Restaurant Quality Measurement Based on Marketing Factors – The Managers' Perspective

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The importance of quality has been recognized in most service industries, as it generates revenues and has a strong impact on customer behaviour. The measurement of restaurant service quality has attracted increasing attention from hospitality researchers since the implementation of the Conceptual Model of Service Quality and the SERVQUAL instrument in the mid-1980s. As a fairly new topic, it requires frequent and critical monitoring that would shed light on current research and make needed adjustments regarding the methodological research process and inquiry focus. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of several quality factors in guests' assessment of restaurant quality. However, to date no study has examined the marketing perspective (7P) of service quality. Because there is no consensus in the scientific literature regarding which marketing quality factors matter in assessing the quality of the dining experience, this paper describes and tests the development of a marketing-oriented Restaurant Quality Model. Food quality often seems to be accepted as the fundamental component in determining the quality of the dining experience; however, several studies have identified that other quality dimensions are also important in delivering quality. Special attention was therefore devoted to a marketing perspective and the restaurant managers' perception of what customers expect from a quality service, because managers' perceptions can represent a major gap in delivering quality service, according to the literature (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). A sample of 207 valid questionnaires obtained from managers of different restaurant facilities in Slovenia is analysed. The results show that according to managers the most important marketing quality dimensions for ensuring restaurant quality are 1) people, 2) promotion, placement and price, and 3) product (food), while other marketing factors are not statistically significant in determining restaurant quality. Research results also reveal that the results of numerous studies are mutually inconsistent and contradictory. This research has raised many questions in need of further investigation. It is suggested that future research focus on the analysis of the gap between consumers' expectations and management's perceptions.

Key words: Restaurant quality, service quality management, F&B management, marketing mix, Slovenia

Introduction

In the highly competitive restaurant industry, satisfying guests should be the critical objective of all businesses that wish to prosper and encourage repeat business. A crucial challenge for all restaurant managers today is how to offer food and services of a proper quality. There are many industry-specific factors that significantly affect the level of over-

all service quality: these are volatile demand, small (mostly family-run) businesses, a vast selection of food and beverage products offered, the intangibility of services, labour-intensive production, intense competition, and others. To gain an advantageous edge in this highly competitive environment, the marketing literature has consistently emphasized the importance of a marketing orientation as a strategic tool. The growing recognition of the customer-based marketing approach has suggested that implementing quality as a marketing tool is the essential element in fostering customer relationships and sustainable market share (Sedmak, 2011; Wang, Law, Hung & Guillet, 2014). Understanding customers' needs is the first step in delivering quality services. The best way to manage customers' expectations is to determine what their needs and wants are, strategize how to meet them, and implement these strategies in practice. In the scientific literature, there are several theoretical models to explore customers' expectations and assess service quality. Since the implementation of the Conceptual Model of Service Quality and the SERVQUAL instrument by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry in 1985, the issue of restaurant service quality has received considerable critical attention. Several attempts have been made (Kim, Ng & Kim, 2009; Sulek & Hensley, 2004; Vanniarajan, 2009) to improve and develop specific quality measurement techniques suited to the needs of the restaurant industry (measurement tools are presented in Chapter 2.1.1). All of these techniques focus on specific aspects of service delivery, such as food, environment, cleanliness, price perception, and other factors (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006; Ayeh & Chen, 2013; Barber, Goodman, & Goh, 2011; Edvardsson, 2005; Han, Back, & Barrett, 2010; Mosavi & Ghaedi, 2012; Raajpot, 2002; Voon, 2012) and are based on the theoretical concept of the generic Service Quality model, according to which the gap between customers' expectations and managers' perceptions of those expectations will have a major impact on the customers' evaluation of service quality. The first step in ensuring restaurant service quality is therefore to avoid discrepancies between managers' perceptions and guests' expectations. Nevertheless, only a few studies (Briggs, Sutherland & Drummond, 2007; Lau, Akbar & Fie, 2005; Nasution & Mavondo, 2008; Wilkins, Merrilees & Herrington,

2007) have included the measurement of managers' perception about what guests' expect regarding high-quality service. However, based on a thorough literature review, we could not reliably determine the importance of different marketing factors (7P) in the assessment of the quality of the dining experience, as no study analysed restaurant quality from the marketing perspective (7P). The purpose of this paper is to investigate the importance of individual marketing attributes in delivering service quality from the managers' perspective. Managers must understand what features connote high quality to customers in advance, what features a service must have in order to meet customers' needs, and what levels of performance in those features are needed to deliver high-quality service.

