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Customers' perceptions of floating restaurants in Egypt

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Floating restaurants are a new phenomenon for dining out in Cairo, where customers can be provided not only with a meal but also an entertaining casual dining experience with unrivalled views of the Nile River. This study aims to identify customers' perceptions of the floating restaurants sailing down the Nile River and also explores the different attributes that influence customer satisfaction with, and increase the intention of repeat patronage for, Sailing Floating Restaurants. Frequencies, means, Pearson correlations, cross tab and factor analysis were used for the data analysis. The results indicate that aspects such as parking spaces, healthy, and local dishes, along with rest-room cleanliness are pivotal attributes to create satisfied customers and to increase repeat patronage intentions. Floating restaurant managers should reasonably take into consideration the trip length, which contributes significantly to customers' satisfaction and repeat patronage intentions.

Keywords: Sailing Floating Restaurants (SFR); customer satisfaction; food quality; service quality; repeat patronage intention

Introduction

Cairo is the capital of Egypt, the largest capital city in the Arab World, where approximately 12 million residents live. This Middle Eastern city attracts approximately 4.2 million visitors daily for different reasons, such as jobs, education, entertainment, shopping and so on. The Egyptian Tourism Board (ETB) reported that the number of new restaurants in Cairo has increased by 21% during the last ten years. Cairo is globally renowned for its vibrant oriental cuisine and diverse restaurant industry, with more than 40,000 food-service establishments. The majority of those food-service operations (63%) are unclassified food centers (e.g. open markets, canteens, and coffee shops). The remainder are classified into five, four and three star restaurants, such as floating restaurants, classical restaurants, ethnic and theme restaurants, and fast food operations.

The rapid growth of the floating restaurants in Cairo's Nile River has occurred only in the last two decades. A floating restaurant is a vessel, which is usually a type of steel barge, used as a restaurant on water. Sometimes retired ships (commercial or warships) are given a second lease of life as floating restaurants. An example of such a warship is HMS Belfast, which was converted to serve as a floating restaurant on the River Thames in London. Floating restaurants are spread along the two Nile banks in Cairo and are divided into two different types: fixed floating restaurants, where the restaurants serve their customers in its

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fixed location and customers can come through any time they want without advanced reservation. The other type is the Sailing Floating Restaurants (SFRs), which are the focus of this study. Sailing Floating Restaurants are slightly different from the fixed version, for while SFRs serve three fixed meals (lunch, early dinner and late dinner) they have specific sailing times and therefore, customers must be on board before the sailing time.

All customers are required to book lunch or dinner in advance. SFRs serve a wide range of food and beverage products where customers can choose from the set menu or select from the à la carte menu, which offers seafood, Lebanese and oriental cuisines, and the whole cruise lasts around two hours. Both fixed and sailing floating restaurants are categorized from four stars to five stars and they are affiliated with international chains such as Marriot, Meridian and Intercontinental, while others are independent. According to the Egyptian chamber of tourism establishments, several factors can explain the reasons behind the movement of eating out in Egypt: increasing participation of women in the labor force, longer workdays, urbanization, and growth in the tourism movement to Egypt. Other factors have also contributed to the flourishing of eating out, such as the increasing numbers of foreigners living in Egypt, the increasing convenience in eating out, the increasing per capita income, and the increasing number of restaurants, such as floating restaurants, casual dining outlets and fast food restaurants (Anonymous, 2009).

The purpose of this study is to explore customers' perceptions of the floating restaurants sailing down Cairo's Nile River, one of the fastest growing sectors for dining out in Egypt (Egyptian Tourism Board, 2008). More specifically, the following objectives of the study are to explore the relationships among food quality attributes, service quality elements, atmosphere (and other aspects) and customers' satisfaction of floating restaurants; and also to investigate the relationship among customers' satisfaction, service quality and repeat patronage intention.

Literature review

Eating away from home goes beyond just satisfying hunger and has become a popular form of entertainment. People go out to eat, and they expect to derive pleasure and satisfaction from it, especially whenever the food is presented in a charming place (Warde & Martens, 2000). Value, quality, variety and dining environment are the criteria upon which the consumer bases his/her everyday dining decisions. Meiselman (2000) differentiated between dining out and eating out and stated that customers who dine out are looking for a whole meal experience, which includes good food and beverage products, good service and good atmosphere, while those who eat out are just seeking to satisfy their hunger regardless the environment of the restaurants. The meal experience represents a moment in everyday life of human beings, and individuals will have their own experiences of meals, whether they eat at home or in a restaurant (Warde & Martens, 2000). The meal's experience is a complex phenomenon, and for an understanding of the different facets of a meal increased acknowledgement of the complexity of the meal is required (Meiselman, 2000). The first person to be credited with formalizing marketing insight into restaurants was Campbell-Smith (1967), who stated the key elements in restaurants that could influence commercially provided meals as food, atmosphere and service. While floating restaurants are generally assumed to be in the business of selling food, they are, however, primarily retailers of the food service experience (El Nazer, 2007).

