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The relationship between restaurant attribute satisfaction and return intent in theme restaurants

Rachel Dawn Weiss
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESTAURANT ATTRIBUTE SATISFACTION
AND RETURN INTENT IN THEME RESTAURANTS

by

Rachel D. Weiss

Bachelor of Science
University of Florida
1997

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Science Degree
William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration

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The Thesis prepared by

RACHEL WEISS

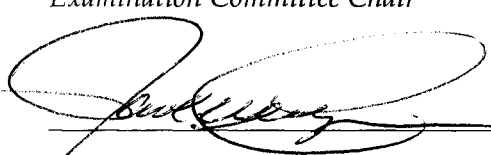
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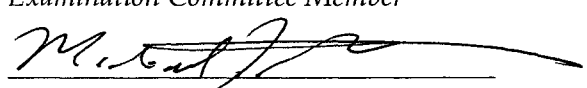
MASTER OF SCIENCE IN HOTEL ADMINISTRATION


Examination Committee Chair


Dean of the Graduate College


Examination Committee Member


Examination Committee Member


Graduate College Faculty Representative

ABSTRACT

The Relationship between Restaurant Attribute Satisfaction and Return Intent in Theme Restaurants

by

Rachel D. Weiss

Dr. Andrew Hale Feinstein, Examination Committee Chair
Assistant Professor of Hotel Administration
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Theme restaurants were designed to provide their customers with a meal coupled with an entertaining experience (Bagli, 1998). After a rapid rise in popularity in the early to mid 1990's, theme restaurants began to experience a decline in market share. As the theme restaurant segment experiences the downsizing of many once popular brands, it is imperative that the industry segment investigate customer satisfaction with restaurant attributes in order to assess which areas are in need of improvement. Although much research has been conducted on customer satisfaction in the service industries, none has focused on the theme restaurant industry in particular. Expectancy disconfirmation theory has been adopted in order to assess customer satisfaction with theme restaurant attributes. This study adds to the existing body of customer satisfaction literature by examining four theme restaurant attributes and their influence on return intent. The restaurant attributes of interest in this study are food quality, service quality, atmosphere, and novelty.

Findings and Conclusion: This study has provided empirical results indicating that customer satisfaction with the theme restaurant attributes food quality and atmosphere is influential in determining return intent. These findings support previous research showing a link between customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. The present research provides a contribution to the field by providing insight into the repeat purchase behavior of theme restaurant patrons. It expands the current body of literature on customer satisfaction by examining an industry segment that has not been previously researched.

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CHAPTER I

THE STUDY AND ITS PURPOSE

Introduction

As tourists visiting Las Vegas make their way down the Strip, they are bombarded by signs enticing them to visit theme restaurants. Within this tourist mecca, a passerby will notice the facades of Planet Hollywood, ESPN Zone, Harley Davidson Café, and House of Blues. Slightly hidden from view or tucked away within casinos, Rainforest Café and Hard Rock Café beckon as well. All of these restaurants share a similar goal: to reel their customers in on the promise of a novel restaurant experience involving entertaining décor and casual dining. In addition to the meal, the patrons will hopefully purchase a souvenir or two to commemorate their experience.

However, these restaurants often fall short of keeping their promise of providing a novel, entertaining dining experience to customers (Bagli, 1998). The decline of the theme restaurant industry, which has occurred primarily in non-tourist locations, has been characterized by the downsizing or elimination of many once-popular brands such as Fashion Café, All-Star Café, Planet Hollywood, and Rainforest Café (Pate, 2000). The restaurants' losses of novelty, low-quality food, and stale décor have been among the multitude of reasons cited for the decline of the theme restaurant segment (Bagli, 1998; Pate, 2000).

To assess how a restaurant is performing and thus know where improvements are needed, managers need to be able to find out if their customers are satisfied. One of the most popular and widely accepted ways to assess customer satisfaction in the service industries is through an application of expectancy disconfirmation theory (Oh, 1999). This theory views customer satisfaction as a result of whether customers' perceptions of a given service encounter live up to their expectations of that encounter (Oliver, 1980). If perceptions exceed expectations, a positive disconfirmation has occurred. If they are below expectations, a negative disconfirmation has occurred. Zero disconfirmation occurs when perceptions equal expectations.

Customer satisfaction within the expectancy disconfirmation framework can be measured via direct or indirect methods of questioning. Indirect questioning, popularized by the SERVQUAL questionnaire, uses two sets of questions about a service encounter (Parasuraman, Zeithamal, & Berry, 1988). One set measures customers' expectations of the encounter, the other measures their perceptions. Customer satisfaction is assessed by subtracting the expectation scores from the perception scores of each service attribute. Direct questioning, on the other hand, eliminates the need to calculate difference scores. Instead, this method uses a Likert-type scale that contains options ranging from "worse than expected" to "better than expected" to measure expectancy disconfirmation (Yuksel & Rimmington, 1998).

Researchers typically use multi-attribute scales to assess customer satisfaction in restaurant settings (Stevens, Knutson, & Patton, 1995; Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke, 1997; Kivela, Reece, & Inbakaran, 1999; Qu, 1997). In order to find out how important each of these attributes is in determining dining choice and repeat purchase, customers

may be asked to rank or rate the relative importance of the attributes (Qu, 1997; Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke, 1997). These attribute scores help managers focus their improvement efforts on areas deemed most important by customers.

Of all the possible determinants of customer satisfaction in restaurants, studies have often found customer satisfaction with food quality to be a powerful predictor of customer intent to return (Oh, 2000; Qu, 1997; Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke, 1997). A study by MacLaurin and MacLaurin (2000) found that Hard Rock Café, one of the most successful theme restaurant chains, ranked highest among its competitors in terms of food quality. Therefore, it is logical to think that customer satisfaction with theme restaurants' food quality may be influential in determining return intention.

Service quality has also been found to be a significant contributing factor in determining customer satisfaction and return intent in restaurant settings (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, & Voss, 2002; Stevens, Knutson, & Patton, 1995; Qu, 1997; Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke, 1997). These findings lead the author to believe that service quality may be important in determining return intention for theme restaurant patrons as well.

The atmosphere of a service setting has been deemed essential in determining customer satisfaction (Bitner, 1992). It has also been established that atmosphere quality can be influential in determining repeat patronage (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994). Theme restaurants heavily emphasize their atmospherics, including décor, music, and lighting, as a selling point to consumers. It is logical to think that customer perception of the restaurants' atmospherics may be influential in determining return intention.

Consumer choice and decision-making are thought to be attributed to experience seeking behavior (Hirschman, 1984). One of the behaviors people exhibit in relation to experience seeking is novelty seeking. It is thought that people desire new and different experiences and this phenomenon influences purchase behavior (Hirschman, 1984). It has been found that novelty seeking is a motivator in desire to travel (Lee & Crompton, 1992). In addition, it has been found that people who visit novel travel locations are less likely to return to the same location again (Bello & Etzel, 1985). In other words, novelty “wear-out” occurs. It is logical to think that novelty “wear-out” may have occurred in the theme restaurant segment as well, resulting in low levels of repeat business.

Problem Statement

More awareness by theme restaurant managers and entrepreneurs is needed to understand the relative influence of various restaurant attributes in determining return intention of theme restaurant patrons. This research will attempt to expand the current body of research in the area by determining the influence customer satisfaction with theme restaurant attributes has in determining theme restaurant patrons’ intent to return. The restaurant attributes of interest in this study are food quality, service quality, atmosphere, and novelty. These attributes were chosen for inclusion in the study due to their prevalence in the customer satisfaction literature and interest to the researcher (Qu, 1997; Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke, 1997; Kivela, Reece, & Inbakaran, 1999).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the influence of customer satisfaction with food quality, service quality, atmosphere, and novelty on customer intent to return within the theme restaurant segment. This study provides theme restaurant managers, investors, and executives with insight as to what factors may be related to the low repeat patronage rates of their restaurants.

In addition, the results obtained from this study increase the limited amount of literature available on the theme restaurant segment. Further, the study attempts to empirically determine why the theme restaurant industry has experienced such a sharp decline in popularity.

Research Questions

1. Which theme restaurant attributes are patrons most satisfied with?
2. Does satisfaction with theme restaurant attributes influence intent to return?
3. Are customer satisfaction scores heterogeneous among the restaurants studied?

Significance of the Study

Research is warranted within the context of theme restaurants because this segment of the restaurant industry is in a state of decline, and industry managers need help in uncovering what factors are contributing to the industry's downfall. A greater understanding is needed of what is going wrong in this business sector so that theme restaurant managers and entrepreneurs can cater to what is important to the customer and avoid future restaurant closings. One way to do this is to find out what factors are

influential in determining customer intent to return to theme restaurants. Identifying these factors focuses improvement efforts in the correct areas. In addition, it avoids resource expenditure in areas that are not important to customers. Finally, this study will contribute to the limited body of academic literature available on the theme restaurant industry. It will also expand the body of academic literature on customer satisfaction in restaurants.

Limitations

This study is limited in that it will only be looking at four of the variables that may be influential in determining repeat patronage of theme restaurants. Given the deadline for completion of this project, including more variables would have been unmanageable for the author.

Further, data was collected via a convenience sample in the Las Vegas market during a one week period. Therefore, it may not be representative of the behavior and opinions displayed by all patrons of the theme restaurant segment. Also, approximately 20% of the people approached and asked to participate in the study refused. Reasons cited for refusal included lack of time, lack of desire, and not having eaten at one of the restaurants of interest. Finally, although selected due to their status as prototypes, the three restaurants analyzed in this study may not be representative of the theme restaurant industry as a whole.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Theme restaurants have been called a number of things since their explosion onto the restaurant scene in the early 1990's. They have been labeled a "slickly packaged blend of eating, shopping, and entertainment" (Bagli, 1998, p. 1). They have been coined "eatertainment" facilities by many (Pate, 2000; Van Houten, 1998; Chenoweth, 2000) and defined as "glorified museums with average food" (Van Houten, 1998, p. 28). These establishments "mix food with games or tell a story through the décor" (Pate, 2000, p. 1). They have been characterized as "restaurant[s] at which glassed-in display cases of somewhat obscure pop-culture memorabilia are used to distract diners from corporate cookery gone wrong" (Chenoweth, 2000, p. 1).

Two of the characteristics many theme restaurants rely on for customer draw are their novelty and unique décor/atmosphere. Now that the theme restaurant segment is floundering (Bagli, 1998), it is worth exploring whether customer perceptions of these restaurant's novelty and atmosphere have an effect on customer intent to return. It is also of interest to determine what influence customer perception of food quality, often seen as a negative aspect of the theme restaurant experience, has on their intent to return. The relative influence of the four customer satisfaction dimensions identified in this review of literature will be assessed to uncover which dimensions are influential in determining

customer intent to return. The following review of literature attempts to provide an overview of the theme restaurant industry as well as explore these four constructs.

Theme Restaurants

A number of unique traits can be used to characterize theme restaurants. Also dubbed “eatertainment” restaurants by trade press, theme restaurants typically feature a neatly packaged combination of dining, retail stores, and entertainment of some sort (Ramseyer, 2001; Bagli, 1998). They can be considered unique in that they often focus on retail sales or entertainment value above sales in other areas (Farkas, 1998). In fact, at the height of the theme restaurant craze, retail sales accounted for more than 45% of total revenue for many of these organizations (Bagli, 1998). Some of the retail merchandise from these restaurants, such as the logo pins from the Hard Rock Café locations, have even gone on to become collector’s items.

Theme restaurants can also be characterized by their elaborate décor (Bagli, 1998). The décor often attempts to tell a story or even provide a source of entertainment on its own (Pate, 2000). Some prominent examples include the elaborate simulated rainforest décor at Rainforest Café and the Hollywood memorabilia displayed at Planet Hollywood. Other atmospheric elements play a role in the entertainment value of theme restaurants as well. For instance, music appropriate to the given theme is usually piped into these restaurants. Rock and roll is played at the Hard Rock Café, while the Rainforest Café restaurants are infused with the sounds of exotic birds and water.

Theme restaurants attempt to provide the guest with an experience (Van Houten, 1998). It is the restaurants’ goal that guests walk away with more than just a full stomach.

In fact, as illustrated by theme restaurants' focus on retail sales, guests can often experience the restaurant without actually eating there.

The theme restaurant industry has appealed primarily to tourists (Emmons, 2000). In fact, Hard Rock Café estimates that up to 70% of their business is tourist-driven (Ramseyer, 2001). Because of their tourist appeal, theme restaurants have typically experienced the most success in high-traffic tourist locations. Prominent examples of this are seen in the proliferation of theme restaurant chains in locations such as the Las Vegas Strip, Downtown Disney, and New Orleans' French Quarter.

History of Theme Restaurants

The Victoria Station restaurants have been cited as one of the original theme restaurant chains (MacLaurin & MacLaurin, 2000). This chain was founded in 1969 and, although no longer in business, can be viewed as an industry pioneer. Similar to the theme restaurant chains in existence today, the Victoria Station restaurants featured a casual dining menu served in a unique setting. The setting consisted of dining areas modeled after railroad boxcars. The theme decor featured elements such as railroad memorabilia and baggage carts.

Considered by most to be an industry pioneer, the opening of the first Hard Rock Café in 1971 marked the early beginnings of the theme restaurant industry (MacLaurin & MacLaurin, 2000). The boom of this segment, however, did not really begin until the early nineties (Emmons, 2000) when the number of theme restaurant chains went from a modest six to over thirty in a period of six years (Bagli, 1998). During the period 1992-1998 theme restaurant revenues increased from \$300 million to over \$2 billion (Bagli,

1998). During this period, jumping on the theme restaurant bandwagon seemed like a surefire way to make a lot of money.

Now, however, the theme restaurant industry is in trouble. Industry experts have stated that the life cycle of this segment was shorter than expected (Bagli, 1998). The rapid decline of this segment has been characterized by the closing of many restaurant units, particularly in non-tourist markets. Two of the industry prototypes, Planet Hollywood and Rainforest Café, have fallen into financial tailspins (Ramseyer, 2001). Predictions have been made as to the future of the theme restaurant industry. Restaurant analysts think Hard Rock Café may survive the industry's decline because it has made food and décor a primary focus (Bagli, 1998). Other than that, it has been predicted that there will be no other international theme restaurant chains, only single facilities in high-tourist locations (Bagli, 1998).

