

Strategic Service Operations in Korean Restaurants: Customer Dining Expectations and Dining Factors in Camarines Sur, Philippines

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Abstract: This study examined customer dining expectations and dining factors in Korean restaurants in Camarines Sur, Philippines, and their implications for strategic service operations. Using a quantitative descriptive design, data were gathered from 385 respondents through online and in-person surveys and analyzed using weighted mean and standard deviation. Dining expectations were assessed in terms of authenticity, physical environment, food quality, and service quality, while dining factors were classified into pull and push factors. Results showed moderately high overall dining expectations, with food quality and service quality receiving the highest ratings. Dining factors were also rated as motivating customers to visit Korean restaurants, with pull factors receiving higher ratings than push factors. Cleanliness, food taste, food presentation, menu variety, employee responsiveness, and restaurant popularity emerged as important considerations. The findings emphasize the need to align food production, service delivery, sanitation, employee capability, physical-environment management, and market positioning to support customer value, operational consistency, and competitiveness in local markets.

Keywords: Korean restaurants, dining expectations, dining factors, strategic service operations, Camarines Sur

1. Introduction

Restaurant managers must understand not only what customers experience after dining but also what they expect before selecting and entering a restaurant. These expectations serve as standards against which customers evaluate restaurant performance, and failure to meet them may lead to dissatisfaction and the loss of customers to competing establishments (Stevens et al., 1995). This challenge is particularly important for ethnic restaurants, where customers evaluate both the functional aspects of service and the cultural character of the dining experience. In Camarines Sur, Korean restaurants serve not only as places for eating but also as accessible settings where local customers can experience Korean cuisine and elements of Korean culture. Customers may therefore enter these establishments with expectations concerning authenticity, physical environment, food quality, and service quality. Authenticity may be reflected in the ingredients, preparation methods, menu offerings, restaurant design, décor, and cultural presentation, while the physical environment includes elements that influence customer comfort and perceptions of the establishment. Food quality relates to the sensory and nutritional characteristics of the meal, whereas service quality concerns employees' ability to provide prompt, courteous, knowledgeable, and responsive service. Previous studies show that authenticity, food-related attributes, physical surroundings, and service performance are important components of customers' evaluation of ethnic and Korean restaurants (Jang et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2015; Ryu & Jang, 2008).

For Korean restaurant operators in Camarines Sur, the management problem lies in determining which dining factors attract customers and shape their decision to visit. In this study, dining factors are classified into pull factors and push factors. Pull factors refer to the direct attributes of the restaurant, its employees, and the food offered. These include restaurant design, lighting, music, cleanliness, employee courtesy, speed of service, staff friendliness and responsiveness, employees' knowledge of the food served, and the appearance, presentation, texture, taste, variety, and healthiness of food. Push factors include social media and mass media awareness, cultural familiarity, cultural



knowledge, previous travel experience, value for money, convenience and accessibility, restaurant location, and restaurant popularity. Together, these dining factors reflect how customers may be influenced by their previous exposure to Korean food and culture and attracted by the actual features of the restaurant experience. The push–pull approach has commonly been applied in tourism and hospitality research to explain the internal and external considerations that influence participation in a destination or experience (Crompton, 1979). Research on ethnic restaurant selection similarly identifies authenticity, food quality, service quality, atmosphere, employee behavior, price, and perceived value as important considerations in dining decisions (Nam & Lee, 2011; Premordia & Gál, 2023).

Although previous studies have examined authenticity, restaurant quality, dining environments, customer satisfaction, perceived value, and behavioral intentions, many have concentrated on how customers evaluate their experiences after dining (Jang et al., 2012; Tsai & Lu, 2012). Less attention has been given to the expectations customers bring to Korean restaurants and the specific dining factors that motivate their visits, particularly in a developing provincial market such as Camarines Sur. Customer expectations and dining factors may differ according to cultural familiarity, media exposure, accessibility, previous dining or travel experiences, and perceptions of price and value. This absence of localized information creates a strategic management concern because decisions based only on general market assumptions may not accurately reflect the preferences and priorities of local customers. Therefore, this study aims to determine customers' dining expectations in terms of authenticity, physical environment, quality of food, and service quality and to identify the pull and push dining factors that motivate customers to visit Korean restaurants in Camarines Sur. The findings are expected to provide a basis for customer-centered strategies in restaurant service, marketing, food production, employee management, and operations management.

