

Frontline Service Staff Behaviors and Customer Satisfaction: A Micro-Level Analysis of Restaurant Service Encounters in Chandigarh

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the impact of frontline service staff behavior on customer satisfaction in restaurants of Chandigarh. The study focuses on the "people" aspect of the food and beverage service-practices framework, in which the customer's attention is captured by the way the staff behaves, communicates, attends to him/her and/or handles the service accuracy. The study employs quantitative, cross sectional design with 435 usable responses from food and beverage outlets in Chandigarh. Frontline service behaviour items were measured on a 5-point likert scale with 22 items and customer satisfaction items had 5 items. Data were analyzed by reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, correlation analysis and multiple regression. Four aspects of frontline service behavior emerge from the analysis: professionalism, personalisation, communication and accuracy. The four dimensions have good reliability and positive correlations with customer satisfaction. The results of the regression model indicate that accuracy is the most powerful predictor of satisfaction, followed by communication, personalisation and professionalism. The variance in customer satisfaction is explained by the overall frontline service behaviours construct (62.0 %). The paper advances the restaurant service research field by combining the general service quality measurement with the specific behaviors that a customer has to face while eating a meal at the restaurant. The results of the research for managers can be translated as a general concept of good service into staff behaviours that can be trained, monitored and improved.

Keywords: Frontline Service Behaviour; Customer Satisfaction; Restaurant Service Encounters; Communication; Personalisation; Service Accuracy; Chandigarh

INTRODUCTION

Restaurants compete not only through food, price and ambience, but also through the quality of human interaction. (Namkung & Jang, 2007) The physical setting influences both customers and employees, but in restaurants the service setting is experienced through people as much as through décor (Bitner, 1992). In a dining situation, the customer meets the service system through frontline employees, greeting at the entrance, a clear explanation of the menu, accurate order-taking, timely service, attention during the meal and proper billing all become part of the customer's judgement of the restaurant (Wall, E. A., & Berry, L. L. (2007). These behaviours may appear small when viewed separately, but together they shape the dining experience. In a similar way, Han and Ryu (2009) and Kim and Moon (2009) found that physical surroundings, ambience and employee conduct jointly affect customer responses in restaurant and service settings. Indian restaurant sector has grown rapidly with urbanisation, changing family

routines, rising disposable income and the wider acceptance of eating out. According to the National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI, 2019), the food services market had expanded considerably before the COVID-19 disruption. later assessment showed how sharply the pandemic affected restaurants, making customer retention and service reliability more important for outlets working in competitive urban markets (NRAI, 2021). In this environment, restaurants cannot rely on food quality alone. They must also manage the service encounter with consistency and care.

Service quality research has long established that customers evaluate both tangible and intangible elements of service. Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988) placed reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles at the centre of perceived service quality. Grönroos (1984) also claimed that perceived quality is not just a matter of what is delivered but also of how it is delivered. This logic was later expanded by Brady and Cronin (2001) who argued that service quality was a multi-level construct. In the context of restaurant studies, Qin and Prybutok (2009), Ryu et al. (2012) and Slack et al. (2021) demonstrated that food quality, physical environment, service quality and perceived value are all related to satisfaction and behavioural intentions in a restaurant. These studies are still relevant, but many studies focus on service quality as a general construct. Such an approach may mask the precise manner in which staff behave when providing service, which is the manner in which the customers actually experience the service. This more focused and practical question is explored in the present study. It queries about how customer service behaviours in front of the customer affect customer satisfaction in restaurant service situations. Bitner et al. (1990) were able to show that positive and negative service experiences can stem from tangible employee behaviors, not abstract service attributes. In the similar study, Winsted (2000) revealed that certain service behaviours are closely related to customer satisfaction. The paper is not designed to supplant service quality models that are more general. Rather it looks at the people dimension in more detail. Service quality is not an intangible concept for customers. They experience if the employee is listening, communicating clearly, serving properly, acting appropriately and addressing each person's unique needs. This behavioural approach can be helpful for restaurant managers as it ties research results back to training and daily supervision.

This behavioural aspect of the environment is even more evident in the post-pandemic era, which is the case for the restaurant. The pandemic crisis has clearly affected food-service practices and expectations, Batat (2021) said. They now look for something more than just courtesy, they look for someone to provide them with hygiene, speed, reassurance and flexibility. The service process has also undergone changes due to digital ordering and delivery systems, and Prentice and Nguyen (2020) observed the integration of technology and employment into customer engagement. But the in-house dining service does rely heavily on the behaviours of staff. A nice and correct human interface can thus be a differentiator for outlets that provide comparable menus and prices. It does not say that the only factor for customer satisfaction is the frontline service behaviour. Food quality and price fairness are still significant and ambience and convenience are still important. Namkung and Jang (2007), Sulek and Hensley (2004) and Konuk (2019) have confirmed that a number of food, atmosphere, value and fairness related factors affect restaurant satisfaction. This study aims to be narrower: to discover how the staff-related aspect of the encounter functions and what behaviours are

more significant in terms of customer satisfaction. Such a focus makes the study useful in practice as it can be turned into staff training and service monitoring.

