



Factors of Biáng! Attracting Lunch Customers in Helsinki

Hung Vu

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences
Hospitality and Tourism Experience Management
Bachelor's Thesis

2024

Abstract

Author(s) Hung Vu
Degree Bachelor of Hospitality and Tourism Experience Management
Report/Thesis Title Factors of Biáng! Attracting Lunch Customers in Helsinki
Number of pages and appendix pages 36 + 1
<p>This thesis, titled "Factors of Biáng! Attracting Lunch Customers in Helsinki," explores how service quality, location, and the buffet concept influence the attraction of lunchtime customers to Biáng! restaurant. With the growing popularity of Asian cuisine in urban settings, understanding the specific factors that draw customers during lunch hours is essential for enhancing operational success.</p> <p>The main research question guiding this study is: "In what ways do service quality, location, and the buffet concept specifically influence the attraction of lunch customers to Biáng! Restaurant in Helsinki?" To address this central question, the study also considers the following sub-questions: "How is customer service important to time-sensitive customers?", "How do a restaurant's location and accessibility affect customers' choices during lunchtime?", and "How does the buffet concept influence lunch customers?".</p> <p>The research focuses exclusively on Biáng! restaurant, allowing for a detailed analysis of customer perceptions and experiences. A qualitative approach was employed, utilizing structured interviews and observational studies to gather insights from both customers and restaurant management. Data collection began in October 2024, with face-to-face interviews conducted in October and early November 2024.</p> <p>The findings reveal that factors such as efficient service, a prime location, and the appealing buffet format significantly influence lunchtime customer attraction. Customer engagement highlighted the necessity of responsive service, emphasizing that time-sensitive customers particularly value quick and effective assistance. Additionally, the study found that the restaurant's accessibility and the variety offered in the buffet concept play crucial roles in shaping customer preferences.</p> <p>Recommendations based on these findings include strategies for enhancing service efficiency, optimizing buffet management, and improving location visibility through targeted marketing initiatives. By addressing these areas, Biáng! restaurant can better meet the needs of lunchtime customers and solidify its position in Helsinki's competitive dining landscape.</p> <p>This thesis contributes valuable insights into customer preferences in the restaurant industry and serves as a resource for Biáng! and similar establishments, guiding efforts to foster exceptional dining experiences while enhancing customer loyalty.</p>
Key words Service quality, lunchtime customer, accessibility, buffet concept, customer experience, Helsinki dining

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Research Question.....	1
1.2	Research Objectives	1
1.3	Scope and Delimitations.....	1
1.4	Significance of the Study	2
2	Key Factors Influencing Lunch Customer Attraction in Restaurants.....	4
2.1	Theoretical Framework.....	4
2.2	Lunch Customer Behaviour	5
2.3	Factors Influencing Customer Choice in Restaurants in Helsinki.....	6
2.3.1	Service Quality in Restaurant.....	6
2.3.2	Location and Accessibility	9
2.3.3	Buffet concept.....	11
3	Biáng! Restaurant: A Case Study	13
3.1	Overview of Biáng! Restaurant.....	13
3.2	Lunch Buffet Concept.....	13
3.3	Strategic Location	14
3.4	Relevance of Biáng! as a Case Study	14
3.5	Context for Data Collection.....	15
4	Research Methodology.....	16
4.1	Qualitative Method	16
4.2	Observations	17
4.2.1	Observation Procedure.....	17
4.2.2	Observation Analysis	18
4.2.3	Observation Results.....	18
4.3	Interviews.....	23
4.3.1	Interview Design	23
4.3.2	Interview Analysis	23
4.3.3	Interview Results.....	24
4.4	Ethical Considerations.....	26
5	Findings and Discussion.....	27
5.1	Key Findings	27
5.1.1	Convenience and Accessibility.....	27
5.1.2	Efficiency on the Lunch Buffet.....	27
5.1.3	Variety and Quality of Food.....	28
5.1.4	Customer Satisfaction with Service	28

5.2 Recommendations	28
6 Conclusion	30
Sources	32
Appendices	37
Appendix 1. Interview questions	37

1 Introduction

The restaurant industry in metropolitan areas is highly competitive, particularly at lunchtime when people look for quick, affordable, and enjoyable meals within a short timeframe (ModernRestaurantManagement 2024). In Helsinki, this strong demand for efficient lunch services has prompted restaurants to find ways to stand out from competitors. Biáng! Restaurant, popular for its authentic Chinese food, draws a steady lunch crowd by focusing on its central location, excellent service, and a buffet format that lets customers choose meals that suit their tastes and time limits. This approach helps Biáng! meet the unique needs of busy lunch customers, making it a popular spot in the crowded Helsinki dining scene.

This study seeks to understand how these factors work together to enhance customer satisfaction and encourage repeat visits. By analyzing customer expectations and how Biáng! positions itself within Helsinki's competitive dining market, this research offers insights into what elements make for successful customer attraction in an urban restaurant setting.

1.1 Research Question

The primary research question explored in this thesis is: "In what ways do service quality, location, and the buffet concept specifically influence the attraction of lunch customers to Biáng! Restaurant in Helsinki?" The sub-questions are:

1. How is customer service important to time-sensitive customers?
2. How do a restaurant's location and accessibility affect customers' choices during lunch time?
3. How does buffet concept influence lunch customers?

1.2 Research Objectives

This study sets out multiple objectives to gain a thorough understanding of what draws customers to Biáng! restaurant. This thesis aims to analyze how service quality affects customer satisfaction and their likelihood to return. Additionally, the research explores the influence of Biáng!'s location on attracting lunchtime visitors and examines the extent to which the lunch buffet concept shapes customer preferences and satisfaction. Based on these insights, the study will provide recommendations to enhance customer retention and improve overall service appeal at Biáng!

1.3 Scope and Delimitations

This study focuses specifically on lunch customer at Biáng! Restaurant in Helsinki, analyzing factors that influence customer attraction, satisfaction, and retention within the lunchtime dining

context. The research examines service quality, location convenience, and the lunch buffet model as primary factors that shape customer preferences and experiences at Biáng!. Data will be collected through qualitative methods, including customer interviews and observational studies, to gain insights into real-time customer behavior and satisfaction related to these factors.

Table 1. Delimitations of the research

Included	Excluded
Lunch service	Other meal periods
Biáng! CityCenter	Other locations of Biáng! Restaurant
Qualitative data (interviews and observations)	Quantitative data collection
Service quality, location, buffet concept	Other potential influencing factors such as pricing strategy or marketing tactics.
Lunch customer segment	Dinner customer, tourists, weekend visitors.

The research is limited to the lunch service at Biáng! Restaurant in central Helsinki, excluding other meal times and restaurant locations, which means the results may not apply to different settings or dining period. Additionally, the study uses only qualitative data collected through structured interviews and in-depth observations rather than quantitative data, which may limit broader statistical analysis. This research is also analyze specific factors of Biáng! Restaurant attracting lunch customers such as service quality, location and buffet format, excluding other potential factors like pricing strategy or marketing tactics. These delimitations aim to provide a focused understanding of Biáng!'s lunchtime operations and their impact on customer attraction within Helsinki's competitive restaurant market.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This thesis introduces Biáng! Restaurant as the client, focusing on why it has been successful in attracting lunch customers in Helsinki. Known for its authentic Chinese cuisine, Biáng! benefits from its strategic location near office areas and public transport, making it a convenient choice for time-sensitive customers. By examining what draws customers to Biáng! and identifying successful strategies, this study provides insights valuable for the restaurant's continued growth.

The findings from this research will help Biáng! gain a clearer understanding of its target customers' wants and expectations. With this knowledge, Biáng! can improve lunch buffet menu, enhance service quality, and improve marketing efforts. These adjustments are expected to boost customer satisfaction, attract more repeat business, and strengthen Biáng!'s position in Helsinki's competitive restaurant market.

Additionally, the study's outcomes offer broader benefits. For Biáng!, the insights will lead to stronger customer loyalty and higher revenue. Beyond Biáng!, other restaurants, hospitality consultants, and business developers can use these findings to better understand what lunch customers prioritize and implement similar strategies in their own operations to attract and retain this customer group.

2 Key Factors Influencing Lunch Customer Attraction in Restaurants

In this chapter, key theories and previous research are explored to better understand lunch customer behavior and the main factors that influence their restaurant choices. Studies on customer preferences emphasize that during lunch, people prioritize convenience, speed, and quality, especially in city settings where time is limited (Sharma, Moon, Bailey-Davis & Martha Conklin 2017, 3192-3194). The review covers essential elements like service quality, easy location access, and the buffet format, as these factors strongly shape customer satisfaction and encourage loyalty. Together, these insights form the basis for understanding how restaurants like Biáng! attract and retain lunch customers by catering to the specific needs of this busy dining period.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This research examines the factors attracting lunch customers to Biáng! Restaurant by focusing on practical aspects that influence customer decisions and satisfaction, particularly during lunch hours.

Convenience and accessibility are key factors in attracting lunch customers (Liu & Tse 2018). In a busy city like Helsinki, where many people have limited time during lunch breaks, Biáng! Restaurant's location near offices and public transportation makes it a convenient option. People often choose restaurants they can reach quickly and easily, so being centrally located and well-connected to public transport significantly helps attract lunchtime customers.

The atmosphere and physical environment of Biáng! Restaurant are important factors that affect whether customers will return. A restaurant that is clean, welcoming, and comfortable creates a positive atmosphere for diners. This is especially true during busy lunch times when a pleasant dining environment can make the meal more enjoyable. A good atmosphere helps customers feel relaxed and appreciated, encouraging them to come back regularly and build customer loyalty (Coronel, Bacar, Manuel & Seronin 2024).

