

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION ON GENERAL CUSTOMER SERVICE PRACTICES, CORE SERVICE DRIVERS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER IN THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY: A STUDY OF GHANAIS EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The study investigated a sample of 200 respondents with respect to customer satisfaction in the restaurant industry in Ghana. The general customer service practices, core service drivers and customer service charter were assessed through survey questionnaires using purposive sampling methods. The descriptive statistics analysis' results revealed that customer service practices among the restaurants were quite acceptable except that the industry needs some improvement in certain areas like frequent customer feedback as well as showing their commitment to effective service delivery. The findings of the study informed the restaurants operators and employees that to ensure effective customer service delivery, they should manage diverse proportions of not only the core service drivers but also other peripherals which

define customers' subjective measurement of effective service quality and satisfaction. Although, the study measured just ten restaurants' in the population area, the study provided valuable insight on customer service drivers and their relative importance in defining effective customer service practice.

Keywords: Customer Satisfaction, Customer Service Practices, Core Service Drivers, Customer Service Charter, Restaurant Industry

INTRODUCTION

In attempt to delight customers, more attention should be given to the customer services' drivers which aim at attracting and retaining significant number of customers. The concept of customer service practices have attracted significant amount of studies in the marketing literature due to its importance for the survival of businesses [Beny, 1995; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995]. The practice supports the marketing philosophy that the survival of organizations depends on placing the customers at the center of its marketing decisions and same time delighting them at all time [Kotler, 2012]. Customer service practices relate to delighting the customers through the utilization of the core customer service drivers which aim at building long term commitment and satisfaction with customers by providing value to all the parties involved in the relational exchanges [Peng & Wang, 2006]. Companies which have realized the benefit of effective customer services practices aim at instilling, nurture, and maintain a healthy balance between the organisation and its customers and do everything possible not to sour such existing relationships. The process promotes customer satisfaction and investment which are the final goal of the customer retention [Kerstetter, 2001; Reinartz & Kumar, 2002; Winer, 2001]. The relationship can be built through observing the cultural dimension of each customer and providing excellent communication and service. The practice has become such an important standard in modern business that it is common for businesses to establish some loyalty incentives and programmes for maintenance, nurturing and keeping a healthy customer relationship [Kotler, 2002]

Customer service describes all of the interactions and communications that customers have with a business [Kotler, 2002]. The term in this study also includes all communications aiming at promoting the customer welfare and the firm's relationship with the customers including all forms of interactions such as phone, social media, email and face-to-face etc. The aim is not only to have good experience but to provide them with an experience that exceeds

their expectations. Thus, effective customer service would usually make use of best relational practices [Turban et al, 2002]

The restaurant industry in Ghana is not an exception in providing this customer service experience. The industry is a demanding sector which emphasizes on the provisions of high-level customer services and continuous quality and relationship improvement [Spreng & Mackey, 1996]. However, due to the intangible nature of restaurants' services, it becomes a major challenge to tangibilise the existing services. However, the ability to tangibilise the restaurant services will no doubt augment or reinforce the expected relationship of customers.

