Analysis of Themed Retailing in Hospitality Industry with special reference to Restaurants in a developing country

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to conduct research to investigate how the themed restaurants can encourage customers to visit frequently, thus build customer satisfaction and loyalty in the context of a developing country like India.
Design/Research Methodology: An empirical study was carried out with a sample of 227 respondents who live in metro cities of India and who frequently visit restaurants for dining out. A conceptual framework defining the relationship between Differentiated Experience, Novelty, Immersive Experience, Coherent Atmosphere, Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty was created. This framework was then examined using Mediating Multiple Regression Analysis.
Findings: The research suggests that Differentiated Experience, Novelty, Immersive Experience and Coherent Atmospheres' were found to be most important drivers of Customer Loyalty and Customer Satisfaction in a context of a themed restaurant.
Originality: The research paper aims to provide guidance to the themed restaurant owners in terms of the parameters which will enable them to build customer loyalty and satisfaction. It will also enable the academicians to understand this upcoming sector for them to pursue further research in this area.

Introduction

The hospitality industry has taken big strides since the 2008 financial crisis and the growth has accelerated with time. Today, with over 7,00,000 hotels around the world, hotel industry contributes over $3.41 trillion to the global economy. The Indian hospitality and tourism sector have been one of the key drivers of growth in Indian services sector contributing $194 Billion to India's GDP in the year 2019. According to the forecast, in the year 2028 the direct contribution of hospitality and tourism sector is estimated to be $460 Billion (World Travel and Tourism Council) and the hospitality sector alone is expected to reach $381.31 Billion by 2022, in India (KPMG Report). The contribution of the sector was predicted to be 9-10% of the Indian GDP in 2020, but due to Covid-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown this sector has seen contraction of 47% in Quarter 1'2020 as compared to Quarter 1'2019 (Ramnani, 2020). The tourism and hospitality sector is a large contributor to employment in India and employs many people directly or indirectly. In the fiscal year 2019, it employed 87.5 Million people which is 12.75% of the total employment in the country *(Ramnani, 2020).* The size of Indian restaurant industry is estimated to be around $57 Billion (with 35% share of organized market) and is projected to increase to $81.8 Billion in 2022-23. Food and services industry contribute approximately 3% to GDP of India (Mehrotra, 2020). The Industry employs 7.3 million people in the country and it is expected to reach 9.2 million by 2022-23, also the industry is expected to indirectly employ 9.5-10.5

million people, by 2021 *(National Restaurant Association of India).*
Restaurants have received decent amount of sociological attention as a place for cultural and social formation, and more comprehensively to the activity of dining in the open environment *(Beardsworth and Bryman, 1999).* Various authors like Visser, (1993), Farb and Armelagos, (1980) and Leclant, (1979) have talked about the rise of the restaurants as the novel setting not only for the consumption of drink and food but a place where a wide range of complex interactions can take place in a public forum. Restaurants now also act as a source of entertainment, a medium to express style and fashion ability and a podium for public presentation of self *(Beardsworth and Bryman, 1999).* In particular, the research by *(King, et al., 1998 and Kim, et al., 2015)* have emphasised that restaurants have been an important part of human beings to maintain the level of peace-of-mind and improve the standard of living.
Various researches have expressed the grown importance of restaurants in the lives of people leading to increased number of restaurants. Considering this, there was a need for many restaurants to distinguish themselves to meet consumer's need and retain the customer base by manipulation of various elements like lighting, ambience and other elements *(Mehrabian and Russell, 1974 and Wood and Munoz, 2007).* The customer is looking for out of the ordinary ambience, especially one that is sensually stimulating and takes you to a different world at least for a while. The consumer is looking for a pleasurable dining experience filled with fun, surprises and a sumptuous meal,

which offers 'emotional benefit' to the consumer *(Weinberg, 1986 and Groeppel,1988).*

Theming of restaurants is an illustration of themed retailing in service industry as consumers look forward towards differentiated experiences at these places *(Kim, 2001).* Themed restaurants can therefore be used to understand the broader concept of theming in service industry. Themed restaurants are described as "an eating establishment, which clothes itself in a complex of distinctive signs that are largely extraneous to the activity of eating itself" *(Beardsworth and Bryman, 1999).* A complex can justifiably be termed a 'theme' if it is constituted out of one of a wide range of readily recognizable narratives drawn from popular culture *(Beardsworth and Bryman, 1999).* The vital significance of these themes lies in the capability of the social and physical parts of the themes to capture customer's consideration for sufficient time so that the attributes of service strategy like service level, corporate image and organizational culture could be effectively communicated *(Kotler, 1974).* Themed retailing in restaurants could offer various benefits like symbolic consumption, which means products are not only viewed for what it is, but also what does it mean i.e. subjective symbol *(Kim, 2001).* Consumers are willing to pay extra for this special meaning and the pleasure that they receive, thus increasing the revenue for the restaurant *(Longo, 1995).* Restaurants also publicize hosting a dinner or lunch while also telecasting a football or a cricket match at the restaurant which adds entertainment along with food and hence it gives benefit of entertainment retailing to the restaurateurs *(Kenyon, 1997).* Cross selling or cross shopping is also the benefit of themed restaurants. It can be easily implemented in a themed restaurant where broad merchandise related to the theme is available for sale *(Kang and Kim, 1999).* Hardrock Café, a café in the metropolitan city of India, namely Mumbai and Pune, earns a huge revenue from selling of merchandise.