Major Theme Restaurant Chains

Three major theme restaurant chains have been chosen for analysis in this study due to their status as industry prototypes. In addition, these chains are three of the only theme restaurant chains that still have multiple high profile units that include locations in the Las Vegas market.

Hard Rock

After 31 years in business, the Hard Rock Café is often considered an icon in the industry. The first Hard Rock Café opened in London on June 14, 1971 (www.hardrock.com/corporate/history/ Retrieved on November 11, 2002). It was founded by Peter Morton and Isaac Tigrett. The theme is comprised of displays of music

memorabilia and American style food, as well as rock and roll background music in the dining rooms and retail stores.

Expansion of the chain began in 1982 when Morton and Tigrett opened Hard Rock Café branches in various major cities in the U.S and abroad. Tigrett eventually sold his interest in the Hard Rock Chain to Mecca and went on to found the House of Blues chain of restaurants and music venues. In 1990, the London-based Rank Group, Plc. gained control of the organization by buying out Mecca, Peter Morton, and Hard Rock Canada investor Nick Bitove and proceeded to consolidate the brand. Currently, the Hard Rock Café has 108 branches in 41 countries.

Planet Hollywood

Opened in 1992 by Keith Barish and Robert Earl, Planet Hollywood is considered one of the theme restaurants that define the segment (Ramseyer, 2000). This chain opened with a well-publicized event in Los Angeles, primarily due to the influence of their high profile celebrity investors including Bruce Willis, Demi Moore, and Arnold Schwarzenegger. The theme concept focuses on the Hollywood film industry and displays movie memorabilia prominently in its units (MacLaurin & MacLaurin, 2000). Rapid expansion of this chain resulted in more than 80 worldwide locations by the late nineties. In the last few years, they have experienced the decline felt by many restaurants in this segment. Their decline has included filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection and the closing of many of their units. Today, only units in high profile locations remain. These locations include nine U.S. units in cities such as Las Vegas, Orlando, and Honolulu as well as 21 international units in cities such as Cancun, Amsterdam, and Paris (<http://www.planethollywood.com/restaurant.shtm> / Retrieved on November 21, 2002).

Rainforest

Also considered to be a quintessential theme restaurant (Ramseyer, 2000), Rainforest Café opened in 1992 with a theme concept that focused on surrounding the customer with a simulated rainforest environment while dining. Some of the features of this environment include simulated thunderstorms, waterfalls, and wildlife. The restaurants are designed to provide both visual and audio stimulation to the customer. These restaurants, much like their predecessors Hard Rock Café and Planet Hollywood, offer a menu consisting of American-style fare. Following a rapid expansion period, Rainforest Café experienced financial troubles and was acquired by Landry's Seafood, Inc. in 2000 (Battaglia, 2000). To date, many mall-oriented locations have been closed, with more focus placed on high-profile locations subject to tourist traffic.

A myriad of potential reasons have been cited in trade literature for the decline of the theme restaurant industry. They include high priced menus (Pate, 2000), low quality food (Bagli, 1998), rapid expansion (Ramseyer, 2001), loss of novelty (Bagli, 1998), poor location selection (Frumkin, 2000), low repeat business (Farkas, 1998), high building/development costs (Ramseyer, 2001), and décor that never changes (Bagli, 1998).

It is of interest to explore if four of the qualities discussed later in the review of literature as essential in the proliferation and success of theme restaurant chains have an effect on customers' intent to return. To assess the effect each of these variables has on return intent, the expectancy disconfirmation model will be used as a basis for explaining customer satisfaction with various theme restaurant traits.

Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory

Customer satisfaction can be defined as “a post-consumption evaluative judgment concerning a product or a service” (Yuksel & Rimmington, 1998, p. 61). Due to the importance of retaining customers in the highly competitive food service industry, scholars and industry practitioners have become increasingly concerned with implementing methods that reveal whether or not their customers are happy with the service they provide (Oh, 1999; Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke, 1997; Qu, 1997). A prevailing model of customer satisfaction assessment has its roots in expectancy disconfirmation theory.

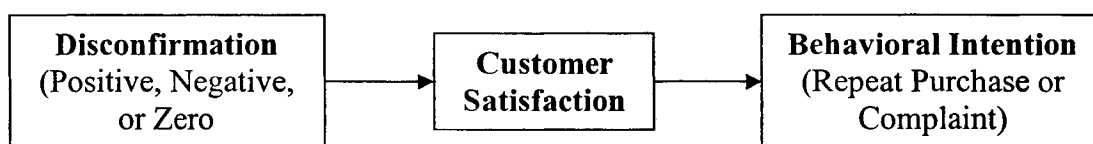
The expectancy disconfirmation paradigm states that customers form judgments or opinions about a given service by comparing the actual service encounter with their expectations of how the service should have been performed (Oliver, 1980). In essence, perceived quality of a service can be determined by the gap that exists between the consumer’s perceptions and expectations of the service encounter (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988).

The expectation aspect of service quality can be viewed as a normative expectation of what should happen when purchasing a service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). The perception aspect of the encounter, on the other hand, focuses on what actually occurred during the encounter. Perceived quality is conceptualized as a subjective, personal judgment about the service that often differs between judges (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1998). This differs from objective quality that can often be found in the evaluation of products. For example, a defective appliance can be agreed upon by

judges to be of sub-standard quality while opinions about a dining experience may vary based on who experienced it.

Oliver (1981) was one of the first scholars to propose a model (see Table 1) where customer satisfaction was determined by contrasting customers' perceptions with their expectations. In his model, customer satisfaction is viewed as an emotional state that occurs when a customer experiences a positive disconfirmation of his/her expectations of a purchase encounter. He defined disconfirmation as the "mental comparison of an actual state of nature with its anticipated probability" (Oliver, 1981, p. 35). He reasoned that one of three possible things could occur in any given purchase situation. If the purchase experience exceeds the consumer's expectations of the event, a positive disconfirmation has occurred. If the purchase experience falls short of consumer expectations, a negative disconfirmation has occurred. Finally, if the purchase experience meets customer expectations a zero disconfirmation, or confirmation, has occurred.

Oliver applied his customer satisfaction model in a retail setting to uncover the potential behavioral outcomes of customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction. His model (Table 1) showed that people enter a retail environment with a number of pre-patronage expectations. Based on a number of factors related to the retail experience (i.e. store crowdedness or merchandise availability) the person's expectations are met, positively disconfirmed, or negatively disconfirmed. It is these disconfirmations that provide the basis for determining customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Finally, Oliver found that a possible behavioral outcome of customer satisfaction in a retail setting is repeat purchase, or store loyalty, whereas a possible behavioral outcome of customer dissatisfaction would be engaging in a complaint.

Table 1: Expectancy Disconfirmation Model

Oh (1999) tested a similar model of customer satisfaction within the hospitality industry. His study tested the relationships among perceived service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and repurchase intention among luxury hotel guests. He found that significant path relationships exist between perceived service quality and customer satisfaction. Moreover, he found that customer satisfaction was positively related to both repurchase intention and intent to spread positive word of mouth about the hotel. A second study used a laboratory setting to simulate a guest visit to a hotel (Boulding, Kalra, Staelin, & Zeithaml, 1993). This study found that the more favorable people's perceptions of a hotel's service quality in comparison to their expectations of the service encounter, the more likely they were to claim they would engage in repeat purchase of the hotel product.

Measurement Tools

Two research methods can be used to assess customer satisfaction scores within the expectancy disconfirmation framework. The first method is classified as "indirect" or inferred disconfirmation (Yuksel & Rimmington, 1998, p.61). When using this method, the customer is asked two sets of questions. One set of questions asks about the customer's expectations of various aspects of the given product or service and the other set asks about his/her perceptions of the same aspects. A difference score is then

calculated to measure the extent to which his/her expectations were met. This arithmetic method is the basis of the SERVQUAL instrument used in determining perceived service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988).

Indirect Method of Assessment

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1998) developed the SERVQUAL scale for use in measuring perceived service quality. Repeated surveys found that questions that were significant in determining perceptions of service quality fell into five distinct categories. These dimensions include tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The authors believed these dimensions to be characteristic of all service firms. The SERVQUAL model views customer satisfaction as transaction-specific, as opposed to an overall feeling or attitude about a service. To assess a customers' level of satisfaction with a given service, their perceptions and expectations must be measured across these dimensions and a difference score calculated for each question (perceptions minus expectations). A positive "gap" is considered to be good. This occurs when the customers' perceptions exceed their expectations. A negative "gap" occurs when customer expectations were not met.

The SERVQUAL model has been widely accepted across fields (Oh, 1999; Stevens, Knutson, & Patton, 1995) and has been adapted for use in the restaurant industry as well as many others. The DINESERV scale adapted the five SERVQUAL dimensions to measure perceived service quality in a restaurant-specific setting (Stevens, Knutson, & Patton, 1995). DINESERV was tested on approximately 200 casual dining, 200 quick service, and 200 fine dining patrons and the authors found that the items fell under the five previously established SERVQUAL dimensions. This article suggested that the

DINESERV scale could be used to uncover a restaurant's problem areas (where perceptions were not meeting expectations) and form strategies to correct these problems. In addition, the scale is thought to be useful in providing continual assessment of a restaurant operation to uncover which areas are improving and/or lagging.

Direct Method of Assessment

The direct method of questioning is the second method that can be used to assess customer satisfaction scores within the expectancy disconfirmation framework. Instead of asking participants two full sets of questions to assess their perceptions and expectations, only one set is used. This method uses a summary-judgment scale to answer the questions. The scale contains options ranging from "worse than expected" to "better than expected" to measure expectancy disconfirmation and eliminates the need to calculate difference scores (Yuksel & Rimmington, 1998). Oliver (1981), in his pioneering research on expectancy disconfirmation theory, proposed that in order to effectively measure disconfirmation, a Likert-type scale should be used with response options similar to those stated above. He found that use of this scale of measurement gave results that were highly correlated with accurate customer satisfaction measurement.

Many researchers have used the direct method of questioning to assess customer satisfaction in hospitality settings. Kivela, Reece, and Inbakaran (1999) used the direct method of questioning to assess customer satisfaction of Hong Kong restaurant patrons. Qu (1997) used this method to question Chinese restaurant patrons about their satisfaction level across four restaurant attribute areas. Finally, Pettijohn, Pettijohn, and Luke (1997) employed this assessment method to establish customer satisfaction scores

for fast food restaurants. In addition to assessing customer satisfaction in restaurants, it is also essential to find out which restaurant attributes are most important to customers.

Attribute Importance

It is generally accepted that multi-attribute scales are appropriate for use in measuring guest satisfaction in restaurants (Stevens, Knutson, & Patton, 1995; Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke, 1997; Kivela, Reece, & Inbakaran, 1999; Qu, 1997). Although researchers differ in their opinions on which attributes should be included in a customer satisfaction model, attribute importance scores can be used in combination with the expectancy disconfirmation model of customer satisfaction assessment to assess the relative importance a customer assigns to particular aspects of a service encounter (Yuksel & Rimmington, 1998). This step is essential because it allows management to uncover which aspects of the service encounter are most important to the customer and can help guide management's improvement efforts (Dube, Renaghan, & Miller, 1994).

A study by Dube, Renaghan, & Miller (1994) used attribute importance scores to determine the relative importance of various upscale restaurant attributes in determining customer's repeat purchase intentions. The authors theorized that customer satisfaction in restaurants is a function of multiple elements of the dining experience. They found that all of the elements studied had a significant influence on diners' intent to return to the restaurant, but that the elements had different importance scores that varied based on the patrons' type of dining occasions. Tasty food, attentive service, and atmosphere were ranked with high importance whether the patron was dining on a business or pleasure occasion.

A study conducted by Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke (1997) attempted to determine which restaurant attributes were most important in contributing to customer satisfaction of fast food restaurant patrons. They found that food quality was rated as most important, followed by cleanliness and value. Menu variety and store atmosphere were ranked as least important. These findings were significant because they helped fast food restaurant managers use their resources to make improvements on the store elements deemed most influential in determining customer satisfaction.

Qu (1997) conducted a survey of Chinese restaurant patrons in order to determine which restaurant attributes were most important in their selection of a Chinese restaurant and which attributes were most influential in predicting their intent to return to the restaurant. He found that the same four restaurant dimensions were significant in customer selection of a Chinese restaurant and repeat patronage intention. These dimensions included food and environment, service and courtesy, price and value, and location advertising and promotion.

Food Quality

Multiple studies have found that customer satisfaction with a restaurant's food quality is a powerful predictor of customer intent to return to a given restaurant (Oh, 2000; Qu, 1997; Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke, 1997). In studies of both fast food restaurants (Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke, 1997) and Chinese restaurants (Qu, 1997), food quality was ranked as one of the most important determinants of customer's decisions to return to a given restaurant.

A study by MacLaurin and MacLaurin (2000) found that Hard Rock Café, one of the most successful theme restaurant chains, ranked highest among its competitors in terms of food quality. However, all theme restaurant managers may not understand the relationship between food quality and return intent. These chains continue to serve low quality food products while expecting their customers to return on the basis of the restaurants' atmosphere and novelty alone (Bagli, 1998). Given the number of publications that cite theme restaurants' low-quality food as a factor contributing to their failure, it is important to address this issue as it relates to customer return intent (Bagli, 1998; Chenoweth, 2000).

Service Quality

Many studies have cited the importance of service quality in determining customer satisfaction with a service encounter (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, & Voss, 2002; Stevens, Knutson, & Patton, 1995; Qu, 1997; Pettijohn, Pettijon, & Luke, 1997). In their study on determining service quality in a retail setting, Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, & Voss (2002) found that interpersonal service quality was important in determining customer assessment of overall service quality. The interpersonal service quality construct consists of the interactions between employees and customers, such as personal attention to customers and customers being treated well. In this study, participants watched videos of retail environments where customers were either greeted by multiple uniformed employees or not greeted by employees at all. They found that this variation in interpersonal service quality had a significant, direct effect on store re-patronage intentions. Participants who saw the video of customers that were greeted by uniformed

employees were more likely to indicate that they would return to the store than those participants who saw the video of customers that were not greeted.