Furthermore, Anonymous (2009) added that food plays a key factor but is by no means the only part of the dining experience provided in floating restaurants. A series of

‘moments of truth’, the time and place, when and where the service provider has the opportunity to demonstrate to consumers the quality of the services and environment, occur between the customers and the service providers. Thus, what happens in these interactions will obviously have a substantial impact on consumer evaluations of a service organization (Meiselman, 2000). The complexity of the meal was discussed from different research perspectives, where some stated that meal experience is a social activity letting patrons socialize. Others found that the experience of a meal is the main reason for customers to eat out (Andersson & Mossberg, 2004; Warde & Martens, 2000; Wood, 1994). Floating restaurants are facing fierce competition and challenges from other restaurants overlooking the Nile and can no longer succeed by depending on good taste and service alone. Today, an exotic experience is not enough to attract consumers to a floating restaurant. Customers are no longer willing to trade off inferior service or atmosphere for an opportunity to try new flavors. They prefer an excellent overall dining experience. Therefore, a better understanding of the key attributes influencing customer satisfaction and post-dining behavioral intentions in floating restaurants will provide important practical implications for restaurants’ operators (Yuksel & Yuksel, 2002).

Customer satisfaction with a restaurant setting and relevant theories

Growing competition in the restaurant industry and the increasing importance of consumer patronage impose the need to provide better services and to satisfy consumers. The topic of ‘customer satisfaction’ has held a significant position in the marketing literature for decades since satisfied customers can directly affect customer loyalty, organizational profits, return patronage and word-of-mouth communications (Dube, Renaghan & Miller, 1994; Stevens, Knutson, & Patton, 1995). Customers’ satisfaction judgments are the results of comparisons between customers’ expectations and perceived performance. If the perceived performance exceeds the expectation, the expectation is positively disconfirmed and the customer is satisfied. On the contrary, if the perceived performance falls short of the expectation, the expectation is negatively disconfirmed and the customer is dissatisfied (Yuksel & Yuksel, 2002). In his study, Oh (1999) tested a model of customer satisfaction within the hospitality premises. He found that significant path relationships exist between perceived service quality and customer satisfaction. Moreover, customer satisfaction was positively related to both repurchase intention and intent to spread positive word of mouth about the hotel. Clark and Wood (1998) identified six important attributes for satisfying customers in a restaurant setting: range of food, quality of food, price of food, atmosphere, speed of service, and quality of service.

Food quality

In utilitarian terms, quality can be defined as ‘fitness for use’ or, more appropriately for foodstuffs, ‘fitness for consumption’, which leads to what the experts in ISO standards call ‘customer’ or ‘consumer’ satisfaction. Thus, quality can be described as the requirements necessary to satisfy the needs and expectations of a consumer. Of all the possible determinants of customer satisfaction in restaurants, studies have often found customer satisfaction with food quality to be a powerful predictor of customer intent to return (Oh, 1999). Another study was conducted by Dube et al. (1994) who measured the relative importance of seven restaurant attributes in repeat-purchase intention in an upscale

restaurant setting and found that food quality was far more important to restaurant customers than all other attributes. Sulek and Hensley (2004) also investigated the relative importance of food, physical setting, and service in a full-service restaurant and found that food quality was the most important factor influencing satisfaction, and the only factor predicting behavioral intention. Clark and Wood (1998) confirmed that food quality is a primary factor influencing customer loyalty in restaurant choice; Susskind and Chan (2000) insisted that from the customer's perspective, food quality is a key determinant for visiting a restaurant; Mattila (2001) considered food quality a key predictor of customer loyalty in casual-dining restaurants. Namkung and Jang (2007) evaluated the relationships of individual attributes that constitute food quality (e.g. food presentation, menu variety, healthy options, taste, food freshness and temperature) with customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. The findings indicated that food presentation, taste and temperature were significantly related to customer satisfaction, whereas food presentation, taste and healthy options were significant predictors of behavioral intention.

