

Enhancing Customer Experience Through Sensory Perception: Case Restaurant Más

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<p>The commissioner for this product-based thesis is Scandic Simonkenttä. This product-based thesis aims to enhance the customer experience through sensory perception in the case company restaurant Más. The objectives focused significantly on sense perception and how to use sense stimulation in restaurant premises. The created product will help the commissioner to increase the restaurant's visibility and overall customer experience. The thesis process begun in February 2021 and finished in May 2021.</p> <p>Secondary analysis was conducted to gather data on sensory perception and the topic of experience creation. Based on the data, literature research was created to support the created product. Other factors, such as engram and synaesthesia, were studied to gain depth into the research and to deepen the created product further.</p> <p>Author's own framework includes the most relevant topics gathered from the literature research and concludes them to one cohesive table. The author used the framework to design and develop his product to the final extent. The primary research, a quantitative semi-structured questionnaire, and a qualitative semi-structured interview were conducted to include the employees' initiatives and the management team of Scandic Simonkenttä. The questionnaire included 13 questions for the seven employees working in restaurant Más. The author also conducted three qualitative interviews for the management team.</p> <p>The product of this thesis is presented in the appendix. The recommendations for enhancing customer experience through sensory perception were created to give tangible examples to the commissioner company on enhancing the customer experience in restaurant Más. It is a practical handbook which can be used in the process of developing the restaurant concept.</p> <p>The referencing in this thesis is done in Harvard style.</p>	
Keywords Customer experience, sensory perception, engram, experience creation, experience pyramid	

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1 Introduction

The competition in the restaurant industry is immense. Multiple new places open monthly, and the field changes constantly. The industry's low profitability also affects the competition since the employee costs, and the taxes are undoubtedly high, and the employees are looking for better wages (MARA, 2021, p. 5). New trends force restaurants to make changes in their concepts frequently to keep up with the demand. Also, forecasting future trends is as important as following the current ones to draw in new customers and have an advantage over the competition. The latest trends evolve highly on alcohol, for example, specialty beers and cocktails. It is difficult for the restaurants to follow the trends and tempt customers since the alcohol taxation is high, and one can buy the products from the store five times cheaper or even ten times cheaper abroad (MARA, 2021, p. 6). Therefore, the customers are tired of essential services and are looking for new exciting experiences and flavors.

The knowledge of experience design is limited, and the importance of sensory stimulation is known by the industry professionals but not highly practiced. Also, the entrepreneur's attitudes towards unique experiences need to change. Selling mass products is no longer beneficial for the consumers as they search for uniqueness and individuality (Hartikainen, 2007). The multi-sensory factor seems difficult, time-consuming and costly, but the benefits are even more significant than the disadvantages. Sensory stimulation on customer behavior is crucial and could increase the business's financial state majorly. For example, according to Sarah Dowdey (2008), scents affect our brain's amygdala and hippocampus, influencing our memories, moods, and behavior. When one smells a specific scent, it is often connected to an event or a memory, such as one's favorite vacation or a previous experience. It can also subconsciously influence moods and feelings, such as happiness, tiredness, and love, which affect customer buying behavior (Dowdey, 2008). Hence, the senses are a crucial part of the whole experience, and the stimulation can increase sales and enhance the customer experience.

The global pandemic has influenced the whole industry. The demand and the customers' needs have changed. Many restaurants have had to close their premises, and new ones open monthly. Hence, the competition is brutal, and the need to renew concepts for the customers' wants is crucial. Before the pandemic, people were heavy restaurant users, and the culture of social dining was thriving. Some restaurants were full daily, others only on the weekends. The demand was getting higher than the selection provided. According to Timo Lappi, the Finnish Hospitality Association Mara Ry CEO, although the demand was high, Finland was far from the other Nordic countries, such as Sweden and Norway,

where good á la carte restaurants were full daily. (Hartwall, 2018) The pandemic affected customer behavior and one's needs. This change did not inspire the restaurants to change their concepts; on the contrary, only a minority of them have adapted to the changes, but the majority have kept the concepts as they were.

This thesis aims to strengthen the sensory perception in the concept of Restaurant Más. It was the flagship restaurant of Scandic in Finland with a unique concept, and the expectations from the company were high. The restaurant opened in November 2017. The first two years of operations were successful, but eventually, the number of customers decreases if no changes are made. The concept has stayed the same throughout the years. Hence, it is time to bring the concept to another level to compete in the industry. According to Dennis Monroe (2019), it is essential to evolve restaurant concepts and listen to the customers to keep the satisfaction and popularity alive. (Monroe, 2019)

This thesis will look into the concepts of experience design and sensory perception concentrating on the restaurant industry. Also, concepts such as service design and experience pyramid will be explained and applied to the renewed concept of restaurant Más. In addition to the sensory perception, concepts of engram and synaesthesia will be explained thoroughly. On the following pages, the literature framework, project management, and methods are shown as well as a thorough project plan and background of the project. Finally, the final concept is introduced, and the learning outcomes are evaluated.

Customer experience has become one of the essential factors in any company providing services. When the experience is positive and well thought out, the benefits towards the company's financial state are significant. Therefore, the author of this thesis decided to enhance the already great customer experience by focusing on sensory perception.

1.1 Objectives

This thesis aims to enhance the customer experience of restaurant Más through sensory perception using experience design, mainly through improving the use of all the five senses to stimulate customer perceptions and behavior to gain brand awareness among the consumers. The subgoal is enhancing the experience concept. All five senses (smell, touch, hearing, sight, and taste) will be included in the concept, and the reasons why sense stimulation will be beneficial in the guest experience aspect as well as in the financial part will be explained thoroughly.

The customer experience will be enhanced with thorough research on sensory marketing, guest experience development, and sensory perception, and the gathered information will be added to the existing knowledge based on previous work. The author will develop his framework for creating a better customer experience with an in-depth focus on experience design and sensory perception with including all the senses purposefully to the product.

With the created framework, the goal is to develop the customer experience towards a more meaningful and holistic experience which the customer will remember longer. The framework will also aim to grow the number of customers visiting the restaurant, increasing the popularity, and ensuring a spot in the high competition of restaurants in Helsinki.

1.2 Company and Restaurant Information

Scandic Hotels Group was founded in 1963 as Esso Motor Hotel in Sweden. Since it has grown to be the biggest hotel chain in the Nordics with hotels also in Germany and Poland. It was the first hotel chain to be listed on Stockholm Stock Exchange (Scandic Hotels Group 2021.) The first Scandic opened in Finland in 1998 when Scandic bought Arc-tia, Alko's subsidiary, and its 22 hotels. Since then, they have bought Restel Hotels in 2017, which included 40 hotels all over Finland. It also operates InterContinental Hotels (Holiday Inn, Indigo, Crowne Plaza) and Hilton Hotels in Finland. This thesis will be done for Scandic Simonkenttä, a 365-room business hotel in Kamppi, central Helsinki.

Restaurant Más is Scandic's first unique restaurant in Finland. It opened its doors on the 3rd of November 2017 in Scandic Simonkenttä. The introduction in Scandic's website tells the customer how the cooks have been inspired by the modern flavors of Iberian cuisine. They give a fusion twist to the food with Nordic food style and aim to use local, high-quality ingredients. They state that the menu includes small portions, or tapas, and more extensive main courses, and of course, desserts. Everything culminates around the idea of sharing food with a friend or a larger party and spending the whole evening in the restaurant. The terrace is located above the famous Narinkka square, where one can enjoy the evening turning into a night with cocktails and great food. They also mention that it is possible to rent the restaurant for private events outside the opening hours. (Scandic Hotels 2021.) The slogans for the restaurant are "why would you leave when you can still stay?" and "Enjoy delicious flavors, engage in conversations and enjoy life."

The concept goes, "Más is a relaxed restaurant near Narinkka Square. The restaurant got its inspiration from the Spanish sobremesa culture and modern Iberian cuisine. You can taste several smaller portions, try flavors from the restaurant's Rotisserie grill or share a

larger dish with the whole party. Savor delicious flavors and carefully selected wines. Engage in conversation and enjoy life.” (Korkka, 2020) Although it is a hotel restaurant, the leading target group is local young and hip people who enjoy cocktails, great wines, and delicious food. (Korkka, 2020)

The restaurant’s name Más means more, over, well, and plus in Spanish. It can also be used in dish names, such as más tapas or más ice cream. Customer service is at the center of the whole concept. The guest needs always to be noticed and greeted as it was in your own home. Also, previous customers are noticed and remembered as well as celebrations such as birthdays and engagements. The waiter needs to always explain the á la carte menu to the customers in-depth and recommend a specific dish and aperitif. S/he also needs to recommend certain wines and inform the guest about their extensive wine selection. When the food is brought to the table, it needs to be explained with at least three main ingredients. The main goal is that the guests are enjoying themselves and spending as long as possible in the restaurant. The working area for the waiters is as close to the guest as possible, and conversations with them are essential in the service concept. The chefs are also present in the restaurant; they bring food to the guests, collect plates, and have conversations with them if possible. The atmosphere is playful yet professional due to the staff’s vibrant energy since all the employees are encouraged to be themselves: singing, dancing, joking, and having fun with the guests. (Korkka, 2020)

1.3 Methodology in Brief

The methods of this thesis include a questionnaire for the restaurant employees to get their initiative on the subject and have them as part of enhancing the customer experience. As a secondary method, the author will be using a literature review of online and offline resources. The author will search for information from multiple books and online scientific articles. The author will also research some commercial articles and websites to support the scientific background. Also, a qualitative interview for the management team is included to understand their expectations and the company’s view on the enhanced concept. The customer experience enhancement is done using the experience pyramid (Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2009, p. 11).

The author will conduct a semi-structured interview on the part of the management team of Hotel Simonkenttä that includes the hotel- and food and beverage manager, general manager, and executive chef. The author will also conduct a qualitative questionnaire for the employees of restaurant Más to get their initiative on the enhanced customer experi-

ence. The questionnaire will be conducted online via Webropol, where everyone can individually give their ideas on open questions, which the author will collect and possibly include to the product in order to enhance customer experience.

1.4 Key Definitions

The key definitions for this thesis are customer experience, sensory perception, and engram. All these definitions will be explained later, more in depth in theory.

Customer experience (CX) is often defined as digital interactions and experiences with smartphones, websites, customer service, or retail. Moreover, customer experience needs to be seen as all of these and more. It is the entirety of how the customers engage with your brand and company through the whole arc as a customer (Richardson, 2010). An economist Lawrence Abbott said in 1955: "What people really desire are not products but satisfying experiences" (Coleman, 2019). CX is the priority for managers internationally and is considered the critical factor for long-lasting success (McCarthy & Schadler, 2014). Multiple global brands, such as McDonald's, Audi, and Apple, focus majorly on CX and even include this into their value and mission statements (De Keyser et al., 2015). The importance of CX is also seen in job titles with companies hiring "Customer Experience Managers" and "Chief Experience Officers (CXO)" (Hagen, 2011).

Sensory perception, or "sensory marketing," gives businesses a new perspective in bringing consumer value, brand as image, and experiences through sensory experiences. It allows the companies to affect the consumer's mind and body and build stronger emotional, intellectual, and behavioral relationships. It is a stimulation of all the five senses: tasting, hearing, touching, seeing, and smelling. (Hultén, 2020, p. 1) According to Aradhna Krishna (2010), the word *sensory* means "relating to sensation or the senses." *Perception* means the way one notices things with the senses of smell, hearing, sight, sound, and touch, or how one thinks about something and his/her idea of what it is like (Qiong, 2017). It is essential to use sensory aspects to develop the concept to enhance the overall experience and strengthen the engram (described below). This also separates the concept from other similar restaurants, and especially hotel restaurants in Helsinki.

Experience creation means creating customized services by lending various tools from other disciplines, making it genuinely multidisciplinary. The experiences are made for guests, as services are made for customers. They are performances that leave unforgettable memories for the guests. Societies have transferred from materialism to experientialism since the '90s. Consumers want to live experiences rather than own things, and expe-

riential purchases are shown to make people happier (Bayle, 2018). In the current experience economy, the main idea is that the services and products can outcompete by creating experiences that the consumers' value. In an economy where many services and products have become commodities, the experience becomes a precious competitive advantage (Bayle, 2018).

An **engram** is the physical, still ambiguous trace of memory in the brain (Josselyn, et al., 2015). In this thesis, it means the memories that the guest has from the visit to the restaurant. How strong the engram is and how it can be strengthened. A big part of the engram is sensory perception. People easily remember scents and visual sights that they can refer to after the experience elsewhere. This will not be explored from the customer's perspective for this thesis, but it will instead be considered when designing different sensory episodes.

1.5 Structure of The Thesis

First, the author will start the thesis with an introduction to the restaurant industry and the phenomenon of experiences. The author will also go through the previous and current state of the industry and where it is heading in the future. It continues to the aims and objectives of the thesis, following the company and restaurant information and the methodology in brief. After, the author will go through the key definitions to explain to the reader the factors in-depth. Secondly, the author will present the topic with literature research to get the reader familiar with the case from experience design to sensory perception and customer experience enhancement. After the literature review, the author will talk about the background of the project and the plans and methodology more in depth. The final part of the thesis is the product: developed concept, the discussion, and learning outcomes of the writing process.

2 Enhancing Customer Experience Through Sensory Perception

The word “experience” is a trend word in the marketing and hospitality industry. It is even said that the word is in inflation as it is used repeatedly to attract customers. However, using the word does not guarantee that an experience is provided, making the gap between academia and the industry even more significant. Experience as a word is almost a superlative used for services to increase sales (Tarssanen, 2009). But, adding the word “experience” does not make a meaningful experience (Rossman & Duerden, 2019, p. 10). The world economy has moved from primary production to delivering services. The latest phenomenon is the experience economy, where the experience and the customer’s happiness are the keys (Rossman & Duerden, 2019).