In restaurant settings, service quality has been found to be influential in determining customer satisfaction and return intention as well. In Qu's (1997) survey of Chinese restaurant patrons, it was found that the service and courtesy dimension was second only to the food and environment dimension in determining customer likelihood of returning to a given restaurant in the future. The results of a study of ambient restaurant patrons in Hong Kong confirmed that the service quality dimension contributed strongly to customer intent to return to a given restaurant (Kivela, Inbakaran, & Reece, 2000).

Atmosphere

In service settings such as restaurants and hotels, the atmosphere in which the service takes place may be crucial in determining customer perception and satisfaction with the service encounter (Bitner, 1992). This is particularly true due to the intangible nature of services, where the absence of a physical product to evaluate may lead customers to pay more attention to the service environment (Bitner, 1992). The store environment has also been viewed as essential in belief formation and categorization of the firm as well as in conveying the service's image (Bitner, 1992). Bitner (1992) defines a servicescape as the manmade, physical surroundings or the built environment.

There are two types of servicescapes, elaborate and lean (Bitner, 1992). A lean servicescape contains minimal elements and objects. An example of a lean servicescape would be a hot dog stand or a self-service kiosk. An elaborate servicescape, on the other hand, consists of many interrelated elements and forms. A theme restaurant is an example

of a business with an elaborate servicescape. It typically consists of multiple sales areas (i.e. bar, dining facility, retail store) and also often features many theme related objects in its décor package (i.e. rock memorabilia, rainforest animals).

Bitner (1992) outlines the three primary dimensions of a servicescape. The first dimension is ambient. This consists of elements such as noise level, temperature, and odor. The second dimension is space/function consisting of the layout and furnishings of the servicescape. The final dimension is signs, symbols, and artifacts. This dimension focuses on the style of décor and signage used.

Multiple studies suggest that servicescapes in leisure services will influence customer satisfaction with the service and, in turn, influence repeat patronage intent (Bitner, 1992; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994). Bitner's (1992) model suggests that a path relationship exists between environmental dimensions of a servicescape and approach behaviors towards that servicescape. Some of the approach behaviors described include stay/explore, spend money, and return. Her study proposes that when people have positive responses to a servicescape, it will lead to their exhibiting approach behaviors towards that servicescape. A more recent model has been developed that suggests that store environment design cues have a significant effect on perceptions of merchandise quality (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, & Voss, 2002).

A study by Wakefield and Blodgett (1994) found that, in a Major League Baseball stadium setting, perception of a stadium's servicescape quality affected participants' satisfaction levels and their willingness to attend games. A final study equated atmosphere with the physical environment (Mayer, Johnson, Hu, & Chen, 1998). In this study, atmosphere was thought to include such elements as theme, décor, and lighting.

This study showed that in a regression model designed to predict slot player satisfaction, the variable “atmosphere” had a significant influence on satisfaction. In this study, the atmosphere variable consisted of elements such as noise level, décor, temperature, and air quality.

The available research on atmosphere in service settings leads to the assumption that elements of the atmosphere (or servicescape) should influence customer perceptions in a theme restaurant setting as well. In fact, an unpublished study by Mayer and Johnson suggested that the design element of theme would contribute heavily to the perception of casino atmosphere. The physical environment of a theme restaurant may have an even more significant impact on customer perceptions than the environment has in a “typical” restaurant due to its unique nature and extensive use of signs, symbols, and artifacts. Some examples of this usage can be seen in the Hollywood memorabilia displayed at Planet Hollywood or the Folk Art displays at the House of Blues.

It has been proposed that “ signs, symbols, and artifacts are particularly important in forming first impressions, for communicating new service concepts, for repositioning a service, and in highly competitive industries where customers are looking for cues to differentiate the organization” (Bitner, 1992, p. 67). It appears that theme restaurants have attempted to distinguish themselves on the basis of these types of environmental cues. Because of this, it is important to explore how customers actually perceive atmosphere quality in these organizations and what effect the atmosphere has on customer intent to return.

Novelty

On a general level, it is thought that people consume goods and services to gain cognitive and sensory experiences (Hirschman, 1984). This has been labeled experience-seeking behavior in literature and is thought to consist of three constructs. The constructs essential in understanding and measuring experience seeking are cognition seeking, sensation seeking, and novelty seeking (Hirschman, 1984).

Cognition seeking relates to a person's desire to seek out factual, theoretical, or philosophical information (Hirschman, 1984). An example of cognition seeking is taking a course at a university. Sensation seeking relates to a person's desire for sensory stimulation. This type of stimulation can be internal or external in nature. Examples of sensation seeking behaviors would include eating a favorite food or listening to music. Sensation seeking appears to more closely explain why people choose to dine out. Novelty seeking behavior relates to a person's desire to seek out novel experiences, or new sources of stimulation. In Hirschman's (1984) study, novelty seeking was conceptualized as a willingness to try new things. It is thought that consumers' novelty seeking drives can have implications in buyer choice and brand loyalty within the service industries.

Hirschman (1980) proposes a model that relates the novelty seeking drive to new product acquisition. The components involved in this model are inherent novelty seeking, actualized novelty seeking, and adoptive innovativeness. Inherent novelty seeking is defined as a customer's desire to try new things or his/her willingness to seek them out. Actualized novelty is characterized by the consumer's action or the "acquisition or purchase of the medium" (Hirschman, 1980, p. 291). Her model proposes that inherent

novelty seeking leads to actualized novelty seeking, which in turn results in the acquisition of new products or services.

Novelty assumes a similar role within the context of tourism. Lee and Crompton (1992) attempt to explain an individual's desire for travel by explaining his/her desire for novel experiences. An empirical study by Crompton (1979) showed that novelty seeking is a key motivator in travel choice.

The novelty construct of a tourist can be defined along six dimensions (Lee & Crompton, 1992). The first of these dimensions is change from routine. This constitutes the tourist's need for a new and different environment. The second dimension is escape which is defined as a "temporary distraction from reality" (Lee & Crompton, 1992, p. 736). The third dimension, thrill, is characterized by excitement level. The fourth, adventure, involves the undertaking of something unknown, potentially involving risks. The final dimensions consist of surprise and boredom alleviation.

In their 1985 article, Bello and Etzel discuss the role of novelty seeking behavior in pleasure travel planning. In this article, the desire for novel experiences is viewed as a pull factor in destination decision-making. In other words, the desire for novelty is viewed as an external, or cultural, motivator in the travel planning process. A consumer is viewed as making his/her destination choice based on the novel attractions and experiences the destination has to offer.

Novel travel can be defined as "a trip characterized by new, unfamiliar experiences that differ from prior life experiences" (Bello & Etzel, 1985, p. 20). Novel travel is in contrast to familiar, or commonplace, travel and it is hypothesized that people who take novel vacations will differ both demographically and in their travel-related behaviors

from those taking commonplace trips. Of particular interest is the finding that people who visited novel travel locations are less likely to return to the same location again. This research “also suggests that novelty wear-out occurs. The findings indicate that exposure eliminates the novelty of a vacation offering. Thus, a destination that requires repeat business from novelty-seekers must continually adjust to offer some new opportunities for novel experiences” (Bello & Etzel, 1985, p. 26).

Similarly, theme restaurants have suffered from novelty wear-out (Bagli, 1998; Pate, 2000; Emmons, 2000). Theme restaurants were founded and expanded on the notion that they offered customers an experience that was new and unique. It has been stated that “a themed restaurant may draw hordes of curiosity seekers initially” (Emmons, 2000, p. 18). However, research supports the notion that once this novelty effect wears off, the restaurants will struggle to keep people coming back.

Summary

Much research has been conducted in the restaurant environment suggesting that multiple attributes are influential in a restaurant patron’s decision on whether to return to a given restaurant. These attributes include, but are not limited to, food quality, service quality, atmosphere, and novelty. Due to the rapid decline of the U.S theme restaurant market in the late 1990’s, it is of interest to the researcher to determine the effect of these attributes in determining return intent of theme restaurant patrons.

Expectancy disconfirmation theory provides a model by which customer satisfaction can be assessed within the service industries. Customer satisfaction scores, along with attribute importance ratings, can help industry managers determine what customers want

and how successful their business is in terms of making their customers happy. Utilizing customer satisfaction scores and attribute importance rankings may help industry managers focus their improvement efforts and prevent their businesses from falling further into decline.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Restaurateurs and restaurant industry analysts agree on the importance of creating satisfied guests (Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke, 1997). It is recognized that when a guest is satisfied with service, it can provide financial benefits to the firm in terms of increased repeat business, positive word of mouth, and increased market share (Barsky & Labagh, 1992; Oh, 2000). Given the sharp decline of the theme restaurant segment in the last five years, it is arguable that these restaurants are falling short of keeping their customers satisfied in one or more areas. In order to find out which theme restaurant attributes are acceptable to guests and which attributes are in need of improvement, patrons' levels of customer satisfaction must be assessed. Further, it is important to determine which theme restaurant attributes provide the greatest benefits, or are of the greatest importance, to the customer in order to focus improvement efforts on those areas (Barsky & Labagh, 1992).

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to assess customer satisfaction levels with four theme restaurant attributes in order to determine which areas are most in need of improvement. The customer satisfaction scores, coupled with attribute importance rankings and customer return intentions, will help theme restaurant managers form improvement

strategies that are focused on the characteristics most important to customers. This experiment will focus on obtaining customer satisfaction information from three prominent theme restaurants. The results obtained from this experiment will show how satisfied theme restaurant customers are with various restaurant attributes, how important various restaurant attributes are to customers, and whether or not customers intend to return to a given theme restaurant.

Research Questions

1. Which theme restaurant attributes are patrons most satisfied with?
2. Does satisfaction with theme restaurant attributes influence intent to return?
3. Are customer satisfaction scores heterogeneous among the restaurants studied?

Evaluation

This section describes the assessment instrument and model used to evaluate customer satisfaction of theme restaurant patrons. In addition, attribute importance ratings, return intent, and general demographic data are also considered.

Assessment Instrument

The questionnaire developed for use in this study measures customer satisfaction with food quality, service quality, atmosphere, and novelty in theme restaurants. In addition, it measures how important various restaurant attributes are to theme restaurant patrons. Finally, it measures the return intent and demographic characteristics of theme restaurant patrons. The questionnaire was adapted for use from a survey developed by Kivela, Reece, & Inbakaran (1999) entitled the "Dining Experience Survey." Their study

measured customer satisfaction with theme/ambient restaurants in Hong Kong by asking questions in three primary categories. The first category asked customers about their expectations of dining in a given restaurant. The second category asked how important each restaurant attribute was in the decision to dine at a given restaurant. The third category asked if the customers' expectations with their dining experience had been met. In addition to these primary areas of questioning, the survey also asked about the demographic characteristics of the customers and their repeat patronage intentions.

The survey used in the present study is very similar to the "Dining Experience Survey" developed by Kivela, Reece, & Inbakaran. However, two main areas were excluded from the questionnaire used in this study. First, the questionnaire used in this study does not ask customers about their expectations prior to dining in the restaurant. Instead, a direct method of questioning was used to assess whether customer expectations had been met, negating the need for an additional set of expectation questions. Also, the convenience attribute was excluded from the present study because the questions pertaining to convenience (ease of parking and telephone reservations) were not necessarily applicable to the theme restaurants under investigation. Planet Hollywood, Hard Rock Café, and Rainforest Café do not accept reservations in many of their locations (especially for small parties) and typically, these restaurants are located in areas subject to high pedestrian traffic.

The finalized questionnaire consists of a total of 60 items (Appendix B). The first question is a screening question asking if the participant has ever dined in one of the aforementioned theme restaurants (Hard Rock Café, Planet Hollywood, and Rainforest Café). The second question is used to identify which theme restaurant the participant has

dined in most recently. This is the restaurant that is referred to in order to answer the remainder of the questions. Questions 3-28 are used to assess how important various restaurant attributes were to the participant when they decided to dine at the given restaurant. Seven questions ask about food, seven ask about service, and eight ask about atmosphere. One question is used to ask about novelty and the three final questions ask about overall food, service, and atmosphere. The responses for these questions are on a Likert-type scale ranging from not important to very important.

Questions 29-54 are used to assess if the given restaurant met the participants' expectations along the dimensions of food, service, atmosphere, and novelty. These questions provide the basis for determining customer satisfaction. The response set for these questions consists of a Likert-type scale ranging from has not met expectations to has exceeded expectations.

Survey questions 55-57 were designed to gather demographic data about the participants. These questions are placed at the end of the survey and ask for information on gender, income level, and age. They are presented in a fixed-response multiple-choice format with mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive ranges presented for the income and age bracket questions. The demographic information collected in the survey is used so that respondents can be segmented based on different demographic variables, such as age and income level. The final three survey items are also presented in a fixed-response multiple-choice format. Survey question 58 asks about the participants' reason for dining out. Finally, questions 59 and 60 are used to assess the participants' intent to return to the given restaurant.

The questionnaire is accompanied by an informed consent cover letter explaining the purpose of the research and informing the respondents that participation is voluntary (Appendix A). The Office of Sponsored Programs approved the survey prior to the start of the study (Appendix C). Two screening questions were used when approaching participants to assess whether they had dined at one of the given theme restaurants and if they were over 18 years old. The survey was self-administered with the researcher or a trained research assistant on hand to answer any questions and explain the nature of the research. Finally, the respondents were offered an incentive for participation in the study. The incentive consisted of a coupon that entitled the participant to free admission to Friday and Saturday late night events held at the House of Blues club in the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino

The questionnaire was pre-tested on 20 diners who have eaten at one of the given theme restaurants to ensure that the survey was understandable. Based on the comments made during the pre-test phase, the questionnaire was deemed easy to understand. No unclear or ambiguous statements were found and no additional revisions were made.

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

Validity

The validity of the survey instrument was established by Kivela, Reece, & Inbakaran (1999). They assessed that the survey had construct validity in measuring the customer satisfaction construct because the survey measures customer satisfaction in a manner consistent with expectancy disconfirmation theory. Expectancy disconfirmation is widely accepted as the theory that best explains customer satisfaction (Barsky & Labagh, 1992). Construct validity was established because the survey items were found to accurately

assess the three sub-dimensions critical to the measurement of customer satisfaction within the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm: importance, expectations, and expectations met.

