



Effects Of Restaurant Quality On Customer Retention And Suggestions For Itsudemo Oy

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ABSTRACT

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The thesis commissioner was Itsudemo Oy, a Japanese-style restaurant chain. The company has been growing and expanding to different cities in Finland. Along with the expansion, the company wanted to know how to improve restaurant quality so that they could not only serve more customers but also serve them better. The objective of thesis was to find out how to improve restaurant quality of Itsudemo Oy. By quality improvement, the company aimed to increase customer satisfaction and retention.

To achieve the objective, quantitative research was used in the thesis. The author firstly conducted secondary research from many publications to examine elements of restaurant quality and their determining effects on customer satisfaction and patronage intentions. Based on this research, the conceptual framework containing these theories was formed and tested its applicability in the context of sushi buffet restaurants in Finland. Primary data collected by survey method was used in the evaluation of the conceptual framework. Software products, SPSS and SmartPLS 3 were utilized to support the data analysis process. After the evaluation, the revised conceptual framework applicable in the context of interest was presented. This framework and the analysis of Itsudemo's current quality were used by the author to provide recommendations for quality improvement.

The results suggested that to customers in Finland, food quality, especially tastiness and presentation, and price-to-value were two strongest determinants of satisfaction and revisit intentions towards sushi buffet restaurants. Employee services and physical environment affected behavioral intentions indirectly through its impacts on customer satisfaction. The analysis of the current situation and perceived quality showed that the case company were highly rated by customers in terms of food presentation, diversity in food offerings, location convenience and comfort of restaurant atmosphere. However, they also had rooms for improvement in terms of food tastiness, pricing and overall customer satisfaction.

In conclusion, the case company was recommended to focus on improving the key factors that had strong impacts on increasing satisfaction and encouraging positive intentions of customers. Also, periodically conducting restaurant quality measurement to find out customers' preferences and perceptions was advised to help the company stay engaged with customers, take advantages of upcoming consumption trends and provide better quality to serve customers.

Key words: restaurant quality, customer satisfaction, customer behavioral intentions, sushi buffet restaurants

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ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

FQ	Food Quality
ES	Employee Service
PE	Physical Environment
PV	Price-to-value
BI	Behavioural Intentions
CS	Customer Satisfaction
H	Hypothesis

1 INTRODUCTION

There has been an increasing demand for sushi food in Finland in the latest years. In 2019, K Group's Grocery Trade investigates in food trends that are shaping Finnish customers' preference and reports two key trends in fine-tuned food and food adventures. The trends refer to the Finns' increasing concern of high-quality, nutritious and good-tasting food. More interestingly, they care about stories behind the food and continuously look for new food experiences with new flavours that represent different cultures around the world. K Group's Grocery Trade finds out that reflecting these trends, sushi accounts for 14-15% of purchases. (K Group's Grocery Trade 2019, 17, 21).

As the demand is growing, many restaurants have been opened to offer affordable sushi buffets to serve the need of customers. There are many sushi buffet restaurants that offer quite similar food options of sushi, similar menu and target to the same type of consumers. In the survey conducted by the author, there are at least 52 different restaurants offering the model sushi buffet reported by 322 respondents. This makes the market highly competitive and challenging to gain and obtain shares. In this harsh competition, it is pivotal to satisfy customers in a way that increases their incentives to return and repurchase (Kivela, Inbakaran & Reece 1999, 205–207). Also acknowledging this fact through business experiences, the case company wants to distinguish themselves and improve their restaurant quality to have more loyal customers who choose them over their competitors.

In restaurant business, restaurant quality is the key factor that affect customer satisfaction. However, restaurant quality is a complex, multi-faceted concept that cannot be directly measured. Improvement of restaurant quality should be perceived as a big task that consists of smaller actions of improving many restaurant quality's elements.

In September 2019, the case company collaborated with TAMK in a two-month project. The author, in a team of four, suggested new ideas to improve restaurant quality. The ideas were generated from a practical approach based on experiences and best practices. The ideas mostly answered the questions of "How".

The author aimed to conduct a thesis as another approach to the project which involves more researches on previous studies and theories. This approach would help to suggest ideas after understanding “Why” and “What”. The process, hence, lasted for another next three months to provide proper suggestions to improve the restaurant quality presented in this thesis.

There are many researches about the effects of restaurant quality on customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions. These researches confirm the relationships among these factors, also suggest considering theories’ applicability in the context of interest. It is because, for example, the theories that work in fine-dining restaurants may not be applicable to fast food or buffet restaurant.

Thus, the author acknowledges that in order to provide suggestions to improve quality for the commissioner, there are tasks that ought to be done in advance. They are to 1) find out what restaurant quality’s elements are; 2) how each element of restaurant quality affects customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions in Finnish market. Only after these tasks are done that the author can provide reasonable recommendations.

2 THESIS PLAN

This chapter introduces the topic, the objectives and purposes of the thesis. After that, the author will provide the definitions of relevant concepts, theories and the conceptual framework which will be used in the research. Next, the methodology, research method and finally, the thesis structure will be explained.

2.1 Thesis topic

The topic of this thesis is service quality in restaurant business, in short, restaurant quality. The thesis focuses on finding out how to improve restaurant quality to increase customer positive intentions. These positive intentions refer to customer behaviours of re-visiting, recommending and positive word-of-mouth. The thesis examines four dimensions in restaurant quality including food quality, price-to-value, employee service and physical environment (Gagić 2013, 170–171).

The topic is carefully chosen according to two criteria:

(1) The topic is relevant in the current situation of the commissioner Itsudemo Oy is growing fast and expanding in quantities to many locations across Finland. Successful expansion requires sustainable moves in which quality should still be guaranteed. The four dimensions of restaurant quality mentioned above are also chosen upon the criterium of relevancy towards the commissioner's interest and situation.

(2) The topic is significant in benefiting the commissioner's case

The importance of restaurant quality has been found by many studies. Wicks and Roethlein (2009, 87) argue that regardless of variety in the definition of quality due to different fields and cultures, these definitions are "moving more towards a focus on customer satisfaction". The definitions imply that quality is the direct cause of customer satisfaction, hence, improvement of quality will increase the satisfaction of customers. In the research, Wicks and Roethlein (2009, 83) also emphasize the importance of satisfying customers by a model called "Customer Retention Chain". The model says satisfying customers will enhance customer

loyalty which leads to the increase in retention rates and eventually, the company can observe the rise in profits. It is because the significant costs of acquiring new customers are reduced when the company can have loyal customers who keep re-purchasing (Khan 2013, 184–185). As the company's purpose is to increase revisit intentions of customers and gain more loyal customers, restaurant quality is a necessary topic to concern and research on.

Furthermore, there seen considerable growth in sushi restaurants in Finland (Jensen 2014), which means that the competition to gain more shares in this market is becoming harsher. Tran (2017, 4–5), after comparing two restaurants which have similar market segmentation, finds that service quality a differentiator. She emphasizes the importance of service quality in bringing satisfaction to customers and turning them into loyal ones towards the restaurants. In the competitive market of sushi buffet restaurants, focusing on the improvement of quality is the way for Itsudemo Oy to distinguish themselves and stand out from the crowd.

2.2 Thesis objective, purpose and research questions

The objective of the thesis is to improve restaurant quality for the case company which can be formulized as the following question:

“How to improve the restaurant quality for Itsudemo Oy?”

In order to achieve this big goal, the author firstly needs to identify what restaurant quality's attributes are, then find out their effects on customer satisfaction and retention in Finnish market of sushi buffet restaurants.

These can be formulized into two sub-questions:

- *“What are elements of restaurant quality?”*
- *“How do these elements of restaurant quality affect customer retention and satisfaction in Finnish market of sushi buffet restaurant?”*

The sub-questions help find out the relevant concepts and conceptual framework for the thesis. These theories will act as the guideline for the whole thesis procedure. The thesis wants to provide a more comprehensive understanding of restaurant quality and its effect on customers' behavioural intentions in the context of sushi buffet restaurants. Along with the analysis of the case company's current

situation, the results are expected to help the case company know how to improve their restaurant quality and increase customer revisit intentions.

2.3 Concepts

The following section includes the definition and explanation of theories related to the thesis. They are concepts related to restaurant quality (service quality; restaurant quality and its attributes; customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions). These concepts are chosen based on the objective of the thesis and the commissioner. The thesis aims to improve restaurant quality in order to serve the commissioner's goal towards higher customer satisfaction and retention rates. Hence, it is highly important for the readers to comprehend these terms in order to understand the topic better and follow further discussion.

2.3.1 Service quality and its dimensions

Before being able to improve restaurant quality, it is the first and foremost to understand what service quality is. Because service quality is the root of restaurant quality.

Service quality is defined as “a measure of how well service delivered matches customer expectations” (Lewis and Boom 1983, 99–107). Based on the comparison of the company's performance and own expectations, customers make the judgement about the firm's overall excellence and define service quality in their perception. (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1985, 41–42; Johnson, Anderson & Fornell 1995, 695–707).