1.1 Objectives of the study

This study aimed to examine the dining expectations and dining factors of customers in Korean restaurants in Camarines Sur. Specifically, it sought to determine customers' dining expectations in terms of authenticity, physical environment, quality of food, and service quality. It also aimed to identify the dining factors that motivate customers to visit Korean restaurants, classified into pull and push factors. The pull factors included restaurant design, lighting, music, cleanliness, employee courtesy, speed of service, staff friendliness, responsiveness to customers' needs, employees' knowledge of the food served, and the appearance, presentation, texture, taste, variety, and healthiness of the food. The push factors included social media awareness, mass media awareness, cultural familiarity, value for money, convenience and accessibility, restaurant location, previous travel experience, cultural knowledge, and restaurant popularity. Through these objectives, the study sought to generate practical information that may support strategic decisions in service design, food production, employee development, marketing, resource allocation, and restaurant operations management.

1.2 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study focused on the dining expectations and dining factors of customers in selected Korean restaurants in Camarines Sur. The dining expectations examined were limited to authenticity, physical environment, quality of food, and service quality. The study also assessed the dining factors that motivated customers to visit Korean restaurants, which were classified into pull and push factors. The pull factors covered restaurant design, lighting, music, cleanliness, employee courtesy, speed of service, staff friendliness, responsiveness to customers' needs, employees' knowledge of the food served, and the appearance, presentation, texture, taste, variety, and healthiness of the food. The push factors included social media awareness, mass media awareness, cultural familiarity, cultural knowledge, value for money, convenience and accessibility, restaurant location, previous travel experience, and restaurant popularity. The respondents consisted of customers from Camarines Sur who had experienced dining in Korean restaurants during the data-collection period. The findings were intended to provide practical information for strategic service design, marketing, food production, employee development, resource allocation, and restaurant operations management.

The study was limited to customers from Camarines Sur who had previous experience dining in Korean restaurants; therefore, the findings may not fully represent Korean restaurant customers in other provinces or regions of the Philippines. The results were based on the respondents' self-reported dining expectations and assessments of the dining factors that motivated their visits. Their responses may have been influenced by personal preferences, cultural familiarity, media exposure, previous dining or travel experiences, memory, and willingness to provide accurate information. The study employed a descriptive design and did not establish causal relationships between dining expectations, dining factors, and actual customer behavior. It also did not directly measure customer

satisfaction, loyalty, revisit intention, restaurant performance, financial outcomes, or the perspectives of restaurant owners, managers, and employees. Other considerations not included in the research instrument, such as dining companions, special occasions, dietary restrictions, promotional discounts, online reviews, and availability of competing restaurants, may also influence restaurant choice. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted within the identified variables, respondents, geographical coverage, selected restaurant context and period in which the study was conducted.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Customer Dining Expectations

Customer dining expectations represent the standards customers use when anticipating and evaluating a restaurant experience. These expectations may relate to the food, employees, physical facilities, service process, cultural presentation, and value received from the amount paid. In Korean restaurants, customers may expect both acceptable operational performance and an experience that reflects Korean culinary culture. Nam and Lee (2011) found that expectations, food, tangible and intangible service attributes, and value for money contributed to customers' evaluation of traditional Korean restaurants. This indicates that dining expectations are multidimensional and cannot be understood only through food taste or employee service. Restaurant managers must consider the total experience delivered before, during, and after the meal.

Authenticity. Authenticity is important in ethnic restaurants because customers often visit these establishments to experience food and cultural elements associated with another country. In Korean restaurants, authenticity may be communicated through ingredients, preparation techniques, menu offerings, food presentation, décor, music, table arrangements, service practices, and other cultural features. Jang, Ha, and Park (2012) determined that authentic food characteristics generated positive emotions and perceived value among Korean restaurant customers. They also found that environmental authenticity was particularly important in upscale Korean restaurants, while food-related authenticity was more influential in casual dining establishments. These findings indicate that authenticity must be reflected both in the food and in the environment surrounding its consumption.

