

Measuring the customer service of local restaurants

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on customer service in the restaurant industry. In the highly competitive environment of the Bult area in Potchefstroom, restaurants need a competitive advantage to survive or outperform their closest competitors. Here customer service can be a crucial advantage. This study measures customer service offered at restaurants and has the primary objective to determine the current levels of service quality of restaurants located in the specified area. Furthermore, the study determined where improvements can be made or where current success levels can be maintained. The SERVQUAL model is used after its questions have been adapted for the restaurant industry. Data were collected from customers through a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire posted on Google Forms. The questionnaire was distributed electronically among customers of restaurants visiting the designated area. The feedback from customers indicated interesting target areas for restaurants to focus on to increase customer satisfaction. The data showed high Cronbach alpha coefficients which indicated satisfactory reliability and internal stability while the response rate was statistically calculated with the Kaiser, Meyer and Olkin test and confirmed to be satisfactory. Some 74 respondents completed the questionnaire. The results show overall high levels of satisfaction with the customer service across all five of the SERVQUAL antecedents while positive correlations exist between the customer service antecedents and the variable "Product offering". The study is of value to restaurant management who needs to focus on the areas of good service delivery and also to improve the less satisfactory areas. This study also provides a blueprint for those managers who aim to measure the service quality of their restaurants.

Keywords: customer, service, quality, restaurant, SERVQUAL, measure, retention, antecedents.

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CHAPTER 1: NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The restaurant industry is highly competitive and everyone is always on the lookout for the competitive advantage over their competitors and customer satisfaction. The businesses are exceedingly dependent on their customers' experiencing satisfaction which will result in customers returning and therefore growth for the organisation.

Better customer service resulting in customer satisfaction helps to maintain the profitability of the company, and goodwill for the company among the valuable customers who stay loyal (Kotler & Keller, 2012). To attain the growth required the companies will need to have a strong focus on delivering and maintaining quality service. It will have to be their primary goal of delivering the service levels demanded by customers who will be happy to pay the price charged if they experience satisfaction and therefore value for their money.

There are a supply and demand relationship between company and customers in terms of product and services offered to the customers by the company. The demands of the customers are changing rapidly, with some looking for valuable time saving options; healthy meals to assist dietary requirements; quenching their cravings for quality products with a complex mix of flavours. That results in more and more restaurants offering customised menus adapting their offerings regularly to try and fulfil the demands and needs of their target market. The restaurants who can keep in touch with their customers' demands and delivering accordingly in a timely fashion enhance their customer service and satisfaction.

A big drive from the restaurants under scrutiny is to deliver quality service and products with a definite aim to gain their customers' satisfaction. Therefore, this study aims to provide valuable insight into their customers' experience and satisfaction of the service and products provided.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CORE RESEARCH QUESTION

The problem investigated/addressed in this study is to determine the level of service delivered by a popular restaurant located in Potchefstroom. More specifically, the geographical area is called the Bult, where the university is situated. This is a unique restaurant business environment as the customers consist of students, professionals, academia and also parents and visitors to the university. The university itself also makes use of the restaurant to entertain their clients and visitors.

In these diverse customer segments, maintaining a competitive edge strongly rely on customer service. Customer service plays a significant role in the management and success of a restaurant. Delivering a high standard of service in a restaurant is fundamental in getting people to fill the seats. When customers are satisfied with receiving a quality product and the perceived value for money with friendly, efficient service, they will appreciate the total offering from the restaurant to such an extent that they will return continuously. Measuring customer service also assists management in determining their customers' service expectations and assists to indicate what the possible effects of delivering quality customer service are. Closely related to service levels are the experience of dining out. "How do they enjoy it, and what is the value in the eyes of the customers?" (Nguyen, 2010). Gone are the days for customers to be satisfied with a smile accompanied by a "please" and "thank you" (Kimanuka, 2014). The problem in a high-density competitive environment is the thread of customers moving to a substitute offering. Customers can receive a product and service to satisfy their needs at various competitors, and the product offering can easily be copied.

Managers of restaurants are therefore required to manage their service levels intensively to protect their market and keep their customers loyal. However, the first step in customer service management is to determine how the customers are experiencing the service currently rendered. Without this point of departure, managerial interventions are often misguided and do focus on the specific problem areas. More so, good service areas are also not maintained. It is therefore imperative that managers measure the service quality of their restaurants to determine exactly whether their service levels are faring well, or alternatively, require managerial interventions to remain competitive. This study aims to measure the customer service levels of a restaurant in the Bult region of Potchefstroom.

1.3 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this study was to measure the service quality at a local restaurant.

The secondary objectives were to:

- ✓ Measure the perceived service level received from a local restaurant;
- ✓ Measure the customer's service expectation from restaurants; and to
- ✓ Determine the gap between the service received and the level of expectations.

1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve these objectives, a survey was conducted that was distributed amongst customers dining at restaurants in the specified geographical area. The survey measured the customers' perceived quality of service and the products provided by these restaurants, and also measured their service expectations with the aim to compare it with the restaurants' delivered service quality (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001:205). The SERVQUAL model was used to analyse and to determine the shortfalls and successes of the quality management of the restaurant. Chapter 3 presents a detailed discussion of the research methodology.

Chapter 3 will have a full discussion of the research methodology.

1.5 DELIMITATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

1.5.1 Delimitations (Scope)

Delimitations are those features of the study that limits your scope and set the boundaries of the study. These are controllable through the choice of the research questions, the study objectives, population targeted and the variables of interest. In this study focus is on the effective promotions offered by restaurants, targeting the clientele that has expendable cash to support a restaurant (Simon, 2011).

Our population ranges from students with spending money to young working people, business people, and older persons. It is focused on sitting restaurants but in particular, casual dining, which excludes formal dining and where customers can enjoy a more relaxed setting, more personalised service and enjoyable food. This sets the

average spend per head and excludes the prices, atmosphere and professional servants associated with formal dining. Therefore, take-away restaurants where the focus is the only value proposition, speed and volume are excluded from this study.

1.5.2 Assumptions

Assumptions are sometimes out of our control but if they are not there or taken into account the study would become irrelevant (Simon, 2011). When sampling, the assumption has to be made that the sample is representative of the population chosen and that people will answer truthfully (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

Our assumptions are to be met in respect to a set sample size for sufficient population representation, information circulation, quality of data received – honesty and integrity, the population representation in our selection falls within the delimitation scope – not only between the ages of 18 and 65 but supports sitting restaurants in the casual dining atmosphere and would support promotions offered by these restaurants.

1.6 ETHICAL CLEARANCE

The study was subjected for ethical approval to the Ethical Committee of the North-West University's Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences. The study was approved as a low-risk study, and the ethics number *NWU-01321-19-A4* was issued.

1.7 LAYOUT OF THE STUDY

This study consists of four chapters.

Chapter one serves as the introduction of the study and presents the aim of the study, delimitations of the study, and methods of the research done. It also provides background on the topic of customer quality service.

Chapter two focusses on defining service quality and the restaurant industry in South Africa but specifically in Potchefstroom from the customers' perceptions and expectations. Focus is also directed towards the relationship between the level of customer service and their satisfaction as a result and a literature overview of the SERVQUAL model is provided.

Chapter three formulates the research approach and methods used for the study of customer service at a local restaurant. The questionnaire is also explained. The chapter illustrates the findings and data analysis. Explaining the target sample, the validity and reliability of the study and the five dimensions of SERQUAL are analysed. The chapter also displays the model that was developed to measure service quality for localised restaurants in Potchefstroom.

Chapter four is the final chapter of the study. In this chapter, the conclusions and recommendations are presented. The areas for further study are also presented and the chapter finally provides a summary of the study.

1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presents the study, the problem statement; the layout and objectives, that is aimed at improving the quality of service at local restaurants. With the background on restaurant service and the service levels that they aim for this study will add valuable information from the customers as their perceptions and expectations on the level of quality service from local restaurants. With this foundation, the possible gap between expectation and current service delivery can be closed to ensure that the service levels improve to add to the sustainability of restaurants in Potchefstroom.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The research approach and the theoretical background of the research and the importance of client service will be discussed in this chapter. The restaurant industry is a competitive industry that is very sensitive to economic and weather. Service delivery can be a decisive competitive advantage if strict standards are implemented and maintained. As a result, there needs to be a more in-depth view of what defines customer service. The chosen SERVQUAL model is also explained in this chapter.

2.2 RESTAURANT INDUSTRY IN SOUTH AFRICA

The restaurant industry is one of the most competitive, high-cost, and high failure industries of business because it is easy to enter into and easy to exit. The South African economic growth figures over the last five years and the expected growth for the next two years are feeble, and as a result, the unemployment figure keeps rising. The customer's expendable portion of their income keeps shrinking. Less buying power creates much danger for restaurants, as the restaurant industry is seen as a luxury expense and non-essential. This means that when a customer has to tighten the monthly spending, the first thing they reduce spending on is entertainment and restaurant visits. The other reason why a restaurant is such a high risk is the fact that customers' loyalty can change at any minute, especially in the casual dining section of restaurants.

The restaurant industry is a monopolistic competitive sector, and in most regions, there are many restaurants, each different in its own way. Each restaurant has many substitutes—these may include other restaurants, fast-food outlets, and the deli and frozen-food sections at local supermarkets. This is especially true for Potchefstroom's Bult area. Potchefstroom is a well-developed inland community with a high concentration of numerous restaurants, cafés, and bars that offer a wide range of cuisine that is suitable for each guest's/ local's budget in the Bult area. There is quite an array of restaurants; one has to consider the fundamental distinction between the dining market and the eating market.