As it were, a restaurant is basically classified as a business establishment which prepares and serves foods and drinks to customers in return for money, either paid before the meal, after the meal or with an open account. These meals are generally served and eaten on premises, or taken-away for delivery services. Due to this, the ability to provide effective customer services during and after sales activity is of paramount importance as this will no doubt enhance customer happiness thereby leading to a repeat visit [Ellis, 2004; Wikipedia]. As people's lifestyle are turning more complex and sophisticated in terms of their eating habits and busy schedules, the desire for more and new flavours, comfortable ambience, healthy dishes, pleasant memories, and excellent quality dining experience, restaurants are required to ensure quality delivery of services whether the food is eaten within or outside the premises that will in the end provide utmost satisfaction to the customer. This is because enormous studies [Kwaw et al 2014; Schneider, Parkington, & Buxton, 1980] have proved service quality to be a major barometer and a basis of customer's judgment of the overall excellence of the service provided in relation to the quality that was expected in measuring customer satisfaction in marketing literature. Thus, service quality and customer satisfaction are enhanced when employees who deliver the service are involved in problem-solving idea generation. Also, the nature of customer service delivered will determine the customers' conclusion of the organizations' performance and the extent to which the customer remains as a loyal partner [Johnson, 1996; Zeithamal and Bitner, 1996]. [Kotler, 2012; Parasuraman et al., 1998] think customer service quality must be tested at every level of service encounter in the restaurant industry. In this case customers experience must be equally measured in areas such as the taste of the food, service promptness, responsiveness on the part of the provider, cleanliness of the environment, the overall attention given them, loyalty incentives, reliability, empathy, trustworthiness, making them feel important, knowledge, courtesy, trustworthiness and confidence. This must be reflected in the combination of both tangible and intangibles elements of the service setting etc. Customer service quality needs to be exhibited at every facet of the organization's service activities. It needs to be a philosophy of business across the spectrum of the entire restaurants

industry. Any compromise of service quality will make customers think twice in a repeated purchase.

Besides, Batt [1999] has also found that service quality and sales are positively related to employee discretion and group self-regulation. Research has shown that high-involvement work systems improved performance, reduced costs, and increased productivity [Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, & Kalleberg, 2000; Huselid, 1995; Ichniowski, Shaw, & Prensushi, 1997]. Thus, proposing that Store-level employee involvement in decision making will be positively related to employee service performance after individual-level personalities are controlled.

However, in spite of the significant role customer service plays in the prospect of the restaurant industry, little is known as to whether customer services at the restaurant industry is effective and satisfactory in Ghana especially around Cape Coast and its surroundings. The region is one of the most visited tourist attractions in the country. Due to these, there are significant numbers of restaurants business across the nooks and hearts of the region. Therefore, a compromised customer services will not only affect the profitability and growth of restaurant industry but the entire Ghanaian economy as a whole. To the best of our knowledge, much empirical work needs to be done in this important still-emerging area to ascertain and appreciate what or what not needs to be done towards the improvement of the sector. As part of efforts to bridge this gap, the study sampled customers of ten restaurants and assessed the nature of customer services practices and how such services are collectively welcomed by customers in general. Thus, the main objective of the study is to examine the nature of the extant customer service practices of the restaurants industry. More specifically, the study sought to understand whether the current customer service practices meet the customer's expectation within the restaurants industry. Thus, how the core customer services principles, core service drivers and service charter are epitomized in the restaurant industry and same time meeting the set standard.

RESEARCH METHODS

The Study

Evaluating effective customer service drivers and their relevance to customers are very important in achieving business success. It has been observed that each guest has different expectations about restaurant's services. Therefore it is extremely enjoining to unveil these expectations in order to determine their needs and preferences. This will help to bridge the gaps between the expectation that customers hold and the actual services offered. Similarly, it will ensure effective supervision of the organisation as a coordinated system. The effect of the evaluation will help to determine their level of satisfaction and happiness with regards to the

service drivers the industry have been utilising in their customer service practices. Several methods were used in this regard to achieve the objectives of this study.

Reliability of Scales

Before the analysis were made, the Cronbach's Coefficient alpha was employed to estimate the internal consistency of the multi-item of the scales employed in the study. Overall results for each of the items used proved no threat of internal consistency. The scales were measuring what we purported to measure as each were higher than the standard [0.50 and 0.65], Nunnally [1967] had proposed. The items are detailed below:

Table 1: Reliability Coff.

Scale Variables	Items	Cronbach Alpha
Overall satisfaction drivers	6	.776
Core Customer Services Principles	6	.791
Customer Service Charter	4	.785
Overall Service Outcome	3	.882

Study Design, Period and Area

This applied research was conducted between March, 2014 and May, 2015 among ten selected restaurants in Cape Coast, the Capital City of the Central Region of Ghana. The region is mainly known by its numerous educational institutions. As a result, the region is considered very attractive for the growth of the restaurants' business. In view of this, we deemed it appropriate to find out from the perspective of the customers the extent to which the core customer service practice are employed to serve them. Thus, the study sought to examine the customers on the core customer service principles in the restaurant industry and how they are satisfied on those core values as well as their relative importance.