Service quality is another important factor. Lunch customers often want quick and efficient service because they have limited time. Reliable service, where customers are served quickly, ensures that they can enjoy their meal within their short lunch period. High-quality service encourages customers to return and recommend the restaurant to others, both of which are important for success during lunchtime (Feriors 2021).

The buffet concept at Biáng! is popular with lunch customers because it offers a variety of food and flexibility. Buffets let customers serve themselves quickly, which reduces waiting time and lets them choose how much they want to eat. This is ideal for lunch customers who are short on time

but still want a good, satisfying meal. The buffet format allows customers to customize their meal based on their preferences, whether they want a light or more substantial lunch (Chua, Karim, Lee & Han 2020). This feature can be especially attractive to a wide range of customers with different dietary needs or time constraints.

2.2 Lunch Customer Behaviour

Lunch customer refers to someone who typically dines during the midday meal period, usually between 11:00 AM and 1:00 PM (Ala-Harja, Pitkäkoski & Aaltojarvi 2017, 489). This customer group is mostly driven by factors such as convenience, price, and time limitations. There are many kinds of lunch customers, but most of them are professionals, students or individuals who need a fast and affordable meal during a break from work and study. Since lunch breaks are often short, these customers tend to choose restaurants that offer quick service and are easily accessible, allowing them to get their meal efficiently without spending too much time or money (Ala-Harja et al. 2017). The key characteristics of lunch customers in this research are time constraints, convenience, and price sensitivity.

Lunch customers, especially those who work or study, often want quick service because they don't have much time for lunch. They usually choose restaurants that offer fast lunch options, like set menus or buffets, which help them eat quickly. These options let customers choose from a pre-set menu or serve themselves, making the dining experience faster and more convenient. Also, how close a restaurant is to workplaces, schools, or transportation is important. Customers are more likely to choose restaurants that are easy to get to, which saves them time and helps them make the most of their short lunch breaks (Chua et al. 2020). The combination of fast service and a convenient location is important for attracting lunch customers who are short on time (Liu & Tse 2018).

Lunch customers tend to be more concerned about price compared to dinner customers, as they look for meals that provide good value for money. Fixed-price lunch deals or meal combos are especially attractive because they offer a range of dishes at a set price, making them both affordable and convenient (Symson s.a.). Customers are attracted to these meal options because they offer great value for money, which is especially important in busy environments where people are short on time and need things to be quick and efficient (Lizcano-Prada et al. 2024) These pricing strategies simplify the decision-making process by allowing customers to enjoy multiple items without the need to individually select and price each one, making the dining experience more convenient and faster (Ala-Harja & Pitkäkoski, 2017).

2.3 Factors Influencing Customer Choice in Restaurants in Helsinki

Helsinki is the capital of Finland, with a population around 1.3 million (World Population Review 2024). Helsinki's food service industry, which includes both restaurants and café-restaurants, has experienced continuous growth since the early 1990s. By 2019, there were 2,612 food outlets in the city, representing a 15.4% rise compared to 2013 (Punamäki 2019, 4). This increase highlights the expanding food scene in the city. According to the data of City of Helsinki, this city has an extremely competitive restaurant market. Customer will have many choices of dining place. This research is focused on three main crucial factors, that influence customer choice in restaurants, including restaurant's service quality, location and accessibility, and buffet concept.

2.3.1 Service Quality in Restaurant

Service quality is one of the most important factors that influence customer satisfaction and loyalty in restaurant industry (Ali, Alam & Bilal 2021, 143-146). It not only impacts how satisfied customers are during their dining experience but also influences whether they will choose to come back to the restaurant or they will recommend the restaurants to others. Good service quality makes customers feel valued and have a positive experience, which makes them more likely to become repeat customers. On the other hand, poor service can lead to dissatisfaction and make them less likely to return or suggest the restaurant to others (Ali et al. 2021).

The Service Quality (SERVQUAL) model was introduced by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in 1988 as a fundamental framework for evaluating service quality in various industries, including the food-service sector (Razak, Aminuddin & Ghazali 2020). This model has been widely used to assess how well service delivery meets customer expectations by focusing on five key dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles (Marketing91 2023). Figure 1 shows 5 dimensions of service quality in the SERVQUAL model.

The Five Key Service Dimensions of the Servqual model

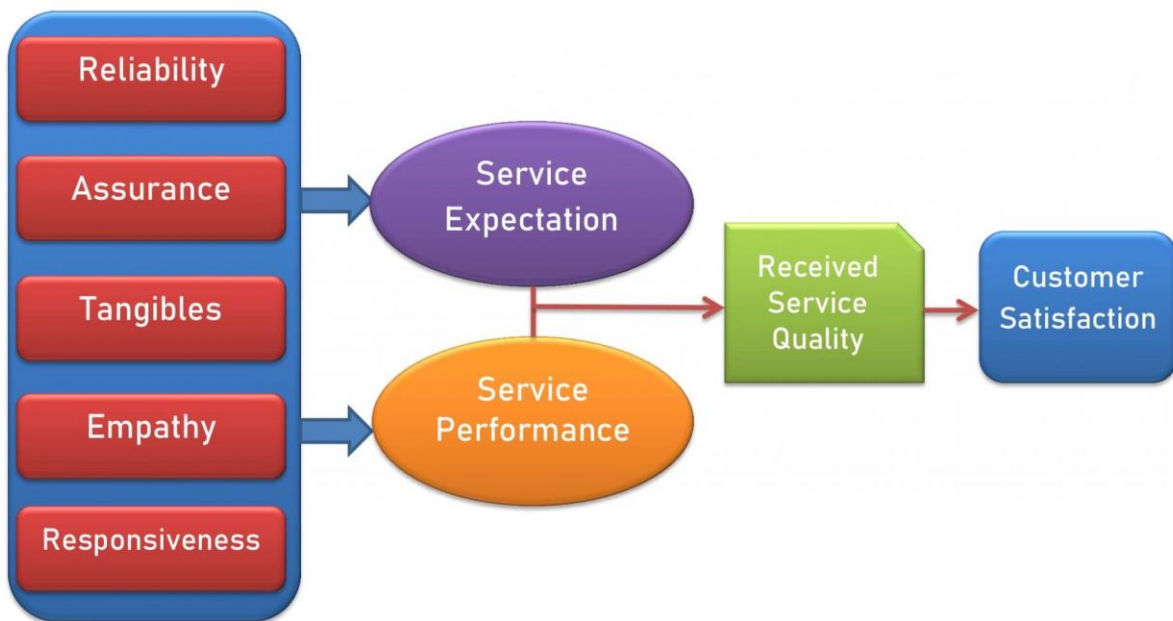


Figure 1. 5 Dimensions of service quality- SERVQUAL model (Newsmoor s.a.)

Reliability refers to the restaurant's capacity to deliver the promised service precisely and consistently. The restaurant needs to fulfill all of the promises made in its advertising (Feriors 2021). This means ensuring that orders are accurate, meals are prepared correctly, and food is served quickly. Particularly, lunch-time customers are often pressed for time, because they usually have lunch at a restaurant during their lunch break, expecting their meals to be delivered efficiently, especially during busy periods like lunch hours. When customers know they can count on the same quality and service every time they visit, they are more likely to return regularly and recommend the restaurant to others. This consistency builds trust, turning one-time visitors into loyal customers who continue to support the business. Over time, this reliability helps create a steady customer base, which is essential for the long-term success of any restaurant or service-focused business.

Responsiveness is one of the most important things that improve the satisfaction of customers in accordance with the SERVQUAL model of Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry. Responsiveness in service quality means how willing and able service staff are to help and respond quickly to customers' needs. In a restaurant, this means serving customers on time, handling their requests efficiently, and being ready to solve problems right away. When employees are attentive and quick, it shortens wait times and makes customers happier, especially during busy times like lunch. However, it can be difficult to keep up this level of responsiveness during peak hours, and slow service or lack of attention can lead to customer frustration and dissatisfaction. To improve responsiveness in

service, restaurants can use a few strategies. First, training employees is important to help them focus on customer needs and provide fast service. The training should teach staff to be both quick and attentive when handling customer requests (Norfahzilah et al. 2020). Second, using technology like table-side ordering systems or mobile apps can speed up the service process by getting orders to the kitchen faster, which helps customers receive their food more quickly (Habtmu 2019). Another helpful strategy is to adjust staff schedules so that there are enough workers during busy times, which can prevent delays (Norfahzilah et al. 2020). Good communication between the service staff and the kitchen is also important to reduce wait times and make the dining experience smoother for customers (Chi, Huang & Nguyen 2019, 28-30). When used effectively, these strategies can result in faster service, increased customer satisfaction, and a smoother, more efficient dining experience.

In the SERVQUAL model created by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), assurance is one of the five main factors for evaluating service quality (Norfahzilah et al. 2020). Assurance in service quality means how well employees in businesses, especially in restaurants, can make customers feel confident and trust the service they provide. This is done through their skills, polite behavior, and knowledge. It shows that the staff are capable, professional, and can communicate clearly, which helps build trust and makes customers feel secure about the service they are getting (EQ4C 2024). In terms of Zendesk Blog, there are several methods to measure quality assurance, including QA software, key performance indicators (KPIs), QA scorecards, customer surveys, and employee surveys. While it's not required to use all these methods together, combining a few of them can be an effective way to enhance customer satisfaction (Wren 19 August 2024). By improving the assurance dimension, the restaurants can create a more reliable and trustworthy environment, which encourages customers to re-visit and recommend the restaurant to others.

