

Dining Experiences of Consumers in Ethnic Restaurants: Analysis of Tripadvisor Reviews for Japanese Restaurants in Istanbul

Serdar Sünnetçioğlu^a, Hacı Mehmet Yıldırım^b, Betül Bertecene^c

Abstract

The people involved in working life and willing to save their time to prefer food and beverage services. Businesses must differentiate their traditional services along with unstable social and cultural conditions, the increasing demand for new and different experiences of consumers and rivalry. Ethnic restaurants are places where the foods belonging to specific culture are prepared and served with genuine cooking techniques. This study aims to reveal the reviews and experiences of consumers about ethnic restaurants. In this way, it will be possible to understand which factors and how are affect the experiences of people in ethnic restaurants. By this aim, Turkish consumers' comments made on top 10 Japanese cuisines in Istanbul on TripAdvisor are analyzed with content analysis. Furthermore, the analysis is supported with descriptive analysis. As a result of the study, food and beverage services and physical environment at ethnic restaurants are the most notable factor for consumers.

Keywords

Dining Experience
Ethnic Restaurants
Japanese Restaurants
TripAdvisor

About Article

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Tüketicilerin Etnik Restoranlardaki Yemek Yeme Deneyimleri: İstanbul'daki Japon Restoranlarına İlişkin Tripadvisor Yorumlarının Analizi

Özet

Çalışma hayatında yer alan ve zamandan tasarruf etmek isteyen kişiler yeme içme ihtiyaçlarını karşılamak için yiyecek içecek işletmelerini tercih etmektedirler. Değişen sosyal ve kültürel koşullar, tüketicilerin yeni ve farklı deneyimlere olan taleplerinin artması ve artan rekabet ile birlikte işletmeler geleneksel olarak sundukları hizmetlerini farklılaştırmak zorundadırlar. Etnik restoranlar; temel aldıkları kültüre ait yiyeceklerin, özgün pişirme teknikleri ile hazırlanıp sunulduğu yerlerdir. Bu çalışmada tüketicilerin etnik restoranlara bakış açıları ve deneyimlerini ortaya koymak amaçlanmıştır. Böylece kişilerin etnik restoranlardaki deneyimlerinin en çok hangi unsurlardan ve nasıl etkilendiği anlaşılacaktır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda TripAdvisor'da en yüksek puan alan ilk 10 Japon mutfağına ilişkin yapılan yorumlar içerik analiziyle değerlendirilmiştir. Ayrıca betimsel analiz ile desteklenmiştir. Çalışma sonucunda etnik restoranlarda yiyecek-içecek ve fiziksel çevrenin tüketiciler tarafından en dikkat edilen unsur olduğu görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler

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^a Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi Turizm Fakültesi. Orcid: 0000-0003-0244-5874.

^b Doç. Dr. Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi Turizm Fakültesi. Orcid: 0000-0003-0718-7296 İletişim Yazarı: h.mehmet@comu.edu.tr

^c Yüksek Lisans Öğrencisi, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü. Orcid: 0000-0003-1646-0194.

Introduction

According to the rise of economic power in terms of the Industrial Revolution, the phenomenon of eating outside started to improve. This phenomenon goes back for many years (Walker, 2005). The restaurant industry of the United States of America (USA) started with the tavern which was opened by Samuel Coles in Boston, USA (Dittmer and Griffin, 1996, s.60). Then it began to become widespread as a result of the migrations of the cooks from Europe and later from France to the USA opening the taverns which were seen as the first sample of their own in the history (Lundberg, 1994). The taverns are known as the places dating back to 1700s in Rome and 512 BC people having meals in ancient Egypt and choosing different foods from the menu.