To fill this research gap, the current study focuses on seven marketing factors that, according to Kotler (2004), form the fundamental part of restaurant services. We assume that, according to managers, all marketing factors have a significant impact on guests' satisfaction as they form an inseparable part of the dining experience. The goal of this article is to describe the development of a marketing-oriented model for measuring restaurant quality and to empirically investigate which marketing factors (7P), according to managers, influence the overall restaurant quality. We, therefore, hypothesize that:

H1: Restaurant managers perceive all marketing quality dimensions (7P) as relevant for ensuring overall restaurant quality.

Testing this hypothesis calls for a literature review inquiry into recent research on restaurant quality. As no previous study analysed managers' perceptions from the marketing perspective, in order to capture the complexities of the phenomenon, a theoretical quality model was developed. In the second part of the study, the model was empirically tested. The overall structure of the study consists of four chapters, including this introductory chapter. Chapter Two begins by laying out the theoretical dimensions. Chapter Three is concerned with methodology, and finally, the conclusion presented in the final chapter gives a brief summary and critique of the findings.

Theoretical Background

Service Quality

Defining service quality requires a specific approach to quality measurement, as it is not based on general objectivity and measurability. The approach from the standpoint of the customer is based on a highly subjective perspective. While a variety of definitions have been suggested (Grönroos, 1984, 1990; Langer, 1997; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Reeves & Bednar, 1995), this paper is based on the definition suggested by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985), who defined service quality as the ability of a service to fulfil and exceed guests' expectations. The common characteristic of all service quality definitions (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Reeves & Bednar, 1995; Ryu & Jang, 2007; Van Vaerenbergh, Larivière & Vermeir, 2012) is the consumer-based concept, which makes service quality a highly subjective and relative phenomenon that differs based on who is judging the service. In our study, specific marketing factors involved in the marketing mix (7P) are used as key quality dimensions.

A large and growing body of scientific literature has investigated the theoretical concept of service quality. Several attempts have been made to capture the essential characteristics of service quality in theoretical models. These models are especially important, because they provide a theoretical basis for various techniques (instruments) for measuring service quality. The American school (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1993; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1994) is mainly focused on identifying the criteria that consumers use in evaluating the quality of services. Researchers have contributed a five-step model of service quality and an instrument for measuring service quality, the SERVQUAL instrument, in which they defined five dimensions of service quality: Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy, and Responsiveness. Meanwhile, researchers from the Scandinavian school (Grönroos, 1990; Lehtinen & Lehtinen, 1991) have identified two major aspects of service quality: technical quality (the tangible aspect of the quality) and functional quality. Drawing on an extensive range of sources, the scholars (Candido & Morris 2000; Lin, Chan & Tsai, 2009) used various methods in an attempt to create valid and overall service quality models. Candido and Morris (2000) defined a new model with 14 steps, but an in-depth analysis revealed that the model is mainly based on the five-step model. None of these modified models has received significant scientific validation. Conversely, several authors have highlighted the need to break the link between the traditional American and Scandinavian schools and have proposed alternative quality models. Lin et al. (2009) upgraded the traditional IPA (Importance Performance Analysis) model and developed a new model called IPGA, which was designed to optimize the use of production resources with the aim of improving the quality of services offered. Nevertheless, all these studies highlight the need for the future development of service quality management.