Empathy in service quality means giving customers personalized attention and care, making them feel appreciated and understood. It involves recognizing each customer's unique needs, emotions, and situations, and responding in a thoughtful and caring way (Indeed 2024). In the restaurant industry, especially during busy lunch hours, showing empathy can greatly improve the customer experience by addressing specific needs, like dietary preferences or time constraints. Simple actions, such as accommodating a customer's food restrictions or being mindful of their limited time, can significantly boost customer satisfaction. When employees show empathy, it creates a stronger emotional bond between the customer and the business, which helps build customer loyalty (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988). Empathy in SERVQUAL model is a critical factor in making customers feel understood and appreciated (Parasuraman et al. 1988). Empathy also can directly influence customer loyalty, as it helps create a personalized and memorable experience, which in

turn leads to repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Kandampully, Zhang & Bilgihan 2015).

Tangibles in SERVQUAL model refer to the physical aspects of a restaurant, such as cleanliness, layout, and ambiance, which play an important role in shaping customer perceptions of service quality (Feriors 2024). Cleanliness is essential since patrons link it to safety and confidence in the restaurant. A clean environment will significantly enhances customer satisfaction, making it a key factor in determining whether customers will return (Barber & Scarcelli 2010). In addition, the layout and design of the restaurant also contribute to customer comfort. A well organized layout ensures efficient movement of the customer and creates a sense of space, preventing feelings of overcrowding during peak time such as lunch (Ryu & Han 2010). This can significantly improve the overall dining experience. Ambiance, which includes things like lighting, background music, and temperature, affects how customers feel and their overall satisfaction. A good ambiance creates a warm and welcoming environment that helps customers feel comfortable and appreciated, pleasant ambiance can encourage customers to stay longer and come back again in the future (Ali, Amin & Cobalognu 2015).

Service quality is a vital factor in shaping customer's decisions, especially in competitive restaurant market like Helsinki. High service standards directly contribute to improved customer satisfaction and loyalty, which are essential for the sustained success of a restaurant. Great service quality will enhance customer retention and positive word-of-mouth, which are key drivers for long term profitability in the restaurant industry (Wu & Liang 2009).

2.3.2 Location and Accessibility

A restaurant's location and accessibility are crucial factors in attracting and retaining customers, especially during lunch hours. The restaurant's location can either be a benefit or a drawback, depending on how well it suits the needs and preferences of its target audience. Accessibility, which includes factors like proximity to transportation and ease of parking, also plays a significant role in determining customer traffic and satisfaction (TigerChef 2024).

The location of a restaurant can have a direct impact on its customer base, and is closely tied to its potential success. Restaurants positioned in high-traffic areas tend to attract more customers due to improved visibility and convenience. Location near business districts, educational institutions, shopping centers, or tourist attractions will bring more opportunities to attract lunch customers because these areas have higher foot traffic, especially in the middle of the day (Chua et al. 2020, 6-7). These locations attract more spontaneous visitors, particularly during peak hours like lunch when people are looking for a quick and convenient meal option (DiPietro 2019). Furthermore,

restaurants located near complementary businesses such as theaters or retail shops can benefit from synergistic effects, where customers are drawn to the area for multiple activities and end up dining as part of their overall experience (Taimela 1 February 2024). Because many people have limited time during their lunch breaks, restaurants located near workplaces or shopping areas are particularly appealing. This convenience makes it easier for people to grab a quick meal and return to their activities

Accessibility, which is how easy it is for customers to get to a restaurant, is very important. Restaurants that are near public bus and train station, tram and metro lines or have enough parking spaces are more attractive because they are convenient (TigerChef 2024). This is especially important for people who are short on time, like lunch customers, the availability of parking or nearby public transport can influence where people choose to eat (DiPietro 2019). Moreover, physical accessibility is becoming more important as restaurants strive to create spaces that are welcoming and usable for everyone. By including features like wheelchair ramps, wide doors, and layouts that are easy to move around in, restaurants make it easier for a wider range of customers to enjoy their services. This approach not only improves the experience for people with disabilities but also helps build customer loyalty, as people appreciate businesses that cater to diverse needs. A more accessible restaurant can attract a broader group of customers and encourage them to return (Bichler, Pikkemaat & Peters 2020)

Besides location and accessibility, a restaurant's visibility is also important for attracting customers who just happen to walk by. Restaurants that are easy to see on busy streets or in commercial areas are more likely to attract unplanned visitors. Customers are more likely to remember and choose a restaurant, that they frequently pass by in their daily routine (Tango s.a.). On the other hand, restaurants that are hard to see or located in quiet areas may have trouble attracting a steady flow of customers. Moreover, the surrounding area of a restaurant also affects how attractive it is. A restaurant in a nice, clean area can make the dining experience better, while an unpleasant or not well-maintained area may discourage customers, even if the food and service is high quality (Dugan 26 August 2024).

To conclude, a restaurant's location and how easy it is for customers to get there are very important, especially at lunchtime when people want convenience. A good location in a busy area, along with easy access by public transport or parking, can make customers happy and attract a lot of people. Additionally, how accessible the restaurant is for everyone and how easy it is to see can also help create a welcoming and convenient place for all customers, which can lead to more repeat business. By carefully considering these factors, restaurant owners can make their businesses successful in the long term.

2.3.3 Buffet concept

The buffet concept is a widely-used dining model in restaurants because it offers customers a large selection of dishes and the ability to serve themselves. Buffets are typically set up with various food stations or a long table, where diners can choose from different types of food, such as starters, salads, main courses, desserts, and drinks. Since diners can serve themselves, they have complete control over how much food they take, making it a flexible option that accommodates different dietary needs and portion preferences (Howstuffworks 2024). Buffets are great for people who want quick, personalized meals, as they can choose from a range of dishes and control their portion sizes, making the dining experience more flexible and suited to individual preference (Chowbus 2024). This makes buffets a convenient and appealing choice for a wide variety of customers.

The buffet concept brings several benefits to the customers, the variety it offers is one of the key advantages of the concept (Hmhub 2023). Buffets typically feature a wide range of dishes, from appetizers and salads to main courses and desserts, catering to different dietary preferences and tastes. Because it lets individuals tailor their meals to their own tastes and portion levels, this variety is especially appealing to lunch patrons. Depending on their preferences, customers can select heavier, more full dishes or lighter ones like salads and fruits (Raab, Mayer, Kim & Shoemaker 2009). Additionally, the buffet concept is highly accommodating to individuals with specific dietary needs, such as those following vegetarian, vegan, or gluten-free diets. Buffets typically offer a wide range of options, allowing diners to choose meals that suit their preferences or dietary restrictions. This inclusivity helps attract a more diverse group of customers, leading to increased foot traffic, particularly during busy times like lunch hours, as more people feel confident they can find something suitable for their needs (The Restaurant Times s.a.).

Additionally, the buffet concept allows customers to create personalized plate combinations, giving them greater control over their dining experience (Hmhub 2023). For time-sensitive customers, such as those dining during a lunch break, the overall convenience of the dining experience is enhanced by the ability to serve themselves quickly, without the need to wait for table service. Furthermore, buffets allow customers to customize their portion sizes, offering them the flexibility to eat as much or as little as they want, which can increase overall satisfaction (Chowbus 2024).

Moreover, customers often choose restaurants with the buffet concepts because of the pricing model of buffets, they can have unlimited access to variety of food, without additional fees. This makes perceived value for customers. With a fixed price, the customers can sample a wide range of dishes, from cold to hot dishes, salads, drinks and dessert, which makes buffets especially

appealing to those who want to try multiple options without the restriction of choosing a single item(Thielemann, Ottenbacher & Harrington 2018, 27-32).

From a restaurant's point of view, buffets can be a good way to reduce food waste. One way to do this is to watch how much customers eat and adjust how much food is prepared. This can help restaurants make less food than they need and offer just the right amount. Buffets can also help reduce food waste because customers can choose how much they want to eat, which means less food gets thrown away, making dining more sustainable (Clowes 9 April 2018). By using these waste management strategies, buffets can balance offering a variety of food while also reducing unnecessary food waste, making the model both economically and environmentally efficient.

The buffet concept provides a dynamic and flexible dining model that benefits both customers and restaurants operators. The combination of variety, convenience and value makes buffet an attractive option in high-traffic environments like lunchtime service in urban areas such as Helsinki.

3 Biáng! Restaurant: A Case Study

This chapter provides a detailed look at Biáng! Restaurant, focusing on what makes it stand out, its popular lunch buffet, and its strategic location in the center of Helsinki. The aim is to understand how Biáng! attracts its lunch customers and what factors contribute to the restaurant's success

3.1 Overview of Biáng! Restaurant

Biáng! Restaurant is a Chinese restaurant in Helsinki, were established in 2019, specializing in offering authentic and flavorful Chinese dishes. The restaurant is focusing on traditional Chinese cuisine techniques and ingredients. Biáng! is attractive to both local and international customers, the restaurant is creating a dining experience that honors the rich diversity of Chinese cuisine while slightly adjust to adapt and maintain a modern and accessible atmosphere for its customers in Helsinki. Biáng! restaurant offers a wide variety of dishes, from popular Chinese food like dumplings and spring rolls to regional famous and signature dishes such as Chongqing chicken with chilies, Yangchow fried rice, and specially Oil Spill Noodles, which is made by hand of the Chinese chefs in the restaurants. Thanks to the carefully attention of Biáng! about high-quality ingredients and a balance of flavors in Helsinki, the restaurant has earned loyal customers among both lunch and dinner.

3.2 Lunch Buffet Concept

One of the central features of Biáng! Is the restaurant's lunch buffet concept, which plays a vital role in attracting lunch customers. Biáng! lunch buffet aims to cater to busy professionals, students, and tourists who are looking for a quick, convenient, and affordable meals during their limited time lunch breaks. The buffet has a variety of food options such as hot food made from meat, fish, and vegetables, variety of salad options, soup, dumplings and drinks. The concept ensures that customers will have a diverse selection of dishes to choose from.