In addition, Kivela, Reece, & Inbakaran (1999) used a panel of diners, industry managers, and industry scholars to check the items for content validity. The panel of 92 was asked to place each survey item with its associated attribute (food, service, convenience, and ambience) to make sure the item had content validity. Finally, the authors administered a pilot study in seven theme/ambience restaurants to test the survey's design, layout, wording, and measurement scales. As a result of the pilot study, minor changes were made in the survey format, the ordering of the demographic questions, and the wording of some of the items.

Reliability

Kivela, Reece, & Inbakaran (1999) assessed the reliability and internal consistency of the survey items using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Using this method, the survey items were found to have reliability coefficients well above 0.50. This is typically accepted as a sufficient level of reliability at which to conduct exploratory research (Hair, Anderson, & Black, 1995).

The researcher repeated this method of reliability assessment for the revised version of the survey used in this study. The two question banks, importance (I) and expectations met (EM), were tested for reliability using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. In addition, the researcher assessed the reliability of the multiplicative result of these scales (EM x I), representing customer satisfaction scores. Each of these areas had reliability coefficients well over 0.50 (Table 2).

Table 2: Composite Reliability for Question Banks

Question Bank	Alpha
Expectations (EM) scale	0.9554
Importance (I) scale	0.9161
Satisfaction Score (EM x I) scale	0.9487

The four distinct attribute areas were tested for reliability as well, with regards to both their importance dimension and their expectations met dimension. Each attribute area had reliability coefficients well above 0.50, with the exception of atmosphere importance (Table 3). Although the same atmosphere questions were used in both the original and revised versions of the survey, this low alpha value indicates that the survey questions used to assess atmosphere importance may not be reliable. For future research, additional pre-testing and possible reconfiguration of these questions may be necessary to ensure appropriate levels of reliability.

Table 3: Composite Reliability for Attribute Items

Attribute Items	Alpha
Food Quality (I)	0.7781
Food Quality (EM)	0.8924
Service Quality (I)	0.8710
Service Quality (EM)	0.9040
Atmosphere (I)	0.4872
Atmosphere (EM)	0.8626
Restaurant That Offers... (I)	0.8116
Restaurant That Offers... (EM)	0.8803

Research Design and Method

Sampling Design

The sample design for this study consisted of two parts. The first part involved determining which theme restaurants to examine in the study. The study was limited to theme restaurants located in the U.S. Among the many U.S. theme restaurant chains, three theme restaurants were selected for analysis based on their classification as industry prototypes. As previously discussed in the review of literature, the theme restaurants Hard Rock Café, Planet Hollywood, and Rainforest Café have been described by industry analysts as prototypes and/or icons of the industry. In addition, they are three of the chains remaining in the industry that still have multiple units.

The second part of the sampling design consisted of the selection of participants for the study. The target population for this study consisted of all patrons to U.S. theme restaurants. Due to monetary restrictions and convenience, however, the sampling frame

was limited to a convenience sample of theme restaurant patrons living in or visiting Las Vegas. The sampling frame also limited selection of patrons to those over 18 years of age. This is because the questionnaire as well as the purpose of the study may be unclear to patrons under 18. In addition, younger patrons of these restaurants will probably not be making the decision on whether or not to return to the given restaurant in the future.

Procedures

The sampling units consisted of 200 patrons of the three given theme restaurants. The survey was administered to 200 people selected via a convenience sample using a mall-intercept approach. Participants were approached in public areas subject to high volumes of pedestrian traffic. The locations where surveys were administered included the pedestrian areas of the Caesars Palace Forum Shops, the MGM Grand Casino in front of the Rainforest Café, and the sidewalk located on the corner of Harmon and Paradise Road in front of the Hard Rock Café. These locations were chosen for both their high levels of pedestrian traffic as well as their proximity to the theme restaurants of interest.

The survey was administered at staggered time periods during the week of March 17th, 2003. The primary researcher or one of two trained research assistants oversaw the administration of the surveys. Research assistants were needed because it was necessary to collect at multiple locations simultaneously. Surveys were collected during the midday lunch hour (11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.), late afternoon (3:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.), and evening (6:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.) time periods at each location over the course of the week.

Every third person passing a researcher was stopped and asked for their participation in the study. Two screening questions were used when initially approaching participants. The participants were asked if they had ever dined at one of the given restaurants and if

they were 18 years of age or older. Those people who answered negatively to either screening question were excluded from the study. All others were asked for their voluntary participation in the study. They were also offered an incentive for participation. The incentive consisted of a free pass to a weekend late night event at the House of Blues. If they chose to complete the survey, they were given a letter of informed consent (Appendix A) and a three page survey (Appendix B) on a clipboard. Once the survey was complete, the researcher or research assistant placed the survey into a folder marked with the date and time the data was collected, gave the participant the incentive, and continued to approach participants for the remainder of the allotted time period.

During the course of the research, approximately 250 people were approached and asked to participate in the study. Of those approached, approximately 20% refused to participate. The main reasons for refusal were lack of time and not having eaten in one of the restaurants. The researcher did not notice any external differences in those who chose to participate and those who refused. A total of 200 surveys were returned and stored for later analysis.

Limitations

The generalizability of the findings to the larger population of interest (external validity) is limited in a number of ways. A convenience sample of both theme restaurants as well as survey participants was utilized by the researcher due to monetary restrictions. An argument can be made as to the prototypical nature of these three theme restaurants in relation to the rest of the industry. However, significant differences may exist between these theme restaurants and other theme restaurants that may limit the generalizability of the study.

In addition, the Las Vegas market was used for the basis of this research. The perceptions of theme restaurant patrons living in or visiting Las Vegas may not be typical of the perceptions of theme restaurant patrons in general, thus compromising the external validity of the study.

Some of the independent variables are correlated with each other. For example, the age of a customer was significantly related to their income. In addition, the satisfaction scores for the four attribute areas were significantly related to one another. As scores for one attribute area increased, the scores for the other attribute areas increased as well. Thus, the correlated variables could mask the significance of the variables during analysis.

In an attempt to control for differences arising from survey administration in multiple locations, the researcher employed and trained two assistants who conducted surveys with the researcher during a one-week period. The assistants were asked to collect survey data at different times of the day and days of the week and at different locations in an attempt to gain a representative sample of the population of interest. It was noted, however, that the success rate in gathering surveys was markedly greater in the Caesar's Palace Forum Shops than in the other two locations. The researchers were escorted out of the MGM Grand on two occasions, thwarting further data collection efforts in that location. If the weather was windy, it was difficult to administer surveys in front of the Hard Rock Café because there was no protection from the elements. Finally, it seemed that the patrons in the Caesar's Forum Shops were more inclined to stop and speak with the researchers than patrons in the other two locations.

Participants were more likely to agree to fill out the survey during the lunch hour or late afternoon than in the evening. It was thought that people may have been in a bigger rush during the evening hours, thus making them less inclined to participate. On more than one occasion, participants approached in the evening cited dinner or show reservations as reasons they could not complete the survey. Also, approximately 20% of the people approached and asked to participate in the study refused. A limitation of this study is that those who refused to participate could have different demographic characteristics than those who agreed.

Finally, it was noted that due to the week of March 17th, 2003 being Spring Break for many colleges, the sample may contain a disproportionate number of respondents in the 18-24 and 25-34 age groups. Data was collected in areas subject to high levels of tourist foot traffic. If many of the tourists in Las Vegas that week were college-aged students, it is likely that they may be overrepresented in the sample.

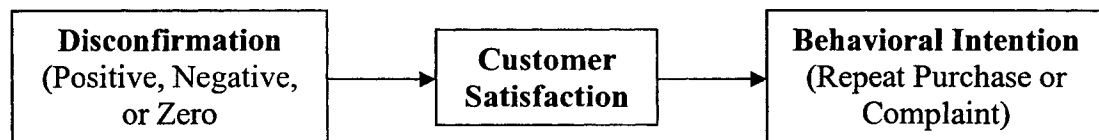
Theoretical Model

The theoretical model used in this study is an adaptation of Oliver's (1980) expectancy disconfirmation model (Table 4). Expectancy disconfirmation theory is one of the most popular and widely accepted ways to assess customer satisfaction in the service industries (Oh, 1999). This theory views customer satisfaction as a result of whether a customer's perceptions of a given service encounter live up to his/her expectations of that encounter (Oliver, 1980). If perceptions exceed expectations, a positive disconfirmation has occurred and if they are below expectations a negative disconfirmation has occurred. Zero disconfirmation occurs when perceptions equal

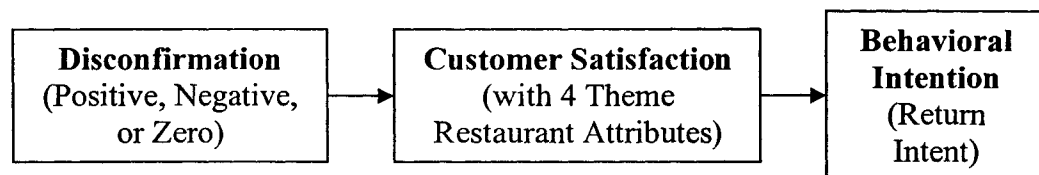
expectations. Customer satisfaction level leads to the customers' post-purchase behavioral intention (Oliver, 1980).

Table 4: Expectancy Disconfirmation Model and Adaptation

Expectancy Disconfirmation Model



Researcher's Adaptation



To assess customer satisfaction with theme restaurants, participants were asked a set of questions about various theme restaurant attributes and whether those attributes were below expectations, met with expectations, or exceeded expectations. A survey question asking if they would return to the restaurant assessed behavioral intention of theme restaurant patrons.

In addition, attribute importance scores can be used in combination with the expectancy disconfirmation model of customer satisfaction assessment in order to assess the relative importance a customer assigns to particular aspects of a service encounter (Yuksel & Rimmington, 1998). This is essential because it allows management to uncover which aspects of the service encounter are most important to the customer and can help guide management's improvement efforts (Dube, Renaghan, & Miller, 1994).

Data Editing and Coding

The surveys were carefully reviewed by the researcher to ensure that they were filled out completely and correctly. Any surveys that were filled out incorrectly were considered unusable and not included in further analysis. A total of 28 surveys out of the 200 returned to the researcher were removed because they were over 50% incomplete or unusable for other reasons. The usable response rate was 86%. Some participants told the researcher they had dined in one of the three theme restaurants in response to the screening question, but when they filled out the survey, they marked “no” in response to the item “Have you ever eaten in one of these three restaurants?” Those surveys were among the ones discarded as unusable. Surveys with missing values were included in the analysis because this does not inhibit analysis using SPSS or MINITAB software.

Data coding was not problematic with this survey because there were no open-ended questions and all responses were mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. Essentially, the surveys were pre-coded for easy translation by the researcher with 1 = not important to 5 = very important; 1 = has not met my expectations to 5 = has exceeded my expectations. The demographic questions, as mentioned previously, were coded using numbers that correspond to ranges of income levels, age brackets, and gender. Return intent was assessed using a Likert-type scale with 1 = will definitely not return and 5 = will definitely return.

Statistical Analysis

The first step in analyzing the data obtained from the surveys was to calculate satisfaction, importance, and weighted satisfaction scores for each survey item (excluding the demographic and return intent items). Satisfaction scores weighted for importance were calculated by multiplying the satisfaction score for each item by the item's importance weight (Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke, 1997). Aggregate weighted satisfaction scores for each main attribute area (food, service, atmosphere, novelty) were calculated by adding together the weighted satisfaction scores for the items associated with each attribute. Mean weighted satisfaction scores were calculated for each main attribute area as well as for each individual item.

SPSS software was used to perform T-tests at a significance level of 0.05 to determine if differences existed between the weighted mean satisfaction scores of various restaurant attributes. These tests were performed for the overall data set as well as for the individual restaurants (Planet Hollywood, Hard Rock Café, and Rainforest Café). The demographic data was analyzed through the use of frequency tables to give the researcher insight into the demographic characteristics of the sample.

A multiple linear regression analysis was performed on the data using SPSS software. Multiple linear regression was chosen as the most appropriate method of data analysis because the independent and dependent variables were ordinal and metric in nature. The linear regression assessed which independent variables were significant in predicting intent to return. Seven independent variables were initially included in the model: age, how often the respondent dined in a theme restaurant, annual household income, aggregate food satisfaction score, aggregate service satisfaction score, aggregate

atmosphere satisfaction score, and novelty satisfaction score. The independent variables were tested for multicollinearity using correlation coefficients as well as tolerance values. One independent variable was removed from the model due to multicollinearity with another variable. Backward elimination was used to remove additional variables from the model as they proved to be insignificant.

General linear regression analysis was performed on the data using MINITAB software. This type of analysis is appropriate when the variables involved are metric and categorical. General linear regressions were used to assess if the restaurant type (Planet Hollywood, Hard Rock Café, and Rainforest Café) was influential in predicting a variety of dependent variables (i.e. return intent, satisfaction).

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

Introduction

This study investigated the relationship between restaurant attribute satisfaction and return intent in theme restaurants. Three primary research questions were developed to look more closely at this relationship. Demographic variables were included in the analysis to assess their effect on return intent. T-tests, multiple linear regression, and general linear regression were used to analyze the data. This chapter presents the results of the analysis.

Pearson's Correlation

All of the independent variables initially included in the multiple linear regression model were analyzed for correlation using Pearson's Correlation analysis (Table 5). The analysis was performed using MINITAB software, and the results confirmed that some of the independent variables were significantly correlated with one another. For instance, the demographic variables age and income showed a significant positive relationship. Because of this relationship, the age variable was excluded from the model.

Many of the attribute satisfaction scores showed significant positive relationships to one another as well. This indicates that as satisfaction with one restaurant attribute increases, satisfaction with other restaurant attributes increase as well. In other words,

two or more of the independent variables may vary together. Thus, the correlated variables could mask the significance of the variables during analysis. Even though these variables showed potential multicollinearity, for the purpose of this research, they were not excluded from the model. When these variables were tested for multicollinearity during the regression analysis, tolerance values indicated that multicollinearity was not a problem for the data.

