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DOI: 10.5937/turpos0-40569

UDK: 38.48-6:641/642(497.11)

005.53:640.4

THE INFLUENCE OF GASTRONOMIC OFFER AND SERVICES ON THE BRANDING OF HOTEL DIVČIBARE

UTICAJ GASTRONOMSKE PONUDE I USLUGA NA BRENDIRANJE HOTELA DIVČIBARE

Apstrakt: *Gastronomska ponuda i restoranska usluga oduvek su igrali veoma važnu ulogu u brendiranju hotelskih objekata. Predmet istraživanja odnosi se na hotel Divčibare (planina Maljen, R. Srbija). Cilj i zadatak ove studije je da ispita stavove i mišljenja gostiju hotela kako usluga i izbor kuhinjske ponude mogu uticati na zadovoljstvo ispitanika i lojalnost gostiju. Istraživanje je sprovedeno u septembru 2022. godine na uzorku od 250 ispitanika. Metode korišćene u radu za dobijanje istraživačkih odgovora su: deskriptivna statistička analiza, Man Vitnjev test, aritmetička sredina i standardna devijacija, analiza pouzdanosti, Kronbahov alfa koeficijent, Korelaciona analiza i Pirsonov koeficijent. Na osnovu sprovedenog istraživanja, ispitanici su ukazali da hotelska gastronomska ponuda, lojalnost, zadovoljstvo i pružene usluge mogu u velikoj meri uticati na brendiranje hotela Divčibare.*

Ključne reči: *gastronomska ponuda, brendiranje, lojalnost, hotel Divčibare.*

Abstract: *The gastronomic offer and restaurant service have always played a very important role in the branding of hotel facilities. The subject of the research refers to the Divčibare hotel (Maljen mountain, R. Serbia). The goal and task of this study is to examine the attitudes and opinions of hotel guests how service and culinary choices can affect respondents' satisfaction and guest loyalty. The survey was conducted in September 2022 on a sample of 250 respondents. Methods used in paper to obtain research answers are: descriptive statistical analysis, Mann Whitney test, arithmetic mean and standard deviation, reliability analysis, Cronbach's alpha coefficient, Correlation analysis and Pearson's coefficient. Based on conducted research, respondents indicated that hotel gastronomic offer, loyalty, satisfaction and services provided, can greatly affect the branding of the Divčibare hotel.*

Key words: *Gastronomy offer, branding, loyalty, hotel Divčibare.*



Introduction

The first forms of providing food and beverage services in order to make money date back to the period of ancient civilizations, while the first commercial restaurants appeared much later. In Serbian society, cafes are given the importance of an institution that has multiple functions: economic, social, cultural, political, democratic, information and communication, stage and theater, driving, and even the function of a battleground for gender equality (Rakić & Rakić, 2010; Radović & Keković, 2014; Zrnić, 2021).

Despite the fact that the first hospitality facilities were focused on offering drinks, the Serbian restaurant industry put food in the foreground, which is in line with the existence of the food cult in the Balkans. An important characteristic of the Serbian cafe is meat as a gastronomic ideal. A restaurant product is a combination of material elements and interrelated service activities. All these elements are included in the restaurant product, which can be further broken down according to the needs of guests, in order to meet their requirements (Konuk, 2019). According to Chen & Chen (2014) a restaurant product includes the following elements: physical product (food and drink), service environment, quality of delivered service, location and price (Yi & Choi, 2012; Nirwandy & Awang, 2014; Gajić et al., 2022).

Even some research has pointed to different attributes of the restaurant that affect the satisfaction of specific requirements of guests (Dion & Arnould, 2016). The literature has determined that these are the quality of food, quality of service and atmosphere - as the most important characteristics for understanding customer satisfaction and their future behavior (Nam et al., 2011; Manhas & Tukamushaba, 2015; Šerić & Gil-Saura, 2012). In particular, all of these attributes represent factors that influence customer attitudes and behaviors. First of all, the patronage of restaurants by customers is driven by satisfaction with food (Kim et al., 2013). In addition to influencing satisfaction and restaurant choice, Hanaysha (2016) found

that food quality affects not only satisfaction but also brand image in consumer perception (Zrnić et al., 2021). The quality and popularity of restaurants and other hospitality facilities is based on the variety of dishes. In this way, the existing ones are retained and new guests are attracted. The catering facility preserves the tradition and acquires an image in the form of recognizability for the content and quality of the offer.