Study Population

The study population includes all customers of the restaurant industry at the Cape Coast Metropolis. Both regular and irregular customers of the restaurants were considered in this case.

Sampling Size and Technique

Five teaching and research assistants were 'employed' to assist in administering the questionnaires to the ten selected restaurants. Data were collected between lunch and dinner time as those periods were deemed appropriate to get the customers. Those customers who

were not able to read were thoroughly coached to answer the questionnaire. A purposive method was employed to select 240 respondents. However, only 200 questionnaires were able to be retrieved and validly used for the analysis.

Data Collection

The study gathered the primary sources of data through a self-administration of questionnaires to the respondents which consisted of five parts. Part A consisted of Demographic profile of respondents, Part B was related to the overall satisfaction of general customer service practices, Part C was also related to the core customer service practices and their perceived importance, Part D was however, about the customer service charter and Part E looked at the outcome of the service delivery. The general customer satisfaction were measured using six item questions which included overall reception, timeliness, accessibility, taste of meal, cleanliness and the general ambience. Besides, the core customer service drivers and their importance were assessed using six question items involving integrity, respect, accountability, empathy, reliability, and tangibles. The service charter also witnessed four item questions and finally the outcome of the overall customer experience were similarly assessed with two questions.

Moreover, the secondary data was obtained mainly from manuals, reports and accessing online journals and documents relating to the industry. The questionnaires were pretested on a number of respondents who were similar in characteristics with the sample population. Data collected were analysed using SPSS version 20 statistical tool. Descriptive statistics such as mean score and percentages were used to present the data results.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

During the study, 240 questionnaires were distributed to the customers of ten restaurants in Cape Coast, the capital city of Central Region in Ghana. Unfortunately, only 200 were retrieved from the customers. Hence, the analysis of the customers opinions was based on 200 responded questionnaires.

Table 2 below deals with the basic demographic distribution of the respondents with respects to gender, age, marital status, educational level and their respective occupational category. The male sample was relatively higher [64.5%] than the female individuals [35.5%]. It is not probable that this proportion of male to female sample reflects actual differences in restaurant's customers but may be due to selection bias. Therefore, other factors need further scrutiny in future for further and better discussion.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of the Sample

		Frequencies	%
Gender	Male	129	64.5
	Female	71	35.5
Age Range	15-25	90	45
	26-36	71	35.5
	37-47	30	15
	48 and above	9	4.5
Marital Status	Married	60	30
	Single	133	66.5
	others	7	3.5
Educational Level	SHS	3	1.5
	Degree	137	68.5
	Masters	54	27
	Others	6	3
Occupation	Teacher	27	13.5
	Health Worker	8	4
	Financial Officer	25	12.5
	Student	90	45
	Businessman	11	5.5
	others	39	19.5

Nature of Customers

Figure 1: Nature of customers

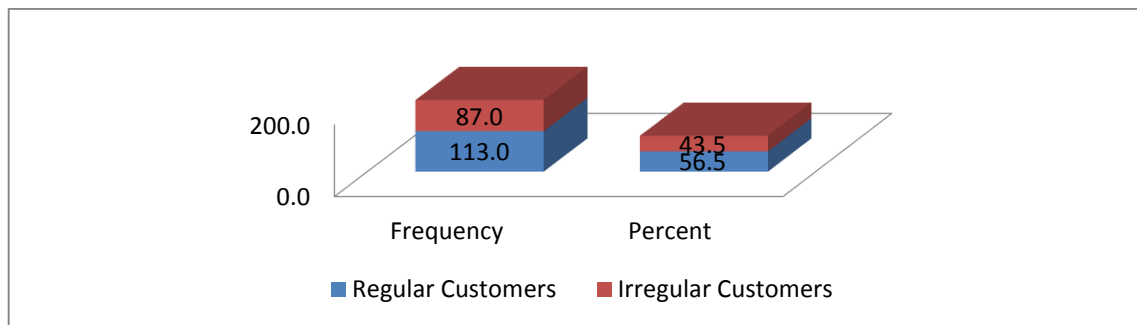


Figure 1 indicates two categories of customers [i.e. regular and irregular customers]. Over half of the sample size [56%] were regular customers, with 43.5% being irregular customers.