Society has changed its focus from well-fare to well-being. People’s happiness is measured more than ever with tests and surveys, and the list of the happiest nations is published yearly (Hassenzahl, et al., 2013). Happiness can be related to meaningful, positive experiences. It increases customer and employee loyalty. The companies that provide a great experience to the employees and customers succeed. Those that do not probably fail (Rossman & Duerden, 2019, p. 6). Mark Hassenzahl et al. (2013) describes experiences as episodes, a chunk of time that one went through – with sights and sounds, feelings and thoughts, motives and actions closely knitted together, stored in memory, labelled, relieved, and communicated to others (Hassenzahl, et al., 2013). After the guests go through an episode, they engage in meaning-making. The experiences can as well be described as positive or negative experiences. It is the frustration or fulfilment of psychological needs that makes an experience negative or positive and personally remarkable (Hassenzahl, et al., 2013).

In the experience design, the guests are seen more as participants, and the experience is continuous. It is sustained by the provider, not the customer, as in regular service (Rossman & Duerden, 2019). Specific service components are needed to enhance the experience when well delivered, but the features are not the experience itself. Most of one’s memories are, in fact, experiences. For example, one’s trip to a winery in Italy can be an unforgettable memory hence the tastes of the wine, smells of the grapes, visual scenery of the estate, the touch of the grapevines when walking on the field or the glass when tasting the wines or even the sun on your skin and the birds singing and foreign people speaking Italian, the language of love. (Rossman & Duerden, 2019, p. 8) All these factors: taste, smell, sight, touch, and hearing, are crucial elements of experience (Krishna, 2011).

According to Pine & Gilmore (2019), services are provided to customers, whereas the experiences are given to guests. In a service economy, the workers are waiters, sellers, or guides. In the experience economy, the workers are actors on a stage in a role. In the service economy, what the customer is provided with is an essential element. In contrast, in the experience economy, the most crucial factor is how the guest is encountered and addressed.

The author will develop the concept of Restaurant Más with the experience pyramid as well as attempt to develop the concept using different methods and tools of experience design. An essential tool to be used in the enhancement process is the experience pyramid since it enables the author to view the customer experience from multiple perspectives experience-wise. Other elements will be built upon the pyramid during the process. The pyramid's main factors that determine an experience are individuality, authenticity, story, multi-sensory perception, contrast, and interaction (Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2009, p. 11).

The main focus is on sensory perception. The author will define how to implement all the senses to the concept to enhance the guest experience and affect the buying behavior.

2.1 Experience Pyramid

The Lapland Centre of Expertise for the Experience Industry describes experiences as “a multisensorial, positive and comprehensive emotional experience that can lead to personal change” (LCEEI, 2002). When creating experiences, there are multiple aspects that one needs to take into consideration. Gladly, there is a great model that was created by Sanna Tarssanen and Mika Kylänen from the Lapland Centre of Expertise for the Experience Industry. The model presents the ideal type of a “product” where all the elements of experiences are reflected in mental and physical levels (Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2009). It is a tool where one can “experientialize” the product, and it is also an excellent device for service development. The service provider can analyze their product through the tool to bring much-needed differentiation to the industry. Also, the model allows designing meaningful and unforgettable experiences for the customers (Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2009).

The experience is examined from two different perspectives: the specific elements of the product and the customers' own experiences. Figure 1 shows the elements of the experience pyramid: The brand elements as well as the customer experience is displayed horizontally and the levels of experience vertically. One should also take into consideration the conscious and unconscious levels of the customer when designing the product. When

all the elements are included in the experience creation, it can take the consumer from a regular restaurant dinner to an intense emotional experience and even lead to personal change, which is the ultimate goal. It is crucial that all the six elements (individuality, authenticity, story, multi-sensory perception, contrast, and interaction) are included in all parts of the product: from pre- and post-marketing to going through the service. The author will explain all the elements of the figure 1 below.

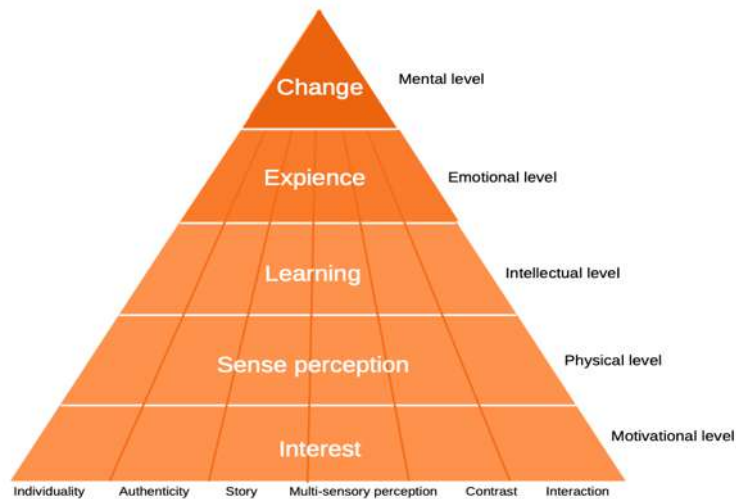


Figure 1. Experience pyramid (Adapted from Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2009)

Individuality is a critical element of an experience. It means the uniqueness and superiority of the product where no other product is the same. When the service or products characterizes individuality, the customer feels him/herself distinguished, and the product respects the preferences and needs of the customer. When participating with a group, the experience is created as shared moments, and then individuality takes broader forms. Overall, the customer should always be treated in the most personalized manner possible.

In the context of the experience pyramid, *authenticity* is connected to the credibility of the designed product. It refers to the real-life lifestyle and the region's culture or locally made items. It can be understood as locational or regional behaviors and reasons of the inhabitants. The product or service is authentic if the customer perceives it as such. The perception of authenticity is fulfilled when the service or product looks enough like the customer's idea or view of the authentic culture (Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2009).

The *story* of a product or service is closely related to authenticity. Authentic story links reality with the experience and gives a social meaning and content to it. Stories can be separated into historical narratives and tales of belief (Timonen, 2004). Historical narratives include reviews of war and colonization, and tales of belief could include relationships be-

tween supernatural creatures and people. The story brings all the experience elements together and gives it meaning and significance. It is the evidence of the experience product and the reason why the customer buys it. The story must be believable and designed so that the details do not disagree with each other (Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2009).

Multi-sensory perception means that the service or product should be experienced with as many senses as possible. It should be appealing to the senses by aroma and odors, visually influential, audible, and able to be tasted and felt like a tactile (touch) sensation. All the sensational stimuli should be in joint harmony and strengthen the wanted theme and impression. The more diverse the sensory content is, the better permanent engram it will leave to the customer's memory (Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2009). All the senses, sensory perception, and the concept of engram are explained in depth in the following chapters as they are the main focus of this thesis.

The *contrast* in the experience pyramid refers to the difference from the customer's perspective. The service or product must differ from the customer's daily routines. When the idea of contrast is included in the product design, the customer gets a chance to experience something exotic, new, and exceptional. When producing contrasts, the culture and nationality of the customer should be taken into consideration since what might be exotic for one might be ordinary for the other. This gives new perspectives for the customer and takes him/her away from ordinary life (Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2009). This could be advertised as a "getaway" in the restaurant industry.

Interaction symbolizes the relationship between the customer, the service personnel, and the other customers. It stands for effective communication with the service and the provider. In the heart of the interaction is the feeling of belonging into a community, where something is experienced mutually as a group, family, or collective. Interaction is an effective way of giving the customers an impression of them being an essential part of the setting. It requires other people experiencing the same service influences to make the experience meaningful. The customer realizes that the others appreciate him/her, and it gives them a social status boost linking him/her to a particular group. Interaction is an element that cannot be skipped when offering experiences (Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2009).

The levels of the experiences are shown in figure 1 vertically. There are five levels: motivational, physical, intellectual, emotional, and mental. They are used to describe the level of the customer's experience. It proceeds from an instinct to an actual experiencing and also to conscious managing of an emotionally intense experience that leads to a mental change (Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2009).

The *motivational level* refers to awakening the customer's interest. The expectations are created, and the readiness and the desire to participate and experience the product is awakened. At this point, every possible criterion related to an experience should be fulfilled.

At the *physical level*, the customer experiences the environment through the senses. The product is recognized, received, and tried. It is also brought into consciousness directly. A great product guarantees a safe and enjoyable experience on the physical level. It is not too hot or too cold, one is not thirsty or hungry, and one does not need to worry about lavatory needs (Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2009).

At the *intellectual level*, the customer processes the sensory stimuli the environment provides. There, one decides if s/he is pleased with the product or not. If all the elements provided in the first three levels are considered, the customer will likely reach the intellectual level, a meaningful experience.

On the *emotional level*, the customer is undergoing the experience. When all the elements mentioned above are carefully executed, the customer will likely experience joy, the pleasure of achievement, excitement, and affection (Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2009).

The highest level is the *mental level*, where a powerful mental reaction to a meaningful experience could lead to a personal change. Here, the customer feels changed as a person; s/he may have adapted a new way of thinking or found a new hobby. It brings modifications to one's physical being, lifestyle, or state of mind (Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2009).

In the developed concept for Restaurant Más, the author will concentrate mainly on the physical levels: contrast, authenticity, individuality, and multi-sensory perception. These are relatively easy to execute to fit the existing concept and use as strengthening factors. Authenticity can be achieved by **believing** in the concept, which gives the customers a feeling of being proud of the work the employees are doing. It can be also achieved by implementing the concept authentically and sticking to the plans. When the concept is Iberian cuisine with a Nordic twist, it is authentically carried out when the twist in the food product is noticeable. The contrast will be executed by highlighting the contrast between the food presentation, which is on the finer edge, the casual service and table set-up, and contrasting the Nordic and Iberian ingredients and flavors. Individuality is seen in the food product since no other restaurant serves Iberian tapas and main courses with a Nordic twist. Multi-sensory perception will be brought to the concept with ambient scents and lighting, taste and touch stimulation, and music that fits the concept.

In the following chapter, the author will explain experience creation in restaurant premises excluding the sensory perception, which will be explained later in detail. The chapter includes factors about the waiting staff, technology, and the importance of tableware in the experience.

2.2 Restaurant Experience Creation

There are multiple aspects to take into consideration when designing experience concepts in a restaurant. One major factor is sensory perception, which is described in detail in the following chapter, as well as the engram and the phenomenon of synaesthesia. Stimulating all the human senses simultaneously affects ones' experience positively, if well planned. Also, designing the restaurant concept with the experience pyramid (shown in the subchapter 2.1) will make the experience more memorable and long-lasting. However, there are multiple important aspects in addition to these two mentioned.

It is highly crucial how the waiting staff greets and serves the guest. It can have a major impact on their mood and the overall experience. They usually represent the style of the restaurant and can be seen as the ones advertising the services (Spence & Piqueras-Fizman, 2014). In a study conducted by Edwards and Meiselman, the waiting personnel's negative and positive verbal recommendations affect the guest's food choice majorly. Positive recommendations affected the amount of the dishes sold by approximately 40%. However, it did not enhance the taste of the food, although the waiting staff can discourage a guest from choosing a certain dish (Edwards & Meiselman, 2005). Also, being extremely polite or even "flirty" has been shown to increase the guests' empathy towards the waiter and even the number of tips given (Rowley, 2011; Engle, 2004; McDermott, 2013).

Tableware has an important role in the dining experience. From the napkins to the cutlery and the shape, size, and color of the plate is to be considered when designing the menu for a restaurant. How the napkin is folded affects the visual atmosphere of the restaurant. Also, the material (e.g., linen or paper) affects the guests' perception and quality of the restaurant and the overall experience. One can also stimulate the touch sense through the careful selection of the napkins. The plateware is considered to be the frame for the food (Spence & Piqueras-Fizman, 2014). If the plate is too small, the food will look crowded on it, and the portion should be appropriate for the visual appearance of the plate. Often chefs use either black or white colors on the plates to showcase the bright colors of the ingredients.

Piqueras-Fizman et al. conducted a study where they compared the perception of a strawberry mousse from white and black plates and how they differed. The dish served from a white plate was perceived as 10% sweeter, 15% more intense, and the participants liked that mousse 10% more than the exact same mousse served from an identical black plate (Piqueras-Fizman, et al., 2012). The shape of the plate is yet to be examined broadly. However, Piqueras-Fizman and Spence suggested that the shape of the plate could be utilized syneasthetically by enhancing, e.g., the flavor sharpness with the sharpness of the plate shape with utilizing the visual-taste cues (Spence & Piqueras-Fizman, 2014).

With cutlery, one of the most important factors to consider is taste. Different materials vary in taste; for example, zinc and copper cutlery have the most metallic taste compared to gold, chrome, tin, silver, and stainless steel (Laughlin, et al., 2011). Also, the quality of the cutlery matters as heavier cutlery is often perceived as the better quality, which also affects the perceived taste of the dish positively (Piqueras-Fizman & Spence, 2011). The touch of the cutlery is often associated with the weight aspect. However, it can also vary significantly with the shape of the cutlery to the surface of the material. For example, the House of Wolf -restaurant in London had designed unique cutlery to stimulate the sense of touch. They also had a dish where the bottom of the spoon was covered with Maldon sea salt rose water crystals to give the specific texture. The dish itself consisted of Hendrick's gin-infused cucumber granita (Spence & Piqueras-Fizman, 2014).

The importance of technology is still increasing when creating experiences. Storytelling is highly effective among the consumers, but what if one changes storytelling into "storyliving"? It means experiencing brands and stories through virtual reality (Greenwald, 2017). This could even be taken further by using augmented reality: projecting a 360° video on the walls and bringing the customers into the story. According to Greenwald, the multi-sensory interaction empowers customers to hear, see, and feel what other people are experiencing better (Greenwald, 2017).