Price is by far the most common form of attracting customers to service settings. Abdelhamied (2001) investigated the effects of price on consumer perceptions of fast food restaurants and found that consumers have robust positive perceptions on consumer perception of restaurants that offer moderate prices. Tse and Wilton (2001) discussed the effects of price on the selection of restaurants and they used conjoint analysis to investigate the trade-off between quality of service and price on the selection of a restaurant. The findings revealed that consumers considered price to be more important than service in restaurant choice. These findings were consistent for males as well as female consumers. The findings further revealed that higher-educated consumers attached relatively greater importance to price.

Service quality

Service quality is one of the most critical factors influencing customer satisfaction and future behaviors; service quality has been extensively researched within the service marketing field. Service quality is often viewed from two perspectives: the customer's cognitive evaluation of the service provided (Clark & Wood, 1998) and a multidimensional construct created by an evaluation of attribute performance (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988). In a service context, service quality can be defined as having two dimensions: functional service quality and technical service quality. Functional service quality is associated with the interactions between the customer and service provider and between the customer and the processes through which the service is delivered. Technical service quality refers to the quality of the service output (Clark & Wood, 1998). In restaurant settings, functional service quality relates to the employee's performance, whereas technical service quality is associated with food quality. Previous studies have identified that these two dimensions of quality perception (service quality and food quality) have a positive relationship with customer satisfaction (Caruana, Money & Berthon, 2000; Namkung & Jang, 2007).

Service quality is usually defined as the customer's judgment of the overall excellence or superiority of the service (Zeithaml, 1988). Thus, it is the customer's subjective evaluation formed by comparing expectations and perceived performance (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Based on this gap theory, Parasuraman et al. (1988) developed SERVQUAL as an instrument to measure service quality. SERVQUAL consists of five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibles. Since it was first developed,

numerous studies have applied SERVQUAL to assess service quality in service-related situations (Caruana et al., 2000).

Moreover, since perceived levels of service in restaurants are based on the relationship between customers and service providers (Nikolich & Sparks, 1995), customer's perceptions and evaluation of service quality may be highly dependent upon the service provider's performance during service delivery. Reliable, prompt, and assured service can be considered intangible cues that influence satisfaction and post-consumption behaviors (Brady & Robertson, 2001). Higher levels of service quality produce higher levels of customer satisfaction, which in turn lead to higher levels of customer patronage and sales revenue. Customer service quality is a crucial source of distinctive competence and is often considered a key success factor in sustaining competitive advantage in service industries (Palmer, 2001). Therefore, attention to delivery of a higher level of service quality is an important strategy by which service organizations can position themselves more effectively in the market place. Thus, in this study, service quality refers to the level of service provided by floating restaurants' employees.

Customer satisfaction and repeat patronage intentions

Customers frequently develop an attitude about a provider based on their product or service experiences. Oliver (1997) described this attitude as a fairly stable like or dislike of the product or service. She indicated that this attitude is strongly related to the customers' intentions to repatronize the service or product and to use positive word-of-mouth endorsements. In this sense, Oliver (1997) defined behavioral intentions (i.e., repurchase and word-of-mouth intentions) as 'a stated likelihood to engage in a behavior'. It is true that repurchase intention is a critical part of such attitudinal or behavioral constructs, it should not merely be characterized by a positive attitude toward a provider, because customers often engage in repeat purchasing behaviors when there is no psychological bond. Although the definitions of customer satisfaction vary in the literature, researchers generally agree that an essential element underlying customer satisfaction is an evaluation process (Back & Parks, 2003; Ladhari, Brun & Morales, 2008). Collier and Bienstock (2006) stated that customer satisfaction results when customers experience a specific service and compare it to what was expected. Kotler and Keller (2006) defined customer satisfaction as the post-purchase evaluation of products or services given expectations before the purchase. These conceptualizations imply that customer satisfaction is an overall judgment process of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectation and actual consumption experiences. The overwhelming number of studies of customer satisfaction outcomes in the service industry indicates a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and repurchase intention (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993).

Kivela, Inbakaran and Reece (1999) investigated the link between dining satisfaction and post-dining behavioral intentions, and indicated that dining satisfaction significantly influences behavioral intentions and repeat visit intention. Further, Soderlund and Ohman (2005) assessed the role of intentions as a link between satisfaction and repatronizing behavior in a restaurant setting, and found that customer satisfaction is significantly related to two specific intention constructs: intentions as expectations and intentions as wants. These studies all provide empirical evidence of a positive relationship between customer satisfactions and revisit intention in the restaurant industry. Satisfied customers are more likely to refuse competitive offers and to repurchase the product or service from the current provider (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993).