Table 5: Pearson's Correlation Matrix for Related Independent Variables

	Gender	Age	Income	Frequent	Foodsat	Servsat	Atmosat
Income	0.019 0.807	0.504* 0.000					
Foodsat	0.199* 0.011	-0.014 0.864	0.014 0.861	0.0178* 0.024			
Servsat	0.146 0.075	-0.098 0.231	-0.114 0.163	0.056 0.491	0.674* 0.000		
Atmosat	0.134 0.095	-0.013 0.868	0.024 0.771	0.179 0.025	0.702* 0.000	0.668* 0.000	
Novelsat	0.042 0.584	-0.066 0.388	-0.045 0.561	0.166* 0.030	0.535* 0.000	0.532* 0.000	0.642* 0.000

Note: Cell Contents: Pearson correlation
P-Value

* Correlation is significant at the alpha=0.05 level (2-tailed).

Profile of the Participants

Responses from 200 participants were collected over the seven day collection period. Of those, 28 were discarded because they were either more than 50% incomplete or filled out incorrectly. This resulted in 172 usable responses for the study. Of the 172

respondents, 48 had dined most recently at Planet Hollywood, 77 at Hard Rock, and 47 at Rainforest Café (Figure 1).

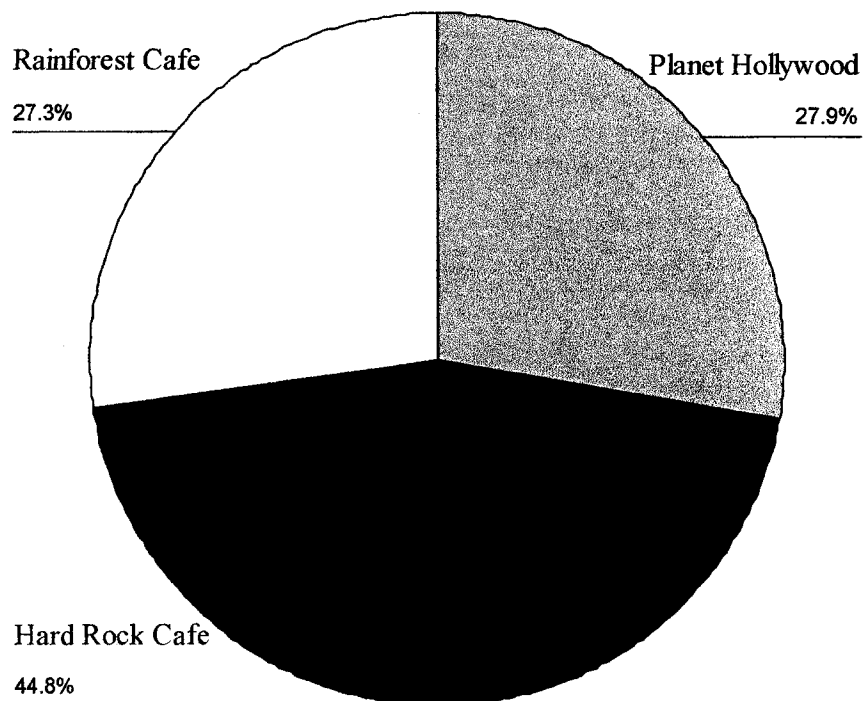


Figure1: Restaurant Distribution

Descriptive statistics were run on each demographic variable and the intent to return variable using SPSS software. Of the 172 participants, the majority was male (Figure 2). Participant's ages fell in one of five categories. Almost 50% of the respondents were between 25 and 34 years of age (Figure 3).

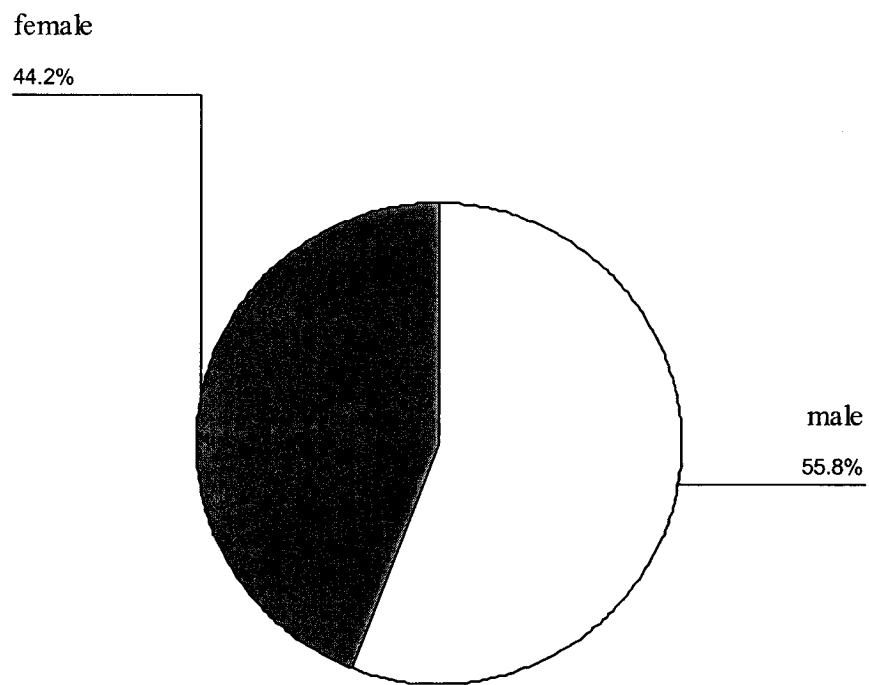


Figure 2: Gender Distribution

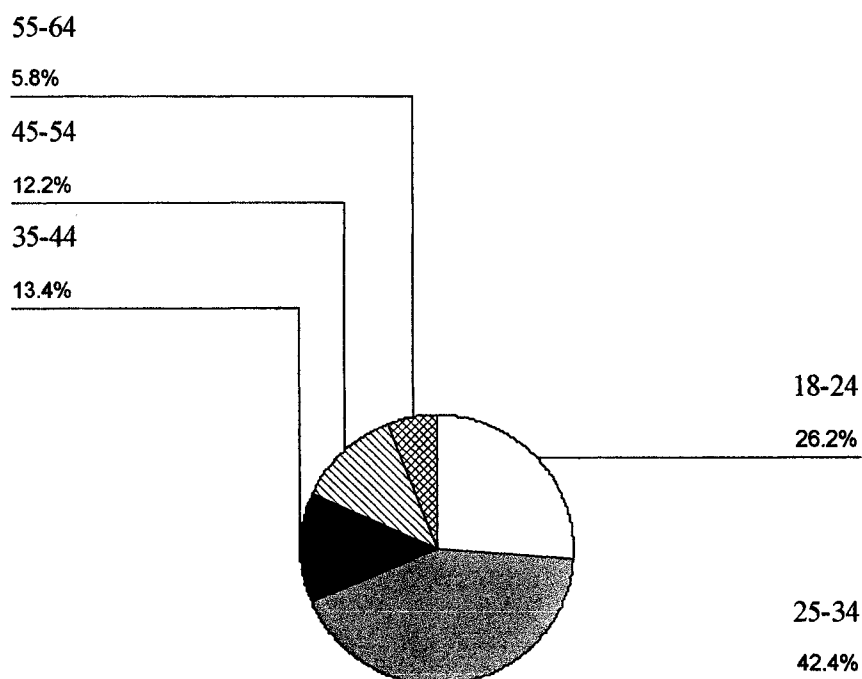


Figure 3: Age Distribution

The participants were also asked to report their annual household income within a given range. Of all the demographic questions, this was the only one that had a missing value. This could be due to the sensitive nature of the question. Of the income ranges given, the greatest percent of respondents fell into the \$60,000 or more category (Figure 4). As discussed previously, it was found that age and income were positively correlated at the .05 level of significance. The reason for this correlation is probably because as people get older, they tend to have jobs that are more lucrative. In addition, they are more likely to live in a household where there is more than one person contributing to household income.

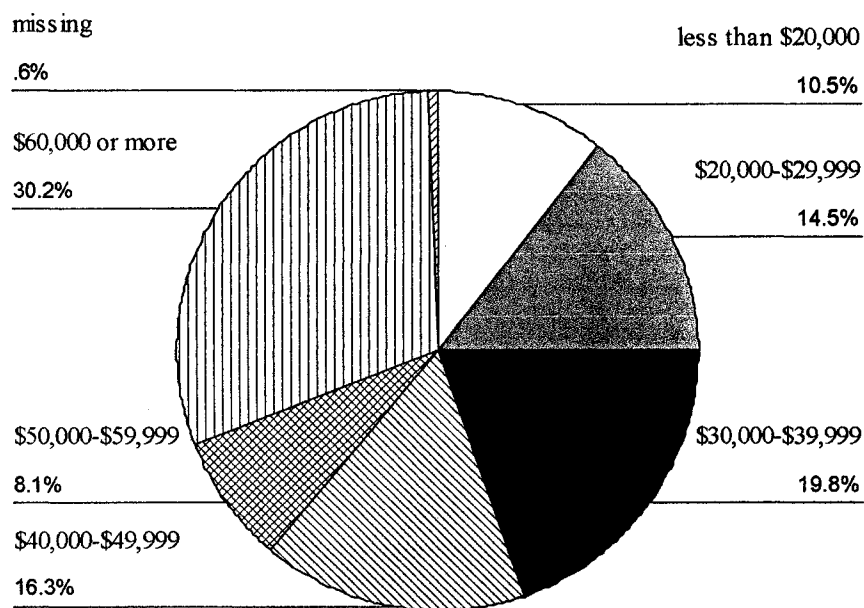


Figure 4: Income Distribution

Participants were also asked how often they had dined at the given restaurant chain in the past six months. Responses ranged from zero to more than five; with 37.8% having dined there once and 25.6% having dined there 2-3 times (Figure 5).

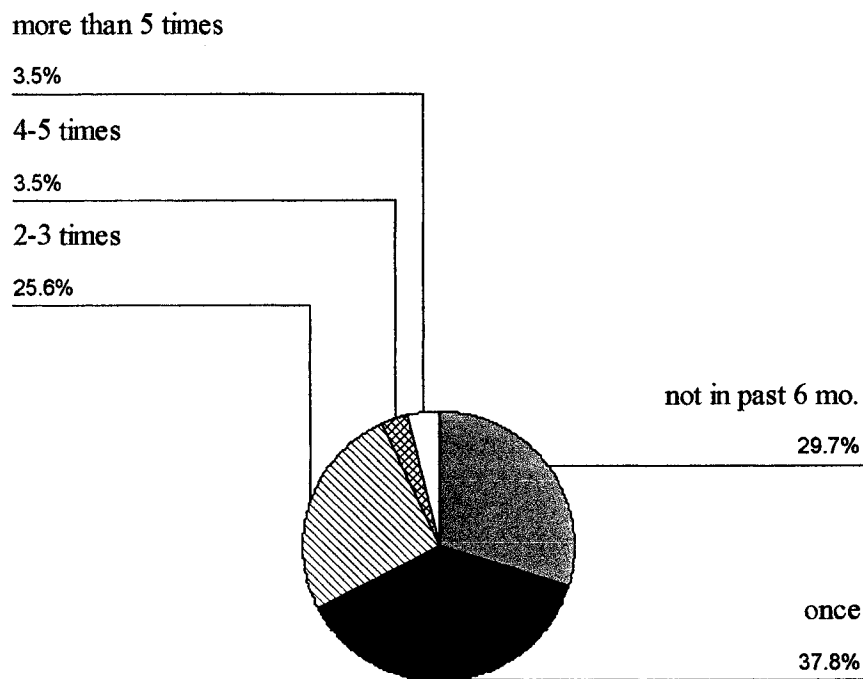


Figure 5: Dining Frequency in Last Six Months

Finally, participants intent to return to the restaurant was assessed using a Likert-type scale with 1 = will definitely not return and 5 = will definitely return. The majority of the respondents fell somewhere between these two extremes (Figure 6).

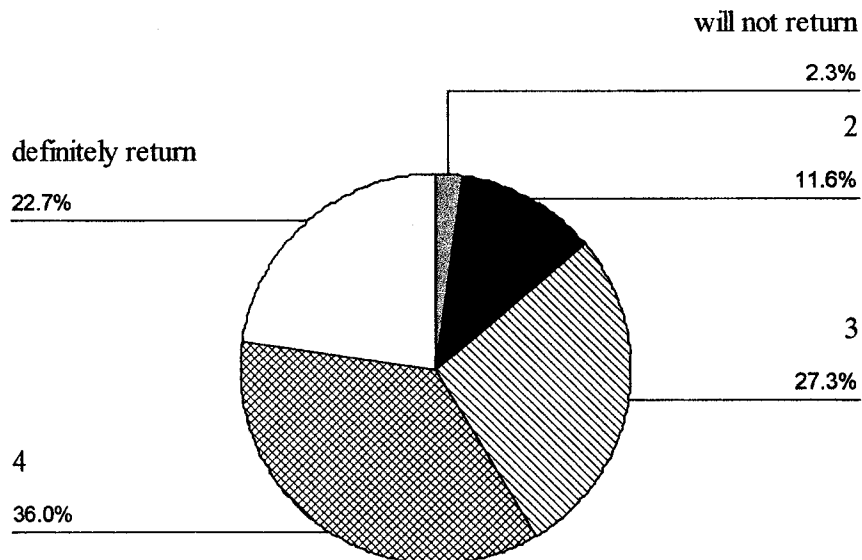


Figure 6: Intent to Return Distribution

In summary, the majority of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 34, with annual household incomes of \$40,000 or more. The majority of the respondents had dined at the given restaurant once or not at all in the past six months and had various return intents.

Formal Hypothesis Testing

The three research questions described in Chapters I and III were converted into three research hypotheses.

1. Which theme restaurant attributes are patrons most satisfied with?

H_0 : No significant difference exists in the mean weighted satisfaction scores of the theme restaurant attributes.

H_a : A significant difference exists in the mean weighted satisfaction scores of the theme restaurant attributes.