One of the quickest developing sections of food services is what is alluded to as "casual dining." Casual dining appeals to patrons from various dimensions. The casual dining segment can be further divided by cost and service level offerings.

Furthermore, there are three types of customers. These types are:

- customers who come once or twice and never again.
- the customers who come now and then, but not often at all.
- Regular or loyal customers to a specific restaurant. The staff recognizes these people as they come often. They are essential for restaurants' success.

These types of customers all require specific managerial interventions. To attract and gain new customers, it is five times more expensive than only retaining an existing customer. If they manage to increase their customer retention with 5%, it can increase the profits by 25% to 95% (Wertz, 2018). Customer service is a proven competitive and customer retention strategy in the restaurant industry. Research that helps a business analyse and compare their customer satisfaction before and after managerial interventions in service quality are able to evaluate if they improved their service quality or not. Obtaining a high level of service quality and customer satisfaction can increase customer loyalty, market share, employee pride, and satisfaction and give them a competitive advantage over their competition.

The financial performance of a business delivering service is also directly correlated to quality service. Therefore, a study is needed into the current perceived service quality of one of the local restaurants. More insight into customers' service expectations is also vital to measure and manage the service experience by customers at a restaurant. This would enable a restaurant to address the shortfalls in their current service delivery approach. Here, the effectiveness of quality service delivery by restaurants and the level of service demanded by customers play a crucial role; this is especially true as the service demand is largely shaped by the customers' expectations of service quality at the specific restaurant.

The results will enable a restaurant to identify the level of service required and the demands of the chosen target market to ensure customer satisfaction. This will enable them to deliver a competitive advantage over their competitors.

2.3 CUSTOMER SERVICE

2.3.1 Definition

There are many definitions of service and customer service.

The seminal definition by Parasuraman et al. (1985) states that customer service is:

“Quality is a comparison between expectations and performance.”

Zeithaml et al. (1990) later adapted this initial definition by stating that a service should be more broadly defined as:

“Experiences, performances, and deeds produced or provided by one person or entity for another person or entity.”

Later, in the development of the disconfirmation theory, Grönroos et al. (2007) defined service quality as:

“A process that consists of intangible activities that typically take place during contact between customers and a business representative that is aimed at solving a customer's problem.”

Service is defined by Etzel et al. (2007) as:

“Actions that are identifiable and intangible with the primary objective to provide satisfaction to customers.”

A modern definition of service quality is (Business dictionary, 2019):

“Service quality can be seen to manage business processes to ensure total satisfaction to the customer on all levels (internal and external).”

For a business to satisfy its customers with its service offering, the service delivery needs to be of a quantifiable quality. The International Organisation for Standards' (ISO) formulated a definition of quality that stipulates that the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfils a requirement of expectation can be seen as quality. The

different definitions of quality can be summarised into three categories (Heizer *et al.*, 2017):

- **User-based:** That is where the end-user, the customer, defines the level of quality that they expect and receive.
- **Manufacturing-based:** This refers to not only manufacturers of products, but also service providers. The set of standards and expectations from their employees and production and the conforming of those standards.
- **Product-based:** The focus on precise measurable variables.

In summary, service can be explained as intangible, perishable economical activities or actions that focus on satisfying the customer's expectation while providing a beneficial value to these customers. The long-term objective is the retention and profit growth from these customers (Beukes, 2015). Barnard (2018) states that services have specific characteristics that differentiate them from products. These characteristics are intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity (or variability), perishability and also a lack of ownership (Fahy & Jobber, 2012; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990). Wilson *et al.* (2012) state further that the characteristics of services hold important implications for marketing practitioners and researchers.

2.3.2 Identifiable characteristics of customer service

Customer service needs specific identifiable characteristics to deliver a set standard and to be regarded as quality service. The five service characteristics, or antecedents as they are called, are (Parasuraman *et al.* 1985, 1988; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990; Wilson *et al.*, 2012):

- **Intangibility:** Customer service cannot be seen, tasted, heard or felt unless the customer buys a product or service delivery, and experiences the quality of service to enable them to evaluate it.
- **Inseparability:** The customer cannot evaluate the service unless they experience the service. It is inseparable and is happening at the same time, unlike a product which is produced long before a customer consumes it.
- **Heterogeneity:** Service delivery is dependent on employees conforming to a predetermined set of standards, but as every customer has a different perception of the service expected, so does every employee offer different

versions of customer service (Barnard, 2018). The customer will not experience the same service from two different employees, even if the training and standards are the same. Every employee offers some elements to the service that is unique to them and at a specific point in time. Service is thus always unique.

- **Perishability:** Service cannot be stored when demand is low and retrieved when the demand is high. If not used, it is lost. If offered inadequately, the opportunity is also lost to meet the customer's expectation (Wilson et al., 2012).
- **Lack of Ownership:** No one can own customer service because it involves an effort delivery, performance, or act that a customer is buying it on the basis that they expect potential satisfaction (Clapton, 2013).

It is also noteworthy that although these antecedents of customer service were developed and researched almost 50 years ago, they remain just as relevant today to apply in customer service management. Numerous studies have proven their worth in modern times. Typical examples are validated applications of the SERVQUAL model that have been done in ophthalmology (Kade & Bisschoff, 2010), hospital care (Van Heerden, 2010; Clapton, 2013), pharmaceuticals (Naiz et al., 2009; Barnard, 2018), and tourism (Leigh, 2019). Measuring these antecedents, therefore, proves to be a sound foundation for service quality management. The five service quality dimensions appear in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Five service quality dimensions



Source: College & College (2019)

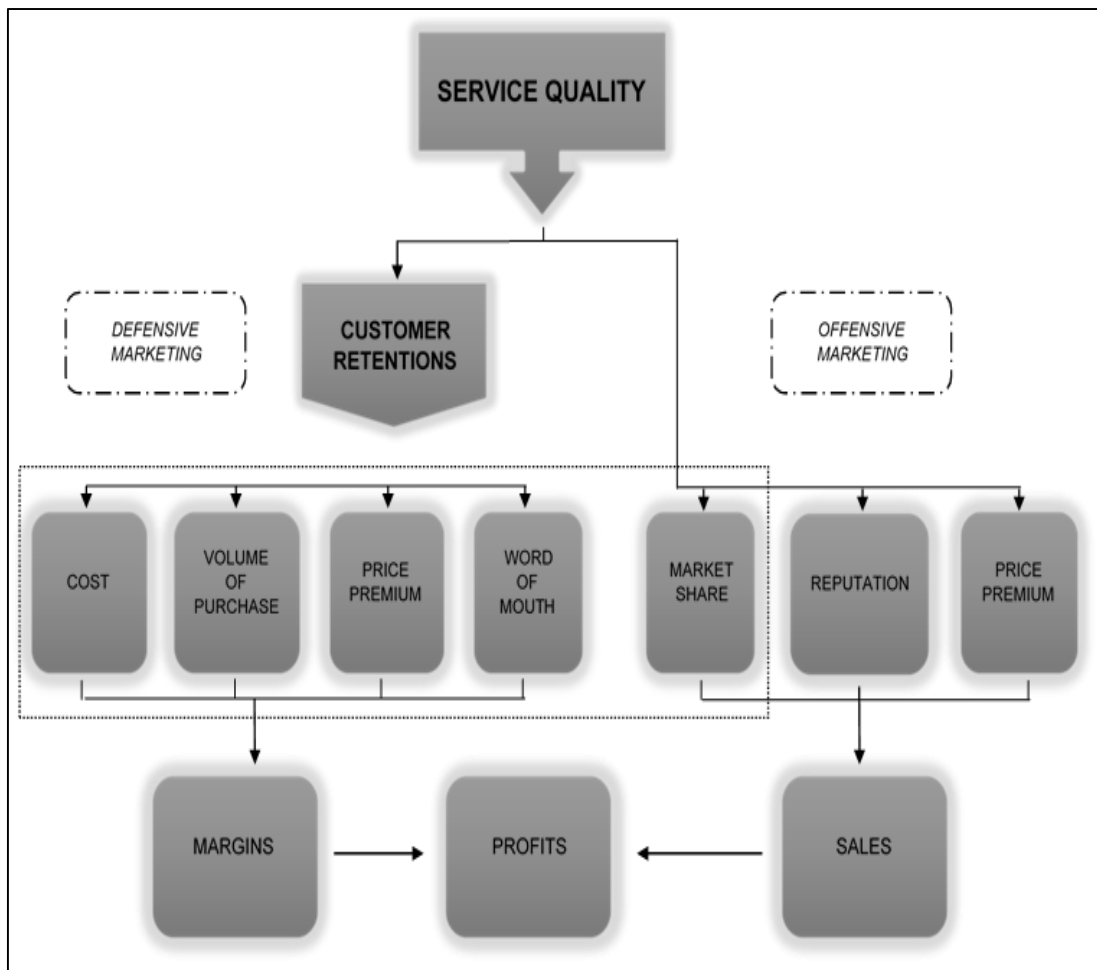
2.3.3 The importance and potential

In business, there is a direct link between the customer service standards of a business and its profitability. There is a relationship between service and its quality, the customer's satisfaction, and their eagerness to part ways with their hard-earned cash. That refers to the customer's satisfaction in the service they receive when they decide upon a service provider and mainly return business at the chosen supplier of service. If the customer's expectation is met or even surpassed, they will perceive the

money paid for the service as value-adding to their problem or desire. The biggest mistake organisations make is to underestimate the importance of customer service and its influence on retaining customers. Some of the most critical benefits from quality customer service are (Beukes 2015):

1. Satisfied customers return when the service or product is required again. This means higher retention levels of customers and less effort, resources, and time needed to obtain customers.
2. Satisfied customers tend to spread their satisfaction with the service received, resulting in word-of-mouth marketing at no cost to the company. This is especially important in our modern age where social communication plays a role in people's lives and is far-reaching, but also instantaneous.
3. Increased customer retention and satisfaction will lead to increased market share.
4. Increased sales and profit.
5. Reduction in costs. Fewer redos and compensation for service failure.
6. Higher profits because customers will pay a higher price for quality service.

