictor ($p < 0.05$) of restaurant customer patronage, which explain the 17% of customers' return patronage.

The reported differences in the study mentioned above might have been due to different sample characteristics. For example, Sulek and Hensley (2004:235) only used diners from one Irish pub style full-service restaurant whereas this study used diners from eight different full-service restaurants. Furthermore, the other difference might have occurred due to different independent variables tested. Sulek and Hensley (2004:242) tested nine independent variables, namely waiting time, seating order fairness, wait-area crowding, server attentiveness, dining atmosphere, dining seating comfort, food quality, overall dining experience and return patronage whereas this study only tested four independent variables.

The next section presents diners' suggestions on improving restaurant experience.

4.7 DINERS' SUGGESTIONS ON IMPROVING RESTAURANT EXPERIENCE

The researcher gleaned suggestions and recommendations from the diners on how to improve the experience of the participating restaurants to exceed diners' expectations. The majority of the diners ($n=321$) made no suggestions, probably because they thought there was no need for improvement in the restaurants at the time of the study, or it could be that they had no idea about what to suggest. Thus, only 79 diners made suggestions. The suggestions received are presented below.

4.7.1 Suggestions on improving food quality

Regarding the quality of the food, two suggestions were received. The first factor involved important food service attributes such as the food variety, waiting times, restaurant cleanliness and food employee courtesy. It was suggested that the

participating restaurants should improve on the variety of food on their menus. The variety of food on the menu is important to certain categories of diners, especially today when healthy eating has become an important issue in society (Soriano, 2002:1066). The results support the notion that food and beverages are an integral part of the overall experience when dining in a formal full-service restaurant.

Secondly, some diners posited that the restaurants should serve food at the correct temperature. Stroebele and De Castro (2004:827) point out that people like certain foods and beverages at certain familiar temperatures and dislike them at others. Deviations from accustomed temperatures are not only noticed quickly, but also create diner dissatisfaction (Stroebele & De Castro, 2004:827). Since the present study was conducted in summer, the majority of diners were probably ordering food that would be served at cold temperatures. It is common belief that cold foods will be chosen when it is hot and that hot foods will be preferred when it is cold (Stroebele & De Castro, 2004:827).

Nonetheless, overall, diners were satisfied with the restaurant's food offerings. A true testament to this high level of satisfaction is that four out of five diners would recommend eating at a formal full-service restaurant. A higher number of repeat diners than first-time diners would make this recommendation. A possible explanation for this difference is that repeat diners are likely exposed to more of the restaurant's offerings (especially the food and restaurant variety, quality and value) over time and find food offerings and restaurants that are appealing to them. Some first-time diners may have more of a hit-or-miss food experience (Geissler & Rucks, 2011:12).

4.7.2 Suggestions on improving service quality

To improve on the quality of service, diners suggested that the restaurants should welcome them pleasantly and include photographs of each food item or

alternatively standby/await diners as they make choices to give explanations where necessary. According to Payne-Palacio and Theis (2005:178) the menu should contain photographs and/or descriptions of food to enable diners to visualise the menu items properly. It is disappointing for the diner to imagine one thing and be served something entirely different due to a lack of the necessary information (Payne-Palacio & Theis, 2005:178). In this regard, Payne-Palacio and Theis (2005:179) suggest that the waiters should verbally describe the menu items to diners if photographs and descriptions are not provided on the menu.

The researcher observed that the menus of some restaurants did not have photographs and a description of all the food and beverage items, probably due to space limitations. However, it may be time-consuming on the part of the waiting staff to await diners as they make choices. Probably, diners themselves should ask the waiting staff when they are not sure about a particular food or beverage item. Alternatively, as the waiters hand the menus to diners, they may inform diners to request assistance when necessary.

4.7.3 Suggestions on improving the ambience

In order to improve the ambience, diners made five suggestions. Firstly, it was suggested that the restaurants should increase the intensity of lighting outside at night, for security reasons. This is a suggestion that restaurants should take seriously as their diners are not only interested in eating out, but also in their own safety and the security of their property. Secondly, the diners posited that the restaurants should ensure minimum noise to allow some people to work on their laptops, especially those frequenting restaurants for business.

Thirdly, diners suggested that participating restaurants should ensure that smoking and non-smoking diners dine separately. Legislation in South Africa requires that restaurants and bars should have separate sections for smoking and non-smoking diners to lower rates of lung and throat cancer (Naidu &

Keeton, 2005:11). It is indicated that the smoking sections should be well ventilated and prohibited to people younger than 18 years of age. Offenders of this legislation face a fine (Naidu & Keeton, 2005:11).