Some restaurants even go as far as projecting the menu on the dining table and change the regular set-up into a visual playground (Spence & Piqueras-Fizman, 2014). Also, tablets are installed on the dining tables for the guests to order their meals themselves. Finally, in the future, we will see even more robots working in the restaurants delivering or even cooking the dishes (Spence & Piqueras-Fizman, 2014). However, the importance of human interaction will never go out of style in creating meaningful experiences.

In the completed product, the author will concentrate on the effect of the employees on the customer experience since it is crucial in the context of the concept. In the Iberian Peninsula, the culture is more vibrant, and small talk is rather a regulation than an exception. The aim is to bring that culture to the restaurant and the whole industry by facing towards the south-European dining culture.

In the following chapter, the author will dive deep into the context of sensory perception. He will explain all the senses in-depth and introduce ways to stimulate those senses in restaurant premises.

2.3 Sensory Perception

The name *sensory perception* means having an awareness of the connection of different senses, which there are five: vision, smell, taste, touch, and sound. The senses create the sensations of visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, and gastronomic experiences. As mentioned earlier, it is no longer enough to provide only good food and great services. Hence, businesses need to understand how it is possible to stimulate senses in seeing and experiencing products, services, and physical environments. The importance is seen especially when the goal of the business is to give long-lasting, memorable experiences of the products and build relationships with the consumers (Hultén, 2020, p. 6). A holistic experience is created when everything from the plate size, the shape of the silverware, ambient scent, music, and the visual effects to the different levels of taste are carefully thought out and executed. It is time-consuming, but the effects on the financial factors can be seen clearly. As a famous idealist philosopher, George Berkeley, said: “to be is to be perceived” (Britannica, 2021).

Sense stimulation has become a trend in the United States in the retail context and also in restaurant and hotel premises. The most common way is to provide an olfactory experience by creating an ambient scent for a certain premise, such as a hotel lobby or a restaurant. There the guest can recognize the scent as part of the brand and associate similar scents later to that specific restaurant or hotel. Unfortunately, it has not become a trend yet, in Finland. Only global brands, such as IHG Hotels, use ambient scents in their hotels. Most Scandinavian hotel brands have not gotten into the trend. Also, restaurants do not use sensory branding as much as they should. Those premises are the easiest to stimulate all the senses from touch to taste. Examples of the stimulations are provided later in the text.

One factor that is highly recommended for the service providers is to create a sensory signature for their premises. It means a concept or a brand name that is aroused by a sequence of sensations. One example of a sensory signature is the breast cancer movement's ribbon that is often called to mind by the pink color or an iPod touch that associates the sensation of touch with the person listening to music to show that there are forms of the product that claims to touch in addition to hearing (Krishna, 2013). According to Bertil Hultén, it is obvious that sensory information and absorption from products, brands, and services, as well as digital and physical service environments, affect an individual's emotions, cognitions, and purchase behavior (Krishna, 2013; Spence, et al., 2014). However, it is important to understand that too many sensory cues may affect the customers negatively and overburden them with information, or they could be harmonious, increasing the power of the sensory cues' factors (Krishna, 2013).

Delivering great sensorial experiences, say, great-tasting food, is more than stimulating each of the customers' senses separately (Dornenburg & Page, 1996). It is rather a matter of understanding how all the senses affect another. For example, for the cooking professionals, it is crucial to understand that around 80-95% of what is perceived as the flavor comes actually from your nose (Martin, 2004; Ge, 2012; Rosenblum, 2010).

All the five senses included in sensory perception are explained individually, in depth, and with thorough literature research below.

2.3.1 Smell

The smell is one of the most powerful senses on humans that influence emotions, motivations, and memories with exceptional intensity (Herz, 2010, p. 87). It has been researched that different scent cues or signals can arouse memories that tend to be even more emotional than the ones evoked by auditory, tactile, visual, or verbal cues (Morris, 2010, p. 81). If one loses the sense of smell, or anosmia, which is also one symptom of COVID-19 disease, it can lead to one being depressed and seeing the world as boring and pale (Douek, 1988, pp. xvii-xx). Anosmia is also called olfactory dysfunction or smell disorder. It is usually common with people of older age as well as people with hay fever, head trauma, and viral illnesses, or other infections. It can be present at birth, related to dementia or Alzheimer's disease, or idiopathic (no known cause) (Ishii, et al., 2020).

Since eating is hedonic activity, the most basic response one has to scents is rather hedonic than analytical. When examining one's hedonic perception, intensity, pleasantness, and familiarity are the factors most often researched. The familiar odors, or scents, are

usually more liked than the unfamiliar ones, and the pleasant ones are more often identified as familiar (Herz, 2010, p. 87).

According to Rachel Herz, people usually devalue their sense of smell, also known as olfaction. One example of the power of the sense of smell is that if you block your olfaction, Coca-Cola and Sprite would have a similar taste (Herz, 2007, p. 196). Scents have a major impact on one's perception of other senses, such as taste, and it is believed that 75-95% of what we believe is the sense of taste is caused by the olfactory (Spence, 2015).

Marketers have learned the importance of sensory stimulation. Scent marketing means distributing fragrances to chosen customer touchpoints. It is described as using fragrances to promote products, dignify brands, and set moods (Vlahos, 2007, pp. 69-73). Retailers and marketers often use scents for advertising and to increase sales (Gordon, 2006, p. A29). One good example of using scents for advertisement is the collaboration between Starbucks and Omni Hotels. They decided to use peel-n-sniff patches in USA-Today newspapers to promote their products and services. The guests at the hotel were given the newspapers, and when they detached the patches, there was a scent of blueberry muffins to increase the sales of the muffins in the Starbucks café located in the hotel's lobby (Elliott, 2007, p. C5). Scents are even used in direct mail pieces via a microencapsulation process, where the scent activates when the mail is opened (Pfanner, 2007, p. C9).

The use of ambient scents has increased significantly over the years in retail, restaurant, and hotel premises. There, one sends scents into the premises to enhance the atmosphere and influence customer behavior (Kotler, 1974, pp. 48-65). It is believed that using ambient scents can have an effect on moods, and when influencing them to be more positive, it can provide better product assessments and lead to higher sales revenues (Morrin, 2010, p. 76). Multiple large companies have used ambient scents in their premises, such as Omni Hotels and Westin Hotels & Resorts (Elliott, 2007; Stellin, 2007), and Bloomingdale's from the retail field (Byron, 2007, p. B2). These scents used in the company premises are also called *signature scents*. They are unique scents that are created especially for the company's needs focusing on their target group. It is often used as a differentiation from the other competitors (Davies, et al., 2003, pp. 611-627). According to Maureen Morrin, pleasant scents tend to cause better customer evaluations, and to enhance the customer experience, the scents must be congruent to find out if the effects are correct (Morrin, 2010, p. 80). Thus, pleasant scents can have a positive effect on revenue (Spangenberg, et al., 2006, pp. 1281-1287).

Researchers have found out that different scents have different effects on behavior and perception. Gueuen and Petr found that the scent of lavender had a positive effect on the time spent in a pizzeria. The time spent increased by 15% when compared to a premise where no scents were used (Gueuen & Christine, 2006, pp. 335-339). However, in the research by Spangenberg et al., the pleasant scent only affected the perception of the time passed, not the actual time spent in the premise (Spangenberg, et al., 1996). The lavender scent is often associated with relaxation. Many massage parlors use lavender in their premises, as well as associative learning, which means the process of an event or an item linking to another as a function of one's past experience (Wasserman & Miller, 1997, pp. 573-607), causes the customer to possibly reunite with the feeling of relaxation when re-encountering the scent (Krishna, 2013).

A scent can also be associated with emotional experiences, either good or bad, such as funerals, and when the scent is present in that situation, e.g., roses, is encountered again, it could bring similar emotions back (Herz, 2010). Scents can also evoke memories from the past, such as the scent of playdough can bring you back to childhood, or the scent of coffee can bring you back to a past memory of enjoying the warm weather on a café's terrace in Rome (Krishna, 2013). Research by Mennella and Garcia shows that childhood scent preferences may affect flavor and food preferences later as a child (Mennella & Garcia, 2000), and as an adult (Haller, et al., 1999). The *innate view of odor preference* alleges that one is born with a tendency to like or dislike certain scents. Some special foods and scents that were encountered as a child are perceived as bad throughout your life. This can be applied to good and bad memories. If one has a good experience when encountering an unpleasant scent, he will probably end up liking the certain scent. There are also cultural differences. For example, in East Asian countries, the smell of cheese is often perceived as contaminated, when in western countries, it is usually much liked (Herz, 2007).

Studies show that if the scent is congruent or identical with the seasonality and the arousal level of the background music played in the premises and with the product being purchased, and when well defined, the customer evaluations tend to be better and more positive (Bosmans, 2006; Mitchell, et al., 1995; Spangenberg, et al., 2006; Mattila & Wirtz, 2001; Spangenberg, et al., 2005). It was also found that if a workplace had a pleasant ambient scent, it increased the workers' self-efficacy, they set higher goals for themselves, and they were more likely to use efficient work strategies (Baron, 1990).

Although a company might use ambient scents on their premises, one might not notice it. The basic measure of the level where the scent can be perceived is called the *detection*

threshold, or the lowest limit of detection, which means the amount of the scent needed to be present for one to perceive it. But, even if one notices the scent, he might not recognize it, which is called the *recognition threshold*, and is usually significantly higher when compared to the detection threshold. There, one can identify scents such as “sweet” or “smoky” as they are more amplified. The ultimate goal for ambient scents is to be in the middle of the two thresholds, where one can perceive but not recognize or describe the scent (Krishna, 2013). Some aromas our nose cannot register, but if the scent is still present, there is the possibility that it might have a subconscious effect on our evaluations and memories (Krishna, 2013).

The author will focus on the product to the effect of scents in the restaurant premises as one of the most crucial elements. The restaurant does not purposely stimulate the olfactory sense, but all the scents come from the open kitchen. The scents of the food being made cannot be disposed of, but they can be enhanced by using an ambient scent in the restaurant premises.

As one of the most powerful senses, the scent can lift one’s service to a new level and increase customer experience and brand satisfaction. In the next chapter, the author will give insight into the sense of touch and its effects on the customer experience with tangible examples of how one can purposely stimulate the sense.

2.3.2 Touch

Touch is not called the proximal or the near sense without reason. It is the only sense, accompanied by vision, where one can detect objects, shapes, and sizes (Peck, 2010). Touch differs majorly from vision, smell, and hearing since they can sense the distal world, and touch is the near sense where contact is needed for perceiving an object, with exceptions such as the warmth of the sun and wind (Klatzky, 2010). Immanuel Kant once said that hands are the human's outer brain, and according to Géza Révész, a Hungarian psychologist, hands are often more intelligent than the head (Kaye, 2015). This shows the importance of touch in general.

Even Aristoteles believed that touch transmitted all sense of perception, making it the most powerful sense (Siegel, 1970). It is the sense most often described in ancient paintings, such as The Creation of Man -fresco in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican which has the touch of the fingers as the main factor (Peck, 2010). Touch has also influenced languages with multiple words referring to the sense, such as touching, handy, losing one’s grip, and catching (Peck, 2010).

Cutaneous and *kinesthetic* are the two sub senses of touch. The cutaneous system transmits information of the touched object or service by responding to skin stimulation. The kinesthetic system transmits a sense of the positions that limbs take in space and inform us about the property of objects. One example is when we hold an object in our hands and determine how large it is. The combination of these two systems is called haptic perception (Klatzky, 2010). According to Roberta L. Klatzky, seducing people into touching an object might increase the potential of him buying it. If the product has the potential to be marketed by using its material properties, evoking the customer to touch the product might allow enhancing its attractiveness to express information (Klatzky, 2010, pp. 33-47).

Many studies also show that contamination has major effects on the perception of a product. For example, when a “disgusting” or otherwise a bad product touches another, it contaminates the other product, which makes it less attractive (Morales, 2010, pp. 49-62). According to a study conducted by Andrea C. Morales and Gavan J. Fitzsimons, there needed to be a physical touch for the consumers to experience the feeling of them being contaminated when they touched a product that was perceived as disgusting. Despite the products being carefully selected and sterilized, due to the evoked disgust among the consumers, the product was seen as having the ability to contaminate (Morales & Fitzsimons, 2007, pp. 272-283). This can also be applied in reverse. Several studies show that the attractiveness of the contact source affects the contagion effects. The product studied was evaluated higher by male consumers when a highly attractive female touched the product before them. The outcome was the same to the female consumers, as when a highly attractive male touched the product, it was ranked higher. According to the researchers, this only applies in the retail context and when the highly attractive person was the opposite gender (Morales, 2010).

Krishna researched the so-called “elongation bias.” The study showed that with two same volume containers, the taller one was perceived as, the larger one in volume. When the participants had to use only their tactile abilities, meaning that they were blindfolded, width became the crucial dimension, or the wide containers seemed bigger, which affected reversely to the elongation bias (Krishna, 2006, pp. 557-567). Krishna and Morrin also investigated if nondiagnostic cues related to touch can affect the taste of a product. The study showed that people higher in the Need for Touch Scale are better at determining informative touch information. They also do not use this specific information when they are making product evaluations if the given information is nondiagnostic (Krishna & Morrin, 2008, pp. 807-818). The Need for Touch Scale is defined as a preference for the use of the information accessed through touch. It consists of two dimensions: the *instrumental*

touch and the *autotelic* touch. In the instrumental touch, the consumer is searching for information and reaching the final judgment with an important purchase goal. In the autotelic touch, however, the consumer is seeking enjoyment and fun sensory stimulation with no need to rush (Peck & Childers, 2003, pp. 430-442).

