Perception of the tourist about the food and drink service. Case of Cantón El Guabo, and El Oro, Ecuador

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Abstract: The perception of the tourist is directly connected to the quality of service provided by the tourism service providers. Consequently, it also leads to an increase or improvement in the quality life of the population within the sector, and in the same way that the area becomes a potential tourist destination for thousands of national and foreign tourists. This article is aimed to diagnose the degree of satisfaction of the client for the purveyance of food and beverage service in the Bajoalto beach. The methodological tactic in the research, was a survey made in Likert scale that was applied to the economically active population of the province El Oro. The results undoubtedly allowed to recognize the Bajoalto beach, as an attractive recognized destination because every weekend many tourists come looking for a different recreation. In the Bajoalto site the traditional gastronomic restaurants face new establishments that arrive and have a greater quantity and variety of gastronomic products. Therefore, the service and the perception that tourists have about this attraction are considered of great importance for the economy of the sector.

Keywords: Tourist perception, service, tourist establishments, gastronomic products

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INTRODUCTION

The Bajoalto site, categorized as Natural Attraction, of coastal type and beach subtype is located in the Tendales Parish of El Guabo Canton, the same that belongs to the Province of El Oro, with an extension of 1.5 km (Mejía & Rigaud, 2016). Each weekend receives dozens of tourists looking for a different recreation space, in which they can enjoy sun, fun and varied cuisine.

When a permanent flow of tourists to the site is received, the community becomes a point of interest and economic development. Therefore, it is required that food and beverage establishments are in operation and comply with the requirements of the Regulations Tourism Act (2015), as well as the food and beverage Tourism Regulations (2018). Problems that regularly occur in food and beverage establishments begin before and during the service, indicating the first to the attention they receive upon arrival ate the restaurant and the second when the product or service is received.

In Bajoalto, all restaurants have a variation of gastronomic products and these mostly receive national and local tourists, many of whom, reside within the Province of El Oro.

Before analyzing the provision of services, it is reasoned that the service standardizes expectations of the clients, differentiating their culture, beliefs and needs of each client (Restrepo & Estrada, 2006). Therefore, the service must meet the needs of people, as well as requiring the necessary material, technical and financial resources.

Under the previous context, it can also be noted that despite their varied seafood cuisine, there are some establishments that do not satisfactorily comply with the quality of services provided to tourists. The same ones should be focused on the handling of foods to guarantee food security to the user, as mentioned by Correia et al. (2012).

According to this, it is mentioned that in Bajoalto, despite its extensive menus in seafood, some establishments are not fully equipped, so that they are not in conditions to provide a satisfactory service to clients.

Related to this, Ramírez (1999) points out that to provide a quality service to the client, one must first know the needs of clients and the perspective they have about the establishment. By knowing about their preferences, it is possible to distinguish what is the objective and what is sought, in order to provide a good service and that the client feels satisfied. As indicated by Botero & Peña (2006), to achieve client satisfaction, it is necessary that tourism establishments always perform an evaluation, in which they can measure their skills, empathy of employees, safety and offer of gastronomic products. Therefore, the perception of services is linked to tangible elements such as fulfillment of promises, professional attitude and competence.

Vergara et al. (2011) emphasize that every product is a service, has no utility, and its use serves to give satisfaction to the customer. In addition, its production and consumption characteristics configure the tourism sector as a satisfaction management and customer service tool. Therefore, the product-service shares its own characteristics, as well as tangible and intangible elements.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is of descriptive type, and seeks to assess the opinion of tourists about the provision of food and beverage services in the Bajoalto site. For its development, the perception of tourists that visit Bajoalto is considered as an object of study. Likewise, it was determined that the population under study are corresponds to the customers who frequent food and beverage establishments. Therefore, a survey was developed where the objective questions
were established to the study population. In this case are tourists who visit Bajoalto beach. It should be noted that the survey was performed via online and on social networks.

In addition, in the present study, the collection of information was carried out. These are the opinions of tourists about the services offered in the restaurant establishments. Consequently, an analysis of the perceptions of the tourists was carried out and in order to achieve this, the study population has been considered. These are the economically active population of the Province of El Oro, by using the following formula:

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  n = \frac{k^2*p*q*N}{(e^{2*(N-1)})+k^2*p*q}
\]

Where:
p: is the proportion of individuals who have the study characteristic in the population. This data is generally unknown and it is usually assumed that p=q=0.5, which is the safest option.
q: is the proportion of individuals without this characteristic, that is 1-p.
n: is the sample size (number of surveys performed).