Parasuraman et al. (1985, 41–50) suggest viewing and evaluate service quality in terms of five dimensions:

1. Reliability – the ability of service providers in delivering the service and quality they promise.
2. Tangibles – the facilities, equipment and physical elements used by the service providers.

3. Responsiveness – the willingness and quickness of the service providers in response to customers' need.
4. Assurance – how employees, on behalf of service providers, persuade customers to believe in their promises.
5. And lastly, Empathy – how customers are taken care by service providers. (Parasuraman et al. 1985, 41–50).

These dimensions act as the base for the author to choose factors to evaluate restaurant quality in the research.

2.3.2 Restaurant quality and its attributes

Developed from the concept of service quality, restaurant quality is a specific measure of service level in restaurant context. Customers compare their expectations to what they receive to define the restaurant quality.

Gagić (2013, 169–172) conducts a thorough literature review and finds four fundamental dimensions that are chosen and applied repetitively to measure restaurant quality in many previous researches. They are food quality, service quality, physical environment and price fairness (Figure 1):

- **Food quality** plays an important role in defining restaurant experience. Food quality itself includes various dimensions, namely tastiness of food, menu variety, nutrition, serving temperature, freshness and food presentation. Dimensions applied to evaluate food quality vary in each research due to the topic and context of interest.

In the thesis's context of sushi buffet restaurants, the author chooses tastiness, menu diversity, healthy options and presentation as four indicators of food quality. It is because these dimensions are the most relevant to evaluate food offerings in sushi restaurants and they suit the commissioner's interest to explore. Itsudemo Oy wants to understand customers' perceptions whether the food they are offering tastes well, whether the presentation looks good, whether the food options are diverse enough. Especially, the commissioner wants to see how customers perceive

healthy food options as they currently have ideas to introduce more healthy dishes of steamed food in their offerings.

- **Service quality** is also considered as a vital factor in dining experience. Dimensions of service quality suggested by previous researches are responsiveness, helpfulness, willingness of employees in delivering promised service to customers.

The thesis chooses to evaluate service quality, or more specific, employee service, based on its dimension of helpfulness and friendliness of employees due to its relevancy to the context of buffet restaurants.

- **Physical environment** composes of decoration, ambience, facility, lighting, layout, table settings and service staff appearance.

Among them, two dimensions – 1) location convenience and 2) comfort, cleanliness of facilities are the most related to the case company, hence, they will be chosen as indicators to evaluate. Most locations of Itsudemo's restaurants are in the proximity of the city centres, or office buildings. It is of interest for the commissioner to know how the customers perceive this element and how much this element would affect their satisfaction and revisit intentions.

- Lastly but not least, **price fairness** is also a vital component in restaurant experience. The thesis focuses on the worthiness of the price compared to what customers receive.

(Gagić 2013, 169–172).

The four dimensions chosen to evaluate food quality are closely related to the thesis's objectives and the case company's interest. They are not only used repetitively by previous researches (Figure 1) but also conform to above-mentioned evaluators of service quality (Parasuraman et al. 1985, 41–50). Food quality and price fairness represent Responsibility and Empathy elements; physical environment falls into Tangibles element; employee service represents Assurance and Responsiveness elements.

These concepts help to understand that restaurant quality is not a single-faceted but a multi-dimensional concept. To improve restaurant quality or achieve the thesis objective, the author needs to provide suggestions to improve quality of all four dimensions.

Construct	Variable	Author
Food quality	tastiness of food, menu variety, nutrition, food is served at the appropriate temperature, food presentation is attractive, serving size, menu design, healthy options, freshness	Kivela et al. (2000); Namkung and Jang (2008), Raajpoot (2002), Kivela et al. (1999); Koo et al. (1999); Law et al. (2008); Mertanen (2007); Johns and Pine, (2002); Olsen, (2002); Cortese (2003); Sulek and Hensley; (2004); Péneau, et al, (2006)
Service quality	employees are always willing to help me, employees have the knowledge to answer my questions, the chain restaurant brand has my best interests at heart, staff appearance, attentive stuff, friendly dining managers.	Parasuraman et al. (1988); Inbakaran, Reece (2000); Oh (2000); Kivelä, Yiu Ha Chu, (2001); Kim et al. (2009); Chow et al, (2007)
Physical environment	décor, ambience, facility aesthetics, lighting, layout, table settings, and service staff appearance.	Ryu and Jang (2008); Cobe (2007); Law et al. (2008); Kim et al. (2009); Kim and Moon (2009); Ryu and Han, (2011); Lin (2004); Ryu and Jang (2008); Ryu and Jang (2007); McColl-Kennedy (2003)
Price fairness	good value for money, reasonable price items, overall value of the dining experience	Auty (1992), Kurtich and Eakin, (1993); Heung (2002), Bolton et al., (2003); Andaleeb and Conway, (2006); Andaleeb and Caskey (2007); Liu and Jang (2009)

FIGURE 1. Literature Review of Restaurant Quality's Dimensions (Gagić 2013, 169–172)

2.3.3 Customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions

The thesis's objective is to improve restaurant quality in order to serve the goal of increasing satisfaction and revisit behaviors. Hence, the directly related concepts "customer satisfaction" and "behavioral intentions" should be comprehended. The concepts are components forming the conceptual framework of the thesis.

- Customer satisfaction:

The definition of "customer satisfaction" is formed based on the theory of expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm. The theory suggests that a customer will evaluate the quality of a product or service by comparing his or her expectation to the product's or service' actual performance. The surpassing of the actual performance over the expectation will satisfy the customer. Vice versa, the customer will be unsatisfied or disappointed. (Lewin 1938; Churchill & Surprenant 1982, 491–493). Based on this theory, many researchers (Brady & Robertson 2001,

53–60; Hellier, Geursen, Carr & Rickard 2003, 1762–1800) define customer satisfaction as customer's feelings of enjoyment or disappointment depending on whether the perceived performance of service or product meets his or her expectations.

- Behavioural intention:

Behavioural intention refers to people's beliefs about what they plan to do in the future, in a certain situation. It is a person's "subjective probability that he will perform some behaviours". (Fishbein & Ajzen 1975, 1980).

In business context, companies concern customer behavioural intentions that indicate their relationship with each other. Behavioural intentions of interest are, for instance, to repurchase or to recommend or to say positive things about the company. These intentions are indicators of customer loyalty which is an important element proved to maximize the profits, reduce the costs of acquiring new customers (Khan 2013, 184–185).

2.4 The conceptual framework

This section includes theories collected by the author in the secondary research. The theories are about relationships among customer satisfaction, behavioural intentions and restaurant quality, which will be presented together in a conceptual framework in the end of the section.

Effects of customer satisfaction on behavioural intentions

Customers who are satisfied with the service tend to come back and re-purchase. Khan (2013, 184–185), Wicks & Roethlein (2009, 83–84) point out that satisfied customers are likely to become loyal customers. Loyal customers are the ones who return, repurchase and recommend the service or product to others. Kivela et al. (1999, 216–218), Namkung & Jang (2007, 399), in their researches, report the direct, causal relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions.

Effects of restaurant quality on customer satisfaction

Restaurant quality has impacts on customer satisfaction in all four dimensions.

- Many studies have a consensus in considering food quality as a fundamental determinant of the overall customer experience. Chen, Andajani & T (2018, 43) conclude in their research that food quality matters in restaurant as customers will base on this element to evaluate the overall experience. Namkung & Jang (2007, 399, 402–404) emphasizes the pivotal role of food quality and its attributes in improving customer experience.
- Employees are the direct interaction point between customers and service, which makes them an important part of the overall service. If the employee performs well in a manner that expresses responsiveness, friendliness, helpfulness towards customers, he or she will help deliver the service at its best, which will satisfy customers. A research from Brooks (2000, 41–42) shows that employee service accounts for 40-80% of customer satisfaction.
- Physical environment means look and feel of restaurants. It refers to how the restaurant is decorated, how the layout and tables are set, which lighting colour is chosen, which theme or style the restaurant pursues. These atmospheric elements that accumulate into the restaurant's brand image. These elements determine a meaningful, memorable experience that makes customers feel comfortable, satisfied and more likely to come back. (Ariffin, Bibon & Abdullah 2012, 34–36, 39).
- Price-to-value is a crucial factor in customer satisfaction. Anderson and Narus (1998), in their article on Harvard Business Review, argue that customers evaluate price along with value to form their perceptions of quality and their satisfaction. Value that customers receive must be fair compared to the amount they are charged, in order to guarantee customer satisfaction.

