


Analysis of Customer Reviews on Korean Restaurant Experience: The Case of Zomato Istanbul

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ABSTRACT

Globalization and the internet era have resulted in an increase in curiosity about different cultures and in an expansion of cultural diversity concerning food choice. In this direction the number of ethnic restaurants which carry the role of making known a culture's gastronomic identity through food, service rituals and atmosphere has increased around the world. As a result choosing a restaurant has become more challenging for customers. In the process of making a decision about which restaurant to go to, online reviews are seen to be vital and reliable sources of information due to the information given by other customers. Today consumers have the power of greatly impacting the promotional activities of restaurants. Therefore the importance of online reviews, especially for ethnic restaurants which are distinct from ordinary restaurants due to bearing the responsibility of promoting another culture, is considered non-negotiable. The aim of this study is to analyse customer reviews on the Zomato platform regarding Korean restaurants located in Istanbul. For the purpose of the study 510 Turkish and English reviews made between November 2013 - May 2022 regarding eleven different Korean restaurants based in Istanbul were analyzed and coded under six main themes and thirty-seven sub themes following qualitative research methods and content analysis techniques. In line with the findings, it was discovered that Korean restaurant customers gave importance to the taste of food and beverages, staff and service, facility, price, authenticity and menu related issues respectively.

Keywords: Korean Cuisine, Ethnic Restaurant Experience, Online Review, Zomato, Istanbul

Introduction

As a result of the internet age and globalization, the ease of access to information and the spread of international travel have made people more aware of different cultures. This situation has led to an increase in interest in different cultures and to the spread of cultural diversity in the choice of food. Moreover the growing interest in eating out due to changes in social life and improvement in living standards with the rise in income levels is associated with an increasing number of customers eating at ethnic restaurants. Responding to this interest in ethnic restaurants, which reflect a certain culture with their menu, decoration, atmosphere and presentation rituals, the number of ethnic restaurants are growing globally as well as the competition between them.

In order to be successful in the ethnic restaurant market, where competition has increased with the increase in supply and demand, restaurants should first enhance the attraction factors for customers to choose the restaurant. Secondly, they should ensure customer satisfaction and loyalty. However, it seems unlikely that these service development efforts will be successful at the point where communication with the customer cannot be made effectively. From the customers' side the decision-making process regarding ethnic restaurants is not only shaped by physical and social needs such as nutrition, keeping up with trends, sense of belonging and gaining status. In addition to these, the issue of whether the atmosphere, decoration, food and service rituals effectively reflect the cuisine of the foreign country is considered an influence factor in the selection of ethnic restaurants. Since the success of a restaurant relies on the satisfaction levels of customers, electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) activities, which are more effective than promotional activities, are considered an issue to which attention must be paid.

E-WOM, which is defined as online reviews that provide one-to-one communication between customers visiting the restaurant

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and potential customers, and where the restaurant experience is conveyed without any interest, spreads through social media platforms and websites such as TripAdvisor, Zomato and Yelp. With that, it is thought that ethnic restaurants, which have the responsibility of promoting a different culture with their meals, presentation styles and atmosphere, unlike ordinary restaurant businesses, should pay more attention to E-WOM activities. Korean restaurants, the number of which is increasing globally, are the output of the 'Korean Wave' movement (Hogarth, 2013) and the healthy food trend. They are among the ethnic restaurants that should consider E-WOM activities as a vital tool for success.

In this context, this research aims to analyze online reviews on the Zomato platform for Korean restaurants that offer a balanced and nutritious dining experience. As a result of the analysis, the points to which customers give the most importance in the Korean restaurant experience are determined and suggestions are made regarding these points. It is thought that determining these points correctly and developing suggestions in line with these points will positively affect the restaurant businesses by enriching and improving the customer experience.