Serving food and drinks is a complex process, which involves much more than simply ordering, bringing food and drinks to the guest, collecting bills and clearing the table (Ismail et al., 2016). With the development of restaurant business, this process has become very heterogeneous, and the choice of service options depends on the determination and goals of a particular restaurant (Baldwin et al., 2011). Fewer tourists, looking for an authentic experience, either "experimental" or "existential", visit local restaurants and regularly consume local food, either as a way of trying real life in a destination or because it is their choice (Lu et al., 2015). Local food can become a permanent choice for "existential" tourists, especially when it manifests a worldview (for example, the adoption of vegetarian cuisine by people who have converted to Hinduism).

The subject of the research is measuring the satisfaction of guests in hotels and other restaurants, local gastronomic offers and services, as well as understanding the mentioned elements through a positive impact on guest satisfaction and loyalty, which should create an image of a positive hotel brand. The main goal of the study is to determine whether, and to what extent, the local gastronomic offer and the process of providing restaurant services have an impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty, and whether and to what extent they have a positive impact on the restaurant brand.

Literature review

In the process of creating a new product, by creating a name, logo and other specific features, a new successful brand is

potentially created. The word brand comes from the Old Scandinavian word "brand" and the original meaning is "stamp or burn". In the modern Serbian language, economic terminology and everyday life, the use of the word brand has become frequent, which is pronounced identically in Anglo-Saxon literature and in almost all parts of the world. In modern marketing literature, the following terms are used as synonyms for the word brand: brand, brand name, brand sign, brand color, trade name and others. Most of these terms are related to creating a brand identity (Errajaa et al., 2021).

A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, design or combination of these elements, which should make it easier for customers to identify a specific product/service and distinguish it from competing products/services. A strong brand symbolizes not only the type of service that will be provided to the consumer, but also the type of experience that they will experience on that occasion. In general, the brand is a guarantee of quality, thus increasing consumer confidence that their expectations will be met, or even exceeded (Gordin et al., 2016).

The brand serves the service company to visualize the intangible elements of the service towards the consumer and, based on that, enable it to take the right place in the consumer's consciousness (Hernandez-Rojas et al., 2021). From that point of view, a brand can be seen as a promise of a set of features that someone buys, which make the brand real or illusory, emotional or rational, visible or invisible (Gajić et al., 2020). In the realization of the offer, the brand of the service company has numerous roles. Some of the most important are the following: the brand makes it easier to build long-term relationships with customers; facilitates recognition and differentiation from competitors; represents a barrier to market entry for companies with an underdeveloped brand; increases the bargaining power of the company; reduces consumer sensitivity to price changes; enhances the effects of communication efforts; affects the relationship between employee loyalty, consumer satisfac-

tion and company image (Rodríguez-López et al., 2020). Unlike physical products, service brands provide a tangible clue and represent a reference point for an intangible offering. A strong brand reduces risk for consumers and serves as an indicator of quality and a source of differentiation (Yi et al., 2018). Moreover, branding helps service organizations develop and maintain long-term relationships with their guests (Demirçiftçi & Kızilirmak, 2016). Guests choose from alternative fast service facilities based on attributes such as location convenience, price, consistency, food quality, service quality and cleanliness (Mun et al., 2022). Guests' "selective perception, selective distortion and selective retention" determine which attributes are perceived as important for their needs and become a part of a lasting brand image (Nicolaidis, 2018). The main goal of the restaurant, but also of every other company, is satisfaction and value creation, which is of special importance for conquering the market. That is why creating "value and consumer satisfaction" is the heart of modern marketing thoughts and practices (Erkmen, 2019).

Consumer satisfaction is the key to retaining existing clients and attracting new ones. According to Rather & Sharma (2016) satisfaction is the consumer's reaction to achievements. It is the price that the attributes of a product or service, or only the product or service, provide (give) a pleasant level of consumption, including levels of underperformance or overfulfillment.

The brand is one of the key factors in assessing the quality of services and customer satisfaction. The literature in the field of marketing services lists different approaches to the factors that affect the company's image. In this context, Woodside et al. (2009) argue that a brand refers to a brand name and the different beliefs that consumers have about a product, service, or business. Authors Singh & Nika (2019) claim that the brand is a very important factor in the company's assessment and that it is "what is in the minds of consumers when they hear the name of the company.