Tools for Measuring Service Quality

In our study, we have focused on tools (techniques) that collect quality information based on pre-determined standards, although the customers' feedback can also be obtained by various qualitative techniques. According to Uran Maravić, Gračan and Zadel (2014) restaurant quality can be measured through different systems: systems in which experts assess restaurants (e.g. Michelin, Gault Milla, and AAA Diamonds); systems in which restaurants are assessed on the web by guests (e.g. Yelp, Zagat, Trip Advisor); systems in which restaurants are assessed by journalists/culinary critics; and systems in which restaurants are assessed on the basis of various academic techniques. Despite the unquestionable significance of qualitative techniques, we decided to use quantitative techniques in our study. Some of these techniques (often also referred to as models) measure service quality based on the quality gaps that occur as a result of differences between guests' expectations and perceptions (SERVQUAL, DINESERV); some are one-dimensional and focus solely on service performance evaluation (SERVPERF, Dineserv.per); some combine quality and importance measurement of different service factors (SERVIMPERF); and finally some focus on employees' responses to specific critical situations (Critical Incident Technique). The predominant quantitative measurement technique is the SERVQUAL instrument (Marković, Raspor & Šegarić, 2012), which measures quality based on the gap between guests' expectations and perceptions. According to Aigbedo and Parameswaran (2004), all five dimensions of the SERVQUAL instrument have

not yet been fully validated. Therefore, the authors propose additional metrics that would better explain the gap between expectations and perceptions. Other authors (Jensen & Hansen, 2007; Ryu, 2005) have highlighted the need for a tailored academic approach to service quality measurement. Kukanja (2014) analysed the inclusion of different quality dimensions in restaurant quality models. According to this author, specific state-of-the-art techniques (e.g. Tangserv, CIERM) have moved away from the traditional RATER dimensions of the SERVQUAL instrument, which indicates the necessity of further investigation of restaurant management quality.

Management's Perceptions of Customers' Expectations

There are relatively few studies examining managers' perceptions of customers' expectations. Wilkins, Merrilees and Herington (2007) and Nasution and Mavondo (2008) found that researchers have not considered management perceptions to be a fundamental prerequisite for high-quality service delivery. This insight is also consistent with previous research in services (Briggs, Sutherland & Drummond, 2007; Lau, Akbar & Fie 2005), which suggests that managers may not always understand what customers expect. In an international study conducted by Yavas and Rezayat (2003), it was shown that managers' perceptions of quality are mainly conditioned by the individual (cultural) characteristics of managers and the organizational characteristics of the firms. In another major study, Wilkins, Merrilees and Herington (2007) found that managers of luxury hotel properties in Australia do not perceive quality to be a multidimensional construct and simplify the meaning of its dimensions. According to Lau, Akbar and Fie (2005) managers must constantly monitor guests' expectations and compare them to executive perceptions. As noted by and Martínez-Tur, Tordera, Peiró and Potocnik (2011) customers' expectations measurement should be the key part of each general business strategy. In the case of the Slovenian hotel industry, the study by Uran (2003) offers the most comprehensive empirical analysis of the internal (organizational) gaps in delivering service quality. According to the findings, due to organizational gaps, quality management cannot be used as a strategy of differentiation in the Slovenian hotel market.

Methodology

Research Process and Sample Description

Following the conceptualization and operationalization of the service quality construct, a 35-item instrument for assessing managers' perceptions of restaurant quality was formulated and empirically tested. Although in many questionnaires (Marković et al., 2012) individual quality factors are substantively combined to express the characteristics of several factors in a single, uniform quality factor (e.g. attractiveness of car parks and surrounding areas), in our study we have exclusively used one quality characteristic for the description of each quality factor (see Table 1). The level of managers' perceptions was measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The model is based on the performance (performance only) aspect of quality measurement (Abdullah & Rozario, 2009; Keith & Simmers, 2011; Landrum, Prybutok & Zhang, 2007). The questionnaire was pretested on five restaurant managers who were invited to participate in the formation of the research instrument. Based on their suggestions, some minor changes were made. Our study was conducted from January to June 2014. The research was performed by ten interviewers in different restaurant settings in Slovenia. A total of 332 independently operated restaurants were included in the study, representing 10% of the population of Slovenia. The research was conducted by direct interviews with restaurant managers in randomly selected restaurants. Managers were asked to fill in the questionnaire. According to the surveyors, some managers refused to participate in the study for a variety of reasons. The final analysis is therefore based on 207 valid questionnaires, representing 6.2% of the relevant population in Slovenia. In the first step, descriptive statistics analysis was used to analyse the respondents' demographic characteristics. The majority of the respondents were an average of slightly less than 40 years of age, and a large majority of the sample was composed of male managers (69.4%). The largest proportion of managers completed one of the programs for vocational secondary education (59.2%), while 40% of managers acquired higher education. Despite the overwhelming proportion of managers with lower levels of education, we have found that they have a relatively large amount of work experience in the indus-

try, with an average of 19.2 years. In addition to demographic data, restaurant ownership was analysed. Results show that almost three quarters of managers (69.1%) own the restaurant they manage, while only a small proportion of managers (30.9%) are employed as professional experts.