Literature Review

Restaurants that reflect the culinary culture of a different place from the country in which they are located are accepted under the title of themed restaurants and are defined as ethnic restaurants. (Jang, Ha & Park, 2012). Considering that the culinary culture of a country is affected by geographical conditions, religious rituals, economy and socio-cultural climate (Beşirli, 2010) it can be said that getting to know a country's culinary culture is an important step in getting to know that country. Ethnic restaurants, which give the feeling of discovering another country without traveling (Zelinsky, 1987 cited in Roseman, 2006), take on the role of cultural ambassadors in this context. Ethnic restaurants, where the elements of a certain culture-specific atmosphere are reflected not only on the food but also on the atmosphere, are distinguished by conveying the unique aspects of the culture to the consumer (Sukalakamala & Boyce, 2007). The intention to visit ethnic restaurants, the number of which is increasing with the effect of globalization, emerges with the desire to consume unusual foods, to have a unique and different dining experience, to get to know a different culture and to go out of one's routine (Roseman, 2006). In Turkey there are several examples of ethnic restaurants serving Indian, Italian, Japanese, Chinese, Thai, Lebanese, Iranian and Mexican cuisine (Teyin et. Al., 2017; Yavuz & Mesci, 2020). In addition, Korean restaurants are among the ethnic restaurants operating in Istanbul, bringing authentic Korean flavors to consumers in Istanbul.

Korean cuisine is distinguished by the use of seasonal products, the use of vegetable oils instead of animal fat, and the widespread use of fermentation technique (Kim et. al., 2016). Whole grains, legumes, vegetables and seafood are among the basic ingredients in Korean cuisine, which is known for its low-calorie and balanced meals (Min & Lee, 2014). One of the most important features that distinguishes Korean culinary culture from other culinary cultures is the table ritual, 'Babsang'. 'Babsang', which is a combination of the words 'Bab' meaning cooked rice and 'sang' meaning 'table where you can enjoy eating'. It consists of 'Bap' (cooked rice), 'Kuk' meaning a soup-like dish, and 'Yangnyum' which refers to an appetizing sauce and 'Banchan' meaning various side dishes (Kwon et. al, 2015; Kim et. al., 2016). The side dishes mentioned as 'banchan' consist of vegetables fermented and seasoned with herbs, sesame oil or perilla oil. *Kimchi*, a traditional spicy cabbage pickle, is definitely included in the side dishes and served with every meal (Jang, Mattila & Van Hoof, 2021). Furthermore signature dishes that belong to Korean cuisine can be listed as tteokbokki (stir fried rice cakes served in a spicy sauce), rabboki (rice cakes and noodle served in a spicy sauce), kimbap (rice and a selection of vegetables or meat wrapped in seaweed sheets), bibimbap (rice and a selection of sauteed vegetables and meat served with Korean chilli paste (*gochujang*) sauce and raw or cooked egg), jajangmyeon (noodle with black bean sauce) and bulgogi (*bul* means fire and *gogi* means meat in Korean; this dish prepared by sauteing or grilling marinated meat).

The growing popularity of Korean cuisine with the aforementioned characteristics can be explained by several factors. This situation is primarily associated with the ethnic food trend observed globally (Clemes, Gan & Sriwongrat, 2013). In addition, it is thought that the trend of healthy eating observed around the world has increased the interest in Korean cuisine, which offers balanced and nutritious options due to the widespread use of vegetables and healthy cooking techniques used in the meals (Kwon et. al. , 2015). Finally, it is thought that the 'Korean Wave' movement (Hogarth, 2013), which started from China in the early 1990s and has spread all over the world since the mid-2000s, increased the curiosity towards the Korean culinary culture (Oh & Chae, 2017). It is known that it is more difficult to promote products belonging to a cuisine in a different country due to the reservations of consumers against a foreign food culture. However, it is observed that when the knowledge about a foreign food culture increases, the consumption behavior also increases (Choe & Hong, 2018). In this context, the demand for Korean cuisine is gradually increasing owing to the trend that refers to the marketing of popular culture products such as Korean television series, pop music groups, computer games and animated series (Yoon, 2017). Since the demand is increased the supply is increased and eventually competition among Korean restaurants has become more intense.

