

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE OF NEW RESTAURANT CONCEPT

Case Frans & Chérie

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Tämän opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli analysoida asiakaspalvelun laatua sekä asiakkaiden ravintolakokemusta konseptimuutoksessa uudistetussa Frans & Chérie Bistrossa. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli selvittää, kuinka konseptiuudistus on onnistunut asiakkaiden näkökulmasta, sillä samankaltaista tutkimusta ei ole tehty kyseiseen ravintolakonseptiuudistukseen liittyen.

Tutkimus toteutettiin laadullisena tutkimuksena, jossa menetelmänä käytettiin kaksiosaista asiakaskyselyä. Koska tavoitteena oli saavuttaa kokonaisvaltainen tutkimus kyseisen konseptiuudistuksen aikana, ensimmäinen osa kyselyä toteutettiin ennen konseptiuudistusta Fransmanni ravintolassa ja toinen kysely konseptiuudistuksen jälkeen uudessa Frans & Chérie Bistrossa. Tutkimuksessa selvitettiin, kuinka asiakkaiden odotukset uudistunutta ravintolaa kohtaan ennen konseptimuutosta poikkesivat varsinaisesta asiakaskokemuksesta ravintolassa vierailun jälkeen. Tutkimuksen perustana käytettiin kirjallisuutta aiheesta.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat asiakastyytyväisyyden olevan hyvä tai erinomainen uudessa Frans & Chérie Bistrossa. Ravintolan sisustukseen sekä tunnelmaan liittyen tutkimuksen tuloksissa ilmaantui kuitenkin ristiriitaisia mielipiteitä konseptiuudistuksen onnistumisesta. Myös oleellisia parannusehdotuksia tehtiin asiakaskokemuksen kehittämiseksi, koskien ruoan laatua, ruokalistan monipuolisuutta, tunnelmaa, sisustusta sekä musiikkia. Tutkimuksen mukaan Frans & Chérie Bistron ravintolakokemuksen kehittäminen olisi tärkeää, jotta pystyttäisiin saavuttamaan konseptiuudistuksessa asetetut tavoitteet ja luoda asiakkaille ravintolaelämyksiä heidän vieraillessaan ravintolassa. Tutkimuksen tulokset toimivat ravintolan johdon apuna uuden ravintolakonseptin kehittämisessä, jotta he voivat parantaa asiakkaiden ravintolakokemusta sekä varmistaa korkean asiakaspalvelun laadun.

Avainsanat Ravintolakonsepti, palvelun laatu, asiakaskokemus, asiakastyytyväisyys, asiakaskokemuksen hallinta, asiakasodotukset

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The objective of this thesis was to analyse customer service quality and customer experience in a restaurant going through a new concept launch. Without any other researches of the topic in the restaurant, this research was to provide an insight for the commissioner into the success of the restaurant concept launch from customers' point of view.

This qualitative survey was conducted by a two-phase customer survey, using two different questionnaires. The first questionnaire was carried out before the concept change in Fransmanni restaurant and the second questionnaire after the change in the new Frans & Chérie Bistro. Therefore, this thesis examined how the expectations towards the new concept Frans & Chérie differed from the actual experience and satisfaction in the restaurant after the change. Hence, the complete research throughout the process of concept change was conducted. Secondary data collection was used to create a framework for the empirical research.

The results of the survey indicated, for the most part, good or excellent level of satisfaction with the new Frans & Chérie Bistro. However, the new venue and atmosphere raised controversial opinions on the success of the new concept, along with relevant improvement ideas for the different parts of the customer restaurant experience, such as, stability of food quality and variety of menu, atmosphere, venue décor and music. More experiential parts should be attached to the service in order to increase the customer experience and to achieve the objectives and goals of the Frans & Chérie Bistro according to the results. The results function as a guideline for the restaurant management to improve the new restaurant concept further in order to provide meaningful customer experiences to the customers and ensure high customer service quality.

Key words Restaurant concept, service quality, customer experience, customer satisfaction, customer experience management, customer expectations

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1 INTRODUCTION

For decades businesses have been relying solely on price as a competitive advantage. Even though it might have been a successful approach earlier, it no longer maintains growth and profitability in a competition between businesses. As the approach in the restaurant industry has become more customer-centric and awareness of the shift from service economy to experience economy has increased, there is now a growing interest towards the customers' needs and desires among businesses. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 1-5.) Therefore, businesses are increasingly interested in the customers' opinions, needs, and wants in order to provide meaningful experiences to them in a personal way and, thus, distinguish themselves from the competition.

The decision to conduct this thesis project based on the research of customers' perceptions of restaurant experience was originated from my passion related to tourism and hospitality industry, as well as my personal interests towards the approach of creating meaningful customer experiences, which is emphasized in these days. As I have been able to develop my knowledge of customer experience creation with my tourism studies and work experience in hospitality industry, the choice of the topic seemed to be natural for me. In addition, my work experience from various restaurants, including Fransmanni, provided an opportunity to create a thesis project based on my own interests and experiences.

The objective of the thesis was to determine the customers' perceptions of a restaurant concept change that occurred when S Group chain restaurant Fransmanni, located in Rovaniemi, changed into Frans & Chérie Bistro in spring 2016. The new concept launch presented a need to discover the customer experience and measure the service quality of the new restaurant concept in order to analyse the success of the concept launch from customers' point of view and improve the services further.

In addition to aiming at determining the customer experience of the new restaurant concept Frans & Chérie Bistro, the service quality of the restaurant was measured. In order to discover the service quality of the new restaurant,

customers' expectations of the restaurant before launching the new concept and their actual perceptions after visiting the restaurant were measured and compared based on the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1985; 1988). The aim of the study was to provide an insight for the commissioner into the success of implementing the new restaurant concept in practice from customers' point of view, as well as, provide relevant improvement ideas based on customers' perceptions of the development of service quality and customer experience in the new restaurant.

This study aimed to answer the following questions: "What is the customer perception of the new restaurant concept and how the restaurant concept could be improved according to the customers' opinions". To get the most effective results, the selected qualitative research method was a two-phase survey. The survey included two different questionnaires; one was conducted before the concept change and the other after the change. The first questionnaire was provided to the customers in Fransmanni prior to the concept change, and the second questionnaire after the concept change in the new Frans & Chérie Bistro. Secondary data collection from the Internet and literature was used to create a framework for the empirical research. All in all, the goal was to receive relevant information from the current restaurant customers on the success of the new restaurant concept, determine if the concept launch could have been implemented in a different manner, and discover the customers' perceptions of improving the service quality and customer experience in the restaurant.

2 RESTAURANT CONCEPT

2.1 Theory of Restaurant Concept

According to Walker (2011, 63–64), the restaurant concept is a mixture of ideas that shape the perceptions of the restaurant's image and is contemplated to interest a certain group of people, which is called a target market. The restaurant concept comprises everything from the public relations, advertising and promotion to the operation itself, and frames the customers' perception of the whole restaurant. The restaurant concept includes all the different elements of business: quality, menu, price, atmosphere, management, location, food and service (Figure 1). It is important that all of these parts of the concept fit together, fit to the market and reach out to appeal to its target in order to the restaurant concept to be profitable. (Walker 2011, 69.)

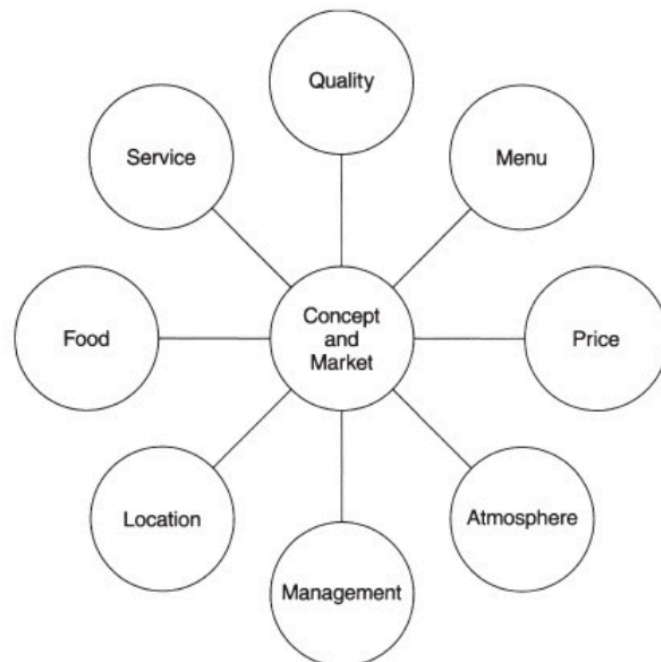


Figure 1. Restaurant Concept (Walker 2011, 69)

No matter what the concept is, there must always be a market which supports it and customers who are going to use the service. It is crucial as well to have a need for the concept in the area in order to the concept to work. (Walker 2011, 69.) The concept is strong if it is well defined, and all the different parts fit together to build the whole, and establishes a vivid and easily remembered

identity for the restaurant (Walker 2011, 64). The name of the restaurant makes a part of the concept and must be fit to the concept ideology and implementation, together with all the other external and internal factors of the restaurant (Walker 2011; Baraban & Durocher 2010, 1–2).

Concept development is an important and crucial part of the restaurant industry. Changes in restaurant concept might be necessary if the concept or image loses its appeal and becomes stale for a market (Walker 2011, 77), for instance, due to competitive environment, sales decline or customers' dissatisfaction with the concept. In spite of the reason, the changes in a concept, either small or extreme, are vital for the company to survive in a competitive market and to be able to meet the customers' changing needs and wants. Thus, continuous adaptation to the operating environment is crucial in the restaurant industry.

In order to ensure the success of the concept amendments to increase the business of the restaurant, multiple issues are worth considering. To successfully create a restaurant concept, detailed information and clear picture of all the prominent factors are necessary, such as, the type of the restaurant, the market, concept development, menu, style of service, speed of service, the per-customer check average, general ambience, management philosophy and budget, in order to build up a good balance between the different parts of the concept and make the concept work in its entirety. (Baraban & Durocher 2010; Walker 2010.) Galen Zamorra, the chef of one of the NYC's restaurants, recently opened a new concept and presented an article with inevitable issues that need more thought than given. He highlights the significance of feedback from all parts involved in the process of the concept change to increase the ability to offer the customers what they expect. (Terenzio 2015.)