Questionnaire Development

The small size of the dataset (see Chapter 2.2) meant that it was not possible to base our qualitative research on studies that analysed managers' perceptions from the marketing perspective. Therefore, to capture the complexities of the phenomenon, we had to base our literature review on studies that analysed customers' quality perceptions from various marketing perspectives. The results of several studies presented below emphasize the importance of different quality factors, as scholars base their studies on different (specific) quality factors. Nevertheless, no study before has empirically investigated and compared all seven marketing quality dimensions (7P) in a uniform questionnaire.

Product (Food)

Numerous studies have reported that food is the most important quality dimension in the restaurant offering (Gupta, McLaughlin & Gomez, 2007; Sulek & Hensley, 2004; Vanniarajan, 2009). All presented studies outline a critical role of food quality evaluation in correlation with other quality factors. Nevertheless, in several international studies (Kim et al., 2009; Sulek & Hensley, 2004; Vanniarajan, 2009), food was identified as the most important quality dimension. Sulek and Hensley (2004) proposed that the quality of food should be simply defined by three key characteristics: food safety, attractiveness and digestibility. Based on the literature review, we used the following quality factors in our research model: offer volume (selection of dishes), the size of portions, taste, appearance, and the perception of food safety.

People

A large volume of published studies (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006; Jaafar, Lumbers & Eves, 2008; Mosavi & Ghaedi 2012; Voon, 2012) describes the role of people as the most important quality dimension. Several researchers confirmed the correlation between the guests' quality evaluation process and the

demographic characteristics of service staff. Luohe and Tsaur (2011) confirmed the link between guests' perceptions and age; Martínez-Tur, Tordera, Peiró, and Potocnik (2011) emphasized the importance of organizational climate; and Wall and Berry (2007) concluded that guests' quality perceptions heavily depend on the type of restaurant itself. Kim and Kachersky (2006) and Meng and Elliott (2008) suggested that guests of gastronomic restaurants are more sensitive to the attitudes of service staff. A study conducted by Waxman (2006) not only stressed the importance of the staff's attitude but also revealed a rich set of social quality factors associated with service staff (e.g. warmth, understanding, etc.). The design of our questionnaire has been based on the results of the presented studies, and some quality factors were logically introduced from the SERVQUAL instrument (employees' politeness), DINESERV (well-trained, competent and experienced staff; the number of staff) and the Tangserv model (customers' interactions with other people). Specific factors that have been introduced to our model for assessing the quality of people are the hospitality of the staff, the competencies of service staff, sufficient number of staff to ensure quality service, the importance of the presence of the restaurant manager, and the distracting presence of other guests.

Price

Subjective assessment of quality is particularly problematic regarding individual perceptions of price. Kim and Kachersky (2006) state that the perceived price level is exclusively a result of an individual psychological process. This view is supported by many authors (Bhattachnaya & Friedman, 2001; Meng & Elliott, 2008) who have stressed the importance of individualism in price perception. According to these authors, a fair price has a significant impact on guests' perception of quality. The restaurant industry tends to be highly price-elastic, as a small change in price is accompanied by a large change in the quantity demanded (Sedmak, 2011). We have noted that price was not identified as the most important quality dimension in any of the presented studies. Nevertheless, many studies stressed the importance of different individual price factors (e.g., an accurate bill is also a quality factor in the DINESERV model). Following the above discussion, we may suppose

that price quality can be measured based on the following price factors: understandability of prices, accurate bill, value for money, price competitiveness, and expected price level vs. actual price level.

Processes
The quality of this dimension is most often assessed according to different activities of service staff. Ha and Jang (2010) have primarily treated the quality of the service encounter as a multidimensional construct that is most often the result of guests' subjective evaluation of several quality factors (e.g. the process of welcoming guests, acceptance of orders, guest attendance, etc.). Heung, Wong and Qu (2000) reported that the speed of service is the most important factor in determining guests' perception of quality. Nam, Ekinci and Whyatt (2011) state that it remains unknown how many quality factors there are. Based on the literature review, the following quality factors were included in the questionnaire: staff responsiveness to questions, staff helpfulness in serving guests' needs, staff responsiveness, and restaurant working hours.