Effects of restaurant quality on behavioural intentions

Results in the study of Cronin, Brady & Hult (2000, 208–210) suggest the direct effect of service quality on behavioural intentions. Namkung & Jang (2007) confirm the importance of food quality in determining repurchasing intentions. In a

study about the effects of employee service quality and food quality on behavioural intentions, Joung, Choi & Goh (2015, 229, 230) find out that only food quality positively affects behavioural intentions while employee service indirectly affects intentions via satisfaction factor. However, a study of Song and Lee (2015, 184) focusing on the context of Japanese restaurants in Busan suggests employee service is the third strongest factor influencing intentions. The effect of physical environment, in this study, is also significant.

Anderson and Narus (1998) define customers' incentives to buy as the difference between value and price (*value – price*). The definition shows that customers decide to purchase based on price-to-value. If value they receive is larger than the price, that the difference is higher means customers are more likely to buy from that service/product provider. They also argue that to make customers come back and repurchase, the suppliers must provide better price-to-value than the next best competing service/product. Price-to-value ranks as the second strongest influencing factors in the study of Song & Lee (2015, 184), Khan (2011, 184–185) concerns price as the most important factor.

The effect levels vary in different researches; however, it can be observed at this stage that all dimensions of restaurant quality have positive effects on customer intentions.

Mediating role of customer satisfaction

It is argued that customers who receiving high service quality will then be satisfied and likely to say positive things, recommend to others and re-purchase from the service or product provider again (Boulding, Kalra, Staelin & Zeithaml 1993, 7–9; Parasuraman et al., 1994). In the book about satisfaction, Oliver (1997) defines service quality is an “antecedent of satisfaction” and satisfaction will then strongly affect behaviours of customers. The mediation role of satisfaction is also emphasized and confirmed empirically by Jannang, Hadiwidjojo, Rahayu & Sumiati (2014, 32–33).

Conceptual Framework of Relationships among Restaurant Quality, Customer Satisfaction and Intentions

It is observed that in different contexts and topics of interest, the relationships of restaurant quality on satisfaction and intentions vary in terms of its existence and

effect levels. For example, in Japanese restaurant in Busan, employee service has a positive effect on behavioural intentions (Song & Lee 2015, 174–190) while in restaurants in retirement communities in U.S., the same factor employee service has no direct impact on customer intentions (Joung et al. 2015, 229, 230). These researches reviewed above confirm the relationships among these factors, but also imply the need to consider the theories' applicability in the context of interest. As the theories that work in one field may not be applicable to another field, the author will firstly test the theories if they help explain relationships among these factors in Finnish market of sushi buffet restaurants.

Based on above literature review, the author forms a conceptual framework of relationships among restaurant quality, customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions (Figure 1). The arrows pointing from the independent factors (restaurant quality's attributes) to dependent factors (customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions). The framework holding above reviewed theories help provide the readers a panoramic view of the relationships among all constructs (restaurant quality, customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions).

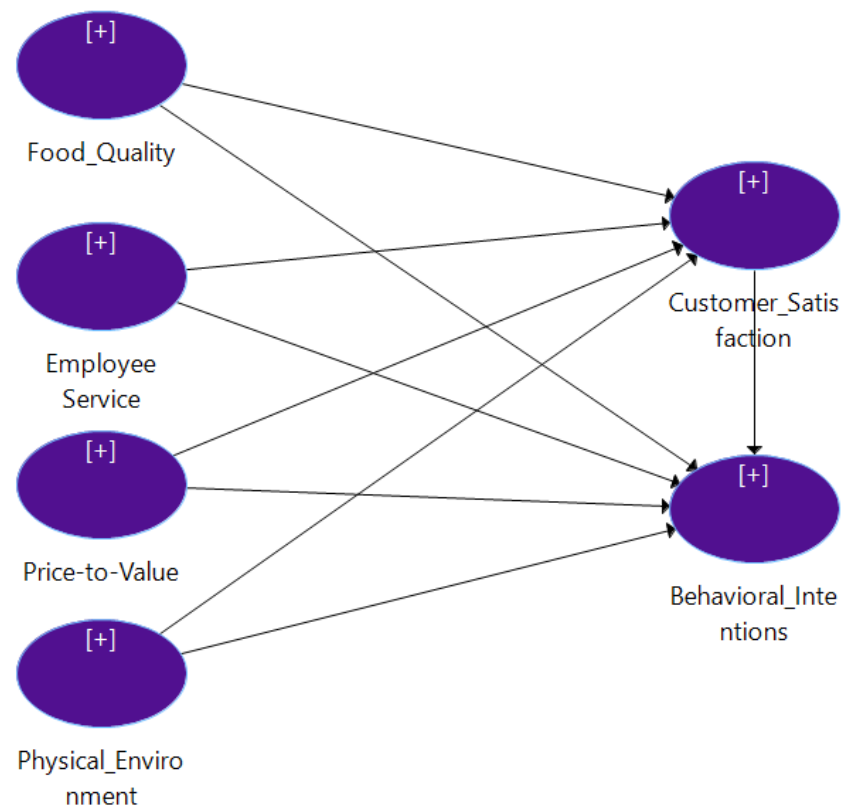


FIGURE 1. Conceptual Framework of Relationships Among Restaurant Quality, Customer Satisfaction and Behavioural Intentions

The conceptual framework contains six factors (constructs) and their relationships, which forms 13 hypotheses of relationships among these factors in the context of sushi buffet restaurants. They are called “hypothesis” as they are theories that remain un-tested empirically in this context of concern. The statistically supported hypotheses after the analyses will be used to form a revised, final conceptual framework applied to give recommendations.

These hypotheses from Figure 1 are:

H1: Customer satisfaction has a positive effect on customer behavioural intentions.

H2-1: Food quality has a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

H2-2: Employee service has a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

H2-3: Physical environment has a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

H2-4: Price-to-value has a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

H3-1: Food quality has a positive effect on behavioural intentions.

H3-2: Employee service has a positive effect on behavioural intentions.

H3-3: Physical environment has a positive effect on behavioural intentions.

H3-4: Price-to-value has a positive effect on behavioural intentions.

H4-1: Food quality has a positive effect on behavioural intentions through customer satisfaction

H4-2: Employee service has a positive effect on behavioural intentions through customer satisfaction

H4-3: Physical environment has a positive effect on behavioural intentions through customer satisfaction

H4-4: Price-to-value has a positive effect on behavioural intentions through customer satisfaction

Previous researches suggest similar conceptual frameworks to identify the relationships among service quality, satisfaction and intentions of customers (Cronin, Brady & Hult 2000, 208–210; Song & Lee 2015, 177; Chen, Andajani & T 2018, 41). The model of Cronin, Brady & Hult (2000, 198, 207) is adopted and applied in the research of Yap and Kew (2007, 63) with three constructs of service quality, customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions.

2.5 Methodology

As the objectives are to identify the relationships among many factors and how customers perceive the quality of restaurant, the author needs to collect customers' perceptions in high quantity to capture the pattern. Hence, quantitative research as methodology and survey, or so-called questionnaire (Appendix 1), as the research method are chosen in this study because they are found relevant to thesis's objectives.

Both types of background research (primary and secondary research) are used in the thesis. Secondary research is conducted to examine theories, related concepts from different scientific publications, books and articles, from which, secondary data is collected to establish the conceptual framework that guide the thesis. Primary data is collected by self-administered questionnaire method which allows respondents to fill the form on their owns. Examining the advantages and disadvantages of open and close questions suggested by Dr. Dawson (2002, 88), the author chooses to include both types of question in the survey. Also, the author follows questionnaire design checklist provided by Dawson (2002, 98) to make sure the survey is properly constructed. The literature review of concepts, frameworks found from secondary research and the case company's situation are used to form the questions.

After collecting and cleaning, primary data will be used to test if the conceptual framework is applicable in the context of the thesis. After that, the data will be analysed to find out the situation of customer restaurant quality. The discussions will be based on the final conceptual framework whose inapplicable parts are eliminated.

Two software products used in data analysis are IBM SPSS Statistics and Smart PLS 3. The software SPSS is used for data cleaning and data examination of data normality, missing values, multivariate outliers. Frequency count is also conducted by SPSS. After that, the software Smart PLS 3 is utilized to draw the framework and conduct multivariate analysis to identify the relationships among constructs. Acknowledging the importance of validity and reliability issues in quantitative research (Dawson 2002, 128), the author uses different related

measures (variance inflation factor - *VIF*, coefficient of determination R^2 , significance value p , outer weights and outer loadings) suggested by Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt (2017, 165, 223, 224) to examine in adjacent of conclusion.

2.6 Thesis process

The thesis consists of six chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction which delivers preliminary information, background of the thesis.

Chapter 2: Thesis plan which explains in detail about thesis topic; objectives, purposes and research questions; concepts and framework; working methods and thesis's procedure.

Chapter 3: Case company which presents information about the case company, Itsudemo Oy and the market of sushi buffet restaurants in Finland.

Chapter 4: Data collection and analysis includes the research's objectives, research design and implementation, followed by the assessment of validity, reliability and limitations. A revised conceptual framework after the evaluation will be presented.

