

THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC FOOD SERVICE QUALITY ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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***Abstract:** This paper aims to analyze the impact of public food service quality on customer satisfaction levels, focusing on consumer perceptions and expectations. The study seeks to identify the main dimensions of service quality, such as product quality, staff behavior, service time, ambiance, value for money, and how these influence the overall customer experience. The research is based on a questionnaire applied to a sample of respondents who frequent public food service establishments. The paper's conclusions offer practical recommendations for managers in the public food sector, aiming to optimize customer experience and strengthen the competitive advantage of the analyzed establishments.*

Key words: *quality in public food service, services, consumers*

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary economy, characterized by increasingly intense competition and market dynamism, the public food service industry occupies a particularly important place in satisfying consumer needs and desires. This sector, which includes restaurants, cafes, fast-food establishments, and catering services, is notable for its constant pace of innovation and diversity of offerings. In such a competitive environment, the quality of services offered becomes a fundamental criterion for differentiation and a determining factor in economic performance [20].

The concept of quality in public food service has a multidimensional nature, going beyond the taste aspect of the products offered. It includes aspects such as food freshness and safety, staff professionalism and attitude, service promptness, space hygiene, general ambiance, and the perceived relationship between value and price. All these components contribute to shaping the consumer experience and the overall perception of the organization [28].

Customer satisfaction represents, in this context, a central indicator of a food establishment's performance. It reflects the extent to which customer expectations are confirmed or exceeded, directly influencing the degree of loyalty and intention to return. Numerous studies have highlighted the direct link between consumer satisfaction and long-term business success, emphasizing its role in consolidating image and increasing profitability [12,18].

In specialized literature, the analysis of the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction has been approached through established theoretical models such as SERVQUAL and SERVPERF, which allow evaluation of perceptions regarding service dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy [20]. The application of these models in the hospitality industry facilitates the identification of determining factors of satisfaction and supports the implementation of continuous quality improvement policies.

Recent developments in consumer behavior, determined by processes such as globalization, digitalization, increasing education levels, and concern for health and sustainability, have redefined quality standards in the HoReCa sector [8]. Consequently, service quality no longer represents just an essential operating condition, but a strategic instrument for competitive differentiation.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the impact of public food service quality on customer satisfaction, by identifying the main dimensions of perceived quality and how they influence consumer behavior. The study aims to highlight the connections between quality perception and satisfaction level, as well as to formulate applicable proposals for increasing performance and customer loyalty in the hospitality sector.

The paper is based on an interdisciplinary approach, combining concepts from service marketing, quality management, and consumer behavior, with the aim of offering an integrated perspective on performance in the HoReCa sector. The practical relevance of the research lies in the possibility of using the results to develop sustainable development and competitiveness strategies [12].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The documentation necessary for preparing this paper was based on a variety of information sources, among which specialized literature, results obtained through questionnaire application, and resources available in the online environment stand out. These materials provided the theoretical and empirical foundation necessary for analyzing the proposed topic.

The research methodology combined qualitative and quantitative analysis of information. First, academic works and scientific articles relevant to the field of public food services were studied in order to outline the conceptual framework of the research. Second, a questionnaire was designed and applied for collecting data regarding customer perceptions and satisfaction levels. This stage allowed obtaining direct data, useful for verifying the formulated hypotheses.

The combination of these methods had the role of ensuring a coherent and systematic analysis of information from multiple sources, facilitating the formulation of well-founded conclusions. By integrating the results obtained from studying specialized literature with those derived from empirical research, the aim was to construct an objective perspective on the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction.

The empirical research was conducted based on a structured questionnaire completed by 120 respondents who had consumed services in traditional public food establishments located in the city of Oradea, Romania. Data were collected between March and May 2025, using convenience sampling, with the inclusion criteria being respondents aged over 18 years and recent experience as customers of public food service units.

The establishments included in the analysis were five urban traditional full-service restaurants operating in Oradea. The questionnaire included closed-ended items and Likert-scale questions addressing food quality, staff behavior, service promptness, cleanliness, ambiance, value for money, overall satisfaction, and intention to return.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The analysis of graphs resulting from the applied questionnaire offers a detailed picture of consumer perceptions regarding public food service quality. Each analyzed indicator contributes to understanding how the consumption experience influences customer satisfaction levels and subsequent customer behavior.

All percentages and figures presented in this section are based on the questionnaire responses, while the cited literature is used only for interpretative support.