In order to survive in the competitive environment these restaurants must take distinctive measures. In the course of determining these measures, acknowledging the customers' opinions and suggestions about their dining experience carries an immense

importance. Along with that the increase in the number of restaurants also complicates the restaurant selection process of customers. In addition to affecting the purchase intention, service improvement activities also have an impact on intentions to revisit by providing customer satisfaction and loyalty (Kivela, Inbarakan & Reece, 1999). In the complex decision-making process online reviews are seen as a strategic source of information for the modern restaurant consumer who gives importance to the experience benefit rather than the physiological benefit, and also for the restaurateurs who aim to sustain customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Vajjhala & Ghosh, 2021). E-WOM is defined as positive or negative comments made by the consumer about a product or company and accessible to a large number of people via the internet and it is defined as expressing emotions for the purpose of seeking advice, supporting the company, worrying about other customers, social benefit, supporting the platform, economic encouragement and extroverted/positive self-development (Hennig-Thurau et. al., 2004). While positive comments encourage the potential customer's purchasing behavior and strengthen the brand image, negative comments can negatively affect the customer's brand perception by reducing the purchase intention (Lee, Rodgers & Kim, 2009; Racherla & King, 2014). Positive reviews give restaurants the chance of increasing sales, making the business more visible on online platforms. Negative comments provide strategic clues to enrich the customer experience, as well as the benefit of seeing the faults of the business and taking the service quality to the next level (Vajjhala & Ghosh, 2021).

The abundance of options offered in today's consumer society causes customers to be more selective and more difficult to be satisfied. Customer satisfaction, which determines the success and reputation of restaurants, depends on factors such as food and service quality, food safety, price-performance relationship, decoration, ambiance (Karaca & Köroğlu, 2018; Sever & Girgin, 2019). However, in ethnic restaurants that act as an intercultural bridge, the issue of whether the food, presentation and atmosphere reflect that culture and the ability of the restaurant to provide an authentic dining experience is added to these factors (Liu & Mattila, 2015; Özdemir, 2022: 243). This situation increases the responsibilities of ethnic restaurants, including Korean restaurants, to provide a certain service quality.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to analyze customer reviews on the Zomato platform regarding Korean restaurants located in Istanbul. For the purpose of this study the online reviews on the Zomato platform made about Korean restaurants based in Istanbul are analyzed following qualitative research methods and content analysis techniques. Currently there are 17 Korean restaurants listed on the Zomato platform. Only 11 of these restaurants are included in this study due to 4 of them being permanently closed and 2 of them serving Chinese and Japanese cuisine in addition to Korean cuisine. As a result, there are 11 restaurants included in the study. In total these 11 restaurants had 521 online reviews from customers but 11 of the reviews were left out because 4 of the reviewers did not experience the Korean restaurant, 6 of the reviews did not contain any data about restaurant experience and one reviewer's language was neither Turkish nor English. Therefore within the scope of the study 475 Turkish and 35 English reviews, in total 510 reviews, made between November 2013 and May 2022 regarding eleven different Korean restaurants based in Istanbul were analyzed. The restaurants are coded as R1, R2, R3, R4, R5a, R5b, R5c, R5d, R5e, R6 and R7 in the study. The reason for coding five of these restaurants between R5a and R5e instead of using numbers is that these restaurants are different branches of the same company. The study implicates both negative and positive reviews for the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of Korean cuisine customers.

Findings

Table 1. Descriptive Findings Regarding Korean Restaurants in Istanbul

FACILITY CODE	LOCATION	POINT	INTERACTIONS	REVIEWS	PICTURES POSTED BELOW REVIEWS	AVERAGE POINTS OF REVIEWS POSTED WITH PICTURES
R1	Nispetiye	3.9	29	15	25	4.3
R2	Sultanahmet	3.1	13	16	10	3.5
R3	Esentepe	3.6	189	69	68	4.2
R4	Mecidiyeköy	4.0	46	56	70	4.0
R5a	Fatih	4.1	131	132	123	4.0
R5b	Beşiktaş	3.7	2	9	4	4.2
R5c	Kadıköy	3.1	30	61	55	3.4
R5d	Bakırköy	3.2	66	71	47	4.3
R5e	Başakşehir	3.9	2	19	17	4.6
R6	Taksim	3.7	15	15	7	4.7
R7	Kadıköy	4.0	52	58	32	4.6
TOTAL		3.6	575	521	458	4.1

The descriptive findings gathered from the Zomato platform between November 2013 and May 2022 regarding 11 restaurants are displayed on Table 1. According to information given on Zomato the restaurants are located in Nispetiye, Sultanahmet, Esentepe, Mecidiyeköy, Fatih, Beşiktaş, Kadıköy, Bakırköy, Başakşehir and Taksim. The average point of the restaurants is 3.6, the total number of comments is 524, the total number of interactions received by the comments is 575, the number of comments under which photos are shared is 458, and the average of the scores of the comments shared with pictures is 4.1.