Atmosphere and ambiance

In marketing literature, atmospherics is defined as the conscious designing of space to produce specific emotional effects in buyers that enhance their purchase probability (Kotler, 1973). Atmospherics is made up of a set of tangible and intangible environmental features, such as music, lighting, and furnishings. Bitner (1992) identified three dimensions of atmospherics: 'ambient conditions,' 'spatial layout and functionality,' and 'signs, symbols, and artifacts.' Ambient conditions refer to the intangible background characteristics of the environment, such as lighting, temperature, music, and scent. These elements mainly affect consumers' non-visual senses and in some cases may have a relatively subconscious effect (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994). Other researchers have proposed that the exterior of the store (e.g., architectural style and parking area) and human elements (e.g., employee appearance and customer interaction) should also be included in atmospheric dimensions (Turley & Milliman, 2000). In the restaurant setting, Ryu and Jang (2008) proposed a measurement scale for the internal dining environment of restaurants, named 'Dinescape.' The Dinescape scale includes six dimensions: facility aesthetics, ambiance, lighting, table setting, layout and service staff. In this study, atmospherics has been limited to the dining restaurant environment.

Methodology

This study depends on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology. There is a growing realization in hospitality, tourism and leisure research that both quantitative and qualitative research methods can coexist and complement each other in order to develop a more complete understanding and to create a source of triangulation (Jennings, 2001). A questionnaire has been developed and administrated to patrons of the sailing floating restaurants. In order to underpin the research and provide richness to the data, 25 in-depth face to face interviews in 16 floating restaurants were also conducted with customers who were already dining in the floating restaurants or waiting for the ship to be docked. The informants were firstly approached by the researcher and requested to be interviewed. The interview questions directed to the customers were slightly different from those in the questionnaires and include more issues concerning the dining experience in floating restaurants. All the informants' answers were recorded after getting their approval. Other interviews were conducted with the floating restaurants' operators to get more information on points related to the topic of the research.

The sampling frame consisted of patrons' of the sailing floating restaurants only. All the sailing floating restaurants (43) were approached to conduct the research. Only 31 (SFRs) agreed to participate and were sampled. Approval was gained from the sampled floating restaurants after visiting the directors in those restaurants and explaining the purpose of the study by the researcher. Restaurants' directors allowed staff members to assist the researcher in distributing the questionnaires after the desserts had been served, just before the ship docked. All the investigated cruises were distinguished by their music and environment..

A questionnaire was used to gather data and examine customers' perceptions of the sailing floating restaurants. The questionnaires were designed in both English and Arabic, because not all the respondents spoke English. This instrument has been developed using three sources; the relevant literature review, partially on a survey developed by (Kivela et al., 1999) and finally on a panel of diners, industry managers, and industry scholars to check the items for content validity, design, layout, wording, and measurement scales. The questionnaire comprised five sections. The first investigated the respondents'

demographic characteristics. The second section investigated respondents' perceptions and satisfaction regarding the before-sailing attributes. The third measured participants' perceptions and satisfaction of the quality of food products. The fourth part asked the patrons to indicate their assessments of quality of service. The fifth section was set to evaluate respondents' perception and satisfaction of the atmosphere and ambiance elements. Customer satisfaction was measured in two items, as shown in Table 2. In this study three behavioral intentions were retained and linked to each set of questions: recommendations, customer loyalty and willingness to pay more. Each behavioral intention was measured using one item: 'I will certainly recommend the floating restaurant to friends and relatives' (Recommendation); 'Floating restaurants will be my first choice when I decide to dine out' (loyalty); 'I would pay a higher price than the other types of restaurants charge for the dining experience I received from the floating restaurants'. All three items are anchored at 'strongly disagree' (1) and 'strongly agree' (5). A five-point Likert-type scale was utilized to measure the items of the questionnaire.

The initial scale for service quality was devised from Kivela et al. (1999) and some attributes were added to fit the floating restaurants in order to identify different service constructs related to the floating restaurants' perception and satisfaction of their patrons. The assessment of measurement properties (reliabilities and validity) for the scale and its purification was carried out in an iterative procedure as follows.

By using the Cronbach's coefficient alpha estimates of an item to total correlations, we can check the reliabilities of items by measuring each factor and delete items that are unreliable.

The estimated Cronbach's α value for the purified service quality dimensions ranged from 0.80 to 0.94, typically accepted as a sufficient level of reliability at which to conduct exploratory research (Kivela et al., 1999).