Figure 2: Conceptual model of service quality and profitability



Source: Zeithaml et al. (2013)

As a result of the link between higher profitability and customer service, a business decision should be taken to regard customer service levels as a predetermined non-negotiable approach to guarantee a competitive advantage over competitors (Zeithaml et al., 2013).

2.4 MEASURING CUSTOMER SERVICE

Certain factors will influence the customer's expectations of the service they will be receiving, and it can potentially influence how they evaluate the quality of service received (Wilson et al., 2012). These factors include:

- **Personal needs.** As the needs of each customer are different, the ability of the company to satisfy their individual needs will determine whether the customer will be satisfied with their expectations.

- **Word-of-mouth information.** Traditionally customers talk about service received with family, friends, and colleagues. However, in this modern connected world, previous experiences from customers can be viewed instantaneously and contribute to the service that the potential customer is expecting. This makes word-of-mouth a significant factor.
- **Previous experience.** Quality service will not only attract new customers but will ensure that they return. This level of service they received will influence the level of service they expect from the company upon revisiting them (Chahal & Kumari, 2010:235).
- **Public and social media communication.** Marketing creates a certain expectation level that the customer perceives to be the standard quality (Barnard, 2018).

Since customers determine the level of service and the alignment of the quality with their expectations, it is crucial to understand how customers evaluate the service they receive after the expectation from the customer is understood.

Parasuraman et al. (1985:22) identified ten "*determinants of service quality*" which they used to evaluate customer service received. These determinants and their definitions were:

1. **Reliability:** consistency of performance and dependability, accuracy in billing, keeping records correctly, performing the service right at the designated time.
2. **Responsiveness:** willingness or readiness of employees to provide service, timeliness of service such as mailing a transaction slip immediately, calling the customer back quickly, giving prompt service.
3. **Competence:** possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the service, knowledge and expertise of the contact and support personnel, research capability of the organisation.
4. **Access:** approachability and ease of contact, the service is easily accessible by telephone, waiting time to receive service is not extensive, convenient hours of operation, convenient location of service facility.

5. **Courtesy:** politeness, respect, consideration, friendliness of contact personnel, consideration for the consumer's property, clean and neat appearance of public contact personnel.
6. **Communication:** keeping customers informed in a language they can understand and listen to them, explaining the service itself and its cost, assuring the consumer that a problem will be handled.
7. **Credibility:** trustworthiness, believability, honesty, company reputation, having the customer's best interests at heart, personal characteristics of the contact personnel.
8. **Security:** freedom from danger, risk, or doubt, physical safety, financial security, confidentiality.
9. **Understanding/Knowing the customer:** understanding customer needs, learning the customer's specific requirements, providing individualised attention, recognising the regular customer.
10. **Tangibles:** physical evidence and representations of the service, other customers in the service facility.

Further research by the authors then narrowed down these determinants to five antecedents (Parasuraman et al., 1988:25). The antecedents for measuring and managing service quality are:

1. **Assurance:** The assurance the customer receives from the employee's knowledge and courtesy, that they will receive the service expected.
2. **Empathy:** The individualised attention and care the customer receives from all the employees. The customer feeling wanted. Alternatively, are they treated as just another customer.
3. **Reliability:** Does the customer receive the service as promised and as expected. Not just once, but upon every visit.
4. **Responsiveness:** Is the service provided in a timely fashion – providing prompt service.
5. **Tangibles:** The appeal, atmosphere, the physical appearance of the staff, and the image experienced by the staff, facilities, equipment, and marketing communication.

2.4.1 SERVQUAL

2.4.1.1 Historical overview of the SERVQUAL model

The SERVQUAL model was developed in the late 1980s as a tool to measure customers' perception of service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985:48). The basis for this model determines the correlation between the customer's perception and expectation of the service received. The model, therefore, finds the difference to determine the level of quality. By subtracting the expectation (E) scores from the perception (P) scores, received from the customer, the gap indicates the service level (Q) being offered ($Q=P-E$). The higher the positive difference between the expected service and the perceived service, the higher the quality level of service delivered, and the other way around, but taking into account the importance of the attributes of the service (Parasuraman et al., 1985:47). This represented a breakthrough in the measuring methods used in service quality research. The model of service quality supports the diagnostic value of the instrument. This is the base with the development of the scale within the questionnaire. Much criticism was given even though this instrument has been widely applied in various research approaches and fields of study. It has been found as a relatively robust tool to use to gather the information needed to determine the service quality levels in different industries and as a result, has become the dominant measurement scale in the field of service quality levels. Putit et al. (2011:148), however, argue that the five dimensions of Parasuraman's service quality measurement scale should be critically reviewed with each study to determine if additional dimensions will not be needed (Putit et al., 2011:145). Sub-dimensions can be added, for example, assurance, reliability, responsiveness, and communication (Devi et al., 2016:258).

2.4.1.2 The SERVQUAL model

SERVQUAL is a three-dimensional model to measure service quality. These dimensions are:

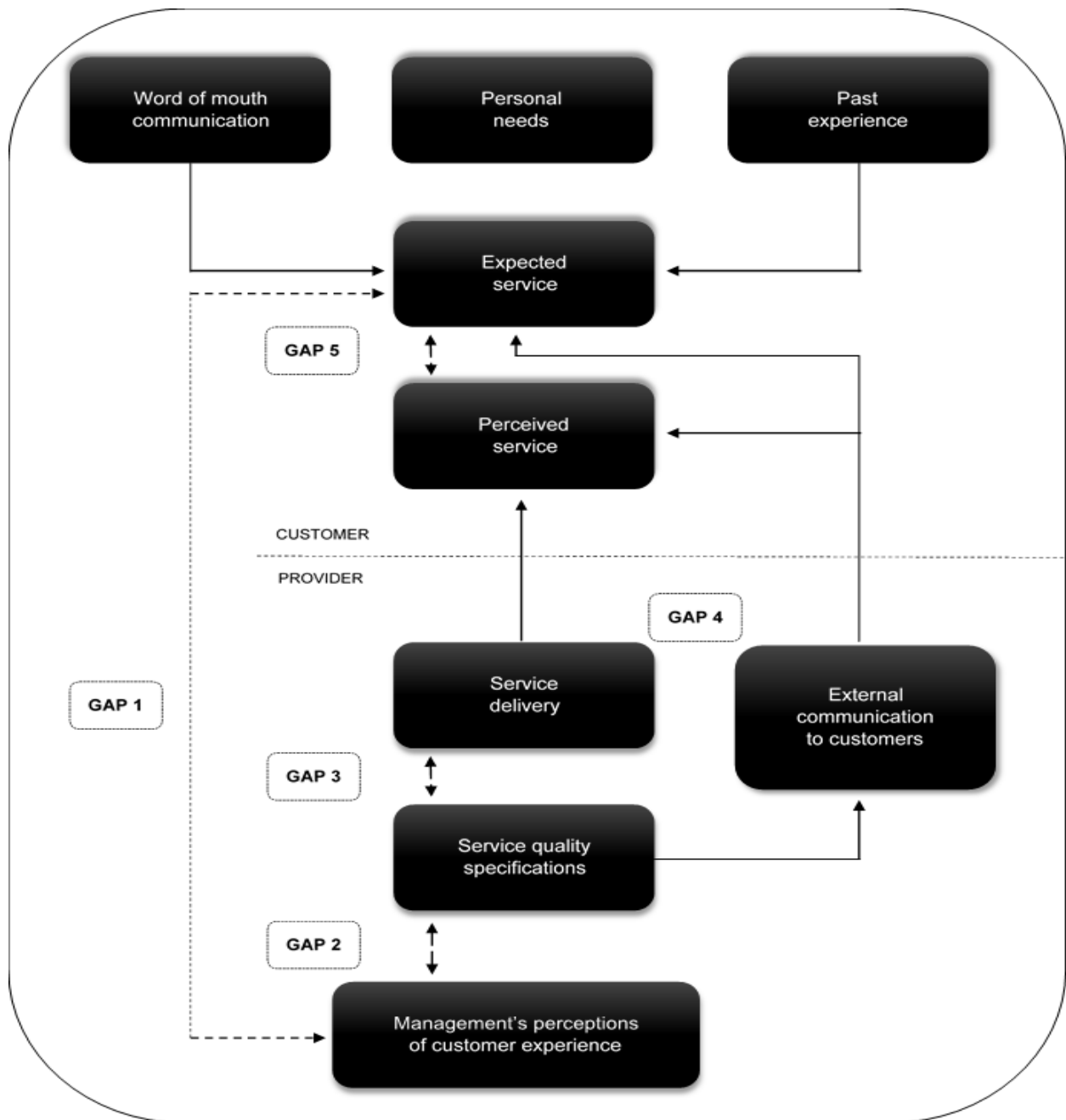
- **Evaluative dimensions:** this dimension measures the service quality antecedents: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, and determines how well each of these antecedents address the service encounter of the customers.