The empirical research was conducted with the purpose of evaluating customer perceptions of public food service quality and determining its impact on the overall satisfaction level. The data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire, applied to a sample of customers who frequented the analyzed establishment in recent months. The

questionnaire included questions regarding the main dimensions of service quality, as well as overall satisfaction level and intention to return.

Following the questionnaire application, a general profile of respondents was outlined, allowing a deeper understanding of how public food service quality influences their satisfaction.

The graph regarding respondent distribution by gender indicates a predominance of women in the study, confirming conclusions from specialized literature according to which women show greater sensitivity to qualitative dimensions of services – cleanliness, aesthetics, and staff behavior [13]. This orientation shows active involvement of the female segment in evaluating gastronomic experiences and forming public opinion regarding quality.

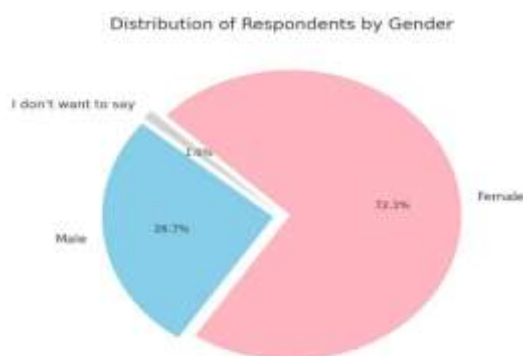


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by gender

The graph regarding respondent age shows that most belong to the young adult category (20–40 years), a group recognized for high social mobility and openness to diverse culinary experiences [9].

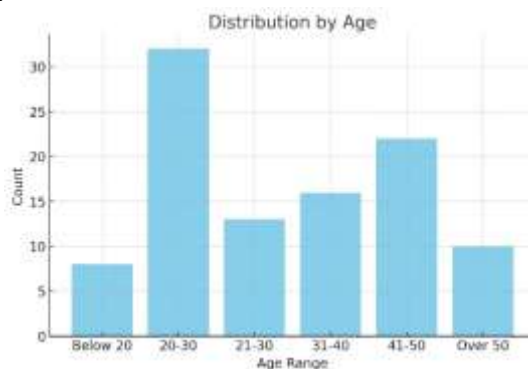


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by age

This segment contributes majorly to HoReCa market development, being most receptive to new concepts, menu modernization, and personalized experiences. This age segment is the most active from a social and professional standpoint, having a higher frequency of interactions with various public food establishments. At the same time, people in this category are more open to innovation, showing clear preferences for modern, fast, and personalized services. Simultaneously, a significant part of the sample is represented by mature people, who value more the authenticity of dishes, ingredient quality, and culinary tradition.

Regarding education level, most respondents have higher education, indicating an informed public with high expectations regarding service quality. These people tend to

analyze more carefully the relationship between quality and price, staff professionalism, as well as the degree of comfort offered by the establishment. The high educational level also influences the degree of exigency and how satisfaction is perceived following the consumption experience.

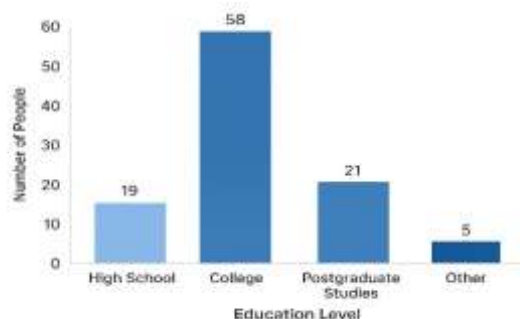


Figure 3. Distribution of respondents by education level

Regarding the frequency of visits to traditional restaurants, most participants declare that they frequent them occasionally or with reduced periodicity. This aspect shows that traditional restaurants are associated more with special moments or particular events, rather than with a daily routine. Therefore, each visit has significant importance in forming the general impression of service quality, and the experience offered must be memorable to generate satisfaction and customer loyalty.



Figure 4. Frequency of visits to traditional restaurants

The results show that the main reasons why respondents choose to visit traditional restaurants are related to socialization and spending free time in a pleasant environment. The most frequent reasons invoked were family meals and meetings with friends, followed by participation in special events or the desire to experience local dishes out of gastronomic curiosity.

These results reflect the fact that traditional restaurants not only a food function, but also a social and cultural one. They represent places of connection and recreation, where the culinary experience combines with human interaction and the need for relaxation.