The buffet concept of Biáng! allow for self service, which means customers will come to the cashier to pay first, and they can serve yourself like take the food and enjoy it without the need to wait for table service, Biáng!'s waiter will come to clean the tables immediately after customers finish their meals and leave. This setup not only speeds up the dining process, but also flexibility in food choices and portion sizes, making a practical choice for those who have limited time in the lunch breaks. The customers do not need to think about the nutritional value of the food because there are both vegetarian and non-vegetarian options, ensuring that all dietary preferences are catered to. Additionally, the price of Biáng!'s lunch buffet is really affordable, especially in a hustle capital of Finland-Helsinki, which is cost only 14,9 Euros. This price is suitable for Biáng!'s target customers,

which are professionals and students, that will make the restaurant a attractive choice for lunch customers looking for both value and convenience.

Moreover, this buffet concept also contribute to the restaurant sustainable development. Firstly, about environmental sustainability, the restaurant use local ingredients, which have to reduce carbon footprint. The restaurant's lunch buffet concept also has a regulation that encouraging customers to reduce food waste, contributing save the environment. Secondly, it also has an positive impact on social sustainability. In the lunch buffet, Biáng! use fresh, high-quality, and healthy ingredients such as fresh meat and vegetables, ensuring customers will have healthy meals, from that enhancing customers' satisfaction. Finally, economic sustainability, by focusing on the needs of lunchtime customers, Biáng! can build a loyal and consistent customer base, supporting the long-term financial health of the business. Aligning its strategy with this group's preferences will lead to more repeat visits and steady revenue growth.

3.3 Strategic Location

Biáng! restaurant is located on second floor on the CityCenter building in, which is located in the heart of Helsinki. The restaurant benefits significantly from its strategic location, this is a key factor in attracting steady and stable flow of lunch customers.

Indeed, the position of Biáng! is in the CityCenter shopping mall, close to Stockmann and Sokos shopping mall. In addition, it only takes five minutes to walk from surrounding company such as OP Bank, Nordea Bank, VR and HSL. Moreover, Biáng! is located right opposite to the Helsinki Central Station, right up to the metro lines, and tram lines is located right in front of the building. These factors made Biáng! easily accessible to office workers, students, and tourists, making it a convenient choice for those who seeking a quick and satisfying lunch without the long move during their busy schedules.

3.4 Relevance of Biáng! as a Case Study

Biáng! Restaurant is a great example for understanding what attracts lunch customers in Helsinki. By offering a quick, affordable, and diverse lunch buffet, Biáng! effectively meets the needs of customers who are short on time. Its location in central Helsinki, close to business districts and public transport, makes it easily accessible to many people.

The success of Biáng!'s lunch buffet provides valuable lessons on how restaurants can attract and retain lunch customers by offering both convenience and variety. The combination of high-quality food, efficient service, and an affordable buffet option positions Biáng! as a strong competitor in

Helsinki's dining scene, making it a valuable subject for studying customer preferences and behaviours during lunch hours.

3.5 Context for Data Collection

The data for this case study was collected through a combination of customer feedback, the author's observations, and interviews with customers and restaurant managers. The goal is to gather insights into how Biáng! attract a stable flow to lunch customers and what specific factors contribute to its success.

Observations were conducted during peak lunch hours to understand the flow of customer, the efficiency of the buffet concept and service, and the dining experience of the customers.

Customer interviews focused in understanding what factors of the restaurant were most attractive and appealing to them, including aspects like the variety of buffet offerings, the convenience of location, speed of service and the quality of the food. Additionally, the interview with the manager provides insights into the strategy of the restaurant, such as lunch buffet menu planning, staff training, and customer service improvements, which play a crucial role in attracting and retaining lunch customers.

4 Research Methodology

This chapter describes the research methods used to collect and analyze data. This study is aimed on understanding the factors influencing lunch customer attraction to Biáng! Restaurant. Data are collected through a combination of observation and structured interviews to gather insights from both customers and the restaurant manager, providing a comprehensive understanding of Biáng!'s appeal and customer satisfaction during lunch hours. These methods were chosen as they strongly align with the study's research approach and objectives.

4.1 Qualitative Method

Qualitative and quantitative research methods are both valuable approaches but serve different purposes based on the research focus and objectives. Quantitative research is structured, using numerical data to identify trends and relationships (Bryman 2016). Quantitative research gives clear, measurable insights that can be applied to larger groups, making it especially useful for studies that need data from many participants to test ideas and make predictions. For example, quantitative methods work well for surveys and experiments, where objective data and statistical comparisons are essential (Bryman 2016).

Qualitative research, on the other hand, is more focused on exploring and describing details. It gathers rich, non-numerical information to capture the subtleties of people's thoughts, experiences, and motivations (Ryan & Bernard 2003). According to Denzin & Lincoln (2018), using methods like interviews, group discussions, and observations, qualitative research delves into people's perspectives, helping researchers understand the "why" and "how" behind their actions. In this study, where the goal is to understand lunch customers' preferences and what attracts them to Biáng! Restaurant, qualitative methods provide deep insights into customer satisfaction, expectations, and their overall dining experience (Ryan & Bernard 2003).

The objective is to gain insights into customer satisfaction, experiences, and perceptions regarding the factors that lead them to choose Biáng! Restaurant. Additionally, the study aims to identify ways to enhance the customer experience for this case study restaurant. Therefore, applying qualitative research for this study brings several benefits. Firstly, Qualitative methods allow the researcher to capture the complexity of customer preferences, revealing insights that might be missed in a purely quantitative approach. Secondly, qualitative research offers flexibility, allowing for adjustments to interview questions and observation areas as new themes arise (Denzin & Lincoln 2018). This adaptability enhances the understanding of aspects like service quality, buffet appeal, and location convenience as they develop in real time. Finally, by focusing on detailed narratives and examining patterns within the data, qualitative research aligns well with the study's aim to

provide Biáng! Restaurant with actionable insights based on customer perspectives. These insights are crucial for refining customer attraction strategies in the competitive lunch market.

4.2 Observations

Observations were conducted as a primary method to gather real-time insights into customer flow and behavior, restaurant layout, and service flow at Biáng! Restaurant during peak lunch hours. Observing customers in their natural dining environment allowed the author to gain a firsthand how the buffet setup, service efficiency and convenient location impact the lunch experience. This method provided clear information on customer interactions with the buffet, staff and restaurant environment, helping to build a complete picture of what makes Biáng! appealing to lunchtime customers.

4.2.1 Observation Procedure

The observation were performed in one week, focusing on peak lunch hours from 11:30 am to 1:30 pm to capture the busiest times of the restaurant. The author went to the restaurant 5 times in the lunch time, observations were carried out quietly, without any direct interaction with customers, to ensure their behavior remained natural. The observations ended after a week, as the results were quite similar across all observation times. From that, the results will be concluded based on the observation notes. The researcher documented key areas, including customer flow and movement, buffet interaction, time spent in the restaurant and service interaction.

Firstly, about customer flow and movement, observations noted how customers how customers navigated the restaurant, from entering to seating, as well as how they interacted with the buffet and seating layout. This helped identify any bottlenecks or areas where movement was smooth, enhancing the overall dining experience. Secondly, the observations also focused on customers interactions with the buffet, including the time that they spent at food selection and how they navigated the buffet setup. It provided insights into customer satisfaction with the variety and layout of the buffet concept, as well as the efficiency of the buffet setup. Thirdly, the average time customers spent from arrival to exit was recorded to understand if the restaurant's setup meets the needs of time-sensitive lunch customers. This information helped determine if Biáng! Offer a fast and efficient lunch experience that meets the needs of of customers with short lunch breaks such as office workers and students. Finally, the responsiveness and efficiency of the staff were observed to assess how well they met customer needs, especially during busy hours. This included how quickly they cleared tables, refilled the buffet, and responded to customer questions.

4.2.2 Observation Analysis

The observation data analysis followed a structured qualitative approach, aligning with the research type and objectives. While quantitative methods often test hypotheses with numbers, qualitative analysis involves categorizing responses to draw deeper insights (Hair, Wolfinbarger, Money, Samouel & Page 2011). Observational data were coded into specific categories such as customer flow, buffet interaction, time spent in restaurant, and staff responsiveness, which were refined to ensure relevance to the research questions (Barbour 2008, 197). The researcher observed detailed, carefully predefined categories based on the literature and research questions, using these to analyze the collected data and obtain results.

4.2.3 Observation Results

The observations were focused on the customer flow, customer movement in restaurant areas, average time spent in restaurant, staff responsiveness rate and buffet popularity by dish. The results of observations are presented by figures.