Physical Evidence
The importance of the physical, tangible environment has been emphasized by several authors (Kim & Moon, 2009; Ryu & Jang, 2007; Yunkyong, 2007), as it represents an important basis for evaluating the quality of services. Cheng, Chen, Hsu and Hu (2012) have reported that physical evidence has a different impact on guests who are visiting the restaurant for the first time than on guests who have previously visited the restaurant. In particular, factors associated with cleanliness and noise significantly influence guests' perception of quality (Barber & Scarcelli, 2010). According to the findings presented in this section and based on several quality models (SERVQUAL, DINESERV, Tangserv, SERVPERF), we have included the following quality factors in our questionnaire: cleanliness of the premises, neat and presentable staff, comfort, design in accordance with food offering, and sense of security.

Promotion
According to Sedmak (2011), the most common forms of promotion in the restaurant industry are advertising, sales promotions, public relations, discounts

and special offers, outdoor lighted signs and boards, menus and wine lists, direct sales, invitations and announcements and special events. Direct sales present the only form of marketing communication that provides instant feedback from guests. The success of direct (personal) sales heavily depends on the competence, professionalism and charisma of the service staff. Aside from the functional aspect of quality, which heavily depends on service staff sales activities (recommendations) and guests' promotional activities (i.e., word of mouth), the quality of promotional activities is also perceived through the quality of technical factors, such as menu design (Din, Zahari, Othman & Abas, 2012) and discounts (Taylor & Long-Tolbert, 2002). In light of the evidence presented in this section, we have decided to include the following promotional quality factors in our questionnaire: visible marketing signs, signs of special attention and compliments (small gifts, etc.), service staff recommendations, the volume of sales campaigns and special offers, and advertising activities in social media.

Placement
In the restaurant industry, the channels of distribution are most often direct (personal). The most important channels of distribution are location, direct distribution and indirect distribution through travel agencies and other providers that include restaurant offerings in their offerings (Sedmak, 2011). The importance of geographic location was emphasized by Bowie and Buttle (2004) and Parsa, Self, Sydnor-Busso and Yoon (2011). We have decided to include the following quality factors in our study (the tangible factors were logically introduced from the Tangserv model): entrance accessibility, accessible parking areas, neat and clean surroundings, the perception of whether the restaurant is worth the distance travelled, and indirect distribution.

Results and Discussion
The results presented in Table 1 show that all quality factors were evaluated relatively highly (the average mean value is 4.24). Among the seven quality dimensions, the highest-rated dimension was product (food) quality (mean 4.72), with food safety its highest rated factor (mean value 4.89). The results indicate that the lowest perceptions are related to the di-

mension of marketing communication (mean 3.80), with the lowest scores related to the factor 'Volume of sales campaigns and special offers (2.83)'. The coef-

ficients of variation show how homogeneous guests are in the evaluation of individual quality factors.

Table 1   Analysis of the assessments of quality (descriptive statistics)

Quality dimensions (7P)	Mean	Coefficient of variation (%)
Product (food)		
Selection of dishes	4.58	13.78
Extent of portions	4.75	10.61
Taste	4.80	9.58
Appearance	4.58	13.47
Food safety perception	4.89	7.77
Physical evidences		
Cleanliness of the premises	4.74	10.11
Neat (presentable) staff	4.65	12.29
Comfort	4.66	12.75
Sense of security	4.86	7.97
Design in accordance with food offered	4.61	14.45
People		
Sufficient number of staff for ensuring quality service	4.35	18.89
Importance of the presence of restaurant manager for ensuring quality offering	4.27	25.74
Distracting presence of other guests	2.58	53.39
Hospitable staff	4.68	11.86
Competences of service staff	4.50	14.98
Promotion		
Visible marketing signs	4.35	18.89
Signs of special attention and compliments	4.24	20.25