Overall satisfaction of general customer service practices

On a five point likert scale, respondents overall satisfaction were assessed with respect to reception, timeliness, accessibility, taste and presentation of food, cleanliness and general ambience. Overall, the average number of the respondents were satisfied with the kind of

customer service practices among the restaurants. General ambience emerged as the highest average with a total mean score of [M = 3.78, SD = 0.92], followed by cleanliness [M = 3.77, SD=0.79], presentation of food [M=3.52, SD = 1.18], reception [M=3.32, SD=0.97], accessibility [M=3.28, SD=0.90] and interestingly timeliness registered the least score of reception [M=3.22, SD=0.86]. In all, respondent total weighted average recorded [M = 3.47, SD= .64920] suggesting the respondents were generally satisfied with the customer service practices among the restaurants.

Table 3: Overall satisfaction of general customer service practices

	Drivers	Items	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Overall Satisfaction	Reception	How satisfied were you with the attention, friendliness and knowledge exhibited when arrived	1	5	3.32	0.97
	Timeliness	Overall amount of time spent before you were served	1	5	3.22	0.86
	Accessibility	How satisfied were you of the accessibility of service assistants	1	5	3.28	0.90
	Presentation of food	How satisfied were you regards the taste, quality and presentation of food	1	5	3.52	1.18
	Cleanliness	How satisfied are you with the general cleanliness of the restaurant	1	5	3.77	0.79
	General Ambience	Overall, rate your satisfaction to the sitting arrangement, music, comfort and space	1	5	3.78	0.92

Assessment of overall core customer service drivers

The core principles of customer service were rated on a five point likert scale to ascertain customers satisfaction on the prevailing practices among the restaurants. Thus, the respondents total weighted average [M=3.42, SD=0.74] suggested that the core customer service principles are effectively imbibed in the restaurant industry. However, integrity registered the least score of [M=2.92, SD=0.99] suggesting the restaurants have more room for improvement in this area. However, accountability [i.e. privacy and confidentiality] was ranked as the highest driver among the core principles [M=3.73, SD=1.05]. Thus, the restaurants impressed the higher percentage of the respondents when it comes to the core customer services principles.

Table 4a: Core customer service drivers

Core Service Values	Customer Statements	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Integrity	Services delivery are professional and impartial	1	5	2.92	0.99
Respect	Customers are treated with dignity, fairness and sensitivity	1	5	3.42	1.18
Accountability	Privacy and confidentiality are well respected	1	5	3.73	1.05
Empathy	The restaurant gives individualised attention and due care to each customer	1	5	3.38	1.07
Reliability	The restaurant delivers its promises	1	5	3.46	1.07
Tangibles	I was impressed with the physical facilities and general appearance of staff	1	5	3.61	0.94
Total mean score				3.42	0.74

Notes: Scale 1-5 indicating level of agreement, 1= being strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=indifferent, 4=agree, 5= strongly agree.

Respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance regarding the core service drivers. The Table-4b therefore shows the perceived importance of the core customer service principles as held by the respondents. A high percentage of the respondents perceived tangibles as the most important contribution when they are assessing the effectiveness of customer service in the restaurant industry with a mean score of [M=3.71, SD= 0.98], followed by accountability [M=3.47, SD=1.09], Respect [M=3.43, SD=1.18], Empathy [M=3.37, SD=0.79] and Integrity [M=3.11, SD=1.05]. The weighted mean score of perceived importance of core customer service principles was [M=3.39, SD=0.76] which suggested that all the core service drivers are considered important by the majority of the respondents when it comes to their rating of effective customer service practice.