When looking at the descriptive findings it is understood that the Korean restaurants included in the study are located in various areas of Istanbul. Also 3.6 out of 5 points being the average point of the restaurants shows that suggestions for improvement are needed. When looking at the number of total interactions this finding suggests that the online reviews made by customers have an undeniable repercussion upon future customers. In addition when examining the average point of reviews posted with pictures it is clear that this is higher than the overall average point of restaurants. This shows that customers tend to visualize positive restaurant experiences rather than negative ones. The range of Korean food items mentioned in the reviews is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Range of Food Items Mentioned In Reviews

RANK	FOOD	NUMBER OF MENTIONS IN REVIEWS
1.	Kimbap	121
2.	Ddokbokki	87
3.	Kimchi	79
4.	Banchan	55
5.	Rabboki	53
6.	Ramen	52
7.	Yangyeom Chicken	50
8.	Jajangmyeon	45
9.	Bibimbap	35
10.	Bulgogi.	27
11.	Mandu	22
12.	Su Gan Chicken	22

As seen on the table kimbap, ddokbokki and kimchi are the most mentioned Korean food items among the customers. Next, banchan which refers to the side dishes served with main dish, rabboki, ramen, yangyeom chicken, jajangmyeon, bibimbap, bulgogi, mandu and su gan chicken are also remarkably recognized in the reviews. On Table 3 the range of reviews including intention of visit, recommendation of food and beverages and recommendation of restaurant is displayed. Restaurant customers recommended the food and drinks offered 70 times, but stated nine times that the food and beverages they had tried should not be purchased. Moreover they recommended visiting the restaurant 107 times and stated that the restaurant was not worth trying 43 times. In addition, customers stated in the comments that they intended to revisit the restaurant 72 times, and that they would not visit the restaurant again 38 times.

Table 3. Range of Reviews by Recommendation and Intention of Visit

RECOMMENDATION OF FOOD AND BEVERAGES		RECOMMENDATION OF RESTAURANT		INTENTION OF VISIT	
POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
70	9	107	43	72	38

These findings show that customers have a tendency to recommend positive restaurant experiences more than negative ones. Furthermore it can be said that an intention to visit a restaurant was affected by positive experiences more than by negative experiences. In the study, main themes and sub themes are formed according to the analysis of online reviews included in the study and in previous research (Emir, 2011; Min & Lee, 2014; Erdem & Yay, 2017). In this direction 6 main themes and 37 sub themes are formed. Furthermore reviews on the Zomato platform regarding Korean restaurants are coded under these main themes and sub themes and categorized as either positive or negative. On Table 4 main themes and sub themes formed specifically for the study and range of reviews by main themes and sub themes are displayed.

When Table 4 is examined, it can be said that Korean restaurant customers mention, in this order, food and beverages, staff and service, facility, authenticity, price and menu in a positive manner. With that, in order of frequency, the subjects of complaints are food and beverage, staff and service, price, facility, authenticity and menu. When the food and beverage sub theme is examined from the positive aspect the analysis shows that the customers pay most attention to the taste of the foods and beverages served in

Table 4. Range of Reviews by Main Themes and Sub Themes

MAIN THEMES	SUB THEMES	CODES	
		POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
FOOD AND BEVERAGE (660)	Taste of Food And Beverages	327	106
	Portion size	63	37
	Freshness of food	27	14
	Quality of food	20	46
	Compatibleness with Turkish taste palate	6	4
	Halal food	9	1
	TOTAL	452	208
STAFF AND SERVICE (548)	Skill of handling complaints and requests	16	18
	Level of communication by staff	0	9
	Kindness of servers	34	34
	Polite gestures	95	18
	Involvement of service staff	69	29
	Duration of service	34	37
	Temperature of food	7	7
	Knowledge about food and presentation	36	6
	Taking orders correctly and completely	0	5
	Absence of menu item	0	15
	Quality of service and presentation	49	33
	TOTAL	343	205
FACILITY (307)	Heating	0	3
	Ventilation	1	5
	Accessibility	12	30
	Interior design	93	31
	Scale and size	16	12
	Room lighting	0	3
	Hygiene	35	16
	Ambiance	35	10
TOTAL	215	92	
PRICE (184)	Price fairness	61	93
	Mischarges	0	2
	Unexpected charges	0	23
	Payment options	0	5
	TOTAL	61	123
AUTHENTICITY (167)	Ethnic atmosphere	36	13
	Diversity of side dishes	10	6
	Free side dishes	41	21
	Originality of food	25	15
	TOTAL	112	55
MENU (56)	Diversity of menu	25	20
	Uniqueness or originality of menu	5	0
	Explanatoriness of menu	2	1
	TOTAL	32	24