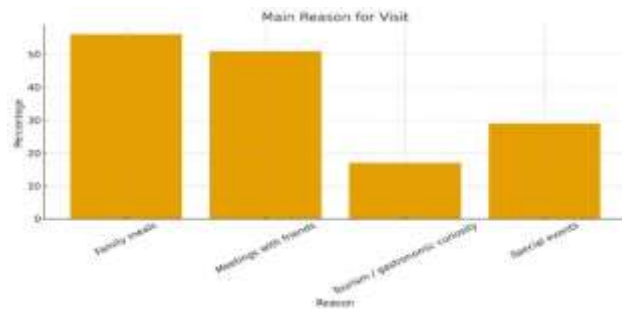


Figure 5. Main reason for visit

In this context, the quality of services offered takes on essential importance, as it directly influences customer perceptions of the general atmosphere and, implicitly, the satisfaction level.

Regarding the perception of food quality, most respondents evaluated the taste, freshness, and presentation of dishes as being at a good or very good level. However, some participants offered more moderate evaluations, signaling the existence of differences between restaurants regarding the consistency of product quality.

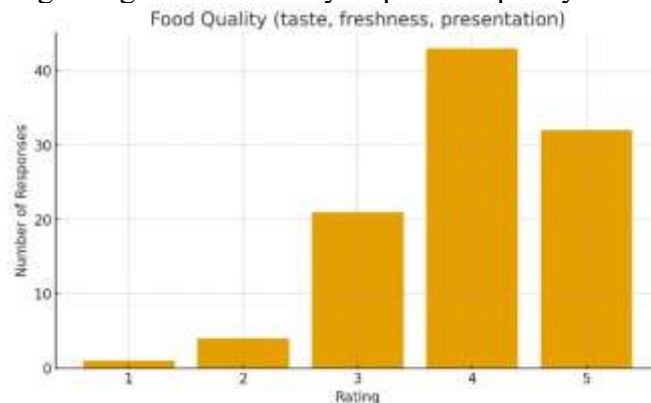


Figure 6. Food quality (taste, freshness, presentation)

This result confirms that food remains a central element of the consumption experience and one of the main factors determining customer satisfaction. Authentic taste, ingredient freshness, and dish aesthetics influence the general perception of service quality, and any discrepancies between expectations and reality can affect consumer loyalty.

To maintain a high level of satisfaction, traditional restaurants must ensure consistent product quality, use fresh ingredients, and pay special attention to how dishes are presented. Additionally, culinary staff training and production process standardization contribute to consolidating the restaurant's image and creating a positive experience for the customer.

Based on the responses obtained from the questionnaire, it is observed that customer perceptions of public food service quality are generally positive, suggesting a high level of satisfaction in relation to the experience offered.

Regarding the question about menu diversity and attractiveness, most respondents appreciated the offer as being varied and interesting. This aspect contributes significantly to forming a favorable impression of the establishment, demonstrating that a balanced menu adapted to customer preferences has an important role in satisfying them.

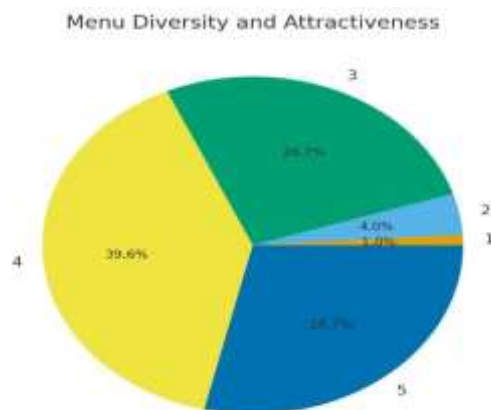


Figure 7. Menu diversity and attractiveness

Regarding service time, opinions were more balanced, although the general trend is positive. Some participants considered that waiting time could be improved, indicating that speed and efficiency in taking and delivering orders are key elements for increasing consumer satisfaction.



Figure 8. Serving time (speed of order taking and food delivery)

Regarding staff friendliness and politeness, the results are clearly favorable. Most customers noticed a positive attitude from staff, an aspect that strongly influences the overall experience and loyalty to the establishment. The direct relationship between customer and employees represents a determining factor in perceiving service quality.