Chapter 5: Suggestions for restaurant quality improvement which start with the analysis of the current situation, based on which and the framework, recommendations on how to improve the case company's restaurant quality will be presented.

Chapter 6: Conclusion which reviews the whole thesis work; reviews the objectives set in the introduction; summaries recommendation and the benefits of the thesis. Personal learning also contributes as a small ending paragraph.

3 CASE COMPANY

3.1 Itsudemo Oy

Itsudemo Oy is a Japanese-style restaurant chain which has been operated for three years. Starting from March 2017 with the first sushi buffet restaurant opened in the city centre of Tampere, the brand has become favourable and continuously growing to different cities, for example, Helsinki (December 2017), Pirkkala (September 2018), Espoo (July 2019), Senajoki (2020), etc. Until the time this thesis is written (2020), there has been 12 sushi buffet restaurants established to serve customers all over Finland.

Not only operating with the model of sushi buffet restaurant, the company is expanding to other business models of sushi bar and fire wok. Many new sushi bars have been recently opened in Tampere in big supermarkets namely Sokos, Prisma, K Supermarket. This new model offers customers convenient, delicious, healthy ready-to-go meals without spending extra time to go to the restaurants, which can be one of the reasons explaining why sushi bars win the heart of many customers and the business has been flourishing.

The motto of the company is “Always a bit more”, which means they always aim to be better in terms of their food quality, their service to deliver customers the best experience.

As the company is currently growing fast in quantity, in the next period of 2020-2021, the company aims to reform, pays more attention to increase the restaurant quality (food quality, employee service, branding, etc.) and consolidate its operations to be more efficient.

3.2 The market of sushi buffet restaurants

There has been growing demand for Japanese food, specifically sushi, in Finland. Many restaurants have been established and serve different targets ranging from luxury, fine dining to affordable offers. At the time, Itsudemo Oy saw the gap of

budget-friendly sushi meals and decided to take the step to fulfil the demand. The competition in the market of sushi buffet restaurants has become harsher and harsher as there are many restaurants that have the same model, same offerings and same customer segment. The survey conducted by the author conveys this harsh competition in gaining market share. Figure 2 shows that, among 322 responses, Itsudemo currently accounts for the largest portion (35.9%), however, Luckiefun and Konichiwa, as two next biggest players, own the portions which are not too far from Itsudemo. The remaining is taken by 52 different restaurants that also offer sushi buffet.

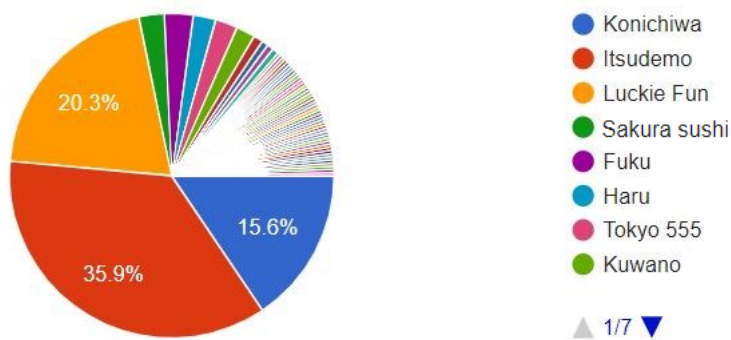


FIGURE 2. Market Share among Sushi Buffet Restaurants (322 responses)

Most of sushi buffet restaurants offer a quite similar selection of food which include sushi, wok, fried food and deserts, which are normally difficult for customers to distinguish the uniqueness of each restaurant. The customer loyalty in this market seems to be quite low, they often switch back and forth among different sushi buffet restaurants.

Consequently, the company needs to find out its competitive advantage, improve the restaurant quality and focus on differentiating themselves to win customers.

4 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter explains in details the objectives of the research followed by the design, validity and reliability of the research. After that, the results from data collection and analysis will help test and revise the conceptual framework.

4.1 Research objectives

The thesis's main objective is to improve restaurant quality and increase customer retention. In order to achieve this, survey is conducted to study about current restaurant quality situation of the case company, and to identify the relationships among restaurant quality, customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

The perception of customers about restaurant quality's elements gathered from the survey is important input for the author and case company when it comes to improvement suggestions and actions. Furthermore, the understanding of how each factor contributes to customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions will help the author and case company know to what extent restaurant quality's elements make impacts on satisfying customers and encouraging them to come back. The relationships and level of contributions revealed will suggest the case company, if improvement resources are limited, which elements they should prioritize to focus on.

The research also wants to explore reasons why customers prefer a sushi buffet restaurant over the others. The results will be used to suggest differentiators that the case company should focus on.

4.2 Research design and implementation

Quantitative research and survey method are found the most suitable to serve the above-mentioned research objectives.

Primary data is collected by survey method. In the survey, 17 questions are included, of which 14 questions are to measure customers' perceived restaurant

quality. Based on the theories mentioned in Section 2.3 and Itsudemo Oy's situation, the research chooses four dimensions to assess restaurant quality; they are Food Quality, Physical Environment, Employee Service and Price-to-value (Parasuraman et al. 1985, 41–50; Gagić 2013, 169–172). For each dimension, the author continues to choose the most suitable and relevant indicators for the thesis already explained in Section 2.3 (Figure 3):

- Perceived food quality is measured in four aspects of healthiness, tastiness, presentation and diversity of menu options.
 - Physical environment is measured based on two aspects of cleanliness-comfort and location.
 - Employee service is measured based on helpfulness and friendliness.
 - Price-to-value is measured based on the worthiness.
- (Gagić 2013, 169–172).
- Customer satisfaction is measured by four items of restaurant quality. (Brady & Robertson 2001, 53–60; Hellier, Geursen, Carr & Rickard 2003, 1762–1800)
 - Behavioural intention is measured by two items of re-patronage and recommendation. (Fishbein & Azjen 1975, 1980).

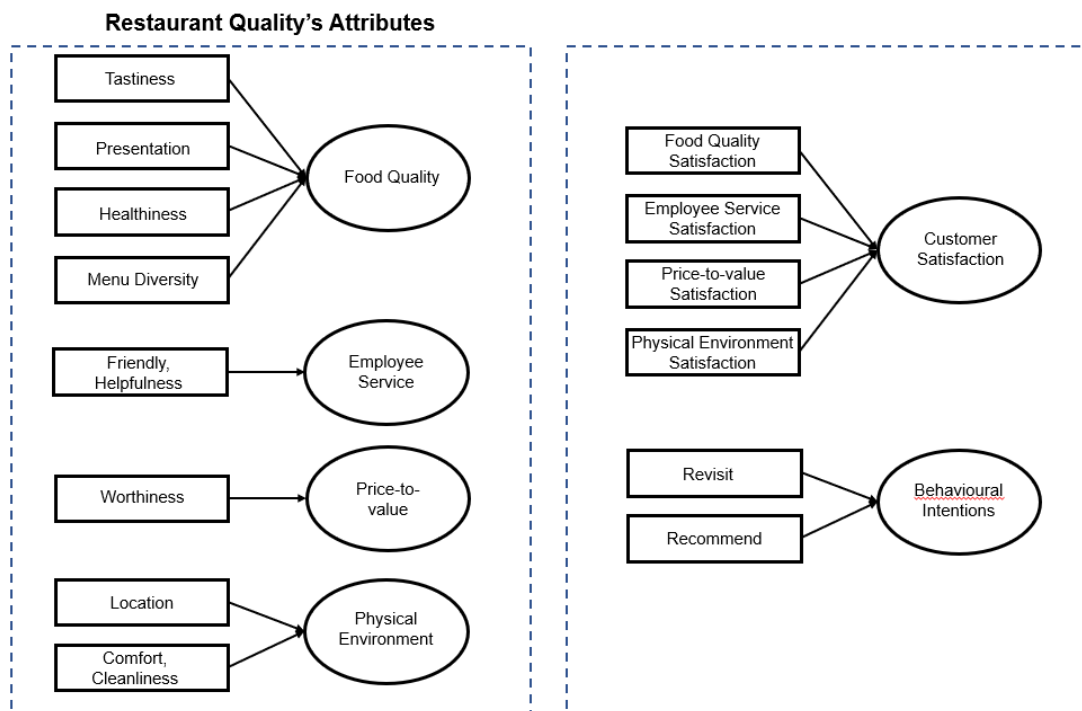


FIGURE 3: Questionnaire (Measurement Model) Based on Literature Review

A Likert 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*extremely disagree*) to 5 (*extremely agree*) is applied to measure each item of the constructs. These 14 questions serve the objectives of the research to identify customers' perception and relationships. Besides these, the first question (*"Have you ever visit any sushi buffet restaurants?"*) is used to filter the right target respondents. The second question asks the name of the restaurant that the respondents are thinking of and the last question asks the respondents specify the reasons behind their restaurant preference, which is directly related to the author's purpose to find out how a sushi buffet restaurant can differentiate itself compare to others.