RESULTS

Once the data collection was finished, the study of the data was prepared. Such analysis was obtained after 135 surveys, which were applied on a digital platform to the study sample.

The information will be analyzed as follows, with the respective figures:

According to the surveys carried out at Altobajo beach with respect to tourist perception and customer service, it is observed that 69% of the customers think that the attention by the staff has not been cordial and pleasant, preceded of a 32% in the range of good, very good and excellent, according to the service to customers by the staff of the establishments.

According to Martínez (2007) about the fact that the customer is the core, around which the policy of any company should always be involved. That is why the perception of the same is of the utmost important, because it is based on the good treatment of the staff to the customer. Thus, it is highlighted that customers have high expectancies of the place and keep in mind that the restaurant establishments provide quality services. In addition, listening, understanding, being predisposed to offer solutions, respect, help, appreciate and remember the customer with some of the attitudes for the provision of services.

Customer expectations evaluate the performance of employees of the tourism establishment, as mentioned by Peralta (2006). The user can interpret and categorize the establishment and thereby, determines customer satisfaction between customer expectations and service offered by the companies. It also depends on the fact that the product offered has quality and in addition, the service must comply all aspects related to the design of products and services, as well as the manufacturing process and/or their provision.
Therefore, Duque (2005) focuses on the provision of service as a key tool of efficiency and effectiveness within the expectation of customers. The quality of the process measures the expectations and needs of the customer in the process of providing services.

**Figure 2: Tourist perception: presentation of the gastronomic product**

![Figure 2](image)

From the exposed results, it can be taken into account that 44% of the customers rate the gastronomic product was satisfactory, as the service offered. On the other hand, 56% are not satisfied with the way in which the dish was presented in restaurants and bars of the Bajoalto site.

These considerations are important when providing a restaurant service, since the decoration of the dish revitalizes and shapes what the place represents. For this reason, Dávila (2013) mentions that the presentation of the dish contains creativeness, visualization, drawing and color, because that way the dish will return to another color and texture.

It is emphasized that the first impression is what counts in the service to customer. A tourist who gets a good impression of the business will return and recommend to friends, colleagues and family. Of course, the taste of the food is indispensable to get satisfied customers, but if they fail to comply with the assembly and presentation, or if the environment is not adequate, they may not receive the same reaction.

That is why the presentation of the dish in a restaurant is very important. Certainly, the food is directly related to emotional aspects and a well-presented dish causes the attraction of the customer, despite the nutrients of the dish. The plating is what surprises the tourist when eating his food.

The main idea of the appetizer is to present in a different way several ingredients that can be usually found on the tables (Montenegro, 2016). This should also be considered that the dish must have many colors, combining diverse forms methods of cooking foods, in addition to texture and flavors. This causes that diners can taste a unique experience in their food.

**Figure 3: Tourist perception: waiting time**

![Figure 3](image)

Of the total customers, 53% who belong to a range of good-regular indicated they are not satisfied with the time spent by the food and beverage establishment of the site when serving the food to the table of customers. Likewise, 42% said that the waiting time was excellent and comfortable.

"In restaurants, the waiting time is responsible for adjusting the excess of demand to balance it with the offer, rationing consumers instead of increasing prices” (Schmal & Olave, 2014).

It should be mentioned that as Bajoalto site uses gastronomic products based on seafood, it is difficult to define the waiting time, but determining a global analysis, it could be mentioned that a span of 20 minutes is very convenient in order to serve the product well prepared to the customer. Therefore, it can be forgotten that the dish must be well served and mounted.
In addition, when there is an absence of processes within the gastronomic production, this is inadequately used. That is why Vera (2016) highlights that employees and waiters of a restaurant are an integral part of its success. The food should be to the taste of the palate, the restaurant should be to the palate and the restaurant should be cozy. Therefore, it is important to hire employees who know how to serve the table quickly and politely. Managers should learn to train the employees of a restaurant in order to ensure the success of the industry. To this, it can be emphasized that for restaurants to provide a better service to the customer, the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can be implemented in the customer service process. Thus, the reception of orders and changes of menus will be facilitated and a more personalized service and with fewer errors will be provided. This allows tourists to carry a better expectation of the service provided.

**Figure 4: Tourist perception: Equipment and facilities**

From the figure it could be considered that 89% disagree with equipment of the facilities, because according to their criterion, they lack to meet the expectations of the customers, whereas 11% considered the facilities of the restaurants as very good and excellent. These perceptions are quantified based on the difference for the consumer between what was expected and perceived (Betancourt et al., 2014).