Zamorra suggests reinventing the space of the restaurant if the new restaurant is launched to the same site as the old one. The reason is to make customers notice the new restaurant and prevent their possible detrimental associations with the old restaurant. Involving the team, including the staff, managers and customers to the new project helps to build excitement and community, strengthens teambuilding and creates a pleasant and motivational atmosphere.

Moreover, to ensure the successful branding of the new concept, it is important that the old restaurant is not anymore visible for the customers, such as, its name or logo. It adds confusion of the branding in the customers' minds. Lastly, in addition to the PR and promotion of the new concept, existing customer base should be attracted and involved in the process, in order to retain and engage the customers of the old concept to the new restaurant. (Terenzio 2015.)

2.2 From Fransmanni to Frans & Chérie

2.2.1 Introduction to New Concept

The restaurant is part of the S Group, which is a network of companies in retail and service sector in Finland. There are more than 1600 outlets in Finland that belong to the S Group chain. The services offered by S Group are related to supermarket trade, department store and speciality store trade, service station store and fuel sales, travel industry and hospitality business, and hardware trade. Additionally, certain automotive and agricultural businesses from regional cooperatives are included as a part of the S Group, as well as, comprehensive banking services are provided by S-Bank. The S Group consists of cooperatives and SOK Corporation along with its subsidiaries. The owners of the cooperatives are their customers, called co-op members, and the purpose is to provide competitive services and benefits for them in a profitable manner. (S Ryhmä 2016.)

The reformation of the S Group restaurant Fransmanni to Frans & Chérie Bistro in spring 2016 aims to enhance personal touch to the restaurant, highlighting uniqueness and memorability. Frans & Chérie is part of the national Frans & Les Femmes chain, which promises to offer memorable experiences, authenticity and individuality to its customers. The personnel's own personality and character are used to create an authentic atmosphere and ensure personal service when encountering customers. The aim is to indicate that customers are welcomed to the restaurant and high quality is perceived as a key in their overall business. (Havia 2016.)

"For love to people, food and wine", was described of the new bistro- style French restaurant. The change develops a demand for a new customer group which consist of younger city women who place an importance on good food and great atmosphere. Simultaneously, the aim is to create a new local customer base. Moreover, the name and the milieu are altered in the restaurant, along with menu, music, clothing, as well as, marketing of the restaurant. (Havia 2016.) However, the intention is not to eliminate Fransmanni chain completely with the new concept. The concept is remodified and various Fransmanni- chain restaurants obtain a new personal name. Even though, Fransmanni has been successful, the driving force of the concept change was to be more ambitious and eager to function better. The change from the service business to the experience business is highlighted with the concept change: "We are no more going towards the taste but the big picture and experience". (Ojanperä 2016.)

2.2.2 Objectives of New Concept Launch

The main objectives of launching the new restaurant concept pertain to four factors: business, customer base, reputation and service. To begin with the business side of the concept, the aim is to gain revenue growth within three years of the concept change (Havia 2016). Because the revenue and profit serve as important part the restaurant business, it is crucial part of the concept change also. The aim of the restaurant is to acquire more revenue in order to be more profitable as a business.

The following objective is related to the customer base and includes the change of the main target market of the new restaurant. Frans & Chérie aims to build new local customer relationships with various customer groups, such as, with active restaurant visitors, brand-aware people seeking for experiences, as well as, the consumers who understand and respect high quality. Moreover, the development of the business during lunchtime and afternoon is highlighted as important goals for the new concept launch. Furthermore, one of the aims is to attract hotel residents to dine at Frans & Chérie, targeting at four out of five hotel guests to eat at least one meal in Frans & Les Femmes chain during their stay in case it is the only restaurant in a hotel. (Havia 2016.)

Regarding the reputation goals, Frans & Chérie attempts to achieve its trustworthiness back, along with being a pioneer in the industry again. The change in the perceptions of the restaurant from good to interesting with the concept change was believed to increase the reputation of the restaurant. The new concept is aspired to increase the experience side of the restaurant visit to the customers by adding the experiential parts for the normal service business. Following the rapid social media growth during the recent years, the new concept aims to have an impact on the reputation with the use of social media. Lastly, enhancing the customer experience and increasing the individuality of the service are the goals of the new concept. All the customers should be treated as they were guests in the restaurant and not only customers. Furthermore, the personnel satisfaction is pointed out to be one of the goals of the new Frans & Chérie. (Havia 2016.)

2.2.3 Implementation of Frans & Chérie Concept

“Passion française – we relate to people, food and wine with the French passion” (Havia 2016). The view behind the new concept is the combination of liberty, fraternity and quality. Liberty relates to the passion of the personnel and signifies the liberty to work with own characteristics and involve their own personality in the service. Furthermore, liberty indicates the ability to provide stories about food and wine with the personnel’s own means. It places an importance to build the customers’ passion and desire to do their utmost by sharing the stories of the raw materials, the food philosophy, as well as, the vineyard which provides the wine, for instance. (Havia 2016.)

Fraternity involves the notion of mutual respect. The customers were to be treated the same manner as the personnel desires to be treated. It includes the desire to generate an effort together for the guests to enjoy themselves. The view of fraternity signifies having a host in the restaurant to ensure that all the guests are treated as welcomed. It consists of an active participation, sharing and togetherness between customers and personnel. With the concept change, the atmosphere in the restaurant will be shifted to less serious and more casual,

becoming effortless for the customers to enter to the restaurant. At last, the fraternity implies reasonable prices and food to be enjoyed by the personnel as well. (Havia 2016.)

The view of quality embraces the means to perform with the highest quality possible. The customers' experience side is highlighted and managed in all the operations, from welcoming, recognition, cleaning, menu, raw materials and serving to the right promptness. Quality is the driving force in their business and, thus, nothing is provided to the customers if the high quality is not ensured. (Havia 2016.)

3 SERVICE QUALITY AND EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT IN RESTAURANT

3.1 Customer Expectations

Customer expectations are customer's beliefs on how the service will be delivered to them. The expectations serve as standards or reference points against they judge the actual performance. (Bitner, Zeithaml & Gremler 2013, 55). Customers' expectations are personal and change over time, which forces the service providers to follow them in order to keep up with the prevailing changes. However, it is generally agreed that customers expect fundamentals and performance, not empty promises or fanciness (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml 1991). Therefore, customers expect to receive good service and fairness in relation to what was paid for. The research conducted by Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml indicates the customers' interest in building closer relationships with the service providers and expecting to receive personal service (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml 1991).

Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml's findings suggest customers' service expectations to have two levels, desired and adequate, that are separated by the zone of tolerance. The desired level is what the customer hopes to receive and the adequate level presents what customer finds acceptable service. (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml 1991.) If the service is placed below the adequate service, out of the zone of tolerance, customer will be frustrated and dissatisfied. On the contrary, if the service performance is higher than the desired service, customer will be pleased and perhaps even surprised. Thus, the zone of tolerance can be considered as a range where customer does not notice the service performance but in case it falls outside the range, the customer will be affected either positively or negatively. (Bitner, Zeithaml & Gremler 2013, 58.)

Variety of factors affect these service levels and influence the size of tolerance. These factors include customer's previous experience, expectations of an affiliated party, number of perceived service alternatives and emergency or

recovery situations. Thus, Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml highlight the importance of service providers to recognize the dual-leveled and dynamic nature of customer expectations and understand the factors affecting them. (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml 1991.) Bitner, Zeithaml and Gremler demonstrate the factors that affect customers' desired level of service, are lasting service intensifiers and personal needs (Figure 2). Lasting service intensifiers stand for individual, stable factors that result in customers' strengthened sensitivity of service, for example, derived service expectations that occur when customer's expectations are driven by another person or group. Personal service philosophy, implying the customers' previous experience of working as a service provider, might contribute the alteration of the expectation level as well. Personal needs refer to the conditions essential for the well-being of the customer and are the prior factors that shape the customers' desire. They can fall into many categories, such as, physical, social, psychological and functional. (Bitner, Zeithaml & Gremler 2013, 60–61.)

There are five factors generating the adequate service levels of different customers (Figure 2). These short-term influences fluctuate more than the factors that affect to the desired service levels. These five factors are temporary service intensifiers, perceived service alternatives, customer self-perceived service role, situational factors and predicted service. The former factor consists of short-term and individual factors that increase customer's awareness of the need of service, such as, personal emergency situations. The perceived service alternatives indicate the other existing service providers. Obtaining multiple service providers to consider increases the adequate service level of the customer. The customer's self-perceived service role is defined as the customer's perceptions on the degree of how the customer influences the received service. Thus, customer's experience and participation can affect to the service and modify the adequate service level. The adequate service level is also influenced by situational factors, which are the service performance conditions that are beyond the control of service providers. Therefore, in case the customer becomes aware of the service providers' inability to manage the situational factors, lower level of service might be accepted. Finally, predicted service affects to the adequate service level, which signifies the level of service

that customers believe to receive. The predicted service of customer is further influenced by past experiences, word-of-mouth, implicit and explicit service promises. (Bitner, Zeithaml & Gremler 2013, 63–64.)

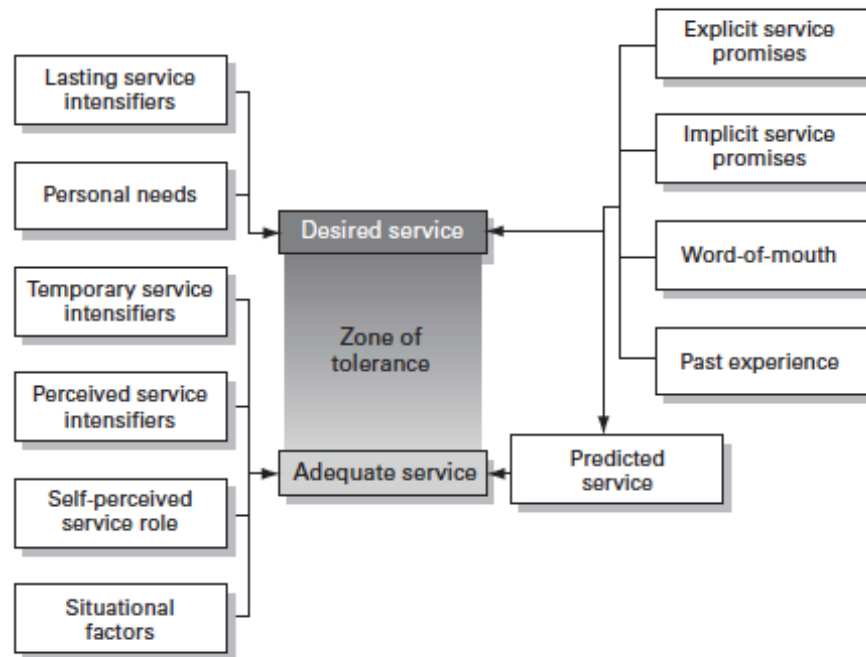


Figure 2. Factors Influencing the Desired and Adequate Service (Bitner, Zeithaml & Gremler 2013, 64)

3.2 Customer Satisfaction

Satisfaction indicates consumer's fulfilment response with the service or a product. It functions as a consumers' judgement of whether a product or service provided a pleasant level of fulfilment related to the consumption, including levels of under- or overfulfilment. (Oliver 2014, 8.) He further explains that in order to define satisfaction with fulfilment concept, at least, two stimuli need to be involved, outcome and comparison referent, such as, prior satisfaction or other people's satisfaction. (Oliver 2014, 8.)

