

TASTE OF INDIA: A CASE STUDY OF INDIAN CUISINE IN TAIWAN

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Abstract

This study discusses localization of Indian cuisine and their impact on customer satisfaction in Taiwan based on the information gathered from field survey and online portals. Three aspects of Indian cuisine were explained. First, it describes how Indian cuisine is localized over Taiwan. Second, how Indian cuisine is maintained and presented to the local customer. Third aspect describes perception and satisfaction of local customers over Indian cuisine. It is observed that the authenticity of Indian cuisine is greatly compromised to attract local people in the business. Preparation of Indian cuisine is altered by use of locally available ingredients including spices and herbs which, modifies the taste and aroma of cuisine. A special unique style is adopted to represent Indian cuisine in Taiwan. Different restaurant settings are introduced to symbolize Indian culture irrespective of different Indian cuisine. In some cases, a single restaurant provides variety of cuisine e.g. Panjabi dishes along with Bengali food. The study determines that authentic Indian cuisine no longer exists and localized version of Indian cuisine is evolved. The survey shows that majority of the customers are satisfied over food quality and prefer to dine at Indian cuisine at least once in a year. It is believed that physical and environment setting of restaurant enhances customer satisfaction even though authenticity of the Indian cuisine is compromised while, high cost of food is dominant factor for less frequent returning behavior of customers.

Keywords: Authenticity, customer satisfaction, food survey, Indian cuisine.

Introduction

Taiwan is one of the beautiful island country in East Asia ranking 15th in GDP per capita. Quick industrialization and rapid growth of Taiwan happened during latter half of the 20th century. People living and working in Taiwan are generally very busy due to sudden economic boom. The behavioral pattern of people in Taiwan changes rapidly based on socio-economic status and heavy industrialization. One of the tremendous change among other behavioral patterns is food habit. People started dining outside due to lack of personal time from their work. Rapidly, restaurant business gained very popularity within locals. Due to industrialization and globalization, Taiwan became lucrative destination for foreigners. Foreigners are establishing their livings along with their most essential food culture. Therefore, restaurant brings another opportunity to locals to taste different cuisine with little effort. Indian cuisine is one of them.

Popularity of Indian cuisine is massive throughout the world. It is imagined as spicy, colorful, aromatic, greasy, and hot food. Indian food mostly combined with rice and/or roti (also known as 'nan', a handmade baked food). Rice is a common element in Indian and Taiwan food habit. Indian cuisine in Taiwan is one of the popular destination among local people because of its aroma and nice taste. Localization of Indian cuisine is observed very similar to Indianization of Chinese food (Sankar, 2017). It is very hard to say when and where exactly first Indian restaurant was setup in Taiwan due to lack of official

records. Reports showed that around three decade ago first Indian cuisine was setup in Taipei area with a big success (Ferry, 2018). The food served by the restaurant was so demanding that customer usually queued-up long time to try the food. Looking the popularity of the Indian food, more and more restaurant had been opened. Due to complexity of Indian cuisine, especially the spices used for cooking, the food was very expensive. With increasing number of restaurant and cost reduction strategy, the complexity of cooking is reduced along with authenticity of the food. Therefore, customer expectation and overall satisfaction of dining experience was severely compromised.

A variety types of customer visit Indian restaurant daily with their own expectation and imagination. India is big country with diverse geographies and climates. Indian cuisine differs from each other, not only taste but also cooking method (Dubey, 2011). There are different kind of food establishment available in Taiwan e.g. North Indian cuisine, South Indian cuisine, Punjabi cuisine, Bengali cuisine etc. Indian restaurants in Taiwan claims themselves to serve authentic cuisine to their customer. However, no details study has been carried out on authenticity of Indian cuisine in Taiwan and their impact on customer satisfaction. In this study three aspect of Indian cuisine is described. (i) How Indian cuisine is localized, (ii) How Indian cuisine is presented to the customer, and (iii) how customers are satisfied over Indian cuisine?