Today there are various themed restaurants in the world with the unique theming and exciting dining experience; below Table I lists out various themed restaurants along with their theme and country where they are located.

Table I: Famous Themed restaurants around the globe

Restaurant	Theme	Location
Godabang Cat Café	Cat	South Korea
The Clinic	Hospital	Singapore
Ninja New York	Ninja	New York
The Jekyll and Hyde Club	Haunted	New York
Rainforest Café	Rainforest	USA
Modern Toilet	Toilet	Taiwan
Buns and Guns	Military	Lebanon

Today in Indian restaurant industry, dining experience delivered by retailer is equally important as the cuisine in the restaurant, if not more. It can be attributed to the increase in disposable income of consumers and willingness to pay a premium for distinct services, food and leisure. Customers now are young at heart, keen and open to trying out new cuisines especially if the restaurant offers distinct or

memorable dining experience. To cater to these customers, themed restaurants started to emerge in Indian markets. The Bar Stock Exchange, stock market themed restaurant was established in Mumbai initially, which was then followed by various themed restaurants all over India. The majority of themed restaurants in India can still be limited to tier one (metropolitan cities), with few themed restaurants present in tier two cities as well. Today there are several restaurants in India which offer varied themed dining experiences like rainforest themed, casino themed, Anglo-Indian themed, Bollywood themed, pirate themed, cave themed, lake themed, bicycle themed, sports themed bars and the like. Hence, there has been a rise in number of customers opting for themed dining in India due to increased number of themed restaurants and varied types of themed dining experiences. Some famous themed restaurants in India are listed in Table II.

Table II: Famous themed restaurants in India

Restaurant	Theme	Location
The Bar Stock Exchange	Stock Market	Mumbai
UFO	Spaceship	Mumbai
Ohri's Eatmor 70mm	Bollywood	Hyderabad
Howzatt: The Galaxy Hotel	Cricket	Gurgaon
Chokhi Dhani	Rajasthani Village	Jaipur
Kaidi Kitchen	Jail	Chennai
Manchester United Pub	Football	Bengaluru

In times of increasing market saturation in the restaurant business, they tend to resemble each other in terms of the culinary items served, the price points and the ambience. Too many players often force the restaurants to offer freebies or promotional offerings often eliminating the marginal players. Under such circumstances, it becomes critical for restaurants to build customer loyalty and a pool of repeat customers. Therefore, the research question that this study addresses is what are the various characteristics of themed restaurants which create a positive emotion and enhance the customer satisfaction for the restaurant. The customer who are satisfied or had a positive emotion are likely to come back to the restaurant as repeat customers and hence the study takes a step further to analyze customer loyalty taking forward customer satisfaction. The aim of the study is to investigate these characteristics scientifically and therefore an empirical study has been undertaken.

Literature Review

Though themed restaurants have started getting limelight in recent years, it is not a new concept. Various studies dates back the presence of themed restaurants to nineteenth century, like *Whitaker, (2010)* claimed that the first themed restaurant began in the later nineteenth century which is Paris café in Montmartre called "The Cabaret of Nothingness" which emphasized a supernatural theming. Later in 1885, Café of the Penitentiary established by Maxime Lisbon , was the café in which the dining hall replicated a prison in this the waiters wore the real convict's

attire with fake chains and cuffs. Various studies have highlighted that the consumption process in themed environments provide with various benefits to the consumers such as fantasies, pleasure and fun *(Han and Jeong, 2013 and Hwang and Lyu, 2015)*.

Themed restaurants started getting spotlight as the need arose among restaurant retailers to create a point of difference from the competitors. The primary reason was that restaurateurs were struggling to create and stage an environment and ambiance which is in favour of memorable dining. It is parallel with previous study which suggests that only good food and service are not enough for pleasurable dining experience *(Hwang and Ok, 2013)*. Also, work from *Dong and Siu, (2013)* and *Tsai and Lu, (2012)* suggest that theming is an effective strategy to differentiate restaurant retail environment from the competitors. The reason for this is that the overall ambiance in themed restaurants usually takes consumers in the specific theme and create experiences which are exotic, unique and superior *(Wood and Munoz, 2007)*. To create these experiences 'defined themed environment' is a necessary first step (Senthil, Chandrasekar, and Selvabaskar, 2012 and Pine II and Gilmore, 1998). Themed restaurant involves using a constructed retail 'theme', wherein the retail environment is perceived in a more holistic way rather than a collection of individual elements *(Rayburn and Voss, 2013 and Diamond et al., 2009)*. Further, *Ishak et al., (2017)* have come out with more specific elements such as lighting colour, music, spatial layout, scents and props to provide a better dining experience in themed restaurants. It involves staging an ambiance with the specific theme as anchor, to stage and offer authentic dining experience as desired by its consumers *(Taylor, 1991)*. *Liu and Tse, (2018)* defines authentic dining experience in themed restaurants as the level to which the food and dining environment are perceived as original to its type and reflect the concept or chosen theme.