The study is relevant to Chandigarh city. There are many restaurants and bars in this city with diverse income, age and lifestyle demographics. Out-of-home eating is widespread in both formal and informal restaurants and family dining. Meanwhile, the demands of the customer have increased. In today's era, hospitality customers are more concerned about service as a whole experience and not just one transaction, as stated by Kandampully et al. (2018). People expect to be treated well and efficiently by the staff, but they also look for a friendly, attentive and personally recognising approach. Therefore, a study of the frontline service behaviours in Chandigarh can provide some insights for analogous markets in India, such as cities. Hence, an investigation of the frontline service behaviours in Chandigarh can provide useful insights for similar restaurant markets in Indian cities. The study aims are three fold. First, it has the ability to highlight the key behavioural dimensions underlying frontline service practices. Secondly, it will examine the connection between these dimensions and customer satisfaction. Third, it provides management implications by providing interventions for behaviour to enhance the service delivery in restaurants. This method is similar to the broader service-encounter tradition that has been developed by Bowen and Schneider (1985) and Bitner et al. (1994), but is adapted for observable restaurant staff behaviors in an urban Indian context. The contribution of the paper is to turn the concept of service quality into a smaller number of observable behaviours of staff which can be measured and enhanced.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The concept of customer satisfaction is widely accepted as an evaluative response that occurs when the customer's expectations are matched or exceeded by the actual performance of the product or service (Oliver, 1980, 1997). Factors affecting satisfaction in restaurants include food quality, service quality, atmosphere, and value and emotional experience (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006; Namkung & Jang, 2007; Sulek & Hensley, 2004). These results are corroborated by recent empirical research. Namin (2017) revealed that service quality and perceived value affect satisfaction. Konuk (2019) showed that service quality has an influence on behavioral intentions. The authors of Slack et al. (2020) highlighted that service quality is a key factor in customer loyalty. The service encounter is an important part of this process as it is immediate, interpersonal and can't be divorced from the consumption experience. Whether the food is good or bad, a poor encounter will decrease satisfaction, and the customer's overall impression will be enhanced by thoughtful staff behaviour. Again, satisfied restaurant customers are more likely to return when service quality is also satisfactory (Barber et al., 2011). Now, with the rise of the hospitality scholars, customer satisfaction is regarded as a larger part of the customer experience than just a post-purchase judgement. Customer experience involves cognitive, emotional, sensory and social reactions while providing customer services (Ali et al., 2018; Kandampully et al., 2018). Responding in a restaurant is influenced by food and environment, but also by the employee's behaviour. A customer who feels ignored, misunderstood or rushed may leave with a negative impression even if the core product is acceptable.

Early service-encounter research showed that employees play a boundary-spanning role between the organisation and the customer (Bowen & Schneider, 1985; Bitner et al., 1990, 1994). Frontline employees are expected to represent organisational standards while also responding to customers' immediate needs. This role is demanding because restaurant service is time-bound and visible. Errors, delays or indifferent behaviour are noticed quickly. By contrast, courtesy, competence and responsiveness create confidence and comfort. Alhelalat et al. (2017) specifically showed the relevance of personal and functional restaurant employee service behaviour for customer satisfaction. Recent hospitality research continues to show that employee service quality remains central even when technology and automation become more visible in service delivery (Prentice & Nguyen, 2020; Prentice et al., 2020). At the organisational level, service climate and employee performance research further explains why staff behaviour differs across outlets and why managerial systems matter (Bowen & Schneider, 2014; Liao & Chuang, 2004; Pham Thi Phuong & Ahn, 2021). Service-dominant logic also supports this behavioural focus because value is co-created during interaction rather than delivered only through the product (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). In restaurant encounters, value is produced when employees and customers coordinate the service process. The employee explains, confirms, serves and responds; the customer interprets these actions as signs of competence, respect and care. This co-created nature of the encounter explains why the same food product can generate different satisfaction levels under different service behaviours.

Restaurant service quality has often been examined through compound models that include food, environment and employee service. Studies in different restaurant contexts have found that service quality and customer value affect satisfaction and behavioural intentions (Qin & Prybutok, 2009; Ryu et al., 2012; Slack et al., 2021). More recent work has developed context-specific service-quality measures for quick-service restaurants and has reinforced the need for practical, encounter-level measures (Mendocilla et al., 2021). The present study follows this direction by focusing on frontline service behaviours rather than on the entire restaurant experience. Research on price fairness, perceived value and revisit intentions also confirms that restaurant satisfaction is affected by a mix of service and value judgements (Konuk, 2019).