Ethnic food is defined as a food originates from an ethnic group which uses its knowledge of local plants and/or animal sources (Kwon, 2015). Ethnic restaurants are ethnically themed to reflect a certain culture and ethnic foods are served in dining environments (Ebster and Guist, 2005). Experiencing new flavors and authentic culture are major reasons for dining at ethnic restaurants (Liu and Mattila, 2015). Even though prior studies on ethnic dining focuses on factors such as service quality, food quality, authenticity, employees, atmosphere, and price (Ha and Jang, 2010; Kim and Jang, 2016; Kim, Youn and Rao, 2017), which factors affect dining experiences at ethnic restaurant in İstanbul Turkey remains under-researched. The appearance of ethnic restaurants is observed to start with the change in living standards and economic growth, also along with the consumers searching for new and different food cultures. The number of ethnic restaurants is observed to increase especially in big cities. It is thought that Far East restaurants have a big part in this observed increase. The goal of this study is to find out how evaluated authentic and themed ethnic restaurants by consumers. To this aim, comments of Turkish people on Japanese restaurants were investigated by content analysis. Within this framework, dining outside experience is explained, and then the evolution of restaurants in the historical process is discussed. Finally, the experiences of consumers at ethnic restaurants are examined. As a result of this study, the opinions of Turkish people about restaurants serving Japanese cuisine are analyzed in depth.

Eating Out Experience

Eating out phenomenon became more widespread after World War II. Changing social and cultural conditions made eating out phenomenon more widespread and created a heavy demand because of providing people less workload as it is fast and practical (Akarçay and Suğur, 2015). The increase of leisure time attracted people more on experiencing new and different products depending on the growth in economic income of consumers in time (Türksoy, 2002). Therefore, consumers tend to different products due to their ordinary and fast-moving choices. As a result of these tendencies, fast consumed products and services created eating out phenomenon (Özdemir, 2010).

Eating out is defined as consuming foods made away from home (Jaafar, Numbers and Eves, 2009; Kant and Graubard, 2004; Petterson and Fjellström, 2007; Warde and Martens, 2000). The broader definition is: "Eating out phenomenon is basically about the consumption of food and beverages away from home. In a commercial sense, eating out is expressed as people's consuming food and beverages produced and served by a place away from home by paying money" (Özdemir, 2010). Eating out is a way of consumption prepared by someone else and in return paid money for it (Dönmez and Bekar, 2016).

Eating out experience is sum of impressions as well as on the various satisfiers, such as food, service quality, dining company and the interior during the visit. It is concluded that customers expect restaurants to mainly satisfy social, intellectual and physiological needs. Especially social needs are dominating for evening restaurants. Edwards (2013) emphasized that eating out involves more than simply matching meals with consumers and the ingestion of food, and includes time perspectives (appropriateness of the food/time, time available to consume a meal, queuing, time since last food intake), social surroundings and physical surroundings, atmosphere or ambience, all of which can affect the eating out experience. Özdemir (2010) searched for the factors affecting the decisions of consumers and as a consequence, divided into 3 parts as; deciding to eat out, also what to eat and choosing a restaurant. As consumers decide eating out according to physiological, psychological, economic and social reasons, the factors about the person, food, and environment may affect the choice of the food. The top factors in choosing a restaurant are the quality and diversity of food, cost, ambience, and location.

Ethnic Restaurants and Japanese Cuisine

Restaurants are known to come out to fulfill physiological needs in the historical process. In earlier times, restaurants are known to be the places where curative broths were made and also recorded as places where people went with a hope to find a cure except from dining (Spang, 2007). Along with the French revolution, it was seen that cooks ran away from their countries and spread to Europe and the USA, therefore, caused many restaurants to be opened in those countries and made restaurant culture widespread all around the world (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009).

Restaurants are divided according to their service variety, size, structuring and characteristics (Denizer and Sarıışık, 2012; Yıldız, 2010; Koçak, 2004; Walker 2008). Restaurants are divided into 7 in terms of their characteristics: Fast-food restaurants, Meat restaurants, Fish restaurants, etc. By taking these types of restaurants into account, ethnic restaurants are included in other restaurants according to the type of a restaurant (Yıldız, 2010). Ethnic restaurants are the places that foods from a specific region and country are served and the foods that are different and special belonging to that country are served to the people who have never eaten them before. In ethnic restaurants, the ingredients belonging to a region or territory are prepared according to the region-specific cooking techniques and served with special service techniques (Cevizkaya, 2015). Apart from the foods of the restaurant, decoration, music that is used in the restaurant, whether the name, authenticity and the staff represent the culture appealing or not are stated as important features for customers to prefer the restaurant (Ebster and Guist, 2005).