Table 4b: Perceived level of importance of the core customer service drivers

	Drivers	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perceived Importance	Integrity	1	5	3.11	1.05
	Reliability	1	5	3.25	1.06
	Empathy	1	5	3.37	0.79
	Respect	1	5	3.43	1.18
	Accountability	1	5	3.47	1.09
	Tangibles	1	5	3.71	0.98
Weighted Mean				3.39	0.76

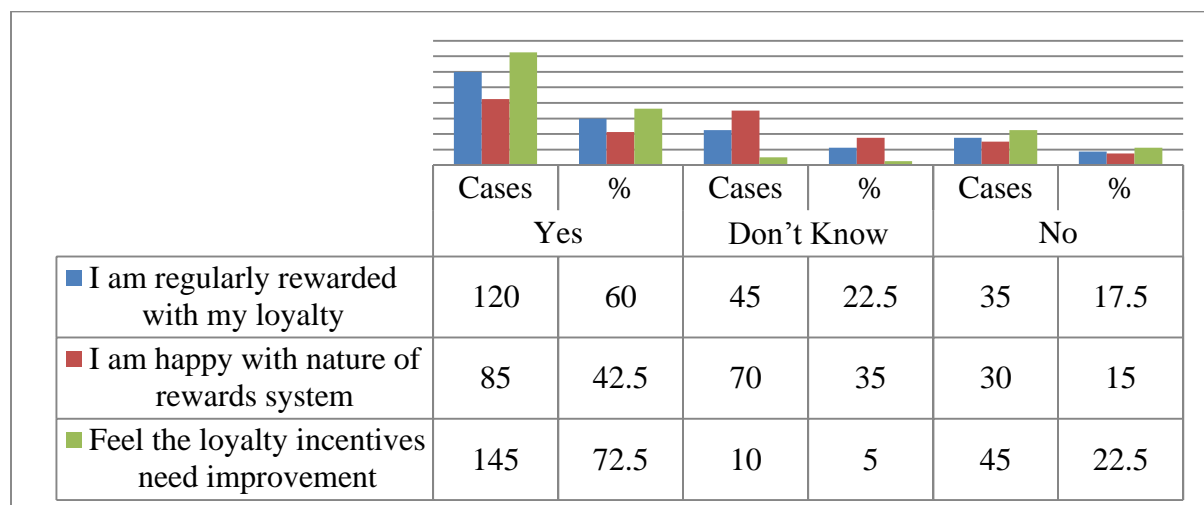
Customer Service Charter

The customer service charter was also assessed. Thus, Table 5 shows respondents estimations with regards to how the restaurants communicate in plain language their commitment to customer service. Overall findings suggested that respondents particularly disagreed with effectiveness of this area as indicated by the weighted mean [M=2.88, SD=0.87]. However, they had positive feeling towards the standard of service being delivered [M=3.21, SD=1.10].

Table 5: Customer Service Charter

Drivers	Statements	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std.Dev
Commitment to service	Mission and values statement are displayed for customers to see	200	1.00	5.00	2.50	1.21
List of services	List of services delivered by the restaurant are well accessible	200	1.00	5.00	2.91	1.00
Consult with customers	I am regularly consulted for my opinions when visit	200	1.00	5.00	2.92	1.15
Service standards	Products and services are of desired quality standard	200	1.00	5.00	3.21	1.10
Weighted average					2.88	0.87