2. Does satisfaction with theme restaurant attributes influence intent to return?

H_0 : Satisfaction with theme restaurant attributes has no significant effect on customer intent to return.

H_a : Satisfaction with theme restaurant attributes has a significant effect on customer intent to return.

3. Are customer satisfaction scores heterogeneous between the restaurants studied?

H_0 : No significant differences exist in the satisfaction scores of the three restaurants.

H_a : A significant difference exists in the satisfaction scores of the three restaurants.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using both SPSS and MINITAB software. The MINITAB software was used to perform the general linear regressions. SPSS was used to perform all other statistical analysis.

T-tests, multiple linear regression, and general linear regression were used to perform analysis on the data. T-tests are used to assess if a significant difference exists in the means of two groups. In this case, t-tests were used to assess if there were differences in the mean weighted satisfaction scores of various restaurant attributes. Multiple linear regression is used to assess the relationship between a dependent variable and multiple independent variables. Essentially, multiple linear regression attempts to predict the

dependent variable using a combination of independent variables. Multiple linear regression is appropriate to use for data analysis when the variables included are ordinal and metric and certain assumptions have been met. The assumptions include having a random sample of data, a linear relationship between variables, an approximately normal distribution of values of the dependent variables, and dependent variables with distributions of constant variance. As discussed with regards to hypothesis two, it is shown that this data set meets the assumptions of multiple linear regression.

General linear regression is also used to assess the relationship between a dependent variable and an independent variable. However, it is appropriate for use when the variables of interest are categorical and the design is unbalanced. Therefore, general linear regression was used to analyze the data when one of the variables of interest was restaurant type. This variable is both categorical and unbalanced (different numbers of people in each restaurant group).

Hypothesis One

H1_o: No significant difference exists in the mean weighted satisfaction scores of the theme restaurant attributes.

H1_a: A significant difference exists in the mean weighted satisfaction scores of the theme restaurant attributes.

The first step in testing this hypothesis was to rank the mean weighted satisfaction scores for each individual restaurant attribute in descending order (Table 6). After the 26 attribute satisfaction scores were ranked, paired t-tests were performed on each consecutive pair to test for significant differences. No significant differences were found

using this method of testing. A broader test was needed to assess if differences existed between the attribute groups (food quality, service quality, atmosphere, novelty). The mean aggregate scores for each attribute group could not be meaningfully ranked, compared, or tested for differences because they were represented by different numbers of questions. For instance, the food quality aggregate satisfaction score was comprised of seven questions, while the novelty dimension was comprised of only one question. Because of this, individual questions representing the four attribute groups were used to test for significant differences. Justification for selection of these questions is presented in the following section.

Table 6:

Ranking of Theme Restaurant Dining Satisfaction Scores in Relation to Restaurant Attributes

	Attribute Area	N	Rank	Mean	Std. Deviation
rest cleanliness sat	A	170	1	18.22	4.32
friendly staff sat	SQ	170	2	17.51	4.92
rest appearance sat	A	167	3	17.41	4.57
food freshness sat	FQ	171	4	17.23	4.68
willing to serve sat	SQ	168	5	17.18	4.68
efficient service sat	SQ	168	6	17.03	5.45
food temp sat	FQ	170	7	16.75	5.18
level of rest comfort sat	A	168	8	16.73	5.02
attentive staff sat	SQ	169	9	16.72	5.26
feels comfortable to eat there sat	A	170	10	16.51	5.09
food tastiness sat	FQ	170	11	16.21	4.67
food quality sat	FQ	168	12	16.15	4.79
knowledgeable staff sat	SQ	170	13	16.12	4.99
staff appearance sat	A	171	14	16.09	5.12
greeting customers sat	SQ	170	15	15.75	5.63
service of a consistent std sat	SQ	169	16	15.70	4.99
food of a consistent std sat	FQ	170	17	15.65	5.07
handling of complaints sat	SQ	156	18	14.99	5.81
menu item variety sat	FQ	171	19	14.69	5.10
rest temp sat	A	171	20	14.54	4.73
offers new dining experience sat	N	171	21	14.44	5.78
food presentation sat	FQ	172	22	13.17	4.81
noise level sat	A	169	23	12.68	4.97
view from rest sat	A	170	24	11.25	5.53
dining privacy sat	A	169	25	11.12	4.74
nutritious food sat	FQ	168	26	10.58	5.12

Justification for Selection of Questions to Represent Restaurant Attributes

After the means were ranked in descending order, each attribute was tested for significant differences with the attribute ranked directly above and below it (Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke, 1997). No significant differences were found. Because the aggregate satisfaction scores could not be used in this type of assessment, the researcher tested for differences between four individual restaurant attributes. One question was chosen from

each attribute area (food quality, service quality, atmosphere, novelty). The questions chosen for analysis were food quality, efficient service, restaurant cleanliness, and a new dining experience. These questions were selected due to their inclusion in a previous study that tested differences between quick-service restaurant attributes (Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke, 1997). The food quality question was chosen because it was thought to be the question most closely representing the attribute area “food quality.” In addition, this question was used in previous studies to represent the food quality attribute area in testing differences in attribute satisfaction (Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke, 1997).

Restaurant cleanliness was included in the analysis because it was ranked number one in customer satisfaction of theme restaurant patrons. This finding seemed unusual, and it was of interest to the researcher to assess its significance. In addition, this question was used in a previous study comparing restaurant attributes and was found to be significantly more important to the restaurant customers than all other attributes studied (Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke, 1997). The new dining experience question was included in the analysis because it was the only question that represented the novelty construct. Finally, efficient service was included for analysis because this question was used in a previous study that tested for differences in attribute satisfaction (Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke, 1997).

Test for Significant Differences

After ranking all attributes, the four specific restaurant attributes were selected for analysis in a paired t-test. This test was used to assess if significant differences existed in the weighted satisfaction scores of the four attributes: restaurant cleanliness, efficient service, food quality, and new dining experience. It was hypothesized that significant

differences would exist between the weighted satisfaction scores of these four attributes at a .05 level of significance. The results of the paired t-test showed that there were significant differences in the satisfaction scores of these four attributes (Table 7).

Customers were most satisfied with restaurant cleanliness and least satisfied with the new dining experience (novelty). Efficient service was second highest in terms of customer satisfaction, and food quality was third (Figure 7).

Table 7: Results of Paired T-Test for Theme Restaurant Attributes

pair	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
efficient service- restaurant cleanliness	-2.692	165	.008
food quality- efficient service	-2.096	163	.038
food quality-new dining experience	3.712	166	.000

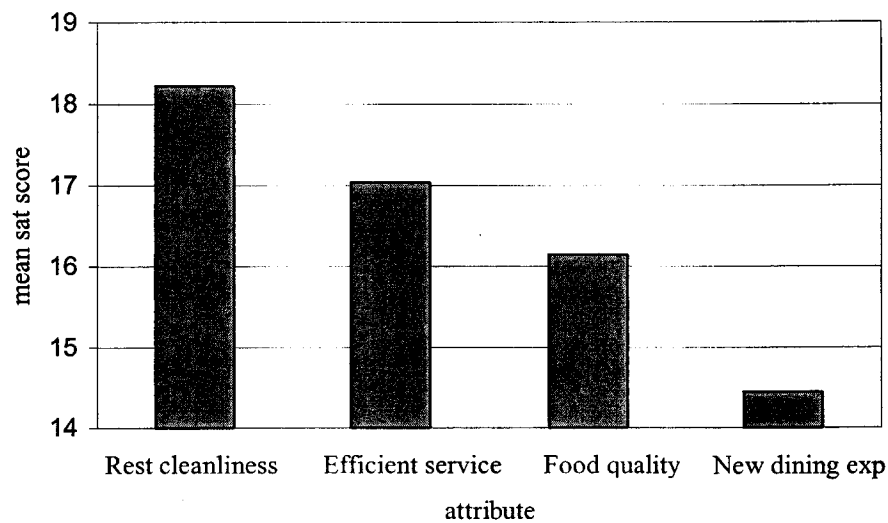


Figure 7: Graphical Representation of Differences in Mean Satisfaction Scores (Theme Restaurants)

After overall differences in theme restaurant attribute satisfaction were assessed through an analysis of the entire sample, the responses for each restaurant were looked at separately to assess if the individual restaurants were showing similar differences in attribute satisfaction. All t-tests were performed at a 0.05 level of significance. To begin, Planet Hollywood attributes were ranked in descending order (Table 8). For Planet Hollywood, the researcher found that customer satisfaction with restaurant cleanliness was significantly greater than customer satisfaction with food quality or a new dining experience (Table 9). In addition, Planet Hollywood customers were more satisfied with the efficient service than with the new dining experience. There was no significant difference in satisfaction with food quality and new dining experience (Table 9).

Table 8:
Ranking of Planet Hollywood Dining Satisfaction Scores in Relation to Restaurant
Attributes

	Attribute Area	N	Rank	Mean	Std. Deviation
willing to serve sat	SQ	45	1	17.58	4.35
rest cleanliness sat	A	48	2	17.42	4.80
friendly staff sat	SQ	46	3	16.78	5.07
food temp sat	FQ	47	4	16.53	5.48
rest appearance sat	A	46	5	16.46	4.73
food freshness sat	FQ	47	6	16.40	5.17
efficient service sat	SQ	47	7	16.34	6.09
level of rest comfort sat	A	47	8	16.30	5.06
attentive staff sat	SQ	47	9	16.00	5.50
greeting customers sat	SQ	46	10	15.91	5.64
feels comfortable to eat there sat	A	47	11	15.62	5.24
service of a consistent std sat	SQ	47	12	15.47	5.01
food quality sat	FQ	48	13	15.46	4.92
knowledgeable staff sat	SQ	46	14	15.33	5.03
staff appearance sat	A	48	15	15.29	5.10
food tastiness sat	FQ	47	16	15.28	4.88
food of a consistent std sat	FQ	47	17	14.96	5.22
rest temp sat	A	48	18	14.90	4.53
offers new dining experience sat	N	48	19	14.62	5.55
menu item variety sat	FQ	48	20	14.48	4.64
handling of complaints sat	SQ	45	21	13.91	6.17
noise level sat	A	47	22	13.32	4.37
food presentation sat	FQ	48	23	13.00	5.17
dining privacy sat	A	47	24	11.06	3.82
view from rest sat	A	47	25	10.77	5.89
nutritious food sat	FQ	47	26	10.00	5.02

Table 9: Results of Paired T-Test for Planet Hollywood Restaurant Attributes

pair	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
food quality- restaurant cleanliness	-2.479	47	.017
restaurant cleanliness-new dining experience	3.526	47	.001
efficient service- new dining experience	2.435	46	.019
food quality-new dining experience	1.018	47	.314

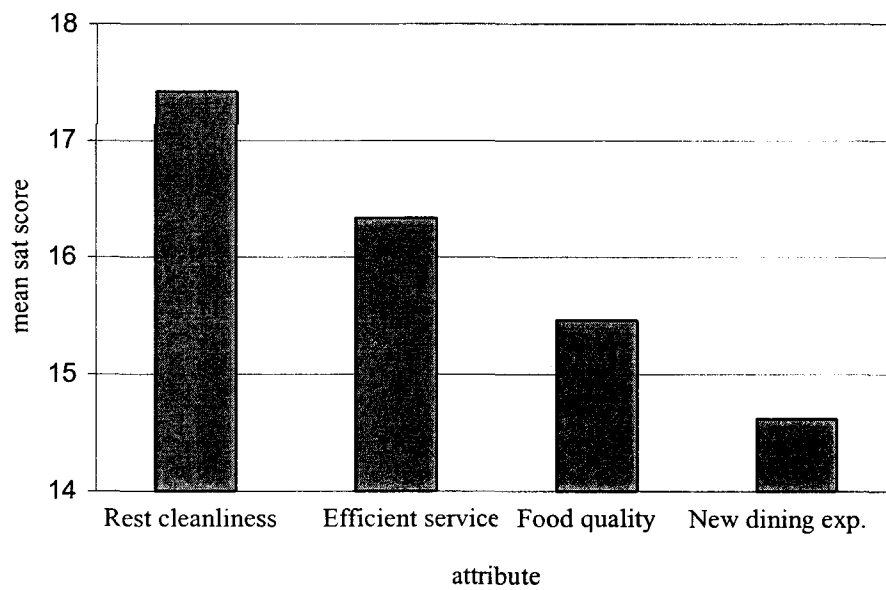


Figure 8:

Graphical Representation of Differences in Mean Satisfaction Scores (Planet Hollywood)

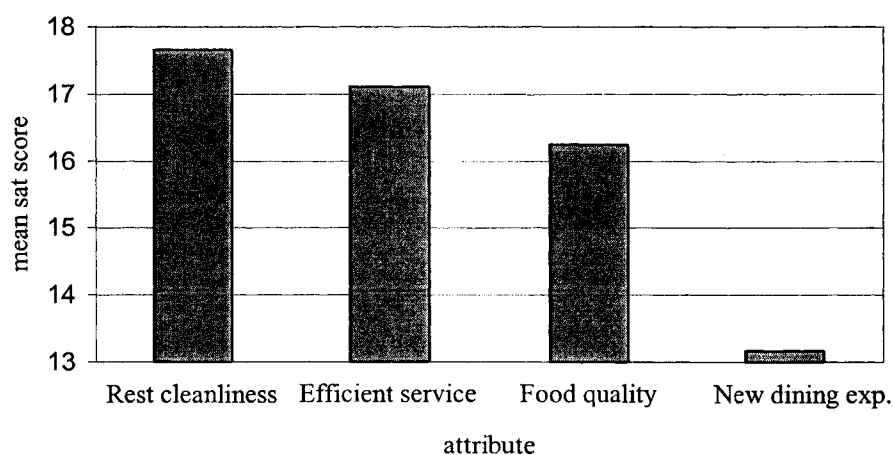
The attribute satisfaction scores for the Hard Rock Café were ranked in descending order (Table 10). When a paired t-test analysis was performed on the data obtained from the Hard Rock Café, the researcher found that restaurant cleanliness had a significantly higher customer satisfaction score than both food quality and new dining experience (Table 11). In addition, satisfaction with the new dining experience attribute was significantly lower than satisfaction with the three other attributes.