Physical Environment. The physical environment provides customers with visible and sensory information about the quality and character of a restaurant. Restaurant design, lighting, layout, furnishings, music, cleanliness, table arrangements, and employee appearance can influence customers before they taste the food or interact extensively with employees. Ryu and Han (2011) found that facility aesthetics, lighting, layout, and service staff influenced customers' evaluation of restaurant performance. The influence of these environmental elements also differed between first-time and repeat customers. A carefully designed physical environment can therefore help Korean restaurants establish cultural identity, promote customer comfort, and create a dining atmosphere that encourages favorable evaluations.

Quality of Food. Food quality remains a central component of the restaurant experience because food is the principal product purchased by customers. Customers may assess food through its appearance, presentation, texture, taste, temperature, freshness, variety, nutritional value, and consistency. In Korean restaurants, these qualities may also be evaluated according to whether the dishes appear culturally credible and are prepared in a manner consistent with customers' understanding of Korean cuisine. Ha and Jang (2010) demonstrated that food quality significantly influenced customer satisfaction and loyalty in Korean restaurants. Their findings further showed that the restaurant atmosphere can strengthen or weaken customers' responses to the food, suggesting that food quality must be managed together with the environment in which the meal is served.

Service Quality. Service quality concerns the ability of restaurant employees to provide dependable, accurate, prompt, knowledgeable, courteous, and responsive service. Customers may evaluate how quickly their orders are processed, how employees communicate, whether requests are handled correctly, and whether staff members can explain unfamiliar dishes. Employee knowledge is particularly important in Korean restaurants because customers may need information about ingredients, side dishes, levels of spiciness, preparation methods, or culturally appropriate ways of consuming particular meals. Chow et al. (2007) found that restaurant service quality contributes to customer satisfaction and patronage. Their decision- and experience-oriented perspective also showed that service quality involves both the functional completion of restaurant transactions and the quality of customers' interactions with employees.

2.2 Push and Pull Dining Factors

The push–pull framework explains that participation in an activity may be influenced by motivating conditions and by the attributes of the place or experience being considered. Push factors generally stimulate a person’s desire to participate, while pull factors represent the features that attract the person toward a particular option. Kim, Lee, and Klenosky (2003) demonstrated that push motivations and pull attributes are related but conceptually distinct influences on consumer decisions. Applied to restaurant visitation, this framework helps explain how customers’ previous exposure, cultural interests, perceived value, and convenience may operate together with food, employee, and restaurant attributes in encouraging a visit.

Social and Mass Media Awareness. Social media, television programs, films, advertisements, online reviews, and other media platforms may introduce consumers to Korean food even when they have not previously visited Korea or regularly consumed Korean cuisine. Images and videos of Korean dishes can create awareness, curiosity, and expectations regarding food appearance, restaurant design, dining customs, and service practices. Lee, Ham, and Kim (2015) found that favorable perceptions of Korean celebrities, television dramas, and popular music influenced preferences for Korean restaurants through the country image of Korea. The popularity of Korean cultural content may therefore encourage consumers to explore Korean food and restaurants as an accessible form of cultural experience.

Cultural Familiarity and Knowledge. Customers’ familiarity with Korean culture may affect their willingness to visit Korean restaurants and their ability to understand the dining experience. Consumers who recognize Korean dishes, ingredients, eating practices, or cultural symbols may feel more confident in selecting food and interacting with employees. In contrast, unfamiliar customers may experience uncertainty and depend more heavily on menu descriptions, social media information, employee recommendations, and familiar food options. Seo, Phillips, Jang, and Kim (2012) found that acculturation and uncertainty avoidance affected foreign residents’ choices concerning Korean food. Their findings suggest that cultural knowledge and familiarity can reduce uncertainty and influence customers’ attitudes toward unfamiliar cuisine.

Value, Convenience, Location, and Popularity. Restaurant visitation may also be affected by practical considerations such as value for money, convenience, accessibility, location, and popularity. Customers may be interested in Korean cuisine but may decide against visiting when the restaurant is difficult to reach, appears expensive, or does not provide sufficient value. Popularity may reduce perceived risk because customers often interpret a well-known or highly recommended restaurant as a more dependable choice. Ponnamm and Balaji (2014) found that the importance assigned to restaurant attributes varies according to customers’ reasons for visiting. Customers seeking convenience may emphasize accessibility and service speed, while those seeking a distinctive dining experience may give more importance to food quality, atmosphere, uniqueness, and cultural presentation.