Communication is one of the most visible staff behaviours in restaurant encounters. It includes explaining the menu, listening carefully, confirming orders, giving information about specialities and informing customers about expected service time. Clear communication reduces uncertainty and mistakes. It also signals attention and respect. In service settings, customers often judge employees not only by what they do but also by how they communicate during the process. Research on frontline communication suggests that interaction quality affects satisfaction because it shapes the customer's perception of competence, warmth and reliability (Winsted, 2000; Muda, 2021). In restaurants, communication becomes especially important when customers seek clarification about ingredients, portion size, waiting time or billing details based the literature the following hypothesis was made:

H1: Service communication positively influences customer satisfaction.

Personalisation refers to the extent to which service employees recognise and respond to individual customer needs. In restaurants, it may include understanding special requests, responding to queries, showing willingness to help, making the customer feel valued and

adapting service to the situation. Personalised behaviour creates relational value beyond the functional delivery of food. Gwinner et al. (2005) noted that employee adaptiveness supports service customisation, while Hennig-Thurau et al. (2002) linked relational benefits with customer outcomes. In hospitality, personal attention is especially important because customers often seek comfort and recognition along with efficient service. When staff members show that they understand customers' specific needs, the service encounter becomes more satisfying, thus the following hypothesis was proposed:

H2: Service personalisation positively influences customer satisfaction.

Professionalism reflects the employee's outward signs of discipline, grooming, courtesy, presentation and confidence. The first impression in a restaurant is created before the meal is even served. Greeting, escorting, dress, grooming and orderly conduct indicate the organisation and service orientation of the outlet. Professional behaviour is closely related to assurance and reliability in service-quality theory (Parasuraman et al., 1988). It also instills trust as customers believe that if the employees are well presented and disciplined, they are more likely to provide reliable service. While satisfaction is not necessarily best judged by professionalism, this is a minimum expectation. Based on this, the hypothesis is as follows:

H3: Service professionalism positively influences customer satisfaction.

Accuracy is the ability to complete service tasks in a correct and orderly manner. This involves serving the food in the correct order, closing rituals properly, ensuring the right tools are used and that the bill is accurate. Accuracy is a critical factor in restaurants, as it is obvious to the customer if orders are incorrect, items are missing, and errors or delays occur when it comes to billing. While accuracy is connected to the reliability dimension of service quality, it is more specific in the context of the restaurant experience. It helps to minimize customer and employee frustration and save time. Several studies have shown that reliable and error-free service contributes to satisfaction and future behavioural intentions (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Ha & Jang, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2018). Thus the following hypothesis is suggested:

H4: Service accuracy positively influences customer satisfaction.

Communication, personalisation, professionalism and accuracy are the behavioural dimensions of frontline restaurant service when combined. These are conceptually connected but not the same dimensions. Communication is about information exchange, personalisation is about individual attention, professionalism is about the display of service and accuracy is about the correctness of the task. These behaviours are expected to enhance customer satisfaction in the service encounter due to their combined effect of making the service encounter easier, more pleasant and more trustworthy (Bitner et al., 1990; Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996; Gremler & Gwinner, 2000; Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Wall & Berry, 2007).

The concept of service quality has been investigated in the past by restaurant and service quality studies, and it is usually treated as a compound effect. This can be helpful to predict satisfaction, but provides limited operational guidance. A manager cannot easily train an employee to "increase service quality" unless that instruction is broken down into observable routines. Behaviour-level analysis therefore has practical value. It links customer satisfaction with actions that can be included in standard operating procedures, service scripts, performance

appraisals and feedback systems (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Bitner et al., 1990; Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996; Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Wall & Berry, 2007). Therefore, as per the literature, the following hypothesis is put forward:

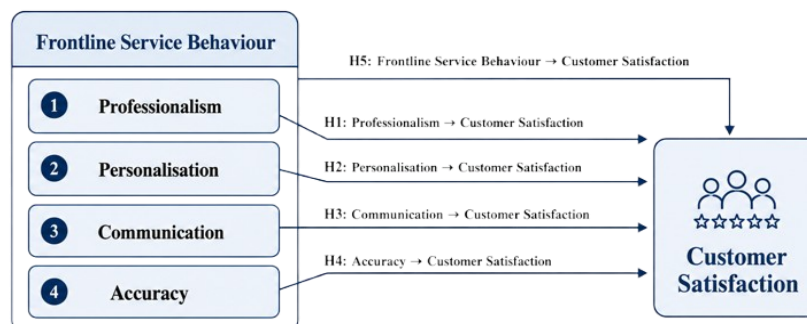
H5: Overall frontline service behaviour positively influences customer satisfaction.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework links frontline service behaviour with customer satisfaction. Frontline service behaviour is treated as a multidimensional construct consisting of professionalism, personalisation, communication and accuracy. Customer satisfaction is treated as the outcome variable. The framework assumes that the customer evaluates the restaurant encounter through both relational and functional cues. Relational cues include courtesy, attention, warmth and helpful communication. unctional cues include accurate order fulfilment, timely service and proper billing.