Food and services industry or hospitality industry as a whole is at the forefront in offering theme-based experiences which are inspired by the Disneyland model *(Soligo and Abarbanel, 2020)*. In hospitality industry, such experiential activities enable consumers to connect with retail spaces in a personal, memorable way, which is considered as one of the best mode of consumption; as they meet personal development needs *(Meng and Choi, 2017 and Pine and Gilmore, 1998)*. Hospitality industry is most influenced by the authenticity of the experience delivered to the customers, hence retailers in this sector often embrace theme-based models of experiential retailing *(Soligo and Abarbanel, 2020 and Ilicic and Webster, 2016)*. Many hospitality studies suggest that adoption of theme-based model is involved with the idea of consumers living positive experiences while travelling or spending their leisure time *(Hwang and Lee, 2019)* and in order to deliver these positive experiences, hospitality industry has espoused theme-park model as seen in case of themed resorts and themed restaurants *(Dong and Siu, 2013)*. Schwartz, (2003)

discusses how the trend has been setup in hospitality industry to use theme as a novel marketing tool, which was started with the Caesars Palace in Las Vegas and in recent times it is very common among the retailers in hospitality sector. Literature also discusses on how using theme and its unique characteristics, as a strategic marketing technique could positively influence customer's decision-making and hence revisit rate *(Jun and Arendt, 2016)*.

Study in hospitality sector also talks about how theme-based experience, is a critical factor in influencing consumer's affective and cognitive responses *(Mason and Paggiaro, 2012)*. Various literature has discussed about the direct impact of theme-based experience on customers, in hospitality and tourism sector. Åstrøm, (2017) describes that theme-based experience is one of the most powerful tools that can be utilised by managers, to create irresistible customer impression. Weaver, (2011) recognises that how various managers have leveraged theming to distinguish or set apart various service space attractions like restaurants, water parks, hotels, cruise ships etc. Delivering theme-based experience has successfully helped retailers in the hospitality sector to achieve several goals like helping customers escape from reality *(Brown and Patterson, 2000)*, stimulating consumption *(Young and Riley, 2002)*, establishing brand tangibility *(Kozinets, et al., 2002)*, transforming services into pleasurable experience and the like *(Åstrøm, 2017)*. Also, certain literature has talked about how theme-based of a hotel or resort, has a capability of indirectly impacting various other activities that customer might be involved *(Dewan, et. al., 2013)*. Tanford and Suh, (2013) discusses how the themed dining experience in the restaurant indirectly influenced gamming in the Casino.

Research on themed retailing till date has been inclined towards qualitative perspective and has lacked the examination of themed retailing from the quantitative perspective. Qualitative aspect has received focus from the researchers and therefore adequate data is available on consumer's perspective towards themed retailing, benefits of themed retailing, co-creation in themed retailing, cultural aspects of themed retailing and various types of themes. Most of the research which has been conducted don't give quantitative results as to how the factors involved in the themed retailing affect the consumer behavior. Also, the research has been more generic towards themed retailing and not particularly in themed retailing in hospitality industry and restaurants despite it being a huge industry and the available research is not directed towards emerging retail markets like India. Therefore, to address the above-mentioned research voids a conceptual framework is proposed which is described in the later sections after which the results of the studies are described and reported. Results are intended to test the conceptual framework empirically and verify the robustness of the study. Findings are described with the implications for the marketers and further scope of study. Table III describes the details about the literature from where the constructs have been adopted.

Table III. Details of Adaption of Constructs

| Construct	Country	Author(s)
Differentiated Experience (DE)	Sweden	*(Wikstrom, 2008),* *(Temkin, 2007),* *(Trotter, 2019), and* *(Foster and McLelland, 2014)*
Novelty (NV)	Sweden	(Wikstrom, 2008), *(Barto, et al., 2013),* (Mandler, 1997), (Mak, 2015), *(Ortony, et al., 1988),* (Mitas and Bastiaansen, 2018), *(Skavronskaya, et al., 2020),* *(Van Kesteren, et al., 2012), and* (Tung and Ritchie, 2011)
Immersive Experience (IE)	Hattiesburg, USA	*(Foster and McLelland, 2014)* (Pine II and Gilmore, 1998) *(Karnes, 2020)* (Akbari, 2017) *(Skavronskaya, et al., 2020)* (Posner et al., 2005) (Diamond, et al., 2009) (Groeppel and Bloch, 2006)
Coherent Atmosphere (CA)	Sweden	(Wikstrom, 2008) *(Foster and McLelland, 2014)* (Rayburn and Voss, 2013) (Kozinets, et al., 2002) (Pine and Gilmore, 1998) (Hunter, 2014) (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004)
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	USA	(Jang, Liu, and Namkung, 2010) *(Oliver, 1997)* (Liu and Jang, 2009) (Kano, 1984) (Fuller and Matzler, 2008) (Matzler and Sauerwein, 2002) *(Matzler, et al., 2004)* (Homburg et al., 2006) (Wu and Liang, 2009)
Customer Loyalty (CL)	Hattiesburg, USA	(Foster and McLelland, 2014) (Enis and Gordon, 1970) (Eliwa, 2006) (Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000) *(Victorino, et al., 2005)* (Mill, 2004) (Assael, 1991) (Surlemont and Johnson, 2005) (Bhote, 1996)