Table 10:
Ranking of Hard Rock Cafe Dining Satisfaction Scores in Relation to Restaurant Attributes

	Attribute Area	N	Rank	Mean	Std. Deviation
friendly staff sat	SQ	77	1	17.90	4.95
rest cleanliness sat	A	77	2	17.66	4.27
rest appearance sat	A	74	3	17.49	4.22
food freshness sat	FQ	77	4	17.26	4.37
efficient service sat	SQ	75	5	17.11	5.54
attentive staff sat	SQ	76	6	17.11	5.28
food temp sat	FQ	77	7	16.94	5.25
willing to serve sat	SQ	77	8	16.60	4.93
level of rest comfort sat	A	76	9	16.45	5.11
staff appearance sat	A	76	10	16.45	4.85
feels comfortable to eat there sat	A	77	11	16.35	5.18
food quality sat	FQ	75	12	16.24	4.67
knowledgeable staff sat	SQ	77	13	16.22	5.27
food tastiness sat	FQ	76	14	16.18	4.68
handling of complaints sat	SQ	69	15	15.88	5.40
food of a consistent std sat	FQ	77	16	15.68	5.24
greeting customers sat	SQ	77	17	15.40	5.89
service of a consistent std sat	SQ	76	18	15.18	5.11
menu item variety sat	FQ	76	19	14.36	5.21
rest temp sat	A	76	20	14.30	4.77
offers new dining experience sat	N	77	21	13.17	5.71
food presentation sat	FQ	77	22	13.05	4.84
noise level sat	A	76	23	12.17	5.29
dining privacy sat	A	77	24	11.30	5.22
view from rest sat	A	76	25	10.91	5.57
nutritious food sat	FQ	74	26	10.24	5.39

Table 11: Results of Paired T-Test for Hard Rock Cafe Restaurant Attributes

pair	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
food quality- restaurant cleanliness	-2.423	74	.018
restaurant cleanliness-new dining experience	7.135	76	.000
efficient service- new dining experience	6.318	74	.000
food quality-new dining experience	4.284	74	.000

Figure 9:

Graphical Representation of Differences in Mean Satisfaction Scores (Hard Rock Cafe)

Restaurant attribute satisfaction scores from the Rainforest Café were ranked in descending order (Table 12). The results of the t-tests on the data obtained from the

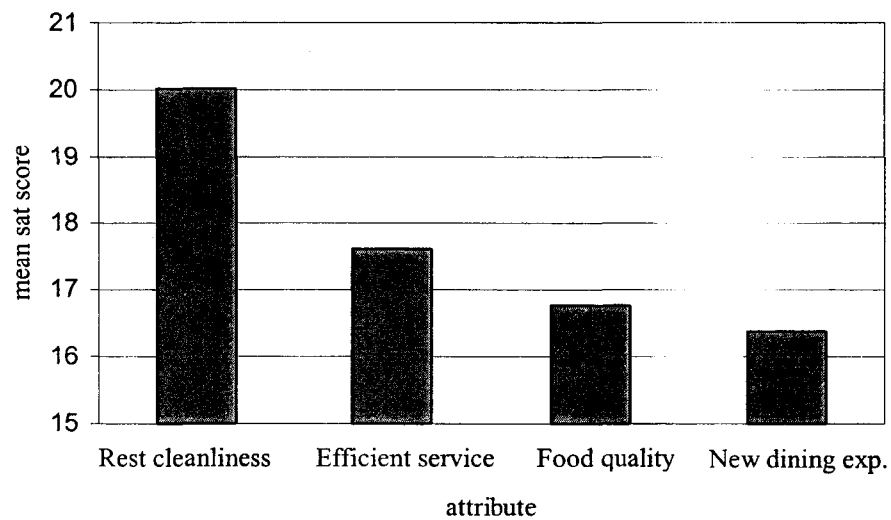
Rainforest Café showed that significant differences exist between customer satisfaction with restaurant cleanliness and customer satisfaction with both food quality and a new dining experience (Table 13).

Table 12:
Ranking of Rainforest Cafe Dining Satisfaction Scores in Relation to Restaurant Attributes

	Attribute Area	N	Rank	Mean	Std. Deviation
rest cleanliness sat	A	45	1	20.02	3.32
rest appearance sat	A	47	2	18.23	4.85
food freshness sat	FQ	47	3	18.00	4.61
willing to serve sat	SQ	46	4	17.78	4.54
feels comfortable to eat there sat	A	46	5	17.70	4.65
level of rest comfort sat	A	45	6	17.64	4.83
efficient service sat	SQ	46	7	17.61	4.59
friendly staff sat	SQ	47	8	17.60	4.75
food tastiness sat	FQ	47	9	17.17	4.35
service of a consistent std sat	SQ	46	10	16.80	4.70
attentive staff sat	SQ	46	11	16.80	5.01
food quality sat	FQ	45	12	16.76	4.87
knowledgeable staff sat	SQ	47	13	16.72	4.48
food temp sat	FQ	46	14	16.67	4.84
offers new dining experience sat	N	46	15	16.37	5.71
staff appearance sat	A	47	16	16.34	5.58
food of a consistent std sat	FQ	46	17	16.30	4.65
greeting customers sat	SQ	47	18	16.17	5.24
menu item variety sat	FQ	47	19	15.45	5.40
handling of complaints sat	SQ	42	20	14.67	5.97
rest temp sat	A	47	21	14.55	4.92
food presentation sat	FQ	47	22	13.55	4.48
noise level sat	A	46	23	12.87	5.03
view from rest sat	A	47	24	12.28	5.05
nutritious food sat	FQ	47	25	11.68	4.71
dining privacy sat	A	45	26	10.89	4.82

Table 13: Results of Paired T-Test for Rainforest Cafe Restaurant Attributes

pair	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
food quality- restaurant cleanliness	-4.024	43	.000
restaurant cleanliness-new dining experience	3.678	43	.001
efficient service- new dining experience	1.151	44	.256
food quality-new dining experience	.702	43	.486

Figure 10:

Graphical Representation of Differences in Mean Satisfaction Scores (Rainforest Cafe)

In summary, the researcher was able to reject null hypothesis one that no significant difference exists in the mean weighted satisfaction scores of the theme restaurant

attributes and show support for the alternative. For the overall sample, a significant difference was found between all four attributes tested. The restaurant cleanliness score was significantly greater than the efficient service score ($t = -2.629$, $p = .008$). The efficient service score was significantly greater than the food quality score ($t = -2.096$, $p = .038$). Finally, the food quality score was significantly greater than the new dining experience score ($t = 3.712$, $p = .000$). The same tests were performed to test for differences in attribute satisfaction within each restaurant type: Planet Hollywood, Hard Rock Café, and Rainforest Café. The analysis showed that significant differences in attribute satisfaction existed within each restaurant type as well.

Hypothesis Two

H2_o: Satisfaction with theme restaurant attributes has no significant effect on customer intent to return.

H2_a: Satisfaction with theme restaurant attributes has a significant effect on customer intent to return.

A multiple linear regression analysis was performed to develop a model that contained independent variables that were significant in predicting a dependent variable. The dependent variable in this analysis was intent to return. The analysis began with seven independent variables thought to be influential in predicting intent to return. Four of those variables were the aggregate weighted satisfaction scores for each restaurant attribute area (food quality, service quality, atmosphere, novelty). The additional three variables were demographic in nature including age, income, and dining frequency. The variable gender was not included in the model because it is categorical and non-metric. Therefore,

it does not meet the criteria for use in a multiple linear regression. Age was removed from the model due to possible multicollinearity with the income variable.

Residual vs. fitted values plots were obtained for each of the remaining variables to ensure they met the assumption of constant variance. Normal probability plots of the residuals were obtained to ensure that the variables met the assumption of being approximately linear. Finally, histograms of the residuals were obtained to ensure that the distributions were approximately normal. All of the variables met the assumptions necessary to perform multiple linear regression.

The first regression model tested contained all six of the independent variables (Figure 11). Through a method of backward elimination, the variables that were not significant in predicting return intent at the 0.05 level of significance were removed from the model. The variables aggregate service quality satisfaction, novelty satisfaction, and annual household income were removed using this method. A best subsets analysis was performed on the remaining variables to assess which combination of dependent variables explained the greatest amount of variability in the independent variable. The variables aggregate atmosphere satisfaction, aggregate food quality satisfaction, and dining frequency provided the best subset of variables to be used in predicting return intent. The final regression model contained these three independent variables (Figure 12).

Figure 11: Initial Multiple Regression Model

Intent to return =
 constant + B_1 foodqual + B_2 servicequal + B_3 atmosphere + B_4 novelty + B_5 income +
 B_6 diningfreq

Figure 12: Final Multiple Regression Model

$$\text{Intent to return} = \text{constant} + B_1\text{foodqual} + B_2\text{atmosphere} + B_3\text{diningfreq}$$

The variables were tested for multicollinearity using tolerance statistics produced by SPSS software (Table 14). Tolerance is the “proportion of variability of that variable that is not explained by its linear relationships with the other independent variables in the model” (Norusis, 2000, p. 467). The closer a variable’s tolerance value is to one, the less of its variability can be explained by the other independent variables. The tolerance values of the independent variables in this model were all large enough to determine that multicollinearity was not a problem for the data (Norusis, 2000). The results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 15.

Table 14: Tolerance Statistics for Independent Variables

Variable	Tolerance
Atmosphere	0.504
Food Quality	0.503
Dining Frequency	0.955

Table 15:
Results of the Multiple Linear Regression for Atmosphere, Food Quality, and Frequency on Return Intent

Variable	B	SE B	t	Sig.
constant	0.474	0.325	1.458	0.147
dining frequency	0.254	0.068	3.726	0.000
atmosphere satisfaction	9.867E-03	0.004	2.776	0.006
food satisfaction	1.422E-02	0.004	3.876	0.000

Note. $R^2 = .419$

The three independent variables in the regression model were significant in predicting return intent at a 0.00 level of significance. The R-square value of 0.419 means that 41.9% of the variability in return intent can be explained by atmosphere satisfaction, food satisfaction, and dining frequency. Each of the three independent variables included in the model were significant at a level < 0.05 . In summary, the null hypothesis that satisfaction with theme restaurant attributes has no significant effect on customer intent to return was rejected and support was shown for the alternative.

Hypothesis Three

H3_o: No significant differences exist in the satisfaction scores of the three restaurants.

H3_a: A significant difference exists in the satisfaction scores of the three restaurants.

A general linear model was used to test the above hypothesis because the variable “restaurant type” is categorical in nature and there are an unbalanced number of respondents in each restaurant type group. After performing the analysis, the researcher found that the only satisfaction scores that significantly differed by restaurant type were

the novelty satisfaction scores (Table 16). Post-Hoc tests were used to see which restaurants' novelty satisfaction scores were significantly different from the others. Tukey's post-hoc test showed that Hard Rock Café and Rainforest Café had significantly different novelty satisfaction scores (Table 17).

Table 16: Analysis of Variance for Novelty Satisfaction versus Restaurant Type

df	f	Sig.
168	4.63	.011

Table 17:
Post-Hoc Analysis of Differences in Novelty Satisfaction Scores between Restaurants

Restaurant Type	Difference of Means	SE of Difference	T-Value	Adjusted P-Value
Planet Hollywood subtracted from				
Hard Rock	-1.456	1.042	-1.398	0.3444
Rainforest	1.745	1.169	1.493	0.2970
Hard Rock subtracted from				
Rainforest	3.201	1.056	3.032	0.0079

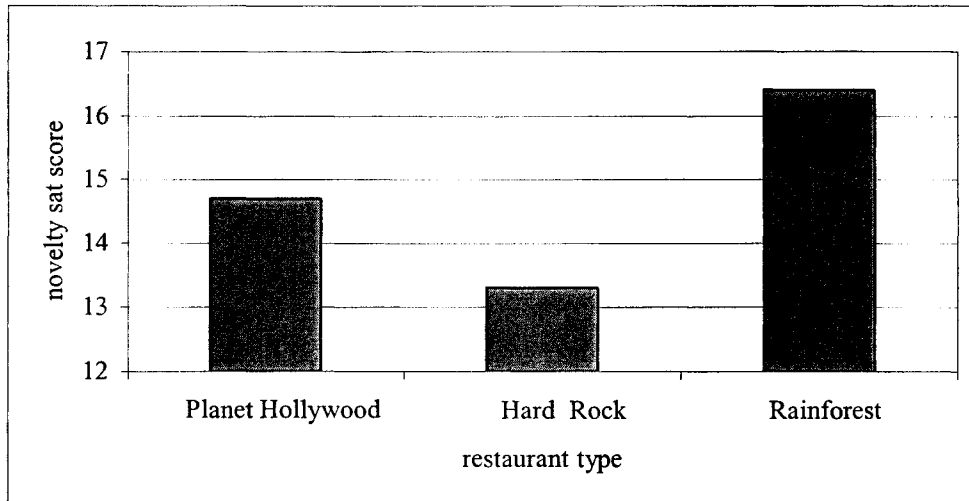


Figure 13: Novelty Satisfaction Scores for Three Theme Restaurants

In summary, the null hypothesis that no significant differences exist in the satisfaction scores of the three restaurants was rejected in favor of the alternative. At least one satisfaction score (novelty) significantly differed among the restaurants.

Summary of the Findings

Hypothesis one tested whether there were significant differences in the customer satisfaction scores of four restaurant attributes. For the overall sample, a significant difference was found between all four attributes tested. The restaurant cleanliness score was significantly greater than the efficient service score ($t = -2.629$, $p = 0.008$). The efficient service score was significantly greater than the food quality score ($t = -2.096$, $p = 0.038$). Finally, the food quality score was significantly greater than the new dining experience score ($t = 3.712$, $p = 0.000$). The same tests were performed to test for differences in attribute satisfaction within each restaurant type: Planet Hollywood, Hard

Rock Café, and Rainforest Café. The analysis showed that significant differences in attribute satisfaction existed within each restaurant type as well.