The framework also recognises that the four behavioural dimensions may overlap in practice. For example, confirming an order is both a communication act and an accuracy mechanism. Similarly, prompt help may reflect personalisation as well as professionalism. The factor structure is therefore interpreted as a practical classification rather than a rigid separation of behaviours. This approach is consistent with the reality of restaurant service, where one employee action can carry both functional and relational meaning. The study therefore examined two levels of influence. At the first level, each behavioural dimension was tested separately as a predictor of customer satisfaction. At the second level, the overall frontline service behaviours construct was tested as a combined predictor. This two-level approach was useful because restaurant managers needed both types of information: which specific behaviours mattered and whether the overall behavioural quality of staff significantly explained customer satisfaction. The contribution of the framework lies in its simplicity. Instead of covering the entire service system, the study isolated the staff-behaviour component of food and beverage service practices and tested its relationship with customer satisfaction. This narrowed focus helped connect the empirical results with visible service routines that restaurants may observe, train and improve.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses



RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study followed a quantitative and cross-sectional research design. The design was appropriate because the objective was to measure customers' perceptions of frontline service behaviours and examine their statistical relationship with customer satisfaction. The unit of analysis was the restaurant customers who had recently experienced the dining service. The study was conducted in food and beverage outlets located in Chandigarh. The outlet selection was based on coverage across different restaurant formats and willingness to participate. Customers were approached after they had completed, or were close to completing, the dining experience so that they could respond to the full service encounter. A purposive sampling approach was used because only customers with direct and recent experience of the service process were relevant to the study. The final usable sample consists of $n=435$ respondents. This sample size was adequate for exploratory factor analysis and multiple regression because it provided a strong respondent-to-item ratio for the 22 frontline service behaviours items and five customer satisfaction items. Throughout the paper, all statistical reporting was based on $N = 435$.

Instrument and measurement

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire adapted from the original research instrument and supported by prior literature on service quality, service encounters and restaurant satisfaction. The frontline service behaviours construct was measured through 22 observable items covering greeting, presentation, helpfulness, promptness, communication, order confirmation, service sequence, billing and closing-service practices. Customer satisfaction was measured through five items capturing overall satisfaction with the dining experience. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement. Higher values indicate more favourable customer perceptions. The scale was suitable because the study focuses on customers' subjective evaluation of service behaviours and satisfaction.

Data screening and ethical considerations

The questionnaire items were retained because they described behaviours that customers can observe without needing internal knowledge of restaurant operations. This was important because customers cannot directly judge back-end processes, staff scheduling or kitchen coordination. They can, however, judge whether the employee greets them, explains the menu, confirms the order, serves correctly and handles the bill accurately. Exploratory factor analysis was applied because the study sought to classify the 22 behavioural items into a smaller set of dimensions. Regression was used because the hypotheses focused on the direct predictive relationship between these dimensions and customer satisfaction. More advanced techniques such as structural equation modelling can be used in future work, but reliability analysis, EFA, correlations and regression provided a clear analytical route for the present research objective (Hair et al., 2019). The data were screened for missing values, invalid responses and response consistency. Cases with incomplete or unusable responses were removed before analysis.

Participation was voluntary and respondents were informed about the academic purpose of the study. No personally identifying information was required for the analysis.

Analytical techniques

The analysis was carried out in five stages. First, descriptive screening was conducted to examine item suitability. Second, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess internal consistency. Third, exploratory factor analysis using principal component extraction and varimax rotation was applied to identify the behavioural dimensions. Fourth, Pearson correlations were used to examine associations among the variables. Fifth, multiple regression was used to test the influence of the four behavioural dimensions on customer satisfaction, followed by a second regression using the overall frontline service behaviours construct.

To avoid ambiguity in model reporting, the regression equations are stated as follows:

$$CS_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PROF_i + \beta_2 PERS_i + \beta_3 COMM_i + \beta_4 ACC_i + \varepsilon_i$$

$$CS_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 FSB_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where CS represents customer satisfaction, PROF represents professionalism, PERS represents personalisation, COMM represents communication, ACC represents accuracy, FSB represents overall frontline service behaviours, and ε is the error term.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	255	58.62
	Female	180	41.38
Marital Status	Married	230	52.87
	Unmarried	205	47.13
Age	25–31 years	150	34.48
	32–38 years	135	31.03
	39–45 years	64	14.71
	46–52 years	51	11.72
	53–59 years	28	6.44
	60 or older	7	1.61
Level of Education	Up to High School	32	7.36
	Bachelor's Degree	256	58.85
	Master's Degree	111	25.52
	Doctorate	36	8.28
Annual Household Income	Less than one lakh	205	47.13
	1–2 lakhs	185	42.53
	2–3 lakhs	32	7.36
	3–4 lakhs	8	1.84
	More than 4 lakhs	5	1.15
Frequency of restaurant visit	Once a week	80	18.39
	Twice a week	85	19.54
	Once a month	147	33.79
	Twice a month	75	17.24
	Never	48	11.03

