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Assessment of service quality in a la carte restaurants within the mega city of Istanbul: A mystery shoppers' study

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Abstract: In recent years, as consumer income levels have increased, restaurant customers' preferences have changed, and this is especially reflected in ALCR customers with high service quality. The research was based on the hypothesis that ALCR's service quality is high. In this study, tourism professionals and academicians aimed to evaluate the product and service quality offered by restaurants — a service sector that aims to provide high-level service — using the secret shopper (SS) method. In the research, 311 restaurant establishments serving in Istanbul, a mega tourism city, were evaluated using the SS method. Since the SS method is an observational technique, the research took a long time (12 months). As a result of the research, it was determined that interaction ($p < 0.001$), physical environment ($p < 0.001$), management ($p < 0.001$) and output ($p < 0.001$) values increased in all restaurant establishments. It was determined that the highest increase was in FDR businesses ($p < 0.001$). The SS method is commonly used in different service sectors but not in the restaurant industry, and this study applied it here for the first time. The study concludes that inspecting restaurants using SS would increase the quality of the

businesses and recommends that tourism professionals apply this method.

Keywords: Tourism, Gastronomy, A la Carte Restaurant, Service Quality, Secret Shopper.

1 Introduction

Consumers seek physical and psychological satisfaction, making businesses struggle to satisfy and influence complex consumer behaviour (Castro et al., 2019). Service quality is very important for tourism businesses, and restaurant customers are particularly concerned about having a high-quality experience. If the quality of service provided is substandard, it leads to a loss of customers and reduced customer intention to recommend, which in turn leads to lower sales, loss of reputation, and reduced customer loyalty (Sherman, 2019). For this reason, leading tourism businesses, like restaurants, continuously improve and train their employees to enhance service quality, which in turn positively affects perceived value and trust levels (Katlav, 2022).

The existence of businesses in the tourism industry and restaurant sector, where competition is intense, depends on their ability to determine the demands and needs of tourists and produce the most appropriate services for these demands and needs (Aymankuy & Ceylan, 2013). Many aspects of service-quality perception in restaurant businesses have been discussed in the literature. The study suggests that restaurant businesses should be evaluated specifically, rather than in general studies. This study, tailored to the restaurant business structure, provides a comprehensive evaluation of both service quality and customer perception. The study will propose strategies to enhance service quality in the restaurant business structure.

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Previous similar studies have been conducted in theme concept restaurants (TCR) (Nawawi *et al.*, 2018), ethnic restaurants (Cevizkaya, 2015), fast food restaurants (FFR) (Wu & Mohi, 2015), and fine-dining restaurants (FDR) (Tuncer *et al.*, 2021), but not in a la carte restaurants (ALCR) which have high quality standards (Mil & Tezel, 2019). This study aims to improve ALCR service quality in the tourism sector by providing recommendations and addressing the quality measurement gap.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Quality concept

Although the definition of quality varies across scientific fields and sectors, there are a few prominent definitions. Crosby (1979) defined quality as suitability for requirements, while Juran (1992) defined it as suitability for use. On the other hand, Deming defined good quality as a predictable degree of consistency and reliability, with a quality standard appropriate to the customer (Petersen, 1999). Quality has also been defined as the degree to which performance meets expectations (Chandrupatla, 2009). The American Society for Quality (2020) defines it as the degree to which goods and services meet customers' needs and satisfy them.

Quality means different things to different people and is related to processes or results (Harvey & Green, 2006). As a concept, quality can be characterized as a philosophy of life; a management style; a process that aims to meet the needs of its citizens to make them happy; a way to achieve efficiency with an understanding that increases competitiveness within the sector and prevents waste; a system that unites the parties; and a continuous improvement process (Akgül, 1999).

2.2 Quality in restaurant business

Quality in the service sector has a very broad meaning (Mendocilla *et al.*, 2021). Service quality significantly enhances customer satisfaction, yet its quantifiable benefits are challenging to measure due to inadequate resource allocation (Djofack & Camacho, 2017). Modern customers are sophisticated, affluent, educated, and time-poor, requiring restaurants to focus beyond just price, products, service offerings, for practical benefits.

For many restaurant customers, dining out is more than just eating outside the home (Ryu & Han, 2011).

When restaurant customers decide to dine out, they are affected by the physical environment of the restaurant as much as the food and service (Hyun & Kang, 2014). Restaurants that have developed in today's conditions can show differences in their physical attributes as well as the service they offer (Yurtseven & Yildirim, 2014).