A. Conceptual framework
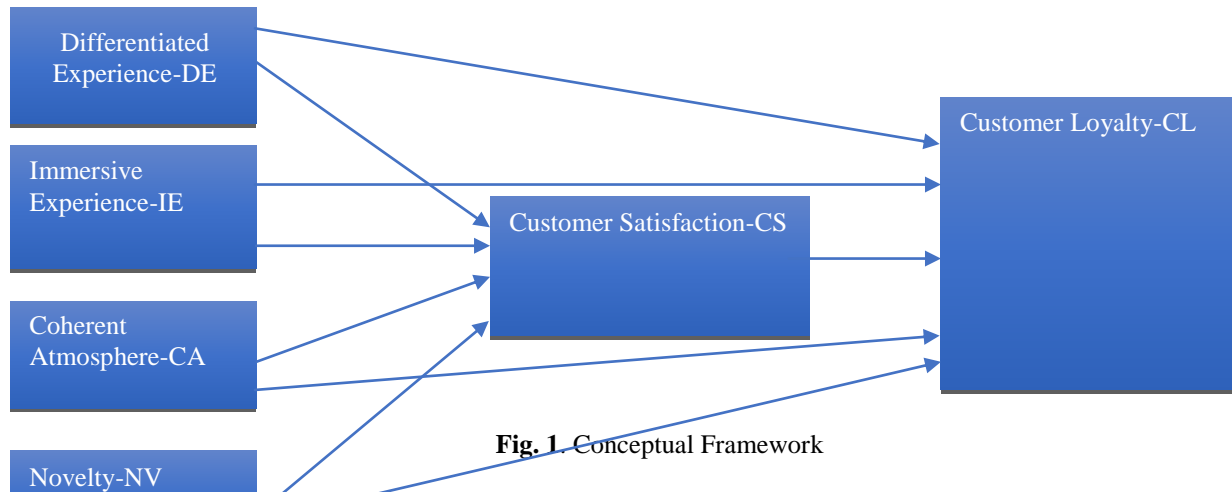
Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 adapts the constructs from the various studies done on the experience creation for the consumers while visiting a themed restaurant. The model discusses that how the various parameters of themed restaurants create a positive emotion and customer satisfaction. The customer who are satisfied or had a positive emotion are likely to come back to the restaurants and hence the model takes a step further to analyze customer loyalty taking forward customer satisfaction.

B. Differentiated Experience (DE).

Differentiated Experience refers to a consistent systematic approach of interacting with customers. This approach intends on creating or delivering experience to customers which is different compared to the retailers in the same retail space *(Temkin, 2007)*. It is an aspect of retailing whereby consumers coming in the physical service space are provided with the experiences that are beyond the traditional experience. Experience Based Differentiation (EBD) reflects customer centric philosophy at all the customer touchpoints in the service space *(Trotter, 2019)*. Themed restaurants attempt to provide a differentiated dining experience to its customers through its themed atmosphere. Customers get the differentiated dining experience in themed restaurants when compared to the traditional restaurant. The reason for this is the particular dining theme in these themed restaurants *(Foster and McLelland, 2014)*. The ability of the retailer in the service space to provide customers with a differentiated dining experience helps retailer to perform in a better way over a stretch of time. Such a differentiated experience enables firms to develop and retain the

customers and hence it can have significant impact on the business *(Wikstrom, 2008)*. Hence the Hypotheses that explains the relationship is given below:

H1a. There is a positive relationship between Differentiated Experience (DE) and Customer Loyalty (CL).

H1b. There is a positive relationship between Differentiated Experience (DE) and Customer Satisfaction (CS).

H1c. Customer Satisfaction (CS) mediates the effect between Differentiated Experience (DE) and Customer Loyalty (CL).

C. Novelty (NV)

Novelty, is referred as a process of experiencing something *new* or *unusual* in the routine process *(Barto, et al., 2013)*. It is defined as the extent to which a customer is unfamiliar with the experience compared to the typical knowledge/information he had of that very same experience (Mandler, 1997). In context of the themed restaurants, it is defined as the extent of the unfamiliarity in the dining experience compared to the customer's expectations (Mak, 2015). It is associated with the complexity, rarity, and delight *(Ortony, et al., 1988)*. Consumers have often referred *novelty* as an important aspect of experiential consumption (Mitas & Bastiaansen, 2018). Customers have shown interest in having *newer* experiences which are far abnormal when compared to their daily life, this trend can be seen in the restaurant retail space as well *(Wikstrom, 2008)*. Immediate consequences of novelty in dining experiences include intense feelings and emotions, and memories related to novel experiences have good chances of getting transformed to long term memory *(Skavronskaya et al., 2020)*. Novelty is connected to enhanced attention and

greater attention helps in creating long term impact over memory *(Kesteren, et al., 2012)*. Novelty hence helps in generating positive sentiment among customers in restaurant retail space by having impact on the memory of the customers and helps in top of the mind recall *(Tung and Ritchie, 2011)*. Hence the Hypotheses that explains the relationship is given below:

H2a. There is a positive relationship between Novelty (NV) and Customer Loyalty (CL).