Ethnic restaurants and thematic restaurants are sometimes confused. Ethnic restaurants are equipped with the things specific to a country, and thus a specific cultural theme is applied (Kılınç, 2014) In terms of the general purpose of ethnic restaurants, this is a way for countries to present their food culture to the other countries' or their citizens and also provide culture exchange thanks to these restaurants. The thematic restaurants that began to be popular and a part of the market in the early 1990s are designed to present not only for food service but also an entertaining experience (Weiss, Feinstein and Dalbor, 2005; Kim and Moon, 2009). Ethnic restaurants that serve foods and things specific to a culture provide a cultural service.

Lakos (2013) focused on the important elements of a culturally influenced experience-oriented service delivery process in ethnic restaurants, how it became so important and what is the way

of designing and preparing a process flow. Three important front stage elements are measured; the physical elements, the service employees and the service delivery process. It is found that these three elements had a high impact on the final realization of the dining experience.

On the contrary, thematic restaurants aim both to fulfill the dining needs of the customers and make them spend entertaining time. In thematic restaurants, apart from foods, the environment and atmosphere are at the forefront. In general terms, cultural factors are followed due to foods being cooked and served with region-specific techniques (Kılınç, 2014).

Far East cuisine has a rich content in terms of sea products. Sea products are used in many foods in Japan surrounded by oceans (Girgin, Demir and Çetinkaya, 2017). The rice which exists more than 2000 years in Asia content is the most preferred food with sea products. "Food" is expressed as Gohan in Japan. Gohan is also used for boiled rice. In the 6th century, animal source foods are removed with Buddhism in Japan and later (15th cent.) today's Japanese cuisine was founded accompanied by Zen philosophy. All these foods are the products made with Soy Sauce (shoyu), miso, tofu and soybean (<http://Web-Japan.org>). In 2013, a set of boiled plain rice called "Washoku", miso soup, main dish (beef or fish), side dish (boiled vegetables) entered the list of "UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Humanity" (<http://ich.unesco.org>).

When studies made before about ethnic restaurants, Sukalakamala and Boyce (2007) searched for the expectations and perceptions of customers about an authentic Thai (Thailand) food. Furthermore, understanding the expectations of customers is aimed in this study. According to the result of the study, location, service, cost and staff of restaurants are the most striking factors that pull customers in. Taste is seen as more important than authenticity.

Jang, Liu and Namkung (2010) explore the role of authentic atmospherics in ethnic restaurants. According to the result of the study, authentic atmospherics significantly influences consumers' emotions and emotions acted as full mediators between authentic atmospherics and behavioral intentions. Also, menu presentation, furnishings, and music were significant predictors of positive emotions whereas menu presentation and music significantly influenced negative emotions.

Liu and Jang (2009) aimed to search for the perceptions of American customers about Chinese restaurants located in the USA. The factors that influence customers more were also searched in the study. A questionnaire developed by the author was applied, and as a result, they concluded that the taste and reliability of food and environmental factors are the most influencing factors for customers. Ha and Jang (2010) examined the customer perceived value of American customers at Korean restaurants in the USA in the study they made. Also, the effects on customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions of hedonic and pragmatic values were examined. American customers find pragmatic factors of Korean restaurants more valuable in terms of hedonic ways. In another study, Ha and Jang (2010) looked at the effect of service and food quality on customer satisfaction and loyalty. According to the results, it is concluded that the quality of service and food affects customer expectations, loyalty, and satisfaction.