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of respondents, a total of 435 customers of restaurants were selected for the final sample. There were 255 male respondents and 180 female respondents, with male respondents making up 58.62% of the sample, and female respondents making up 41.38% of the sample. In terms of marital status, 52.87% (n = 230) of the respondents were married, while 47.13% (n = 205) were unmarried. The gender and marital distribution indicates that the sample is predominantly socially active in the city and will be active in dining out activities alone or with family or peer groups. The largest age category was 25–31 years (34.48%, n = 150), followed by 32–38 years (31.03%, n = 135). Respondents aged 39–45 years accounted for 14.71% (n = 64), whereas 11.72% (n = 51) belonged to the 46–52 years category. Respondents aged 53–59 years represented 6.44% (n = 28), while only 1.61% (n = 7) were aged 60 years or above. The age distribution shows that the study is mostly composed of young and middle-aged consumers, the most active part of urban restaurant consumers, and who tend to be more used to organized restaurant experiences. In terms of educational qualification, most of the respondents had a Bachelor's degree (58.85%, n = 256) while 25.52%, n = 111 had a Master's degree. Those with Doctorate education level accounted for 8.28% (n = 36) and 7.36% (n = 32) had education level up to high school. This educational profile indicates that the respondents were relatively well-educated which makes it more likely that they evaluate and have different perceptions on restaurant service behaviours informatively. Most of the respondents were in the income category of less than one lakh (n = 205, 47.13%) followed by the 1–2 lakhs category (n = 185, 42.53%) in terms of annual household income. The respondents with income levels between 2 lakhs to 3 lakhs accounted for 7.36% (n = 32) and those who have income between 3 lakhs to 4 lakhs accounted for only 1.84% (n = 08). Only 5 respondents (1.15%) reported an annual income of more than 4 lakhs for their total household income. The pattern of income distribution suggests that the sample was mainly confined to the lower and middle-income groups, and as such the affordability and value-sensitive eating habits might be relevant traits in the sample. In terms of how often they ate at restaurants, most respondents (33.79%, n = 147) said they ate there once a month. Twice a week restaurant visitors (19.54%, n = 85) were followed by those who visited the restaurant once a week (18.39%, n = 80) and twice a month (17.24%, n = 75). A relatively smaller percentage of respondents reported that they never went to restaurants regularly (11.03%, n = 48). The frequency distribution profile shows that eating out is a regular consumption pattern for a significant number of respondents suggesting that there was enough face-to-face interaction with services to allow for meaningful evaluation of the behaviours of the frontline staff in restaurants.

Table 2. Reliability analysis

Scale / Dimension	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Frontline service behaviours (overall)	22	0.964
Professionalism	2	0.792
Personalisation	7	0.919
Communication	6	0.911
Accuracy	7	0.908
satisfaction	5	0.894

Source: Author's computation based on primary data

Table 2 assesses the internal consistency of the measurement scales used in the study. The Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs are above the accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating that the items within each scale measure the same underlying concept with sufficient consistency. The overall frontline service behaviour scale records a very high reliability value of 0.964, while customer satisfaction also shows strong reliability with an alpha value of 0.894. The dimension-level results further support the measurement structure. Professionalism, personalisation, communication and accuracy all report acceptable to strong reliability values. This means that the four behavioural dimensions can be analysed separately, while the high reliability of the overall scale also justifies treating frontline service behaviours as a combined construct in the subsequent analysis.

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Test	Value
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO)	0.967
Bartlett's Test chi-square	7210.021
df	231
Sig.	<0.001

Source: Author's computation based on primary data

Table 3 reports the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity to determine whether the data was suitable for factor analysis. The KMO value of 0.967 indicated excellent sampling adequacy, showing that the pattern of correlations among the items was compact enough to produce reliable factors. Bartlett's Test is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, which confirmed that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix.

Table 4. Rotated factor matrix of frontline service behaviour items

Item	Professionalism	Personalization	Communication	Accuracy
Staff greets and escorts me	0.824	0.178	0.214	0.207
Staff are well dressed	0.690	0.427	0.211	0.213
Staff follows grooming standards	0.528	0.547	0.213	0.248
Staff is willing to help	0.536	0.575	0.307	0.146
Staff solves my queries	0.372	0.692	0.244	0.242
Service is prompt and quick	0.331	0.656	0.249	0.308
Staff understands specific needs	0.212	0.702	0.274	0.366
Staff made me feel special	0.227	0.582	0.457	0.286
Staff well trained and experienced	0.097	0.573	0.474	0.362
Prompt service during busy hours	0.103	0.474	0.607	0.289