As mentioned earlier, hands are the first contact to different surfaces, and one gets the first impression, among vision, with touch. In the developed concept, the author will concentrate on stimulating the touch by using different materials and surfaces in the service environment. All the senses combined provide the base for unforgettable experiences. In the following chapter, the author will go more deeply into the sense of hearing and the effect of sounds in the environment.

2.3.3 Sound

Music is one of the most important aspects when setting a tone for a service environment. A famous philosophical question, “if a tree falls in a forest where there is no one to hear the sound, does it make a sound?” is at the core of the perception of music. The answer to the question is similar: Technically, yes, but no one is perceiving the sound (Krishna, 2013). According to Meyers-Levy et al., sound might be the core and the most valued part of the customer experience. They also state that when music is used in an advertisement, it can set a mood and influence the positiveness of attitudes more often. It can even be used to alter the ambiance of the environment and modify the customers’ pace (Meyers-Levy, et al., 2010; Yorkston, 2010).

The customer might also unconsciously associate slow-paced music with a more relaxed, calm space, and it can produce a calming effect (Meyers-Levy, et al., 2010). High-volume music can drive people away. Although There was no significant difference in sales and customer satisfaction, it was found that customers spend less time in stores where the music was louder than compared to the places where the music was softer (Fulker, 2019). The music volume also has been shown to influence how much one chose to spend, the quality of the service perceived (Spence & Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014), as well as the overall experience. Arnold et al. stated that too quiet music casts an unwanted responsibility to co-operate with the staff, while loud music interferes with the perceived experience (Arnold, et al., 2005).

Slow-tempo music has been found to influence the time spent in the restaurant. In a study by Ronald Milliman, the diners ate the same amount as other people in an environment where more fast-paced music was played, but they drank more which increased their average cost of the dinner. The customers ate their dinners slower in a slow-tempo music

restaurant and hereby spent more on drinks. The music did not change the type of food ordered, but the extra time spent in the restaurant increased their beverage consumption and the beverage revenue by 41% (Milliman, 1986). All types of music can also make waiting times more pleasurable, although the duration might not be any shorter (Antonides, et al., 2002).

Hearing can have a positive influence on the perceived freshness or taste of a product. Zampini and Spence found that when eating a potato chip, a louder crunch enhanced the perception of its crispiness and taste (Zampini & Spence, 2005). Similarly, research by the same authors showed that the loud bubbling sound of a drink poured into a container affected the perceived amount of carbonation in the beverage (Zampini & Spence, 2004).

The concept linking a certain sound to a brand name is called *sonic branding*. It is not limited to words only. Different sounds, noises, and phrases can be used to create sensory signatures, and sometimes they can even complement each other. A slogan might be the simplest example of sonic branding. It might be created to form a perception of a product or a service. However, most iconic slogans express information on how to respond to a service or a product emotionally, not only strengthening its tangible aspects. The most well-known and recognizable slogans are “because you’re worth it” by L’Oréal and “I’m loving it” by McDonald’s (Krishna, 2013).

A study by Yalch and Spangenberg shows that younger, under 25-year-old shoppers felt that they had spent more time in a place where easy-listening and instrumental music was played. Older shoppers instead thought they had shopped longer when TOP40 music was played (Yalch & Spangenberg, 1990). In another study, conducted by North et al. showed that when music with strong national associations, say, French, was played, it resulted in the customers buying the wine from the country presented in the music more (North, et al., 1999). Based on these studies, it is clear that music has a major influence on one’s behavior. As mentioned earlier, it can even alter one’s pace in the service environment without him acknowledging it. However, the benefits of background music are seen only when people perceive the music as congruent with the surrounding premise (Krishna, 2013).

The service provider needs to understand the target group when designing the music for the environment. The generalized statements, such as pop music appeals only to younger people and older music is more appealing to older people, are partly true. One most likely prefers the music released when he was in his mid-twenties (Krishna, 2013). Music can also be a way of keeping certain groups out from the premises. For example, Abercrombie

and Fitch play loud pop music just slightly below the legal limit of 90 decibels to attract younger consumers and to drive away older ones, such as parents. Hence, they can preserve their young and cutting-edge brand image (Krishna, 2013). It is also a major marketing advantage for the company, and they even publish their song playlists on Spotify (Abercrombie 2020).

According to Beverland, Lim, Morrison, and Terziovski, music plays a role in creating consistent and even transformational experiences (Beverland, et al., 2006). They also stated that misfit music might cause confusion and eventually lead to shorter time stayed in-store or even leaving the store. Also, for consumers unaware of the brand, misfit music could result in store avoidance. In some cases, it might challenge the brands' genuineness which might result in status loss, decreasing financial capital, and a conflict with the values of the brand as well as deteriorate its sincerity and authenticity (Beverland, et al., 2006). Hence, music plays a vital role in every service provider's premises to create a desirable atmosphere. Among music, visual factors have a major influence on the atmosphere and the customer impressions as well as the overall experience.

The author will concentrate on the sounds on his product by focusing on the music played in the restaurant as well as increasing the sounds coming from the kitchen. The author will also encourage the waiters to be themselves: laugh, chat and even sing if they feel like it. The only sound in the restaurant should not be the music, although it plays a big part.

In the next chapter, the sense of vision is explained in-depth, and the author provides examples of visual stimulation in the service environment.

2.3.4 Sight

The sense of vision has major effects on the perception of products. For example, according to Joandrea Hoegg and Joseph W. Alba, the strength of the color in an orange juice affects the perceptions of the quality of the juice (Hoegg & Alba, 2007). Similarly, Zellner, Bartoli, and Eckard found that water that was flavored with lemon was evaluated differently when the water was colored yellow than when it was colored red (Zellner, et al., 1991). Thus, when the drink is colored with the same color as the fruit is perceived, it is evaluated as higher. Also, a panel of trained enologists in France colored white wine with red food coloring and gave the drink its specific red wine descriptions. When the mistake is shown, and the purple-colored drink has been flavored with cherry, there are few to no complaints (Morrot, et al., 2001).

A big part of marketing in general, especially sensory marketing, has focused recently on the sense of sight. Visual media, such as billboards, prints, and social media, has affected this majorly. It is partly due to the identifiable and memorable sensory signatures (Krishna, 2013). Also, *sensory imagery* has had a big influence on this phenomenon. For example, when one sees an advertisement of a sweater in a magazine, the visual image of the sweater can bring the feeling of softness to him. Similar to this, is when one smells a cookie, he can imagine its taste and texture in his mouth. It can even evoke memories of childhood baking sessions with his family. Major companies, such as Apple, have used sensory imagery in their products widely. Even the company's logo, an apple with a bite bitten from the upper right side and a leaf on top. It is recognizable even in other contexts to many people. Also, the product names have sensory imagery in them. iPod touch tells the consumers that it is used with the sense of touch, similar to the touch bar in the new MacBook Pro -computers and touch ID in older iPhones (Krishna, 2013).

Written text and descriptions also have a meaningful effect on the consumers. According to Rachel Herz and Julia von Clef, positive descriptions in the odor labels had better ratings compared to ones with negative descriptions. For example, when describing isovaleric – butyric acid as parmesan cheese, it resulted in positive emotions among the consumers. But when the same acid was described as vomit, the consumers wanted to escape from it, and they could not believe that it was the same odor (Herz & von Clef, 2001).

The perceived size of the product can affect customer evaluations. It is usually conveyed by qualitative labelings, such as medium, small, or large. One usually perceives a medium labeled product larger even though it might contain as much product as the one labeled as small. Krishna has called this phenomenon *guiltless gluttony*. It means that people most often take the opportunity to eat more without guilt if the product is labeled as small. Some companies have changed the size name of their products. For example, Starbucks changed their previous short, tall, and grande coffees to short, tall, grande, venti, and trenta. The names make the coffee seem more exotic and expensive. They also confuse the expectations on the product sizes, and the customer finds it hard to judge if venti coffee is too small.

It is under-investigated if, for example, ambient lighting affects moods, as one would assume. Also, do candlelight and dimmed lights affect the atmosphere in a romantic setting? (Meyers-Levy & Zhu, 2007). Or the layout of the premises? It is obvious for many that the effects are seen, but it is not yet investigated (Meyers-Levy & Zhu, 2008). It is also believed that colors affect moods, but according to Krishna, it is a common misconception. The issue with that idea is that the effects are more often cultural than physical. She gives

an example of pink being associated with baby girls and blue for baby boys. It is not a speculation of blue being a masculine color and pink being a feminine color, but rather a cultural phenomenon (Krishna, 2013). Colors are also perceived differently due to their wavelengths. The blue color has shorter wavelengths; hence it is perceived as calming and relaxing, whereas the red color has longer wavelengths, so it is perceived as exciting and stimulating (Krishna, 2013).

In a restaurant context, the design of the menu can affect the customer purchase behavior. The menu tells the customer the style, taste, and origins of the restaurant, as do the dishes as well. But the effects can be even greater (Kelson, 1994). The effect on the font used in the menu and the presentation of the prices can affect the sense of quality and luxury. (Fleming, 2013). Although the customer cannot order items he cannot see, it is arrogant to have the assumption that simply increasing the visual effects on the menu will affect the possibility of the customer ordering the item (Spence & Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014).

A customer spends on average three minutes looking at the menu, so the placement of the visual objects on the menu is rather greater than their amount. Notable font colors and sizes in addition to highlighting boxes and photographs might increase the distinctiveness of the items. However, according to Spence and Piqueras-Fiszman, the layout and the colors have a minor influence on the customer's purchases. The waiter is the one influencing the customer in a full-service *à la carte* restaurant accompanied and complemented by the menu (Spence & Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014).

There are so-called "sweet spots" on the menu where the customer will most frequently look at (Von Keitz, 1988). It is called the rule of primacy and recency (Miller, 1992; Ditmer & Griffin, 1994). It refers to one's ability to remember the first (primary) and last (recent) on the menu. The most common scan path suggested in the literature on menu design is shown in the figure 2 below. The desirable location of the chosen items on a menu that the restaurant owner or manager wants the customer to see are positions 1 (primacy), 7 (recency), and possibly 5, where one's eye gazes in the same location of the menu (Main, 1994). According to William Doefler, the area which people will most frequently focus on is anywhere in the upper right in a two-page menu, where the number 1 is located (McVety, et al., 2009).

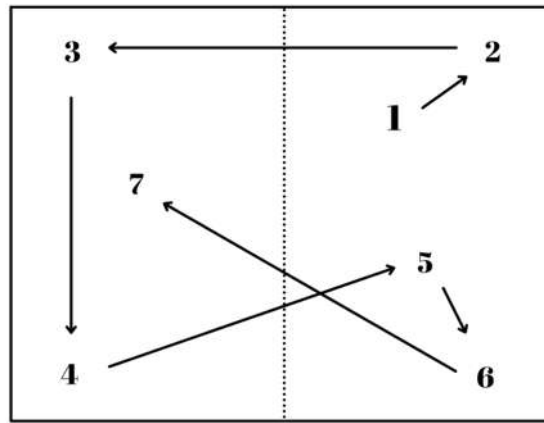


Figure 2. Two-page menu scan path (Adapted from Yang, 2012).

The visual appearance has a major impact on the next sense explained, the taste. The senses are also connected in the spoken language, for example, with the concept of “eye candy,” where something is visually appealing. It is also commonly said that vision is half of the taste.

The current visual state in the restaurant is modern but lacking identity. The premises are designed to fit most concepts with minor changes. Hence, authenticity nor the origin of the concept is not clearly seen in the décor. In the product, the author will concentrate on bringing more authenticity to the concept through vision and changing parts of the décor to more colorful and joyful items, such as blankets and pillows.

In the following chapter, the author gives examples of taste stimulation and goes further in detail with the importance of different tastes.

2.3.5 Taste

There are multiple factors on what makes a meal so appealing. The most common answer would be how it tastes. But does the taste for the consumer mean the bitterness, sweetness, sourness, saltiness, and the amount of umami in the food? Most likely, one is referring to all the senses, including the aroma and the appearance, when describing the pleasantness of the food (Krishna, 2013). Many restaurants have started to alter their food to please all the senses of the customer. For example, adding crispiness to the batter of the fried chicken, changing regular fries to curly fries, and adding auditory cues, such as “sizzling” to their dishes. The presentation of the dish is highly valued in more high-end restaurants, and the aromas, textures, colors, and even sounds of the dish are considered as important. Many famous chefs still claim that the look of the dish is secondary to the taste, but who would have the same appetite for eating a dish from a pan than from a plate? The proposition is ludicrous (Krishna, 2013).

When eating in a restaurant, all the components of the sensory perception are experienced almost simultaneously. Rather than thinking that the visual factors are substitutes for taste, it is better to see it as a component of the taste (Krishna, 2013). One might have learned in cooking school that the flavors of sweetness and saltiness are located in the front of the tongue, the sourness on the sides, and the bitterness in the back. That statement is a complete myth. There are no specific regions of the tongue that the tastes are located in. The taste buds are located all across the tongue and in the back of the mouth, as well as in your intestine. In addition to the four widely known tastes (sweet, sour, bitter, and salty), umami is the fifth, recently more known taste. The word comes from the Japanese adjective “umai” (美味い), which means “pleasant savory taste” or “delicious” (Lindemann, et al., 2002; Krishna, 2013). It is described as meaty or brothy, and it is caused by MSG (monosodium glutamate), a spice that is frequently used in Chinese cuisine (Krishna, 2013).