Restaurateurs and other stakeholders argue that atmosphere is important in creating a successful restaurant concept (Ryu, 2005). The concept of restaurant atmosphere was first defined by Kotler (1973) as the design of the space created by appealing to certain emotions that increase the likelihood of purchase in the consumer. The atmosphere of a business significantly influences consumer decisions, making it crucial to create a memorable dining experience for customers (Ryu & Han, 2011).

Restaurants are places where people experience excitement, pleasure, and well-being while also appealing their hunger (Othman & Goodarzirad, 2013). How people feel in a restaurant is as important as good food (Quinn, 1981), as they seek a dining experience different from that in their homes (Ryu, 2005). Though out-of-home food consumption has increased, especially in urban settings, restaurant businesses have not been sufficiently researched. Customers prioritise not only the taste and quality of their food, but also the facilities and service features offered by the restaurant. This study focusses on the facilities and features offered by the restaurants and the quality values that restaurant customers give them.

2.3 Research hypotheses

Research has previously been conducted on ALCR (Axnestasya *et al.*, 2023; Maretha & Juliana, 2023; Putri *et al.*, 2024) and restaurant quality evaluations (Jun *et al.*, 2017; Pezenka & Weismayer, 2020). However, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding quality assessments of ALCR businesses. In addition, although the SS method has been used to evaluate businesses in many service sectors, there have been no such studies in the tourism sector.

2.3.1 ALCR customer's perception of interaction quality (IQ)

In recent years, restaurant businesses have made significant progress in service quality. Nowadays, in addition to meeting the physical and social needs of consumers, restaurants need to address perceived value and custo-