Quality dimensions (7P)	Mean	Coefficient of variation (%)
Recommendations from service staff	4.49	18.09
Volume of sales campaigns and special offers	2.83	46.89
Advertising activities in the social media	3.36	37.06
Price		
Understandability of price items	4.83	9.68
Accurate bill	4.93	5.48
Value for money	4.82	10.13
Price competitiveness	4.60	17.65
Expected price level vs. actual price level	1.90	62.56
Placement		
Accessible entrance	4.40	21.57
Accessible parking area	4.18	30.58
Neat (clean) surroundings	4.45	17.38
The restaurant is worth the distance travelled	4.57	17.98
The restaurant enhances indirect distribution	2.65	52.06
Processes		
Prompt responsiveness of staff	4.56	14.57
Helpfulness of staff	4.69	12.06
Responsiveness of service staff	4.68	11.79
Restaurant opening hours	4.63	14.47
Waiting time	4.57	13.00

In the next section of the study, an exploratory factor analysis was performed to assess the factor structure of perceived restaurant quality. With this factor analysis, we have attempted to test our hypothesis (H1), which suggests that, according to restaurant managers, all seven marketing quality dimensions (7P) have a statistically significant impact on delivering restaurants' quality. Evidence of the scale's reliability, factor structure and validity on the basis of the analysed data is presented next. First, we checked whether the answers to the above 35 quality factors were normally distributed. Because we could not

confirm a normal distribution for any of the selected quality factors of the first set (Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test (KMO) was used), it was necessary to use the Principal Axis Factoring method for the exploratory factor analysis. The first test was performed to evaluate the suitability of the information for inclusion in the factor model. Thus, on the basis of the value of the KMO measure of sampling adequacy (0.828), as well as the outcome of the Bartlett test of sphericity (χ^2=2536.781; degrees of freedom=595), we estimated that all included variables are suitable for factor analysis. The majority of factors had satisfactory communalities (> = 0.50), suggesting that the greater part of their variability can be explained by the influence of common factors. Two quality factors (variables) with too low communalities ('Food safety perception' and 'Distracting presence of other guests') were excluded from the evaluation process of the factor model in the next step. After a few successive iterations of the factor model evaluation, we finally selected the factor model with 15 factors as the most appropriate (presented in Table 2); while 20 factors had to be removed from further analysis. The suitability of the information for inclusion in the final factor model is also supported by the values of the KMO indicator (0.866) and the outcome of the Bartlett test (χ=1130.289; degrees of freedom=105). Although some commonalities belonging to different factors are little lower than recommended (0.5) (see Table 2), based on a rotated factor solution we have decided to include three main factor groups (quality dimensions) in the final model, as it allows a more meaningful interpretation of the factor model. The final model with three quality dimensions is presented in Table 2. Factor weights with factor loadings above 0.3 and factors that contain more than three items were retained. Factors belonging to the dimensions of promotion, placement, and price were logically merged into a new common quality dimension.

We started our factor analysis with seven marketing quality dimensions (7P), as, following Kotler's marketing theory, we have hypothesized that according to managers' perceptions all seven quality marketing dimensions have a significant influence on guests' overall quality perception. Based on the rotated matrix of factor weights shown in the table above, it is evident that, according to managers' quality perceptions, only three marketing dimensions are im-

portant in delivering overall restaurant quality: people (33.04%), promotion, placement and price (8.46%), and product (food) (5.60%). Based on the presented three quality dimensions and the values of their total explained variances, it is clearly evident that according to restaurant managers' beliefs the quality of people (staff) has the greatest importance (33.04%) in assuring restaurant quality, followed by the quality of promotional activities, placement and price (8.46%) and product (food) (5.60%). Other marketing quality dimensions are, in relation to managers' perceptions of quality, not statistically significant. Special attention should be paid to the second factor, which is formed by merging three dimensions (see Table 2). As a further dissection of the results does not contribute to the improvement of the factor analysis, we have decided to keep three quality dimensions in the final model. These results clearly do not support our hypothesis (H1), as only three marketing quality dimensions have a statistically significant influence on delivering overall restaurant quality according to managers' perceptions.