Kotler (2002) describes buyer's satisfaction as a comparison with the buyer's expectations: "a function of the closeness between the buyer's expectations and the product's perceived performance". If the buyer perceives the performance of

the purchase lower than the expected performance, dissatisfaction occurs. In contrast, if the performance is considered higher, the buyer is delighted. In the middle of these extremities is satisfaction that occurs when the performance meets the expectations. (Kotler 2002,101.)

Customer satisfaction with the restaurant experience is formed by various factors. It can be affected by the three major service attributes from the restaurant industry: food quality, service and ambience (physical environment) (Dutta, Parsa, Parsa, & Bujisic 2014, 149). A study by Ahmed Al-Tit was conducted to discover the relationship between service quality, food quality and customer satisfaction. The study indicated that both service quality and food quality have a positive influence on customer satisfaction, which in turn affects positively to customer retention. (Al-Tit 2015, 134–135.) Kotler (2002) states that satisfaction not only influences buyer's retention but also customer tends to talk either favourably or unfavourably of the product or service to others, consequently, having an impact on the overall reputation of the product or service (Kotler 2002, 101). Moreover, Kivelä, Inbakaran and Reece claim that satisfaction with the dining event leads to repeat patronage (Kivelä, Inbakaran & Reece 1999), where the dining event consists of services, physical attributes, and quality of food and beverage in a restaurant. They have a significant impact on overall satisfaction of the customers, on the atmosphere, and loyalty behaviour. Moreover, they can be seen as significant determinants of restaurant image and predictors of customer perceived value. Regarding the restaurant satisfaction, the effects and the level of noise have been discovered to influence the overall satisfaction as well. (Raab et al. 2013; Al-Tit 2015.)

As described above, one approach to define and measure the customer satisfaction is to compare the expectations with the perceptions of the actual performance, which is implemented in this thesis project. However, there are numerous other comparison operators that affect satisfaction as Oliver (2002) states (Figure 3). In addition to expectations, these include customer's needs, excellence (ideals), sacrifice, fairness and events that might have occurred. On the other hand, there might not exist any comparison operators and the performance affects satisfaction directly.

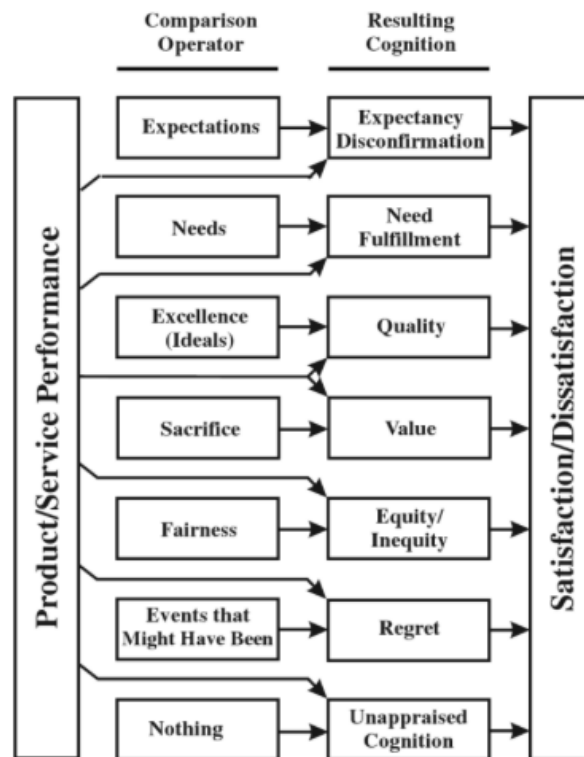


Figure 3. The Comparison Operator (Oliver 2002, 19)

In addition, the key in the restaurant business is to understand that customers' perceived value is a significant determinant of customer satisfaction, and, thus, customer satisfaction is a predictor of behavioural intentions (Ryu, Lee & Kim 2012). The research of the customer experience includes all these different perceptions, which construct the overall restaurant image and enable the restaurant to stay in business.

3.3 Service Quality

There are various different definitions to determine service quality, however, the most commonly used describes the difference of the customer expectations in relation to the actual customer perceptions (Shahin 2006, 4; Grubor, Salai & Lekovic 2009, 274). For the service providers, it is essential to understand the possible differences in customer expectations compared to the actual customer perceptions of the service, in order to be able to identify solutions to the possible problems in the service quality and to exceed the customer expectations. (Shahin 2006, 3–4; Grubor, Salai & Lekovic 2009, 274.)

The service quality concept includes 7 key gaps, presented in the model of Shahin (Figure 4), that are related to the managerial perceptions of service quality and the service delivery to customers. The first gap is placed between the consumers' expected service and management perceptions of consumer expectations that indicates the difference of what management perceive as customers' expectations and what the customers' actual expectations are. Gap 2 presents the conflict between the management perceptions of consumers' expectations and translation of perceptions into service quality specifications. Gap 3 describes the difference between the translated service quality specifications and service delivery to the consumers. Moreover, the contradiction between service delivery and external communication to customers create gap 4.

Gap 5 presents the discrepancy between customers' expected service and customers' perceptions of the delivered service. The difference between customers' expected service and employees' perceptions of the customers' expectations form gap 6. Lastly, the discrepancy between employee's perceptions of the customers' expectations and management perceptions of the customers' expectations create gap 7. (Shahin 2006, 2.) However, a common method for measuring the service quality is a quality management model (SERVQUAL model) that is based on gap 5 and is implemented in this study.

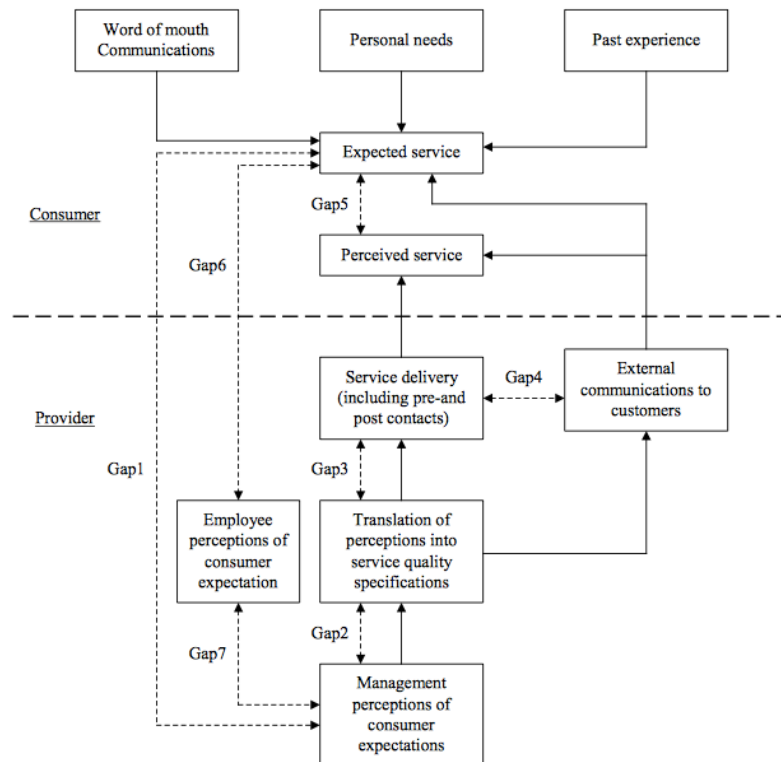


Figure 4. Model of Service Quality Gaps (Shahin / Parasuraman et al. 1985)

The SERVQUAL model was first introduced in 1988 by a group of American authors, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry to measure the service sector's quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985; 1988). It is an approach to manage business to ensure full customer satisfaction and the quality of the service provided. If the expectations are greater than the performance, the quality is not satisfiable and customer dissatisfaction occurs and vice versa. (Shahin 2006, 2.)

The model includes five dimensions which are used to discover the quality of the service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988, 23).

- Tangibles: Physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel
- Reliability: Ability to provide the promised service dependably and accurately
- Responsiveness: Willingness to assist customers and provide prompt service
- Assurance: Employees' knowledge and courtesy, ability to inspire trust and confidence
- Empathy: Caring, individualized attention

Using the different dimensions, the customers rate their expectations, as well as the actual perceptions of the service. With reliable ratings, the service provider can then measure the quality of their service by observing the difference between the expectations and the actual service perceptions. These ratings would then indicate the need for improving some part of the service with deviant dimension ratings. As a result, the service provider understands the customers' needs better and has tools to improve the quality of the service according to those needs. (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988, 30.)

3.4 Total Experience Management

Total Experience Management model (Gelter 2006; Gelter 2010, 62) introduces a holistic model of experience production including the experience producer, production, product and guest experience. This model can be used as a blueprint, not only for tourism product development but also as a guideline for restaurant experience development. It is inevitable to understand the different dimensions and variables to manage and produce successful experiences to customers (Gelter 2010, 61). The model (Figure 5) is divided into two parts; backstage that includes experience producer and experience production, and frontstage that comprises the experience product and guest experience (Gelter 2010, 62).

The first stage of the model presents experience producer, which contains the management of the product, such as, organization, staff & Co-associates management, business & economic management, education & knowledge management and creativity & innovation management. Afterwards, is the experience production stage placed, which includes all the parts integrated into the production of the experience. These are, for instance, logistics, problem solving and resource management, learning, interpretation goals and planning, theatric staging, and designing space and material resources. In this stage marketing, branding and customer relations are included, as well as, evaluation of the success of the production. (Gelter 2010, 62.)