This study conducted factor analysis in order to conduct multiple regression analysis. Accordingly, stepwise multiple regression analyses were then performed to test the effects of food, service, and atmospherics on customer satisfaction via SPSS 15.0. Customer satisfaction was regressed against food-related, service-related attributes and atmospherics performance. The examples of the tested models (food quality) were expressed as follows:

$$Y_{cs} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 \dots + \beta_7 X_7 + \varepsilon$$

where Y_{cs} is customer satisfaction, measured by the mean of the two-item measurement scores; measured by the mean of the three-item measurement scores; X_1 – X_7 are independent variables, representing the individual food-related attributes; β_0 is the constant, β_0 – β_7 are the regression coefficients of independent variables; and ε is the random error.

The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 15.0 was used to analyze the quantitative data. Descriptive analyses were used to examine the responses regarding the different dining attributes. An independent sample *t*-test was conducted to determine the demographic differences. Several correlations and cross-tabulations were conducted between variables to identify statistical relations. Means and standard deviations were used to help interpret the data. Results were considered to be significant when $P \leq 0.05$.

For the qualitative data NUD*IST 6 (a Computer Software Designed to Analyze Qualitative Data) was used, which assisted in the extraction of text related to a particular theme or concept from a cross-section of documents. Conjectures, assertions and assumptions were investigated and either rejected or substantiated (Richards, 2000). This method has been employed successfully in similar researches (Kempa & Dwyerb, 2003; Bowen & Sparks, 1998).

Discussion of findings

Out of the 437 questionnaires distributed, 354 (usable) were returned, a response rate of 81.0%. The results show males accounted for most of these respondents (59.3%). About two-third, 63.8%, of the sample under investigation were 20–44 years old, and the remaining third were 45 to over 60 years old. The majority of the sample were adults and matures who could judge the quality of the food and beverage services provided on board. More than half of the respondents (57.4%) were Egyptians and 21.2% were Arabs, while 21.4% were Europeans, Americans and other nationalities. These foreigners were either living in Egypt or tourists. About 62% had a college degree or above, 34.1% had a high school education and 4.2% stated they had a secondary school education. None of the respondents were illiterate. One-third of the sample (33.7%) had a monthly disposal income ranging from US\$2000–3000, 26.5% had monthly income US\$1001–1999 and 31% had monthly income of \$1000 or less. On average, about half of the sample (48.3%) dined out 1–2 times per month in floating restaurants, 41.6% dined out 3–4 times per month and 10.1% dined out 5–6 times or more per month. A cross-tabulation has been conducted among income level, frequencies of dining out and nationality of respondents, and the result indicated that those who had less than US\$1000 monthly income and dine once or twice per month were mostly Egyptians. This result may also imply that floating restaurants offer affordable prices; hence, most of patrons with low disposal income were Egyptians. Data were spilt into groups based on number of visits to the floating restaurants and MANOVA was used to examine differences between groups based on frequency of visits. A significant ($F_{4,2141} = 2.41$, $p < 0.001$) multivariate effect was found between groups for total dining experience (trips) taken, and explained 6.2% of the variance (Wilk's Lambda = 0.939). Follow-up ANOVAs revealed significant differences between frequency of visit groups for intentions to revisit ($F_{4,711} = 4.2$, $p < 0.003$) and disposal income ($F_{4,705} = 3.6$, $p < 0.007$). Tukey's post hoc analysis revealed that first-time visitors were significantly ($p < 0.05$) less likely to revisit than both those with 3–4 times and 5–6 times of visits.

Before-sailing attributes

Table 1 shows the patrons' initial perceptions of floating restaurants on arrival before entering. Except for parking facilities and sailing times, all other attributes have very reasonable mean scores. This is a very logical finding, because all of the floating restaurants' docks were located on the two Nile banks, which areas are overpopulated and where parking spaces are quite limited and insufficient in number. Additionally, sailing times were not accurate in some cases and need more attention from the (SFR) operators. Responses from the in-depth interviews assured the same problem and most responses were similar to each other, informants stated that:

Table 1. Before sailing attributes of floating restaurants.

Attributes	Mean Score	Std. Dev
Availability of parking facilities	2.71	1.44
Exterior design and appearance	4.58	0.56
Proper reception on docks	4.11	0.83
Neat wait area on docks	4.33	0.72
Proper time of sailing	3.46	1.01

Floating restaurants are their first choice when they decide to dine out but the parking problem is a barrier

Restaurants operators stated that, in sometimes they sail late about the exact sailing time because they have to wait customers who have reserved and didn't arrive . . .

Sometimes we have to miss customers who didn't arrive on time which create problems for the management . . .

In-depth interview responses with both customers and operators clearly depict two problems facing the floating restaurants – parking spaces close to the main entrance of the restaurants and difficulty of travel agencies' buses in accessing close to the docks, causing the late arrival of customers, which consequently lead to late sailing.