According to the background, the establishment must be located far from sources of contamination and even it is observed that there is no planning and zoning. The establishment must be for an exclusive use and with independent access. The distribution of the environments (kitchen, warehouse, salon and bathroom). There must be a regulation about cleaning facilities and equipment (Caldas, 2014) and they must be in the planning of the company. This is a key factor that intervenes the quality of the product.

Within each environment of the establishment, there should be no objects outside it. To this, it is important to note what Barrios (2013) said about having a minimum level of maintenance personnel that is consistent with the optimization of service to customers, without compromising the security of the human resource in the company. All this is emphasized in order to provide a high quality and satisfactory service for customers.

**Figure 5: Tourist perception: security**

According to the figure, 88% of the respondents consider that the security inside the establishments is in a range from awful to good, because they determine that there are some establishments that are not very safe for tourists. In the background is the 12% that interprets that there is a level from excellent and very good level of confidence in the safety of food and beverage establishments. This is due to the fact that there are informal vendors who sell food in beach areas. Such vendors who do not maintain hygiene norms or culinary processes for the conservation of those products. Having said that, it should be highlighted what was said by the Sectoral Commission of the Navarro Institute of Occupational Health (2007), that the security of an establishment is indispensable for visitors, since the reputation of an establishment depends on them. It can also be mentioned that the security is not only focused on preventing theft or assault, but also on the safety of food and a good food manipulation of a restaurant. This is the key to many restaurants, emphasizing hygiene and safety aspects (Ticliahuanca, 2017).
In addition, it should be mentioned that before building the establishment, risks must be verified, as well as providing training on risks that can affect workers, and establish the respective procedures for emergency cases.

**Figure 6: Offer of gastronomic products**

Figure 6 determines that the percentage of 67% corresponds what tourists mentioned that bars and restaurants of the Bajoalto site lack a varied menu, and 33% exposed that it does.

The menu is the main source of tourist attraction, since this structures the establishment. Having a varied menu allows customers to openly select their order for the table.

Similarly, Thompson (2006) mentioned that customer satisfaction is an indispensable requirement to earn a place in the “mind” of customers and therefore, in the target market. When publicizing the varied menu in gastronomic products, the restaurant will be representing its identity and personality on the menu, because in their its objective will also be reflected in the mind of consumers so they can get a good impression of the place and in the same way, it succeeds in its tasks.

**Figure 7: Customer service: Price/quality**

As shown in the chart, regarding the perception of price/quality in gastronomic products and bars, 77% indicates being satisfied with the prices. Mejia & Rigaud, 2016 determined in their research that 25% is willing to spend between $80 and $110, whereas 29% would pay between $111 and $140. The influencing factors are: delivery time, service, environment and hygiene. These are some criteria to be taken into account. The remaining 23% indicates that the values to be paid are accessible.

**Figure 8: Customer service: Recommendation**
The chart shows that 33% is found in conditions to promote the Bajoalto destination through different physical and technological means. On the other hand, the variety of restaurants and bars, and 67% show a degree of disinterest for bad experiences in certain establishments. Related to this, Cruz et al. (2013) point out that in order to achieve customer loyalty towards an establishment, it is necessary to provide security, trust, and meet the expectations of the place, since apart from strategies, methods and administrative tools used by the company to strengthen its image in front of tourists, loyalty is the best strategy. This allows the business to flow independently and be recognized not only for its image, but also appreciated, managing to place it in the mind of the consumer.

Similarly, Vera & Trujillo (2008) state that loyalty and quality are concepts that serve to measure customer satisfaction towards quality service. Although there is an immense relation between the quality of service perceived by a customer, this and loyalty are dimensions related to the degree of satisfaction. This influences the persuasion of the customer regarding a restaurant establishment.

**Figure 9: Customer service: Image of the staff**

The chart established that 66% have taken a bad impression of the restaurant for not following any kind of standard of quality, service, attention, etc. In addition, a considerable group of 34% get carried away for the first visual impression projected by gastronomic establishments, since in these companies the neatness must prevail. Everything must be in place, well located, and the image of the personnel must also be perceived.