In the frontstage, the experience product is described based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1954). Thus, the experience offering includes the experience facilitator (staff, environment etc.), experience dramaturgy (senses), physiological needs (food & drink, toilets, etc.), safety needs (security, risk management, etc.), belongingness (hospitality, to be seen, etc.) , esteem (skills, self-confidence), self-actualization (dreams) and transformation (change). All of the dimensions of the experience offering comprises the on-site experience of the customer. This on-site experience is affected by the pre-experience of the customer, such as, previous experiences and expectations. In addition, the on-site experience affects to the post-experience and, therefore, pre-experience, on-site experience and post-experience together create the holistic experience for the customer. (Gelter 2010, 62.)

The last stage of the model is guest experience, which signifies what the customer received from the experience. This includes customer's feelings and modes, together with meanings and significance the experience provided for the customer. (Gelter 2010, 62.) The experience generates a memorable Erlebnis for the customer, indicating every-day experiences, or peak experiences in the work or leisure time that contribute to the cumulative Erfahrung, meaningful life experience of the customer. This customer's Erlebnis is affected by the previous meaningful experiences of the customer, which also determine whether the experience places an importance in the customers' life. (Gelter 2010, 56.) The model contains the various parts important for experience creation and management and, therefore, functions as a guideline for businesses to manage their operations to create experiences for the customers.

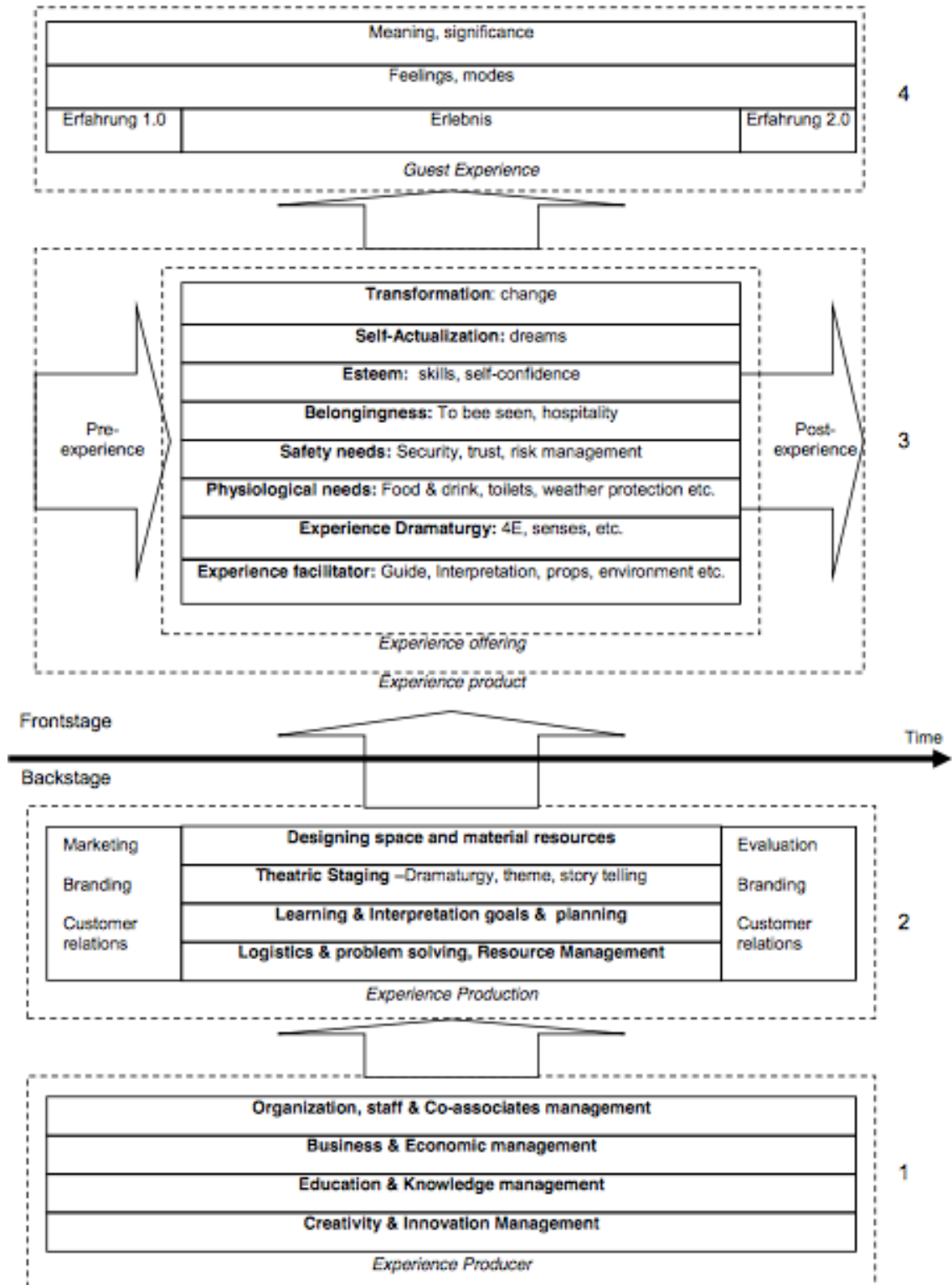


Figure 5. Total Experience Management Model (Gelter 2006; Gelter 2010, 62)

Even though, not all companies consider providing customer experiences, it takes place even unconsciously. For the restaurant to offer superlative experiences, instead of only services, is important in order to distinguish

themselves from their competition. First of all, understanding the customer journey in a restaurant is fundamental basis for improving customer experience. Customer journey includes everything from a customer entering to the restaurant until leaving the restaurant. Customer passes different touchpoints during the journey that affect to the overall experience they will receive. Thus, it is important to analyse the elements, steps, barriers and emotions that emerge during the journey in order to ensure the ability to improve the experience and create meaningful experiences for the customer. (Richardson 2010.)

All experiences are personal and include customer involvement in various levels: rational, emotional, sensorial, physical and spiritual (Verhoef et al. 2009, 32). Therefore, in order to engage customers personally ensuring the memorability of the experience, it is important to consider everything that affects to the experience from customers' side (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 5). The ideal situation would be for the customers to fulfill their basic needs, psychological needs and self-fulfillment needs, as well as generate the ability to transform as a result of a memorable and meaningful experience for the customer. (Maslow 1954.)

Moreover, experience creation demands for the discussion of customer participation and connection (environmental relationship). The experience engages customers in different levels, either participating passively and not directly affecting the performance, or participating actively and personally being involved in the performance. Moreover, customers' connectivity with the experience has an impact to the overall customer experience as well. Two different dimensions exist, absorption and immersion. Absorption indicates that the attention is achieved by providing the experience into the customer's mind from distance and immersion signifies that the customer is physically part of the experience. All of these dimensions determine the four realms of the experience: entertainment, educational, escapist and esthetic. (Pine & Gilmore, 2011, 45–47.) According to Pine and Gilmore (1998, 102; 2011, 45–47), every experience can be placed somewhere on the spectrum of the two continua, depending on the participation and connection of the experience that can be seen below in Figure 6.

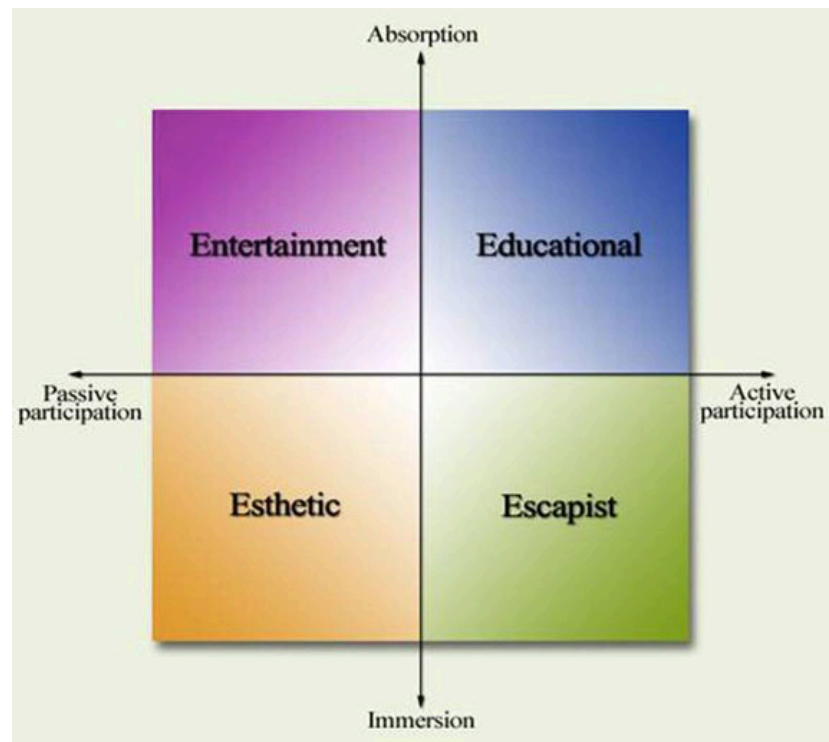


Figure 6. The Experience Realms (Pine & Gilmore 1998, 102)

4 CUSTOMER RESEARCH IN FRANS & CHÉRIE

4.1 Qualitative Research Method & Target Market

The research method used in this thesis is qualitative research. The qualitative research, on contrast to quantitative research, attempts to place more highlight on the study of phenomena from the insider's perspective and assesses the meaning more context- and time-specific. Quantitative data signifies easily generalizable data, which differentiates it from qualitative data analyses. Qualitative research requires observation of the context and individuality of the surveys, which denotes the challenge of data generalization. (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer 2012.) It is generally argued that in the survey examining customers' opinions, where variety of variables affect those opinions, it is more effective to use qualitative research. (Dias de Figueiredo 2010.) In qualitative research individual experiences, group norms and relationships are being examined which was important for this study conducted to examine customers' perceptions of the restaurant experience (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey 2005, 3). The qualitative research method in this study was divided into primary and secondary data collection. The primary data was collected by a two-phase customer survey questionnaire and the secondary data from the Internet and literature to create a framework for the empirical research. The reason for implementing this method was to obtain rich and accurate results for the study.