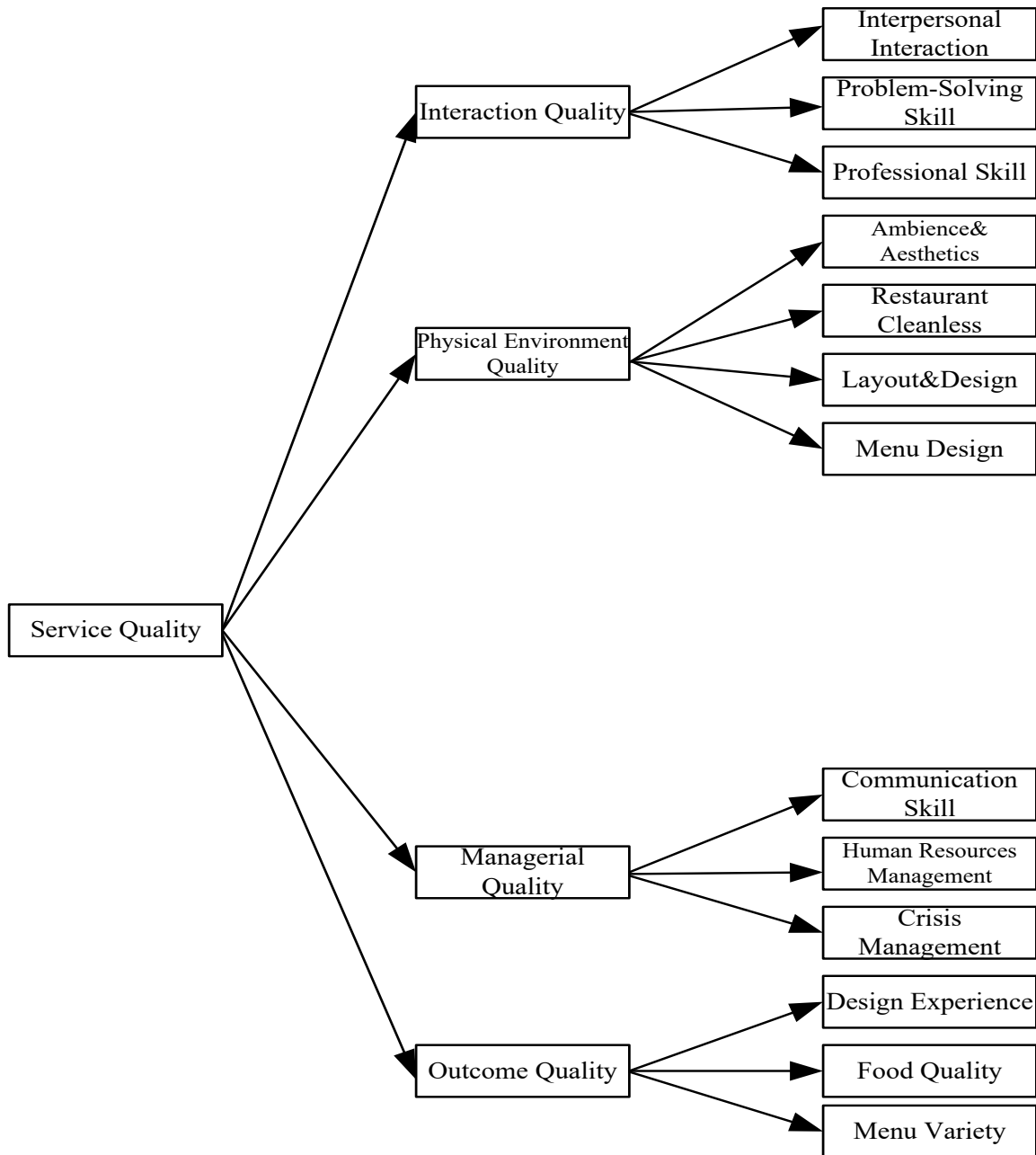


Figure 1: Map of the northern region of Portugal.

mer satisfaction in order to retain existing customers and gain new ones in a competitive market with increasing service quality expectations (Tuncer et al., 2021). The service quality of restaurants can positively affect customer satisfaction, behavioural intention, and perceived value (Han & Hyun, 2017). In this study, the following hypothesis on restaurant interaction quality (IQ) is proposed:

H_1 : ALCR customers' perception of IQ is affected by independent variables.

2.3.2 ALCR customers' perception of physical environment quality

Restaurant businesses must prioritize customer demands and expectations to improve their physical environmental conditions and maintain their existence (Önçel, 2020). In the restaurant businesses, lighting, environmental temperature, staff uniforms, cleaning, table layout, music, service equipment, and menus are all meaningful factors in evaluating the quality of the physical environment (Aydoğdu,

2022). Wu and Mohi (2015) examined restaurants' physical environmental quality in five sub-dimensions: design, ambiance and aesthetics, dining equipment, restaurant cleanliness, menu design, and layout. Customers consciously or subconsciously perceive the physical environment in restaurant establishments positively or negatively. The perception of the physical environment is effective in evaluating the restaurant business (Özdoğan, 2016). In this study, the following hypothesis was developed to measure restaurant physical environment quality (PEQ):

H₂: ALCR customers' perception of PEQ varies depending on the type of establishment.

2.3.3 ALCR customers' perception of management quality

The restaurant industry is experiencing a steady rise in new establishments, sales, and staffing levels, which is expected to persist into the future (Statista, 2019). The restaurant industry is influenced by factors like businesses size, seasonality, variable demand, high labour costs, turnover, and the intensity of competition (Kukanja & Planinc, 2018). Restaurant managers must consistently re-evaluate their offerings to meet guests' expectations, individual demands, and needs, thereby ensuring the business's financial success (Fang & Hsu, 2014). In this study, the following hypothesis was developed to measure customers' perceptions of restaurant management quality (MQ):

H₃: ALCR customers' perception of MQ varies depending on the type of business.

2.3.4 ALCR customers' perception of output quality

Customer satisfaction is the primary goal of ensuring quality in restaurant businesses (Göde, 2015). For this reason, businesses should focus on customer and customer satisfaction in order to compete in the sector (Aydoğdu, 2022). Customers consistently desire quality service from restaurant businesses, which in turn positively impacts the business's image (Ryu *et al.*, 2012). In this study, the following hypothesis was developed to measure restaurant customer perceptions of output quality (OQ):

H₄: ALCR customers' OQ perception varies depending on the type of business.

2.4 Proposed factor structure for ALCRs

Through an extensive literature review, a model for ALCR was developed, based on a research model Tuncer

et al. (2021) originally developed to measure FDR service quality (Figure 1).

The proposed multi-dimensional and hierarchical service quality model was adapted for ALCR enterprises by adding the "Manager Quality" sub-dimension to Tuncer's model.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research model

This study aims to evaluate the product and service quality offered by businesses in the restaurant sector — a service sector aiming to provide high-level service — through observation by tourism professionals and academicians using the SS method. Since the characteristics of businesses in the service sector differ, service measurement models also vary (Tuncer *et al.*, 2021). ALCR businesses are expected to be of high quality, and for this reason, ALCR businesses serving in mega-city Istanbul were chosen as this study's sample group.