According to the researcher's observations all eight restaurants had sections for both smoking and non-smoking diners. Signs were well posted to direct diners. However, it seemed as if diners did not seat themselves according to the smoking and non-smoking demarcations. The researcher observed that in some restaurants diners were not asked to be seated in respective sections depending on whether they smoke or not, except at Restaurants B, E, F and G. At Restaurants B and G, the manager stood at the entrance asking diners upon their arrival, whether they smoke or not and then seated them accordingly.

The law bans smoking in partially enclosed areas of restaurants, such as covered patios, verandas, balconies, walkways and parking areas (Tobacco Products Control Amendment Act, Number 23 of 2007:14). Owners could be fined R50 000 for breaching this law. To maximise levels of satisfaction of diners' experiences, restaurants forming part of this study should ensure that smoking and non-smoking diners are not seated together.

Fourthly, it was suggested that signs to the restrooms or cloakrooms should be made explicit or easily identifiable to make these areas more accessible for the comfort of their diners. Last but not least, it was also suggested that restaurants should improve their decor, appearance and amenities. A study of 63 Toronto restaurants found that there was a statistically significant effect on the average amount spent by restaurant guests in relation to decor, including items such as outside seating, live entertainment and parking (Susskind & Chan, 2000:56). Further, recent research indicated that guests in restaurants link the appearance and ambience of an establishment with potential concerns about food safety (Banotai, 2003:49).

The dining experience is therefore not just the food, the service, the appearance or other components, but a combination and blend of all items. These can be considered derivative products (Geissler & Rucks, 2011:113). It has been suggested that managers who are uninformed about the significance of the combination of these variables are a major reason why restaurants have the largest rate of failure, comparatively, of any individual business (Geissler & Rucks, 2011:14).

4.8 RELIABILITY

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 (2006:186) 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. Reliability analysis showed that the internal consistency of the constructs in this study was relatively high and considered to be acceptable because, according to Pietersen and Maree (2007:216), the alpha value should be 0.70 or higher.

The Cronbach's α coefficient for the total index was high (0.8955), while moderate to high reliability coefficients were calculated for food and beverages (0.7916), service quality (0.8743), ambience (0.8081), overall expectations (0.8964) and overall experiences (0.8629). The high alpha values indicate good internal consistency among the items.

4.9 SUMMARY

The research findings revealed that respondents with a tertiary diploma recorded the highest expectation score (4.25) whilst those who spoke languages other than Afrikaans, English, IsiZulu and IsiXhosa recorded the lowest (3.69).

Respondents in the age group 55 to 64 years recorded the highest experience score (4.53) whilst those who spoke IsiXhosa recorded the lowest (3.84). Altogether 44.5% of the respondents frequented restaurants at different intervals two to four times in the previous six months whilst 51.2% spent on average, R200 to R299 per person and 18.5% held occupations in business, commerce and finance. Respondents who spent more than R399 had the highest expectation score (4.53) whilst those who frequented restaurants at different intervals more than 10 times in the previous six months had the lowest (3.97). Respondents with an occupation in education reported the highest experience score (4.36) whilst those who frequented restaurants at different intervals of nil to one time in the previous six months reported the lowest (4.04). A total of 22% of the respondents patronised restaurants because of good service. Restaurant B obtained the highest expectation (4.39) and experience (4.51) scores whilst restaurant C recorded the lowest expectation (3.71) and experience (4.03) scores. All diners' experiences were below expectations giving an overall gap of -0.47. The strongest correlation with diners' expectations was level of service ($r=0.76$) whilst the strongest correlation with diners' experiences was food quality ($r=0.54$). The regression model showed that the level of service ($t=10.73$) was rated as the most important variable for diners' expectations whilst the quality of food ($t=7.51$) was rated as the most important for diners' experiences.

The next chapter focuses on the conclusions drawn from the results presented above and includes the recommendations and evaluation of the study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND EVALUATION OF THE STUDY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters contained a deliberation of the literature review, research methodology, results and discussion. This chapter encompasses three sub-sections: research objectives, recommendations and evaluation. The chapter commences by revisiting the research objectives individually to indicate how each was achieved. Based on the research findings, recommendations are made regarding the dissemination of the findings and recommendations to restaurateurs and future research opportunities emanating from this research are presented. The chapter concludes with an evaluation of the study in terms of limitations, contributions to the restaurant industry and research ethics.