Menu presented properly	0.153	0.319	0.766	0.244
Order taken on writing pad	0.195	0.288	0.700	0.231
Order repeated for reconfirmation	0.326	0.192	0.725	0.322
Staff informed specialities	0.383	0.190	0.641	0.362
Silver service satisfaction	0.353	0.186	0.449	0.503
Expected service time informed	0.285	0.212	0.552	0.508
Served food exactly as ordered	0.114	0.331	0.398	0.625
Sequence of service followed	0.211	0.271	0.258	0.717
Food bill accurate and in order	0.113	0.345	0.233	0.713
Used utensils replenished	0.168	0.256	0.322	0.716
Feedback form provided	0.355	0.219	0.283	0.630
Complimentary mouth freshener offered	0.388	0.182	0.250	0.633

Source: Author's computation based on primary data

Note: Bold values indicate the factor under which the item has been retained. Items were assigned on the basis of both statistical loading strength and conceptual relevance. In cases where moderate cross-loadings were observed, the final placement was guided by theoretical coherence with the behavioral meaning of the factor

Table 4 represents the rotated matrix which shows four easily interpretable dimensions of frontline service behaviours. The first is Professionalism, which includes items that relate to staff conduct and the presentation of services. The highest loading was for “staff greets and escorts me” (0.824), “staff are well dressed” (0.690) and “staff follows grooming standards” (0.528). These reflect that the customers feel the professional service when the staff's appearance, the way they greet the customers and the manner in which they serve them are formal. The second factor, Personalization, relates to aspects of customer specific attention and responsiveness. The highest loading items were “staff understands specific needs” (0.702), “staff solves my queries” (0.692), “service is prompt and quick” (0.656), “staff made me feel special” (0.582) and “staff well trained and experienced” (0.573). This means that customers see customised service as being able to respond to the needs of customers, assist and make them feel valued.

Communication, the third factor, conveys information and how clear it is in the process of eating. The factor was loaded with items such as: menu presented properly (0.766), order repeated for reconfirmation (0.725), order taken on writing pad (0.700), staff informed

specialties' (0.641), prompt service during busy hours (0.607), and expected service time informed (0.552). The results indicate that customers appreciate clear, timely and structured communication when ordering and during the delivery of services. The fourth factor, Accuracy, is the level of correctness and completion of the service process. The following loadings were high: sequence of service followed (0.717); used utensils replenished (0.716); food bill accurate and in order (0.713); served food exactly as ordered (0.625); a complimentary mouth freshener offered (0.633); a feedback form provided (0.630); and satisfaction with silver service (0.503). The items indicate that customers assess accuracy in terms of service execution, error-free service, correct billing and service rituals.

Thus, the factor structure supports the argument that frontline service behavior is multi-dimensional in nature, providing empirical support. The rotated matrix reveals that the customer does not consider the people dimension as a single concept, but rather separates the following dimensions: professionalism, personalization, communication, and accuracy in completing the service process. This classification helps restaurant managers analyze the general concept of "good staff behavior" into four measurable and trainable dimensions of service.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics and correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Professionalism	4.238	0.664	1.000				
Personalisation	4.157	0.674	0.671	1.000			
Communication	4.076	0.696	0.646	0.810	1.000		
Accuracy	4.208	0.649	0.634	0.762	0.780	1.000	
Customer satisfaction	4.312	0.614	0.681	0.735	0.756	0.778	1.000

Source: Author's computation based on primary data

Note. Correlations are positive and statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 5 summarises the descriptive statistics and correlations among the four behavioural dimensions and customer satisfaction. The mean scores for all variables are above the middle of the five-point scale, suggesting that respondents generally rated the service behaviour of front line employees positively. With a mean score of $M = 4.312$, $SD = 0.614$, customer satisfaction had the highest mean value indicating that the surveyed customers were generally satisfied with their restaurant experience. Among the behavioural dimensions, professionalism recorded a mean of 4.238 ($SD = 0.664$), followed by accuracy 4.208 ($SD = 0.649$), personalization 4.157 ($SD = 0.674$), and communication 4.076 ($SD = 0.696$). The correlation results indicate that all the behavioural dimensions are positively correlated with customer satisfaction. Of these, the variables that are most closely correlated with customer satisfaction are accuracy (0.778), communication (0.756), personalization (0.735), and professionalism (0.681). This pattern suggests that customers really appreciate reliable and error-free services, and they also appreciate that they are communicated clearly, that they are attended to, and that the staff behave professionally. The positive associations support the proposed hypotheses and justify the use of regression analysis to investigate the independent predictive effect of each behavioural dimension on customer satisfaction.

Table 6. Regression results: behavioural dimensions predicting customer satisfaction

Predictor	B	Std. error	β	t	Sig.	VIF
Constant	1.029	0.119	—	8.617	<0.001**	—
Professionalism	0.129	0.038	0.148	3.404	0.001**	2.171
Personalisation	0.143	0.055	0.156	2.625	0.009**	4.052
Communication	0.218	0.047	0.264	4.609	<0.001**	3.761
Accuracy	0.289	0.052	0.307	5.588	<0.001**	3.466

**p < 0.01

Source: Author's computation based on primary data

Table 6 shows that the regression model is significant and explains 62.4% of the variation in customer satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.624$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.620$; $F = 178.700$; $p < 0.001$). All four behavioural dimensions have positive and significant effects. Accuracy is the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.307$; $p < 0.001$), followed by communication ($\beta = 0.264$; $p < 0.001$), personalisation ($\beta = 0.156$; $p = 0.009$), and professionalism ($\beta = 0.148$; $p = 0.001$). The values of the VIFs are between 2.171 and 4.052, which are all less than 5, signifying that there is no serious multicollinearity.