The survey, after being formed, is distributed online through social media platforms (Facebook groups, emails) and offline in shopping malls (Prisma Kaleva, Koskikeskus, Ratina). People are asked to complete a survey voluntarily. A total of 322 responses were collected.

The data is then analysed based on the framework with the usage of the software products SPSS and SmartPLS 3.

4.3 Validity, reliability and limitations

It is important to concern validity and reliability, especially when coming to quantitative research (Dawson 2002, 128). In this research, both questionnaire and the conceptual framework need to be tested if they can measure what they intend to correctly (reliability) and consistently (validity).

The questionnaire is also known as Measurement Model because it is used to measure the constructs of interest. For the questionnaire or measurement model, the author aims to test whether all the indicators chosen from literature review and case company's situation can correctly and consistently measure their according dimensions. The conceptual model is also known as the Structural Model because it contains the path relationships among the constructs. For this model, the author needs to test if it can help reveal the relationships of these constructs in a correct and reliable way. Only after being confirmed by statistical indicators that these models are valid and reliable to help us measure constructs or identify

the relationships, that the application and the interpretation of the results generated from these models make sense.

The author follows the guideline suggested by Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt (2017, 165, 223, 224) to examine validity and reliability of this model. The guideline instructs to calculate and examine the values of variance inflation factor (VIF value), outer weights/outer loadings and their significance to evaluate the Measurement Model. After that, to evaluate the Structural Model, the guideline suggests focusing on coefficients of determination (R^2 value).

After the calculation, the author finds out all the values meet the acceptance criteria, which indicate that the Measurement Model and Structural Model are valid and reliable for the results to be interpreted.

There are strengths and limitations in this research.

The strengths are the above-moderate number of responses and only a few missing data. The questionnaire is designed to be concise, yet still includes both open and close questions. The close questions which serve as measurement items of constructs are set so that respondents cannot skip, so there is no missing compulsory data for the analysis. Open questions to ask for comments and opinions are up to respondents' willingness, but still get quite high numbers of responses. The last question asking reasons behind restaurant preferences has only seven data point missing out of 322 responses. The author, while conducting the survey, observes many support and encouragement from respondents. These show that people are willing to take part in the survey, which will increase the reliability of data collected.

However, the biggest limitation of the survey is that the author restrains the number of questions to avoid survey from being too long. Questions related to demographics (age, gender, occupation, location) are eliminated, which, if being included, can help reduce possible bias issues and provide more insights. For example, if female respondents are much more than male respondents, it will lead to the fact that results of the research are more applicable to female. Also, if the items are included, the author can divide the data into smaller groups based

on, for instance, location, to examine and compare how the research work for these sub-groups.

4.4 Relationships among restaurant quality, customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions in sushi buffet restaurants in Finland

In Chapter 2, based on above rigorous literature review about the relationships of each pair of constructs, the conceptual framework holding these theories is established. The conceptual framework provides the readers a panoramic view of the relationships among six constructs (restaurant quality's elements, customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions). The author wants to test if these theories remain true, applicable in the context of sushi buffet restaurants in Finland.

From the survey's data analysis, the author aims to test 1) if there is an actual relationship between two constructs and 2) if there is, how strong the relationship is. The author uses *the significance value* (in short, p value) to test the existence of relationship. If $p \text{ value} < 0.05$, the hypothesis is considered statistically significant and the existence of relationship is confirmed. After that, the author checks *the path coefficient value* to evaluate how strong the relationship is. The higher the value is, the stronger the effect level of a construct on another is.

Table 1 summarizes the findings about the existence/significance of relationships. Table 2 summarizes effect level/strength of these relationships.

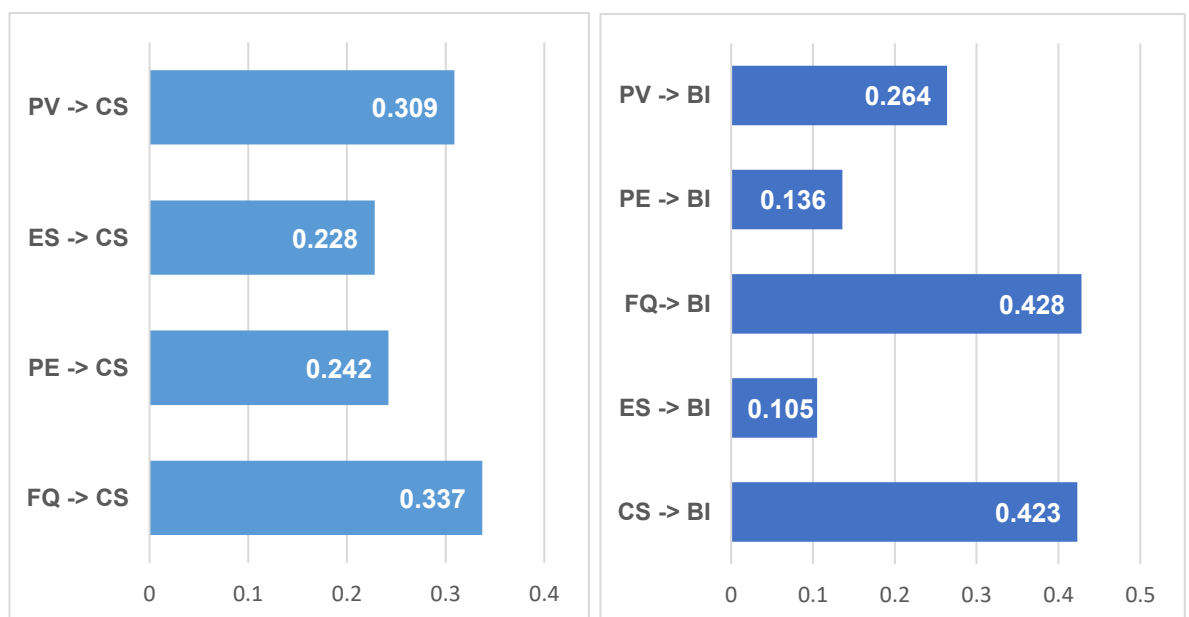
TABLE 1. Summary of Hypotheses Testing

(1) *** = significant with p-value value ≤ 0.001 or 1%

(2) The symbol "→" stands for "have a direct, positive effect on".

	Hypothesized Path	p value	Results
H1	Customer Satisfaction → ⁽²⁾ Behavioural Intentions	*** (1)	Supported
H2-1	Food Quality → Customer Satisfaction.	***	Supported
H2-2	Employee Service → Customer Satisfaction.	***	Supported
H2-3	Physical Environment → Customer Satisfaction.	***	Supported
H2-4	Price-to-value → Customer Satisfaction.	***	Supported
H3-1	Food Quality → Behavioural Intentions.	***	Supported
H3-2	Employee Service → Behavioural Intentions.	0.844	Not supported
H3-3	Physical Environment → Behavioural Intentions.	0.467	Not supported
H3-4	Price-to-value → Behavioural Intentions.	***	Supported
H4-1	Food Quality → Behavioural Intentions VIA Customer Satisfaction	***	Supported
H4-2	Employee Service → Behavioural Intentions VIA Customer Satisfaction	***	Supported
H4-3	Physical Environment → Behavioural Intentions VIA Customer Satisfaction	***	Supported
H4-4	Price-to-value → Behavioural Intentions VIA Customer Satisfaction	***	Supported

FIGURE 4. Summary of Effect Levels of Relationships



Firstly, the data shows that customer satisfaction is an important antecedent of behavioural intentions. The survey's results report that customers in Finland consider the overall satisfaction of their dining experience to decide whether they will come back or recommend the restaurant to other people. This result supports previous researches (Khan 2013, 184–185; Wicks & Roethlein 2009, 83–84; Kivela et al. 1999, 216–218; Namkung & Jang 2007, 399) that restaurants who continuously satisfy customers will gain more loyal customers and enjoy increasing profits of customer retention.

The next findings are about effects of elements of restaurant quality on customer satisfaction and intentions:

- Food Quality:

The data shows that food quality not only matter to customers (Chen, Andajani & T 2018, 43; Namkung & Jang 2007, 399, 402–404), but also is the most important determinant of satisfaction and behavioural intentions among four attributes of restaurant quality considered by customers in Finland (Figure 4). It is understandable as food quality has been accepted as a fundamental element of dining experience in many previous researches (Kivela et al. 1999). In the open question, most of respondents also report that food quality is the most important reason they prefer a sushi buffet restaurant over the other (Appendix 2).

More interestingly, the survey's results show that among the factors contributing to food quality, tastiness and presentation are found the most important to customers in Finland when they experience sushi and Asian warm food offered by the restaurants (Appendix 3). Namkung & Jang (2007, 402, 403) reports that tastiness and presentation are two most significant determinants of customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

This finding indicate that restaurant managers should focus on the improvement of food quality, especially find ways to deliver sushi dishes which not only taste delicious but also look attractive.