Although studies have been conducted to evaluate various dimensions of restaurant service quality, the first scale developed by Stevens *et al.* (1995) is DINESERV. The DINESERV model is proposed as a reliable, relatively simple tool for determining how consumers view a restaurant's quality — but it is suitable for consumer use only. This study instead takes the opinions of professionals and academics in the field of tourism, rather than those of consumers, as the basis of its research. For these reasons, the DINESERV model was not used in the study.

3.2 Participants

This research was conducted in the Turkish tourism sector and utilized the purposeful random sampling method to target ALCR enterprises for in-depth analysis over a long period. This sampling method is used to reduce bias and increase credibility and reliability (Baltacı, 2018).

Mega-city Istanbul is one of the most important centres for tourism in Turkey, with the number of tourists increasing every year. There was an increase in the number of foreign tourists coming to Istanbul in 2024 increased by 14.01% compared to the previous month and 11.68% compared to the previous year (T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2024). Therefore, the diversity of tourism in the city of Istanbul encompasses cultural, health, gastrono-

mical tourism, religious and shopping tourism, to name just a few areas. Businesses serve the tourism sector, offering accommodation, food and beverage services, travel services, entertainment services, and more. All types of restaurant businesses providing food and beverage — local restaurants, traditional restaurants, fast food restaurants, fine-dining restaurants, ethnic restaurants — serve local and foreign tourists coming into the city.

The sample size was determined based on the depth and breadth of data sought from the individuals. According to Shenton (2004), qualitative research based on observation and interviews does not require large sample sizes, because the data obtained repeats itself after a certain stage.

In light of this information, restaurant establishments in Istanbul constitute the sample population of the study. According to the statistics obtained, 587 ALCR establishments serve under the supervision of the Ministry of Tourism throughout the city of Istanbul (T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2024). Among these, a total of 311 establishments were deemed sufficient to form the research sample. This number shows that 52.9% of ALCR establishments serving in Istanbul province have been reached. In the study, the limited population ($n < 10,000$) formula, one of the formulas developed for qualitative research, was used to calculate the number of samples. The formula used is given below (Ural & Kılıç, 2005):

$$n = \frac{N.P.Q.Z_{\alpha}^2}{(N-1).H^2 + Z_{\alpha}^2.P.Q}$$

n: Sample size

N: Universe size

α : Standard deviation value

H: Standard error value

Z: The theoretical value corresponding to a certain significance level (error probability value) “ α ” or confidence level “ $1-\alpha$ ”

P: Rate of observation of an event in the universe

Q: The rate at which an event is not observed in the universe (1-P)

When the formula is applied, the number of samples was determined as 230 for a population size of 587. In the research, with the number of samples reached ($n = 311$), a number greater than that recommended in the formula ($n = 230$) was reached. Therefore, when the table of sample sizes versus population sizes for qualitative studies is examined using a population size between 550

and 600, the recommended sample size is between 226 and 234 (Ural & Kılıç, 2005). When the number of samples reached 311, it was determined that more samples than the recommended value range ($n = 226-234$) were reached, and that a sufficient number of samples for the research had been obtained.

3.3 Instruments

The observation technique — one of the qualitative research methods — was used in the study. An observation form, consisting of four dimensions and 13 sub-dimensions measuring these dimensions, was prepared as a result of a comprehensive literature review, scales used in previous similar studies, propositions, and expert opinions. The observation form was re-evaluated and revised by 10 senior managers of 10 tourism enterprises, 10 tourism professionals, and 10 tourism academicians. After finalising the product and service quality criteria that customers expect from restaurant businesses, the researchers piloted the form in 30 restaurants. As a result of the pilot application, it was determined that the Cronbach’s alpha values of the product and service quality criteria were high (> 0.600). High Cronbach’s alpha values indicate reliability in the product and service quality criteria (Kilic, 2016).

3.4 Secret shopper assessment (SSA)

In the secret shopper assessment (SSA), as in previous studies, each SS was informed and trained about the background, objectives, data collection, and study results before the observation. According to the quality criteria, which were tested for validity and reliability, the restaurant establishments were observed using the SSA method between February 1, 2022, and February 1, 2023. The evaluation periods were the same for all restaurant establishments and took place between 18:00-23:00 on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, which are considered the busiest periods for restaurants.

The process of observing and inspecting each restaurant establishment with SSA was repeated once every four months. Each inspection was conducted by a different tourism professional or academic. After the evaluation, the SSA report was given to the business, and the arrangements made in the next SSA process were evaluated.