5.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES REVISITED

The primary objective of this study was to determine the expectations and experiences of formal full-service restaurant diners in Port Elizabeth. To achieve this goal, certain objectives were formulated, and these objectives formed the backbone of the study; they guided the thinking in the study; and had important implications on the unfolding of the study. In terms of the research objectives stated in section 1.3, the following secondary objectives emerged from the investigation (all of the objectives were met):

Secondary objective 1: To conceptualise and explicate, by means of a literature study, the key constructs under study, namely the expectations and experiences of diners in Port Elizabeth formal full-service restaurants.

Expectations represent what diners feel a restaurant should offer, affecting their reactions and decisions about food and services, although sometimes unconsciously (Kasapila, 2006:17). 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 (Budhwar, 2004:9) for instance; a belief that the food will possess certain sensory attributes each at certain intensities (Kleynhans, 2003:17).

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, 2010:3). According to Zeithaml *et al.* (1993:3) there are five levels (types) of customer expectations, ranging from ideal or desired expectations, normative expectations, experience-based expectations, acceptable or adequate expectations to predicted expectations (see section 2.2.2).

The meal experience refers to a series of tangible and intangible events a diner experiences when eating out (Kotschevar & Withrow, 2008:22). Any feelings diners may have when they arrive at the restaurant, and when they leave, should be taken into account and included as part of the total meal experience. Although it is difficult to define exactly where the meal experience actually starts, and indeed ends, it is usually assumed that the main part of the experience begins when diners enter a restaurant and ends when they leave (Kivela *et al.*, 1999a:205).

Secondary objective 2: To establish the influence of demographic variables on diners' expectations and experiences in formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth.

Table 5.1 provides a summary of the influence of demographic variables on diners' expectations and experiences. It is evident from Table 5.1 that the

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

Table 5.1: Influence of demographic variables on diners' expectations and experiences

Demographic variables	Significant differences in means							
	Food and beverage		Service		Ambience		Overall expect	Overall experi
	Expect	Experi	Expect	Experi	Expect	Experi		
Gender	√	√	√	√	X	X	X	X
Age	√	√	X	√	X	X	√	√
Monthly income	√	√	√	√	X	X	√	√
Education	√	√	√	√	X	X	√	√
Home language	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

√ Indicates a significant difference
 X Indicates a non-significant difference

Key

Expect represents expectations
 Experi represents experiences

Secondary objective 3: To establish the influence of non-demographic variables on diners' expectations and experiences in formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth.

Table 5.2 provides a summary of the significant differences in the means calculated for expectations and experiences of respondents with different non-demographic variables. It is, for example, evident from Table 5.2 that the average Rand spent had an influence on all the investigated experiences and expectations of diners. However, the frequency of visiting the restaurants in the past six months only had an influence on food and beverage and service expectations and experiences of diners.

Table 5.2: Expectations and experiences of respondents with different non-demographic variables

Non-demographic variables	Significant differences in means							
	Food and beverage		Service		Ambience		Overall expect	Overall experi
	Expect	Experi	Expect	Experi	Expect	Experi		
Frequency in the past six months	√	√	√	√	X	X	√	√
Average rand spent per person	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Occupation	√	X	√	X	X	X	√	X

√ Indicates a significant difference

X Indicates a non-significant difference

Key

Expect represents expectations

Experi represents experiences

Secondary objective 4: To establish the influence of diners' reasons for selecting particular formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth on their expectations and experiences

Table 5.3 provides a summary of the influence of reasons for selecting a particular restaurant on diners' expectations and experiences. Food and beverage expectations and experiences had, for example, an influence on diners' reasons for selecting a particular restaurant (see Table 5.3). However, ambience expectations and experiences did not have an influence on diners' reasons for selecting a particular restaurant.

Table 5.3: Influence of reasons for selecting a particular restaurant on diners' expectations and experiences

Influence	Significant differences in means							
	Food and beverage		Service		Ambience		Overall expect	Overall experi
	Expect	Experi	Expect	Experi	Expect	Experi		
Reasons for selecting a particular restaurant	√	√	√	X	X	X	√	X

√ Indicates a significant difference

X Indicates a non-significant difference

Key

Expect represents expectations

Experi represents experiences

Secondary objective 5: To establish the influence of restaurant choice on diners' expectations and experiences in formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth.

Table 5.4 provides a summary of the influence of restaurant choice on diners' expectations and experiences. It is very evident from Table 5.4 that food and beverage, and service expectations and experiences had an influence on the restaurant choice of diners. However, ambience expectations and experience did not have an influence on restaurants choice.