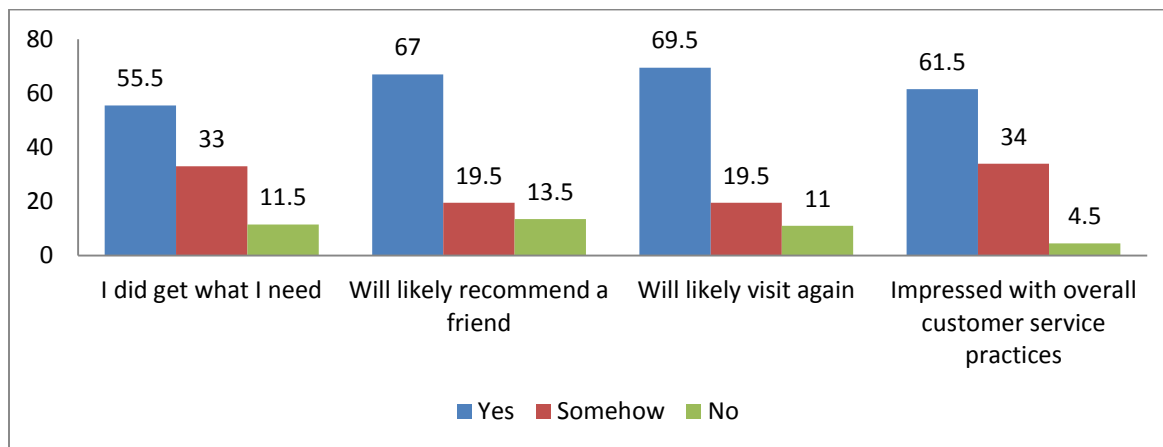
Figure 2: Customer Rewards systems



Similarly, the study [Figure-2] empirically validated the idea of customer value, rewards and incentives system as augmentation to effective customer service success. These systems are believed to impact significantly on customer loyalty especially where they are treated as

important persons. This is in line with [Deng et al, 2000; Annika & Grönroos, 1968] who provided that superior value to customers is a prerequisite when trying to establish and maintain long-term customer relationships, as it stresses the fact that the underlying construction of customer satisfaction is more than a perception of the quality received. An effective reward and incentive systems will register in the mind of the customers and will have a long lasting effect on the customer which in turn will lead to the high level of the customer loyalty. However, there is an inverse correlation when the relationship is not a healthy one. Dissatisfied relationship leads to customer defection, customer terrorism, and negative word of mouth missionaries [Agyemang, 2005].

Figure 3: Overall Customer Service outcome



Furthermore, we wanted to discover how much the respondents agreed on four different statements about their assessment of the overall outcome of the customer service they received in terms of what they need, their repeat purchase, and recommendation to friends. The Figure 2 above shows positive outlook. Thus, 55.5% got what they needed from the restaurants, 67% will recommend to friends, 69.5% will likely visit again and similarly, as many as 61.5% confirmed that they were impressed with the overall customer service practices.

DISCUSSION

Measuring effective customer service practices relates to how well the customer service drivers are utilised to meet customers' expectations. The measurement is a subjective feedback from customers and not the company's determination. The study therefore attempted to assess how customers were satisfied with the service variables and their relative effectiveness and utilisation as well their perceived level of importance. The findings showed varied perceptions and experiences. A high percentage of the respondents had positive emotions with the existing

customer services practices in the restaurant industry in Ghana. Regarding the general customer service principles, the respondents overall satisfaction was good considering general sitting ambience as the most satisfied service driver among the restaurants followed by cleanliness, presentation of food, reception, timeliness, and accessibility [Table-2]. These findings actually make sense with [Johnson, 1996; Zeithamal and Bitner, 1996; Kwaw et al 2014] that customer service quality and customer satisfaction are enhanced when employees who deliver the service are involved in problem-solving idea generation. Also, the nature of customer service delivered will determine the customers' conclusion of the organizations' performance and the extent to which the customer remains as a loyal partner. Moreover, Seung Ah Yoo [2012] has also found that customer perceptions of restaurant cleanliness have a positive effect on customer evaluation of restaurant quality and customer service effectiveness. In this present study, the respondents were satisfied with respect to the over all general customer service principles of the restaurants including its general ambience and tangibles.

The restaurants have paid attention to the effective utilisation of the six core customer service drivers - integrity, respect, accountability, empathy, reliability, and tangibles- as the weighted mean score [M=3.42, SD=0.74] indicated positive response' with respect to the overall satisfaction of the core drivers [Table-3]. Jay Weatherill [2007] has affirmed that, to simplify and align effective customer service and satisfaction measurement practices across organisations, all organisations are encouraged to use the core customer service drivers in order to create consistency and easy benchmarking.