The smell is a crucial part of the sense of taste. This is because the vapors from the food pass to the olfactory mucosa (a sheath in the upper inset of the nose) through a passage at the back of one’s mouth (Krishna, 2013). If the scent component of the flavor is blocked, the food tastes significantly different or flavorless. Many of one’s favorite foods have pleasant smells and vice versa. Thus, it makes sense that we like the taste of the foods which smells we find appealing. However, there are exceptions, such as coffee. Most people find the smell of coffee highly appealing but do not fancy the taste (Krishna, 2013). In addition to smells, other senses influence the taste of the food majorly, such as what the food feels like (touch), what it sounds like (hearing), and of course, what it looks like (vision). When it comes to touch properties in the taste, wetness, crispiness, crunchiness, softness, and dryness are important factors. For example, we might find crunchy snack bars that are smooth, unpleasant, and crunchy peanut butter repulsive. In a study where consumers ate potato chips with headphones on their ears, the lack of the crunchy sound influenced the perception of the taste and the freshness of the chips. Hence, the expectations of the food influence our taste perceptions (Krishna, 2013).

Molecular gastronomy has grown to the phenomenon as it is over the years. The pioneer in the field is the already closed El Bulli in Catalonia, Spain. The phenomenon focuses on the chemical factors of the food to enhance the sensory experience. Many of the products served in the infamous El Bulli featured extraordinary shapes, chemical compositions, and temperatures. It is about playing with the colors, textures, sounds, smells, and tastes of the food unconventionally. For example, serving one dish entirely as liquid, or even as only smells that one breathes from a balloon. The dishes can also be amplified with sounds, as Heston Blumenthal does in his infamous restaurant The Fat Duck. A dessert

on one of the menus is called “sound of the sea,” and it is served with a large seashell that has earbuds attached where one can hear the actual sounds of the sea (Blumenthal, 2021). The possibilities are endless and only imagination is the limit when figuring out new, innovative ideas to stimulate the senses through food.

The ways of stimulating ones’ sense of taste are extensive. The importance of knowing how to use taste as a stimulus in experience creation is highly crucial. When all the senses are stimulated simultaneously, the possibility of creating a meaningful, even transformative experience increases significantly. The possibility of financial gain and positive brand awareness in creating experiences is yet to be widely understood in the restaurant industry in Finland.

In the next chapter, the author explains the phenomenon of synaesthesia, where all the senses are congenitally or intentionally mixed, and gives examples of the possibilities of using it in a restaurant environment.

2.4 Synaesthesia

According to Eleanor Hubbard and Vilayanur Ramachandran, synaesthesia is, in fact, a genuine sensory phenomenon (Ramachandran & Hubbard, 2001). There, one experiences specific distinctive sensory on imagining or perceiving a certain stimulus (Cytowic & Eagleman, 2009; Deroy, et al., 2013; Simner & Hubbard, 2013). Synaesthesia is associated particularly with composers, novelists, and painters. To name a few, Lady Gaga, Pharrell Williams, and Jean Sibelius claimed that they are synaesthetes (Brennan, 2014; Just, 2017; Kemp & Blakemore, 2006; Massy-Beresford, 2014). When one has synaesthesia, s/he, for example, experiences music notes and numbers and flavors in certain colors and sensations (Ramachandran & Hubbard, 2003).

Synaesthesia, also described as crossmodal correspondence or crossmodal similarity (defined as precise descriptions between different sensory experiences (Knoeferle, et al., 2015)) has inspired multiple chefs when creating their menus (Bertolli, 2003). Paul Bertolli demonstrated a synaesthesia-based menu in his book ‘Cooking by Hand: A Cookbook’ (Bertolli, 2003). However, while he talks about creating a menu that shows the pointiness of the shapes that the flavors of the dishes uncover (see figure 3), according to Charles Spence and Jozef Youssef, he does not mention synaesthesia precisely, and hence it is difficult to understand whether this shape-taste meal is a true example of synaesthesia or shape-taste crossmodal correspondence (Spence & Jozef, 2019).

The Shape of a Menu

*Four Types of House-Cured Sausages (Salame
Toscano, Genovese, Mortadella, Coppa di Testa)*

Bitter Lettuces

N.V. Lambrusco, Barbolini

~

Maccheroni al Sugo di Carne

1999 La Sagreta Rosso, Sicilia

~

Halibut with Fresh Porcini Mushrooms

1997 "Batar," Querciabella

~

Fricassee of Rabbit

1998 Chardonnay, "Kleinstejn," Santa Maddalena

~

Budino of Pears with Almonds

1997 Orvieto, "Calcaia," Barberani

Sometimes I think of a menu as having a graphic shape. This menu might look like this:



Figure 3. The shape of the menu (Bertolli, 2003)

In *The Shape of the Menu*, Bertolli demonstrates the imagined shape that matches the flavors on the menu. For example, the first dish includes house-cured sausages and bitter lettuces. It is paired with Lambrusco wine which is, according to Bertolli, an extremely sharp and pointy combination. One can see clearly how the shapes gradually become smoother when continuing through the menu. This could be associated with him being synaesthetic since he is seeing the flavors as shapes and demonstrates them visually on the menu (Spence & Deroy, 2013).

An example of a synaesthetic dish is creating four small liquid spheres that each represent one of the most common flavors (among the western diners): sweet, salty, sour, and bitter. All the bites were colored according to the color commonly associated with the flavor (sweet = red, sour = yellow, bitter = green & salty = blue). The idea of the dish was to demonstrate the associations between color and taste. The diners were asked to arrange the bites according to their perception of which they assumed tasted as sweet, bitter, salty, or sour. Due to the spherification, there were no olfactory cues to give any hints of the flavors. Then, they tasted each of the bites to find out if they were correct or not. For some, it was truly surprising to find out that the color they associated with the taste was different (Spence & Jozef, 2019).

Synaesthesia can be used in the customer experience concept in restaurant Más, but it acquires further planning and discussion if it suits the existing concept and the development the restaurant is aiming for. Synaesthesia is executed the easiest in menus where the entire base could be linked to it. Hence, the author will not use synaesthesia for the product but will keep it in mind for further development.

Synaesthesia has all the possibilities to create strong engrams that stay with the guest for a long time. In the next chapter, the engram is explained in detail, and different methods are presented.

2.5 Engram

Engram, also known as memory trace or neural substrates of memory (Sakaguchi & Hayashi, 2012), is the physical, unclear trace of memory in one's brain (Josselyn, et al., 2015). According to Richard Semon, it describes a neural substrate for recalling and storing memories. He also suggested that an experience triggers a group of neurons that process tenacious physical and chemical changes to become an engram (Josselyn & Tonegawa, 2020). According to Kathryn A. LaTour and Lewis P. Carbone, the memory that one has of an experience fades quickly, and it is feebler than initially thought. Therefore, the goal is to create many sub-experiences that will stay with the customer to create stiction, or "sticky," long-lasting memories that will enhance the overall experience. The authors believe that including a method of assessing customers' memory process would be a vital contribution in designing customer experiences (LaTour & Carbone, 2014).

Although the goal of a meaningful experience is for it to continue after the service ends, the knowledge of what goes into long-term memory is still minor (Landauer, 1986). Psychological research recommends that if the information is emotional, personally relevant, and vivid, it is likely to be remembered. Also, it states that the first and last impressions are critical (Cohen & Conway, 2007). According to Hanefors and Mossberg, experiences that one imagines as memorable are connected with joy, curiosity, surprise, and excitement (Hanefors & Mossberg, 2003).

Memory has major impacts on our emotions. Emotions influence how the world is perceived, how it is remembered, and which decisions are taken. Marcel Proust, a famous French author, describes in his book "Remembrance of Things Past" how he got a strong memory of his childhood when eating a madeleine cookie (Brosch, et al., 2013). This showcases how the senses impact our memory, as described in the chapters above. When one smells, touches, sees, tastes, and hears a certain stimulus, s/he can remember vivid memories from the past.

Hippocampus is implicated in the creation of new memories, emotions, and learning (Cherry, 2020). It is a significant neural region underlying memory processes. The hippocampus is located in the brain's medial temporal lobe, close to the ears. If one damages his/her hippocampus, s/he suffers from amnesia, or memory loss, where one is having trouble forming new memories and remembering old ones (Brosch, et al., 2013).

According to Broch et al., attention and perception are focused on emotionally pertinent information. A strong emotional response provokes physiological provocation, which leads to the insertion of certain memory traces (Brosch, et al., 2013). Emotionally appropriate events can benefit from stronger merging, which increases the likelihood of the event being remembered later. The distinctness of the memory that is emotionally important events is often taken as a sign of the memory being precise (Brosch, et al., 2013).

Long-time memory (LTM) is divided into three types based on the content: *semantic*, which is known as general knowledge; *episodic*, which means experiential knowledge; and *procedural*, which is for routines and skills. The episodic memory fades the quickest, but it is oddly the information that has the most influence on customer decisions (LaTour & Carbone, 2014). Therefore, a well-designed experience needs to be fade-resistant, and the factors of the experience need to be memorable and "sticky." If the ones designing the experiences recognize memorable and "sticky" clues that cause emotions, they can design services based on those factors to steer the customers' memory and learning during their experience (LaTour & Carbone, 2014).

According to Josselyn and Tonegawa, it is possible to manipulate memory encodings artificially to generate incorrect memories or to even create memories in mice without a sensory experience due to the recent advantages in engram research (Josselyn & Tonegawa, 2020).

The peak-end theory, created by a Nobel-Prize winner psychologist Daniel Kahneman, is based on the rule of remembering experiences by the most intense points (the peaks) or the final parts of the experience (Doll, 2020). There, one judges the experience based on how they felt during the peak or the highest point of the experience rather than the total average throughout the experience. Chip and Dan Heath suggest in their book "The Power of Moments: Why Certain Experiences Have Extraordinary Impact" that the peak moment requires evaluation (happiness, sensory pleasures & surprise), insight (eureka moments, sobering clarity), pride (achievement & courage), and connection (social moments), or at least one of them. The best experience is created when all of the elements

are present (Doll, 2020). According to Kahneman and Fredrickson, the length of the experience is insignificant on the judgment on unpleasant experience. This they call the *duration neglect* (Fredrickson & Kahneman, 1993).

What the customer remembers from the service experience and how long it lasts are one of the most important aspects to think about while designing experiences. The final goal is to leave engrams to the customers' memory through experiences. This enables the customer to remember the specific experience that stimulated all the senses and left a trace on the memory. It also strengthens brand awareness and satisfaction while influencing the neurological aspects.

In the customer experience enhancement, the author will focus on the first impression: what the customer sees, hears, smells, touches, and tastes first that sets the tone for the rest of the experience. Also, teaching something new to the customer can leave strong, long-lasting impressions that might carry for years and become habits. Giving the customer something to do, be it a new recipe of the house bread or his/her favorite dessert, or even providing them with a seed to plant a tree and teach them about global warming and deforestation. All of this might leave a positive memory engram that could stay for years to come.

In the following chapter, the author will introduce his framework for creating the product by using the given theory previously presented.

2.6 Own Framework

In the previous chapters, multiple different authors have provided information on the subject of enhancing customer experience through experience design and sensory perception. In this chapter, the author will demonstrate his own framework of the elements taken into consideration during the product development phase. The most relevant models picked from the theoretical framework are presented in the table below.

Table 1. Figure of the important models in this thesis (Lukander, 2021).

Source	Framework	Focus	Use
(Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2009)	Experience Pyramid	Experience elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individuality - Authenticity - Story - Multi-sensory perception - Contrast - Interaction 	Enhancing the customer experience using mostly the experience elements, focusing on multisensory perception, contrast, and authenticity.
(Sakaguchi & Hayashi, 2012; Josselyn, et al., 2015; Josselyn & Tonegawa, 2020; LaTour & Carbone, 2014; Landauer, 1986; Cohen & Conway, 2007; Hanefors & Mossberg, 2003; Brosch, et al., 2013; Cherry, 2020; Doll, 2020; Fredrickson & Kahneman, 1993; Spence & Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014; Edwards & Meiselman, 2005; Rowley, 2011; Engle, 2004; McDermott, 2013)	Experience Design, Engram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engram - Employee Importance 	Implementation for the experience as the most crucial feature, including the experience pyramid.

The author will use the theories presented above in his product shown in the appendix 1. The models picked to the table allows the designer to have an in-depth understanding on all the small parts necessary to make the experience as meaningful as possible. Hence, the author sees the models as the most important ones in enhancing the customer experience.

In the following chapter the author will move from the theoretical framework to the background and implementation of the project. He also presents the methods used in the primary research and the outcomes of the conducted interviews and questionnaire.

3 The Background and Implementation of the Project

In the following chapters, the author will explain the background and starting point of the project, which is followed by the project process. Afterward, he will explain the methods used for the empirical part. Finally, he will assess the limitations and risks in the project and evaluate his work.

3.1 Background of The Project

Restaurant Más opened in November 2017 as the first unique restaurant of Scandic Finland. The concept was created by the food and beverage manager Elina Korkka and the executive chef Markus Lamberg. They visited Spain and got inspired by the relaxed social atmosphere and the dining culture, which is quite the opposite of the Finnish one. They started creating a concept that was something new and innovative that would bring new ways of dining to Helsinki, social dining where most of the food is meant to be shared. Exceptionally from other hotel restaurants, they wanted to promote Más as an individual restaurant without the hotel context. One could not see from the restaurant's design that it is a part of the hotel and a large hotel chain.