The research process included two different survey phases. The first survey was conducted before the concept change in Fransmanni restaurant and the second survey after the change in Frans & Chérie. Thus, the satisfaction with Fransmanni and expectations towards the new restaurant Frans & Chérie were analysed in the first questionnaire (Appendix 1), and the satisfaction and actual experience in Frans & Chérie Bistro were identified in the second questionnaire (Appendix 2). Consequently, service quality and customer experience in the new restaurant concept was measured and analysed by comparing the expectations and actual experience of the customers in Frans & Chérie Bistro.

Target market for both survey questionnaires was current customer base in Fransmanni and Frans & Chérie. Principally, the first survey questionnaire targeted brand-loyal regular customers of Fransmanni who have visited to the restaurant before. The reason for this decision of target market was to gain information of the customers who had experiences of the restaurant and not merely base the responses of the survey on one experience. Comparing the previous experiences and providing comprehensive approaches about their experiences and expectations increase the validity of the survey results. The second survey questionnaire targeted existing customers in Frans & Chérie who had used the restaurant's services at least once and visited Fransmanni as well. Because the restaurant was opened only four months before the second questionnaire was conducted, the possibility of acquiring a good amount of respondents who visited the restaurant several times was low. The target amount of the number of questionnaires to be received was 100 responses from both of the questionnaires.

4.2 Research Process

4.2.1 Pre-Survey: Customer Expectations of New Restaurant Concept

The aim of the first survey was to analyse the customer satisfaction with Fransmanni restaurant and expectations towards the new concept, Frans & Chérie Bistro. As mentioned above, the method of this survey was a questionnaire with both closed- and open-ended questions. The reason to include both types of questions suggested a better reflection of customers' thoughts by providing a freedom to respond to the questions in their own words and limiting the offering of response options. Providing the response options to all questions might lead the customers into a certain direction with their answers (Pew Research Center 2016). However, partly closed-ended question form was necessary considering the customers' time-constraints with responding the questionnaires. The duration to fill out the questionnaire was limited because the survey was conducted while the customers were using the services in the restaurant.

The survey was conducted in Fransmanni prior the concept change from the last week of April until the beginning of May. The author was present in the restaurant and provided the questionnaires to the customers to fill out, in order to find the right customers for the target market, to ensure the ability to offer more information of the survey and respond any questions customers may have had concerning the questionnaire. The author being present and delivering the questionnaires to the customers signified a possible increase in response rates as well, because some customers indicated a desire to contribute to the research when the author itself was present and provided information about the process directly to customers. Moreover, the process was more time-efficient when having the questionnaires distributed by a third party and limiting the responsibility of the waiters and waitresses.

The survey questionnaire form (Appendix 1) began with the information of the respondent, such as, gender, age group (e.g. 20-29, 30-39), nationality and residence. The form continued with questions of the reasons and frequency of visiting the restaurant. Next two questions concerned customers' satisfaction with Fransmanni, firstly data was obtained of the overall satisfaction with different aspects of the experience including menu (diversity of options), quality of food and drinks, venue, customer service, atmosphere and cleanliness. The following question aimed to determine what customers value most in a restaurant experience in general. The provided options were quality of food, quality of drinks, venue decor, value for money (price), customer service quality, atmosphere, information of the products/services (origin of food etc.) and cleanliness. The option "other" was provided in all the multiple-choice questions as well allowing customers to present ideas about other important aspects in their restaurant experience.

Following three open-ended questions concerned the expectations towards the new restaurant Frans & Chérie. Firstly, a word association question enabled the respondent to describe in adjectives of their thoughts concerning the new Frans & Chérie Bistro. Some of the examples of adjectives were provided in order to ensure better understanding of the question and maximize the number of responses. Afterwards, customers were supposed to describe a possible

restaurant experience Frans & Chérie would offer. In that question, some indications were provided, such as, food/drink, atmosphere, music, customer service and story. The 10th question allowed the respondents to provide suggestions to improve the restaurant experience in Fransmanni to the new concept Frans & Chérie Bistro, which would assist the restaurant managers to evaluate the success of the Frans & Chérie Bistro based on customers' opinions. Lastly, the questionnaire included a question of customers' interest to visit Frans & Chérie when it was opened on May. At the end of the questionnaire, an opportunity to participate in the lottery of a restaurant gift card was offered to ensure great amount of responses.

4.2.2 Post-Survey: Customer Experience and Satisfaction

The aim of the second questionnaire was to receive information of the customers' actual experience after visiting the Frans & Chérie Bistro. This questionnaire form was also provided to customers at the restaurant by the author itself to ensure the right target market for the survey, to generate more efficient process and to be present if any questions arised from the customers. With the same reasons as mentioned above, this survey questionnaire included also both closed- and open-ended questions and consisted of similar question form. This part of the survey was conducted from October to November.

The questionnaire form (Appendix 2) began with the respondents' information, following up the reason and frequency of visiting the restaurant. The satisfaction question was similarly formed as in the previous questionnaire in order to better compare the results. The next question enabled respondents to describe if the experience in Frans & Chérie Bistro was placed below their expectations, met their expectations or exceeded them based on variety of different aspects of the restaurant experience, in order to obtain better insight into comparing the expectations and the actual experience of customers. Furthermore, the questionnaire contained similar questions of the received restaurant experience, provided a possibility to present improvement ideas for the restaurant and presented the customers' desire to visit again in the restaurant. The question of the success of concept change was included and customers' perceptions on the

success of the new concept were provided. To increase the amount of responses, the lottery was organized between the survey participants.

4.3 Analysis of Survey Results

4.3.1 Respondents' Profiles

The 1st questionnaire received 111 responses and consisted of 56% female and 44% male customers' responses. The respondents were from 22 different villages or cities in Finland and one from Belgium. The age range was from under 20 until 80+. The largest respondent group (26%) belonged to the age range of 20-29, 23% of the respondents consisted of 50-59 years old and 18% belonged to the group of 60-69 years old (Figure 7).

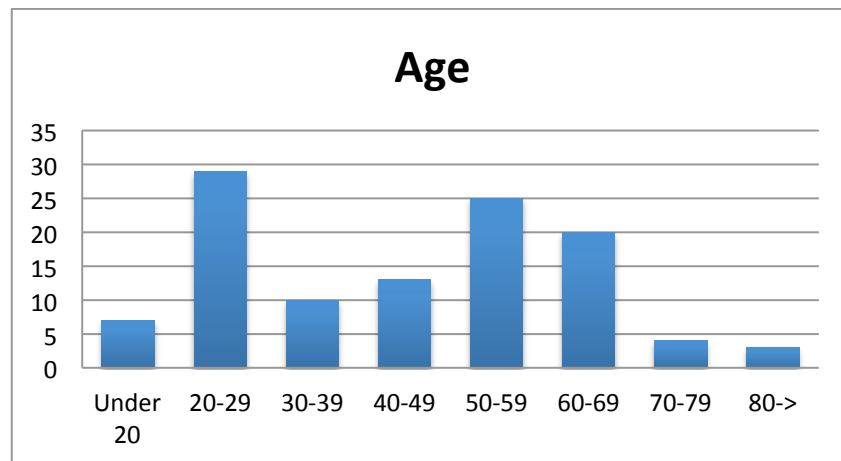


Figure 7. Age Group (Questionnaire 1)

The 2nd survey questionnaire received 109 responses consisting of 68% of male and 32% of female responses. Because the first survey questionnaire was more equal by the gender of respondents and the second survey consisted of majority of male responses, it must be taken into consideration in the results. Moreover, the second survey respondents were distributed between 37 villages/cities in Finland and one from the USA. The age range was from 20-29 until 60-69 years old, while 34% was 50-59 years old, 24% belonged to the group of 20-29 and 19% was 40-49 (Figure 8).

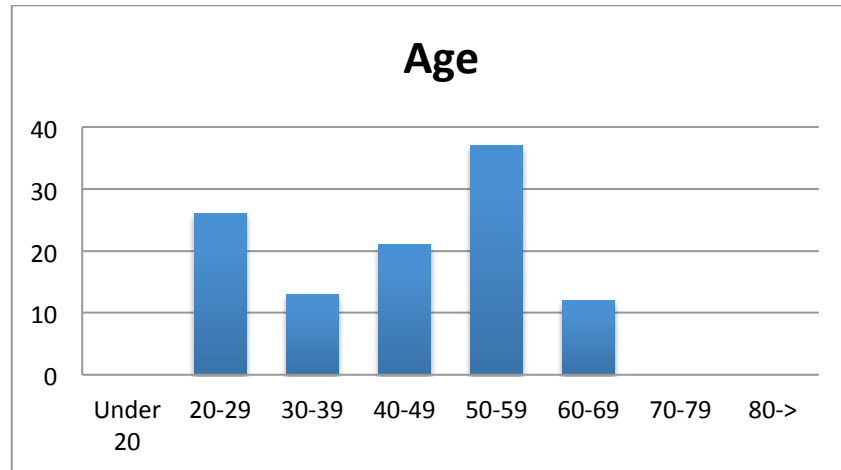


Figure 8. Age Group (Questionnaire 2)

The first questionnaire included more variety of the reasons for visit compared to the second questionnaire. The previous positive experiences in the restaurant (31%) received the highest ratings, following work (18%), regular customer (15%), leisure (14%), other, indicating celebrations etc. (14%) and recommendation (7%). On the contrary, the second questionnaire participants were mostly work customers (65%), and the distribution between other reasons were leisure (9%), previous positive experiences (8%), other (7%), regular customer (6%) and recommendation (4%). Only 1% of the both survey respondents indicated the reason being the first restaurant found (Figure 9 & Figure 10). The needs and wants of the work and leisure customers differ significantly which may affect to the responses of the two questionnaires and, thus, need to be considered in the result analyses.