Restaurant, Employee, and Food Pull Factors. Restaurant design, lighting, music, cleanliness, employee courtesy, speed of service, friendliness, responsiveness, and knowledge can directly attract customers and shape their evaluation of the dining experience. Food appearance, presentation, texture, taste, variety, and healthiness similarly communicate the restaurant’s ability to provide an appealing and satisfactory meal. Kim, Youn, and Rao (2017) found that food-related cues, including ingredients and food names, influenced perceptions of authenticity and customer emotions in ethnic restaurants. Their findings indicate that even seemingly small food-related details can influence how customers interpret an ethnic restaurant and whether the experience appears distinctive, culturally credible, and worth purchasing.

2.3 Synthesis and Research Gap

The reviewed literature demonstrates that customers evaluate ethnic and Korean restaurants through several interconnected dimensions. Authenticity provides cultural meaning, while the physical environment creates the setting in which food and service are experienced. Food quality forms the core restaurant product, and service quality determines how effectively that product is delivered. Media awareness, cultural familiarity, perceived value, accessibility, location, popularity, restaurant design, employee performance, and food characteristics may also motivate customers to visit.

Existing research has largely examined customer satisfaction, perceived value, restaurant image, loyalty, and behavioral intentions following the dining experience. Online restaurant reviews have likewise revealed that ethnic dining experiences involve food, ambiance, service, location, reputation, price, and the occasion for dining, showing that customers evaluate restaurants through a broader combination of operational and experiential attributes (Oh & Kim, 2020). However, limited localized evidence explains the expectations customers bring to Korean restaurants and the particular push and pull factors motivating restaurant visits in the Rinconada area of Camarines Sur. The present

study addresses this gap by examining dining expectations in terms of authenticity, physical environment, quality of food, and service quality and by identifying the push and pull dining factors that motivate customers to visit Korean restaurants.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to determine the dining expectations and dining factors of customers in Korean restaurants in Camarines Sur. This design was appropriate because the study aimed to describe customers' assessments of their dining expectations in terms of authenticity, physical environment, quality of food, and service quality. It also sought to identify the dining factors that motivated customers to visit Korean restaurants, classified into pull and push factors. The study did not examine causal relationships or differences among groups.

3.2 Respondents and Sampling

The respondents consisted of 385 individuals from Camarines Sur who had previous experience dining in a Korean restaurant. Random sampling was employed to select the respondents and provide eligible customers with an opportunity to participate in the study. Only individuals residing in Camarines Sur who had previously dined in a Korean restaurant were included to ensure that they could provide informed assessments of the dining expectations and dining factors covered by the research instrument.

3.3 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured survey questionnaire. The instrument contained items measuring customers' dining expectations in terms of authenticity, physical environment, quality of food, and service quality. It also included items measuring the dining factors that motivated customers to visit Korean restaurants, classified into pull and push factors. The pull factors included restaurant design, lighting, music, cleanliness, employee courtesy, speed of service, staff friendliness, responsiveness to customers' needs, employees' knowledge of the food served, and the appearance, presentation, texture, taste, variety, and healthiness of the food. The push factors included social media awareness, mass media awareness, cultural familiarity, cultural knowledge, value for money, convenience and accessibility, restaurant location, previous travel experience, and restaurant popularity. The respondents rated each statement using the response scale provided in the questionnaire.

3.4 Data-Collection Procedure

The survey was administered through both online and in-person methods. The online questionnaire was distributed electronically to qualified respondents residing in Camarines Sur, while printed questionnaires were personally administered to eligible respondents who were available during the data-collection period. Before answering the questionnaire, the respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, the qualifications for participation, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. The completed questionnaires were checked for completeness, organized, encoded, and prepared for statistical analysis.