Based on the results, the most crucial factors affecting customer satisfaction are correct and reliable service, particularly order accuracy, service sequence and correct billing. Communication, personalisation and professionalism also have a positive impact, albeit to a lesser degree than accuracy.

Table 7. Regression results: overall frontline service staff behaviour predicting customer satisfaction

Predictor	B	Std. error	β	t	Sig.	R^2
Constant	1.067	0.114	—	9.346	<0.001**	
Frontline service staff behaviours (overall)	0.771	0.029	0.787	26.602	<0.001**	0.620

**p < 0.01

Source: Author's computation based on primary data

Table 7 evaluates the effect of overall frontline service behaviors on customer satisfaction. The coefficient is positive and statistically significant, and the model explains 62.0% of the variance in customer satisfaction. This indicates that frontline service behaviour, when considered as a combined construct, has substantial explanatory power in restaurant service encounters.

Table 8. Hypothesis testing summary

Hypothesis	Statement	Results
H1	Service communication positively influences customer satisfaction	Supported
H2	Service personalisation positively influences customer satisfaction	Supported

H3	Service professionalism positively influences customer satisfaction	Supported
H4	Service accuracy positively influences customer satisfaction	Supported
H5	Overall frontline service behaviors positively influences customer satisfaction	Supported

Source: Author's computation based on primary data

Table 8 consolidates the hypothesis-testing results. All five hypotheses are supported, confirming that communication, personalisation, professionalism and accuracy each have a positive influence on customer satisfaction. The overall frontline service behaviours construct also shows a significant positive effect. These results strengthen the central argument of the study: customers do not judge restaurant service only through food or ambience, but also through the behaviour and execution of frontline service staff.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results support the role of front line workers in restaurant service interactions. The importance of food and physical setting are still relevant, but the results demonstrate that the way the service is presented by the staff is also key to the customer's reaction. This reinforces the service encounter perspective which holds that employees are not just machines; they are a part of the customer's experience and satisfaction evaluation (Bitner et al., 1990; Bowen & Schneider, 1985). This is particularly important when it comes to accuracy. Customers can also enjoy friendliness and warmth, but if there are any mistakes in orders, serving the service, or invoices, it will diminish satisfaction. With accuracy, there is trust in the service system. It demonstrates that the restaurant is able to provide what it had promised. This finding is consistent with the reliability logic of service quality, but it provides a translation of this logic into the specific behaviors of restaurants (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Qin & Prybutok, 2009; Wall & Berry, 2007). Staff training should therefore not only be viewed as an operational issue, but also as a customer experience issue.

Communication plays a very important role in customer satisfaction. Customers at restaurants frequently rely on employees for details on foods, service time, ingredients and charges. When communicating, people feel respected and do not feel confused. The discovery also indicates that the power to communicate extends beyond being polite while talking. It consists of listening to the customer, confirming, explaining and informing at the appropriate time, as noted in previous studies of service behaviours and emotional response in service encounters (Mattila & Enz, 2002; Muda, 2021; Winsted, 2000). Such behaviours are trainable and can be incorporated into service standards. Personalisation has a positive impact because customers of restaurants appreciate being catered to. That doesn't imply that all restaurants should have extremely customized service. Simple actions, like answering a specific question, taking a moment to see if they are hesitant, dealing with a customer's question with patience and making them feel welcome, can all create a feeling of individual attention. Personalisation becomes more important in urban markets where there is a large number of alternatives to choose from, and the customer is able to compare restaurants not only in terms of food but also in terms of

the service being provided (Gremmler & Gwinner, 2000; Gwinner et al., 2005; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002).

Professionalism has a positive, but lesser effect. This does not mean that it is not important. Instead, professionalism can be a threshold expectation. Employees are expected to be dressed, courteous and well-behaved. If these expectations are fulfilled they do not necessarily lead to high levels of delight but when they are not it can have a negative effect on the service image. This is consistent with the results of the service-performance research, which indicates that employee behavior affects service outcomes and customer views about the service climate (Alhelalat et al., 2017; Liao & Chuang, 2004; Pham Thi Phuong & Ahn, 2021). Thus, professionalism should be regarded as a foundation for communication, personalisation and accuracy.