3.5 Data analysis

Data analysis was performed using the SPSS 15.0 statistical package. Data were presented as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Normal distribution was tested using Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. The significance levels of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were found to be $p < 0.05$, and it was concluded that there was no normal distribution. Skewness and kurtosis values were found not to be between +1.5 and -1.5, and it was thus concluded that the data were not normally distributed (Tabachnick *et al.*, 2013). Non-parametric tests were used in the statistical evaluation of the data. The Kruskal Walls H test was used to measure quality improvement as a result of secret shopper evaluations, and the Friedman test was used for comparisons following improvements (Büyüköztürk, 2004).

4 Results

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 1 displays the characteristics of the restaurants included in the sample.

Out of the 311 establishments, 112 (36.0%) were categorized as TR, 106 (34.1%) were classified as LR, and 93

(29.9%) were FDR. Most of the participating restaurants (52.4%) were chain restaurants managed by department heads and business managers (42.8%). Additionally, 35.0% of the businesses had between two and 10 branches, 35.4% had been in the sector for 10 to 14 years, and 40.8% employed between 10 and 49 staff.

Table 2 presents the operational information of the sampled restaurant establishments. The majority of the restaurants used the ALC service method only for dinner (36.3%). 49.8% of local guests preferred the establishments; 69.8% of local guests preferred Turkish cuisine, compared with 66.6% of the foreign guests.

4.2 Measurement model

Considering that the measurement tools were originally developed in English and later translated into Turkish, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is required. The model proposed in the research was evaluated using AMOS. The factor loadings of the items according to the EFA results are given in Table 3.

According to the EFA results (Table 3), items with insufficient factor loadings and items that loaded onto multiple factors were removed and excluded from the final measurement model. After the EFA, the surviving items were sent to CFA for a more rigorous psychometric evaluation to empirically determine whether the research variables were differentiated or not. After CFA, items with

Table 1: Business information

Business Information	Options	n	%	Business Information	Options	n	%
Restaurant Type	FDR	93	29.9	Management style (By...)	The boss(es)	123	39.5
	TR	112	36.0		Department heads	133	42.8
	LR	106	34.1		Professional CEO	55	17.7
Ownership Structure	Chain	163	52.4	Number of Branches	No	101	32.5
	Independent	148	47.6		2-10	109	35.0
Year of Service	< 1	19	6.1		11-25	66	21.2
	1-4	62	19.9		> 26	35	11.2
	5-9	71	22.8	Number of Personnel (people)	< 10	18	5.8
	10-14	110	35.4		10-49	127	40.8
	15-19	34	10.9		50-99	76	24.4
	> 20	15	4.8		100-149	58	18.6
					150-199	25	8.0
					> 200	7	2.3

Table 2: Business Operation information

Business Operations	Options	FDR		TR		LR		TOTAL	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
A'la carte service meal	Just dinner	66	71.0	32	28.6	15	14.2	113	36.3
	Lunch & Dinner	22	23.6	71	63.4	5	4.7	98	31.5
	All of them	5	5.4	9	8.0	86	81.1	100	32.2
Guest profile	Local guests	10	10.8	73	65.2	72	67.9	155	49.8
	Foreign guests	24	25.8	12	10.7	2	1.9	38	12.3
	Both of them	59	63.4	27	24.1	32	30.2	118	37.9
Culinary preferences of foreign guests	Turkish cuisine	28	30.1	73	65.2	106	100.0	207	66.6
	Foreign cuisines	18	19.3	11	9.8	0	0.0	29	9.3
	Both of them	47	50.6	28	25.0	0	0.0	75	24.1
The culinary preference of local guests	Turkish cuisine	38	40.9	73	65.2	106	100.0	217	69.8
	Foreign cuisines	20	21.5	10	8.9	0	0.0	30	9.6
	Both of them	35	37.6	29	25.9	0	0.0	64	20.6
TOTAL		93	29.9	112	36.0	106	34.1	311	100.0

Table 3: Measurment Model

Construct	EFA	EV	<i>t-values</i>	<i>p</i>	CA	AVE
IQ		56.7			.890	.672
IQ1	.771		<i>fix</i>	***		
IQ2	.758		43,529	***		
IQ3	.730		30,644	***		
PEQ		57.9			.930	.710
PEQ1	.901		<i>fix</i>	***		
PEQ2	.682		28,982	***		
PEQ3	a		29,360	***		
PEQ4	.909		26,744	***		
MQ		59.1			.920	.719
MQ1	.945		29,930	***		
MQ2	a		<i>fix</i>	***		
MQ3	b		34,179	***		
MQ4	.945		25,742	***		
OQ		74.4			.950	.725
OQ1	.937		21,363	***		
OQ2	a		<i>fix</i>	***		
OQ3	.931		21,528	***		

Notes: ***p<0.001

EV = Explained Variance; CA = Cronbach Alpha; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

a Dropped during EFA

b Dropped during CFA

insufficient factor loadings were removed. The results indicate that the proposed main four-factor structure, and the 13 substructures associated with these factors, provided very good outcomes ($\chi^2 = 575.221$, $df = 192$, $\chi^2/df = 2.996$, root mean square error of approximation = 0.066, comparative fit index = 0.981, Tucker-Lewis index = 0.988, and incremental fit index = 0.981).