The second hypothesis tested whether satisfaction with restaurant attributes was influential in predicting intent to return. It was determined that customer satisfaction with restaurant attributes was significant in predicting intent to return ($F = 34.566$, $p = 0.000$). The model that explained the greatest amount of variability in intent to return included the independent variables food quality satisfaction ($t = 3.879$, $p = 0.000$), atmosphere satisfaction ($t = 2.776$, $p = 0.006$), and dining frequency ($t = 3.726$, $p = 0.000$). Service quality satisfaction ($t = -.995$, $p = 0.322$) and novelty satisfaction ($t = -.185$, $p = 0.854$) were not found to be significant in predicting return intent.

The final hypothesis addressed whether differences existed in attribute satisfaction scores among restaurants. The only significant difference that was found was in the area of novelty satisfaction. It was found that Rainforest Café's novelty satisfaction scores were significantly higher than Hard Rock Café's ($t = 3.032$, $p = 0.0079$). No significant difference existed between Planet Hollywood's novelty satisfaction scores and those of the other two restaurants.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Customer satisfaction research in the service industry is widespread. However, a limited amount of research has focused on the theme restaurant industry. This study focused on customer satisfaction with various theme restaurant attributes, and their effect on intent to return. Demographic variables were also examined to assess their impact on intent to return.

Summary of Key Findings

In examining phase one of the analysis, it was determined that there was a significant difference in the satisfaction scores of various theme restaurant attributes. For the overall sample, a significant difference was found between all four attributes tested. The restaurant cleanliness score was significantly greater than the efficient service score ($t = -2.629, p = 0.008$). The efficient service score was significantly greater than the food quality score ($t = -2.096, p = 0.038$). Finally, the food quality score was significantly greater than the new dining experience score ($t = 3.712, p = 0.000$). The same tests were performed to test for differences in attribute satisfaction within each restaurant type: Planet Hollywood, Hard Rock Café, and Rainforest Café. The analysis showed that significant differences in attribute satisfaction existed within each restaurant type as well.

In phase two of the analysis, it was determined that customer satisfaction with restaurant attributes was significant in predicting intent to return ($F = 34.566$, $p = 0.000$). The model that explained the greatest amount of variability in intent to return included the independent variables of food quality satisfaction ($t = 3.879$, $p = 0.000$), atmosphere satisfaction ($t = 2.776$, $p = 0.006$), and dining frequency ($t = 3.726$, $p = 0.000$). Service quality satisfaction ($t = -.995$, $p = 0.322$) and novelty satisfaction ($t = -0.185$, $p = 0.854$) were not found to be significant in predicting return intent.

The final phase of the analysis assessed whether differences existed in attribute satisfaction scores among restaurants. The only significant difference that was found was in the area of novelty satisfaction. It was found that Rainforest Café's novelty satisfaction scores were significantly higher than Hard Rock Café's ($t = 3.032$, $p = 0.0079$). No significant difference existed between Planet Hollywood's novelty satisfaction scores and those of the other two restaurants.

Discussion

In the highly competitive foodservice industry, it has become increasingly important to understand customer wants and needs in order to provide the customer with the best possible product. Customer satisfaction assessment has been used in many service industry sectors as a means to determine if customers are happy with the service they have received. Typically, people who are satisfied with a given service become repeat customers. The results of this research found that customer satisfaction with theme restaurant attributes is influential in predicting intent to return. This finding is important because since the late 1990's, theme restaurants have been experiencing a decline in sales and market share. Creating satisfied customers who are going to provide repeat business

to these restaurants should be of the utmost importance to theme restaurant managers. In order to do this, it is important to assess which theme restaurant attributes customers are most and least satisfied with.

One of the most interesting findings of this research was that customer satisfaction with theme restaurants' novelty was significantly lower than their satisfaction with other theme restaurant attributes (food quality, efficient service, and restaurant cleanliness). This is important because theme restaurants have typically tried to sell themselves on the promise of providing a new and different experience to their customers. This experience was often viewed as compensating for areas in which the restaurants were lacking, such as food quality and value. Although the promise of novelty may have been a significant selling point in the early 1990's when these restaurants were experiencing their initial "boom," the results of this study indicate that the novelty may have worn off. Overall, guests do not seem to feel that these restaurants are providing a new dining experience.

It was also interesting to find that novelty was the only attribute area that differed among restaurants with regards to customer satisfaction. Rainforest Café customers were significantly more satisfied with the restaurant's novelty than the customers at Hard Rock Café. This is a logical finding because Rainforest Café is a much newer operation than Hard Rock Café. In addition, Rainforest Cafe has significantly fewer outlets in its operation, thus decreasing the chance that a customer would have visited the chain repeatedly. Hard Rock Café, however, has been in operation for over 30 years and has over 100 locations all over the world. It is likely that novelty "wear out" may have occurred for this restaurant chain.

Customer satisfaction with theme restaurant novelty was not found to be significant in predicting customer intent to return. Instead, the only attribute areas found to be significant in predicting intent to return were food quality and atmosphere. This also implies that customers are no longer frequenting these restaurants because of their promise of a new dining experience. Instead, they are using their opinions on restaurant attributes like food quality and atmosphere to drive their repeat purchase decisions.

Conclusions

These findings support previous findings that customer satisfaction with restaurant attributes is influential in predicting repeat purchase behavior. These findings further support the expectancy disconfirmation model that was adopted for this research. The disconfirmation of theme restaurant patrons' expectations of theme restaurant attributes resulted in their level of satisfaction with the attribute. Their satisfaction level, in turn, was influential in predicting their behavior (intent to return). Only two of the four attributes were found to be significant in predicting return intent. However, this finding supports the hypothesis that attribute satisfaction is predictive of return intent in general.

Implications of the Study

This study was undertaken because of the researcher's belief that theme restaurants are failing because they are not able to create repeat business. The researcher thought that the restaurants were selling themselves on the promise of a novel dining experience and then failing to satisfy customers in other areas. It was thought that determining what

attributes customers were satisfied with and what was influential in determining their intent to return would provide guidance to managers concerned with waning business.

The finding that theme restaurant patrons are less satisfied with the restaurants' novelty than with other restaurant attributes should help managers understand that they can no longer sell themselves on novelty alone. An implication of this finding is that theme restaurant managers must increase their focus on improving other aspects of the dining experience. Now that theme restaurants do not have the appeal of newness, they need to begin to look at other casual dining restaurants as their competitive set and adapt accordingly. For instance, many casual dining restaurant chains focus on food quality, service quality, and value to maintain their popularity. The findings of this study indicate that theme restaurants may need to focus on those same things if they want to continue to prosper.

This study found that of the attributes studied, food quality and atmosphere were the only restaurant attributes influential in predicting return intent. This indicates that these are the areas in which management should focus their improvement efforts. Maybe the restaurants need an updated look, less crowded seating, or softer music in order to create repeat business. Planet Hollywood and Rainforest Café have already gone through extensive menu revisions in attempts to put the focus back on food. This study provides empirical findings that indicate that they may be on the right track for increasing repeat business.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although this research has provided a starting point from which to explore the theme restaurant segment, it has only touched on the surface of a much larger issue. The idea for this research was spawned by the author's desire to determine why theme restaurants are failing. This is a broad problem with many contributing factors. This research focused on one aspect of theme restaurant success/failure: customer satisfaction and repeat purchase behavior. There are many other internal and external factors that may be contributing to the decline of the theme restaurant industry. Exploring these factors provides an excellent opportunity for future research.

First of all, theme restaurants financial statements could be analyzed to determine if these restaurants are spending more money on the elaborate décor, large dining rooms, and expensive real estate involved in theme restaurant projects than can be recovered through restaurant revenue. Secondly, a market analysis could be conducted to assess if these restaurants have oversaturated the market, thus causing the cannibalization of the theme restaurant segment. Finally, additional market analysis could be conducted to determine if the closing of theme restaurant units is related to poor location selection.

There are also many ways in which the present customer satisfaction research could be expanded and improved upon. First of all, a more comprehensive model of customer satisfaction and return intent in theme restaurants could be developed by including additional restaurant attributes, such as price/value and convenience, in the model used to predict return intent. In addition, theme restaurants could be compared with other casual dining restaurants to determine if their customer satisfaction scores differ with regards to the attributes studied. More theme restaurants could be included in the sample frame to

give a more representative sample of the theme restaurant population. Finally, this study could be replicated by individual theme restaurant unit managers to assess how their particular facility compares to the industry in general. In conclusion, future research efforts are essential to add to the body of literature on theme restaurants and help explain the rapid expansion and decline of this industry segment.

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APPENDIX A

Participant Informed Consent

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration

INFORMED CONSENT: Your rights as a research subject

General Information: My name is Rachel D. Weiss. I am a graduate student in the UNLV College of Hotel Administration and the primary researcher on this project. You are invited to participate in a research study. The study will be used to find out customer's opinions about their dining experience. By participating in this study, you are giving your informed consent.

Procedure: If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to fill out the self-administered questionnaire.

Risks of Participation: There are minimal foreseen risks associated with this study other than possible cognitive fatigue. You might be uncomfortable answering some of the questions asked. You are encouraged to discuss this with me. I will explain the questions to you in more detail.

Benefits of Participation: Benefits focus on providing valuable information to researchers as well as restaurant industry managers on the subject of customer satisfaction with dining-out experiences.

Contact Information: If you have any questions about the study or if you believe you may have experienced harmful effects as a result of participating in this study, please contact me immediately at 702-895-1795. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, you may contact the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 702-895-2794.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with UNLV. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Confidentiality: All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for at least 3 years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be destroyed.

**The Relationship between Restaurant Attribute Satisfaction and Intent to Return in
Theme Restaurants
INFORMED CONSENT (continued)**

Participant Consent: I have read the above information and agree to participate in the study described above. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

APPENDIX B

Survey Instrument

DINING EXPERIENCE SURVEY

The questionnaire should not take you more than 8-10 minutes to complete. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers; a quick response is generally the most useful.

Thank you very much for your participation and assistance. Researcher: Rachel Weiss

Have you ever dined at any of the following restaurants?

(Planet Hollywood, Hard Rock Café, Rainforest Café)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If so, please indicate the restaurant where you most recently dined. Please select only one restaurant:

- ☐ Planet Hollywood
- ☐ Hard Rock Café
- ☐ Rainforest Café

Please respond to the following questions by thinking back to your most recent dining experience at the restaurant you indicated above. The answers to the following questions only apply to the restaurant you indicated. Please respond to the questions by circling a number between 1 and 5 in response to each statement. Please answer all items.

How important to you was each one of these items when you decided to dine in this restaurant?

Section 1

Did the restaurant meet with you expectations for each of these items?

Please circle one number only

Please circle one number only

*Not
Important*

*Very
Important*

*Has not met
Expectations*

*Has exceeded
Expectations*

					Food					
1	2	3	4	5	presentation of food	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	menu item variety	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	nutritious food	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	tastiness of food	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	food quality	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	freshness of food	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	temperature of food	1	2	3	4	5

					Service					
1	2	3	4	5	friendly, polite & helpful staff	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	attentive staff	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	staff greeting customers	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	efficient service	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	staff are willing to serve	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	staff have food/beverage knowledge	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	sympathetic handling of complaints	1	2	3	4	5

					Atmosphere					
1	2	3	4	5	level of comfort in the restaurant	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	level of noise in the restaurant	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	view from the restaurant	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	cleanliness of the restaurant	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	dining privacy	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	restaurant's temperature	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	restaurant's appearance	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	staff appearance	1	2	3	4	5

					A restaurant that...					
1	2	3	4	5	offers a new dining experience	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	offers food of a consistent standard	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	feels comfortable to eat there	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	offers service of a consistent standard	1	2	3	4	5

Which one of these statements best applies to you?

Please check one box only

What gender are you?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

To which of the following age groups do you belong?

- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ Over 65

Which of the following represents your annual household income?

- ☐ Less than \$20,000
- ☐ \$20,000-\$29,999
- ☐ \$30,000-\$39,999
- ☐ \$40,000-\$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000-\$59,999
- ☐ \$60,000 or more

The primary reason I chose to dine at this restaurant is...

- ☐ I was celebrating
- ☐ For business
- ☐ For pleasure
- ☐ It was convenient
- ☐ I had extra time
- ☐ Other _____

How many times have you dined in this restaurant or any of the restaurants in this chain in the past six months?

Please check one box only

- ☐ I haven't dined in this restaurant in the past six months
- ☐ Once
- ☐ 2-3 times
- ☐ 4-5 times
- ☐ more than 5 times

On a scale from one to five, which number best represents your intent to return to this restaurant or any of the restaurants in this chain?

I will definitely not return

I will definitely return

1

2

3

4

5

The survey is now complete. Thank you very much for your time and participation.

Appendix C

Notice of Approval to Conduct Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: March 19, 2003

TO: Rachel Weiss, Hotel Administration
Dr. Andrew Feinstein (Advisor)
M/S 6022

FROM: Dr. Fred Preston, Chair
UNLV Social Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board

RE: Status of Human Subject Protocol Entitled: *A Study Relationship between Food Quality Atmosphere, Novelty, and Return Intent in U.S. Theme Restaurants*

OPRS# 600S0303-099

This memorandum is official notification that the protocol for the project referenced above has been reviewed by the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) and has been determined as having met the criteria for exemption from full review by the UNLV Social Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in regulatory statutes 45CFR 46.101. The protocol has been reviewed via the expedited review process and has been **approved for a period of one year** from the date of this notification. Work on the project may proceed.

Should the use of human subjects described in this protocol continue beyond **March 19, 2004**, it will be necessary to request an extension. **Should there be ANY changes to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit those changes to the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects.**

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 895-2794.

Cc: OPRS File

VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Rachel D. Weiss

Local Address:

3144 Brockington Drive
Las Vegas, NV 89120

Home Address:

1121 Lasswade Drive
Tallahassee, FL 32312

Degrees:

Bachelor of Science, Psychology, 1997
University of Florida

Thesis Title: The Relationship between Restaurant Attribute Satisfaction and Return Intent in Theme Restaurants

Thesis Examination Committee:

Chairperson, Dr. Andrew Hale Feinstein, Ph. D.
Committee Member, Dr. Deborah Barrash, Ph. D.
Committee Member, Dr. Michael Dalbor, Ph. D.
Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. Michael Sullivan, Ph. D.