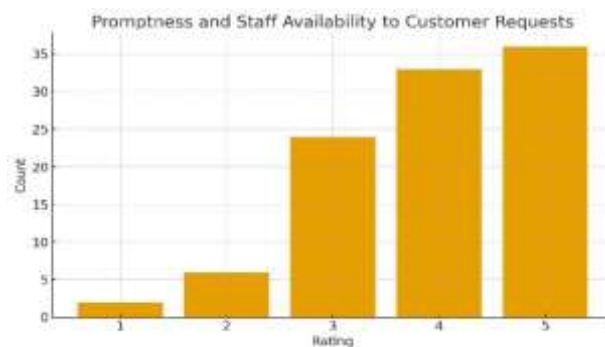


Figure 9. Promptness and staff availability to customer requests

Additionally, staff promptness and availability were evaluated positively, confirming employee involvement in satisfying customer needs and requirements. This professional

behavior consolidates the establishment's image and contributes to creating a pleasant and efficient experience.

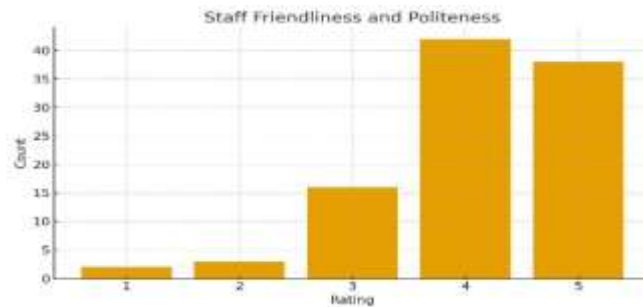


Figure 10. Staff friendliness and politeness

Regarding the cleanliness of the dining room and toilets, the responses show a majority positive evaluation, indicating that hygiene constitutes an essential element in forming a favorable perception of service quality.

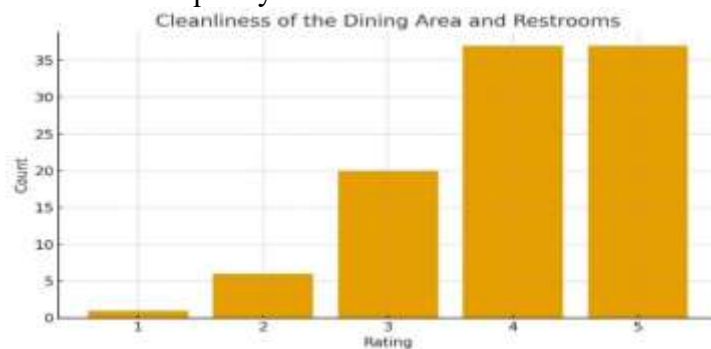


Figure 11. Cleanliness of the dining area and restrooms

Additionally, the comfort and general appearance of the establishment, along with value for money, were appreciated as being appropriate, suggesting that design and perceived product value significantly influence satisfaction levels.

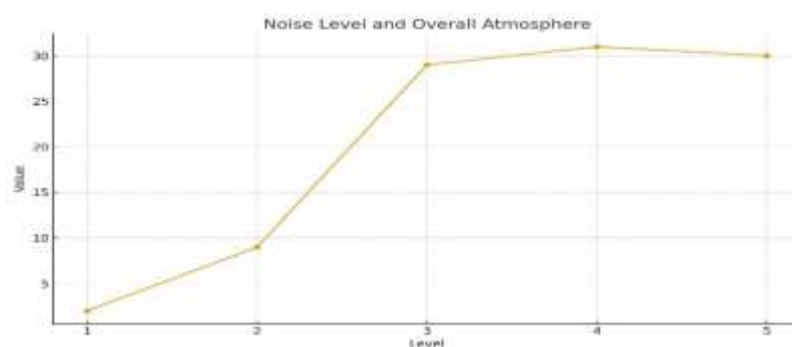


Figure 12. Noise level and overall atmosphere

The general atmosphere (noise level, ambiance, decor) was evaluated positively, confirming that sensory and environmental elements contribute to customers' pleasant experience.