Table 5.4: Influence of restaurant choice on diners' expectations and experiences

Influence	Significant differences in means							
	Food and beverage		Service		Ambience		Overall expect	Overall experi
	Expect	Experi	Expect	Experi	Expect	Experi		
Different restaurants	√	√	√	√	X	X	√	√

√ Indicates a significant difference
 X Indicates a non-significant difference

Key

Expect represents expectations
 Experi represents experiences

Secondary objective 6: To establish if there is a significant difference between diners' expectations and experiences in formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth.

Gap analysis was used to compare diners' experiences with their expectations to establish customers' satisfaction with their dining experience (see section 4.5.1). The gap scores for each attribute were calculated by subtracting the expectation means from the experience means. Gap analysis indicates discrepancies between experiences and expectations of diners (Nasution & Mavondo, 2008:207).

Diners' mean expectation scores ranged between 3.42 and 4.85 whilst the mean experience scores ranged between 2.96 and 4.39 (see Table 4.11). The overall

mean experience score (4.10) was less than the overall mean expectation score (4.57) giving an overall gap of -0.47 for the 34 restaurant attributes. The narrowest gap (-15) was the “friendliness and politeness of staff” meaning that diners’ expectations were almost met. Thus, diners did not expect staff to be more friendly and polite than they actually were which had a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

The widest gap (-72) was the “sympathetic handling of complaints” meaning that diners expected restaurants to be much more sympathetic when handling complaints than they actually were. Only one restaurant attribute the “friendliness and politeness of staff” was not statistically significant meaning that this attribute did not require more attention in terms of making improvement efforts whilst the other 33 restaurant attributes were statistically significant meaning that these attributes required more attention in terms of making improvement efforts.

Secondary objective 7: To determine the influence of different dining attributes on diners’ overall expectations and experiences in formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth.

All three of the dining attribute variables showed a moderate to strong positive correlation with overall expectations (see Table 4.12). All three dining attributes had a significant correlation with overall expectations. The strongest correlation with overall expectations was level of service, followed by food quality.

An examination of the relationship between the four independent variables and diners’ overall experiences showed that all the variables had a weak to moderate positive correlation with diners’ overall experiences (see Table 4.12). The weakest correlations with overall experiences were calculated for the ambience. All four independent variables had a significant positive correlation with diners’ overall experiences. The strongest correlation with overall experiences was food quality, followed by overall expectations.

Full regression models were run for each of the two dependent variables (see Table 4.13). The first full model regressed the three dining attributes against overall expectations, while the second full model regressed the three dining attributes and overall expectations against overall experiences. The first full regression model showed that all three dining variables were significantly related to diners' overall expectations. Respondents rated the level of service as the most important variable for overall expectations, followed by the quality of food and ambience.

The second full regression model showed that the quality of food, the level of service and overall expectations were significantly related to overall experiences (see Table 4.13). Respondents rated the quality of food as the most important variable in rating their overall experience, followed by overall expectations and the level of service.

The research objectives attained in this study contribute to the development of a service excellence approach that helps to identify diners' expectations and experiences and secure performance improvement in formal full-service restaurants. In this context, these objectives may broaden the knowledge of diners' expectations and experiences in full-service restaurants.

Below, the researcher makes recommendations regarding diners' expectations and experiences to formal full-service restaurateurs. However, to reap the benefits associated with the recommendations, the results of the study need to be disseminated to restaurateurs in Port Elizabeth.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher wishes to make certain recommendations regarding (1) the dissemination of the research findings and (2) recommendations to restaurateurs.

5.3.1 Dissemination of the findings

As agreed upon with participating restaurateurs (see section 3.5.3), an electronic copy of the research findings will be distributed to restaurant managers or food and beverage managers of formal full-service restaurants who participated in the study. The potential value of the findings towards the enhancement of diners' experiences will be described in the report. In order to enhance the dissemination of the research findings, the researcher can also mention to the restaurant managers or food and beverage managers that he is available to make presentations on the findings of the study to their restaurants. (Two of the participating restaurants have already requested the researcher to make such a presentation.)

It is recommended that the research findings be presented at conferences and especially at tourism and hospitality conferences in South Africa. The research findings could also be submitted to academic journals for publication, especially the South African Post-Secondary Education (SAPSE) accredited journals. (Some of the findings have already been published in 2 SAPSE accredited journals, namely *The African Journal of Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance* and the *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*.) In this way the researcher could make a valuable contribution towards improving diners' experiences and hence customer satisfaction in formal full-service restaurants in South Africa and internationally.