With regards to how important the respondents see the core customer service drivers [Table-4b], tangibility [i.e physical facilities and staff appearance] emerged as the most important service driver with the highest mean value of [Mean=3.71, SD=0.98] which shows that the average customers were concerned with the importance of tangible aspects of service delivery. According to [Gronroos, 1984; Amy Tan et al, 2009], companies' tangibles and respect for privacy including its customer contact can have both negative and positive effect on organisations. Therefore, organisations need to understand the importance of increasing tangibility of their services - front-line staff, attraction of their physical buildings, and well designed promotional materials – so as to convey a high level of service quality impressions.

Similar observation was also made with respect to customer service driver based on accountability [i.e respect for customer privacy] which revealed that, customers perceived this aspect of service driver as equally more important to their satisfaction of the service expected [Table 4]. Moreover, respondents opinions regarding the customer service charter (that is, the restaurant commitment to customer service) suggested that respondents were not particularly impressed as indicated by the weighted mean score [M=2.88, SD=0.87]. However, they had

positive feeling towards the standard of service received from the restaurants [M=3.21, SD=1.10]. Similarly, high percentage [Table-5] of respondents were almost indifferent when it comes to consulting them for their feedback. Respondents inevitably wanted to be consulted for their feedback of services received but findings proved otherwise as shown in Table-4. Customer feedback is paramount when determining customers needs and tastes, particularly when restaurants want to find out about their strengths and weaknesses. Without customer feedback, a company could not possibly meet the product needs of the consumer. Consequently, its products would likely fail in the marketplace [Scott Davis, G., 2003].

Overall, the customers' assessment of the restaurants were quite positive and encouraging [Figure 2]. The respondents got what they needed, happy to refer friends, had positive impressions about the restaurants and as a result were happy to repeat their patronage. The result epitomises the findings of [Mohammad Muzahid Akbar and Noorjahan Parvez, 2009] that customer satisfaction has a positive and significant relation to customer loyalty. Customers' attitude towards the restaurants will enhance their repurchase intention or purchasing additional products or services from the same company, as well as their willingness to recommending the company to others, demonstration of such commitment to the company by exhibiting a resistance to switching to another competitor. In spite of the respondents appreciation of effective utilisation of the customer service drivers, still almost 20% were undecided to recommend the restaurants apart from the 13.5% who declared their reluctance to recommend the restaurants [Figure 2] .

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

The study examined customers perceptions and satisfaction on the core customer service drivers and their relative importance to the customers. In attempt to find out what customers think, the study measured the general customer service principles with respect to reception, timeliness, accessibility, presentation of food, cleanliness, and general ambience dimensions. In addition, the core customer service drivers, their perceived importance to the customers as well as the customer service charter and their overall outcome on the actual service delivered were also measured. The results revealed that customers' perception towards the customer service practices among the restaurants are quite acceptable except that the industry needs some improvement in certain areas like frequent customer feedback as well as displaying their commitment to effective service delivery. Customers were particularly interested in their privacy when visit, tangible aspect of the restaurant, as well as showing commitment to serve their clients. The findings of the study informed the restaurants operators and employees that to ensure effective customer service delivery, they should manage diverse dimensions of not only

the core service drivers but also other peripherals which define customers subjective measurement of effective service quality and satisfaction. Although, the study measured just ten restaurants' in the population area, the study no doubt can provide valuable insight into the utilisation of customer service drivers and their relative importance in defining effective customer service practice.

However, the findings of the study have to be understood considering some few limitations. The data were only gathered from the Central Regional capital, Cape Coast, therefore the results might not be the ultimate reflection on other customers across the country. Besides, data collected were only limited to the customers of the sampled restaurants using a survey approach to gather responses, hence generalising for all customers in Ghana becomes a major challenge.

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