- **Procedural dimensions:** In this dimension, the scheduling, flow logic, accommodation, expectation, communication, and responses of customers are measured.
- **Personal dimensions** measure the appearance, assertiveness, attentiveness, discretion, direction, and courteous problem solving of the service encounter.

According to Parasuraman et al. (1985:48), the function of service inequality between expectation and performance is calculated with the dimensions mentioned above. The gap analysis is done to indicate the difference between the service expected and the service experienced (Parasuraman et al., 1985:42). It is essential to consider that the customer's expectation might be formed by the factors, as explained, their experience; word-of-mouth impression received; their own needs and marketing, or other communication creating a visual picture of what the company offered.

The model below in Figure 3 illustrates the gaps between offering and receiving.

Figure 3: SERVQUAL model dimensions



Source: Zeithaml et al. (1990)

Gaps 1 to 4 are identified as functions of the way the company provides the service, while Gap 5 pertains to the customer and the difference between expectation and delivery. Gap 5 is the mostly used analytical tool in the SERVQUAL model (Kade & Bisschoff, 2010). The gaps provide an overview of the service encounter and also identify where service quality misalignments may originate within an organisation. The five gaps are defined as:

- **Gap 1:** This is the inequality gap and indicates the separation between customer expectation and the management's perception of those expectations. Management can have a distorted idea of what a customer is expecting from the company in the form of customer service. With these distorted ideas, managers will make uninformed decisions and have a misconception in their approach to their delivery standards and training (Van Heerden, 2010). This gap can also be influenced by miscommunication between managers and their customers, which might be a result of a lack of interaction between management and customers (Kleynhans, 2008).
- **Gap 2:** This is the dissimilarity gap, indicating the manager's perceptions of customers' expectations and the quality of service being provided. This gap will be created by management, not setting and keeping a high level of service standard, and keeping the commitment to train employees regularly. Setting the standards and not enforcing them is not effective management.
- **Gap 3:** This gap is the variance gap. It indicates the variance between the service quality specifications of the company and the actual service that is provided, also referred to as the performance gap. It clearly shows whether the employees and management are implementing the service standards as required by the company's mandate. This gap will also be widening if companies do not evaluate employees and management regularly.
- **Gap 4:** This gap exists when there is a difference between the actual service level and the service that is being externally communicated by the organisation. Management has to make sure that the externally communicated service levels are met. This gap is usually caused by a tendency of organisations to promise more than what they can deliver. A lack of communication between different departments of an organisation can also cause this gap.

Companies with a high service quality level or at least motivated to deliver a high-quality level of service would place a high value on the information

gathered through the SERVQUAL model. This will offer immense assistance with service improvements, as well as maintaining those levels with the correct information reflecting the customer's priorities.

- **Gap 5:** This is the customer gap, which identifies the difference between the perceived service levels and the actual service received. It is important to remember that customers determine the service quality, and even though not all customers have the same perception about service, the responsibility lies with the company to ensure that they understand the expected service level from different customers and try to comply with that. A possible method of delivering the needed service levels can be to try and change the expectations from the customers, by information needed by them to understand the company, its products, and services, but also its mission and vision. This might better align the expectation with the level of quality service offered (Kleynhans, 2008).

The gap analysis in the SERVQUAL model identifies three possible outcomes that can be used to formulate or adjust the service quality strategy. Typically, these outcomes are one or more of the following (Zeithaml et al., 2009):

- **Outcome 1:** Where there is no gap, and the expectation equals delivery.
- **Outcome 2:** Where a negative gap is identified, which means the service received did not align with the customers' expectations.
- **Outcome 3:** Where a positive gap is identified, which means that service delivery exceeded the expectation and demands of the customer. Resulting in satisfied and happy customers this positive gap also indicates a high possibility of returning customers. This outcome might also attract loyalty and long-term commitments from customers, and in a service delivery company that is not only an essential survival tool but also a competitive tool (Mehralian et al., 2016).

2.4.1.3 Advantages of the SERVQUAL model

The SERVQUAL model offers a number of advantages. They are:

- Although there are a number of key instruments accessible for the goal of determining service quality, the SERVQUAL model has been a major contributor as a generic model used to measure service quality. The model has been proven against different service settings, cultural background and size of studies to prove that the model offers value in measuring and managing service quality and customer satisfaction.
- The model can be used on a regular basis to determine the customer's perception of the quality of service from a specific company and it can be compared to the competitors of that company. Graphs and tables can be used to illustrate the feedback from customers, the problems identified and areas that are in line with the customer's view of quality service in order to maintain the restaurants' strengths over its competitors and enjoy a great competitive benefit.
- The model offers the opportunity to assess the overall performance within the dimensions and every dimension individually.
- SERVQUAL also allows the business to categorise their customers into different segments based on their scores, to be able to address their needs more effectively.
- SERVQUAL is effective for different business and service delivery sectors because it provides the basic skeleton to be adapted according to the specific business, in a specific country and even different cultural backgrounds.
- The model's questionnaire and gap analyses are very user friendly and easily adaptable.
- Finally, there is sufficient evidence from previous research results to indicate that the model carries an effective reputation for offering valid, valuable statistical information through extensive field testing and refinement (Al Bassam & Al Shawi, 2010).

To appreciate the full potential of the benefits of the SERVQUAL surveys, it should be conducted on a regular basis. The following reasons offer a motivation for repeated service quality measurements (Al Bassam & Al Shawi, 2010):

- To allow yearly comparisons;
- To establish whether the service improvements have affected the customers' perception and expectation of the service at the specific business; and
- To determine if improvements were effective and resulted in satisfied customers in specific areas.

If the SERVQUAL model is implemented to measure the customer's perception and expectation on an annual basis, it might result in customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and customer retention. From these positive results, word-of-mouth marketing will follow naturally which will lead to better financial performance. One should be cautious not to measure too often because it might result in customers losing their motivation and this can lead to inaccurate feedback (Eldejany, 2018:9).

2.4.1.4 Disadvantages of the SERVQUAL model

There are also disadvantages to the SERVQUAL model. The following disadvantages (theoretical and operational) exists (Shadin, 2006; Parasuraman et al., 1985; 1988).

2.4.1.4.1 *Theoretical disadvantages:*

- Validity, is criticised. It is argued that as a generic instrument, the simple revision of the SERVQUAL items is not enough to measure accurately across different service industries.
- Some critics feel that there is not enough evidence to support the Gaps model where Perception minus Expectation equals quality. Critics found that the major contributor to the gap scores was the customers' perception score because of the generalised response tendency for customers to rate their expectations always high.
- Another criticism is that the model is process orientated. This means that it is focused on the process of service and not the outcome of the service encountered. If the model were to take process and outcome into account together, it would be a much better predictor of customers' expectation.
- Because SERVQUAL is focusing on the five dimensions it is restricted and not universal. Items do not always load on to the factors which one would a priori expect; there is a high degree of inter correlation between the five dimensions.

It will be more meaningful if the researcher were to work with the original ten dimensions instead of the adapted five.

- SERVQUAL fails to draw on establishing economic and psychological theory because it is based on an expectation model rather than an attitudinal model.

2.4.1.4.2 *Operational disadvantages*

- Using expectations offer a disadvantage. Customers rather use standards other than expectation to evaluate the service quality they received.
- SERVQUAL cannot with 4 or 5 items, capture the variability or the specific context within each of the service quality dimensions. Even if specific items are used to supplement the SERVQUAL model, these “new” items should be comparable to the current SERVQUAL items.
- There is evidence supporting the reasoning that customers evaluate service quality by reference to multiple encounters of service delivery between employees and themselves and not the *Moment of Truth* philosophy.
- The reversed polarisation (rewording) of items in the scale can cause feedback inaccuracy. 13 statement pairs are positively worded and nine pairs are negatively worded, which makes up the 22 items on the SERVQUAL questionnaire. The negative is the full set of responsiveness and empathy statements. Item wording creates data quality difficulties and might cause readers to question the validity of the instrument.
- The Likert scale has been criticised on several grounds, although none is specific to SERVQUAL, but has an indirect influence. There is an absence of verbal labelling for points two to six. Critics feel that customers might over use the extreme end of the scale and not a true reflection.
- With the administration of the instrument results, there is a lot of repetitiveness and confusion. Customers completing the research might be confused by the administration of the E and the P versions of the SERVQUAL model.

Figure 4: Advantages and Disadvantages of SERVQUAL



Source: Shadin (2006)

The SERVQUAL model is useful in identifying service dimensions that underperform. It also offers some reasoning as to what causes the service failure through the gap analysis (Bisschoff & Lotriet, 2008:269). A business can use Gap 5 as a quick method to determine the gap between expectation and the actual service received by them. But both the customers' and the business's sides are reflected in the gaps as defined. This provides the business with a better opportunity to find a solution. If more effectiveness is needed, the researcher can add more sub-divisions, depending on the industry (Devi et al., 2016:274).

2.4.1.4 SERVPERF

The Service Performance model or SERVPERF was developed after critique on SERVQUAL by the authors Cronin and Taylor in 1992. These researchers claimed that the foundation on which the SERVQUAL model of Parasuraman et al. (1985; 1988) is built, namely the study of relationships between expected and experienced quality, is not a proper approach towards quality assessment (Cronin & Taylor, 1994:128). Where SERVQUAL focuses on the quality service as a factor between the expectations versus perceptions, the SERVPERF model calculated on service quality by focusing on the satisfaction versus the purchasing intentions relationship (Jain & Gupta, 2004:26). These concerns are also shared by other researchers (Carrillat et al., 2007:479; Mohd et al., 2013:10), who state that the role of expectations and its inclusion in the SERVQUAL measuring instrument is a cause of major concern. To some extent, there is an overlap between the technical and functional dimensions in the SERVQUAL model (Mohd et al., 2013:10).