3.5 Statistical Treatment of Data

The weighted mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the collected data. The weighted mean was employed to determine the level of customers' dining expectations in terms of authenticity, physical environment, quality of food, and service quality. It was also used to determine the extent to which the identified pull and push dining factors motivated customers to visit Korean restaurants. The resulting mean scores were interpreted according to the verbal descriptions assigned to the response scale used in the questionnaire. The standard deviation was used to determine the consistency or variability of the respondents' assessments. A lower standard deviation indicated that the responses were more closely grouped around the mean, while a higher standard deviation indicated greater variation among the responses. No inferential statistical test was applied because the study was limited to describing customers' dining expectations and dining factors.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary. The respondents were informed of the purpose of the research and were allowed to decline or discontinue their participation without penalty. No personally identifying information was collected beyond the information necessary to determine their eligibility. The data gathered were treated confidentially.

and used solely for research purposes. The findings were presented in summarized form to protect the privacy and anonymity of the respondents.

4. Results and Discussion

Customers demonstrated moderately high expectations regarding the authenticity of Korean restaurants, as indicated by an overall mean of 3.40 and a standard deviation of 0.543. Food authenticity obtained the highest mean of 3.42, followed by authentic menu presentation at 3.40 and atmosphere authenticity at 3.37. The item-level standard deviations ranged from 0.621 to 0.648, indicating that the respondents generally shared similar expectations, although their views on authenticity were slightly more varied than their assessments of the other dining dimensions. This variation may reflect differences in customers' familiarity with Korean cuisine, exposure to Korean culture, previous dining experiences, and personal understanding of what constitutes an authentic Korean restaurant. From a strategic service and operations management perspective, restaurant operators should not rely on a single or overly rigid representation of authenticity. Instead, they should establish clear authenticity standards for ingredients, preparation methods, dish names, menu descriptions, décor, and cultural presentation while ensuring that these elements remain understandable and acceptable to local customers. Menu engineering, standardized recipes, sourcing procedures, and employee product knowledge should therefore be coordinated to create a consistent Korean identity without reducing accessibility for customers who are less familiar with the cuisine.

The physical environment received an overall mean of 3.43, interpreted as a moderately high expectation, and produced the lowest overall standard deviation of 0.483 among the four dimensions. This comparatively low standard deviation indicates that respondents were most consistent in their expectations regarding the restaurant environment. Restaurant cleanliness and the neat and well-dressed appearance of employees both received the highest mean of 3.57, followed by interior design and décor at 3.54. These results show that cleanliness, professional appearance, and visual attractiveness are broadly recognized requirements rather than preferences limited to particular groups of customers. Noise level obtained the lowest mean of 3.10 and the highest item-level standard deviation of 0.752, indicating greater differences in customers' preferences for the restaurant's sound environment. Some customers may appreciate a lively atmosphere, while others may expect a quieter and more comfortable setting. Strategically, managers should prioritize sanitation systems, employee grooming standards, preventive maintenance, and consistent dining-room presentation because customers appear to agree strongly on these operational requirements. Noise management may require a more flexible approach involving appropriate music volume, seating arrangement, acoustic control, and the separation of crowded or group-dining areas from spaces intended for quieter dining.

Quality of food received the highest overall mean of 3.55, interpreted as a very high expectation, with a standard deviation of 0.511. Food presentation obtained the highest mean of 3.60 and a relatively low standard deviation of 0.558, suggesting strong agreement that Korean dishes should be visually appealing. This was followed by food freshness at 3.58, food taste at 3.55, drink taste at 3.53, and appropriate food temperature at 3.49. The standard deviations ranged from 0.558 to 0.619, indicating generally consistent customer expectations across the food-quality indicators. These findings establish food quality as the most important operational priority among the dimensions examined. Korean restaurant operators should therefore develop standardized recipes, portion and plating specifications, ingredient-quality standards, proper storage procedures, and time-and-temperature controls. Consistent food presentation is especially important because visual appearance communicates product quality before customers taste the meal and may influence customers' willingness to share their experience through social media. Strategic purchasing, supplier selection, inventory control, kitchen workflow, and employee training should consequently be aligned to ensure that dishes remain fresh, flavorful, visually attractive, and consistent during every service period.