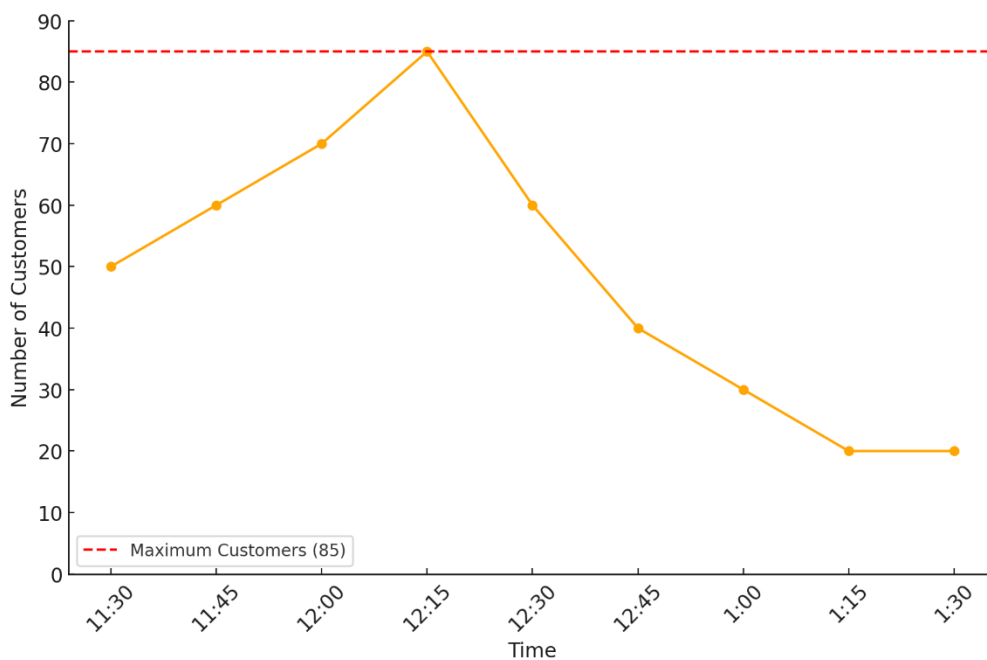


Figure 2: Customer flow during peak hours, indicating the highest count of 85 customers.

Figure 2 illustrates the customer flow in Biáng! restaurant during peak lunch hours from 11:30 AM to 1:30 PM. The data indicates a clear pattern in customer attendance, with significant fluctuations observed throughout the time frame.

At 12:15 PM, the restaurant experienced its highest customer volume, reaching a peak of 85 customers. This surge in attendance likely corresponds with the traditional lunch break for many patrons, highlighting the restaurant's popularity during this time. Following this peak, there was a noticeable decline in customer numbers. At 12:30 PM, the count dropped to 60 customers, indicating a slight decrease as some patrons began to leave after their meals.

The downward trend continued, with customer numbers decreasing to 40 at 1:00 PM, then further to 30 by 1:15 PM. By 1:30 PM, the count stabilized at 20 customers. This decline suggests that while the restaurant is a popular choice during peak lunch hours, customer flow diminishes significantly after the initial lunch rush, indicating the importance of optimizing service and menu offerings during high-traffic times to capitalize on customer demand.

Overall, the data from Figure 2 provides valuable insights into customer behavior and peak attendance patterns, which can help inform operational strategies for enhancing the dining experience at Biáng! during busy lunch hours.

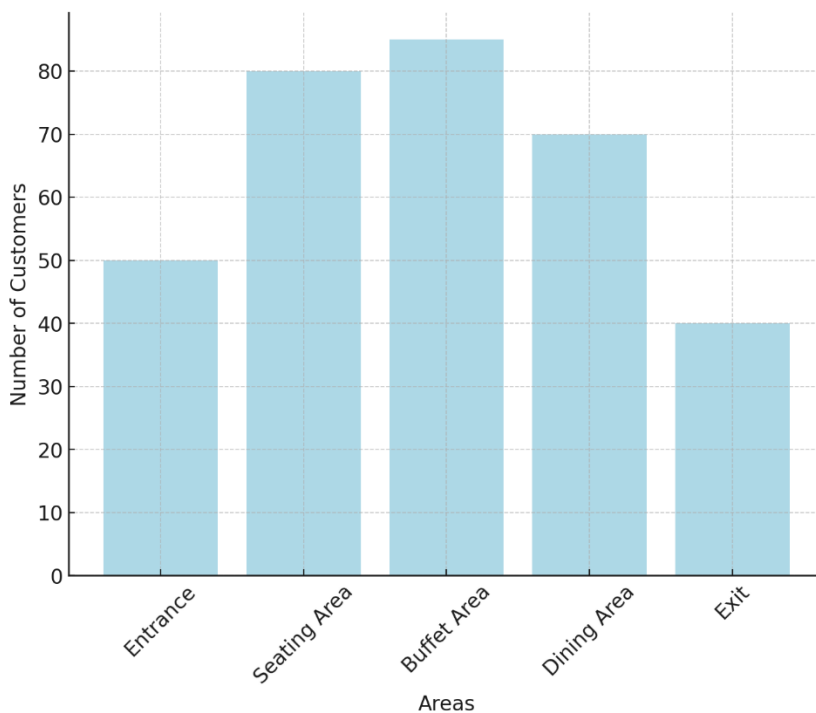


Figure 3: Customer movement in restaurant areas.

Figure 3 shows how customers move around different areas of Biáng! restaurant during busy lunch hours. The numbers indicate how many customers are in each section of the restaurant, giving insight into how people flow and interact within the limit of a maximum of 85 customers at any time.

The number of entrance shows that 50 customers were seen entering the restaurant during peak times, indicating that the restaurant is popular and attracting many diners. With 80 customers in the seating area at its busiest, the restaurant is close to its maximum capacity. This proves that a lot of people prefer to eat inside, showing the restaurant's ability to host many guests comfortably. The maximum count of 85 customers in the buffet area means that many patrons were actively choosing their meals at this time. This reflects the appeal of the buffet style, allowing customers to enjoy a variety of food options. At times, there were 70 customers eating at tables. This indicates a lively dining atmosphere and shows that the restaurant can efficiently manage customer flow without exceeding its capacity. The observation of 40 customers leaving the restaurant indicates a steady flow of diners finishing their meals. This suggests that customers are enjoying their experience and leaving at a regular pace, which is important for keeping the restaurant running smoothly (Kwortnik & Thompson 2009).

Overall, the data in Figure 3 highlights how well the restaurant manages customer movement during busy lunch hours. By looking at where customers are located, the restaurant can understand their behavior better, improve service efficiency, and make better decisions to enhance the dining experience.

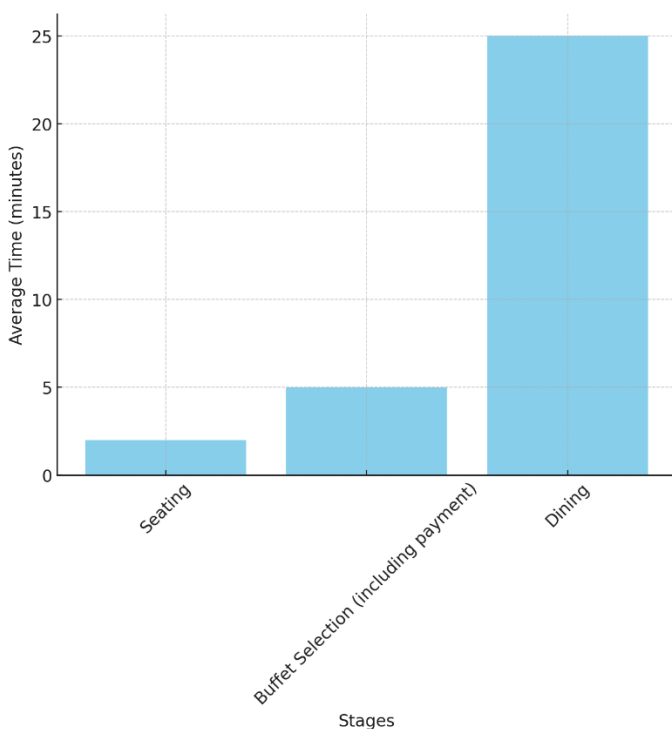
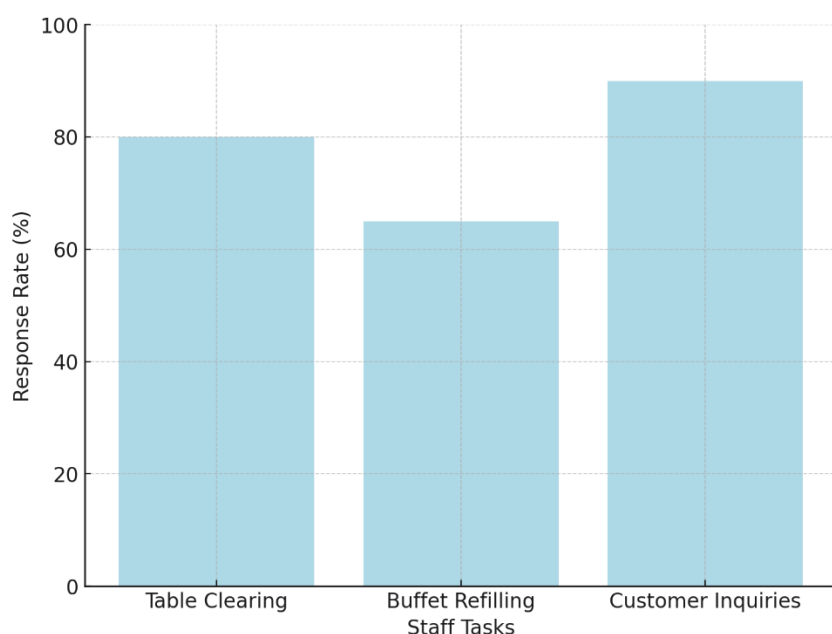


Figure 4: Average time spent in restaurant.

This figure shows the average time customers spent at various stages of their dining experience at Biáng! restaurant. According to the figure, customers take an average of 2 minutes to be seated, indicating the service upon arrival. The average time spent selecting food and completing the payment process is 5 minutes. This reflects a quick and streamlined buffet experience, as well as the effectiveness of buffet table arrangement. Finally, customers spent an average of 25 minutes dining at the restaurant, suggesting that they take time to enjoy their meals, but not too much time since they have limited lunch time. The fact that customers do not spend too much time on their meals also shows that the restaurant can have space for the following customers, thereby welcoming more customers. These average times indicate a well-managed dining process that allows customers to have a satisfying experience while maintaining a steady flow through the restaurant.