Literature review

The popularity of Indian food in Taiwan is increasing as evidenced by the growing number of restaurants in the island within last decade. It is believed that restaurant business is one of the hard and competitive business among others (Josiam, Sohail & Monteiro, 2007; Gregoire, Shanklin & Greathouse, 1995). India is a big country with unity in diversity and sometimes called a small world due to diverse culture, belief, language and ethnicity (Bijoy, 2015). In India, there are 29 states and 7 union territories. A variety of traditional and regional Indian cuisine are noticed over Indian subcontinent. These different cuisine or kitchen culture are originated by the diversity of this subcontinent e.g. culture, occupation, climate, locally produced vegetables, fruits and spices which significantly depend on soil and climate (Krisnakumar, 2019). Another influential factor to impact Indian cuisine is Indian religion or cast system (Md. Taufique, 2019). Every state has a very individual method of cooking based on locally obtainable ingredients which makes a vast variety of Indian curry. The variety of taste of regional Indian food are not only due to the different curry powder or spices or herbs but, the way of cooking. It is seen that the environment also plays a crucial role on quality and authenticity of cuisine (Josiam & Moteiro, 2004; Jain & Bagler, 2015). Indian cuisine is widely available throughout the world as a result of the progress of the Indian diaspora, mostly in the countries of the previous British Empire (Josiam, Sohail & Monteiro, 2007; Basu, 2011; Ray & Srinivas, 2012).

The typical meaning of authenticity is the genuineness, honesty, or sincerity of an object (Zhang, Chen & Baoliang, 2019). Mc. Connell firstly introduced authenticity and proposed the theory of “staged authenticity” in which authenticity is an inherent property of tourism object and obtaining authenticity experience is regarded as fundamental goal of tourism (Chhabra et al., 2013). Authenticity gives expression of originality, unmixed. The quality of being genuine from original. People likes to eat authentic food and authenticity plays a very positive role in a restaurant. Authenticity is conceptualized into four categories namely (i) objectivism (objective authenticity emphasized the authenticity of the objects visited by tourist), (ii) constructivism (constructive authenticity is the result of social construction rather than objective things identity of objective by tourism or tourist producer in term of their preferences, effects, expectation, imagery, beliefs etc.), (iii) post-modernism, (postmodernism authenticity deconstructs the conception of authenticity by blurring the boundaries between the original and depilated, and (IV) existentialism, (existentialism is the degree to which an individual’s actions are congruent with their beliefs and desires, despite external pressure (Wang, 1999). Authenticity is one of the important perspective of the culinary tourism research.

It is well known that customer satisfaction is the most important part of any restaurant business. Starting from cuisine selection to visit, the customer make some imagination in their mind. It is well known that the hospitality service

especially food industry very much rely on three elements (Bujisic, Hutchinson & Parsa, 2014; Berry, Carbone & Haeckel, 2002). First element is food quality which signifies how fresh and healthy food or dishes are served. In a restaurant, customer always demand and expect good quality food and services (Lei & Hu, 2010). It is very difficult to make all customer satisfied over same food and quality since each customer carries their unique opinion of taste. It is observed that customers have become more and more classy, value conscious and easily find alternative services in case of single mistake (Mhlanga, Hattlingh & Moolman, 2014). Second is service quality indicating how customers are greeted or taken care by the restaurants? In restaurant or hospitality industry, service quality has been confirmed to be one of the very important aspects for customer satisfaction. It was found that improved service quality creates excellent customer satisfaction (Bujisic, Hutchinson & Parsa, 2014; Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1996). Third important elements is physical environment or setting of the restaurant including, interior decoration, cleanness and atmosphere. It was observed that the physical environment is very influential to create positive image and behavior on customer especially for services such as hotel, restaurant, professional office, banks, retail store etc. (Bitner, 1992). Other researcher described price tag of food or overall services as fourth element for customer satisfaction (Correia et al., 2008). These are the key elements directly related to customer satisfaction.