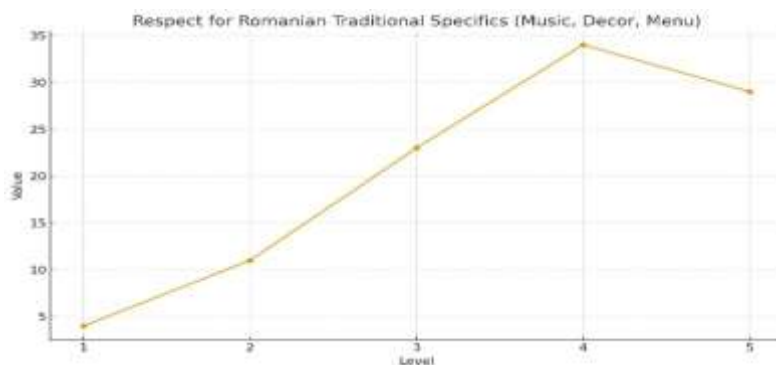


Figure 13. Respect for Romanian traditional specifics (music, décor, menu)

However, regarding respect for traditional Romanian specificity, opinions were slightly more divided, signaling that, although appreciated, there is room for improvement in terms of authenticity and maintaining traditional elements.

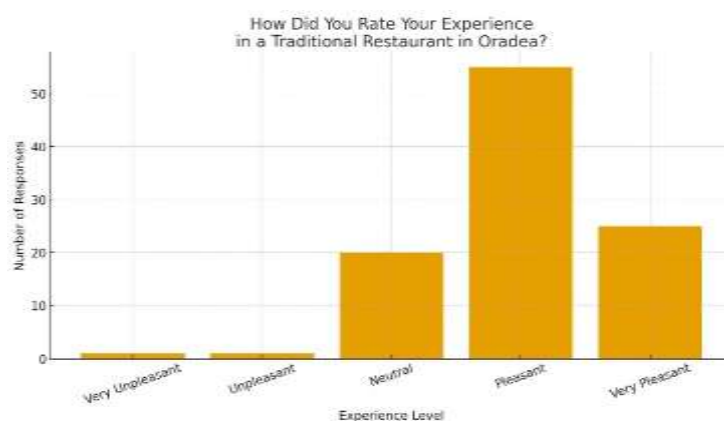


Figure 14. The customers experience in a traditional restaurant in oradea

Most respondents declared that their restaurant experience was pleasant or very pleasant, demonstrating that the services offered met consumer expectations.

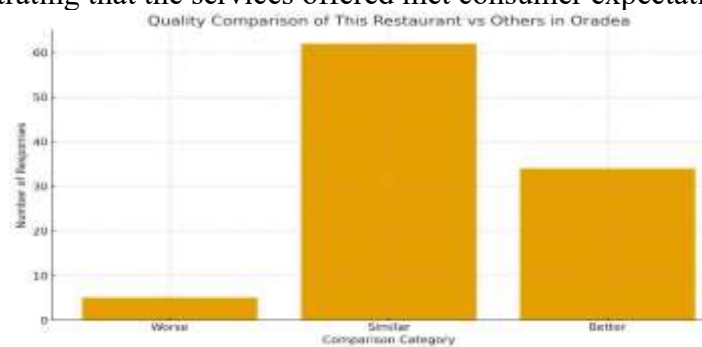


Figure 15. Quality comparison of this restaurant vs others in Oradea

Additionally, many consider that this type of restaurant offers a quality level like other restaurants in the city, which consolidates the positive image of the local brand.

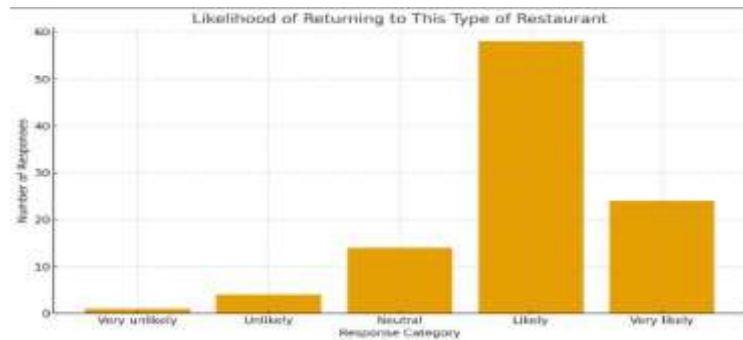


Figure 16. Likelihood of returning to this type of restaurants

The intention to return and recommend the restaurant to other people is high, a fact that highlights a favorable impact of service quality on customer loyalty, a direct connection between felt satisfaction and subsequent consumer behavior.