Figures 5: Staff responsiveness rate for different tasks.

Figure 5 illustrates the staff responsiveness rates for different tasks at Biáng! restaurant during peak lunch hours.

Staff responsiveness for clearing tables is recorded at 80%, indicating that the majority of tables are cleared promptly, contributing to a tidy and inviting dining environment. However, this non-absolute ratio results in some tables not being cleared quickly, leading to customers having to wait to be seated. The responsiveness rate for refilling the buffet stands at 65%, suggesting that while the staff is generally attentive, there may be room for improvement to ensure that popular dishes are consistently available. With a responsiveness rate of 90% in handling customer inquiries, such as asking for ingredients of the food, the staff shows a strong commitment to customer service,

effectively addressing customers' needs and questions. These data highlight the restaurant's strengths in service, particularly in customer engagement, while also pointing areas need to be improve in managing the buffet.

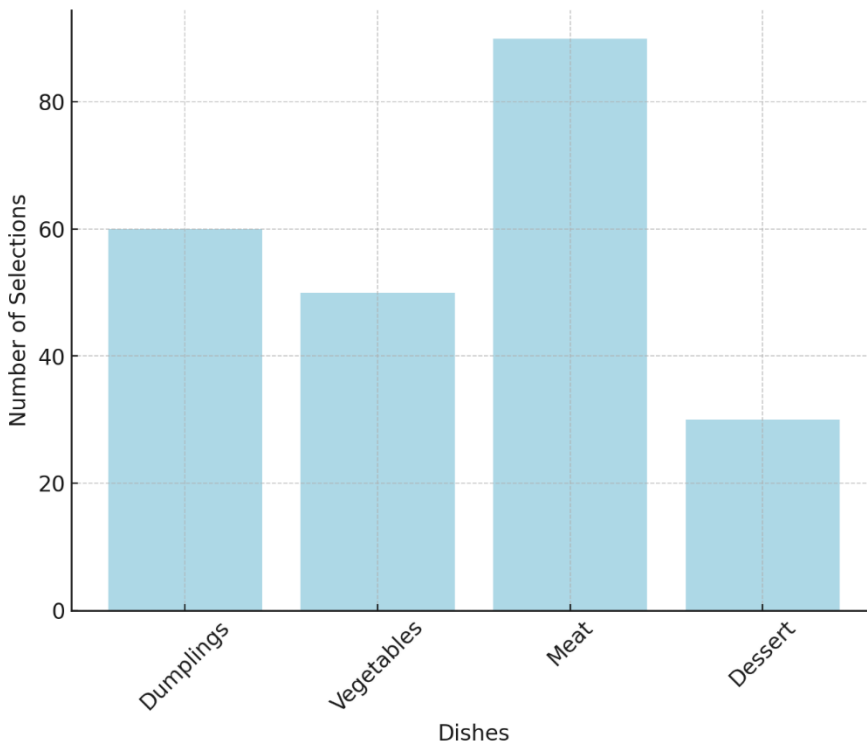


Figure 6: Buffet popularity by dish.

This figure shows how popular different dishes are at the buffet in Biáng! restaurant during lunchtime. The number of times customers chose each dish reveals their preferences.

Meat dishes were the most popular with 90 selections. This high number shows that customers really enjoy the meat options available, suggesting that the restaurant should ensure these dishes are always high quality and well-refilled. Dumplings are the second most popular dish with 60 selections. This popularity suggests that the restaurant should focus or even expand more varieties because customers are really enjoy this dish. Vegetables received 50 selections, which is also popular, indicating that many customers enjoy healthy options. This highlights the importance of offering good quality and variety of healthy dishes to cater a wide range of customers' needs. Desserts were chosen the least, with only 30 selections. This might mean that while customers like sweets, they tend to prioritize main dishes during lunch. The restaurant need to have action to handle this problem. These data provides insights into customer preferences, helping the restaurant to have actions to improve the dining experience.

4.3 Interviews

Interviews were conducted with frequent customers of Biáng! restaurant to gain qualitative insights into their dining experiences during lunch hours. A structured format was utilized, allowing participants to share their thoughts freely while ensuring key topics were addressed (Bryman 2016). The interview questions are included in the Appendices chapter (appendix 1).

4.3.1 Interview Design

Interviews were conducted with both customers and the restaurant manager of Biáng! to gain comprehensive insights into the dining experience from different perspectives. The interviews were conducted over a period of one week, from October 28, 2024, to November 3, 2024. A total of 12 frequent customers participated in the interviews, providing valuable qualitative data through a structured format that allowed for open dialogue while addressing key themes. The author also got the line with LN – the general manager of Biáng! restaurant, provided insights into strategies employed to enhance customer experience. The restaurant was delighted to collaborate with the author in this research because they are committed to understanding customer needs and enhancing the dining experience.

The interviews were conducted in a comfortable setting within the restaurant, after customers finished their meals, to encourage candid conversations. Each session lasted approximately 10 minutes, and participants were informed about the purpose of the study, ensuring that their responses would remain confidential and be used solely for the research purposes. The participants are asked to sign the consent forms to comply with ethical research standards (American Psychological Association 2019).

4.3.2 Interview Analysis

The interview was conducted face-to-face with the participants, and all the audio data were recorded with the participants' consent. Initially, the author listened to the audio data several times and transcribed the audio data to ensure accuracy, then familiarized themselves with the data through multiple readings (Flick 2018). The researcher organizes the transcriptions in Microsoft Word, employing quotation marks to clearly mark the participants' responses. Each quote is connected to its corresponding participant to maintain context and ensure their voices are clear and identifiable. By following these meticulous steps, the researcher guarantees an organized interview process, accurate data collection, and precise transcription, thus preserving the reliability and credibility of the research.

The analysis process employed a qualitative content analysis approach, start with the coding of the transcribed material. Key phrases and responses were highlighted to capture recurring ideas and answers of the participants, essential for managing qualitative data (Friese 2019). The codes were then grouped into broader themes related to the research objectives, revealing primary factors influencing customer attraction to Biáng! restaurant, such as great location and menu diversity, etc (Braun & Clarke 2006).

4.3.3 Interview Results

The interviews conducted with customers and the restaurant manager at Biáng! Restaurant provided valuable insights into the dining experience and operational practices. The most significant theme that received many repeated answers was the importance of convenience and accessibility of the restaurant. Many customers highlighted the restaurant's strategic location, with one respondent described: "The location is very convenient for me, especially since I work nearby, it is easy to get to by walk for a quick lunch without any hassle. That is also why I choose Biáng! Restaurant rather than other ones." (R1). Another respondent agree with this sentiment, stating: "Being close to public transports like tram and metro makes it easy for me to get here. Besides, located right on the metro station makes me want to get here everyday thanks to its convenient." (R2). Additionally, there are 8 same answer with the same information were repeated, consolidating that easy access is crucial for attracting and retaining customers.

The efficiency of the lunch buffet was another important result. Generally, the customers appreciated the quick service that allowed them to enjoy their meals without long waiting times. One customer remarked: "The buffet setup is great, I can grab my food and customize my own plate quickly and then get back to work" (R3). One added: "The price of the buffet is so affordable, I can also use my working benefits here. With a reasonable price, I have several options of food to try, while I do not need to pay for separate orders" (R7). However, some customers are not very satisfied when popular dishes ran out, that made them sometimes had to wait for refilling. One participant stated: "Sometimes my favorite foods ran out and I need to wait for times for refilling, it quite affected my satisfaction because I do not have much time for the lunch. I would like to see faster refills for popular dishes." (R5). Another one suggested: "I think the staff should observe the food more often and closely to refill it before it runs out." (R6). These feedback highlights the customers' interest in the buffet setting, as well as the need for the restaurant to ensure that the buffet remains well stocked during peak hours to enhance the dining experience.

The variety and quality of food also emerged as key factors influencing customer satisfaction. Interviewees are consistently happy with the authenticity, freshness and diversity of the buffet's food offering. One participant responded: "I love the authenticity flavors of the food here, which reminds

me of home-cooked meals when I was a child. I have tried many places, but the flavors here suit me the best" (R7). Another respondent said: "The food here is so diverse, the restaurant has variety options of meat and vegetables. I am happy to dine here because I am a vegetarian, and I love the offering of 6 vegetable dishes every day. A plus is the vegetables are always fresh" (R8). Another customer added: "Every time I come here, there are something new for me to discover. As my experience, the food is changed every day and this is very interesting, which keeps me coming back to try more food." These valuable customers' feedback shows the importance of maintaining the variety and quality of food options to meet customer preferences and expectations.

The customers' satisfaction with service was also emphasized in the interviews, almost all the participants are happy with the quick service, the friendly and attentive staff. Many customers appreciated the staff's effort and reliability in addressing their needs. Respondent 1 noted: "The staff are always friendly and attentive, which make me feel valued as a customer." (R1). Respondent 2 also shared: "I appreciate how quickly and reliably when the staff respond to my request. For example when I asked them about the ingredients of the food because I have allergy with peanuts, they responded to me quickly and fluently, which enhance my comfort when dining here." (R2). However, there were suggestions for areas that should be improved, particularly related to the speed of table clearing and food refilling. One respondent said: "Sometimes I come here in my lunch break, I need to wait to be seated because there are tables which are not clean. Quickly clearing tables would help minimize my waiting times, which help my experience better" (R7). Another added to it: "If the staff could refill the buffet items faster, it would be a plus to my dining experience." (R9).