H2b. There is a positive relationship between Novelty (NV) and Customer Satisfaction (CS).

H2c. Customer Satisfaction (CS) mediates the effect between Novelty (NV) and Customer Loyalty (CL).

D. Immersive Experience

Immersive Experience takes the customer into new reality by enhancing the traditional experience, by making it more engaging via retail atmosphere *(Karnes, 2020)*. Immersive Experience (IE) can be created by using props, goods, service, stage and the like to engage an individual in way so that the consumer is more absorbed in the activity *(Pine and Gilmore, 1998)*. It is very important to create immersive dining experience in themed restaurants as it differentiates the overall dining from the traditional restaurants by absorbing or involving customers into the themed dining *(Akbari, 2017 and Skavronskaya et al., 2020)*. In themed restaurants, retailers try to provide immersive dining experience by manipulating all the atmospheric elements according to the pre-defined theme *(Foster and McLelland, 2014)*. Immersive Experience (IE) gives rise to the emotions which makes it easier for the customer to be more involved in the dining experience *(Karnes, 2020)*. Immersive dining experience creates positive emotion in the customers where they become happy, elated or excited, hence it further helps in retention of experience in the long-term memory *(Posner, et al., 2005)*. Immersive Experience (IE) can increase customer satisfaction, which results in the customer retention or customer loyalty and hence more successful and more profitable restaurant business. Hence the Hypotheses that explains the relationship is given below:

H3a There is a positive relationship between Immersive Experience (IE) and Customer Loyalty (CL).

H3b. There is a positive relationship between Immersive Experience (IE) and Customer Satisfaction (CS).

H3c. Customer Satisfaction (CS) mediates the effect between Immersive Experience (IE) and Customer Loyalty (CL).

E. Coherent Atmosphere

Coherent Atmosphere is achieved when all the atmospheric elements (ambiance, lighting, music, props etc.) are manipulated as a single unit, which is contradictory to the traditional approach where all the atmospheric elements are considered individually *(Foster and McLelland, 2014)*. Customers these days expect more multi-sensory, more interactive and more holistic dining experience *(Rayburn and Voss, 2013)*. Coherent Atmosphere (CA) is an important

aspect of themed restaurants, as all the atmospheric elements in themed restaurants are controlled with respect to the pre-decided theme in a holistic way *(Kozinets, et al., 2002)*. Coherent Atmosphere (CA) is a necessary first step in creating a unified themed dining experience *(Pine and Gilmore, 1998)*. It involves using a finely curated retail theme where retail environment is perceived as whole instead of a collection of an individual items *(Diamond, et al., 2009)*. This approach helps in transforming the brand of the retail space into retail environment by dictating the brand message through retail environment, so that customer connects to what the brand stands for *(Hunter, 2014)*. Coherent Atmosphere (CA) helps to bring together all the atmospheric elements to create a unified theme that creates specific physical construct *(Pine and Gilmore, 1998)*. Coherent Atmosphere (CA) allows retailers to better control the retail environment and hence better control the consumer experience which results in enhanced control of brand message *(Wikstrom, 2008)* and *(Ailawadi and Keller, 2004)*. It helps restaurant retailers to stand out from the other options available to the customers, *(Groeppel and Bloch, 2006)* which results in better visibility and awareness and hence it might result in more loyal or greater customer base. Hence the Hypotheses explaining the relationships is given below:

H4a. There is a positive relationship between Coherent Atmosphere (CA) and Customer Loyalty (CL).

H4b. There is a positive relationship between Coherent Atmosphere (CA) and Customer Satisfaction (CS).

H4c. Customer Satisfaction (CS) mediates the effect between Coherent Atmosphere (CA) and Customer Loyalty (CL).

F. Customer Satisfaction

Customer Satisfaction (CS) can be described as a judgement by the customer that a service or product feature or the service or product as a whole, provided pleasurable consumption experience *(Oliver, 1997)*. Customer Satisfaction (CS) is conceived as the fulfillment response which is employed to evaluate and understand the consumption experience *(Oliver, 1981)*. Customer Satisfaction (CS) judgements are the results of the difference between the perceived performance or experience and the consumers' expectation *(Liu and Jang, 2009)*. If the performance as perceived by the customer exceeds customer's expectation then the customer is said to be satisfied and vice-versa *(Oliver, 1981)*. The three-factor theory suggests that basic factors are mandatory requirements for customer satisfaction and if these mandatory requirements are not fulfilled it causes customer dissatisfaction *(Kano, 1984 and Matzler and Sauerwein, 2002)*. Above these mandatory factors are the excitement elements (factors) which increase Customer Satisfaction (CS) if they are provided to customers, but no customer dissatisfaction if they are not provided *(Fuller and Matzler, 2008 and Matzler, et al., 2004)*. Themed restaurants provide restaurant retailers with the excitement factors which might help in increasing Customer Satisfaction (CS) *(Liu and*

Jang, 2009). These satisfied customers of themed restaurants then generate long term benefit for the restaurant retailers like sustained profitability and customer loyalty *(Homburg, et al., 2006)*. When the consumers are satisfied with the experience, they get at a restaurant they become frequent purchasers of the services and provide positive feedback to friends and family regarding their experience *(Gibson, 2005)* and *(Wu and Liang, 2009)*. Hence the Hypotheses depicting the relationships is given below:

H5a. There is a positive relationship between Customer Satisfaction (CS) and Customer Loyalty (CL).