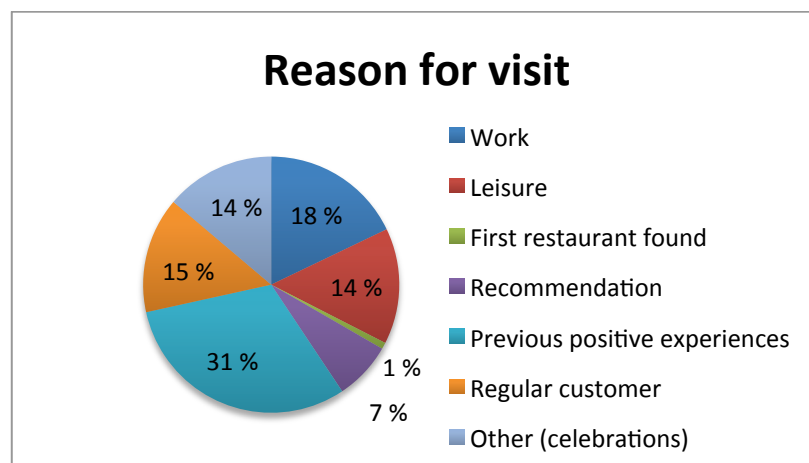


Figure 9. Reason for Visit (Questionnaire 1)

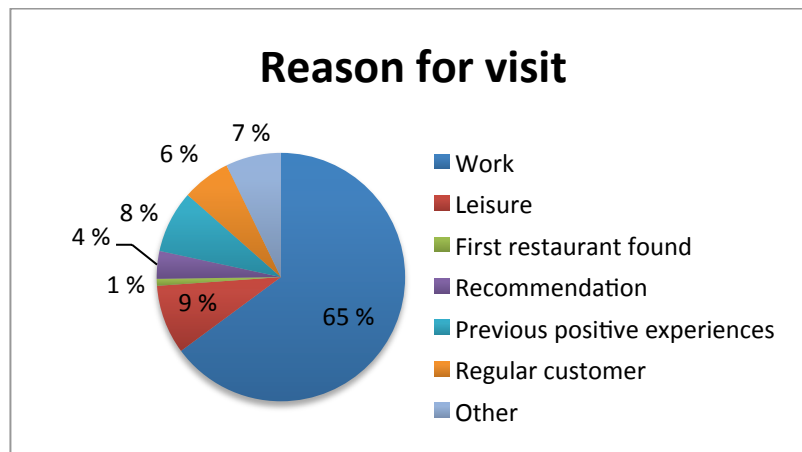


Figure 10. Reason for Visit (Questionnaire 2)

The majority of the respondents of the first questionnaire (45%) visit Fransmanni a few times a year and for 11% of the respondents this was their first time. However, the second survey questionnaire received responses from customers visiting for the first time (47%), and between daily visitors (4%) to customers who have been visiting only few times (12%).

4.3.2 Customer Experience & Service Quality of Frans & Chérie

Based on the findings of the customers' expectations towards the Frans & Chérie and the actual experience and satisfaction of the restaurant, the overall customer service quality can be discovered. The first questionnaire's findings provided information of the satisfaction with Fransmanni and expectations towards Frans & Chérie, which can be used to determine the general expectations towards the new concept. The findings of the satisfaction with Fransmanni restaurant disclosed mostly good or excellent level of satisfaction with all different aspects of the restaurant. However, customer service was highlighted and perceived as excellent. Apart from the positive results in cleanliness, atmosphere, customer service and quality of food, the clear distribution of opinions from moderate to excellent in the diversity of options in menu, drinks and venue can be observed below in Figure 11.

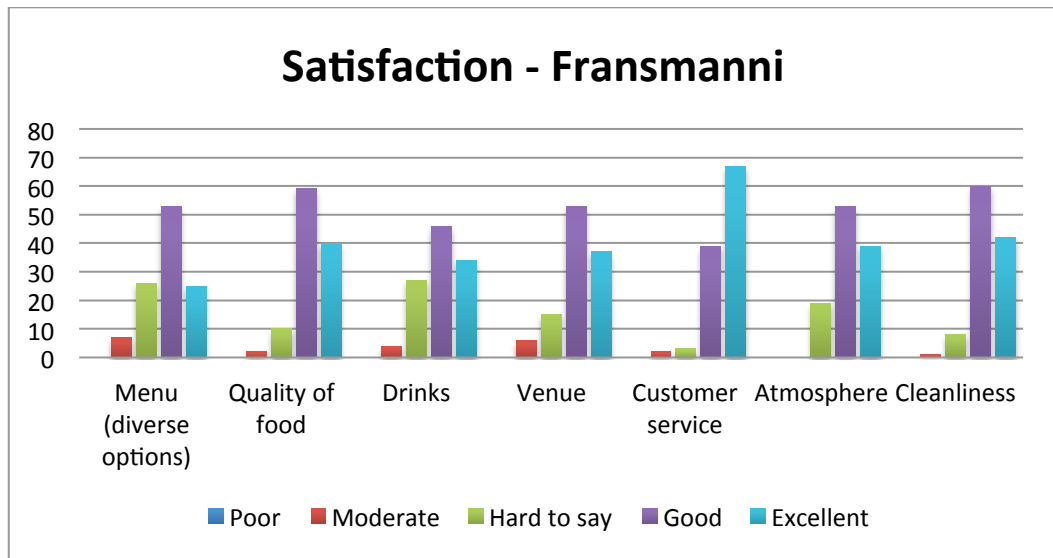


Figure 11. Satisfaction with Fransmanni (Questionnaire 1)

The question of the restaurant experience indicated the quality of food, customer service quality and cleanliness as the most valued aspects of restaurant experience in general, following the atmosphere, value for money (price) and venue decor. Quality of drinks and information of the products/services are the least valued in a restaurant experience according to the results.

The expectations towards Frans & Chérie, according to the word association question to describe the customers' perceptions of the new Frans & Chérie Bistro, are shown in a word cloud found below (Figure 12). The highlighted words are the most used words among the respondents, such as, French, casual, attractive, new, sophisticated, different, cozy, fresh and atmospheric. Other words important to pay attention to are modern, young, authentic, nice, delicious, expensive and warm. Thus, the restaurant is expected to change into a modern direction with new, more casual and fresh atmosphere but also being sophisticated, attractive and different.



Figure 12. Word Cloud - Expectations Towards Frans & Chérie (Made with Tagul Word Clouds)

The respondents' differing views were denoted in the question of the upcoming Frans & Chérie restaurant experience. Based on the responses, the expected restaurant experience offered more relaxed, peaceful but still sophisticated atmosphere with versatile menu and great, familiar customer service. However, the restaurant was also described as elegant and expensive, while others imagined the restaurant offering more casual atmosphere, a place easy to enter and relax, offering special French menu, as well as small snacks with trendy drinks. Based on the responses, the restaurant was suggested to provide unique restaurant experience compared to other restaurants in Rovaniemi.

The respondents' similar opinions on the improvements of customer experience in Fransmanni for the new concept was noticeable. Based on the responses, the new and fresh venue decor with increased lightning was necessary to transfer the restaurant into the modern era. Considering venue decor, respondents suggested more cozy compartments separated from other customers to increase privacy in the restaurant. Moreover, respondents showed an interest towards organizing different events in the restaurant, for example, some European events (cheese fondue- celebrations, wine tasting), as well as live music or theatre performances. The increased variety of beer and whiskey selection, and personal, changing seasonal menus were suggested. The

responses indicated a lack of seafood and chicken options in the menus and the use of local products was highlighted. Instead of merely large portions of food, more light food options was desired based on the responses. Moreover, the respondents showed interest towards some stories and information about the origin of food to be provided for the customers to improve the customer experience. The results showed a positive attitude towards the change as 46% of the respondents considered they would definitely want to visit Frans & Chérie, 38% would want to visit and only 2% would not like to visit there.

The findings showed considerable differences between the perceptions of satisfaction in the different restaurants (Figure 11 & Figure 13). The satisfaction with Frans & Chérie was rated mostly good or excellent as the satisfaction with Fransmanni but the excellent level of satisfaction is perceived slightly lower in Frans & Chérie. For example, customer service was rated 60% excellent and 35% good in Fransmanni, while in Frans & Chérie 46% excellent and 47% good. It is notable in other aspects of satisfaction as well, such as, quality of food, menu and venue. Furthermore, atmosphere in Fransmanni was not perceived as moderate or poor but in Frans & Chérie 7% of the respondents considered it poor or moderate. The same occurred with the venue, while respondents rated it 5% poor or moderate in Fransmanni and 10% in Frans & Chérie.

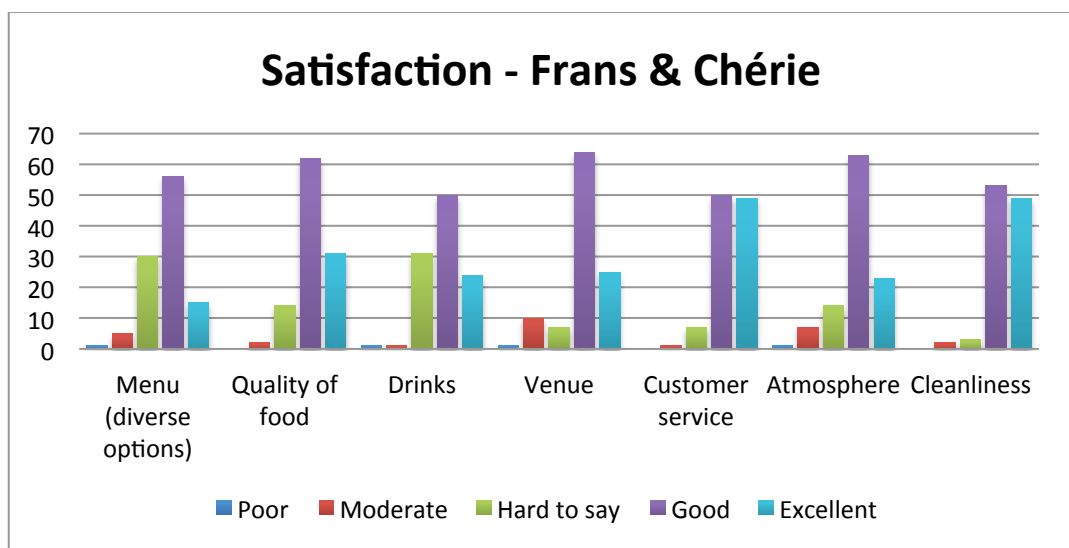


Figure 13. Satisfaction with Frans & Chérie (Questionnaire 2)

The concept change was defined definitely successful by 21% and successful by 56% of the survey respondents. However, 20% considered it somewhat successful and 3% not successful or definitely not successful. To conclude, the concept change is perceived as positive among the respondents but not extremely successful. The actual restaurant experience in Frans & Chérie was described positively with their professional and friendly customer service, upgraded local menu (especially steaks, snails, reindeer and wine), and nice and relaxed atmosphere. Furthermore, fresh and modern decor with more lightning and space created with light colors were valued in the concept change. The change was perceived transferring from cozy to modern and the new restaurant was considered casual but elegant as the expectations suggested. The restaurant was seen to work as an entirety; good food and prompt customer service with quality.