Therefore, as an adaptation of SERVQUAL, Cronin and Taylor (1994:129) decided that the SERVPERF model should focus on customer satisfaction rather than service quality. However, although SERVPERF also used 22 questions in its design and continued to utilise the same five antecedents developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988), Cronin and Taylor (1994:128) adapted their questions in the questionnaire. According to Cronin and Taylor (1994:130), this model approaches customer satisfaction influences and their purchasing intent, and the return has a direct influence on the company's bottom line. Quality is regarded as an attribute.

In summary, SERVQUAL directly measures both expectations and performance perceptions, whereas SERVPERF only measures performance perceptions. As a result, SERVPERF uses only performance data because it assumes that respondents automatically provide their ratings after comparing performance perceptions with performance expectations (Carrillat et al., 2007:480).

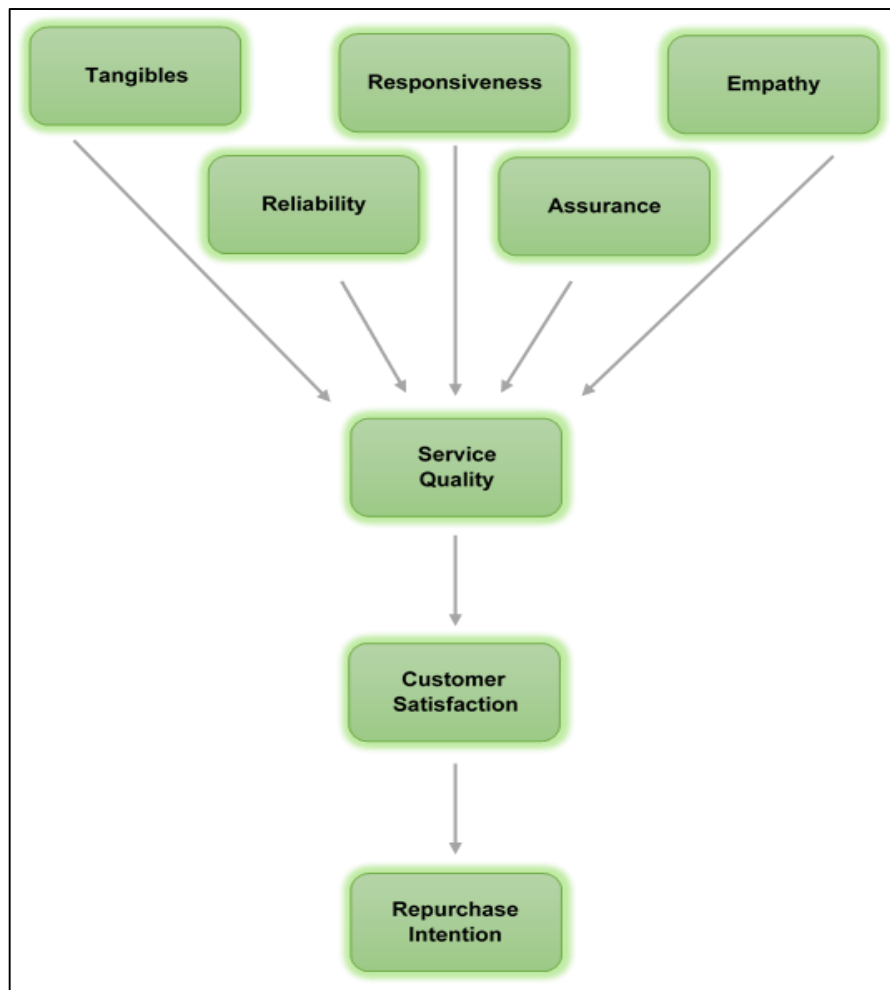
2.5 THE LINK BETWEEN SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

As established by Deming (2000:10-13), through his many principles of quality, quality can increase demand but also price flexibility. Increased quality and price due to an increase in demand will lead to an increase in productivity and profits (Deming, 2000:10-13). If service quality is used as an essential tool in a competitive market, it will aid in supporting satisfied customers, who will become return customers (Kaul, 2005). Service quality will result in customer satisfaction, which in turn will lead to loyal customers. Customers who develop loyalty towards the company and brand will return instead of following competitors. This will result in returning customer with the financial well-being of the company and the ultimate success following (Storbacka et al., 1994:24).

An additional advantage is that satisfied customers will do free word-of-mouth advertising for you (Wicks & Roethlein., 2009). They will be costing less as a result of retaining existing customers and these customers are normally less sensitive for price changes (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993:138). The consequences will be a business enjoying more profitability and a higher level of retention of valuable customers when they are satisfied with the service offering (Wicks & Roethlein, 2009:83).

A big contributing reason for many quality initiatives failing is because the focus was on financial profits and gain, rather than customer satisfaction. The figure below illustrates the relationship of five service quality antecedents (Parasuraman et al., 1988:25), and how satisfaction with each of these antecedents leads service quality, which in turn, results in loyal customers with repeat purchase intentions.

Figure 5: Conceptual model of service quality and profitability



Source: Eldejany (2018:9)

2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Restaurants are extremely dependant on customers and particularly returning customers/customer retention to survive and be sustainable since quality service has a direct link to profitability. Customer service at a high-quality level will ensure customer satisfaction as a result of the perception outperforming the expectation. This chapter focused on the literature study of the restaurant industry as an introduction, service quality, and its elements and measuring the service quality. The SERVQUAL model and its service quality dimensions were discussed. The model illustrates the format of the empirical study that deals with measuring customer service of the dining experience in Potchefstroom (see Chapter 3). The research methodology and the results of the research questionnaire are discussed in chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the research methodology applied, and the results of the practical research that investigate the service quality of a casual dining restaurant in Potchefstroom are described. The explanation will showcase the questionnaire design, the population targeted, the data collection process, the statistical techniques used with processing the data, and the SERVQUAL model results of the research study done.

The measuring of the service quality in a restaurant in Potchefstroom was done with the assumption that should the service be of good quality, return customers would be a result and benefit to the restaurant. The SERVQUAL model can identify which service quality factor plays the most critical role in the restaurant's customers' expectations and will provide a reputable forecast into the service quality needs (Morrison-Coulthard, 2004:479). This explanation is necessary in order to answer the questions and objectives stated in Chapter 1 to make the recommendations from the results of the study and to assist restaurants in Potchefstroom with their customers' perceptions and expectations on customer service.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.2.1 Questionnaire

The study employed a questionnaire that consisted of a covering page requesting consent, and then two sections. The questionnaire was electronically distributed via Google Forms, and respondents completed the questions online on the electronic platform.

The letter of consent is also the first page of the questionnaire. Respondents are requested to give their consent so that their information can be used. They do so by clicking the required tick-box to show that they agree. If they do give their consent, the questionnaire opens up and allows them to record their dining experiences on the electronic questionnaire.

In the first section the customers' feedback was recorded with regard to their dining experience at a local Potchefstroom restaurant in the Bult area, while, in the second section of the questionnaire, the adapted SERVQUAL questionnaire collected data on the five service quality antecedents: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988:27). The basic formulation of questions in SERVQUAL was retained. However, their application has been adapted to address the restaurant service application setting. The questionnaire is attached as Appendix A.

3.2.2 Data collection

The questionnaire will be set up in an electronic format. Data will be collected online via Google Forms. The electronic platform automatically captures the data as soon as a respondent completes his/her survey. The researcher will, therefore, only have access to the collective data and not be able to identify any of the respondents nor to isolate any specific response. This will ensure anonymity. The data collection consists of several steps. These are:

Step 1: Digitise the questionnaire into Google Forms and add as the first page the letter of consent. (see Appendices A and B)

Step 2: Draft a letter of invitation. This letter of invitation contains a live link on which the customers can click to transfer them to the first page of the questionnaire, where they will find the letter of consent; they will have to agree that their data can be used for research purposes only.

Step 3: After clicking on the link, the customers will receive the first page of the questionnaire – this will be the consent form. They have to agree by clicking on “Yes” after reading the informed consent form. If they click on the “No” tick-box, they will be thanked for their time and not receive the questionnaire to complete.

Step 4: If they agree and give consent for their data to be used, the questionnaire opens up, and the customers can now complete the questionnaire.

Step 5: After completion, the data is automatically saved with the other responses. It is not possible to connect any respondent nor any specific restaurant to any specific data entry. The data is anonymous.

Step 6: The researcher received the final data-set and cannot, by any means, identify any of the individual responses. The data was then analysed using IBM's Statistical Programme for Social Sciences (Version 25) (IBM SPSS, 2018). The report was compiled based on the results.

3.2.3 The population

The population consists of all the customers who visited any restaurant and ordered a sit-down meal in the Potchefstroom geographical area who qualifies to be part of the population of this study. Also, all customers who visited any sit-down restaurant during 2019 forms part of the population. This could be franchised and non-franchised restaurants. Members who ordered take-out foods are not part of the population.