Service quality obtained an overall mean of 3.53 and a standard deviation of 0.511, showing very high and relatively consistent customer expectations. Food being served as ordered received the highest mean of 3.58, followed by friendly and courteous employees at 3.57, helpful employees at 3.56, employee knowledge of the products offered at 3.53, and prompt service at 3.50. Waiting time before food arrived received the lowest mean of 3.45 but remained a moderately high expectation. Item-level standard deviations ranged from 0.590 to 0.624, indicating that respondents generally agreed on the service behaviors expected from Korean restaurant employees. Order accuracy emerged as the strongest expectation, highlighting the importance of coordinated front-of-house and back-of-house operations. Restaurant managers should establish clear order-taking procedures, point-of-sale verification, table identification systems, and communication protocols between servers and kitchen staff. Employee training should include courtesy, menu knowledge, explanation of unfamiliar dishes, responsiveness to requests, and proper handling of customer concerns. Waiting time should also be monitored through production scheduling, workstation design, staffing levels,

preparation planning, and service-time standards. These operational controls can help restaurants deliver accurate and efficient service without compromising food quality.

Across the four dimensions, quality of food received the highest mean of 3.55, followed by service quality at 3.53, physical environment at 3.43, and authenticity at 3.40. However, the physical environment had the lowest standard deviation of 0.483, indicating the strongest consistency among respondents, while authenticity had the highest overall standard deviation of 0.543, reflecting slightly greater differences in customer expectations. This pattern shows that strategic priorities should not be determined by mean scores alone. Food and service require the highest performance standards because they received the highest expectation ratings, while cleanliness, employee appearance, and environmental quality require consistent implementation because customers showed strong agreement regarding their importance. Authenticity requires a more carefully segmented approach because customers may differ in their knowledge and appreciation of Korean culture. Restaurant managers may therefore provide both traditional and more familiar menu options, clear food descriptions, adjustable spice levels, and employee guidance to make the experience culturally meaningful yet accessible.

Overall, customers demonstrated moderately high dining expectations toward Korean restaurants, as reflected by the grand mean of 3.48 and standard deviation of 0.457. The relatively low standard deviation indicates that the respondents' ratings were closely grouped around the mean, suggesting a generally consistent view of the authenticity, physical environment, food, and service that Korean restaurants should provide. Quality of food obtained the highest mean of 3.55, followed by service quality at 3.53, both interpreted as very high expectations, while the physical environment and authenticity received moderately high expectations, with means of 3.43 and 3.40, respectively. These results support previous findings that food quality, service performance, restaurant atmosphere, perceived authenticity, and value collectively shape customers' evaluation of Korean and ethnic restaurant experiences (Ha & Jang, 2010; Nam & Lee, 2011; Ryu & Han, 2011; Jang et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2015). From a strategic service and operations management perspective, the findings indicate that restaurant operators should prioritize standardized recipes, ingredient freshness, food presentation, taste consistency, order accuracy, employee courtesy, responsiveness, menu knowledge, and waiting-time control. The physical environment recorded the lowest dimension-level standard deviation of 0.483, indicating the strongest agreement regarding cleanliness, employee appearance, comfort, and restaurant presentation; thus, these areas should be supported by uniform sanitation, grooming, maintenance, and facility-control standards. Authenticity had the highest dimension-level standard deviation of 0.543, suggesting slightly greater differences in customers' understanding and appreciation of Korean cultural elements. Managers should therefore maintain credible Korean food, menus, décor, and service practices while providing clear descriptions and appropriate adaptations for customers with different levels of cultural familiarity. Overall, integrating food production, service delivery, physical-environment management, and cultural positioning can help Korean restaurants in Camarines Sur allocate resources effectively and provide a consistent, distinctive, and customer-centered dining experience.

Dining Factors

The pull factors highly motivated customers to visit Korean restaurants, as reflected by the overall mean of 3.53 and standard deviation of 0.455. The relatively low standard deviation indicates that respondents were generally consistent in rating the restaurant, employee, and food attributes that influenced their visits. Restaurant cleanliness obtained the highest mean of 3.62 and the lowest item-level standard deviation of 0.549, showing both a high level of motivation and strong agreement among customers regarding its importance. This was followed by food taste at 3.59, food appearance and presentation at 3.57, food variety and healthiness at 3.56, and restaurant design and staff responsiveness at 3.55. These findings show that customers are primarily attracted by operational attributes that can be directly controlled by restaurant management. In contrast, music received the lowest mean of 3.38 and the highest standard deviation of 0.635, suggesting that it was a less influential factor and that customers differed more widely in their musical preferences. From a strategic service and operations management perspective, managers should prioritize sanitation controls, ingredient and recipe standards, taste consistency, plating specifications, menu variety, nutritional options, employee responsiveness, and restaurant design. This priority is supported by previous studies identifying food quality, service performance, environmental cleanliness, and restaurant atmosphere as central determinants of restaurant evaluations and customer behavior (Ha & Jang, 2010; Liu & Jang, 2009; Ponnampal & Balaji, 2014).