To differentiate from the couple tapas restaurants already existing in Helsinki, the management team wanted to bring Scandinavia to the concept through the ingredients. The first menu included ingredients such as cebs, chanterelles, and daikon. The combinations on the dishes were innovative as they used espresso foam with a lamb chop and fried vanilla milk. Also, cocktails were designed with Scandinavian flavors in mind by using blueberries and Finnish spirits. Stories were told to the guests about the origins of the food and how it was traditionally made. There was the reservation name assembled on the table with wooden blocks, cutlery on a wooden box made by a carpenter, and the cocktail menu in a small pouch with each cocktail presented on one small card. When the guests were finished and paid, they were given a signature postcard which they could write to themselves, a relative, or a friend, and the restaurant would send it for them.

It has been now over three years since restaurant Más was opened. The concept has stayed the same, although the parts giving the experience have been stranded, such as the postcard and the stories. The menu has changed three times a year, and the food style has changed into more traditional Spanish cuisine. The customers still love the restaurant, its food, and the atmosphere, but some changes need to be made. New customers need to be drawn to the restaurant, and that acquires changes in the concept to bring

excitement to them. As Pine & Gilmore (2019) said, basic services are not enough anymore (Pine & Gilmore, 2019). The restaurant needs to evolve with the trends to keep the interest awake and to maintain the customer base (Weber, 2015).

As mentioned earlier, restaurant Más was the first unique restaurant in Scandic Finland, and the buzz was huge. The restaurant was advertised on public transport, and it had multiple articles on news platforms after the opening, such as Helsingin Sanomat and Iltalehti. The first months up to a year were busy, and the restaurant was full many days a week. However, the numbers started gradually decreasing, as usual in the industry, if the buzz is not kept on constantly. The restaurant was still occasionally full, especially during the Christmas season and in the summer. Finally, Covid-19 caused an immense lack of customers, which was the reality for most of the restaurants. There, the ones who had a great social media strategy, focused on advertising to the younger generation and making the restaurant trendy, were the ones succeeding.

Restaurant Más had never had its social media, until recently a Facebook page was made. However, Instagram is the most important social media channel for the restaurant to advertise themselves, and the author believes the possibilities for Más to succeed with Instagram advertisement are great due to the ambiance that the restaurant has. Many guests are still surprised that the restaurant exists since they have never heard of it.

The author has been working in the restaurant for over two years and has seen the original concept and the experience fading. Hence, he felt the urge to enhance the current situation and planned the thesis topic according to the needed changes in the restaurant. In the fall of 2020, the author brought up the idea to develop the restaurant concept further to the food and beverage manager Elina Korkka. They had a brief “brainstorming” conversation on the subject and decided that the author will conduct the thesis based on the idea. During the process of writing the thesis, the author decided to direct the thesis more towards customer experience since it is the base for the entire concept.

3.2 Project Management

The thesis project started originally in autumn 2020, when the author planned his thesis topic and wrote the outline where the topic and the objectives were first introduced. He also got the first touch on writing theses. The project continued in February 2021, when the author had his first meeting with the thesis supervisor. They discussed the topic, and the author was assigned to create the table of contents as the first step. After finalizing the

table of contents, he got to start the writing process with the introduction that includes objectives, company information as well as methodology in brief, key definitions, and the thesis structure. This took three weeks in total.

After finalizing the first header, the author transitioned into the theoretical framework. He chose to start by searching for books from HH Finna on the topic of sensory perception and experience design. He found multiple books suitable for the topic from the library at Haaga campus. Some books also were from Laurea University of Applied Sciences, which were sent to Haaga campus. The author started to read the books one by one and collect important information on a separate document. He went through all the books which resulted in already comprehensive base for the theoretical framework. He started the process of writing all the material in his own words, which took him five weeks from starting the reading to the finalized framework. He also supported the collected offline data with dozens of online articles and websites. This process resulted in 25 pages of in-depth research on the thesis topic.

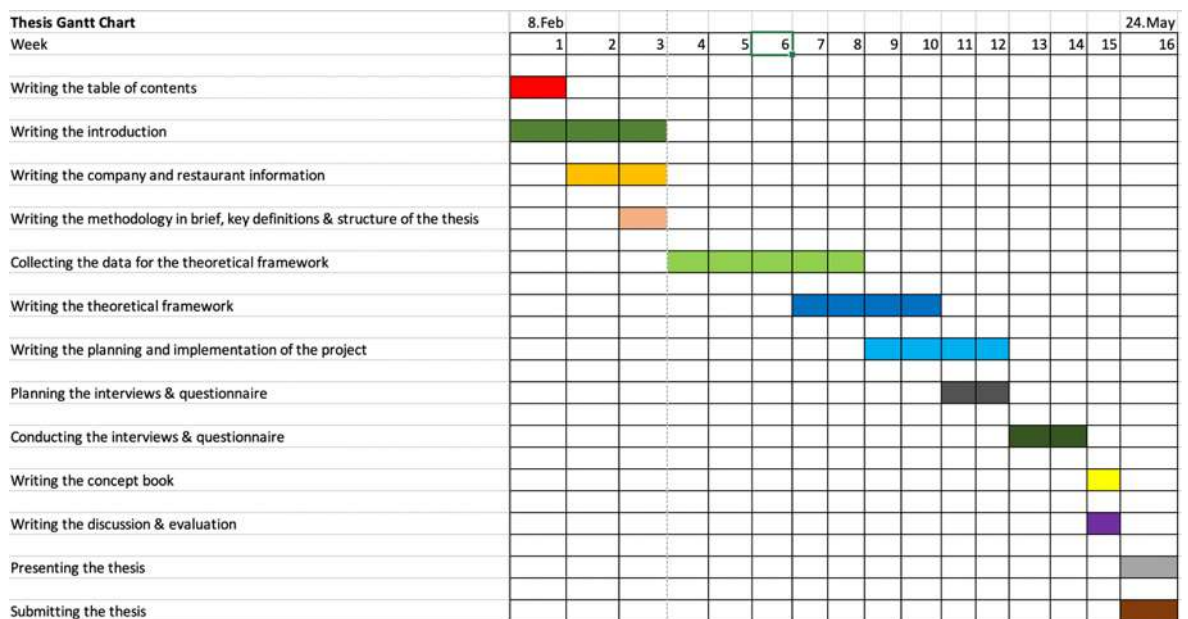
After finishing the theoretical framework, the author moved to the empirical part, that includes the primary research, background of the project, limitations, and risks, as well as the author's own evaluation. He started with writing about the background of the project and how he came up with the topic of the thesis. Afterwards, he designed the primary research, which includes the quantitative semi-structured questionnaire for the employees and the qualitative semi-structured interviews for the hotel's management team. He gave an insight on all the primary research methods and explained them in theory. He conducted the three interviews and sent the questionnaire where he received seven answers, which equals as the whole employee team of restaurant Más. Secondly the author introduced how he collected the data and who the research was conducted for. Lastly, he analysed the data and presented the limitations and risks in the project and gave his own evaluation on the project's outcome. This whole process of writing the empirical part took six weeks in total.

Afterwards, came the most important part of the thesis, designing the product for the commissioner. The process of designing the product was fast and simple for the author since he got his own initiative during the writing process of the theory. He also included the employees' and the management team's initiatives to the product as the secondary source after the theoretical framework. The author designed 15 pages of recommendations for the commissioning company on how they could enhance the customer experience, focusing on sensory perception and the brand levels and the customer experience of the experience pyramid. The writing process of the product took the author one week in total.

The final part of the thesis, the discussion and evaluation, was written lastly. The author reflected the whole process of writing the thesis and how well he managed in his own opinion. He also assessed the learning outcomes that occurred during the writing process. He received comments on the designed product from the commissioning company, which are included in the evaluation.

The whole writing process is seen also visually on figure 4 presented below.

Figure 4. Thesis Gantt Chart



3.3 Methodology

As mentioned in chapter 1.3, the main methods in this thesis are literature review, qualitative semi-structured interview for the management team of Scandic Simonkenttä, and a qualitative semi-structured questionnaire for the employees of restaurant Más.

In the empirical part of this thesis, the author conducted three qualitative semi-structured interviews for the management team of Scandic Simonkenttä. The interviewees include the general manager Jouko Puranen, the hotel and food and beverage manager Anni Ikonen, and the executive chef Heini Onnela. In the interviews, the author aimed to get their initiatives to the enhanced customer experience by including questions of each physical step of the experience pyramid and a more in-depth approach to sensory perception. The author also asked them about their overall approach to experience creation and how dedicated they are to improving that specific feature in the restaurant.

The quantitative semi-structured questionnaire includes seven employees of restaurant Más, four of them are servers, and three are cooks. The questions focused on the practical side of experience creation, focusing on the physical levels of the experience pyramid. The aim of the questionnaire was to get also the initiative of the employees for the thesis since they are in the key role for creating the experience.

The secondary research method, a literature review, was conducted with thorough research on the topics. The author used multiple books and dozens of online articles to create detailed, in-depth research on multisensory perception and experience creation. The research was used as a base for the interviews, questionnaires, and the final product.

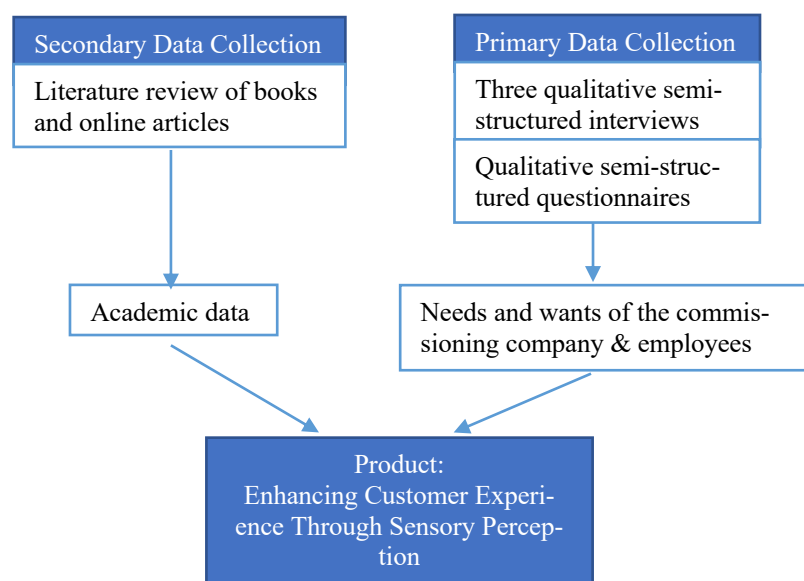


Figure 5. The data collection process for the thesis

3.3.1 Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview

Semi-structured, or semi-standardized interviews are consisted of many key questions that help defining the research topic. It also gives the possibility for the interviewee to elaborate on important information (Gill, et al., 2008). Qualitative research allows the researcher to examine one's experiences by using research methods such as focus group discussion, in-depth interviews, and observation. However, it is more than applying qualitative methods. There, one can understand how, why, and what the process and the influence of context is. The interviewees are selected purposely to benefit the research being made (Hennink, et al., 2020). The semi-structured interview gives a more flexible approach to the process of interviewing. The interviewer can practise less structured questioning. The interviewee may have the control over the process allowing him/her to give more in-depth answers. It permits him/her to tell personal stories (Frances, et al., 2009).

The author used qualitative research method to collect as in-depth data as possible and use the interviewees personal experience to create the product. The limitation for the interview was the schedules of the participants and the interviewer and finding suitable times for the interview, which took longer than anticipated.

In the following chapter the author gives insights to the method of quantitative semi-structured questionnaire and reasoning why he decided to use the specific method.

3.3.2 Quantitative Semi-Structured Questionnaire

Quantitative data collection methods are often used to measure occurrences. Questions such as how many and how often are usually asked in quantitative data collections. They are often based on mathematical calculations and numbers. Findings from quantitative data collections are easily summarized and compared (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Open question questionnaires often produced unexpected results, which may make the research more valuable. The data analyse is however more difficult when compared to multiple choice questions (Business Research Methodology, 2021). Open questions give the possibility to allow people to express how they feel about the question. The answers are often more detailed and in-depth, and the respondent can elaborate on their answers. However, the data collection is time-consuming and the risk of respondent not answering the questions is evident. Also, the process of analysing the data is long and often coding is needed to put the answers into categories (Simply Psychology, 2018).

The author used quantitative semi-structured questionnaire as a research method to create a private brainstorming session. He used open questions to get the best ideas and understand what the employees wished from the customer experience. Limitations for the questionnaire containing open questions was the participant's willingness to answer the given questions.

In the following chapter the author explains the data collection process and the reasoning behind the interviewee selection.

3.3.3 Data Collection

The author organized individual interviews for the management team of Scandic Simonkenttä. The team includes the general manager Jouko Puranen, hotel and food and beverage manager Anni Ikonen and the executive chef Heini Onnela. The interviews were held at Scandic Simonkenttä on separate days during early May. The author recorded all

the interviews and collected the most important factors from each of the interviews. The product was based on the author's secondary research method, the quantitative questionnaire, and the qualitative interviews.

The author decided to use partly the same questions for the questionnaire as he did for the interviews. The dimensions collected from the literature review served as the base for the questions. He decided to use only the interviews' practical questions, which included the brand levels and customer experience from the experience pyramid. The meaning behind the chosen questions was to get the ideas of the ones executing the experience in the restaurant, which might help them implementing the new recommendations better. The questionnaire can be found in appendix 2.

The author created the quantitative semi-structured interview on Webropol with open questions to get the employees' initiatives involved in product creation. The questionnaire included 13 questions about the levels and elements of the experience pyramid and sensory perception. The author also wanted to know the current state of the concept awareness by asking them to define the concept in a few words. The author approached the participants online with the link to the questionnaire. He gave the participants a week to answer the questionnaire, which he closed after all the answers were given. Open questions are often associated with qualitative questionnaires. Still, since all employees were involved in answering the questions and the answers were compared and summarized, the author decided to shift the method towards quantitative research.