3.2.4 The sample

The study made use of a non-probability, convenience snowball sample. The snowball sampling was initiated by uploading the letter of invitation to participate in the study on the public Facebook platforms dealing with business activities in Potchefstroom specifically. The request will also be to share the invitation to friends of participating members. In total, 74 usable responses were captured and analysed.

3.2.5 Statistical analysis

The study makes use of six statistical techniques to analyse the data.

- **Descriptive statistics** are used to determine the frequency distributions and mean values of the customer service quality experiences. Mean values of 3.5 and higher (on the 5-point Likert scale) indicate high levels of satisfaction with a service quality antecedent. Values between 3 and 3.5 show satisfactory levels, and those below three are regarded to be unsatisfactory service indicators (Bisschoff & Lotriet, 2008:276).

- **Cronbach’s coefficient alpha** is used to determine the reliability and internal stability of the data. A coefficient of 0.70 and higher is desirable, as this shows satisfactory reliability and stability (Field, 2013).
- **Kaiser, Meyer, and Olkin’s test of sample adequacy** measures if there are sufficient data-points to analyse the data-set successfully. A KMO value of 0.70 and higher is preferable (Field, 2013).
- **Bartlett’s tests of sphericity** test internal relationships between the data and this must be significant at the 95% confidence interval ($p \leq 0.05$) (Pallant, 2013).
- **Exploratory factor analysis** was used to determine if the adapted questions indeed measure the specific service quality antecedent. If they all load onto the specific antecedent, it means that they do so; this would provide validity to the questionnaire (Asvat, 2018).
- **Pearson correlations** were used to determine the relationships between the antecedents. Only strong ($r \geq 0.50$) and significant correlations ($p \leq 0.05$; 0.01) are interpreted (Field, 2013).

3.3 RESULTS

3.3.1 Dining experience feedback

The customer experiences and preferences are shown in the frequency tables below.

Table 1: Value for money from your favourite restaurant?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Poor	1	1.4	1.4	1.4
	Average	6	8.3	8.6	10.0
	Good	35	48.6	50.0	60.0
	Extremely good	28	38.9	40.0	100.0
	Total	70	97.2	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.8		
	Total	72	100.0		

From Table 1, it is evident that 90% of the Bult area's diners in Potchefstroom experience good (50%) to excellent (40%) value for money. This refers not to the combination between price and the product and service received for the price paid.

Table 2 shows the dining experience over several criteria, such as staff friendliness, product knowledge of staff, and cleanliness. Respectively these three categories account for excellence in friendliness (55.6%), product knowledge (38.9%) and cleanliness (56.9%). This reflects the level of quality service received from the employee in their treatment of the customer. Although product knowledge requires some interventions to improve, the category shows a high rating on “good” product knowledge (54.2%). These ratings show that customers of restaurants on the Bult area in Potchefstroom regard the dining experience, in general, to be satisfactory..

Table 2: Dining experience

Friendliness of staff				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	2.8	2.8	2.8
Average	4	5.6	5.6	8.3
Excellent	40	55.6	55.6	63.9
Good	26	36.1	36.1	100.0
Total	72	100.0	100.0	
Product knowledge				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	2.8	2.8	2.8
Average	3	4.2	4.2	6.9
Excellent	28	38.9	38.9	45.8
Good	39	54.2	54.2	100.0
Total	72	100.0	100.0	
Cleanliness				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	2.8	2.8	2.8
Average	4	5.6	5.6	8.3
Excellent	41	56.9	56.9	65.3
Good	25	34.7	34.7	100.0
Total	72	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 shows the results of the dining experience based on the ambiance of the restaurants.

Table 3: Ambiance of the dining experience

Lighting				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	2.8	2.8	2.8
Average	9	12.5	12.5	15.3
Excellent	33	45.8	45.8	61.1
Good	28	38.9	38.9	100.0
Total	72	100.0	100.0	

Music				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	2.8	2.8	2.8
Average	14	19.4	19.4	22.2
Excellent	26	36.1	36.1	58.3
Good	30	41.7	41.7	100.0
Total	72	100.0	100.0	

Comfort				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	2.8	2.8	2.8
Average	9	12.5	12.5	15.3
Excellent	35	48.6	48.6	63.9
Good	26	36.1	36.1	100.0
Total	72	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 shows the results based on variables such as the lighting, music, and comfort that are presented. Even with a combined 82.4% of customers rating the restaurants as good to excellent when it comes to a dining experience with regards to these three categories, these categories' results are lower than the rest indicating possible room for improvement.

In Table 4, the results on the evaluation of the consistency of the food and service quality are presented.

Table 4: Quality of service and food remains consistent

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	2.8	2.8	2.8
No	2	2.8	2.8	5.6
Sometimes	5	6.9	6.9	12.5
Yes	63	87.5	87.5	100.0
Total	72	100.0	100.0	

The clients overwhelmingly agree that the food and service quality is highly consistent (87.5%) and that little variation can be expected from the restaurants. This is very important for the retention of customers when they have the perception that the quality of service will be as expected every time they make use of it.

In Table 5, the issue of sufficient healthy options on the menu is explored. There is an increase in the demand for a healthier and more sustainable way of living, which includes especially eating options. If a restaurant can align themselves with this growing trend, they might have a competitive advantage.

Table 5: There are sufficient selections of healthy choices on the menu

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	2.8	2.8	2.8
No	12	16.7	16.7	19.4
Yes	58	80.6	80.6	100.0
Total	72	100.0	100.0	

Most respondents (80.6%) feel that there are healthy options on the menu to choose from. However, although in the minority, 16.7% do not feel that is the case. This could be an area where restaurants could improve on because 16% is a significant market share if these customers seek alternative dining experiences.

In Table 6, the role promotions play in a customer's dining decision can indicate to a restaurant how sensitive customers are to the cost of dining, and 70.8% of customers base their decision on where to dine on promotions. This is a significant amount of dinners following promotion, which means they are price sensitive. This percentage will change depending on the state of the economy and the customers' expendable cash. Some 29.2%, however, is not basing their decision on promotions. Promotion can, therefore, be used strategically to attract customers, but restaurants should not

cheapen their brand because there should be a balance between more sales with fewer profits. In the end, service delivery should not be compromised for more sales.

Table 6: The role of promotions in the dining decision

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	21	29.2	29.2	29.2
	Yes	51	70.8	70.8	100.0
	Total	72	100.0	100.0	

In Table 7, the acceptance of smoking is analysed. As mentioned with the increase in healthier living, a big drive towards less smoking is turning more people away from smoking.

Table 7: Smoking in a restaurant

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Acceptable	3	4.2	4.2	4.2
	Acceptable with Separation	48	66.6	66.6	70.8
	Not Acceptable	21	29.2	29.2	100.0
	Total	72	100.0	100.0	

The customers that do smoke need to be accommodated as well. According to the feedback, 66.6% of respondents feel that smoking in restaurants is acceptable, but with separation. There is, however, a significant percentage of customers, 29.2% that regard smoking as unacceptable. This is a noticeable number of customers that cannot be ignored.

3.3.2 Service quality results

3.3.2.1 The validity of the adapted SERVQUAL questionnaire

The service quality of Potchefstroom restaurants is presented next. However, before the adapted questionnaire can be analysed, proof of its validity in the adapted format is required. This can statistically be done by subjecting each service quality antecedent individually to exploratory factor analysis to confirm if the adapted measuring criteria, indeed, measure the specific service quality antecedent (Moolla & Bisschoff, 2012:75; Salim, 2011; Hill, 2018, Asvat, 2018). The results of the statistical validation are shown

in table 8. The number of the criteria relating to each antecedent corresponds with the number of the questionnaire in Appendix A.

Table 8: Validity results of the service quality loyalty antecedents

Tangibility	Factor Loadings	Assurance	Factor Loadings
Tan 1	.841	Ass 1	.870
Tan 2	.891	Ass 2	.817
Tan 3	.789	Ass 3	.920
Tan 4	.884	Ass 4	.868
Variance explained	72.6%	Variance explained	75.6%
Reliability	Factor Loadings	Responsiveness	Factor Loadings
Rel 1	.851	Res 1	.782
Rel 2	.835	Res 2	.906
Rel 3	.728	Res 3	.911
Rel 4	.835	Res 4	.902
Variance explained	66.2%	Variance explained	76.9%
Empathy	Factor Loadings		
Emp 1	.773		
Emp 2	.856		
Emp 3	.899		
Emp 4	.915		
Emp 5	.860		
Variance explained	74.3%		

From the table, it is evident that the adapted measuring criteria indeed measure all the service quality antecedents. This can be concluded based on the fact that all the criteria load onto their respective antecedents. No criterion was discarded from the analysis because of a low factor loading (below 0.40), which was set for this study (Asvat, 2018). The table thus shows that the adapted questionnaire is a valid tool to collect the data for this study. The variance explained by each antecedent should also exceed 60% in providing an excellent fit to the data (Field, 2013). From the table, it is evident that all the antecedents do represent an excellent fit to the data; meaningful data analysis was therefore possible.

3.3.2.2 Suitability of the data for analysis

The suitability of the data is determined by, firstly, ensuring that an adequate sample exists (as per the KMO measure); this means that there are enough data-points to analyse the data meaningfully. Secondly, the significance of interrelationships between the data-points needs to be confirmed at the 95% significance level (Bartlett's tests, where $p \leq 0.05$). Then, as a final measure to ensure scientific data analysis, the reliability of the data was calculated using the Cronbach alpha coefficient, which should exceed 0.70 to indicate excellent reliability and internal stability. These results appear in the table below.