However, the menu was perceived somewhat unclear and some respondents showed dissatisfaction towards the food quality, based on occasions where partly cold, overly salty and not evenly cooked food were served. Regarding the variety of menu, the responses showed a lack of chicken and turkey options offered in the menu. Differences between the opinions on the lightning and atmosphere were indicated as well, whereas some perceived the restaurant too light, dreary, cold and noisy, and some considered the new venue and atmosphere as a positive alteration. The large open space without smaller compartments was perceived negative considering the privacy of the customers. Moreover, music raised also controversial perceptions among some respondents as it was considered being in dissonance with the other aspects of the restaurant experience. Some customers were disturbed by the noises from the kitchen as well, and the busy staff was indicated to have affected to the quality of service. Lastly, based on the results, the pub side of the restaurant was perceived more uncomfortable compared to Fransmanni and the same comfort to watch the games from the screen was not provided in the new restaurant.

Based on the findings, it is possible to argue that the restaurant has mostly met or exceeded the customers' expectations (Figure 14). It is interesting to note

how the actual experience was perceived to have exceeded the expectations especially in quality of food, venue decor, customer service quality, atmosphere and cleanliness. However, the results indicated that venue decor, atmosphere and information about the products and services have also been rated as below or definitely below the expectations. This suggest for the differing opinions of the success of the venue decor and atmosphere that was already mentioned above in the results. Moreover, the lack of information about the products and services, such as, origin of food, stories etc., can be noted from the ratings.

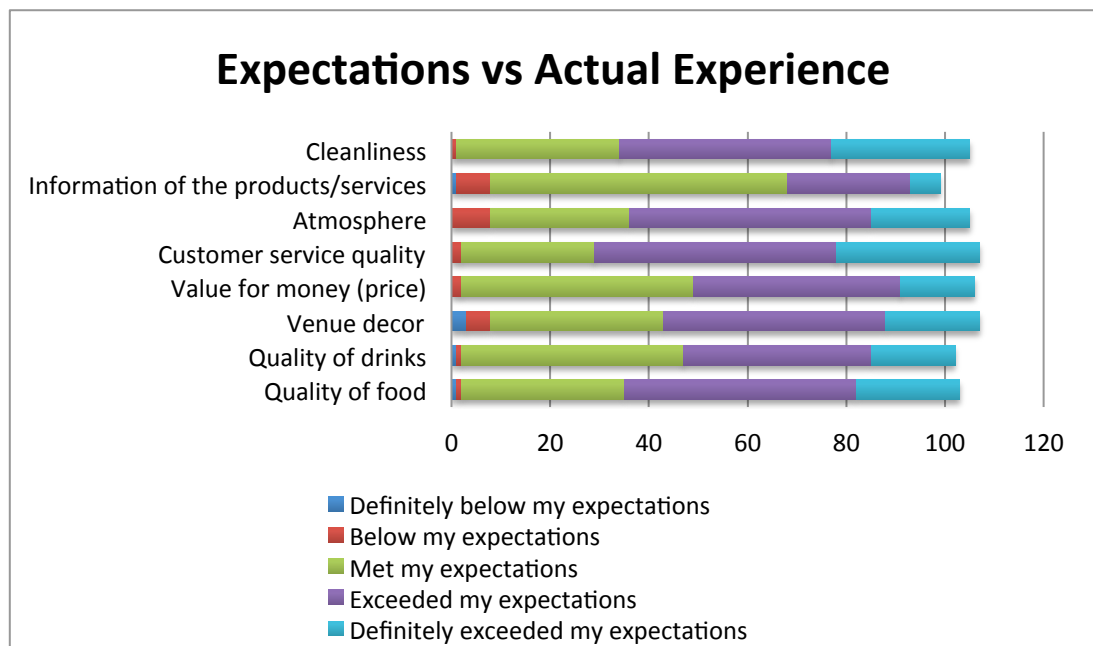


Figure 14. The Expectations Compared to the Actual Experience in Frans & Chérie (Questionnaire 2)

The second survey indicated that the respondents were, mostly, eager to visit the restaurant again based on their experiences. 33% of the respondents would definitely visit again, 52% would like to visit again and 14% considered maybe visiting again based on their experiences. Only 1% demonstrated dislike in visiting the restaurant again based on their experiences. Mainly, the positive reasons related to the atmosphere and fresh decor, excellent customer service, menu and food quality, good value for money, close location, good deals for the business customers (s-card) and because the restaurant is attached to a hotel. However, some respondents complained of the lack of vegetarian and vegan options and, thus, the menu was not assessed as attractive.

4.3.3 Suggestions for Improving Frans & Chérie Concept

The results demonstrated some improvement ideas for the new restaurant concept, related to the customer service, menu, venue decor and customer experience in general. Welcoming the customers was suggested to be improved by reducing the customers' waiting time for receiving the table and service. The responses indicated occasions where customers had left the restaurant when considered to be left unnoticed. Even though, that can be the effect of staff shortage at work or an exceptionally busy day, it is important to notice and inform the customer of the situation.

As mentioned before, the vegetarian, chicken and turkey options in the menu were not comprehensive enough based on the results and the stability of food quality provided space for improvements. The results indicated improvements for the diversity of the menu with some surprising effects, as well as, more options of different salads and evening snacks could be offered. Moreover, the wider beer selection and local beer options would improve the customer experience based on the results. Comprehensive wine list with suggested wine pairings would provide a positive improvement as well. Getting the breakfast from the "aquarium" was considered unsuccessful because it is very narrow and, thus, creates a problem when there are many customers at the same time.

Considering the venue decor, the results suggested a division of the large space into smaller compartments to provide more privacy for customers, as well as, the interest towards bigger tables for larger groups was revealed. It was also observed that the table order in Fransmanni was considered better than in the new restaurant. The lightning was perceived as overly bright that affected to the atmosphere and could be improved with warmer and softer lightning. The results indicated that light ceiling would provide more space, as well as table cloths and pillows improve the venue decor. For the bar side, especially the tables and seats were not perceived pleasant for the respondents because of the lack of compartments and interest towards some changes were showed considering the issue. The responses suggested clear separation of the bar

side from the restaurant side and the slot machine was hoped to be received back as well.

Because the large number of business customers in the restaurant, interest towards tables with charging possibility was showed in the results. As mentioned earlier, some respondents considered the music unrelated to the atmosphere and the overly wide variety of music. A specific list for music suitable for the restaurant and occasional acoustic live music performances and events would improve the customer experience based on the responses. Moreover, the waiters' clothing was considered too casual for the restaurant. According to the results, student discounts would be a positive addition since the pricing is not perceived ideal for students.

4.4 Limitations of Research

Certain limitations for this study existed. Regardless of the original plan, the study was conducted by using different people in two separate questionnaires due to the required amount of answers to receive. Therefore, the study includes different people's responses to the questionnaires of expectations and actual experience. Consequently, the results are formed more in general level and not based on the same people's responses which might have affected to the results of the overall service quality of the restaurant.

Secondly, some of the responses might have been based on only one experience, either good or bad, which affects to the results and not necessarily can be generalized and considered as valid. For instance, a customer can receive bad service due to unexpected busy day and staff shortage that occurred at that time. The one bad experience might have an impact on the customers' perceived service quality and the restaurant in general. Moreover, customers' dislike towards some part of the restaurant experience during the time when the questionnaires were filled out by the customers, might have resulted to the negativity in all the responses. On the contrary, one good part of the experience can affect positively to the whole questionnaire from that person.

Thirdly, some respondents of the second questionnaire did not visit Fransmanni or know about the concept change. These responses were not accurate considering the questions of the concept change and, thus, were not taken into account in the results. Moreover, the respondents age and gender, busy respondents or even alcohol use might have affected to the responses which is important to consider. Because the second survey respondents included mostly business customers (65%) compared to the first questionnaire (18%), it has to be considered in the result analyses. Business customers and, for instance, tourists' needs and wants differ significantly, which affect to the way the service quality and customer experience are determined. Furthermore, misunderstandings in certain questions was identified with some responses. For example, some respondents did not eat in the restaurant and, thus, responded to the food questions either "hard to say" or left them blank. Therefore, it created a challenge to analyse the results due to the respondent's differing ideas how to respond to the questions not considering them.

Regarding the validity and reliability of the survey, it is necessary to take into consideration if the survey measures what it is supposed to measure (validity) and how representative is the measurement (reliability). As a matter of validity, it can be examined through the validity of content, construct, criterion-related, concurrent, predictive and the overall appearance. (Cardozo & Magdalena 2009.) Thus, in this survey, the content of the questionnaires was consistent and related to the research questions and was able to bring valuable results from various dimensions of the topic of service quality and customer experience in the restaurant. The focus of the survey was decided and the survey was designed based on the aims of the study, and the validity of the results was controlled by an ongoing evaluation of the results and observation in the research settings. However, the random sampling error is important to point out, as it is not guaranteed that the respondents of the questionnaires are representative of the larger population as a whole. Even though, the target has been selected to present the customers of Fransmanni and Frans & Chérie from as various age groups as possible and the survey has been conducted during

several different days and times of the day, human judgement and context have to be taken into account. (Shuttleworth 2008; Shuttleworth 2009.)

If the survey shows the same results when repeated, it can be considered as reliable or dependable. Four types of reliability are equivalency, stability, internal and inter-rater (Cardozo & Magdalena 2009). In this survey, it is slightly contradictory to assess the reliability. As mentioned earlier, qualitative research might not indicate generalizable data and if the survey was repeated, obtaining the same results is not guaranteed because of all the external factors need to be considered, such as, the time of the day or the current mood of the respondent that can affect to the results of the survey. This survey is context related where all different factors in an ever-changing context within the research have to be taken into consideration. It is also necessary to be aware of that surveys using human judgement are considered less reliable compared to quantitative data. (Trochim 2006; Shuttleworth 2008.)

5 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis project was to measure the success of the new restaurant concept launch that took place in Fransmanni restaurant during spring 2016. The research was centered upon the customers of the restaurant aiming to examine customers' perceptions of the new concept, customer experience and service quality in the new restaurant Frans & Chérie Bistro. Therefore, the results were aspired to provide an insight for the commissioner of the success of the new restaurant concept from customers' side as no other research was yet made from the topic. Moreover, the aim for this research was to provide improvement ideas for the restaurant concept based on the customers' point of view.