Moreover, the manner of staff and the taste of food have importance in ethnic restaurants. Tasai and Liu (2012) try to verify the effect of authentic dining experiences in ethnic restaurants on repurchase intentions in authentic restaurants. The repeated visits of customers are directly

proportionate to an authentic dining experience. Lee, Niode, Simonne and Bruhn (2012) searched for the attitudes of customers about the safety of especially Asia and Mexican cuisine-based foods and perceptions about food safety and attitudes towards ethnic restaurants. Ha and Jang (2010) applied focus group study and an online questionnaire to a Californian. As a result, it was indicated that participants prefer eating in restaurants where they rely on the foods. Mexican restaurants had higher points for food safety compared to Asian restaurants. Cleanliness of kitchen, toilets, and heat of foods are important factors for customers.

Jang and Park (2012) aimed to determine how food factors in ethnic restaurants affect customers' feelings, perceived values and also behavioral intentions. They wanted to determine which factors also including Korean stuff appeal to American customers. As a result of the study, it was revealed that environmental factors have priority in Korean restaurants. In addition to environmental factors, it was concluded that the factors concerning foods affect the preference of customers. Agarwal and Dahm (2015) searched for whether factors affecting success in the general restaurant are valid for ethnic restaurants or not. After the interview and questionnaire made with 20 restaurants owners, it was concluded that management style is the most important factor in factors affecting ethnic and other restaurants. Ingerson and Kim (2016) examined consumer segments based on cultural background effect on cognitive and emotional perspectives and determined that food quality in terms of gastronomy, service quality and health factor are quite important about the preference of customers. Furthermore, they stated that Korean foods and decoration are quite important and different usage of marketing styles are very crucial strategically. In the study of Baltescu and Boscor (2016), it was stated that 59 percent of local people prefer eating out and only 4 percent prefers ethnic restaurants. It was seen that ethnic restaurants do not develop a good marketing policy and it is needed for ethnic restaurants to review their marketing policies. Teyin, Aslan, Sormaz, Pekerşen and Nizamliođlu (2017) tried to draw attention to some of the ethnic restaurants located in Istanbul by reviewing the literature about ethnic restaurant notion. Cronin and Taylor (1992) stated that measuring only perspectives of customers will give more correct results in case customers do not have expectations about service before getting the service and do not know what they will expect.

Methodology

In this study qualitative research method has been used. In qualitative research, data analysis involves the preparation, organization, coding, combining of codes, creating themes, and finally presenting the data in figures or tables (Creswell, 2013, s.179). The purpose of using qualitative analysis technique in the study is to present a descriptive and realistic picture to the reader about the research topic and to direct the reviews and experiences of individuals as much as possible (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011). As an analysis method, content analysis and descriptive analysis are used. Strauss and Corbin (1990) proposed two data analysis processes: descriptive analysis and content analysis. Descriptive analysis is more superficial than content analysis and is mostly used in researches where the conceptual structure of the research is clearly defined in advance. Content analysis allows the analysis of collected data to reveal previously unclear themes and dimensions. In this direction, content analysis was conducted in the analysis of the comments. In descriptive analysis, data are summarized and interpreted according to predetermined themes (Karagöz, 2017). The data were analyzed in four stages. These are 1) coding data 2) creating themes 3) editing codes and themes 4) finding findings definition and interpretation.

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Restaurant experiences of customers are reached through the TripAdvisor website online. Top ten Japanese restaurants taking the highest evaluation in Istanbul sample on TripAdvisor. 169 positive, 46 negative and as a total of 215 comments belonging to the related restaurants between years 2012-2018 are located. The comments included in the research are limited to Turkish comments.

Reliability is an important issue in terms of the convincing results of qualitative research. In this study, it has been tried to increase the external reliability by explaining the situations related to data collection and analysis in detail. In addition, within the scope of internal reliability, time-dependent reliability with the same coding of the same phenomenon at different times; more than one researcher coded a case in the same way and tried to provide observational reliability. In qualitative research, internal validity depends on the fact that it is possible, as far as possible, with direct quotations and as neutral as possible. In order to increase the internal validity of the study, direct quotations were made from consumer comments. External validity depends on the generalization of the results. This is one of the issues where qualitative research is weak. However, it can be said that the validity of the studies increases if the inferences can be made from results that may be valid. (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011).