This study also contributes to the literature, by demonstrating that the people aspect of service can be decomposed into measurable service behaviours. Some service-quality models are very general and unfortunately managers need more detail. Staff need to operate in a professional way, communicate clearly, personalise when appropriate and be accurate - these four dimensions offer a more operational language. This language is easier to translate into recruitment, induction, training, supervision and service audits, and it complements earlier work that separates broad service quality from observable service behaviours (Alhelalat et al., 2017; Brady & Cronin, 2001; Winsted, 2000).

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, the findings support the view that the people dimension of service quality deserves separate attention. Traditional service-quality dimensions remain useful, but the present results show that customers distinguish between different staff behaviours. Accuracy, communication, personalisation and professionalism are not merely different words for the same construct. They represent different routes through which employees shape satisfaction, which is consistent with hierarchical and behaviour-focused interpretations of service quality (Alhelalat et al., 2017; Brady & Cronin, 2001; Grönroos, 1984).

The study also contributes to restaurant-service literature in the Indian urban context. Much of the restaurant service-quality research has been conducted in international settings or in broad hospitality samples. The present evidence from Chandigarh shows that behavioural service dimensions are relevant in a growing Indian dining market where customers are exposed to both traditional service expectations and newer expectations of speed, clarity and individual attention. This is consistent with restaurant studies showing that service quality works alongside food, atmosphere and value in shaping satisfaction (Ha & Jang, 2010; Ryu et al., 2012; Slack et al., 2021).

Managerial Implications

The findings indicate that for managers, they should train their staff in a sequence. The first priority should be accuracy and this has the highest predictive effect. Order-confirmation routines, service-sequence checklists and bill-verification practices should be used in restaurants. In sequence second aspect should be communication Staff should be trained to clarify waiting time, to repeat orders and answer enquiries without irritation, and to explain

menu options. The third priority is personalisation – staff members become more aware of special needs and give little bits of attention. Grooming, greeting and disciplined conduct should be a base level of professionalism. Research in the restaurant service industry indicates that employee behavior and service climate affects service quality evaluation (Bowen & Schneider, 2014; Wall & Berry, 2007). The results also have implications for performance assessment. Restaurants can use behaviour-specific metrics alongside sales volume and the general supervisor's judgement such as order accuracy, complaint handling, clarity of communication, responsiveness to customer requests, and proper service closure. These behaviours can be used to redesign customer feedback forms. This would enable managers to understand the reason behind the dissatisfaction, whether it is about food, ambience, price and/or employee's behavior, and would support evidence that links employee's service performance with the customer's outcomes (Liao & Chuang, 2004; Prentice et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The paper explored how customer satisfaction is affected by the front-line service staff behaviors in the restaurant service encounter in Chandigarh. The results indicate that frontline service behaviour is a multi-dimensional phenomenon with professionalism, personalisation, communication and accuracy as dimensions. All four dimensions are positively related to customer satisfaction and the construct accounts for a large proportion of the variance in customer satisfaction. The most influential predictors are accuracy and communication, with personalisation and professionalism also playing a significant role. The findings also validate the importance of a micro level analysis of restaurant service. They illustrate the nature of the service encounter and the way in which certain staff actions interact to influence satisfaction. This focus on the encounter is helpful because it helps tie together customer ratings with behaviors that managers can see and work on. The primary contribution of the theory is the focus on observable behaviours at the front line of service rather than service quality categories. This helps to make satisfaction more real. It demonstrates how customers assess service in terms of specific behaviors that are performed during the service interaction. The study thus offers a complementary perspective to SERVQUAL-type studies by adding a behaviour level approach to the restaurant service delivery.

The management implications are clear. Training for the restaurant's needs should be based on observable behaviours, not general statements like “provide good service”. Staff need to be able to verify orders, inform patrons of the wait time, present menus clearly, respond to questions patiently, follow the service flow, verify the accuracy of the billing and close the service properly. Good practice is to use operational checklists to monitor accuracy and role play, feedback and coaching to develop communication and personalisation skills.

Limitations of the stud

First, it is cross-sectional and therefore cannot be used to measure causality over time. Second, the data were gathered in a single urban setting, and should be interpreted with caution when generalizing to other cities or restaurant types. Third, the study concentrates on customer satisfaction and does not directly investigate the concept of loyalty, revisit intention and word-of-mouth. The model can be extended in the following ways in future research. Longitudinal studies can investigate the influence of frontline service behaviours over time on repeat

patronage. The structural equation modelling can be used to test satisfaction as a mediator between service behaviours and loyalty. Comparative studies can be undertaken across cities, restaurant categories and price bands to provide an indication of the extent to which the same behavioural dimensions are present across contexts. Future research can also incorporate customer ratings and/or observational data along with manager assessments to mitigate common method concerns.

Overall, the study confirms that restaurant service quality is not only a matter of food, décor or price. It is also built through small, repeated and visible staff behaviours. When employees communicate clearly, attend to individual needs, behave professionally and deliver accurately, customer satisfaction improves. For restaurants operating in competitive urban markets, these behaviours are not minor details; they are part of the product the customer buys.

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