Methodology

The data for this study were collected through the field questionnaire survey. Two different sections were designed in questionnaire sheet. First section was designed to survey customer status e.g. age, occupation and second section was dedicated for satisfaction assessment e.g. how customer will grade quality of food in number scale from 1 to 5 while 1 for poor quality and 5 for excellent. Three popular different Indian restaurants in Hsinchu, Taiwan namely Chillies, Little India, and Mayur Indian Kitchen were selected for data collection. Hsinchu, a well-known industrial city, is one of the most populous cities in Taiwan. First questionnaire were issued to customer on April 2018 to survey their satisfaction over Indian restaurant. A total 250 question sheets were issued while only 189 were collected due to customers' poor willingness to response over period of one year. No Indian customer data was recorded in this research to remove the country bias. All responses were collected from Taiwanese adult individual customer. Apart from customer survey, restaurant managers were personally interviewed to understand the cuisine. Additional data for restaurant menu were collected online from five different restaurants. *See Figure 1: Survey results for nature of customer*

Findings and discussion

A total 189 customer responses were recorded and categorized in two distinct categories. First set of questions including nationality, sex, age group, and

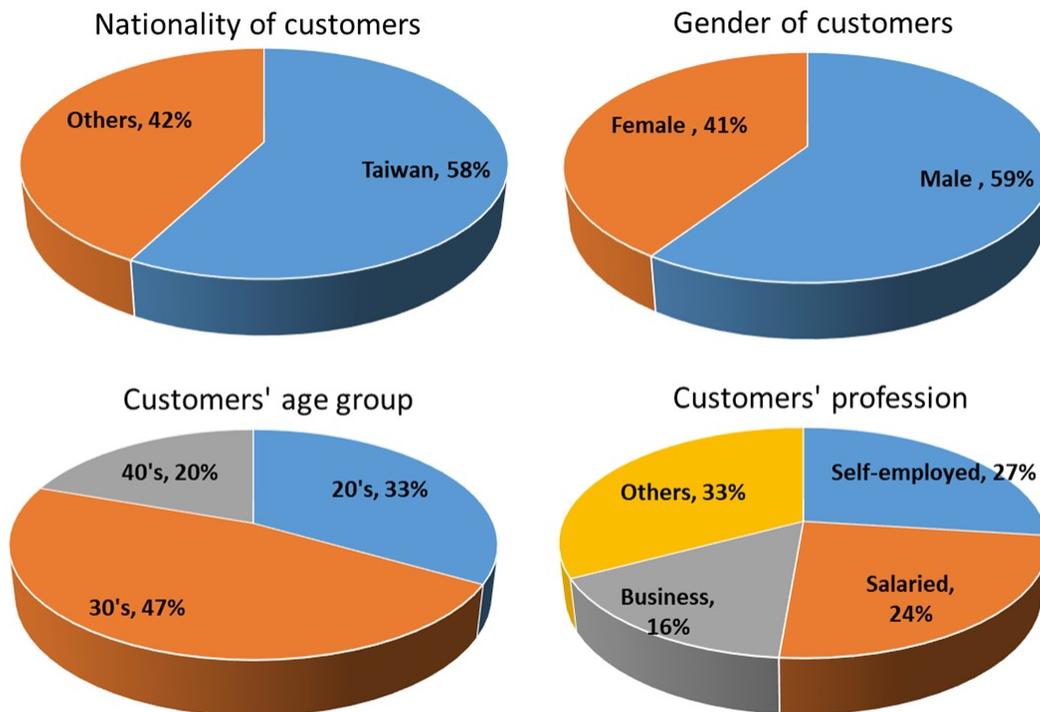


Figure 1: Survey results for nature of customer

profession were designed to understand the nature of customer, as shown in Figure 1. It was observed that majority of customers are middle aged at their 30's with stable source of income and Taiwan national. No particular pattern was observed in customer gender suggesting the popularity of food to everyone. It was also observed that over 50% customer were high valued customer as evidenced from their profession indicating higher price of food. Second set of questions were designed to see the customer satisfaction over Indian cuisine. As shown in Figure 2, more than 95% customer expressed their satisfaction on overall service provided by the restau-

rant. See *Figure 2: Survey results for customer satisfaction*

High customer satisfaction is also evidenced by the willingness of customers to recommend cuisine to others. Authors believed that customer satisfaction over Indian cuisine is related to the quality of the food served by the restaurant. However, it was surprising that majority of the customers (>88%) do not visit the restaurant within a year. Cost could be the key factor for this behavioral pattern of the customer as evidenced by the customer profile described above.