The push factors motivated customers to visit Korean restaurants, with an overall mean of 3.44 and standard deviation of 0.479. Although the responses remained relatively consistent, the slightly higher standard deviation compared with the pull factors indicates greater differences in customers' external exposure, cultural background, previous experiences, and practical considerations. Restaurant popularity obtained the highest mean of 3.51 and was

the only push factor interpreted as highly motivating. It was followed by social media awareness at 3.48, convenience or accessibility at 3.47, cultural knowledge at 3.46, and restaurant location at 3.45. Value for money in relation to price obtained the lowest mean of 3.38, while previous travel experience recorded a mean of 3.39 and the highest standard deviation of 0.636, suggesting that travel exposure was not equally relevant to all respondents. Strategically, restaurant operators should strengthen brand visibility and reputation through consistent social media content, customer reviews, food photography, cultural storytelling, promotions, and community engagement. Accessibility, visible location information, operating schedules, parking guidance, and clear price-value communication should also be incorporated into the service strategy. Korean popular culture can stimulate interest in Korean restaurants, while the broader push–pull framework explains how customers’ prior interests and exposure interact with the attributes of the establishment in shaping visitation decisions (Kim et al., 2003; Lee et al., 2015).

Overall, the dining factors motivated customers to visit Korean restaurants, as demonstrated by the grand mean of 3.48 and standard deviation of 0.447. The low overall standard deviation indicates a generally consistent pattern of responses across the factors examined. Pull factors received a higher mean of 3.53 than push factors at 3.44 and also had a lower standard deviation, showing that customers were more strongly and consistently motivated by the actual restaurant experience than by media exposure, cultural familiarity, travel experience, location, popularity, or perceived value. This suggests that promotional activities and cultural awareness may initially encourage customer interest, but controllable operational attributes—particularly cleanliness, food taste and presentation, menu variety, restaurant design, and employee performance—are more influential in attracting customers. Strategic service and operations management should therefore adopt an integrated approach in which marketing creates awareness and interest, while restaurant operations fulfill the expectations formed through that exposure. Resources should be concentrated on dependable food production, sanitation, service training, responsive staffing, physical-environment management, and consistent brand presentation, supported by social media communication and cultural positioning. Because customers’ evaluation of restaurant attributes can vary according to their visitation motives, managers should continuously collect feedback and adjust their food, service, environmental, pricing, and promotional strategies to the needs of the local market (Ponnam & Balaji, 2014).

5. Conclusions

The study concludes that customers in Camarines Sur have moderately high overall expectations of Korean restaurants. Among the dimensions examined, quality of food and service quality received very high expectations, while authenticity and the physical environment received moderately high expectations. Customers particularly expected visually appealing, fresh, and flavorful food, accurate order fulfillment, courteous and helpful employees, knowledgeable service personnel, clean surroundings, and professionally presented staff. The relatively low overall standard deviation indicates that these expectations were generally consistent among the respondents. However, the slightly greater variation in authenticity suggests that customers differ in their knowledge and understanding of what constitutes an authentic Korean dining experience.

The findings also show that customers were more strongly motivated by pull factors than by push factors. Restaurant cleanliness, food taste, food appearance and presentation, menu variety, nutritional value, restaurant design, employee responsiveness, and employee knowledge were among the strongest motivations for visiting Korean restaurants. Popularity, social media awareness, convenience, accessibility, cultural knowledge, and location also encouraged visits, although these factors were less influential than the actual attributes of the restaurant experience. This indicates that promotional exposure and cultural interest may generate initial awareness, but customers are more strongly motivated by operational attributes that restaurant managers can directly control and improve.