4.3 Hypothesis testing

Table 3 presents the mean and standard deviation values of the IQ of the sampled restaurant establishments related to H_1 , and Table 4 presents a statistical evaluation of the IQ of the sampled restaurant establishments. H_1 argues that the perceived quality of different establishment types affects restaurant customers' perception of IQ.

It was determined that the FDR IQ values were lower (2.47 ± 1.25), but in the last control, the FDR value remained high (4.57 ± 1.30) while decreasing in the other restaurants (Table 4). The results show that establishment type affects customer perception of IQ. Thus, H_1 is supported.

Based on the Kruskal Walls H test, it was found that the IQ value increased for all restaurants during the secret shopper evaluation process ($p < 0.001$). Based on the Friedman test, it was found that quality persistence was achieved ($p < 0.001$) (Table 4).

Table 5 presents the mean and standard deviation values, as well as a statistical evaluation, of the physical environmental quality of the sampled restaurant establishments, in relation to H_2 .

H_2 argues that the perceived quality level of establishment types affects restaurant customers' perception of physical environmental quality. FDR physical environmental quality values were found to be higher (3.74

± 1.23), and the FDR value remained high (4.30 ± 0.96) while it decreased in other restaurants in the last control. These results show that the type of establishment affects customer perception of physical environmental quality. Thus, H_2 is supported.

It was found that the PEQ value increased for all restaurant establishments during the secret shopper evaluation process according to the Kruskal Walls-H test ($p < 0.001$), and the Friedman test showed that quality retention was achieved ($p < 0.001$) (Table 5).

Table 6 presents the mean and standard deviation values of the MQ of the sampled restaurants and the statistical evaluation of the MQ of the sampled restaurants in relation to H_3 .

H_3 argues that the quality level of a given type of establishment affects the restaurant customers' perceptions of management quality. TR MQ values were higher (3.74 ± 1.14), and the FDR value remained high (4.27 ± 0.97) while it decreased in other restaurants in the last control. The results show that customer perception of MQ is affected by business types. Thus, H_3 is supported.

Based on the Kruskal Walls H test, it was found that the MQ value increased for all restaurant establishments during the secret shopping process ($p < 0.001$), and quality retention was achieved ($p < 0.001$) according to the Friedman test (Table 6).

Table 7 presents the mean and standard deviation values of the OQ of the sampled restaurants, as well as the statistical evaluation of the OQ of the sampled restaurants, in relation to H_4 . H_4 argues that the perceived level of quality of different types of establishments affects the restaurant customer's perception of OQ.

It was determined that the FDR OQ values were higher (4.44 ± 0.82), and the FDR value remained high (4.69 ± 0.82) while it decreased in other restaurants at the last

Table 4: Interaction Quality (IQ) Assessment

Management Quality		Control		
		1	2	3
		M $\pm$ SD	M $\pm$ SD	M $\pm$ SD
FDR		2.47 $\pm$ 1.25	3.89 $\pm$ 1.15	4.57 $\pm$ 1.30
TR		2.83 $\pm$ 1.15	3.73 $\pm$ 1.14	3.49 $\pm$ 1.15
LR		2.55 $\pm$ 1.10	3.45 $\pm$ 1.05	3.10 $\pm$ 1.11
Kruskal Walls H	X ²	21.303	33.661	32.175
	p	0.000	0.000	0.000
Friedman	X ²		979.035	
	p		0.000	

Table 5: Physical Environment Assessment

Management Quality		Control		
		1 M±SD	2 M±SD	3 M±SD
FDR		3.74±1.23	4.37±0.92	4.30±0.96
TR		2.82±1.20	3.66±1.17	3.42±1.18
LR		2.34±1.22	2.91±1.31	2.58±1.27
Kruskal Walls H	X ²	221.921	259.730	336.944
	p	0.000	0.000	0.000
Friedman	X ²	793.741		
	p	0.000		