The challenge in conducting the questionnaire was getting the answers during the given time. The author planned to make the questionnaire public for one week, but instead receiving the answers took nearly twice the time anticipated. However, the author managed to collect data from all the employees of restaurant Más, as he aimed to. The understanding of the concepts for the participants could have been better. The author made as easily understandable questions as possible, but some of the terms seemed unclear for the participants. Gladly, the author received the wanted information from the questionnaire and moved to design the product for the commissioning company.

In the following chapter the author analyses the data and introduces the results from the primary research.

3.3.4 Data Analysis and Results

The data from the qualitative semi-structured interviews and the quantitative semi-structured questionnaire is analysed by comparing the answers and finding similarities. The most significant and often used answers are used to support the created product.

For the quantitative semi-structured questionnaire, the author received seven answers, which equals all the employees currently working in restaurant Más. Some of the answers were more in-depth as some were briefer. However, the author got an in-depth understanding of the current state of the restaurant and the aims of what should be improved. The answers were similar in many questions, which brought up the understanding of the cohesion to the views of improvement.

When asking about the individuality in the restaurant, many answers included the wooden blocks used on the table to mark the reservation by their last name and chatting with the guests to find their preferences and using them as an advantage on the service. Also, calling the guest by his/her first name was a factor that was present in multiple questions. When asking the participants about authenticity, it was clear that according to most of the answers the current state of the restaurant is not authentic. The menu is the closest to authenticity, but the décor and the milieu was rated as ordinary and non-authentic. According to some of the answers, the “sobremesa” -style (the time that a family or a group spends after a meal sitting on the table chatting with a cup of coffee or a drink (Perez, 2010)) is missing from the restaurant, which was aimed for in the original concept. The menu was said to be mostly authentic. However, one answer pointed out that it includes American burgers, Italian salads, and Finnish mash potatoes. Therefore, the author assumes that more defined profiling is wanted in the future. To bring more authenticity to the restaurant, most participants wanted to bring the food closer to authentic Spanish cuisine and focus on the tapas. Also, dropping most of the hotel necessities from the menu was suggested. One participant saw the idea of “everything for everyone” being a disadvantage to the concept.

All the participants answered that there was no story in the restaurant’s concept. However, all the participants saw the advantage of the stories bringing more experiences to the guests. When asking them about multi-sensory perception, the first sense that came to their minds was smell. Also taste, sounds and touch were mentioned and the holistic stimulation of all the senses. Proposals for the sense stimulation were, for example, the smell of the food, music choice and eating with your hands.

All the participants see the contrast in the restaurant, but it is not defined well enough. The recommendations for adding contrasts included braver flavor combinations, more authentic dishes, and embracing the “sobremesa” culture. Also, enhancing the overall experience and making changes to the décor were brought up. The participants felt that apart from the fundamental interaction in a restaurant, there was no added interaction. They felt that the kitchen could be more involved in the restaurant with the cooks chatting with the guest and visiting the tables more often. Also, getting the guests to participate in the experience by challenging them to think about the ways of pairing food and drink and the best ways for them to eat the dish. Also, the interaction on social media and its importance was mentioned in the proposals. In the final question, the participants were able to give any recommendations they wanted to the product. One brought up the fundamental of happy worker equals happy customer. It is the obvious conclusion for the whole experience enhancement. If the worker is not dedicated and taken care of, the experience is less successful.

As a conclusion of the data analysis, there are many features that should be enhanced and developed to ensure a good experience. Defining and strengthening sensory aspects plays a key role in the experience which is ultimately seen in the brand awareness. Playing music that suits the concept, defining the scents in the restaurant and enhancing the visual state of the milieu brings value to the brand and memorable experiences to the guests. It is clearly seen how much the employees care for the concept and the restaurant and want it to succeed. It makes the whole development process easier when the employees are involved in the process by helping the ideation and executing their own ideas.

3.4 Limitations and Risks

The first limitation of this thesis is its applicability since the product, and its proposals are made the restaurant concept in mind. All the proposals might not work in all the restaurants. However, the literature research is universal, and it can be employed in most restaurants and other companies.

The second limitation is the personal relation to the commissioning company. The author will be employed by the company through the thesis process, which might unconsciously affect the objectivity of the thesis. Due to the previous work at the company and the industry, certain assumptions and opinions may have been already established and difficult to discard. However, all the possible attempts will be made to ensure the best possible product. The created product not being tested creates a risk on the successfulness and workability. Also, the author does not know who will apply the product and how it will be applied.

Experience design is in a key element in the product. It is a factor that is widely unknown and difficult to execute without proper knowledge. Therefore, the risk of the commissioner not being aware of experience design is evident. There were limitations on the product creation due to the pandemic and the restaurant being closed. Therefore, the author changed the topic of the thesis from concept development to enhancing customer experience. Some of the topics in this thesis are difficult to measure, such as engram. The risk of creating features to strengthen the engram but not being able to measure the successfulness is evident. Lastly, the author aimed to execute a workshop for the restaurant employees to get their initiatives. However, due to the pandemic, most employees are laid off, so he shifted the research method to a quantitative questionnaire created in Webropol.

3.5 Evaluation

The aim to enhance the customer experience focusing on sensory perception is fulfilled. The author created the product to be as easily executed as possible. No major investments need to be made to implement the product, but rather small changes in the décor and design of the milieu. Also, the senses are easily implemented to the concept as they are based on existing products and ingredients used in the kitchen and the bar. However, to create olfactory stimulation through ambient scent a small investment needs to be made by purchasing scent dispenser(s) to distribute the odour to the space. Also, making or ordering a new music playlist may require some investment.

The objectives of the thesis were reached in theory, although gaining brand awareness is only seen in long-run. The author managed to enhance the customer experience theoretically, and believes it is also possible to execute by the commissioning company in the restaurant Más. The recommendations on how to use sensory perception in the concept as well as enhance the overall experience are tangible and possible to implement. However, the practical evaluation of the successfulness of the product is left for the commissioning company to execute.

The author kept the planned timetable during the thesis process. The theoretical framework was executed as planned and the depth was reached due to the various books and online articles used to gather the information. The primary research was changed in the middle of the process due to the current situation in the restaurant field. Executing the planned workshop for the employees was not manageable and the author had to change the method to quantitative semi-structured questionnaire. Also, conducting interviews was tolerably delayed due to structural changes in the management team of the hotel. However, the outcomes of the interviews and the questionnaire were successful and helpful for creating the product.

The author's expectations of the product were immensely high in the beginning of the process. Therefore, when concept development was changed into enhancing customer experience, it affected the author's impressions of the product. However, according to the plan, the finished product was made including the employees and the management team's proposals. Hence, the author's expectations were fulfilled.

In the product, the author gives recommendations to the commissioning company on enhancing the customer experience. In order to implement the given recommendations, the commissioner should create an accurate timetable for the project and implement proper project management.

The commissioner gave the author feedback from the designed product. They highly appreciated the visual state of the product and the practical, easily executed recommendations. They were happy that the product was made according to the interviews conducted for the management team. They also mentioned that they will start the enhancement process in fall 2021 with the help of the author's product. Moreover, the commissioner stated that they would want the author's help in the process. Overall, they felt that the product was great and appreciated the topic that was original and something that they should aim for in the entirety of the service concept.

4 Discussion

In the following chapters, the author presents the thesis process in depth by showing visual examples of the process progress. He also presents the learning outcomes gained from the whole process of the thesis, including designing the product.

4.1 Thesis Process

The thesis process was a great challenge for the author. Academic writing was familiar for him, however not in this extent. The process of collecting the data and writing the theoretical framework took longer than he anticipated and the level and needed depth of the writing surprised him. What took the longest for the author was writing the theory from the collected data. Also, referencing and the number of them being used was challenging and taught him many lessons.

Moreover, conducting and designing the primary research, e.g., the interviews, was more demanding than anticipated. Also, deciding on the method used for the primary research was surprisingly difficult. However, he managed to get great results from the research, and it had major benefits on designing the product.

The author got tremendous help from the thesis supervisor, who helped him during the whole process. The numerous questions asked from the supervisor were always answered with great advice. The number of meetings held with her gave the author immense help and confidence in the writing process. The author feels that he could have not executed the thesis as well without the help and the courtesy of the supervisor.

4.2 Learning Outcomes

The author defined his objectives not only through the commissioning company's wishes but also from his personal interest in enhancing the customer experience and developing the restaurant's image to gain more visibility. The original idea to develop the restaurant's concept came from the author himself out of the desire to bring the restaurant back to the map. The author also had significant learning from the topic itself. Customer experience and sensory perception were familiar topics on a large scale, but the author gained depth through the literature review and expanded his knowledge to another level. Also, engram and synaesthesia were nearly unfamiliar topics. The research gave a more in-depth view of an engram that will help him majorly in his future career. Synaesthesia was a whole new topic that excited the author. However, it was not possible to use it on a large scale in his product.

One of the most significant learning curves was in academic writing and referencing. Writing, in general, was familiar from the years spent in the university of Applied Sciences. However, the number of new rules in writing and ways of referencing and source debating came as a surprise. Moreover, writing in English was familiar, but the scale of grammar and practices taught him a lot. Secondly, research methods were a factor that was not widely used in the given education. Designing interviews and questionnaires gave the author an important lesson and may help him in his future career. Lastly, conducting interviews was a new skill gained from the thesis process that will benefit the future. Analysing the collected research data was also a new and valuable skill gained.

The whole thesis process and the research topic will benefit the author with his desired future career in designing concepts and customer experiences. Therefore, personal growth was the biggest gain from the process, and it will have a long-lasting impact.

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Bachelor's Thesis

Enhancing Customer Experience Through Sensory Perception

Practical Handbook



Case Restaurant Más

Arttu Lukander





This handbook will give recommendations and tangible examples of how restaurant Más should enhance their customer experience. The experience pyramid and sensory perception are used as the essential guidelines in giving the recommendations. The initiatives of the employees and the hotel's management team are taken into consideration based on the interviews and questionnaire.



Experience Design

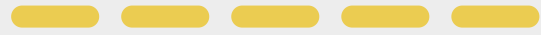
Story

There is no defined story in the current concept of restaurant Más. There was storytelling in the original concept, but the employees did not really keep it alive since it was not original. In the context of Más, the story would be created the easiest through food products. Where the flavors and the style of the food originates, how the restaurant wanted to make it with their own twist and how they want to bring the Spanish dining culture to Finland.

Also, the stories should be brought back to the concept through collaborating with Spanish producers and including their stories in the product. For example, wine producers have great stories on the history of the winery and how the wine was originally made. There should be special theme nights once a month where different producers and menu entires would be introduced.



Contrast



The contrast is already present in the concept through the food. Only a few make tapas at home. Other features should be enhanced. The restaurant would achieve the contrast to ordinary life by shifting the focus towards more traditional authentic tapas restaurant. Bringing in more colors, textures and changing the music into more traditional, yet unrecognizable music. The focus on customer experience helps to set to contrast to one's everyday life. Creating flavors that one would not make at home. Dimming the lights and adding more candles during the winter and flowers in summertime. Creating a whole different world when one steps through the door with ambient scent and the scents coming from the kitchen. Hearing the authentic music and people chatting and laughing. Creating an ambiance that one wants to enter over and over again.

Focusing on embracing the sobremesa -dining style would give contrast to the other restaurants, where one is served with one starter, one main course, and one dessert.

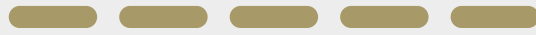
Recommending sharing food and filling the table with multiple dishes. Sharing multiple tapas as a starter, sharing half a rotisserie chicken as the main course paired with patatas bravas and ending the night rather with a cocktail, than a cup of coffee.



Also, focusing a part of the flavors to Portugal, as the concept of the restaurant is Iberian. Ingredients such piri piri, cinnamon, and cloves could be used to bring Portuguese flavors to the menu. These flavors should be added to the story of the restaurant as a key factor in the concept. Also, the meaning of Iberia should be told to the guests, since many do not know what it means. Associating Iberia only as Spain would give a possibility of teaching the guests the meaning behind the concept.

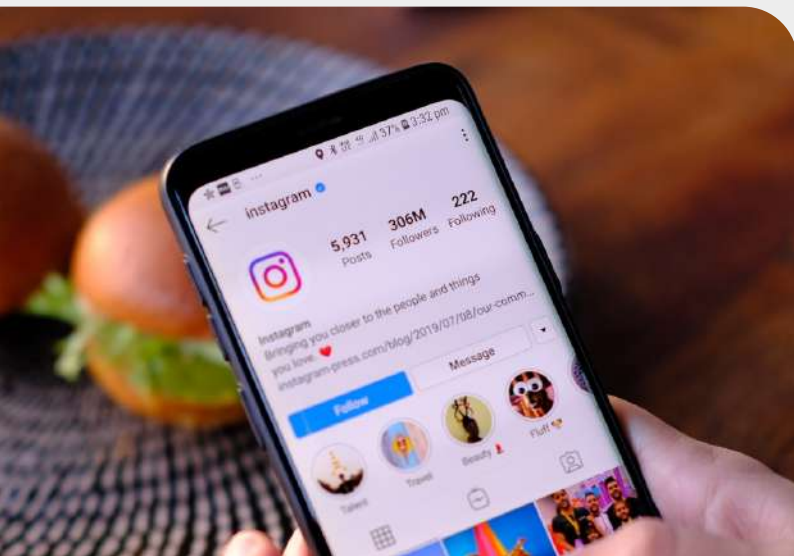


Interaction



The base of the restaurant concept is naturally interactive. Therefore, the restaurant should focus on online interaction pre-and post-dinner. The experience should always begin before entering the restaurant door. Before the guest arrives, it would be beneficial to send a pre-experience email or other format in order to ensure a holistic experience. However, the current booking platform allows only to send one specific type of email that cannot really be altered. Hence, the author would recommend using a different platform, if possible.