Table 9: The KMO, Bartlett's test, variance explained and reliability of the brand loyalty antecedents

Antecedents	KMO	Bartlett	Cronbach Alpha
Tangibility	0.778	0.00	.871
Reliability	0.767	0.00	.841
Responsiveness	0.773	0.00	.896
Assurance	0.793	0.00	.889
Empathy	0.849	0.00	.908

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) values all exceed the required 0.70 with ease. This shows satisfactory sample adequacy. Regarding the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, all the antecedents show significance at the 95% confidence interval ($p \leq 0.05$) as required. Finally, the reliability of the data is excellent because all the antecedents have high alpha coefficients, which exceeds the required 0.70 with ease (Pallant, 2013:6).

3.3.3 Measuring the service quality antecedents

The descriptive statistics on customer satisfaction antecedents consist of the mean values and standard deviations. The table also shows the skewness statistics of the antecedents. The mean values of the Likert scale are interpreted as suggested by Bisschoff and Hough (1995). This interpretation was successfully applied by various researchers in using Likert scale applications (Bisschoff & Lotriet, 2008; Siqebengu, 2017; Hill, 2018):

- < 3: Lower importance; Dissatisfaction; Immediate action required

- 3-3.5: Important; Satisfaction; Develop to become excellent
- >3: Very important; Very satisfied/Excellent; Maintain to stay on top

The standard deviation provides a secondary measure; it indicates whether the respondents agree on the questions, and to what extent (Bisschoff & Hough, 1995).

Table 10: Descriptive statistics of the customer service antecedents

Measuring criteria	N Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std.	
			Deviation Statistic	Skewness Statistic Std. Error
1. Tangibles [Restaurant has modern-look and inviting feel]	74	4.20	.721	-0.327 .279
2. Tangibles [The physical facilities are clean and sufficient]	74	4.42	.702	-0.800 .279
3. Tangibles [Employees are looking neat and professional]	74	4.46	.578	-0.495 .279
4. Tangibles [Materials associated with the service are visually appealing for example food display, condiments, glasses, menus]	74	4.42	.597	-0.472 .279
5. Reliability [When the restaurant promises to do something by a certain time, it does so]	74	4.42	.662	-0.711 .279
6. Reliability [When a customer has a problem, the restaurant shows a sincere interest in solving it]	74	4.54	.554	-0.662 .279
7. Reliability [The restaurant performs the service right the first time]	74	4.38	.635	-0.517 .279
8. Reliability [The bill is error-free]	74	4.62	.590	-1.313 .279
9. Responsiveness [Employees are informing customers about promotions]	74	4.26	.812	-0.824 .279
10. Responsiveness [Employees give prompt service to customers]	74	4.42	.597	-0.472 .279
11. Responsiveness [Employees are willing to help and never too busy to respond to customer's requests]	74	4.42	.641	-0.970 .279
12. Responsiveness [Employees are knowledgeable about products and able to suggest pairings]	74	4.26	.703	-0.408 .279
14. Assurance [The behaviour of employees instils confidence in customers]	74	4.34	.668	-0.796 .279
15. Assurance [Customers feel safe in their transactions]	74	4.59	.547	-0.904 .279
16. Assurance [Employees are consistently courteous]	74	4.43	.526	-0.014 .279
17. Assurance [Employees have the knowledge to answer customer's questions]	74	4.31	.618	-0.669 .279

Table 10: Descriptive statistics ... (continued)

Measuring criteria	N Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness	
				Statistic	Std. Error
18. Empathy [Restaurant gives individual attention to the customer]	74	4.39	.637	-.560	.279
19. Empathy [Employees give personal attention to customers]	74	4.39	.637	-.560	.279
20. Empathy [Restaurant understands specifics needs of its customers]	74	4.47	.624	-.764	.279
21. Empathy [Restaurant has customer's interest at heart]	74	4.53	.602	-.881	.279
22. Empathy [Operating hours are convenient to all customers]	74	4.57	.599	-1.055	.279
23. Product offering [Restaurant product offering is adequate]	74	4.53	.602	-1.268	.279
24. Product offering [Restaurant product offering is good value for money in terms of quality]	74	4.49	.707	-1.505	.279
25. Product offering [Restaurant is delivering quality products]	74	4.61	.569	-1.128	.279
26. Product offering [The quality of the products are consistent]	74	4.49	.579	-.598	.279
27. Product offering [Product offering invites complementary products]	74	4.35	.766	-1.076	.279
Valid N (listwise)	74				

Table 10 shows the individual scores for each of the measuring criteria. All the criteria have highly satisfactory scores and exceed 4 on the 5-point Likert scale. This indicates high levels of satisfaction. The summary statistics of each of the antecedents appears in Table 11.

Table 11: Summary: descriptive statistics of the customer service antecedents

	N Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness	
				Statistic	Std. Error
Tangible	74	4.3750	.55402	-.497	.279
Reliable	74	4.4899	.49560	-.691	.279
Responsive	74	4.3649	.59723	-.719	.279
Assurance	74	4.4189	.51203	-.402	.279
Empathy	74	4.4703	.53321	-.630	.279
Valid N (listwise)	74				

From the table, it is evident that all five service quality antecedents are performing well because they all exceed 4.3 on the 5-point Likert scale. It would, therefore, seem that the diners have a good experience and that there is no apparent antecedent that fails

in providing an excellent dining experience. More specifically, the antecedents (and their scores) represent:

- **Tangibles:** The appeal, atmosphere, the physical appearance of the staff, and the image experienced by the staff, facilities, equipment, and marketing communication. It is clear from Table 11 above that customers perceive an excellent image of the business's look and staff presentation. Tangibles have a mean of 4.38 on the 5-point Likert scale.
- **Reliability:** Does the customer receive the service as promised and as expected? Not just once, but upon every visit. It is clear from Tables 10 and 11 above that customers experience the service as reliable and consistent. The reliability of the service has a mean of 4.49 on the 5-point Likert scale.
- **Responsiveness:** Is the service provided in a timely fashion providing prompt service? It is clear from table 8 above that the customers perceive the service to be quick and effective. Responsiveness has a mean score of 4.36 on the 5-point Likert scale.
- **Assurance:** The assurance the customer receives from the employee's knowledge and courtesy, that they receive the expected service. It is evident from Tables 10 and 11 that customers feel assurance from the service offered compared to the expectation. Assurance has a mean score of 4.42 on the 5-point Likert scale.
- **Empathy:** The individualised attention and care the customer receives from all the employees. The customer feeling wanted. Alternatively, are they treated as just another customer? It is clear from Tables 10 and 11 that customers' empathy also performed satisfactorily with a mean score of 4,47 on the 5-point Likert scale.

3.3.4 Correlational statistics

Pearson's correlation was used to determine the relationships between the antecedents. Also, the relationships between the concept "Product offering" and the five service quality dimensions were calculated. Strong significant correlations ($r \geq 0.5$; $p \leq 0.05$) were considered for interpretation (Field, 2013). The results appear in Table 12 below.

From the table, it is evident that all the inter-correlations between the antecedents are substantial and significant ($r \geq 0.68$; $p \leq 0.01$) at the 99% confidence interval. This means that the antecedents cannot be seen as independent variables in service quality management. They are all inter-related in the management towards service quality and customer satisfaction of the restaurants. It is also noteworthy that all five the antecedents have strong positive correlations ($r \geq 0.74$; $p \leq 0.01$) with the variable "Product offering." This means that the product offering strongly influences the service quality levels of the restaurants.

Table 12: Descriptive statistics of the customer service antecedents

		Tangible	Reliable	Responsive	Assurance	Empathy	Product Offering
Tangible	Pearson Correlation	1	.772**	.702**	.749**	.808**	.749**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	74	74	74	74	74	74
Reliable	Pearson Correlation	.772**	1	.715**	.783**	.770**	.783**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	74	74	74	74	74	74
Responsive	Pearson Correlation	.702**	.715**	1	.719**	.694**	.719**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	74	74	74	74	74	74
Assurance	Pearson Correlation	.715**	.709**	.692**	1	.704**	.759**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	74	74	74	74	74	74
Empathy	Pearson Correlation	.749**	.783**	.719**	.774**	1	.774**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	74	74	74	74	74	74
Product Offering	Pearson Correlation	.808**	.770**	.694**	.774**	.774**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	74	74	74	74	74	74

***.* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

3.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the research methodology and results obtained from the empirical study. The chapter empirically evaluated the suitability of the data and the measuring instrument. Then, based on the positive findings of the reliability and validity analysis, the chapter continues and measures customer service quality with the restaurants on the Bult area of Potchefstroom. The chapter finally correlated the service quality antecedents with the Product offering of restaurants and found that high correlations exist between the service quality antecedents and the product offering. There are also high inter-correlations (as expected) between the service quality antecedents.

The next chapter concludes the study. The chapter provides conclusions, recommendations, and areas for future research relevant to this study.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 is the final chapter of the study. This chapter aims to conclude the study, formulate recommendations, and to postulate possible areas for further research. This chapter also presents a summary of the results on the feedback received from customers with regard to customer service in the restaurant industry in Potchefstroom, and it offers an overview of the study conducted.

4.2 CONCLUSIONS

The South African restaurant industry is exceptionally competitive and extremely susceptible to the economic environment, which puts a strain on customers' expendable cash in low growth cycles. The restaurant market is straightforward to enter or to exit, which tends to lend itself to new competition regularly. Furthermore, this is why customer service and product offerings are essential. If the dining experience of customers is to such an extent that customers are continuously satisfied, a competitive advantage can be created.