Results

As a result of the content analysis, 6 main themes emerged for service quality of Japanese ethnic restaurants. These themes are: "food-beverages, service quality, physical environment, cost and others" (Table 1).

Table 1. Service Quality Themes Experiment of Japanese Ethnic Restaurants by Consumers

Themes	Sub Themes	Codes	
		Positive	Negative
1- Food-Beverages (273)	1.1. Taste	184	10
	1.2. Freshness	16	-
	1.3. Presentation	37	-
	1.4. Menu Diversity	26	-
2-Staff (81)	2.1. Staff Manner		
	2.1.1. Respect	1	-
	2.1.2. Favor	14	3
	2.1.3. Interest	36	17
	2.2. Knowledgeableness	7	2
3- Service Quality (57)	2.3. Well-groomed	1	-
	3.1. Good	55	-
	3.2. Bad	-	2
4-Physical Environment (172)	4.1. Decoration	40	2
	4.2. Ambience	24	-
	4.3. Music	2	4
	4.4. Location	25	-
	4.5. View	47	-
	4.6. Crowd and Noise	-	28
5- Cost (41)	5. Reasonability	11	30
6- Others (5)	6.1. Cleanliness of Toilet	1	-
	6.2. Ancillary Services (Baby Chair)	-	4
	Total		629

When Table 1 examined, it was understood that “Food-Beverage” factor took most of the comments from consumers and was the one which consumer considered more. Taste of foods (184), freshness (16), presentation (37) and diversity (26) are factors consumers had in mind mostly. When the comments were examined, it was seen that the flavor came into prominence in the comments about the food-beverages theme. For example, comment 32 emphasized the flavor of the food, while comment 45 underlined the variety of food.

“I can say that me as a person who doesn’t love Sushi, the restaurant made me love it. The place where we went with friends for a special day and although I didn’t use to love Sushi, the special tastes we gave the order to fit in with the crowd were seriously amazing. By the way, they also have pretty good and delicious meat menu, but I think you should go to eat sushi. Do not ever leave the restaurant before eating the desserts after the meal.”

Comment 32

“The most delicious Sushi I have ever eaten is here; I am mad about it. It could make someone who has never tried or eaten. Sushi addicted; it is the best of the Anatolian side. It could rank among the top three in Istanbul. Edamame as a start, tuna tartar among Sushi, tornado 1, Volcano are my favorites. Xiomi roll is a legend. In the final, soufflé is brilliant for a dessert. If you say: “We want to taste all of it two of us together”, you should be willing to pay 250-300 TL, but it is worth it.”

Comment 45

Apart from food factors, it was seen that what consumers considered more were the staff and physical environment factors. Accordingly, it is obvious that consumers pay attention to the staff’s attitude towards a consumer, knowledge of menu and service speed. It was observed that both positive (comment 51) and negative (comment 18) comments regarding the staff.

“We were welcomed with waiters who have sullen faces in the place where we went with my husband and baby, we couldn’t take any answer for any of our problems, there was no baby chair, I ignored their helplessness, we were treated as we were making mistakes about asking and being there with the baby. This bad treatment made us get us down totally.”

Comment 18

“We had a kind and knowledgeable waiter. They brought everything we wanted in order at once. The service sets used plain and elegant.”

Comment 51

Location and view of the restaurant provide an opportunity for consumers to have a good time while dining. Furthermore, location and view could be a factor in attracting consumers. Preferences and experiences of consumers about restaurant view are important factors for leaving a positive impression.

“The ambiance was moderate; there was something lack in the place. It was more like a Luxurious Far East artisan’s restaurant concept except enjoying for a long time.”

Comment 210

"Inari is the goddess of rice and tea which is symbolized for plentifulness and represented with the white fox and woman figure. The woman figure representing this goddess is in the middle of the place. The decoration is fascinating. "

Comment 185

Service quality and speed take an important place at the ethnic restaurant experiences of consumers along with cost and other factors. Positive comments were made about the service in general (Comments 14, 96, 193).