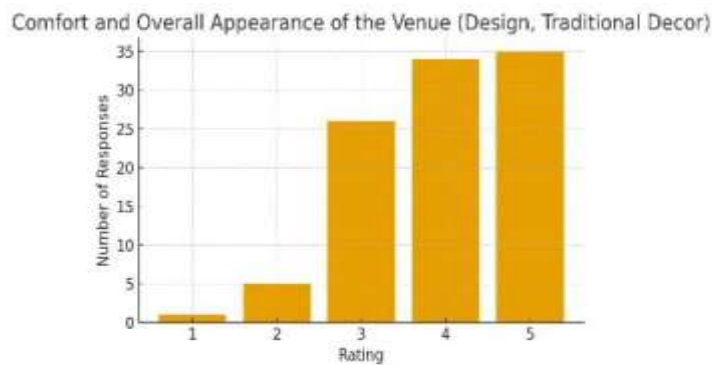


Figure 17. Comfort and overall appearance of the venue

The responses provided to the open-ended question highlight that most customers have a positive perception of traditional restaurants in Oradea, Romania, included in the survey (five urban traditional restaurants)., but there are also some clear directions for improvement.

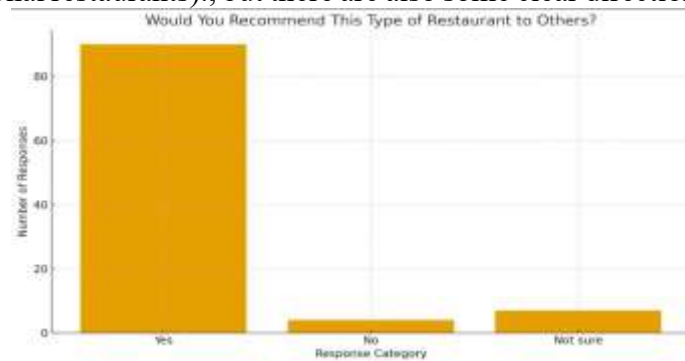


Figure 18. Possibility to recommended the traditional restaurants

A significant part of respondents mentioned they have no suggestions, considering that the experience offered is satisfactory or even "perfect." This trend confirms the high satisfaction level identified in previous questions as well, suggesting that traditional restaurants generally succeed in offering quality services and a pleasant experience.

However, from analyzing the responses, several recurring improvement themes emerge:

Authenticity and preservation of traditional specificity

Many respondents emphasized the importance of preserving traditions through decor, music, folk costumes, authentic recipes, and use of local products. The desire is evident that restaurants avoid excessive combination of modern with traditional, so as not to diminish cultural identity.

Menu diversification and food quality - a considerable number of customers requested a greater variety of traditional dishes, more authentic or tastefully reinterpreted dishes, as well as increased attention to ingredients used (preferably from local producers).

Service and staff attitude - requirements are noted for more promptness, friendliness, attention to customers, and faster service, especially for families with children. Additionally, staff appearance (traditional clothing, smile, professionalism) is considered part of the traditional experience.

Appearance and general atmosphere - respondents mentioned the need for more authentic decor, appropriate traditional music (not too loud), as well as maintaining a warm, clean, and welcoming atmosphere.



Figure 19. Quality-price ration of products and services

Prices and value for money - some participants suggested adjusting prices to better reflect product quality, as well as maintaining a balance between cost and perceived value.

CONCLUSIONS

Following this research, we have reached the conclusion that the quality level of public food services directly and significantly influences customer satisfaction. Consumer experience is determined not only by the quality of dishes, but also by a series of complementary factors - cleanliness, staff behavior, service promptness, establishment atmosphere, and value for money. All these elements contribute to forming a positive general perception and creating complete experience for the customer.

The questionnaire results highlighted that most respondents perceive traditional restaurants in Oradea as offering quality services, appreciating authenticity, pleasant ambiance, and employee professionalism. At the same time, the responses also revealed certain directions for improvement - such as menu diversification, use of local ingredients, maintaining traditional specificity, and increasing service promptness. These observations show that the public manifests an increasing interest in authentic experiences but adapted to current market requirements.

We consider that the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction is lasting and profound, as a satisfied customer not only returns, but also recommends the establishment to other people, thus contributing to consolidating the image and long-term success of the

restaurant. Customer loyalty is built through consistency, attention to detail, and an approach based on respect, empathy, and professionalism.

From the analysis performed, it clearly emerges that the public food industry must constantly pay attention to quality, both regarding products and services offered. Authenticity, tradition, but also openness to innovation are elements that can positively differentiate an establishment in an increasingly competitive market.

In conclusion, our research confirms that customer satisfaction is the direct result of the quality of services offered, and maintaining high standards, based on professionalism, respect for customers, and valorization of local traditions, represents the key to sustainable development of public food establishments in Romania.

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