To cross verify the above results, further analysis was carried out on data

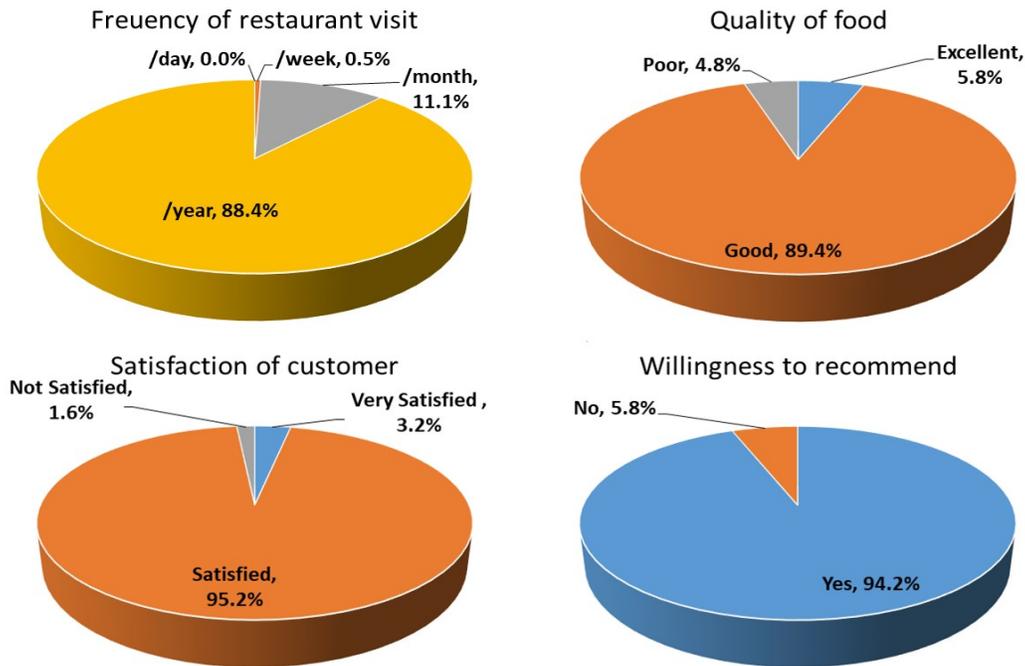


Figure 2: Survey results for customer satisfaction

collected from personal interview of restaurant managers and online portals. A question set was carefully arranged to look into cuisine authenticity, food quality and service quality of the restaurant. Restaurants were asked to specify the cuisine type. All restaurants served Indian cuisine rather particular cuisine suggesting non-authentic nature of restaurant. It was observed that restaurants under this study have had good attractiveness as Indian cuisine. However, making all type of Indian cuisine in single restaurant is very much impractical due to vast variety of Indian cuisine and needed experience. Therefore, authenticity of Indian cuisine was spoiled as claimed by the business entity. Despite of compromised authenticity of cuisine,

food quality was well maintained as observed from the survey. This is very much achievable when any particular type of cuisine is localized based on demand of local customers. One of the restaurants clearly mentioned about local food in their menu list, which verifies author assumption of food localization.

To further understand the service quality of the restaurant, business experience and employee type was investigated. The restaurants in this study were experiencing business in Taiwan ranging from 5 years to over 30 years. Majority of the employees of all the businesses were part-time worker with very little or no experience about the Indian cuisine. An interesting pattern was seen about