5.3.2 Recommendations to restaurateurs

Based on the conclusions presented above, since diners' expectations of food and beverage and expectations and experiences of the level of service vary according to gender (see section 4.3) some scholars (Homburg & Giering, 2001:48; Noble, Griffith & Adjei, 2006:27) argue that men and women tend to have different attitudinal and behavioural orientations in their buying behaviour

(see section 4.3.1.1). Consequently, restaurants could segment their level of service on the basis of diners' gender and metro sexuality by using gender segmentation, differentiation and positioning strategies to target a specific gender.

Furthermore, since diners from different age groups rated their expectations and experiences of food and beverage, experiences of service, overall expectations and overall experiences significantly different (see Table 4.3) participating restaurants may find it useful to tailor their offerings based on the age groups of diners. Diners from different age groups often have different service expectations (see section 4.3.1.2). Restaurant managers could therefore use different market segmentation strategies for different age groups. When a restaurant targets a specific group of diners differently it is likely to exceed their expectations and ensure diner satisfaction in an accumulating manner (Shaw, 2012:51).

In the same vein of thought, since diners in the 55 to 64 age group had higher experiences than diners in other age groups (see Table 4.2) the researcher recommends that restaurant managers consider attracting more diners in the 55 to 64 age group since they are easier to satisfy compared to other age groups. From the preceding points, restaurateurs can treat this age group as one market segment and develop a unified market strategy to attract more diners of this age group.

In another vein, restaurants could also create a niche market strategy for first-time diners and tailor make marketing strategies to increase their frequency of visits. To increase their frequency of visits, restaurants could offer incentives targeting first-time diners. This will strengthen the diners' emotional bond to the restaurant and encourage them to spread the word about their excellent service (Cullen, 2004:80; Jordaan, 2012:6). Some researchers (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:490-491; Davis, 2008:248; Jordaan, 2012:6) have found that if a restaurant

increases the number of first-time diners to repeat diners by 5%, it can raise its profits anywhere from 25 to 125% (see section 2.2.3.2).

The researcher recommends that restaurants introduce a “Best Customer” reward programme for a restaurant’s 10 or 20 most frequent diners within six months to increase the frequency of repeat diners since repeat customers were easier to satisfy compared to first-time diners (see Table 4.4). Consequently, repeat customers are the most desirable patrons because they tend to spend more than other customers (see section 2.2.3.2).

In another vein, since diners who spent more than R399 had higher expectations and experiences than diners who spent less than R399, restaurants could carefully consider their pricing structures. The researcher recommends that restaurant managers consider attracting more diners who spend more than R399 since they are easier to satisfy compared to diners who spend less than R399. Restaurants could implement a “premium pricing” strategy by targeting high income diners and having high-priced menu items that are related to the value expectation of diners (see Table 4.4). Sulek and Hensley (2004:240) posit that diners 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 (see section 4.3.2.1.ii). By implementing a “premium pricing” strategy restaurants will concentrate on value and not volume of diners (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 diners’ expectations.

To further increase the restaurant experience of diners, restaurateurs could introduce an up-selling concept to diners who spend more than R399 whereby more expensive items are offered than the ones the customer originally ordered to boost restaurant profits (see section 2.3.1.4). This will ensure that diners spend more than R399 and hence increase their restaurant experience since the study showed that diners who spent more than R399 had higher restaurant experiences.

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

The researcher recommends that restaurants introduce revenue management strategies such as early bird specials to influence demand (see section 4.4). 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 diner 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 diner (Burke & Resnick, 2001:352).

Therefore, restaurants could set prices according to predicted demand levels so that price-sensitive diners who are willing to purchase at off-peak times can do so at favourable prices, whereas price-insensitive diners 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 diners (when there is typically higher demand) than for weekday diners.

However, diners may view the demand-based pricing and price discrimination associated with revenue management as unfair for several reasons (Kimes & Wirtz, 2003:126). For example, if diners view peak-demand prices as higher than their reference price, or if they view regular prices as higher than their reference price due to frequent low-demand prices, diners may view the prices charged as unfair (Kimes & Wirtz, 2002:36). In addition, if diners believe that restaurants are not providing more value for the higher peak-demand price, their dual entitlement beliefs may be violated (Kimes & Noone, 2002:28).

The researcher recommends participating restaurants to tailor their offerings based on diners' reasons for eating out. In this study there were significant differences in the means for expectations and experiences of food and beverage, expectations of service and overall expectations of diners' reasons for selecting a particular restaurant with most diners patronising restaurants because of good service (see Table 4.6). In this regard, the study conveys an unambiguous message by suggesting to restaurants to keep service at the core of their offerings without losing sight of other add-ons. Consequently, restaurants could focus on good service since it plays a pivotal role in full-service restaurants (Cheng, 2006:159). This recommendation supports the strategic objectives of the National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS) to deliver a world-class service experience to diners (RSA NDT, 2012:7).