G. Customer Loyalty

Customer Loyalty for restaurants can be defined as the "consumer inclination to patronize the given restaurant frequently during a specific period of time" *(Enis and Gordon, 1970)*. This definition can be further extended as the biased behavior or response towards certain retail space, in decision making which is expressed over the given period of time *(Eliwa, 2006)* and loyal customer can be defined as someone who dines from a particular restaurant whenever it is possible and who also recommends the restaurant to others *(Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000)*. According to *Victorino et al., (2005)*, for restaurant to be successful, Customer Loyalty (CL) is very important, as around 60% of the revenues come from regular customers *(Eliwa, 2006)*. Customers prefer themed restaurants and fine dining as these restaurants have specific image and meaning in the minds of the customers that have special meaning that carries social value in the minds of customers. These dining experiences contribute towards the social status of the consumers *(Mill, 2004)*. Customers value the retail space that treats them the way customers desire in terms of the landscape, atmospheric elements, staff etc. and themed restaurants with their authentic dining experience have the capability to do so *(Assael, 1991)*. For restaurant industry it is very important to signal the quality of the dining experience to potential customers. This task is relatively easy for themed restaurants due to various aspects of themed restaurants like reliquary theming, parodic theming, ethnic theming and reflexive theming and hence it helps in customer acquisition *(Surlemont and Johnson, 2005)*. Themed restaurants enhance the image of the restaurant by influencing the customer value, enthusiasm and customer loyalty *(Bhote, 1996)*. Therefore, Customer Loyalty (CL) increases the business of themed restaurants.

Research Methodology

A. Sample Setting

Sample set featured 227 respondents, where they filled a questionnaire in the form of 5-point Likert scale, containing items to measure parameters of themed restaurants. The data for this quantitative study was collected during the months of April to July, 2020. The respondents in the research study were people, residing in 8 metropolitan Indian cities, which are Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Pune and Ahmedabad. These cities have a population of more than 1 Million and have many popular themed restaurants in and around the city. These included individuals from different occupational backgrounds and middle income and above economic strata, all of whom were sampled through a snowball sampling and convenience sampling process. Preliminary inquiries were conducted to classify the respondents as visitors to themed-restaurants based on prior behavior. The respondents' age had a wide range i.e. from 17 to 60 years of age. The age of the sample-set is appropriate based on the target market for the themed restaurant retailers, as the customers from varied aged group visit these restaurants. The demographic details of the respondents are given in Table IV. The response rate of the online survey was 71%. 230 respondents completed the survey on a 5 point Likert scale, out of which 227 were finally selected for data analysis after removing three for missing values or being invalid. The questionnaires were filled in English, a language all the respondents were proficient and comfortable with. To verify the sampling adequacy KMO's Bartlett's test of sampling adequacy was used. The value of the KMO's co-efficient is 0.838 which is above the threshold value of 0.7 *(Hair et al., 2016)*.

Table IV. Respondent Details

Number of Respondent	Gender	Age Group	Respondents belong to Metropolitan Cities in India
77	Male	17 to 30 years	Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Pune and Ahmedabad
73	Female	17 to 30 years	Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Pune and Ahmedabad
35	Male	31 to 45 years	Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Pune and Ahmedabad
25	Female	31 to 45 years	Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Pune
11	Male	46 to 60 years	Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Pune
9	Female	46 to 60 years	Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore and Pune

B. Measures

The study used established measures for Differentiated Experience (DE), Novelty (NV), Immersive Experience (IE), Coherent Atmosphere (CA), Customer Satisfaction (CS) and Customer Loyalty (CL). The measuring instrument is adopted from various questionnaires which are given below:

- *Differentiated Experience (DE) (Bruner et al., 2005, Campbell and Goodstein, 2001 and John, et al., 1998)*
- *Immersive Experience (IE)* (Agarwal and Karahanna, 2000),
- *Customer Satisfaction (CS)* (Reynolds and Beatty, 1999),
- *Customer Loyalty (CL)* (Wulf et al., 2001)
- *Novelty (NV)* (Kok, 2017)
- *Coherent Atmosphere (CA)* (Foster and McLelland, 2014)

The survey was divided into two sections: the first section consists of a brief profile of the respondents and to which part of the country they belong. It also asks the consumers to mention the name of one or more themed restaurants, they had visited in the past 6 months. The second part was administered on a 5-point Likert scale consisting of factors related to themed restaurants which had an impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty.