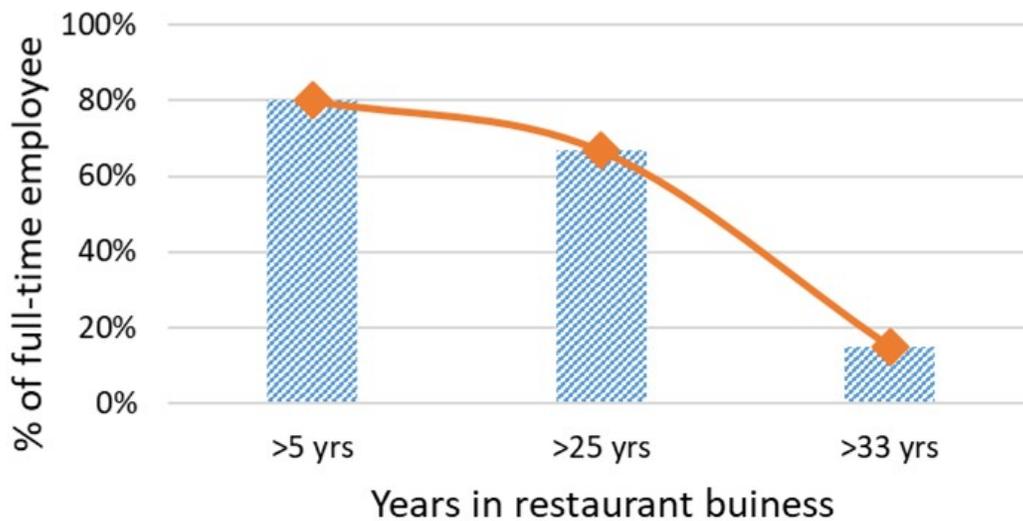


Figure 3: Full-time employee ratio in Indian cuisine service

part-time to full-time employee ratio over these restaurants. The business with longer experience had lower full-time employee ratio, as shown in Figure 3.

This could be related to business demand. Once restaurants get popularity among locals due to localization of food, they need more local employees rather experienced personnel to fit the customer demand. Local part-time employee can understand the customer demand well for better service quality, while make business expenditure lower.

See Figure 3: Full-time employee ratio in Indian cuisine service

To understand non-returning customer behavior despite good food quality, cost analysis was carried out based on data collected from online portal. Restaurant menu is an important aspect to have influence on customer satisfac

tion. Commonly, ordering individual food resulted higher cost compare to set meal which benefitted customer. Therefore, customers had have very few choices when they look for daily or frequent dining solution. Table 1 shows summarized menu list extracted from different Indian cuisine served in Taiwan. Any Indian cuisine have very interested meal system. In general, a single full course of Indian meal consists five different taste of saltiness, bitterness, savoriness (umami), sourness, and sweetness. To taste Indian cuisine, one must order a complete courses of food including appetizer, main course, accompaniments and desserts alike five different taste where main course correspond to bitterness and umami. As can be seen in the summarized menu list, customer has to spend big amount which is more than daily wage of normal Taiwanese as per year 2020 data.

Table 1: Summarized and categorized Indian restaurant menu from Taiwan

Food course/Type	Minimum listed cost collected from all menu list (New Taiwan Doller, TWD)	Maximum listed cost collected from all menu list (TWD)	Calculated average cost (TWD)
Appetizer	90	290	162
Accompaniments	220	590	362
Main course (Curries)	195	420	323
Main course (Grains)	80	250	138
Desserts	55	120	86

Conclusion

According to survey results, a good customer satisfaction is observed. Based on customer feedback during survey, it is believed that good food quality and localization of Indian cuisine are key factors for higher customer satisfaction. Interview with business owner indicates that cuisine authenticity is highly compromised as claimed by the business. It is observed that a vast variety of Indian cuisine and poorly trained employees make it difficult to keep and serve authentic Indian food in Taiwan. Preparation of Indian cuisine is altered by use of locally available ingredients including spices and herbs which, modifies the taste and aroma of cuisine. In some cases, a single restaurant provides variety of cuisine e.g. Panjabi dishes along with Bengali food. The study determines that authentic Indian cuisine no longer exists and localized version of Indian cuisine is evolved. The survey also shows that majority of the customers are satisfied

over food quality and dine at Indian cuisine once in a year. It is believed that high cost of food is dominant factor for non-returning behavior of customers. Based on the discussion above including customer type, restaurant menu and servicescape analysis, it is believed that Indian restaurant serves as high profile type of restaurant Taiwan. To attract more customer and to deliver high satisfaction, authors recommended to improve servicescape of the business entity while maintaining present food quality. Few easy to achieve improvements such as adding parking facility, providing extra amount of food etc. will certainly improve customer satisfaction.

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