From the above definitions and approach to the relationship between brand and consumer satisfaction, it follows that brand image affects consumer awareness by a combination of different factors such as propaganda messages through different media, public relations, propaganda personal communication with the recipient, consumer experiences with different products or services. The brand of the restaurant, and the service it provides, is especially important in a situation where consumers in the previous period did not have the opportunity to assess the quality of products and range of services. In such cases, hotel companies with a better image are given more importance. Also, the existence of a positive image of the quality of the services simplifies the buying process, because the risk of buying a certain product or service of a brand other than the one they are used to is reduced in the mind of the customer. The goal of every restaurant and other catering companies, is to achieve positive economic results. There are four reasons why consumer satisfaction lowers costs. First, it costs less to retain existing consumers than to attract new ones. It is estimated that on average, the costs of attracting new consumers are almost five times higher than retaining existing ones. Second, increased consumer satisfaction reduces dealing with complaints, which leads to lower business costs. Third, regular customers give the company the opportunity to reduce transaction costs. This is especially pronounced when it comes to consumers who buy large quantities, which enables economy of size in activities such as distribution, invoicing and maintenance. Finally, satisfied consumers increase the productivity of employees in the company, which leads to lower operating costs (Gagić et al., 2013).

Methodology

To collect primary data, a survey questionnaire was created, which was used to examine the views of guests. The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents in printed form. A total of 250 questionnaires

were filled correctly out of 330 distributed, in the hotel Divčibare categorized with three stars according to the Regulation on standards for categorization of catering facilities for accommodation R. Serbia (Official Gazette of RS, no. 83/2016 and 30/2017). At an altitude of 980 meters, the mountain field known as Divčibare stretches from Crni vrh, Paljba, Golupac, to Veliko brdo. The hotel Divčibare is located in the central part of Maljen, 38 km southeast of Valjevo (R. Serbia). The questionnaire consisted of fourteen questions, divided into four parts:

- The first part deals with general issues aimed at determining the demographic characteristics of hotel guests.
- The second part refers to the findings that reflect the satisfaction of guests with the restaurant, gastronomic offer and service provided.
- The third part covers questions related to the opinion about creating a brand in a restaurant.
- The fourth part of the questionnaire deals with questions about the overall opinion of guest satisfaction and their loyalty.

Respondents expressed their views on five-point Likert scales. The respondents evaluated the stated findings on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant "absolute dissatisfaction", while 5 meant "absolute satisfaction". Data analysis was performed using the statistical program IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences SPSS 22). The G*power test model indicates that 101 is an adequate number for a representative sample, however a far higher number of valid sheets were collected, which testifies to the sample's attained representativeness. To obtain research results the following statistical methods are used: descriptive statistical analysis, Mann Whitney test, arithmetic mean and standard deviation, reliability analysis, Cronbach's alpha coefficient, Correlation analysis and Pearson's coefficient.

There were theoretical and practical restrictions during the research period. One of the restrictions is the paucity of literature on the subject. Additionally, it was common

for tourists to refuse to cooperate with interviewers. Some guests are still hesitant to interact with strangers and express their fear of the epidemic. This study may therefore be essential for both adding to the body of knowledge already known about the issue and for advancing a bigger, more substantial body of research on it. Employers will also be able to confess error and develop tactical solutions if they become aware of problems with service quality, which will help them succeed in the long run as a company, survive in the market, and contend with growing competition.

Results and discussion

Demographic analysis of respondents

In our research, 250 respondents participated. Of the total number, 32% were men and 68% women. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number (percentage) of respondents in relation to gender

| Gender | Number | Percentage |
|--------|--------|------------|
| Male | 80 | 32 |
| Female | 170 | 68 |

Source: Authors' calculation

In terms of age, there are slightly more older respondents, i.e. about 52% of respondents are over forty years old. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Number (percentage) of respondents in relation to age

| Age | Number | Percentage |
|---------|--------|------------|
| 18 - 20 | 9 | 4 |
| 21 - 29 | 45 | 18 |
| 30 - 39 | 58 | 23 |
| 40 - 49 | 71 | 28 |
| 50 + | 67 | 27 |