- Price-to-value:

From the result, the author observes that customers in Finland also consider price-to-value as the second strongest important factor to make decisions of repurchase and recommend (Figure 3 & 4). The result supports the previous argument that price-to-value is a crucial factor as customers judge the price along with value they receive (Anderson & Narus 1998). Many customers from the survey report that they would still come back even though the price, to them, are little expensive. Some answer in the open-ended question that they would be willing to pay more for better quality as well as “ethical and sustainable” offerings. This is a good indicator for the case company in their strategy to improve the overall restaurant quality. Restaurant managers should pay attention to set the price that is equivalent to the quality they offer to customers.

- Employee service:

The survey shows that customers does not consider employee service as a vital factor to decide their revisit intentions. Joung et al. (2015, 229, 230) also report an insignificant relationship between employee service and customer intentions, meanwhile, Song & Lee (2015) find the opposite result. This can be explained by the difference in restaurant context. In buffet sushi restaurants where customers are mostly self-served, the impacts of employee service on behavioural intentions must be limited. However, customers from the survey report that employee service really determines their satisfaction, which strengthens findings of Brooks (2000, 41–42) about the importance of employee service on customer satisfaction. This finding suggests the restaurant managers should also pay attention to employee service as they will affect customer satisfaction which later will determine customers’ positive intentions and positive word-of-mouth (Joung et al. 2015, 229, 239).

- Physical environment:

Same to employee service, the survey shows that physical environment influences customer revisit intentions indirectly through satisfaction. The finding is similar with previous researches (Ariffin, Bibon & Abdullah 2012, 34–36, 39; Song & Lee 2015, 183, 185–187). Many respondents choose to go to a specific restaurant because the location is convenient to them

and they feel comfortable with the overall cleanliness of the restaurant. Hence, managers should take physical environment into consideration.

Based on the above analysis, it is seen that 11 hypotheses representing 11 relationships among six constructs are confirmed supported and applicable in the context of sushi buffet restaurants in Finland. Hence, the author will form the modified conceptual framework which contains statistically supported theories after conducting above empirical research and eliminates two theories that are not applicable. It means in the Finnish market of sushi buffet restaurants, all significant relationships among restaurant quality's elements, customer satisfaction and intentions are conceptualized in the below framework.

The final framework below will be used in the analysis and discussion leading to recommendations in Chapter 5.

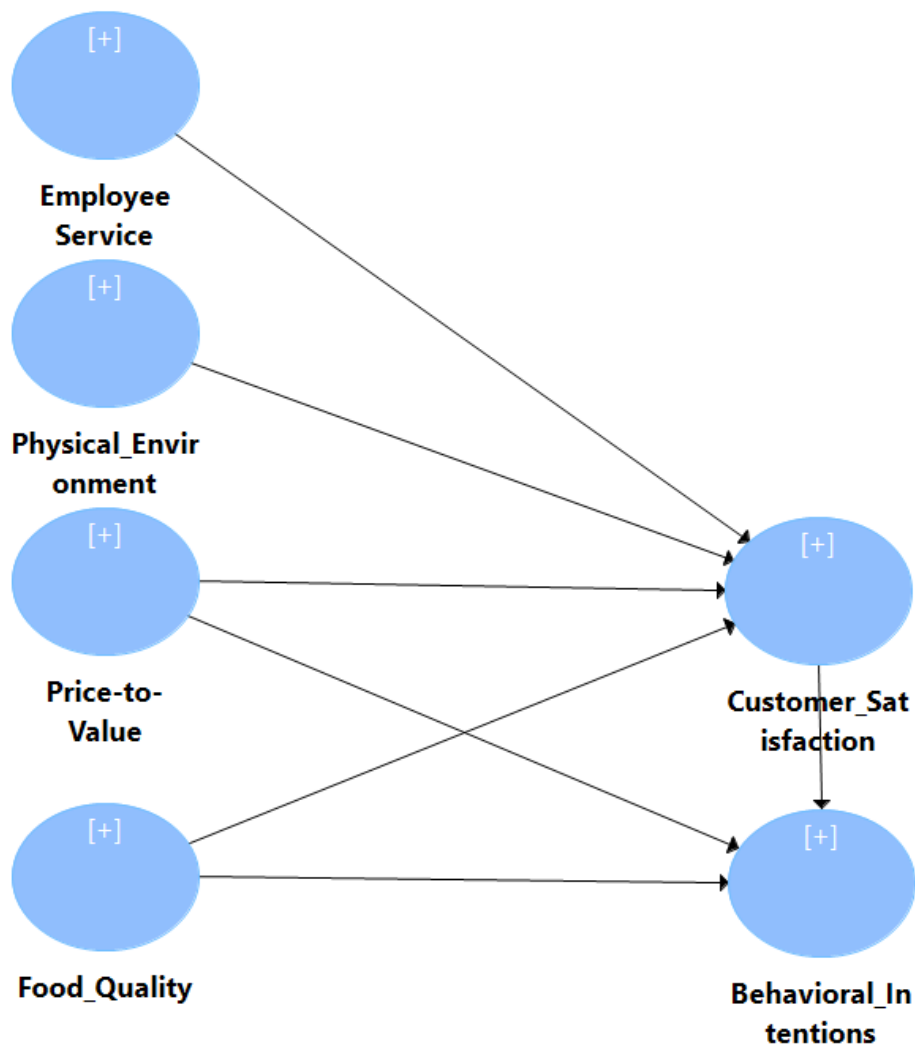


FIGURE 5. Final Conceptual Framework Applied in The Thesis

5 SUGGESTIONS FOR RESTAURANT QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

The author will start with the current situation of the case company (SWOT analysis) and current restaurant quality perceived by customers. Based on the final conceptual model in Chapter 4; comparison between the case company's and the market's perceived quality, directions to improve restaurant quality will be recommended.

5.1 Current situation analysis

5.1.1 SWOT analysis

SWOT is an assessment tool that helps a company to identify its core strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. In which, strengths and weaknesses refer to the company's internal factors, meanwhile, opportunities and threats refer to external factors. The author conducts SWOT analysis to examine the overall situation of the case company, which will be considered to provide reasonable suggestions.

Strengths

Itsudemo Oy has the strength of being a fast-growing restaurant chain. The company expands and opens many locations to serve more customers across Finland, which might help explain the popularity of the company. Location is an advantage of Itsudemo. Most locations are chosen to be assessible and convenient to customers. The restaurant chain also offers diverse food options. The company knows how to utilize social media marketing to stay connected and engaged with customers. The biggest strength of Itsudemo Oy is the company's mindset and willingness to change, adapt and improve to be better.

Weaknesses

High quantity of restaurants brings the company difficulties in fully control restaurant quality. If there is any change or quality improvement that needs to be made, the process will take longer time and effort of managers.

Opportunities

In 2019, it is observed and reported by K Group's grocery trade that two strongest growing trends are fine-tuned food and food adventures. The trend is predicted to continue growing strongly the next years. Well-being, based on the results observed and analyzed, has become "the new standard". Fine-tuned food trend refers to people's increasing concern in well-made, expert-recommended food and the stories behind them. Food adventure trend refers to increasing interest of Finns to explore new flavors, new food experience around the world. From their research, it is shown that 39% of Finns wants to try out new foods and 32% actively seek for new food experiences. (K Group's Grocery Trade 2019, 3, 23). Answered from this thesis's open question, many customers mention they are interested in healthy and high-quality food. They are willing to pay for more for better quality. To Itsudemo Oy, these trends are opportunities they can consider, catch and take advantages. Also, it can help the company to deal with the biggest threat mentioned below.

Threats

The market of sushi buffet restaurants is saturated and competitive with many players. From 322 answers, the author finds at least 52 different restaurants that offer similar model of sushi buffet. The crowded market makes it difficult not only for any new entrants but also for established restaurants to keep and gain more market shares.

<p style="text-align: center;">STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast-growing • Popularity • Willingness to change, adapt and improve • Diversity of food options, good locations • Efficient marketing 	<p style="text-align: center;">WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large quantity of restaurants make it hard to fully control restaurant quality and quickly adapt improvement strategy
<p style="text-align: center;">OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly growing trends in fine-tuning food and food adventure • Increasing concern of customers in quality 	<p style="text-align: center;">THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The market is saturated and highly competitive

FIGURE 5. SWOT Analysis

5.1.2 Current restaurant quality analysis

From the survey, the author filters out 113 answers from Itsudemo's customers and conducts descriptive basic analysis to examine the restaurant's current quality perceived by customers. As customers perceive quality of the service in comparison with its competing alternative (Takeuchi & Quelch 1983; Anderson & Narus 1998), it is necessary to analyse perceived quality of Itsudemo in comparison with market's perceived quality overall. The differences between them will help reveal more precisely current restaurant quality and provide insights of where to keep up or improve.