C. Procedure and Data Collection

An online survey questionnaire was used to collect the data and address the various hypothesis on themed restaurants in the Indian market. The survey questionnaire was pre-tested with five customers and three faculty members in the marketing and retail domain, who have experience of dining in a themed restaurant as well as a traditional restaurant, to establish the content and purpose related validity of the questionnaire. Five items from novelty, differentiated experience and coherent experience were removed from the scale based on the feedback provided by the experts. A pilot study was carried out with 40 respondents to establish reliability and validity of the scale. The Cronbach's α indicating the internal consistency reliability of the measures for the six constructs were all above the suggested value of 0.60 *(Malhotra and Dash, 2016)*. The Cronbach's α for all the constructs is higher than 0.63 as depicted in Table V; therefore, the reliability has been established and the constructs can be used for further analysis. Each respondent indicated their agreement/response to the questions of each construct in the form of five-point Likert scale. The data was collected via an online form which was circulated to the intended target audience. Initially 149 responses were received from the administration of the survey. A follow up email was sent to the remaining respondents and thereafter another 81 responses were received totaling to 230 responses.

D. Non-Response Test Bias

To ensure that there is no non-response bias, the responses obtained in the two phases were checked using wave analysis as advocated by Armstrong and Overton (1977). The p-value of the $\chi 2$ test is less than 0.05, and therefore the two sets of data, Wave 1 having 149 responses and Wave 2 having 81 responses, are not statistically different from each other.

Data Analysis and Result

The hypothesis presented in the conceptual framework was tested using mediation regression analysis. *(Preacher and Hayes, 2004)* approach to test mediation was used to overcome the shortcomings of *(Baron and Kenny, 1986)*.

A. Exploratory Factor Analysis

To substantiate the reliability and validity of the survey questionnaire used to measure constructs, Factor Analysis was administered on the SPSS tool. Questionnaire item within each of the individual constructs was subjected to Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax Kaiser Normalization to identify dimensions that are underlying the constructs. The results of the Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) are as shown in the Table V. The six factors in the resultant factor matrix were produced after 7 iterations. There were no cross loadings in the resultant factor matrix. The structure of the factor matrix was stable. All the variables were significantly part of only one factor. 0.622 was the lowest value in factor loadings, which is above the threshold value of 0.5 *(Hair et al., 2016)*. All the variables were logically grouped in the factors on the basis of the construct and the literature review. These six factors together explain 68.17% variance.

The convergent and divergent validity was established by ascertaining the appropriate statistic. Table V exhibits the values of Scale Composite Reliability (SCR), thereby confirms that the constructs possess the convergent validity as the values are above 0.5 which is the threshold limit. The values of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all the constructs are mostly above the threshold of 0.5. Only two constructs, CA and CS have value that are less than the threshold i.e., 0.488 and 0.451 respectively, but these values are very close to the threshold limit of 0.5 *(Campbell and Fiske, 1959)*.

Table V. Factor loadings, Cronbach's α, SCR and AVE

Component	Item	Factor Loading	Cronbach's α	SCR	AVE
Immersive Experience (IE)			0.778	0.810	0.590
	I lose track of times when I go for dining at such themed restaurants	0.772			
	Time appears to go by quickly while I am dining at these themed restaurants	0.868			
	I am completely absorbed in the dining when I visit themed restaurants	0.648			
Differentiated Experience (DE)			0.650	0.727	0.573
	How different do you think your dining experience is in these themed restaurants?	0.817			
	How interesting do you think it is to dine at such themed restaurants?	0.691			
Novelty (NV)			0.630	0.773	0.630
	Dining experience provided by themed restaurants are unfamiliar compared to the traditional restaurants	0.766			
	The experience at themed restaurants are more complex than regular restaurants	0.821			
Coherent Atmosphere (CA)			0.713	0.737	0.488
	I find the ambiance of themed restaurants according to the name/theme of the restaurant	0.625			
	The cuisine at themed restaurants are according to the theme of the restaurant	0.822			
	Uniform of staff at a themed restaurant is according to the theme it depicts (Waiter as Jailer in Kaidi restaurant)	0.630			
Customer Satisfaction (CS)			0.786	0.708	0.451
	I enjoy the dining experience at themed restaurants	0.626			
	I find it entertaining to dine at themed restaurants	0.756			
	I am satisfied with the overall dining experience at themed restaurants	0.622			
Customer Loyalty (CL)			0.850	0.776	0.537
	I am, willing to go the extra mile, for dining experience provided by such themed restaurants	0.704			
	I like to dine frequently at these themed restaurants	0.798			
	I feel loyal and would like to frequently dine at such themed restaurants	0.692			

Discriminant-validity is referred as the independence among the factors or dimensions (Bagozzi R. , 1980) & (Bagozzi et al., 1991). Inter-factor-correlation matrix is presented in the Table 5. The diagonal values of the inter-factor-correlation matrix represent the square-root of AVE (Fornell and Larcke, 1981). The lower part of the Inter-factor correlation matrix (Table VI) represents Pearson's correlation co-efficient for inter-factor correlation. As seen from the Table VI, values in the lower part of the matrix are less than the values of the diagonal elements, hence the constructs used shows discriminant validity. There is also no correlation among the factors as there are no cross-loadings among the factors and hence the discriminant validity is indicated.