In this thesis, the qualitative research was conducted by using a two-phase customer survey method. The survey included two different questionnaires, the first one was completed before the concept change in Fransmanni restaurant and the latter was conducted after the concept change in Frans & Chérie Bistro. Different aims for the questionnaires existed, whereas the first questionnaire aimed at measuring the success of Fransmanni and expectations towards the new concept, and the second questionnaire intended to find out customers' opinions about the success of the new concept and the customer experience in the new restaurant, as well as, provide improvement ideas. Consequently, the service quality and customer experience were analysed based on the survey results and the relevant improvement ideas presented for the Frans & Chérie Bistro to improve the customer experience and customer service quality.

The results of the survey suggested positive attitudes towards the concept change among the respondents. According to the results, some changes in Fransmanni restaurant were necessary to bring more modern touch to the restaurant, revise and freshen the venue decor, and bring more lightning to the restaurant. The results disclosed the respondents' wishes for cozy compartments to provide more privacy. Moreover, the expectations of the respondents revealed increased interest towards the restaurant changing into more casual and relaxed but still maintaining the fine and warm atmosphere

with the great and familiar customer service. Based on the responses, interest towards updated menu with more variety of options was indicated, as well as, to be provided interesting stories related to the origin of food and drinks, and the use of local products in the menu was suggested.

The respondents were, mostly, satisfied with the concept change as the results suggested. The positive issues related to the change was provided to the professional and friendly customer service remained from Fransmanni. As the customers expected, the atmosphere was satisfiable with its nice and relaxed feeling and being both casual and elegant at the same time. New decor, light colours and increased lightning was considered contradictory issues between the respondents. Even though most respondents were satisfied with it, some considered the new venue and atmosphere with more light as dreary, cold and noisy. According to the expectations, customers hoped for some compartments to be build to the new restaurant to permit more privacy. However, the responses from the second survey revealed a dissatisfaction with the issue that it did not occur. The large open space and lack of compartments were showed to lose the customers' privacy in the restaurant. Moreover, the pub side of the restaurant was considered less comfortable compared to Fransmanni because of the lack of sofas and compartments. The results presented the atmosphere and the venue in Frans & Chérie to have received slightly more negative results than in Fransmanni, due to the facts mentioned above.

Apart from the various positive opinions on the customer experience and satisfaction, some respondents considered the music being in dissonance with other factors in the customer experience and were disturbed by the noises from kitchen. Busy staff also lowered the customer experience among some respondents as the customers considered a lack of attention provided for them. Menu and food was considered mostly excellent and delicious with the use of local products as well. However, some negative issues were highlighted, such as, the stability of food quality as it was indicated to vary considerably. Moreover, increasing the variety of the menu by including more chicken, turkey and vegan options was suggested in the results.

Hence, the results provided some improvement ideas, in addition to the facts mentioned above, for the restaurant to increase the customer service quality and customer experience. First of all, as the goal of the new restaurant concept was to provide more experiential parts to the service business and offer memorable experiences ensuring authenticity and individuality in the service, it should be implemented in practice as well. Even though, the customer service was rated as excellent, it is important to notice every customer individually in every situation. For example, negative feedback was provided on customers' overly long waiting time to be seated without being noticed or informed and, as a result, customers left the restaurant. Even though, the reason might be exceptionally busy time of the day or staff shortage, in those situations, customers should be noted of the increased time to receive service. Moreover, to increase the experience side for the customers and differ themselves from other restaurants, stories about the raw materials, food philosophy or the vineyard where the wine comes from could be provided for the customers in an interesting manner to involve the customers and increase the memorability of the experience. Lastly, some exceptional and extraordinary events in the restaurant could be organised, such as, cheese fondue- celebrations, wine tasting, acoustic live music or theatre performances, to improve the customer experience and attract them to the restaurant.

This thesis project was executed to provide an understanding to the restaurant management of the success of the new restaurant concept launch and successfully assessed customer service quality and customer experience in the new restaurant. Moreover, as planned before the project, some relevant improvement ideas were provided based on the results to improve the customer experience and service quality of the restaurant. Even though, the results can be assessed as valid in this survey, they are not necessarily generalizable because of the human judgement and the differentiation in customers' opinions. Thus, further research is needed on the topic in order to ensure reliable results, by using a wider scale in the research and taking into consideration all different customer types in the restaurant's customer base. Moreover, the research involving personnel satisfaction and management perceptions of the restaurant would be an interesting aspect of the future research on the topic.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Survey Questionnaire 1

Appendix 2. Survey Questionnaire 2

Appendix 1. (1/3)



Dear Customer of Fransmanni,

This questionnaire is part of the final thesis project of a tourism student at Lapland University of Applied Sciences. The aim is to find out the customers' satisfaction with the Fransmanni restaurant, as well as their expectations towards the concept change of the restaurant into Frans & Chérie Bistro as part of the Frans & Les Femmes chain.

Customers' opinions are highly valuable since this change will take place in May 2016 and with the help of these results we want to ensure the high quality of the new restaurant concept. We will assure the confidentiality of this survey so that the answers will be anonymous. It takes only a few minutes from you to fill in the questionnaire and by doing it you will have an opportunity to participate in a lottery of a restaurant gift card.

1. Gender:
 - Female
 - Male

2. Nationality: _____

3. Age group:
 - Under 20
 - 20-29
 - 30-39
 - 40-49
 - 50-59
 - 60-69
 - 70-79
 - 80 ->

4. Reason for your visit?
 - Business (hotel guest, meetings, etc.)
 - Leisure (hotel guest, etc.)
 - First restaurant found
 - Recommended by someone
 - Previous positive experiences (food, customer service..)
 - Regular customer
 - Other, please specify: _____

Appendix 1. (2/3)

5. How often do you visit Fransmanni approximately?

- First time
- Daily
- Every week
- A few times a month
- Less than a few times a month
- A few times a year
- Less than a few times a year

6. What would be your overall satisfaction rating for Fransmanni? (Scale 1-5 where 1= poor, 2= moderate, 3= hard to say, 4= good, 5= excellent)

	1	2	3	4	5
Menu (diverse options)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of food	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Drinks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Venue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Customer service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Atmosphere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cleanliness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other: _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Which of the following issues do you value most in a restaurant experience? (Scale 1 to 5 where 1= none, 2= a little, 3= somewhat, 4= quite much, 5= very much)

	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of food	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of drinks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Venue decor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Value for money (price)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Customer service quality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Atmosphere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information of the products/ services (origin of food etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cleanliness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other: _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Describe in 3 adjectives what comes to your mind concerning the new Frans & Chérie Bistro?

(Examples: modern, young, French, feminine, casual, formal, traditional, new, different, fancy, old-fashioned, expensive, inexpensive, nice, fresh, attractive, authentic)

Appendix 1. (3/3)

9. What kind of restaurant experience do you think Frans & Chérie Bistro will offer? (food/drinks, atmosphere, music, customer service, story etc.)

10. What improvements would you suggest for Fransmanni when developing the restaurant experience to the new concept Frans & Chérie Bistro?

11. Would you be interested in visiting Frans & Chérie when it will open on 27 May?

- Definitely
- Yes I would be interested in visiting it
- Maybe
- Not really
- Definitely not

Thank you for your participation!

There will be a lottery organized among the survey participants. You have a possibility to win a 50€ gift card to the new restaurant Frans & Chérie which will be opened on 27 May 2016. Please fill in your contact information below if you would like to participate in the lottery.

Name: _____

Phone number: _____

Email: _____

Appendix 2. (1/3)



Dear Customer of Frans & Chérie Bistro,

This questionnaire is part of the final thesis project of a tourism student at Lapland University of Applied Sciences. The research consists of two-phase survey, where the first part of the survey was conducted before the change from Fransmanni to Frans & Chérie to find out customers' satisfaction with Fransmanni and expectations towards Frans & Chérie Bistro. The aim of this second part of the research is to find out the customers' satisfaction with the new Frans & Chérie restaurant in order to make a complete research comparing the expectations and satisfaction of the new restaurant and to make possible improvements to ensure the high service quality of the restaurant.

Customers' opinions are highly valuable and with these survey results we want to ensure the high quality of the new restaurant concept. We will assure the confidentiality of this survey so that the answers will be anonymous. It takes only a few minutes from you to fill in the questionnaire and by doing it you will have an opportunity to participate in a lottery of a restaurant gift card.

1. Gender:
 - Female
 - Male

2. Nationality: _____

3. Age group:
 - Under 20
 - 20-29
 - 30-39
 - 40-49
 - 50-59
 - 60-69
 - 70-79
 - 80 ->

Appendix 2. (2/3)

4. Reason for your visit?

- Business (hotel guest, meetings, etc.)
- Leisure (hotel guest, etc.)
- First restaurant found
- Recommended by someone
- Previous positive experiences (food, customer service..)
- Regular customer
- Other, please specify: _____

5. How often have you visited Frans & Chérie approximately?

- First time
- Daily
- Every week
- A few times a month
- Less than a few times a month
- A few times since the restaurant was opened

6. What would be your overall satisfaction rating for Frans & Chérie? (Scale 1-5 where 1= poor, 2= moderate, 3= hard to say, 4= good, 5= excellent)

	1	2	3	4	5
Menu (diverse options)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of food	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Drinks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Venue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Customer service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Atmosphere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cleanliness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other: _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. How did Frans & Chérie Bistro meet your expectations? (Scale 1 to 5 where 1= definitely below my expectations, 2= below my expectations, 3= met my expectations, 4= exceeded my expectations, 5= definitely exceeded my expectations)

	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of food	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of drinks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Venue decor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Value for money (price)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Customer service quality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Atmosphere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information of the products/ services (origin of food etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cleanliness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other: _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix 2. (3/3)

8. Please describe what kind of restaurant experience did Frans & Chérie Bistro offer you? (food/drinks, atmosphere, music, customer service, story etc.)

9. Do you think the change from Fransmanni to Frans & Chérie Bistro was successful?

- Definitely successful
 Successful
 Somewhat successful
 Not successful
 Definitely not successful

Please tell us why: _____

10. What improvement ideas would you suggest for Frans & Chérie Bistro?

11. Would you like to visit Frans & Chérie Bistro again based on your experiences?

- I would definitely visit again
 Yes I would visit again
 I might visit again
 I would not visit again
 I would definitely not visit again

Please tell us why: _____

Thank you for your participation!

There will be a lottery organized among the survey participants. You have a possibility to win a 50€ gift card to Frans & Chérie Bistro. Please fill in your contact information below if you would like to participate in the lottery.

Name: _____

Phone number: _____

Email: _____