the restaurant . This sub theme is followed by portion size, freshness of the food, quality of food, Korean foods' compatibleness with Turkish taste palate and halal food options. Some prominent examples of customer statements are:

"The food was delicious and the portions were large, my friends and I enjoyed it very much. I will visit again as soon as possible." (Translated from Turkish)
"If there are those who have a prejudice against Far Eastern cuisines, I must say in advance that almost everything on the menu is suitable for Turkish taste" (Translated from Turkish)
"It is also useful to say that it is halal for Muslims who pay attention to what they eat and drink." (Translated from Turkish)

On the negative side, the taste of the food and beverages is the most complained about subject in the comments. Following this, quality of food, portion size, freshness of the food, compatibleness with Turkish taste palate and halal food options are other subjects of complaint for the customers as quoted:

"Pork is used in most dishes. . . halal meat can be used as meat, sunflower or olive oil can be used as oil" (Translated from Turkish)
"I've been going to this place occasionally since it first opened, but it still maintains the same tastelessness. There is no taste in the food. The kimchap is not fresh, the kimchi smells stale, the food I normally enjoy is tasteless here" (Translated from Turkish)

Regarding staff and service related subjects, customers most value polite gestures and involvement of the service staff, quality of service and presentation, and knowledge about food and presentation. After that, duration of service, kindness of service staff, skill of handling complaints and requests, and temperature of food are considered attractive factors when accomplished properly. Some of the customer review quotations can be listed as:

"The waiters are very interested and say what is good and especially suitable for Turkish taste" (Translated from Turkish)
"The employees are very caring, polite and smiling. The lady on duty helped us in choosing the kimbab" (Translated from Turkish)
"In this place where I went with my friend, they welcomed us with a smile. Since we are not familiar with Korean cuisine, they helped us with interest." (Translated from Turkish)

On the negative side, duration of service, kindness of servers, and quality of service and presentation are the most mentioned factors. With that, involvement of service staff, staff's skill of handling complaints and requests, polite gestures, absence of menu items, level of communication by staff, temperature of food, knowledge about food and presentation, and taking orders correctly and completely are also taken into consideration when reviewing Korean restaurants. Some reviews concerning these issues are:

"First of all, I want to talk about the fact that, in a restaurant, the interest and sincerity of the employees is more important than the taste most of the time. This restaurant was missing that. . . . a sullen welcome, the waiters left the menu, no help. I would understand if they were busy. I called and wanted suggestions, they hardly explained with a lip movement." (Translated from Turkish)
"Its menu is extensive but only in the booklet. So if you couldn't deliver the products, what you need to do is for the employee to come to us and say, "This group of products cannot be served today, I'm sorry."" (Translated from Turkish)
"The service is terrible, we waited 45 minutes for our dishes, the waiters are really young and unexperienced, and sad to say, LAZY."

Regarding sub themes, our research showed that customers pay attention to the interior design of the restaurant the most. After interior design, the most praised subjects are hygiene and ambiance of the restaurant referring to the sound and odor of the restaurant. Scale and size of the restaurant and accessibility to the restaurant are also seen as attraction factors among the customers. Some prominent examples of customer reviews are:

"If you search on the internet and look at the correct address, the place is very easy to find, even if you go for the first time." (Translated from Turkish)
"It has a very warm environment." (Translated from Turkish)
"The environment is calm and stylish." (Translated from Turkish)
"First of all, the place was extremely clean and tidy." (Translated from Turkish)

The findings show that customers complain about accessibility, hygiene and scale and size. Furthermore, ambience, ventilation, room lighting and heating are also subjects of complaint. Some of the reviews that paid attention to these subjects are:

"The decor can be said to be the most negative aspect of the place. From the outside, it does not have a view that will allow you to enter." (Translated from Turkish)
"We found the place very difficult in terms of transportation... and the interior decoration of the place was not taken care of." (Translated from Turkish)
"Very sloppy and stuffy place." (Translated from Turkish)
"The spoon that came was very stained, even dirty; there was a big dried food scrap on it. . . . There was also dust on the serving plate. They definitely need to pay more attention to hygiene." (Translated from Turkish)

An examination of the topic of prices revealed that, contrary to the other main themes, negative comments are more than positive ones. The findings show that customers valued fair prices but also complained about unfair price policies the most. Some reviews concerning price related issues are:

"If I evaluate it in terms of price performance, I can say that it is not worth the money we paid. Sorry :(Will I go again? I won't." (Translated from Turkish)
"The Korean waiter was very caring and cute, but unfortunately it was not enough to save the performance/price balance. I wouldn't go again, I wouldn't recommend it to anyone." (Translated from Turkish)
"Although the prices seem high, I would definitely recommend it. The restaurant deserves its price." (Translated from Turkish)

Also unexpected charges are seen as an important subject of complaint. There are also negative reviews about inadequacy of payment options and mischarges such as:

"It was strange that the service charge was higher than the 10% service charge specified in the menu? I recommend that you keep in mind that the account will be brought by reflecting at least 10% difference on the pricing in the menu." (Translated from Turkish)
"It's nice that it's shabby, but if two people eat one dish, what's the point of charging 5 TL? I don't understand, is it the price for the sticks?" (Translated from Turkish)
"Of course, it would be much better if Sodexo or other food cards were passed." (Translated from Turkish)

Considering that the aim of the study is analyzing ethnic restaurants' online customer reviews, authenticity of food, service rituals and matching atmosphere with the culture are considered vital. The sub themes regarding free side dishes and diversity of side dishes refer to the 'banchan' – side dishes served next to main dishes in Korean cuisine. These sub themes are formed based on the fact that there are a remarkable number of reviews praising or criticizing the existence or diversity of side dishes in the restaurants. The most praised subject is whether the restaurant offers free side dishes or not. The following positive subject among

customers is the ethnic atmosphere created at the restaurant. Also, originality of food and diversity of side dishes are considered attraction factors. Some of the reviews including these issues can be listed as:

"The restaurant plays old-new Korean songs. Squid Game, which is very popular now, was also included inside, which in my opinion was a very cute detail." (Translated from Turkish)

"Everything is so authentic. From the steel chopsticks and rest used to the Korean music playing in the venue." (Translated from Turkish)

"There is a wide variety of appetizers served at the beginning of the meal. I recommend you try them all." (Translated from Turkish)

"My favorite Korean restaurant in all Istanbul; it gave the real experience of being in Korea. Very good and the best thing is the side dishes and the grill table."

The most complained about subject is also free side dishes. Furthermore, on the negative side, originality of food, ethnic atmosphere and diversity of side dishes are subjects of complaint respectively. Some of the customer statements that paid attention to these subjects are:

"The varieties of appetizers they serve are few and the kimchi is unfortunately to be paid for." (Translated from Turkish)

"Frankly, I was slightly disappointed because I expected a more Korean style seating system instead of the classic desk chair. The reason for this is that there are clothes belonging to Korean culture inside and you can take pictures by trying on those clothes." (Translated from Turkish)

"The taste of most dishes is unfortunately far from the ones in Korea. Especially the last time I ate ddeokkbeokki, I was shocked. It was officially made with our chili paste, not gochujang." (Translated from Turkish)

"I would also expect a restaurant theme with a little more modern or traditional Korean motifs." (Translated from Turkish)

The topic of the menu is the least matter of concern according to the reviews, however there are some reviews regarding diversity of menu, both positive and negative, that are worth the restaurants' attention. Also, uniqueness and originality of menu and explanatoriness of menu are both praised by customers in some cases. Some of the customer statements concerning the menu theme are:

"The menu is not descriptive at all, when the employees are asked about its content, they say we don't know." (Translated from Turkish)

"I was prejudiced, but really, I think everyone can find something to suit their taste. There are so many varieties." (Translated from Turkish)

Results, Discussion and Suggestions

Interest in ethnic restaurants has increased globally both as a result of seeing eating out as a social experience rather than a physiological need and growing curiosity towards different cultures. Customers of ethnic restaurants, which are increasing in number all over the world, evaluate their experiences impartially in the comments they make on various online platforms. These comments provide important feedback to restaurant owners as well as being a guide for potential customers.