Formal full-service restaurants could address the problem areas exposed in this study to increase diners' expectations and experiences and reduce the gap score and thus ensure customer satisfaction. This is in line with the suggestion made by Wishna (2000:29) that since diners have become more sophisticated in their

dining decisions restaurants must increase diners' experiences on a daily basis in order to survive and be successful.

Furthermore, it should be noted that managers should not ignore the restaurant attributes that were assessed with the lowest expectations scores (pleasant odours and spatial layout and functionality) (see Table 4.11). If these attributes meet the expected minimum, diners will focus on other dimensions in the service quality evaluation process (Markovic *et al.*, 2010:192). Hence, it is recommended that managers should maintain at least this expected minimum of restaurant service.

It is also recommended that participating restaurants train their waiting staff on handling diners' complaints and be more sympathetic when handling complaints since the attribute, "sympathetic handling of complaints" had the widest negative gap which was statistically significant (refer to section 4.5.1). Markovic *et al.* (2010:192) assert that the attribute with the widest statistically significant gaps represents serious shortfalls and requires significant attention of restaurant managers in terms of making improvement efforts. Consequently, by training waiting staff on handling diners' complaints restaurants could improve the quality of employees in the hospitality sector which is one of the actions the NTSS aims to address (RSA NDT, 2012:7).

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 diners when they interact (Barta, 2008:7). Waiters are therefore responsible for the "moment of truth" or "critical fail point" when diners 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).

The next section provides an evaluation of the study.

5.4 EVALUATION OF THE STUDY

The evaluation of the study is presented in terms of the contribution of this study to formal full-service restaurants as well as its limitations. The ethical considerations applicable to this study are also addressed.

5.4.1 Value of the study

The contribution of this study to formal full-service restaurants in South Africa cannot be underestimated. The study is of value to restaurateurs because it has established the influence of demographic variables on diners' expectations and experiences in Port Elizabeth formal full-service restaurants. The influence of demographic variables can provide important direction for the participating restaurants in their contemporary and futuristic efforts to satisfy their diners.

The study reveals not only the expectations and experiences of diners in formal full-service restaurants, but also the problem areas. The participating restaurants may use this information as a basis for evaluating performance of their employees, planning training programmes, improving quality of dining experience as well as achieving long-term success.

The study contributes towards valuable knowledge in the field of formal full-service restaurant diners, their expectations and experiences and can help restaurateurs to reduce the DINESERV gap and enhance diners' experiences. It could enable restaurateurs to know what diners expect and hence ensure customer satisfaction. In this context, the findings may broaden diners' expectations of food, service and ambience in formal full-service restaurants.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the current literature in the restaurant industry in South Africa. In this regard, researchers in the restaurant industry in South Africa may use this study as a point of reference in future, while tertiary institutions may use it in their future research programmes. In this context, results may broaden the knowledge of expectations and experiences of diners in formal full-service restaurants and are suitable for international comparison. Following publication and presentation of the research findings, the research design and methodology followed in the study can form a valuable directive in the development of similar research studies, even internationally and for other disciplines.

Any realistic evaluation of any study needs to take certain limitations in the research leading to the final draft of the study into consideration. Below are the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

5.4.2 Limitations of the study

Although the researcher 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 diner expectations and experiences research in the restaurant sector more effectively. Obtaining permission from the restaurants was time consuming and some diners refused to participate in this study. The view points of diners who refused to participate in the study are lacking.

The sample was drawn from formal full-service restaurants only probably at the expense of diners from other restaurant categories. Consequently, the findings of this study represent only the expectations and experiences of formal full-service restaurant diners. The findings can therefore not be generalised to other

restaurant categories, in particular to convenience and fast-food categories, or to diners who frequent other restaurants.

In addition, the assessment of diners' expectations and experiences 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 diners' expectations and experiences.

Last but not least, experience and expectations can only be estimated through indicators and cannot be measured as clearly and precisely as profits (Vilares & Coelho, 2003:1708).

Despite the limitations of the study, the researcher has future research propositions that can serve as directives for enhancing diners' expectations and experiences in formal full-service restaurants.