"Both the service and reception were, I think, everything was good."- Comment 14

"The service was amazing."- Comment 96

"The service and interest were at a high level."- Comment 193

The price of the meals is effective on the consumers' choice of restaurant. There are consumers who find prices to be high (Comment 48), as well as consumers who find prices favorable (Comment 136). In addition to costs, cleanliness of toilet and ancillary services are mentioned in the comments.

"The cost is reasonable." - Comment 136

"The costs are like in "Istanbul." - Comment 48

According to the findings, physical environment – ambiance (depending on view), decoration and music have a big role in having a positive effect on ethnic restaurant experiences of consumers.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, the reviews and experiences of consumers about ethnic restaurants are investigated. According to the results, the most important factor affecting the ethnic restaurant experiences of the people are the taste of the food and the physical environment. In the experience of the people, it takes precedence over the physical environment rather than the factors such as service quality and price. Therefore, based on this finding, it can be said that it is important to create the ambiance reflecting that culture in ethnic restaurants.

The factors consumers pay attention more are food-beverage and physical environment. The location, service, cost, and staff are the most attractive factors that pull customers in. Taste of foods is seen as more important than authenticity. Similarly, Lee, Niode, Simonne, and Bruhn (2012) searched for the expectations of customers from authentic and ethnic restaurants and as a result of this study, it was emphasized that the most important factor which customers expected more was the taste. Ha and Jang (2010) concluded that service and food quality affect customer satisfaction and loyalty. When the former studies made about ethnic restaurants examined, Sukalakamala and Boyce (2007) searched for the perspectives and expectations of customers about an authentic Thai (Thailand) food. This article emphasizes whichever restaurant people go to, the main motivation is food and they first share ideas about the food. The reason why the second factor that people evaluated most is physical environment is thought to be due to characteristics of ethnic restaurants. Because ethnic restaurants contain a specific cultural theme inside and reflect this to their appearances. This result matches up with

the research results of Jang and Park (2012). As a result of that study, it was seen that American customers in Korean restaurants give priority to environmental factors. In the study Ting, Tan and John (2017) made, they concluded that making an advertisement of ethnic foods could be an effective way to protect cuisine heritages.

When the comments are examined, it is seen that it is composed of people who have never tried Japanese cuisine products before, and they like it very much after trying it. It can be concluded that the main reason for choosing an ethnic restaurant is curiosity. In this sense, it is seen that they approach the food in ethnic restaurants with hesitation and then they like it very much. Consumers who have the fear of trying new food (food neophobia) that review these comments may also change their opinion about being a restaurant patronage.

Based on our study, people preferring ethnic restaurants seem to care about food factor, and in this regard, it is thought that using food factor while creating marketing policy could help a lot. Besides, with preserving and advertising ethnic foods, people will become conscious about different food cultures and preference of restaurants and foods will increase, too. Within this subject, our study aims to shed light on the proprietors and expectations of ethnic restaurants and make a contribution to literature in this way. Therefore, in addition to the quantitative researches in the literature, this qualitative research focused on the elements of consumer attention in ethnic restaurants by conducting content analysis on consumer reviews. The results here may be beneficial for ethnic restaurant operators and potential entrepreneurs.

This study is limited to TripAdvisor comments on Japanese restaurants in Istanbul. In the future the antecedents and results that affect the experience of eating can be investigated using quantitative methods. Also, eating experiences of different ethnic cuisines in different regions are needed to be investigated.

In this study, Japanese restaurants taking place in Turkey were evaluated. It seems important for future studies to scrutinize the situations of other countries' ethnic restaurants. Another topic that should be taken into consideration is the things directing consumers to these restaurants. Furthermore, whether these restaurants affect the image of the country they present and whether it creates a willingness to go to these countries or not are topics that should be considered. After the situation is examined in terms of ethnic restaurants in Turkey, what the situation is in other countries in terms of Turkish restaurants are topics that must be researched.

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