“A waiter must know how long a dish demands for its preparation on the kitchen. Especially when food is prepared on orders” (Lora Arduser D.R., 1995). About this, Najul (2011) points out that in order to have a good customer service, the staff must not only wear a uniform correctly, but also being well trained in the workplace and customer service. Thus, this will allow the staff to fully comply with their work, increasing their organizational efficiency. Thus, the company will not only have a good reputation, but will also achieve its goals and objectives. By mentioning the work by Salazar & Cabrera (2016), the Servqual Model is an efficient tool for measuring the image of the staff who work in the company since with its five dimensions. These dimensions are: responsiveness, empathy, security, reliability and tangibility. The quality of service will increase, since this evaluation will allow knowing in what the personnel of the company is failing and this will be capable to provide a solution to that problem.

It should not be forgotten that the fundamental issue to determine the position of the company in the market is the opinion of customers about the service or product received. For this, the company must meet all expectations and needs of customers and thus, a positive opinion towards the establishment will be formed.

Highlighting what Cadena et al. (2016) point out, measuring customer satisfaction seeks two main objectives: evaluate the personnel of the company and the customer satisfaction. In both cases customers are involved. Because if the staff is not completely trained in customer service, a good service will not be provided and satisfaction would be low.

That is why Vásquez et al. (2007) state that customer satisfaction is the key component to give prestige to a tourism establishment, not only of food and beverage, but also in the different sectors. Likewise, this will have a good reception of customers.
Figure 10: Customer service: degree of satisfaction

Figure 10 shows 64% of people dissatisfied with the service it could be deduced that for a customer be loyal to a product or service an added value is required. For the remaining 36% it is likely that a totally satisfied customer becomes loyal, even in the followers of the company and its products. Considering what García (2016) says that the service is important because it constitutes a fundamental part of the organizations. This is due to the fact that currently, customers are increasingly demanding, because they not only seek price and quality. But also, a good service, pleasant good treatment, a quick atmosphere, and a fast service. Therefore, companies should consider to make the user feel pleased with the service offered.

This also indicates that, for a company to provide good service, it must offer a quality product, as well a buyer-company interaction relation. Therefore, according to what stated by Pérez et al. (2012), the degree of customer satisfaction with the reception, taking into account that this implies the different characteristics of the service, such as intangibility, heterogeneity and inseparability from production to consumption of the product. However, it is considered that in order to achieve customer satisfaction, the product offered must be of quality, since this is the one is correlated with satisfaction because it depends on the service provided by a company. The customer experiences the level of satisfaction in relation to the service offered.

In order not to create false expectations to the customer it is necessary that the product offered is defined, as well as the requirements. According to Vargas & Guerra (2010), the expectations of the service reflect both hopes and wishes of customers. Therefore, the provision of high levels of services is the main strategy for success and survival of the company in its competitive environment.

CONCLUSIONS

At the end of the research work and according to surveys carried out to tourists who visit the Bajoalto site, it was determined that the current situation of food and beverage establishments of the area is that some of them are in optimal conditions. However, the expectations are not met by some of them.

Tourists highlight the variety of gastronomic products and the origin of raw materials. The Bajoalto site, by being located in the coastal area makes it a source of marine products, benefiting the restaurant sector in obtaining top quality products. The sector allows observing the territory that provides an attractive tourism place and receives hundreds of tourists.

On the other hand, there is a disagreement on the part of tourists who visit the Bajoalto site, because the service or products they offer in different restaurants or accommodations is not of good quality. This means that the customer refuses to buy these services anymore. On the other hand, the pollution that exists at the place by waste thrown on the beach makes it to have a bad image, causing problems for tourism in the locality.

Many service companies have tried to ensure that their customers receive, in a constant way, first quality services and above all, that the interaction between employee and customer is recurring. Therefore, the service provider must identify the expectations of customers have regarding the quality of those services. Unfortunately, the quality of the services is more difficult to define and assess compared to the quality of the products.

For this reason, it is important that the service provider clearly defines and communicates the needs of customers, since this person is in direct contact with people who acquire the service.
The consumer is the one who decides if the price of a product is correct. When consumers buy a product, the price will be set based on estimates of the value of the product and the market share the company expects to obtain, taking into account the competitors. Product demand is an indicator of how much consumers are willing to pay for a product. Another external factor that influences the pricing decisions is competition process and their possible reactions to the respective measures of the company itself. The company needs to know prices and quality offered by each competitor.

If customers perceive that the price is greater than the value of the product, they will not purchase that product. If consumers perceive that the price is lower than the price of the product, they purchase it, but the vendor loses opportunities for profit.

REFERENCES