Table 6: Management Quality (IQ) Assessment

Management Quality		Control		
		1 M±SD	2 M±SD	3 M±SD
FDR		3.74±1.14	4.39±0.93	4.27±0.97
TR		2.59±1.13	3.58±1.10	3.28±1.05
LR		2.45±1.12	3.31±1.14	2.72±1.16
Kruskal Walls H	X ²	180.395	156.274	244.322
	p	0.000	0.000	0.000
Friedman	X ²	810.226		
	p	0.000		

control. These results show that customer perception of OQ is affected by the type of business. Thus, H4 is supported. The Kruskal Walls-H test revealed that the OQ value increased for all restaurant establishments during the secret shopping process ($p < 0.001$), and the Friedman test demonstrated that quality persistence was achieved ($p < 0.001$).

5 Discussion

Service quality is an important factor in ensuring guest satisfaction in the restaurant business, and it is often not easy to evaluate service quality because it depends on the

delivered product and the service itself (Mendocilla et al., 2021). Service quality is also multidimensional, consisting of both tangible and intangible elements (Tuncer et al., 2021). To date, various studies have been conducted to measure restaurant service quality in general. However, since restaurants provide services in specific areas today, it is necessary to evaluate the service quality based on the service area of the restaurant. Specific research on this issue has been conducted on QSRs (Singh & Sarangal, 2021), FFRs (Wu & Mohi, 2015), buffet restaurants (Luong & Hussey, 2022), steakhouse restaurants (Millenia & Sukma, 2022), green restaurants (Park et al., 2020), and FDRs (Hwang & Ok, 2013), but there is not enough research for ALCR. This paper will help fill this gap in the literature.

Table 7: Output Quality Assessment

Output Quality		Control		
		1 M±SD	2 M±SD	3 M±SD
FDR		4.44±0.82	4.72±0.47	4.69±0.55
TR		2.60±1.08	3.27±1.02	3.41±1.20
LR		2.09±1.43	2.73±1.32	2.64±1.38
Kruskal Walls H	X ²	388.656	391.208	343.686
	p	0.000	0.000	0.000
Friedman	X ²	548.971		
	p	0.000		

This study has put forward a multidimensional and hierarchical service quality model of ALCR enterprises adapted from the service quality models prepared for FDR. In our article, the SSA method is used to evaluate the service quality offered by ALCR restaurants to their customers. After thoroughly reviewing the existing literature, the study proposes a research model that utilizes scales specifically developed for measuring the quality of restaurant service across four important dimensions. Sumaedi and Yarmen (2015) evaluated fast food restaurants in Islamic countries in eight dimensions; Malik *et al.* (2013) evaluated successful restaurants in Pakistan in five dimensions; Saglik *et al.* (2014) evaluated university cafeterias in the city of Erzurum in Turkey in three dimensions; Rahman *et al.* (2012) evaluated restaurants in Bangladesh in three dimensions; Gagić *et al.* (2013) evaluated quality in four dimensions in Serbia; Surapranata and Iskandar (2013) evaluated it in five dimensions in an a la carte restaurant in Indonesia; and Almohaimmeed (2017) evaluated it in eleven dimensions in Saudi Arabian restaurants. In their study in Malaysia, Garg and Kumar (2017) found that different quality factors play an important role in ensuring customer satisfaction in restaurant businesses.

The primary quality dimension in our study is IQ. Saleh and Ryan (1991), who emphasise that restaurant businesses should operate their restaurants from a customer-oriented perspective rather than an operator-oriented perspective, define service quality as a vital strategy for the success of a restaurant business. The appropriate combination of tangible and intangible dimensions of restaurant service can affect the customers' perception of its quality. This results in customer satisfaction and

positive behavioural intentions in restaurant businesses (Ryu & Han, 2011).

Our findings support the importance of differentiating the IQ perception of ALCR customers according to the type of restaurant (H1). Magyaródi and Oláh (2017) emphasize that the quality of interaction provides clues as to the overall quality of the restaurant and its food. Previous similar studies have provided findings supporting this conclusion. Saad Andaleeb and Conway (2006) suggest that interaction — an element of service quality in full-service restaurants — results in greater customer satisfaction than food quality or physical environment. Chow *et al.* (2017)'s findings emphasize that IQ can be affected by different factors. This result requires us to comment that it is necessary to investigate the IQ variable in a different sample group in order for restaurant quality systems to achieve the desired success.