The restaurant manager of Biáng! emphasized the key strategy for attracting and retaining lunchtime customers is quick service and buffet setting. "We focus on quick service and a well-organized buffet. We understand that many of our customers have limited time during lunch, so we aim to make their experience as efficient as possible." The restaurant manager said.

To maintain variety and freshness in the buffet, the manager explained, "We regularly review customer feedback to adjust our offerings. Our goal is to keep the menu dynamic and appealing, introducing new dishes based on seasonal ingredients and popular trends." This approach not only helps in retaining existing customers but also attracts new ones by keeping the menu exciting.

Regarding service quality, the manager emphasized the importance of training staff to provide attentive and responsive service, noted: "Promptness and attentiveness are key in maintaining customer satisfaction during lunch. We train our staff to be responsive and friendly, as building a relationship with customers is essential." This insight highlights the restaurant's commitment to making sure that customers feel appreciated and well taken care of during their time there.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

This research prioritizes the rights and privacy of participants. Before taking part in the study, all respondents signed an informed consent form that explained the study's goals, what their involvement would entail, how their confidentiality would be protected and the researcher's contact information in case of questions. Participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences (Creswell 2014, 98). Confidentiality is a key ethical requirement. To protect participants' identities, all names and identifying details were anonymized from the data analysis and reporting (Hair et al. 2011). This research was commissioned by Biáng! restaurant, which allowed for a focused examination of customer experiences while ensuring that a range of perspectives was included. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants did not receive any monetary or material rewards. The selection of participants was unbiased, and the researcher aimed to create a welcoming atmosphere to encourage honest responses. By following these ethical guidelines, this study strives to maintain a high standard of integrity and respect for all participants.

5 Findings and Discussion

5.1 Key Findings

This section summarizes the essential themes derived from the research regarding factors influencing customer experiences at Biáng! restaurant.

5.1.1 Convenience and Accessibility

One of the most prominent themes that came out of the research is how important convenience and accessibility are for customers. Customers consistently highlighted the restaurant's prime location, which is situated near a variety of office buildings and public transport options. This strategic positioning allows for easy access during the lunch hour, which is essential for those who do not have a lot of time. Participants expressed that the ability to quickly reach the restaurant significantly influences their decision to dine there. As customers said: "The location is very convenient for me, especially since I work nearby, it is easy to get to by walk for a quick lunch without any hassle" (R1); and: "Being close to public transports like tram and metro makes it easy for me to get here. Besides, located right on the metro station makes me want to get here everyday thanks to its convenient" (R2). This ease of access is essential not just for immediate customer satisfaction but also for fostering long-term loyalty. The ability to quickly access the restaurant allows customers to maximize their lunch breaks, reinforcing their preference for Biáng! over other dining options that may require more time to reach. This aspect creates a positive impression of the restaurant and helps attract a steady flow of customers during lunchtime.

5.1.2 Efficiency on the Lunch Buffet

The efficiency of the lunch buffet system was another important factor affecting customer satisfaction of Biáng! restaurant. In general, customers appreciated the speed of buffet service, which allows them to have lunch quickly and return to work without hindrances and delays. Many interviewees noted that with the buffet setup, they can have their meals quickly and get back to work. This efficiency is particularly crucial during peak lunch hours when time is of the essence for many customers.

However, there are still some of the participants who expressed concerns regarding the replenishment of popular dishes in the buffet line. As a result of the interviews, feedback indicated that certain items often run out, leading to dissatisfaction among customers who were eager to enjoy their favorites. One participant mentioned: "Sometimes my favorite foods ran out and I need to wait for times for refilling, it quite affected my satisfaction because I do not have much time for the lunch." (R5). This insight highlights an area for Biáng! to improve its buffet service management during

busy lunch periods. Biáng! should have actions to ensure that popular dishes remain available throughout the lunch service.

5.1.3 Variety and Quality of Food

The variety and quality of food offered at Biáng! were consistently praised by customers, making this a standout feature of the restaurant. Participants emphasized the authenticity of the flavors and the diverse options available, contributing significantly to their overall satisfaction. According to interviewees, the variety of dishes available at the buffet and authentic food flavors are the reasons why they come back to Biáng! Restaurant several times in lunchtime. These feedback indicates that the restaurant's commitment to quality and diversity is a major driver of customer loyalty. Furthermore, The freshness of the ingredients used in dishes were highlighted. As one customer said: "Every time I come here, the food tastes fresh, which makes a big difference to other restaurants." (R4). Customer feedback shows that the emphasis on using high-quality ingredients in making food enhances the overall dining experience and can set Biáng! apart from competitors. In conclusion, the variety and quality of food are pivotal to the restaurant's appeal, and continue focusing on these aspects will be vital for Biáng! to sustain and grow their customer base.

5.1.4 Customer Satisfaction with Service

Customer satisfaction regarding service quality at Biáng! is predominantly high, primarily due to the friendliness and attentiveness of the staff. Many interviewees noted the positive interactions they experienced, which significantly enhance their overall dining experience. In customers' feedback, they feel happy and respected, thanks to the staffs' friendly attitude. These customers's feedback highlight the importance of staff training and engagement in delivering high-quality service.

Although the general satisfaction with service is high, there are still opportunities for improvement. According to customers' feedback, table clearing should be done more quickly, and food refilling should be enhanced to improve the dining experience. This indicates that while service quality is generally high, there are actionable steps the restaurant can take to enhance operational efficiency during lunch periods.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings from this research, the problems that can be seen easily are the speed of clearing table and refilling buffet items. The author have some suggestions for Biáng! Restaurant to enhance the service quality and the efficiency of the buffet format.

First of all, to improve the operational efficiency during peak hours, Biáng! Restaurant should schedule additional staff during busy lunch hours to manage both table clearing and customer services. As the restaurant have more workforce, it can help to maintain a quick turnover rate. Additionally, assigning specific staff members to focus solely on clearing and resetting tables during peak hours can ensure that tables are cleared promptly, reducing wait times for incoming customers and significantly improving their dining experience. Secondly, to enhance the speed of refilling buffet items, the restaurant can design specific staff members to monitor the buffet tables during peak hours. The staff's sole responsibility is to keep an eye on popular dishes and refill them promptly. Furthermore, the manager should train the staff about buffet items, including which dishes will be run out quickly. This action will help the staff to understand and remember customers preferences, which help them prioritize refills effectively.

Moreover, as in the interview with the restaurant manager, they did not mention about marketing program, representing a weakness for the restaurant. Biáng! Restaurant should have a marketing strategy to attract more customers and retain existing ones. Implementing marketing program can help increase the restaurant's brand recognition, helping the restaurant to be more visible in the competitive lunch dining market and foster customer loyalty.

6 Conclusion

The process of developing this thesis on the factors influencing customer experiences at Biáng! restaurant has been both challenging and rewarding, offering a comprehensive exploration of the elements that attract lunchtime customers. Beginning with a clear research objective, the author engaged in an extensive literature review to establish a theoretical foundation for the study. This review highlighted existing research on customer preferences within the hospitality industry, identifying key factors such as convenience, food quality, and service efficiency as critical drivers of customer satisfaction.

The research utilized qualitative methods, specifically structured interviews and observational studies, to gather insights from both customers and restaurant management. Conducting interviews provided valuable firsthand perspectives, while observations offered additional context on customer behavior and interactions within the restaurant. This combined approach revealed the complexities of customer experiences, highlighting that factors like the restaurant's prime location, the variety and authenticity of the food, the efficient buffet format and service quality are crucial in attracting customers during lunch hours. Engaging directly with participants and observing the dining environment emphasized the relationship between customer expectations and restaurant operations, showing that a responsive and adaptable approach is vital for success in a competitive dining market.

Throughout the research process, the author faced several challenges, including ensuring a range of viewpoints and maintaining ethical standards when engaging participants. Managing studies while adhering to ethical guidelines not only strengthened the credibility of the findings but also built trust between the researcher and participants. This aspect of the process highlighted the importance of ethical considerations in research, especially when working with human subjects.

The insights gained from this study contribute significantly to understanding customer experiences in the restaurant industry. The findings offer actionable recommendations for Biáng! restaurant to improve its operations and boost customer satisfaction. These recommendations include strategies for better managing the buffet, speeding up service, and implementing targeted marketing efforts to attract a wider range of customers.

Overall, the thesis process has been a valuable learning experience, enhancing the author's research skills and deepening his understanding of the complexities of customer service in the hospitality sector. A key takeaway from this experience is the importance of adaptability in research methodologies, as well as the value of engaging with a diverse range of participants to capture a broader spectrum of insights. The author also learned that effective communication and

relationship-building are essential in gathering meaningful data. The knowledge gained from this journey not only improves the understanding of customer preferences but also sets a solid foundation for future work in hospitality management. The author is confident that the findings and recommendations from this research will be beneficial for Biáng! and similar establishments, ultimately helping them provide exceptional dining experiences in a competitive Helsinki market.

Sources

Ala-Harja, H., Pitkääkoski, T. & Aaltojarvi, I. 2017. Lunch customer experience factors in the restaurant industry. Conference proceedings: 7th advances in hospitality & tourism marketing & management (AHTMM) conference, Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, North, pp. 488-503.

Ali, D., Alam, M. & Bilal, H. 2021. The influence of service quality, price and environment on customer loyalty in the restaurant's industry: the mediating role of customer satisfaction. *Journal of Accounting and Finance in Emerging Economies*, 7, 1, pp. 143-154.

Ali, F., Amin, M. & Cobanoglu, C. 2015. An Integrated Model of Service Experience, Emotions, Satisfaction, and Price Acceptance: An Empirical Analysis in the Chinese Hospitality Industry. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 25, 4, 449-475.