Source: Authors' calculation

In relation to education, the ratio is 37% respondents have secondary education, 28% college, and 35% university education. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Number (percentage) of respondents in relation to education

| Education | Number | Percentage |
|-------------|--------|------------|
| High school | 91 | 37 |
| College | 71 | 28 |
| Faculty | 88 | 35 |

Source: Authors' calculation

In relation to the place where tourists come from, the result is expected, because Vojvodina, Belgrade and central Serbia make up about 59%, which otherwise represent the main market of interest for Divčibare. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Number (percentage) of respondents in relation to where they come from

| Location | Number | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|--------|------------|
| Vojvodina | 55 | 22 |
| Belgrade and Central Serbia | 92 | 37 |
| West part of Serbia | 53 | 21 |
| South part of Serbia | 50 | 20 |

Source: Authors' calculation

Descriptive analysis

Table 5. shows the results of descriptive statistical analysis. The arithmetic mean and standard deviation were calculated for all individual statements. More favorable attitudes of the respondents are present in the statements where the value of the arithmetic mean is higher, and more homogeneous attitudes are present in the statements where the value of the standard deviation is lower.



Table 5. Results of descriptive statistical analysis

| Variables | Findings | Mean | St. deviation |
|---|---|------|---------------|
| Local gastronomic offer / service delivery process | The gastronomic offer in the restaurants on Divčibare is unique | 3.62 | 0.94 |
| | The food exudes a wealth of flavours | 3.98 | 0.89 |
| | Portions are served in an original way with a touch of creativity and courtesy of the food server | 3.70 | 0.93 |
| Restaurant brand | You would rather choose a restaurant of a well-known brand, in a certain destination, than a lesser-known, independent restaurant | 3.95 | 0.96 |
| | I find restaurants with a rich offer of national dishes are more attractive | 3.90 | 0.97 |
| | The national gastronomic offer has a positive effect on the good image of the restaurant | 3.97 | 0.86 |
| Satisfaction | Famous restaurants, which have a long tradition, are my first choice in Divčibare | 3.97 | 1.15 |
| | In addition to delicious portions, to build a positive image of the restaurant, the ambience of the restaurant, the speed of service and the kindness of the waiter are also important. | 4.33 | 0.84 |
| Loyalty | I am generally satisfied with the overall service provided, the ratio of price and quality in the restaurant in this destination. | 3.83 | 1.04 |
| | I am always ready to recommend the gastronomic offer of Divčibare to friends and family | 4.12 | 0.98 |

Source: Authors' calculation

Using the Mann Whitney test, there are no significant differences in the estimates of the findings in relation to gender, age and place of arrival of tourists. There was a statistically significant difference in relation to the level of education, in the following statements:

a. Portions were served in an original way with a touch of creativity and courtesy of the food server ($p = 0.02$).

Applying the post-hoc series Mann-Whitney U test, a statistically significant difference in this statement was observed among the respondents.

1. secondary and higher education ($r < 0.01$), where respondents with higher education were statistically significantly more in agreement with this statement compared to respondents with secondary education.

2. college and faculty education ($r = 0.05$), where respondents with higher education statistically significantly agreed more with this statement compared to respondents with lower education.

b. You would rather choose a restaurant of a well-known brand, in a certain destination, compared to a lesser-known, independent restaurant ($p = 0.02$).

i. Applying the post-hoc series Mann-Whitney U test, a statistically significant difference in this statement was observed among the respondents.

1. Secondary and higher education ($p < 0.01$), where respondents with higher education were statistically significantly more in agreement with this statement compared to respondents with secondary education.

v. In addition to delicious portions, to

build a positive image of the restaurant, the ambience of the restaurant, the speed of service and the kindness of the waiter ($p = 0.05$) are also important.

i. Applying the post-hoc series Mann-Whitney U test, a statistically significant difference in this statement was observed among the respondents.

1. secondary and higher education ($p = 0.02$), where respondents with higher education were statistically significantly more in agreement with this statement compared to respondents with secondary education.

r. I am generally satisfied with the overall service provided, the ratio of price and quality in the restaurant in this destination ($p = 0.04$).

i. Applying the post-hoc series Mann-Whitney U test, a statistically significant difference in this statement was observed among the respondents.

1. secondary and higher education ($r = 0.08$), where respondents with higher education were statistically significantly more in

agreement with this statement compared to respondents with secondary education.