Although we could not confirm H1, the results of this study indicate an important insight into managers' perceptions of restaurant quality. It was hypothesized that all seven marketing dimensions are important in delivering restaurants' quality offerings according to restaurant managers' quality perceptions. The initial theoretical construct consisted of 35 quality factors and seven quality dimensions. However, the results of the (exploratory) factor analysis indicate that only three dimensions and 15 factors are statistically important in delivering overall restaurant quality. Twenty factors had to be removed from the factor analysis, as they had low communalities (< 0.5) and low factor weights (< 0.3). Thus, the results of this study indicate that managers perceive restaurant quality based on only three marketing quality dimensions and 15 quality factors (see Table 2). These results also indicate that the offered quality is perceived as highly incoherent from the managers' perspective.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine how different marketing quality factors influence restaurant managers' overall quality perception. Based on the qualitative research, we were unable to determine

Table 2   Rotated factor solution

Quality factors	Quality dimensions		
	People	Promotion, placement and price	Product (food)
Sufficient number of staff for ensuring quality service	0.703	0.039	0.040
Competences of service staff	0.665	−0.126	0.112
Signs of special attention and compliments	0.643	−0.031	−0.098
Helpfulness of staff in satisfying clients' needs	0.622	−0.086	0.073
Hospitable staff	0.445	−0.196	0.276
Design in accordance with food offered	0.323	−0.249	0.194
Price competitiveness	0.025	−0.846	−0.067
The restaurant is worth the distance travelled	−0.035	−0.722	0.078
Recommendations from service staff	0.298	−0.596	−0.060
Extent of portions	−0.088	0.070	0.724
Sense of security	−0.153	−0.261	0.604
Taste	0.093	−0.062	0.584
Appearance	0.240	0.113	0.506
Selection of dishes	0.254	0.055	0.445
Neat (presentable) staff	0.311	−0.006	0.416
% explained variance	33.043	8.468	5.605

the significance of different marketing factors, neither from the managers' perspective nor from the guests' perspective, as the results of several presented studies are mutually inconsistent and contradictory. This finding is in accordance with our earlier observations, which have shown that service quality dimensions cannot be generalized. Thus, we have developed and tested a new marketing-oriented model that is based on comprehensive restaurant and marketing methodology (7P). The results of this study have shown that only three (out of seven) marketing dimensions have a statistically significant influence on managers' perception of overall restaurant quality: 1) people, 2) promotion, placement and price, and 3) product (food), while other marketing factors are statistically insignificant. Returning to the hypothesis posed at the beginning of the study, it appears that the quality of people (staff) has by far the greatest significance in ensuring restaurant quality. Surprising-

ly, food quality was found to have little significance in determining the perception of restaurant quality. It can thus be suggested that, according to managers' beliefs, customers perceive restaurant quality primarily according to the quality of people and not food. Taken together, these results suggest that not all marketing dimensions are significant in ensuring overall restaurant quality, according to management perceptions. This research extends our knowledge of restaurant quality management. This is the first time that all seven marketing dimensions have been used to explore management perceptions of restaurant quality. As the methodology is based on the generic marketing approach (7P), we assume that it may also be applied to other restaurant facilities (e.g. theme restaurants, rural facilities, etc.).

A number of important limitations need to be considered. The major limitation of this study is the absence of customers' evaluation of perceived restau-

rant quality. The current study only examined domestic managers' perceptions of restaurant quality in Slovenia; thus, additional caution must be applied, as the findings might not be generalized. This research has generated many questions in need of further investigation. Future studies should empirically examine and compare the customer expectation-management perception gap in order to extend the current findings. More broadly, further research is also needed to determine whether differences exist between managers of different types of food & beverage (F&B) facilities and different segments of guests. Randomized controlled trials combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods (Uran Maravić, Gračan & Zadel, 2014) could provide more precise evidence of the importance of the presented results in ensuring overall restaurant quality. Concerning the enormous importance of staff, further research focusing on the role of this dimension could provide a more detailed understanding of how to manage human resources in restaurant quality management.

For restaurant managers, these results indicate the value of investing substantial effort in understanding the complexity of human resources. Furthermore, as people (staff) represents only one dimension of the restaurant marketing mix, managers must constantly measure the quality of their offering (7P) in order to improve their marketing plans and strategies. To avoid discrepancies between managers' quality perceptions and customers' expectations, restaurant quality measurement should be the key management priority of all restaurant businesses.

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