5.4.3 Future research

The research could be expanded to formal full-service restaurants situated in other cities of South Africa and the findings could be compared with the current research to determine whether the expectations and experiences of diners in full-service restaurants are similar no matter their location in South Africa. Triangulation requirements could be considered by applying multiple methods (for example, individual interviews and focus group discussions) and multiple data and data sources (for example, data obtained from mystery customers, waiters and restaurant management) in order to enhance the reliability and validity of the research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:92; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011:31).

Furthermore, future research in restaurants could attempt to increase participation of male diners. In this study, females were more willing to participate than males. To improve the response rate in future studies, incentives could be offered to respondents and restaurants.

Future research could focus on one aspect of the dining experience at a time not only to shorten the length of the questionnaire, but also to get maximum enthusiasm from the diners in completing the questionnaires and to yield more comprehensive insights. Substantial focus could be paid to the ambience and food quality as the contemporary studies in diner expectations and experiences have mainly explored service quality.

5.4.4 Research ethics

This study was conducted according to the research ethics guidelines as given by Babbie and Mouton (2001:529). The research proposal of this study was submitted to subject experts in hospitality management and to the Research Committee of the Faculty of Management Sciences at the Central University of Technology in Free State to obtain appropriate approval. The research was then conducted in accordance with the approved research proposal. Permission was obtained from restaurants and consent from diners that expressed interest to participate in this study.

Therefore, the sample only included the restaurants and respondents from whom permission and informed consent were obtained to collect data. Respondents' information and responses shared during the study were kept private and the results were presented in an anonymous manner in order to protect the identities of the respondents.

To this effect, the researcher conducted this research competently with due concern to the dignity of the participating restaurants and individuals. The

researcher constantly consulted the study leaders in connection with the progress of the research. Upon completion of data interpretation and report writing, the researcher intends to share the findings and conclusions of the research with the participating restaurants.

5.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study was a challenging and enriching experience for the researcher, leading to a better understanding of the expectations and experiences of diners in formal full-service restaurants. The hope is expressed that the study results will prove to be useful in enhancing diners' experiences in formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth. However, formal full-service restaurants need to understand that expectations and experiences are diners' cues that are also dependent on constant change that forms part of our daily lives. In this regard, restaurant attributes with high/low expectation and experience scores will not always have high/low scores and these expectation and experience scores can never be applied for an indefinite period whenever restaurants attempt to enhance diners' expectations and experiences. The researcher acknowledges that a study on abstract concepts, such as expectations and experiences of diners, cannot claim to be conclusive or all-inclusive. The researcher therefore needs to engage in further research to unravel the expectations and experiences of diners. The completion of this study therefore does not represent closure or the end of the quest to discover diners' expectations and experiences. The process is ongoing and there are many more hills to climb.

“I have walked that long road... I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment... and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended”. Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela (1994:554)

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Addendum A

COVERING LETTER FOR THE QUESTIONNAIRE



Respondent number

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Restaurant name

15 December 2011

Respected participant,

QUESTIONNAIRE ON EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF DINERS

I am Oswald Mhlanga, a Masters student at the Hotel School (Faculty of Management Sciences) at the Central University of Technology in Free State. I plan to focus my research on expectations and experiences of diners in formal full-service restaurants in Port Elizabeth. The idea is to collect the relevant data by means of a structured questionnaire and to make observations of the activities in the restaurant.

Please assist me in the data collection by filling in the questionnaire. Take note of the following things before filling in the questionnaire:

- There are no correct or incorrect answers. Simply give your personal opinion.
- All the data collected will be treated confidentially and anonymously.

The questionnaire is divided into the following sections:

Section A: to be completed before the meal

Section B: to be completed after the meal

The questionnaire will take approximately seven minutes to complete. Thank you for your esteemed co-operation. It is highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Oswald Mhlanga,

Student: Hospitality Department.

Addendum B

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE



Respondent number

Restaurant name _____

The purpose of this survey is to determine your expectations and experiences with the quality of food, service and ambience while dining at this formal, full-service restaurant. You are not required to identify yourself. All responses will be treated with strict confidentiality. Please complete Section A before the meal and Section B after the meal. Please mark the appropriate block with an X, using a pen.