2. college and faculty education ($p = 0.02$), where respondents with higher education were statistically significantly more in agreement with this statement compared to respondents with with lower education degree.

Reliability analysis

In this situation, when a certain variable is measured through several statements, it is very important to calculate whether the given variable is reliable, ie whether the statements through which it is measured are internally consistent.

For the purposes of this analysis, the value of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is calculated, which ranges from 0 to 1. The findings are internally consistent, ie the variable is reliable if the value of this coefficient is 0.7, and more. The results of the reliability analysis are shown in Table 6, as well as the results of the descriptive analysis for the formed variables.

Table 6. Results of reliability analysis and descriptive analysis for forming variables

| Variable | Cronbach's alpha | Arithmetic mean | Standard deviation |
|--|------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Local gastronomic offer / service delivery process | 0.923 | 3,77 | 0.72 |
| Restaurant brend | 0.821 | 3,94 | 0.81 |
| Satisfaction | 0.756 | 4,15 | 0,78 |
| Loyalty | 0,793 | 3,97 | 0.94 |

Source: Authors' calculation

As can be seen, in Table 6 there is a high degree of internal consistency between the variables in the model.

Based on the results of the descriptive analysis, it can be concluded that hotel guests are most satisfied with the satisfaction variable (4.15), while other variables range from 3.8 to 3.95. The result of the standard deviation shows that the highest homogeneity is present in the variable loyalty (0.94), and the lowest in the variable describing the gastronomic offer and the process of service provided (0.72).

Correlation analysis

Correlation analysis shows the degree of dependence of two variables (eg. two statements). In field research, the value of Pearson's linear correlation coefficient is usually calculated, which shows the degree of linear dependence, ie. degree of quantitative agreement between two variables. The value of this coefficient ranges from -1 to 1. However, if the questionnaire contains positively scaled statements (as is the case with our questionnaire containing seven-point scales), the value of this coefficient is usually



positive and ranges from 0 to 1. , values from 0 to 0.4 indicate a weak linear correlation, from 0.4 to 0.6 to a moderate linear correlation, and from 0.6 to 1 to a strong linear correlation. Of course, it is important that the value of Pearson's coefficient is statisti-

cally significant at the level of 0.05, ie. with a probability of 95%. Otherwise, the obtained value will not be statistically significant and will not be taken into consideration. The results of the research are shows in Table 7. as follows:

Table 7. Results of correlation analysis for forming variables

| Correlation analysis | Range | Pearson's coefficient |
|--|-------------|-----------------------|
| Correlation between gastronomic offer and satisfaction | - r = 0.758 | p <0.01 |
| Correlation between gastronomic offer and loyalty | - r = 0.729 | p <0.01 |
| Correlation between satisfaction and brand | - r = 0.740 | p <0.01 |
| Correlation between loyalty and brand | - r = 0.592 | p <0.01 |

Source: Authors' calculation

Based on the obtained results, we can say that the local gastronomic offer has a greater impact on satisfaction compared to guest loyalty, while, on the other hand, the correlation has a greater impact of satisfaction (0.740) than loyalty (0.592) on the restaurant brand. In all relationships, there are strong correlations of these models except between loyalty and brand, where there is a moderate correlation.

Conclusion

According to the accessible material, the authors of the paper conducted fieldwork on Serbia's Divčibare resort. Visitors of the hotel Divčibare who were there in September 2022 participated in the survey; 250 questionnaires that had been properly filled out of 330 distributed forms. Recommendations for further research in the field of gastronomic offer may include more hotel facilities and restaurants in Divčibare resort in order to gain an even broader picture of the attitudes of guests towards the gastronomic offer and services in order to brand restaurants in a better way. The obtained data would greatly help in creating an even better branding strategy for hotel and restaurant facilities. Hoteliers need to recognize the indication that the local culinary offer can be used as a competitive advantage of hotel restaurants,

reducing the possibility of failure. Also, the excellent gastronomic offer and service can greatly contribute to the branding of the hotel and catering facility. Furthermore, this study shows that the satisfaction and loyalty of the respondents depends on the quality of service and gastronomic offer.

Based on the results of the survey, respondents stated that the gourmet selection, customer contentment, loyalty, and services may all have a significant impact on the hotel Divčibare reputation and thus can greatly influence branding of the hotel.

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