The pre-experience material should be congruent to the concept, visual to awake interest, and also informative concerning the upcoming dinner. The post-experience should be sent to the guest who reserved the table after leaving the restaurant. It should be similar to the pre-experience but rather assuring them to return to the restaurant as a guest.





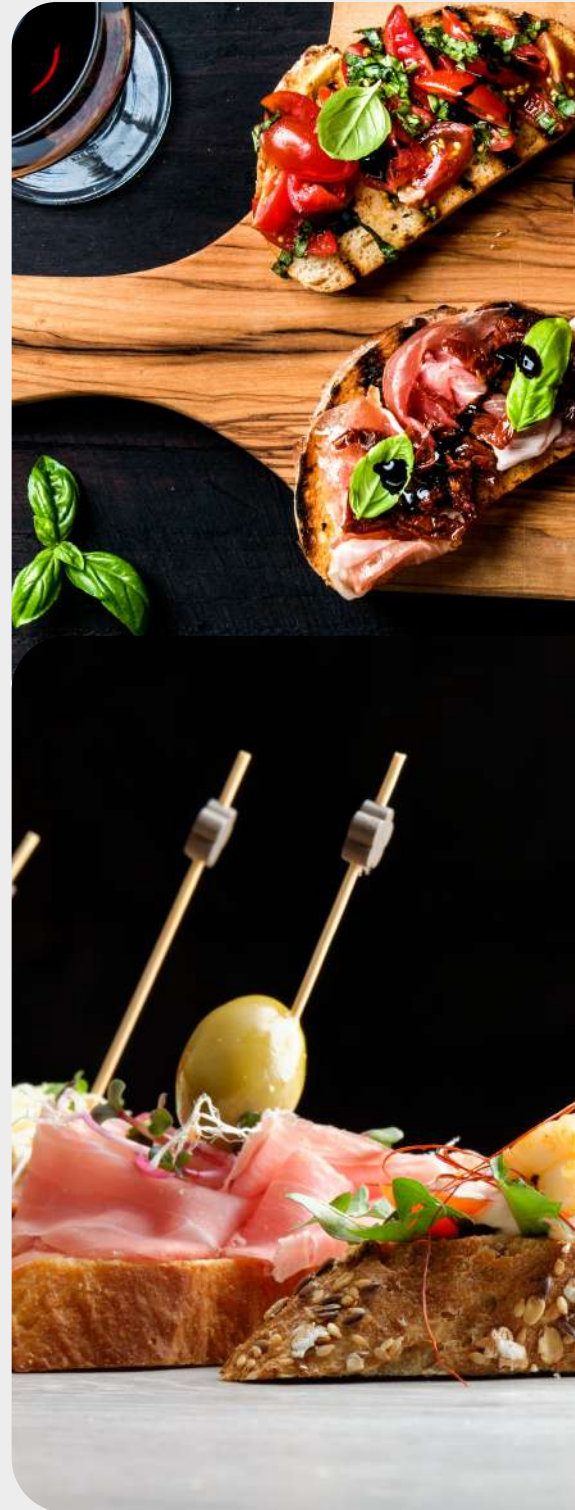
The interaction should be constant on social media, especially on Instagram. Changing messages with the followers, organizing competitions, and sharing posts. Currently, restaurant Más has close to no social media visibility. It should be changed in order to increase brand visibility.

In the restaurant, the interaction should be relaxed, familiar, and personal. Calling the guests by their name is a great way for them to feel at home. However, not all guests like to be recognized by their names, so the waiter should be able to read the customer accordingly. The guest should be participated in the experience by not giving all the answers on a silver platter. The guest can sometimes think what the best way for him/her is to eat the dish. For example, not giving cutlery to the tapas that can be clearly eaten with your fingers. If the guest needs cutlery, s/he will ask for them. This would also be a learning curve for some guests who dislike eating with their fingers.

Authenticity

According to the interviews and questionnaire, the concept of the restaurant Más is lacking authenticity and innovation. The food product has changed over the years towards more authentic Spanish cuisine, but there are still factors that could be enhanced. Focusing on tapas is the best way to enhance the food product. Bringing more authentic Spanish flavors to the menu through small bites. The mandatory hotel necessities should be dropped or changed to fit the concept. Burger, for example, should be on the room service menu or changed into tapas size sliders, which would bring a new twist to the beloved product.

All tapas should have the same price and combinations should be recommended and sold at a cheaper price. There should be larger tapas sets or “menus” with a set price. These will be shared on the table with the guests. Also, wine and beer packages should be sold to the guests to pair with the food. It would bring more flavor combinations to the guests as well as increase the average cost per seat.





The décor should be shifted towards more authentic Spanish décor.

There should be more colors, such as toned reds, oranges, yellows, and blues to bring more liveliness to the milieu. These will be added by changing the curtains around the big round tables and changing the furs on the armchairs to colorful blankets. Also, adding pillows to the sofas and the armchairs as well as bringing flowers or colorful candles to the dining tables.

The sobremesa culture is a crucial factor in the original concept. However, it is not embraced enough. The menu should include shared food, such as tapas and large main courses, which the guests can share on the table. Real sobremesa culture acquires plenty of time for the dinner. However, it is not a financially stable solution to let the guests dine as long as they want. Therefore, the dinner time should be around 3 hours, where the guests can still enjoy the food and the company with no hurry, and the restaurant can have better seat turnover.

Individuality

Individuality is essential in the concept of Más. The key factor in the service concept is that the waiters are all individual characters. They can laugh, sing and dance during the service if they want. They are in the key role of making the experience individual. It all comes down to the commitment of the waiters and how well the employer and managers treat them. The most important person for the company is the worker since if the worker is happy, s/he makes sure the guest is happy.

Ensuring that every guest gets individual service is essential in the experience creation. Surprising the guest in their special occasions and always doing the service with a twist. Letting the guest know s/he is appreciated and wanted as our guest. Having small talk with the guests during the service and making them feel welcomed and like a personal guest of the waiter. Reading the guest and recommending dishes and drinks according to their needs, not the price of the product.



Sensory Perception

2.1 Smell

To stimulate the olfaction, the smell should come from multiple places. The author would recommend creating an ambient scent to the restaurant that could be distributed by installing scent dispensers around the restaurant. The scent should be subtle, unrecognizable, yet noticeable. The scent of orange flowers mixed with a hint of smoke or another rustic scent would suit the brand and bring authenticity to the milieu.

Other scents should be distributed to the guest through the food and drink product. Grating citrus zest on top of a dish brings beautiful, strong scents to the customer. Spraying rose water or orange flower water on top of a dish creates a similar added scent, which should be used in desserts as well as cocktails. Also, squeezing the natural oils from a citrus zest on top of a cocktail brings out similar scents to the drink. Including herbs in the dishes and strengthening their scents by rubbing or beating the herb leaves gives a subtle yet noticeable smell to the dish or a drink.



2.2 Touch

The biggest element of touch the author received from the interview and the questionnaire was embracing eating with your hands. It is an authentic way of eating tapas, and it gives the guest new textures and materials to feel with their fingers. Hence, the author would recommend excluding the cutlery box from the dining table and bringing them to the guest by request

Changing the menu format was one factor that was brought up in the interview. Changing the menu to small menu cards where one dish is one individual card. All the cards would be placed in small fabric bags, separating tapas, main courses, and desserts in different bags. The idea came from the cocktail bags that have been a hit in restaurant Más. Hence, making the menu and cocktail bags as a vital part of the concept would strengthen the brand and make the experience more memorable.

Bringing more textures to the milieu makes the experience more interesting. Changing the texture of the napkins and bringing more pillows and blankets to the space. There should be more touch stimulation when thinking about the texture of the glasses, cutlery, and plates. The cutlery should be changed, for example, to ones with wooden handles. The water glasses already have a special texture with an angular shape, but they should be changed to more authentic ones with different colors.



2.3 Sound

The biggest factor when focusing on the sound is obviously music. It plays a vital role in a restaurant concept and can make or break the customer experience. Therefore, the author would recommend changing the music played in the restaurant. It should be changed the concept in mind. To ensure a relaxed atmosphere, the music should be more up-tempo, however not fast-paced. The most important factor when choosing the music is the vibe. How the guest feels when listening to the music. Does it make him/her eat faster, focus on the lyrics, or sleepy? Neither of these is the desired outcome. Focusing on instrumental music that cannot be easily recognized makes the ambiance better and lets the guest focus on the food, service, and good company.

Another sound feature that should be focused on is the overall noises around the restaurant. The murmur of the other guests and the servers, the cooking sounds from the kitchen and the lively laughter of the groups enjoying themselves. This should be embraced in order to create the desired atmosphere.



2.4 Sight

The topic that was clearly the most important among the questionnaire's answers on the sense of vision was colors. Authentic colors, textures and décor enhances the overall atmosphere. Adding more freshness to the milieu through hints of colors, such as orange, yellow, red, and blue. Also including colors through food; the dishes should be as colorful as possible and there should be fruit baskets in the bar visually present to the guests. The plating of the food should be surprising and unconventional. There should be flowers and herbs used in the dishes as well as in the cocktails.

The uniforms of the servers should be picked according to the concept. Relaxed, lively concept requires relaxed uniforms, such as a black t-shirt with the restaurant logo, a long gray apron, black jeans, and comfortable shoes.





2.5 Taste

Taste is the most obvious sense when it comes to a restaurant concept. The food needs to be appropriate to the concept, high-quality ingredients should be used, and the presentation should be appealing. The food product is already great in Más, but the concentration should be on surprising flavor combinations. Simple ingredients paired in a surprising way will create a wow effect for the guests. Also, focusing on bringing and enhancing different textures of the dish. Each plate should have something crunchy, soft, and firm.

Multiple flavors should be used in the dishes as much as possible. Balancing the saltiness with sweetness and creaminess with bitterness, bringing more umami to the flavors, maybe also as a separate component. Adding the flavors unconventionally leaves an unforgettable impression to the guests. A dessert built on an amuse spoon, where the bottom of the spoon is covered in sugar crystals, for example. It brings the textures to the tongue that one would not expect.

Appendix 2: Interview questions

Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. How would you define an experience?
2. How important experiences are to you in a restaurant?
3. What are the key points, on your opinion, on a customer experience in general?
4. What do you feel is the key point in the customer experience of restaurant Más?
5. What do you know about experience design?
6. Many restaurants claim/advertise to offer experiences for the customers, yet experiences are not really designed, but the word is used in a marketing manner. How do you see this? / What are the advantages and disadvantages on this on your opinion?

Experience Pyramid / Brand Elements & Customer Experience

7. Can you please define the concept of Más in a few words? (to get the idea if they know the actual concept, since some of the interviewees are fairly new and have not worked in Más)
8. How do you feel Más differentiates from other competitors?
9. How individuality (customer wise) can be seen in the concept?
10. How would you bring more individuality to the customer experience of restaurant Más?
11. How authenticity can be seen in the concept?
12. How would you make it more authentic?

Stories enables strong customer experience that leaves strong engrams to the customer. The whole restaurant experience or the menu can be lead from start to finish through a story.

13. Is there a defined story in the concept of restaurant Más?
14. How could one implement a story into the concept?
15. What comes first to your mind when talking about multi-sensory perception?
16. How would you develop all the senses (touch, smell, sound, sight & taste) to the concept?

In order to have a good experience, theory states that there should be contrasts to daily living. Do you think our concept offers that? If it does, how?

17. How would you bring more contrast into the concept?

18. Do you see the service concept as interactive? If yes, how? And if no, how can we make it more interactive?

19. How could there be more interaction with the customers?

Levels of Experience

Engram is defined as a memory trace that stays with the customer after the stay.

Therefore, the customer remembers the brand or the service for a long time. According to a psychological research, if the information is emotional, personally relevant, and vivid, it is likely to be remembered (Cohen & Conway, 2007).

20. The goal of an experience is to leave powerful engrams to the customer that could lead to him/her learning something new and ultimately changing his/her perception and ways of acting. Do you think it is possible to change one's perception and way of living through experiences?

21. How could it be possible to leave powerful engrams to the customer which create a mental change?

22. Any other factors you wish to be implemented in the customer experience/concept?

23. Thank you for participating in the interview!

Appendix 3: Questionnaire questions

Quantitative Semi-Structured Questionnaire Questions

Thank you for taking part in the ideation questionnaire for enhancing the customer experience of restaurant Más. This questionnaire will take approximately 15-30 minutes and it is done mostly with open questions related to experience design.

1. Can you please define the concept of Más in a few words?
2. How individuality (customer wise) can be seen in the concept, and how would you make the experience more individual?
3. Do you see the concept of Más as authentic? If yes, how?
4. Could you make the concept even more authentic? If yes, how?

Stories enable strong customer experience that leaves strong engrams to the customer. The whole restaurant experience or the menu can be lead from start to finish through a story.

5. Is there a defined story in the concept of restaurant Más? If yes, what kind of story?
6. Could you implement a story into the concept? If yes, how would the story go in general?
7. What comes first to your mind when talking about multi-sensory perception?
8. How could you develop all the senses (touch, smell, sound, sight & taste) to the concept?

In order to have a good experience, theory states that there should be contrasts to daily living.

9. Do you think our concept offers that contrast? If it does, how?
10. How would you bring more contrast into the concept?
11. Do you see the service concept as interactive? If yes, how? And if no, how can we make it more interactive?
12. How could there be more interaction with the customers?
13. Any other factors you wish to be implemented in the customer experience/concept?

Thank you for participating in the questionnaire!