On board satisfaction of the dining experience

Results, shown in Table 2, indicate that respondents' perceptions and satisfaction regarding the food-related attributes of presentation, freshness, variety of items and food temperature, respectively, were extremely satisfactory. Moreover, the small standard deviations show relatively little variance. And consistent with these positive results, the means of intention to return (4.11) and customer satisfaction (4.08) indicate that, on average, respondents were mostly satisfied and likely to return to the floating restaurant. However, attributes such as availability of healthy and vegetarian items and availability of local dishes received lower scores. No significant differences were detected between male and females regarding the previous mentioned attributes. A post hoc Tukey test was conducted to assess significance among the floating restaurants; some cases were significantly different from all the other floating restaurants, which implies just two restaurants needed improvements in the availability of healthy and vegetarians' options and availability of local dishes. A cross tab correlation was performed between respondents' nationalities and availability of vegetarian, healthy and local dishes. Results illustrated that Americans, followed by Europeans, consider vegetarian dishes on menus much more important than the Arabs and other nationalities, and a great proportion of the Americans and Europeans were not agreed on the availability of vegetarians, health and local dishes. Restaurants operators must consider this point in order to meet customers' needs and wants.

Floating restaurant attributes influencing satisfaction

To identify the restaurant attributes that influence customer satisfaction in floating restaurants, stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted. Table 2 also summarizes the effects of food, service and atmospherics on customer satisfaction. For food-related attributes, this study demonstrated that food presentation, food freshness, menu variety and food temperature, were significantly related to customer satisfaction in floating restaurants. Based on the obtained results, food presentation was the most important contributor to satisfaction. Food temperature was also shown to have strong impacts on satisfaction. The taste of the food and food portions also explained satisfaction. On the other hand, availability of local dishes and healthy items did not contribute strongly to customer satisfaction. These findings were consistent with Sulek and Hensley (2004), and Namkung and Jang (2007), who reported the importance of food quality in affecting customer satisfaction.

To explore whether the food-related attributes could influence revisit intention, Pearson correlation was conducted between food quality and revisit intention. Table 3

Table 2. Floating restaurant attributes influencing customer satisfaction.

On board attributes	Item	Mean score	Std. Div.	Factor Loading	Std. error	t-stat-istic	Cronbach's alpha	AVE
Service related attributes	S1: Attentive staff	3.86	0.75	0.926	0.012	81.634	0.0971	0.861
	S2: Efficient service	4.21	0.76	0.918	0.009	80.416		
	S3: Sympathetic handling of complaints	3.90	0.711	0.929	0.017	86.123		
	S4: Staff appearance	4.18	0.57	0.851	0.010	83.620		
	S5: Restaurant has personnel who seem well trained, competent and experienced	3.61	0.76	0.905	0.012	82.212		
Food related attributes	S6: dependable and consistent service	4.11	0.68	0.921	0.013	87.292		
	S7: Restaurant has staff who are knowledgeable of the menu items	2.08	1.11	1.410	0.412	55.739		
	F1: Food freshness	4.22	0.76	0.961	0.041	39.233	0.941	0.867
	F2: Taste of food and portion	3.60	0.77	0.870	0.015	97.231		
	F3: Variety of food items	4.04	0.80	0.801	0.014	85.739		
	F4: Availability of healthy dishes	3.02	1.21	1.210	0.431	33.456		
	F5: Availability of local dishes	2.91	1.14	1.232	0.312	36.412		
	F6: Food temperature	4.03	0.810	0.812	0.046	38.282		
Atmosphere related attributes	F7: Food presentation	4.31	0.714	0.711	0.035	38.011		
	A1: The restaurant has a visually attractive dining area	4.12	0.77	0.77	0.012	82.234	0.893	0.851
	A2: Comfortable seat space and easy to move around in	4.16	0.79	0.79	0.011	73.123		
	A3: Dining privacy	4.02	0.91	0.84	0.017	86.123		
	A4: Cleanliness of the restaurants and the public areas on board	4.09	0.84	0.81	0.016	83.532		
	A5: Cleanliness of the rest rooms	2.61	1.37	1.37	0.010	83.420		
	A6: Appropriate restaurant temperature	4.53	0.59	0.62	0.013	87.292		
Customer Satisfaction	A7: Music and entertainment, and Lighting	4.31	0.62	0.64	0.006	86.121		
	C1: Were you satisfied with the overall service you received in the floating restaurant.	4.09	0.74	0.833	0.041	21.197	0.941	0.865
	C2: Were you satisfied with your decision to come again to the restaurant	4.01	0.76	0.953	0.028	61.270		
Repeat Patronage intention	: I will certainly recommend the floating restaurant to friends and relatives	3.87	0.89	0.987	0.003	293.32	0.991	0.976
	: Floating restaurants will be my first choice when I decide to dine out	4.11	0.76	0.992	0.002	317.453		
	: I would pay a higher price than the other types of restaurants charge for the dining experience I received from the floating restaurants	4.08	0.76	0.871	0.002	289.006		

Table 3. Pearson correlations between food quality and repeat patronage intention.