American Psychological Association. 2019. Publication manual of the American Psychological Association. 7th ed. American Psychological Association. Washington, DC.

Barber, N. & Scarcelli, J. M. 2010. Enhancing the assessment of tangible service quality through the creation of a cleanliness measurement scale. *Managing Service Quality: An International Journal*, 20, 1, pp. 70-88.

Bichler, B. F., Pikkemaat, B. & Peters, M. 2020. Exploring the role of service quality, atmosphere and food for revisits in restaurants by using a e-mystery guest approach. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insight*, 4, 3, pp. 351-369.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research In Psychology*, 3, 2, pp. 77-101.

Bryman, A. 2016. *Social Research Methods*. 5th ed. Oxford University Press. Oxford.

Chi, H. K., Huang, K. C. & Nguyen, B. D. T. 2019. Service quality and customer satisfaction in restaurant industry in Vietnam - A comparison between meta-analysis and empirical study. *International Journal of Business and Management Invention (IJBMI)*, 8, 5, pp. 28-36.

Chowbus 2024. What is a Buffet Restaurant & How Do Buffets Work?. URL: <https://pos.chowbus.com/blog/article/what-is-a-buffet-restaurant>. Accessed 18 October 2024.

Chua, B-L., Karim, S., Lee, S. & Han, H. 2020. Customer restaurant choice: an empirical analysis of restaurant types and eating-out occasions. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17, 17, 6267.

Clowes, A. 9 April 2018. Rethinking the buffet: 3 things hotels can do now to reduce food waste. Blog. URL: <https://www.wri.org/insights/rethinking-buffet-3-things-hotels-can-do-now-reduce-food-waste>. Accessed: 16 October 2024.

Coronel, I. D., Bacar, F., Manuel, C. Z. & Seronin, M. F. 2024. Ambiance that Keeps You Coming Back: Exploring Customer Satisfaction and Revisit Intention in Coffee Shops. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*, 12, 2, pp.159-169.

Creswell, J. W. 2014. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 4th ed. Sage. Los Angeles.

Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. 2018. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 5th ed. SAGE Publications. California.

DiPietro, R. 2017. Restaurant and foodservice research: A critical reflection behind and an optimistic look ahead. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 29, 4, pp.1203-1234.

Dugan, B. 26 August 2024. The Impact of Location on Restaurant Success: Choosing the Right Spot. Blog. URL: <https://a2zrestaurantconsulting.com/the-impact-of-location-on-restaurant-success/>. Accessed: 18 October 2024.

EQ4C 2024. The SERVQUAL Model: Measuring Service Quality by Comparing Expectations with Perception. URL: <https://eq4c.com/the-servqual-model/>. Accessed 18 October 2024.

Feriors 2021. Service Quality Definition & How to Achieve Customer Satisfaction with SERVQUAL. URL: <https://feriors.com/service-quality-servqual-definition-customer-satisfaction/>. Accessed 15 October 2024.

Flick, U. 2014. *An introduction to qualitative research*. 5th ed. Sage Publications. London.

Friese, S. 2019. *Qualitative data analysis with ATLAS.TI*. 3rd ed. Sage. London.

Habtamu, W. A. 2019. Assessing a restaurant service quality using the DINESERV model. A quantitative study on Pizza Hut. Master's thesis. Umeå University, Department of Business Administration. URL: <urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-176277>. Accessed 15 October 2024.

Hair, Jr. J. F., Wolfinbarger, M., Money, A. H., Samouel, P. & Page, M. J. 2011. Essentials of Business Research Methods. 2nd ed. Routledge. London.

Hmhub 2023. Buffet services: features, pro-cons- organizing, etiquette. URL: <https://hmhub.in/2nd-sem-f-b-service-notes/buffet-service/>. Accessed: 18 October 2024.

Howstuffworks 2018. Why Restaurants Love Buffets Even More Than You Do. URL: <https://money.howstuffworks.com/why-restaurants-love-buffets-even-more-than-do.htm>. Accessed 18 October 2024.

Indeed 2024. Service Quality: Definition, 5 Dimensions and Implementation. URL: <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/service-quality>. Accessed 16 October 2024.

Kandampully, J., Zhang, T. C. & Bilgihan, A. 2015. Customer loyalty: a review and future directions with a special focus on the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 27, 3, pp. 379-414.

Kwortnik, R. J. & Thompson, G. M. 2009. Unifying service marketing and operations with service experience management. *Journal of Service Research*, 11, 4, pp. 389-406.

Liu, P. & Tse, E. C. Y. 2018 Exploring factors on customers' restaurant choice: an analysis of restaurant attributes. *British Food Journal*, 120, 10, 2289-2303.

Lizcano-Prada, J., Maestre-Matos, M., Mesias, F. J., Lami, O., Giray, H., Özçiçek, C. D., Bamoi, A. G. A. & Martínez-Carrasco, F. 2024. Does Consumers' Cultural Background Affect How They Perceive and Engage in Food Sustainability? A Cross-Cultural Study. *Foods*, 13, 2, 311.

Marketing91 2023. The servqual model – definition, dimensions, gaps and advantages service. URL: <https://www.marketing91.com/servqual/>. Accessed 15 October 2024.

ModernRestaurantManagement 2024. 2024 Outlook: Restaurant Trends and Challenges, Part Three. URL: <https://modernrestaurantmanagement.com/2024-outlook-restaurant-trends-and-challenges-part-three/>. Accessed: 25 October 2024.

News Moor s.a. 5 Dimensions of Service Quality-SERVQUAL Model. URL: https://news-moor.com/servqual-model-five-key-service-dimensions-servqual-gaps-reasons/?utm_content=cmp-true. Accessed: 24 October 2024.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, A. V. & Berry, L. L. 1988. SERVQUAL: A Multiple-Item Scale for Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Service Quality. *Journal of Retailing*, 64, 1, pp. 12-40.

Punamäki, J. 2021. Tourism, restaurant and event sector in Helsinki. Fact sheet. Helsinki. URL: <https://www.hel.fi/static/kanslia/elo/matkailu-ravintola-ja-tapahtuma-ala-helsingissa-22-10-2021-eng.pdf>. Accessed 15 October 2024.

Raab, C., Mayer, K., Kim, Y-S. & Shoemaker, S. 2009. Price-sensitivity measurement: a tool for restaurant menu pricing. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 33, 1, pp. 93-105.

Razak, N. A., Aminuddin, Z. M. & Ghazali, A. R. 2020. Service quality and customer satisfaction in restaurant industry using partial least square. AAMC 2019 the 13th Asian Academy of Management International Conference 2019, pp. 218-225.

Ryan, G. W. & Bernard, H. R. 2003. Techniques to identify themes. *Field Methods*, 15, 1, pp. 85-109.

Ryu, K. & Han, H. 2010. Influence of the Quality of Food, Service, and Physical Environment on Customer Satisfaction and Behavioral Intention in Quick-Casual Restaurants: Moderating Role of Perceived Price. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 34, 3, pp. 310-329.

Sharma, A., Moon, J., Bailey-Davis, L. & Conklin, M. 2017. Food choices and service evaluation under time constraints: the school lunch environment. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 29, 12, pp. 3191-3210.

Symson s.a. Understanding price sensitive customer and how to assess price sensitivity level. Blog. URL: <https://www.symson.com/blog/price-sensitive-customers-and-how-to-assess-price-sensitivity-level>. Accessed 16 October 2024.

Taimela, A. 1 February 2024. Understanding why location is important for restaurant success. Blog. URL: <https://www.limepack.eu/blog/restaurant-eu/understanding-why-location-is-important-for-restaurant-success>. Accessed: 18 October 2024.

Tango s.a. Why location is so important for restaurants. Blog. URL: <https://tangoanalytics.com/blog/location-important-restaurant/>. Accessed: 18 October 2024.

The Restaurant Times s.a. Buffer restaurant: are they sustainable? The Restaurant Times. URL: <https://www.posist.com/restaurant-times/restro-gyaan/pros-and-cons-of-buffet-restaurants.html>. Accessed: 17 October 2024.

Thielemann, V, M., Ottenbacher, M, C. & Harrington, R, J. 2018. Antecedents and consequences of perceived customer value in the restaurant industry: A preliminary test of a holistic model. *International Hospitality Review*, 32, 1, pp. 26-45.

TigerChef s.a. Why the location of your restaurant is so important. URL: <https://www.tigerchef.com/why-the-location-of-your-business-is.html>. Accessed 18 October 2024.

World Population Review 2024. Helsinki, Finland Population 2024. URL: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/cities/finland/helsinki>. Accessed 15 October 2024.

Wren, H. 19 August 2024. Customer service quality assurance: The ultimate guide. Blog. URL: <https://www.zendesk.com/blog/customer-service-quality-assurance/>. Accessed 15 October 2024.

Wu, C. H-J. & Liang, R-D. 2009. Effect of experiential value on customer satisfaction with service encounters in luxury-hotel restaurants. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 28, 4, pp. 586-593.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questions

For the customers:

1. What are the main reasons you choose Biáng! Restaurant for lunch?
2. How would you describe your experience with the lunch buffet format at Biáng!?
3. How important is Biáng!'s location and accessibility in your decision to dine here?
4. What aspects of the service at Biáng! contribute most to your dining experience?
5. Is there anything you would like to see improved in your lunchtime experience at Biáng!?

For the manager:

1. What strategies does Biáng! use to attract and retain lunchtime customers, particularly those with limited time?
2. How does Biáng! ensure that the lunch buffet remains fresh, varied, and appealing to repeat customers?
3. In your experience, what aspects of service quality are most crucial in maintaining customer satisfaction during lunch?