The findings of perceived restaurant quality from Itsudemo's customers as well as comparison with the overall market are summarized in below Figure 6 and Figure 7.

As mentioned in the survey design, customers are asked to rate their opinions on restaurant quality in a range from 1 to 5. Itsudemo sushi buffet restaurants receive quite high scores overall. As seen from Figure 6, the restaurants are highly favoured by customers in terms of the diversity in food offerings (rated 4.09 out of 5), attractiveness in visual presentation of food (sushi) (rated 4.25 out of 5) and its physical elements. The results report that customers find Itsudemo restaurants' locations convenient and easy to access (4.39 out of 5). The facilities are perceived as clean and comfortable (4.3 out of 5). It is worth noticing that in these attributes of restaurant quality, Itsudemo's scores exceed the market's overall scores, which means the restaurant chain is doing well in these areas.

The findings from the conceptual framework in Chapter 4 suggest that the strongest factors that affect customers in Finland in forming their satisfaction and revisit intentions towards sushi buffet restaurants are food quality (especially in terms of food taste and food presentation), and price-to-value. The findings are supported by previous researches of Namkung & Jang (2007, 402, 403) for the importance of food quality and Anderson & Narus (1998) for the importance of price-value in determining customer satisfaction and retention. In these most important factors, namely food quality, specifically tastiness, and price-to-value, customers perceive Itsudemo's quality lower than the market's offered quality (Figure 6).

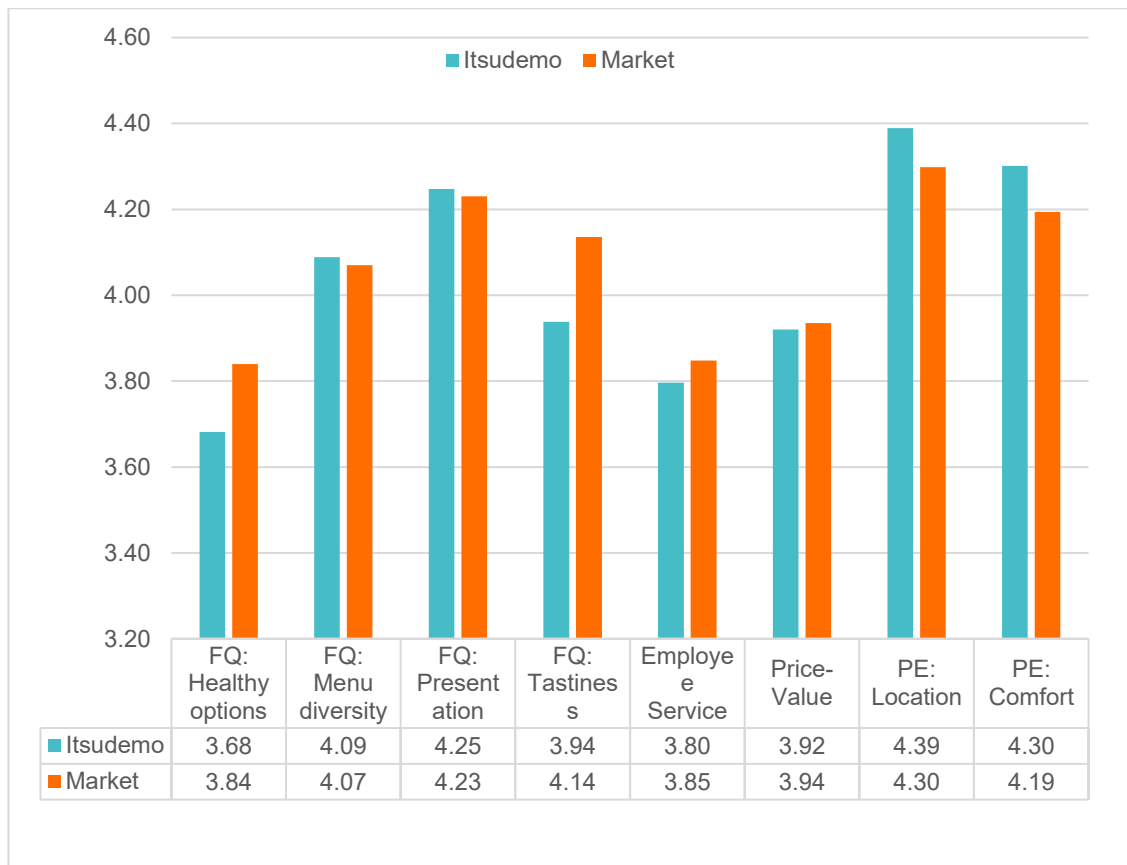


FIGURE 6. Current Restaurant Quality Analysis

Overall satisfaction of customers in terms of Itsudemo's food quality, price-to-value (two biggest determinants) and employee service are currently lower than the market's overall satisfaction. As customer satisfaction is the key antecedent of behavioural intentions (Khan 2013, 184–185; Wicks & Roethlein 2009, 83–84; Kivela et al. 1999, 216–218; Namkung & Jang 2007, 399), it is explainable observing that customers report their intentions to come back and recommend Itsudemo a little lower than their intentions towards other restaurants. Even though the overall score of Itsudemo in customer behavioural intentions, are quite high (4.04 out of 5 for intentions to revisit and 3.91 out of 5 for intentions to recommend the restaurant), they are still a little lower than the market's average scores. (Figure 7).



FIGURE 7. Overall Customer Satisfaction and Behavioural Intentions Analysis

5.2 Recommended directions

The author will base on the findings of this research to suggest recommendations to improve current restaurant quality.

The analysis above provides the insights of where the case company is currently doing well and where the case company can improve to offer better quality.

According to the findings that food presentation strongly affects customer satisfaction and retention (Namkung & Jang 2007, 402, 403), Itsudemo should keep up with their good performance in providing special kinds of sushi with attractive visual presentation inspired by occasions. Being creative with the food's occasion-based stories and food design not only helps the company stay fresh to their current customers but also attract more customers who are looking for new food experiences. This act can help the company take advantage of one of the strongest growing trends, food adventures (Food Trends 2019, 23).

As tastiness is the strongest determinant (Namkung & Jang 2007, 402, 403), Itsudemo should focus more to improve it as well as the overall food quality satisfaction of customers towards the restaurant. The fact that Finnish customers are looking for more fine-tuned food and willing to pay more for better quality (Food Trends 2019, 23) is the opportunity and an upvote for Itsudemo's ideas of trying out new dishes. Introducing and serving new healthy options, such as

steamed dumplings and new kinds of warm food can help the company attract customers who are more and more health-conscious and differentiate Itsudemo with others buffet restaurants where fried, wok food is currently dominant. Also, importantly, the quality customers receive should be considered in setting the price customers need to pay as price-to-value is an important factor to customer satisfaction and retention (Anderson and Narus 1998).

Employee service and physical environment also have indirectly impact on customer retention through their effects on customer satisfaction (Joung et al. 2015, 229, 239; Song & Lee 2015, 183, 185–187). So Itsudemo should keep up their good work in providing customers excellent service, comfortable and clean atmosphere while they experience the dining. This research finds that in Finnish market of sushi buffet restaurant context, location does not impact repurchase intentions of customers directly but indirectly via its effect on customer satisfaction. Hence, if the company intend to open new restaurants, the fact location should be taken into consideration.

For long-term, it is worth acknowledging that customers' perceptions and preference are inconstant. Their demand can change over time and new trends can come up. (Takeuchi & Quelch 1983). Hence, the case company should periodically re-measure factors that affect customer satisfaction and intentions, ask customers how they are currently perceiving the restaurant quality. Also, it is important to know how customers are perceiving their competitors' and the market's quality to make the most precise judgement of the situation (Takeuchi & Quelch 1983). Survey or interview can be suitable methods for the purposes of measuring customer satisfaction, their perceived quality and their expectations. By doing so, the company can understand about the needs of customers, quickly identify if there is any trend shaping customer preference at the time being. These knowledge of market's needs and current situation can help Itsudemo see the gap that needs to be filled, orient their strategy as well as actions to stay on top of the trends and serve customers at their best. These efforts, in the long run, hopefully will bring more customers, not only because of increasing quality but also of their favours towards the brand that always stay engaged and dedicated to customer experience. The company who continuously satisfy customer will gain more loyal customers and higher profitability (Wicks & Roethlein 2009, 83).

6 CONCLUSION

The objective of the thesis is to suggest ways to improve restaurant quality for Itsudemo Oy. In order to achieve this, the author conducts the research started by reviewing and collecting relevant theories and concepts from many articles, books and publications. This secondary research is used by the author to form a conceptual framework which includes all these theories with the assumption that these theories also work in the context of sushi buffet restaurants in Finland. To examine the theories, the author collects data from survey method and analyses its applicability. The results are concluded in the modified conceptual model and applied to provide recommendations for Itsudemo's quality improvement. These recommendations are to serve the purpose of increasing customer satisfaction and retention from the commissioner.