		Food quality	Repeat patronage intention
Food quality	Pearson Correlation	1.354	0.041**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		0.029
	N		354
Repeat patronage intention	Pearson Correlation	0.041**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.029	
	N	354	354

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed)

shows the main effects of food quality on revisit intention. Food quality was found to directly influence revisit intention, which indicates that higher food quality produces more satisfied customers in floating restaurants, which is consistent with previous studies identifying the relationship between perceived food quality and customer satisfaction and repeat patronage intention (Namkung & Jang, 2007). Responses from the interviews assured the lack of the vegetarian options and local dishes, hence informants stated that:

Menus include many international items, but healthy dishes or vegetarians were not sufficient in the menus...

Food is part of every nation culture, and we as tourists would love to taste the Egyptian cuisine but there were not enough dishes from the Egyptian cuisine offered.

A very important point has come up which is the importance of authentic food or local food, especially for tourists; hence, some tourists focused on the lack of local food on the menus. Respondents were satisfied with most of the service-related attributes, except the staff knowledge of the menu items which rated low. See Table 2 for the mean scores. Significant differences were detected among the investigated floating restaurants regarding the service-related attributes, which imply some restaurants need to improve their service. Staff knowledge of menu ingredients is quite important in case a customer has a food allergy to a certain type of food ingredients. Based on the results of regression analysis of service-related attributes against customer satisfaction, efficient service and staff appearance were significantly related to customer satisfaction. Dependable and consistent service attentiveness of staff and the ability of the staff member to handle complaints also contribute strongly to customer satisfaction. However, the results also reflect the weaknesses of staff members in knowledge of the menu items. A (two-tailed) Pearson correlation has been conducted to explore the relationship between service quality, customers' satisfactions and repeat patronage intention. The results in Table 4 showed a direct effect of service quality on repatronage intention, where the r -value is 0.539 and the correlation is significant at $p < .001$. Based on this result, the assumptions of service management literature were supported. Therefore, service quality has a positive relationship to repatronage intention. The strength of this relationship is considered moderate at 0.29 as measured by the r -square value. While the overall findings of this study were similar to those in the service management literature, the results were somewhat different from Cronin and Taylor's (1992) findings that service quality was not able to influence repurchase intention.

The results of the current paper accord with past research that has extensively examined the relationship between satisfaction and behavioral intentions, and the results suggest that satisfaction of service provided and quality of food offered have a positive influence on intentions to return (e.g. Cronin, Brady & Hult, 2000). On the other hand the

Table 4. (Two-tailed) Pearson correlations among service quality, customer satisfaction and repeat patronage intention.

Variables		Service quality	Customer satisfaction	Repeat patronage intention
Service quality	Pearson Correlation	1.354	0.486**	0.539**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000
	N		354	354
Customer satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	0.486**	1.354	0.812**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000
	N	354		354
Repeat patronage intention	Pearson Correlation	0.539**	0.812**	1.354
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	
	N	354	354	

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

results contradict Hellier et al.'s (2003) research, which found that customer satisfaction did not influence repurchase intention. These differences could be due to the different context of the research. On the other hand the direct effect of customer satisfaction on repurchase intention has been proved by Ranaweera and Prabhu (2003) who investigated the effects of customer satisfaction on customer retention and found the relationship to be to be significant and positive.

Responses from the interviews were positive and reflected informants satisfaction with the efficient service provided on board. Also, restaurant operators' emphasized their care in delivering the highest level of service quality. The results highlighted the key role of service quality as a means to ensure competitive advantages of restaurant services, and as an effective tool to influence the satisfaction of floating restaurants patrons.