In our study, the secondary quality dimension is “physical environment quality.” Physical environment quality refers to the effectiveness of service delivery from providers to customers, but it encompasses more than just physical aspects of the service (Brady & Cronin, 2001). Variables such as physical quality (Ryu *et al.*, 2012), sanitation (Lee *et al.*, 2016), and facility comfort (Hwang & Ok, 2013) have been used in studies on restaurant management. The findings of our study suggest that there is a significant difference in the perception of PEQ among ALCR customers depending on the type of establishment (H2).

The tertiary quality dimension in our study is “management quality.” As a relatively new research area, restaurant management quality requires frequent and critical academic monitoring. Only good knowledge management of guest expectations can result in more rea-

listic manager perceptions of actual and desired quality (Kukanja & Planinc, 2018). Several studies have examined MQ and managers' restaurant quality recommendations (Briggs et al., 2007). The findings of our study suggest that there is a significant difference in ALCR customers' perception of MQ depending on the type of restaurant (H_3).

The fourth quality dimension in our study is "output quality." Sulek and Hensley (2004) investigated food quality, atmosphere, and restaurant waiting time and concluded that food quality is most important. Kala (2020) examined service quality in different dimensions in his study on touristic restaurant management and drew attention to the food and beverage dimension. A categorized service quality model has also been presented in which the food dimension is more important (Jaafar, 2010). Our study suggests that customers' perception of the OQ of ALCR restaurants varies significantly depending on the type of restaurant (H_4).

The study highlights the significance of quality perception in restaurants and builds upon the theoretical and practical literature on quality in ALCRs, which represent a crucial part of the restaurant sector.

6 Conclusions

The results of our study show that customers' perception of IQ, PEQ, MQ, and OQ vary significantly depending on the type of restaurant. Our study has also provided important practical implications. The most important result in this regard is the statistically significant differences in the service quality of different types of ALSR restaurants. This difference can be attributed to the different demographic profiles of customers who prefer ALCR establishments and their different quality expectations.

As in every city, the metropolis of Istanbul is divided into regions with different socio-economic characteristics. The fact that the businesses are spread over these regions, and the different quality expectations of the customers with different levels of buying power living in these regions, support the differences in the service quality found in the study. This study shows that the service quality expectations of customers vary depending on the socio-economic and socio-demographic structure of the region where the restaurants are located. Aydoğdu (2022) and Özdoğan (2016) also support this result.

Clearly, the difference in service quality across types of businesses is also related to the management style. As long as the management style of restaurant businesses is that of professional CEOs, the service quality

increases. Another factor affecting service quality is the ownership structure of an establishment. As a businesses grow — i.e., as it becomes chains with an increasing number of locations — the service quality also increases. This study has shown that service quality will increase with the management style, as well as the size of the businesses.

6.1 Limitations and future research directions

As in many studies on the restaurant sector, this study has various limitations.

The biggest limitation of the study is that it was conducted in Istanbul. Due to constraints such as time, economic, and labour costs, this study cannot be representative of all ALCR restaurant establishments. This goal can be pursued in future research by including ALCR businesses operating in other provinces of the country with a larger team of researchers.

This study — conducted only in restaurants such as FDR, TR, and LR that provide ALS service — cannot represent the restaurant sector. Future studies could be conducted in establishments providing different services (such as fast food, buffet, table d'hôte), and in specific types of restaurants such as ethnic and concept restaurants. This will better reflect the overall population of restaurant establishments.

Although the study reached a significant portion of the FDR businesses offering ALS operating in Istanbul, the rate of businesses reached remained at 29.9%. Considering the higher number of FDRs in holiday-tourism regions of Turkey, such as the Aegean and Mediterranean, if future studies are conducted in these provinces, the proportion of FDR businesses in the study can be increased.

This study was also applied to the chain and non-chain restaurant establishments and disregarded their national and/or international characteristics. Specific results may emerge with the inclusion of these different characteristics in future studies. For example, being national or international may make a difference in the quality characteristics of restaurant businesses. Management and franchising characteristics may also affect the quality criteria.

Within the scope of the study, four quality criteria were measured for ALSR in the model developed based on previous studies (Wu & Mohi, 2015; Tuncer et al., 2021). Future studies can be planned more comprehensively, possibly with an increased number of measured quality criteria.

Another limitation of this study is that only the data collected by tourism professionals through the SSA method was used to determine ALSR quality values. In future studies, the data diversity can be enriched by including the data obtained from restaurant customers.

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Disclosure statement

The authors declared that the research does not have an unethical problem and that they observe the topic of research and publication ethics.

Data availability statement

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding authors upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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