Overall, Korean restaurants are expected to provide a coordinated combination of high-quality food, dependable service, clean and attractive surroundings, and recognizable cultural elements. The findings further indicate that food production, service delivery, physical-environment management, cultural positioning, and promotional activities should not be treated as separate functions. Their effectiveness depends on how well they are integrated into a consistent and customer-centered restaurant strategy. Since the study used descriptive statistics, the results describe customers’ expectations and motivations but do not establish causal relationships between the factors examined and actual restaurant visits, satisfaction, or future behavioral intentions.

Managerial Implications

The findings indicate that Korean restaurants in Camarines Sur should adopt an integrated service and operations strategy in which food quality and service reliability serve as the principal competitive priorities. Management should allocate resources first to standardized food production, ingredient quality, food safety, sanitation,

employee capability, order accuracy, and service efficiency. Authenticity, physical-environment design, and marketing communication should then support the restaurant's cultural identity and market positioning. Aligning these operational capabilities with customer expectations can help restaurants achieve greater service consistency, strengthen customer value, differentiate themselves from competitors, and improve their long-term operational competitiveness.

Food quality should remain the primary operational focus. Managers should develop standardized recipes, ingredient specifications, portion controls, plating guides, and food-temperature standards to maintain consistent taste, appearance, freshness, and serving quality. Supplier selection, purchasing, receiving, storage, and inventory-control procedures should be aligned with these standards. Since food presentation was both highly expected and strongly motivating, restaurants should establish visual plating specifications for each dish. Attractive and consistent presentation can enhance perceived quality, reinforce the restaurant's Korean identity, and encourage customers to share their dining experience through social media.

Service operations should be designed around order accuracy, employee courtesy, responsiveness, product knowledge, and waiting-time management. Managers should provide continuous training on Korean dishes, ingredients, preparation methods, side dishes, spice levels, allergens, and appropriate ways of explaining unfamiliar menu items. Clear order-taking procedures, point-of-sale verification, table identification, kitchen communication, and service-time standards should be implemented to minimize errors and delays. Staffing levels, work assignments, and production schedules should also correspond with anticipated customer volume to maintain efficiency during peak periods.

The consistency of customer expectations regarding the physical environment indicates the need for formal sanitation, maintenance, grooming, and dining-room presentation standards. Managers should use cleaning schedules, inspection checklists, preventive-maintenance plans, and employee appearance guidelines. Restaurant design, lighting, room temperature, music, and noise levels should be managed to create comfort while communicating a recognizable Korean identity. Since customer preferences regarding music and noise were more varied, these elements may be adjusted according to the time of day, customer volume, and type of dining occasion.

Authenticity should be managed through a balanced cultural-positioning strategy. Restaurants should preserve credible Korean ingredients, preparation methods, dish names, menu descriptions, décor, tableware, and dining practices while ensuring that the experience remains understandable and approachable to local customers. Menus may include food photographs, brief descriptions, spice-level indicators, recommended combinations, and explanations of side dishes. Employees should also be trained to guide customers who are unfamiliar with Korean cuisine. This approach allows the restaurant to maintain cultural credibility while adapting its service communication to different levels of customer familiarity.

Marketing strategies should strengthen awareness, popularity, and accessibility while accurately representing the actual restaurant experience. Managers may use food photographs, short videos, cultural stories, customer testimonials, menu information, and clear details about location, operating hours, parking, reservations, and prices. However, promotional activities should remain aligned with the restaurant's operational capacity. Since pull factors were more influential than push factors, increased visibility should be supported by dependable food, service, sanitation, and environmental standards. Otherwise, marketing may create expectations that the restaurant cannot consistently fulfill.

Finally, restaurant managers should establish a performance-monitoring system covering food quality, sanitation, order accuracy, waiting time, employee knowledge, service behavior, facility condition, and customer feedback. Customer comments, complaint records, service audits, kitchen checks, and periodic satisfaction surveys may be used to identify operational weaknesses and changing expectations. Through the coordinated management of food production, service delivery, workforce capability, physical facilities, cultural positioning, and promotional communication, Korean restaurants in Camarines Sur can improve consistency, allocate resources more effectively, and build a stronger competitive position.

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