With study, knowledge was gained on how customers of the restaurant industry perceive service quality and what they expect from the service providers. Through the feedback from customers, gaps were identified the restaurants should address in order to provide service to such an extent that customers are satisfied, and their expectations are met. With the results, the study assists the restaurants to understand what customers are expecting and how their performance is measuring up to the customers' standard of quality service.

Many areas were identified for a restaurant to focus on, so they can significantly improve their quality of service. This creates an opportunity to focus on the improvements in the areas most needed to comply with quality service expectations. This study allows the opportunity for future studies towards customer service. It is advisable that future studies also make use of the SERVQUAL model because, as proven, it delivers the quality feedback needed, and it will offer the opportunity to compare the current results with the future results.

SERVQUAL model results modified to accommodate the restaurant industry demand proved to be effective, and offer valuable information. This model result assists managers and owners of the restaurant in making informed business decisions to advance their restaurant business. In general, the SERVQUAL model was found to be suitable for measuring customer satisfaction with services rendered by a restaurant. Thus, the study provides valuable information to use in the service delivery of restaurants.

The results concluded that tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy are all critical antecedents affecting the restaurant industry service quality, as stated by Parasuraman et al. (1988:14). The idea that customers' perceived service quality is affected by the level of satisfaction is supported and proved in this study, and it is consistent with earlier studies of Mehralian et al. (2016:979) and other works. The individual perceived service quality scores (mean values) are all above 85% levels, which indicates that the restaurants on the Bult area in Potchefstroom are offering quality service, and customers are satisfied with the service they receive. There is, however, much room for improvement, where if businesses make an effort to focus on, they will increase their customer retention and enable themselves to have a competitive advantage over the competition. Management should see the value in this feedback and start addressing it immediately by way of improving training and revisiting set standards.

Finally, the proposed customer service research model provides relevant management information and appears to be successful in determining the quality of service of a restaurant.

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

A restaurant's primary objective is to increase its market share by gaining more customers and increasing the retention of customers. Since there is a clear relationship between customer service and customer satisfaction, between customer satisfaction and loyalty, it will be a profitable business decision for restaurants to improve their customer service quality.

The following recommendations concerning the service quality of the restaurant industry can be highlighted:

- Establishing a customer service culture is critical to be able to compete with your competition and retain satisfied customers. An overall drive by the whole business and their approach to customer satisfaction are recommended to consequently establishment a customer service culture.
- Client service should form part of the restaurant's strategic goals towards higher profits through customer service standards.
- Time and effort should be allocated to the follow-up of research results.
- The training of staff needs to improve and happen regularly, and to offer to appreciate a strong focus by the staff through performance incentives will ensure service levels improve.
- Employees that work directly with customers should focus on showing eagerness, interest, and willingness to assist customers and should also have the product knowledge to do so. Personalised customer service is significant for the client to experience. It should be "Memorable and satisfying."
- It is also recommended that this study is conducted again in the future to facilitate direct comparative analysis of the current service levels. Measure and manage customer satisfaction and the service quality levels to compare the results regularly.
- As indicated through the results, the music, lighting, and comfort need to be improved by restaurants to improve the ambiance of a restaurant.

4.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It is recommended that future research focuses on:

- The frequency to measure service quality. By regularly measuring the service quality of the restaurants in the Bult region of Potchefstroom, comparative analysis and continued managerial intervention could improve service quality and benefit the restaurants.
- Market demographics. The different market segments have different needs, and research could lead to a differentiating strategy where the different market segments could be serviced.
- Specialised services. The North-West University is a significant roleplayer in the region. Corporate dining requirement is a major market segment that can be targeted. At present, only a few restaurants in the area successfully target these services. Professional dining with visitors, corporate functions and even

catering services are significant market segments to target. Future research could focus on identifying specific needs for this corporate client.

4.5 SUMMARY

This chapter offered a conclusion to the research study and its results. The importance of customer service cannot be more emphasised, and it is clear, no other industry is more dependent on retaining customers through quality service than the restaurant industry. Every competitive advantage needs to be focused on in order to be sustainable and profitable and having superior customer service, and satisfied customers cannot be bought, but only hard worked for. The study showed that customers are satisfied with the restaurants' service offerings, but that there is room for improvement. This industry might be extremely susceptible to economic cycles, but it is also very quickly transformed by customer's food, health, and taste changes. Experimental changes in methods of service and product delivery could be used, if the customers' needs are not clear, to determine possible managerial interventions for competitiveness. It is expected; you will not be able to satisfy them, which will lead to an unsatisfied and non-returning customer. For that reason, customer and industry trends, demands, and "flavours of the month" need to be determined regularly. The restaurants' services might be up to standard from a manager's perception, but because the customer determines quality service, the customer's perception needs to be determined regularly. The restaurants in the Bult area of Potchefstroom should take this to heart and make efforts to measure their customers' expectations so that they can continue to deliver service quality and remain competitive.

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APPENDIX A: CUSTOMER SERVICE SURVEY

Section A: Service quality measurement

Instructions:

Please rate the service quality of the restaurant by indicating your satisfaction on the 5-point scale.

1 = Very dissatisfied
2 = Dissatisfied
3 = Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4 = Satisfied
5 = Very satisfied

Tangibles (four items)

1. Restaurant has modern-look and inviting feel.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The physical facilities are clean and sufficient	1	2	3	4	5
3. Employees are looking neat and professional	1	2	3	4	5
4. Materials associated with the service are visually appealing – for example food display, condiments, glasses, menus.	1	2	3	4	5

Reliability (four items)

5. When the restaurant promises to do something by a certain time, it does so	1	2	3	4	5
6. When a customer has a problem, the restaurant shows a sincere interest in solving it	1	2	3	4	5
7. The restaurant performs the service right the first time	1	2	3	4	5
8. The bill is error-free	1	2	3	4	5

Responsiveness (four items)

9. Employees are informing customers about promotions	1	2	3	4	5
10. Employees give prompt service to customers	1	2	3	4	5
11. Employees are willing to help and never too busy to respond to customer's requests	1	2	3	4	5
12. Employees are knowledgeable about products and able to suggest pairings	1	2	3	4	5

Assurance (four items)

14. The behavior of employees instils confidence in customers	1	2	3	4	5
15. Customers feel safe in their transactions	1	2	3	4	5
16. Employees are consistently courteous	1	2	3	4	5
17. Employees have the knowledge to answer customer's questions	1	2	3	4	5

Empathy (five items)

18. Restaurant gives individual attention to the customer	1	2	3	4	5
19. Employees give personal attention to customers	1	2	3	4	5
20. Restaurant understands specifics needs of its customers	1	2	3	4	5
21. Restaurant has customer's interest at heart	1	2	3	4	5
22. Operating hours are convenient to all customers	1	2	3	4	5

Product offering (five items)

23. Restaurant product offering is adequate	1	2	3	4	5
24. Restaurant product offering is good value for money with regards to quality	1	2	3	4	5
25. Restaurant is delivering quality products	1	2	3	4	5
26. The quality of the products are consistent	1	2	3	4	5
27. Product offering invites complementary products	1	2	3	4	5

28. Overall, I would judge my service experience as satisfactory

YES	NO
------------	-----------

Section B: Customer restaurant experience and needs

Instructions:

Please rate the experience of the restaurant by indicating your view on the following 5-point scale.

1 = Extremely poor
2 = Poor
3 = Average
4 = Good
5 = Extremely good

1. The restaurant offers value for money	1	2	3	4	5
2. Dining experience: Friendliness of staff	1	2	3	4	5
3. Dining experience: Product knowledge	1	2	3	4	5
4. Dining experience: Cleanliness	1	2	3	4	5
5. Ambiance: Lighting	1	2	3	4	5
6. Ambiance: Music	1	2	3	4	5
7. Ambiance: Comfort	1	2	3	4	5
8. Quality of food remains consistent	1	2	3	4	5
9. Sufficient healthy choices on menu	1	2	3	4	5

10. Smoking in a restaurant is

Not acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable with separation
----------------	------------	----------------------------

11. There are sufficient healthy options on the menu

No	Yes
----	-----

12. Quality of the food remains consistent

No	Yes	Sometimes
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Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX B: EDITOR'S CERTIFICATE



Antoinette Bisschoff
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Sunday, 17 November 2019

To whom it may concern

Re: Confirmation of language edit, typography and technical precision

The MBA dissertation "Measuring the customer service of local restaurants" Herman Du Plessis (12256382) was edited for language, typography and technical precision. The referencing and sources were checked as per NWU guidelines.

Final, last minute corrections remain the responsibility of the author.



Antoinette Bisschoff

BA Languages (UPE – now NMU); MBA (PU for CHE – now NWU); Translation and Linguistic Studies (NWU)

Officially approved language editor of the NWU since 1998
Member of SA Translators Institute (no. 100181)

Precision ... to the last letter

APPENDIX C: ETHICS CERTIFICATE



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25 October 2019

Prof C Bisschoff
Per e-mail
Dear Prof Bisschoff,

EMS-REC FEEDBACK: 25102019
Student: H du Plessis (12256382)(NWU-01321-19-A4)
Applicant: Prof C Bisschoff - MBA

Your ethics application on, *Measuring the customer service of a restaurant*, that served on the EMS-REC meeting of 25 October 2019, refers.

Outcome:

Approved as a minimal risk study. A number NWU-01321-19-A4 is given for three years of ethics clearance.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Linde'.

Prof Bennie Linde
Chairperson: Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC)
Potchefstroom Campus