To solve the main question *"How to improve restaurant quality for Itsudemo Oy?"*, the author starts by answering the first sub-question *"What are the elements of restaurant quality?"* in Chapter 2. Restaurant quality includes four main attributes, namely food quality, employee service, price-to-value and physical environment. Acknowledging from secondary research that these attributes have positive effects on determining customer satisfaction and retention, but the effects vary in different restaurant context, the author examines the applicability of these theories in the case company context and answers the second sub-question *"How does each of these elements affect customer satisfaction and retention?"* in Chapter 4. The results show that to customers in Finland, food quality, especially food taste and presentation, and price-to-value are the strongest, direct determinants of customer satisfaction and intentions towards sushi buffet restaurants. Physical environment and employee service affect behavioural intentions indirectly through its impacts on customer satisfaction. Based on this result, the conceptual model that explains the relationships among these factors are revised. This conceptual model is built from previous research and tested in the context of the thesis. The author uses this conceptual framework and the analysis of the commissioner's situation to answer the main question *"How to improve restaurant quality for Itsudemo Oy"* carefully in Chapter 5. Briefly, the author recommends the company focus on maintaining what they are good at (food presentation, em-

ployee service and physical environment) while continuously improving food tastiness and always provide quality up to their promise. Also, the company should stay on top and take advantages of the trends in food adventures and fine-tuned food. Finally, as customers are always changing in preference and perception, the company should periodically engage and investigate their new preference and perception. Following this will help the company improve restaurant quality and in the long run, gain more returning customers and have higher profitability.

The validity and reliability of this quantitative research has been taken into consideration in the procedure. With the moderate sample size, the testing results that passes the criteria and highly engaging survey respondents, the research is considered as valid and reliable. The biggest limitation of the research as mentioned above is the elimination of demographic questions with an aim to keep the survey less lengthy, which restricts the author for further multigroup analysis that can provide more insights. If the author could do further research, this would be the thing she considered to improve.

Studying the concerning topic given directly by the company, the thesis provides practical managerial suggestions that bring benefits for the commissioner. Furthermore, the thesis brings benefits to the research of relationships among restaurant quality's attributes, customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions in Finnish market of sushi buffet restaurants with the revised conceptual framework. Previously, there has been no research that tests the applicability of the theories related to relationships in the context of sushi buffet restaurants. Hence, the thesis hopes to be used as a reference for further research on this niche topic, sushi buffet restaurants in Finland.

The author has learned a lot during the process of doing the thesis. From secondary research and data analysis, the author learns how to use the software products, SPSS and SmartPLS 3, which will be helpful for further projects related to market research that she might encounter in the future. Another important lesson is about time management. The author learns that planning in advance with clear deadlines helps in dealing with the big work. Finally, the author finds writing an essential skill that she should focus more on practicing and improving in order to convey her ideas in a precise and concise manner.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Thesis Survey: Customer Feedback

*required

1. Have you ever visited any sushi buffet restaurant? *
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. What's the restaurant that comes first to your mind?
 - a. Konichiwa
 - b. Luckie Fun
 - c. Itsudemo
 - d. Tokyo 555
 - e. Other (open-ended)

Please answer following questions according to your restaurant you think of/name above

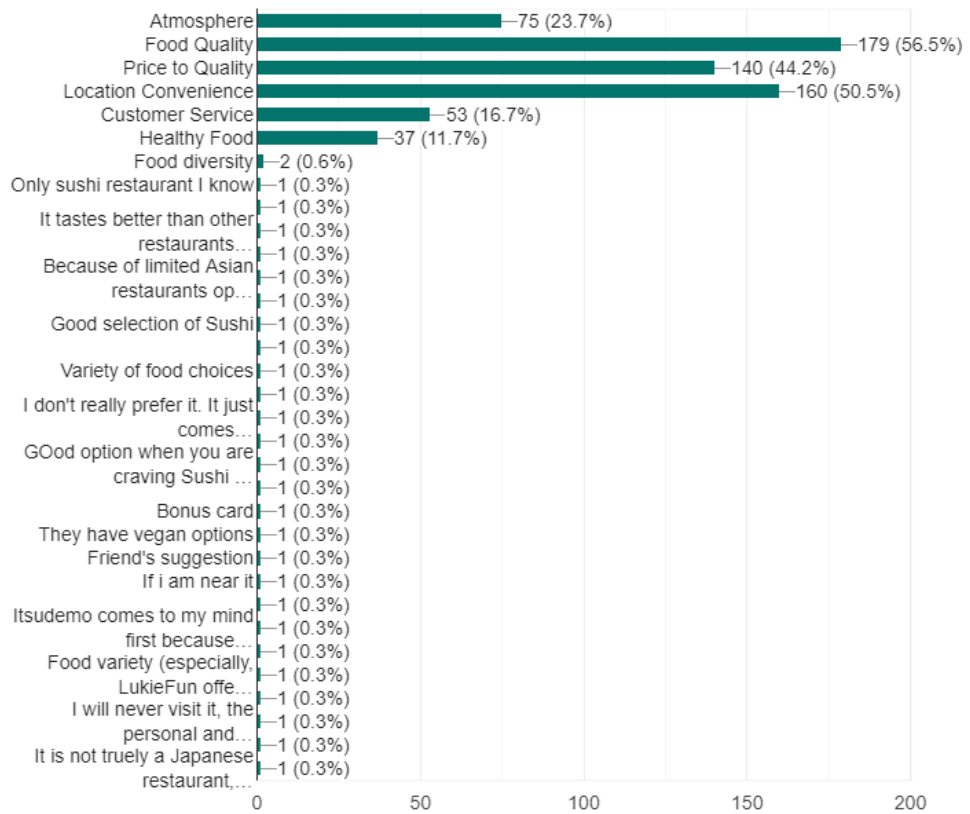
3. The restaurant offers healthy options *
 1. Extremely disagree
 2. Somewhat disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Somewhat agree
 5. Extremely agree
4. The restaurant offers diverse food options *
 1. Extremely disagree
 2. Somewhat disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Somewhat agree
 5. Extremely agree
5. The food presentation is visually attractive *
 1. Extremely disagree
 2. Somewhat disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Somewhat agree
 5. Extremely agree
6. The food is tasty *
 1. Extremely disagree
 2. Somewhat disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Somewhat agree
 5. Extremely agree
7. The employees are helpful and friendly *
 1. Extremely disagree
 2. Somewhat disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Somewhat agree
 5. Extremely agree
8. The food quality you receive is worth the price you pay *
 1. Extremely disagree
 2. Somewhat disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Somewhat agree
 5. Extremely agree

9. The location of the restaurant is convenient *
 1. Extremely disagree
 2. Somewhat disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Somewhat agree
 5. Extremely agree
10. The restaurant is clean and comfortable *
 1. Extremely disagree
 2. Somewhat disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Somewhat agree
 5. Extremely agree
11. I am satisfied with the food quality at this restaurant *
 1. Extremely disagree
 2. Somewhat disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Somewhat agree
 5. Extremely agree
12. I am satisfied with the employee service of this restaurant *
 1. Extremely disagree
 2. Somewhat disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Somewhat agree
 5. Extremely agree
13. I am satisfied with the price of this restaurant *
 1. Extremely disagree
 2. Somewhat disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Somewhat agree
 5. Extremely agree
14. I am satisfied with the comfort and convenient of this restaurant *
 1. Extremely disagree
 2. Somewhat disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Somewhat agree
 5. Extremely agree
15. I'd like to come back this restaurant in the future *
 1. Extremely disagree
 2. Somewhat disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Somewhat agree
 5. Extremely agree
16. I'd like to recommend this restaurant to my friends and others *
 1. Extremely disagree
 2. Somewhat disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Somewhat agree
 5. Extremely agree
17. What makes you prefer this restaurant than other options? (open-ended)

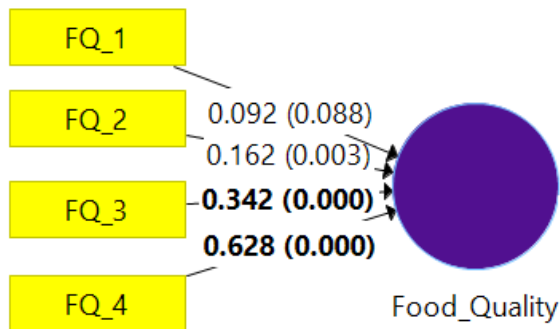
Appendix 2. Results of the open end question

17. What makes you prefer this restaurant than other options?

317 responses



Appendix 3. Attributes of Food Quality



FQ_1: Healthy options

FQ_2: Diversity in food offerings

FQ_3: Attractive presentation

FQ_4: Food tastiness