Respondents' perception and satisfaction of atmosphere-related attributes were satisfactory to a great extent, as illustrated in Table 3. The results indicated that floating restaurants have very attractive interior design, comfortable seats and table positions, and aisles, and that hallways and walkways are sufficient and properly designed and positioned. Cleanliness of the restaurants and the public areas on board were satisfactory; however, rest room cleanliness was rated relatively low. Analysis of variances (ANOVA) was conducted on the overall mean of the atmosphere-related attributes. The findings indicate a significant difference in rest-room cleanliness in the floating restaurants ($F - 3.706 = 5.1$, $P < 0.002$) which implies some floating restaurants need to improve the cleanliness in the rest rooms. Floating restaurants' operators were investigated regarding this point and their answers were as follows:

Floating restaurants always depend on tanks to keep its sewage and when these tanks got full due to the usage, the bad smell arises. But this only happens in long trip that last for more than two hours.

The ship only got four toilets assigned to serve 200 customers, and this limited number of restrooms creates the problem of crowdedness in toilets...

In order to get more perspectives regarding this result informants were asked about this point (rest room cleanliness) in particular, and their responses were different:

I couldn't use the toilet due to its horrible smell.

Rest rooms were not sufficient, only two toilets to serve a big boat like this.

Rest rooms have been used by both the staff members and guests...

No significant differences were detected regarding the lighting or music, and variables such as restaurant temperature, lighting, music and entertainment were positively perceived. But the in-depth interviews gave more light and cues concerning atmosphere-related attributes. Respondents who had their lunch on a cruise enjoyed sailing on the world's longest waterway and seeing Cairo's most interesting monuments from the Nile, and hearing the waves rolling underneath or around them. Whereas those who had an early dinner (which starts at 6 pm and ends at 8 pm), or late dinner (which starts at 10 pm and goes on until after midnight), enjoyed the oriental theme offered by the floating restaurants. They were very excited with the meal experience, and with the entertainment provided by spectacular belly-dancing and folklore, and/or western shows and a whirling dervish, plays and even dressing up parties where guests don traditional apparel.

An exciting meal experience can be produced from the respondents' viewpoints by a combination of events initiated by the guests themselves, by the staff or by the social interaction among the guests. Informants also declared that they prefer informal dining and, to a great extent, they became loyal to specific floating restaurant due to the casualness, to feeling at home and being comfortable. All the informants agreed on the value for money in floating restaurants and the only thing they want to point out is the short trip time (two hours only); all of them want all the trips (lunch, early diner, dinner) to last for more than three hours. Informants also compared between fixed floating restaurants, where they can dine and stay as long as they want without a specific time to leave, and sailing ones where they must leave once the meal finishes and the ship is docked.

Conclusion and implications

This study investigates customer perceptions of floating restaurants in Egypt and the key restaurant attributes affecting customer satisfaction and repeat patronage intention. Considering both the qualitative results, which are descriptive in nature, and quantitative results, which encompass mean scores, correlations and cross tabs that are statistical in nature, this study provides new insights for floating restaurant operators on how to improve the overall dining experience. One of the main themes that emerged from the study is that parking is a problem facing customers who decide to dine in floating restaurants. Although this problem is, in nature, out of the floating restaurant owners' control, it can influence the decision to dine at a floating restaurant or elsewhere. Notably, this study provides evidence for the direct effect of service quality and satisfaction on repatronage intention, as suggested by the literature, and satisfaction emerged as a stronger predictor of repatronage intentions in the restaurant settings. A number of marketing implications can be drawn from this study. The descriptive result reveals that patrons' perception towards service quality level provided was satisfactory in some aspects. However, the qualitative results indicated some problems with the service. This implies that more effort is needed to improve the service quality level of the restaurant. The frontline staff may well be trained to be more responsive and sensitive to customer needs, thus providing services that are more efficient and effective. Staff ability to answer customers' quires is another issue to be considered by the restaurants' operators. In addition, the restaurant atmosphere can also be improved by ensuring cleanliness and favorable ambience with appropriate music and lighting.

Customer satisfaction is also very crucial for marketing planning since satisfaction does influence customers' intention to repatronage the restaurant in future. Hence, marketers should look into the factors that would affect customer satisfaction level. In addition, as customer expectations are changing over time, practitioners are advised to measure their customer expectation and satisfaction regularly and handle complaints

timely and effectively. For instance, the length of the trip is a frequent request from the customers and floating restaurants' operators should think how to increase the trip time to satisfy the patrons and to gain competitive advantages of other type of restaurants over looking the Nile.

The present study has a number of limitations. First, the nature of the sampling unit cannot be generalized to all the sailing floating restaurants in Egypt, as only the Cairo area has been examined. Secondly the study excluded the fixed floating restaurants in Cairo. The use of a cross-sectional data in a single also limits some of the conclusions obtained. In view of the limitation, to be more generalizable future studies should use a wider sample in different areas of Egypt that, of course, overlook the Nile and which have many floating restaurants running.

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