Section A: To be completed before the meal

	1	2
1. Gender	Male	Female

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

1	2	3	4	5	6
Up to 24	25 – 34	35 – 44	45 – 54	55-64	Over 65

3. Home language

1	2	3	4	5
Afrikaans	English	IsiXhosa	IsiZulu	Other, specify

4. Monthly income bracket before deductions

1	2	3
R6 000 or less	R6 001-R11 999	R12 000 or more

5. Highest level of education completed

1	2	3	4	5	6
No Schooling	Primary School	High School	Tertiary Diploma	Tertiary Degree	Other,

6. Occupation

1	Business, commerce and finance	7	Sports, leisure and recreation
2	Retail, tourism and hospitality	8	Pensioner
3	Education	9	Government
4	Science and medicine	10	Student
5	Engineering and technology	11	Self employed
6	Legal	12	Other, specify:

7. How many times have you dined in this restaurant in the past six months?

1	2	3	4	5
0-1	2-4	5-7	8-10	More than 10

8. State the main reasons for choosing this restaurant.

1	Convenience	7	High quality food
2	To relax	8	Good service
3	Been here before	9	Good atmosphere
4	Celebration	10	Quiet/peaceful
5	Business need	11	Recommended by others
6	Social occasion (going out for a meal with friends/family)	12	Others, specify

9. What is the average rand spent per person at this restaurant? R _____

10. The number of guests at your table, including yourself is _____

11. The guest(s) at your table, if any, is/are your -

1	2	3	4	5
Partner	Family member(s)	Friend(s)	Colleague(s)	Other.....

What were your expectations of each of the following attributes when you decided to dine in this restaurant?

Tick **ONE** box only to indicate your degree of expectation.

1=Very low expectations, 2=Low expectations, 3=Indifferent, 4=High expectations, 5= Very high expectations.

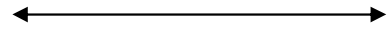
FOOD AND BEVERAGES



		1	2	3	4	5
12	Presentation of the food (for example, decoration, shape of food)					
13	Combination of food on the plate					
14	Garnishing					
15	Colour of food					
16	Colour of beverages					
17	Smell or odour of food					
18	Smell or odour of beverages					
19	Taste of food					
20	Taste of beverages					
21	Texture of the food					
22	Temperature of food					
23	Temperature of beverages					
24	Variety of menu items					
25	Value for money					

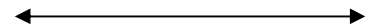
1= Very dissatisfied 2=Fairly dissatisfied 3 =Unsure 4= Fairly satisfied 5=Very satisfied

FOOD AND BEVERAGES



		1	2	3	4	5
46	Presentation of the food (for example, decoration, shape of food)					
47	Combination of food on the plate					
48	Garnishing					
49	Colour of food					
50	Colour of beverages					
51	Smell or odour of food					
52	Smell or odour of beverages					
53	Taste of food					
54	Taste of beverages					
55	Texture of the food					
56	Temperature of food					
57	Temperature of beverages					
58	Variety of menu items					
59	Value for money					

SERVICE



		1	2	3	4	5
60	Friendliness and politeness of staff					
61	Attentiveness of staff					
62	Staff greeting diners					
63	Efficient service					
64	Management presence					
65	Staff have food and beverage knowledge					
66	Sympathetic handling of complaints					

AMBIENCE



		1	2	3	4	5
67	Attractiveness of exterior appearance					
68	Attractiveness of interior décor					
69	Subdued lighting					
70	Comfortable temperature					
71	Desirable level of noise					
72	Rational music					
73	Pleasant odours					
74	Spatial layout and functionality					
75	Effective signs, symbols and artefacts					

76. If you had the opportunity, would you come back to this restaurant?

1	2	3	4	5
Definitely not	Probably not	Unsure	Probably	Definitely

Addendum C

CHECKLIST FOR OBSERVATIONS

Item	Observation	Attributes observed
1	What is the seating capacity of the restaurants?	Number of seats
2	What is the turn-up or diners like over the week and month?	Patronage and period of stay of diners in the restaurants
3	What is the variety of food and beverages on the menus?	Selection of items on the menu and meal offerings
4	What are the prices of food and beverages offered?	Prices charged
5	What are the methods of payment for the food and beverages?	Forms of payment, for example, debit card thereof
6	What is the plate waste like?	Food and beverages left by the diner
7	What is the appearance of the staff in terms of cleanliness and dressing?	Neatness of the staff
8	What is the behaviour of the staff as regard serving guests?	Care or attitude of the staff towards diners
9	Is the manager ready to assist diners?	Presence of the manager in the restaurant
10	What are the hours of operation of the participating restaurants?	Hours of business
11	How are the aisles or walkways spaced?	Distances between rows of seats and tables
12	Are there signs for smoking and non-smoking diners?	Availability of signs for smoking diners
13	Are there signs for restrooms?	Availability of signs to restrooms
14	How are the menus for the participating restaurants designed?	Menu layout and design
15	What do diners comprise?	Ethnicity and types of diners