In line with the increasing interest in ethnic restaurants and especially Korean restaurants, customer reviews for Korean restaurants were analyzed in this study, the aim of which was to have a deeper understanding of the experiences of Korean restaurant customers in order to enrich and improve the restaurant experience. According to the findings, food and beverage and service and staff related factors were the subjects which Korean restaurant customers paid most attention to. Taste of food and beverage were the most attractive, yet most complained about, factor compared to other elements similar to previous research (Sukalakamala & Boyce, 2007; Albayrak, 2013; Sünnetçioğlu, Yıldırım & Bertecene, 2020). This shows that even though customers visited Korean restaurants for the purpose of experiencing an ethnic cuisine, their first aim was eating a delicious meal and receiving a welcoming service. The fact that the customers mentioned factors regarding food and beverage and service and staff more than authenticity related subjects also proves this.

While the staff and service factor was the second most mentioned subject among customers (in keeping with prior research) (Doğan, Güngör Tanrısevdi, 2016; Özkale, 2021), polite gestures and involvement of the servers were the second most influential factor of all sub themes. Customers seek a smiling face, a friendly attitude and interest from the service staff. When dining in an ethnic restaurant it can be said that customers feel out of their comfort zone and insecure about their choices due to not being completely familiar with the cuisine. Given this fact, it is thought that customers need to be informed about the menu with a positive attitude when visiting Korean restaurants.

The findings show that customers paid attention to the interior design of the restaurants included in the study. In addition to this, ethnic atmosphere was considered an attractive factor for customers. Under the authenticity theme it was interesting that banchan culture related reviews occurred the most. According to a study made by Jang et. al. (2021) as the number of side dishes served in Korean restaurants increases so the willingness to try Korean cuisine increases. Thus, as with the finding in which customers sought to experience traditional food rituals, so also the number of side dishes might be appealing for customers. Also according to the findings it is notable that customers complained about the compatibility of the served meals with the original recipes. In the light of the growing popularity of Korean culture on mass media, customers visiting these restaurants have an awareness of at least how the food is supposed to look like even if they haven't experienced it before. Therefore serving ethnic food in as original a way as possible is considered a key element.

The price theme was the third most complained about subject among the customers. This finding matches with previous research (Emir, 2011; Taştan ve Kızılcık, 2017). This result is considered to derive from the fact that food production in Korean cuisine consists of imported ingredients. For this reason the prices are easily affected by currency changes. Menu related subjects were the least mentioned theme in the reviews. This finding shows similarity with previous research made by Erdem & Yay (2017) and Taştan & Kızılcık (2017). Under this theme customers complained about and praised the diversity of the dishes most.

Based upon the analysis of online reviews regarding Korean restaurants, suggestions for Korean restaurants to obtain a more successful business through enhancing and enriching customers' restaurant experience are listed below. Korean restaurants in Istanbul should:

- Regularly check online reviews about the restaurant to gain a deeper understanding of strengths and weaknesses in the organization.
- Prioritize the taste of foods and beverages, form recipes for every dish in the menu and follow the recipes strictly to achieve a stable flavor profile, especially regarding the most mentioned dishes in the comments.
- Determine the appropriate portion amount for each meal on the menu and make sure that the kitchen staff do not exceed this portion amount.
- Train the kitchen staff about the products and cooking techniques used in Korean culinary culture; ensure that authentic products, recipes and techniques are used in the meals served.
- Offer traditional Korean food rituals and presentations properly in order to reflect Korean culture fairly.
- Incorporate banchan culture in the menu. Considering how much customers praise these free of charge small treats, they should offer appetizers in banchan table culture in sufficient quantity and variety.
- Make sure that the service staff's attitude towards customers is friendly, kind and involved. In order to achieve this, attention should be paid to the job satisfaction and organizational loyalty of personnel.
- Educate staff about Korean cuisine culture, food and beverages served in the restaurant along with service rituals by organizing regular tasting events for service staff.
- Include cultural elements (cultural music, traditional decorative items such as paintings, statues or posters) in dining areas as well as create a cozy and elaborate interior design.
- Follow a stable price policy as far as possible, taking account of a fast changing economic climate.

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