Table VI. Discriminant Validity Test for Constructs

	DE	IE	NV	CA	CS	CL
DE	0.757					
IE	0.280	0.768				
NV	0.034	0.392	0.794			
CA	0.479	0.441	0.575	0.698		
CS	0.548	0.296	0.287	0.091	0.671	
CL	0.509	0.421	0.227	0.451	0.481	0.733

*All the values displayed here are in the absolute form

B. Hypothesis Testing

To test the hypothesis, regression analysis was used which is suggested by *(Preacher and Hayes, 2004)*. The relationship between the constructs (DE, IE, NV, CA) and the CL mediated by CS on was examined *(Curran, et al., 1996)*. To test the assumption of linearity, scatter plots were used that showed the linearity of relationship between independent variables and dependent variables. The highest absolute value obtained for kurtosis and skewness were 1.139 and 0.946 respectively which were within the acceptable range of values. Normal probability plots and histograms were also examined to test the normality in the data. As seen from the Table VII, Durbin-Watson values are between 1.5 and 2.5, therefore there is no correlations among variables *(Hair, et al., 2010)*. Residual plots were used to verify the equality of means (homoscedasticity) assumption. The residual plot shows that the variance around the straight line is constant. Histogram plots and the statistical value suggests that there are no deviations beyond the limits, as required to satisfy the assumptions for doing regression analysis *(Gandhi, et al., 2017)*.

The values of the Multiple-Regression analysis are shown in the Table VII. suggests that all the hypotheses are supported which were discussed earlier in the paper. If we pay attention to the path between CA-CS, it has the highest impact on the CS. It explains approximately 30% variance in Customer Satisfaction. The β co-efficient CA-CS path is 0.551 and it is statistically significant with value of *p=0.000*. Similarly, IE also has significant impact on as it nearly explains 14% variance in CS and 14% variance in CL. The β co-efficient is found to be 0.3768 for the path IE-CS, and β co-efficient is 0.375 for the path IE-CL.

Table VII. Multiple Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	β coefficient	P	Durbin-Watson
DE-CS	0.388	0.150	0.147	39.85	0.388	0.000	2.051
DE-CL	0.313	0.098	0.094	24.50	0.313	0.000	1.879
IE-CS	0.378	0.143	0.139	37.61	0.378	0.000	1.880
IE-CL	0.375	0.141	0.137	36.80	0.375	0.000	1.838
NV-CS	0.205	0.042	0.038	9.850	0.205	0.002	1.942
NV-CL	0.251	0.063	0.059	15.13	0.251	0.000	1.775
CA-CS	0.551	0.304	0.301	98.11	0.551	0.000	1.961
CA-CL	0.419	0.175	0.171	47.80	0.419	0.000	1.820
CS-CL	0.564	0.319	0.316	105.2	0.564	0.000	1.843

DE-Differentiated Experience; IE-Immersive Experience; NV-Novelty; CA-Coherent Atmosphere; CS-Customer Satisfaction; CL-Customer Loyalty

The results of the mediating regression analysis using *(Preacher and Hayes, 2004)* approach are displayed in the Table VIII. The statistical values suggest that DE under the mediation effect of CS *(H1c)* plays significant role in the prediction of CL. This has also been verified with the Sobel 2-tailed significance test, it showed a *p-value < 0.05*, which signifies the mediating effect. As seen from the table indirect effect (A x B) of DE on CL is 0.271, significance of indirect effect can be seen from *(Preacher and Hayes, 2004)* Boot-Lower-Limit and Boot-Upper-Limit values which are 0.1660 and 0.3898 respectively; these values satisfy the necessary condition for indirect mediation effect i.e. range should not contain *zero*. Complete Mediation occurs when the co-efficient of independent variable becomes insignificant in the presence of mediator and Partial Mediation occurs when the co-efficient of the independent variable decreases considerably in present of the mediator, but still remains significant *(Baron and Kenny, 1986)*. For the hypothesis DE-CS-CL, unstandardized β co-efficient of the mediator is 0.654 and it is found to be statistically significant, also the β co-efficient of independent variable DE is 0.149 which is not statistically significant (*p-value=0.06 which is greater than 0.05*), hence it proves the Complete Mediation. DE explained around 9% variance in CL, but when CS was introduced as a mediator the variance explained was increased to 33%, which is more than thrice compared to the DE-CL model. Therefore, it can be said that

there was improvement in the model due to the introduction of CS as a mediator. Hypothesis for the other three

independent variables were proved for partial mediation in a similar manner.

Table VIII. Mediation Regression Analysis

IV	MV	DV	Effect of IV on MV	Effect of MV on DV	Direct Effect C'	Indirect Effect A x B	Total Effect	Mediation	Sobel p-value*	R2
DE	CS	CL	0.413	0.708	0.148 (35%) *	0.271 (65%) *	0.419	Complete Mediation[*]	0.000	0.329
NV	CS	CL	0.140	0.708	0.120 (57%) *	0.093 (43%) *	0.215	Partial Mediation	0.002	0.338
IE	CS	CL	0.276	0.708	0.174 (50%) *	0.173 (50%) *	0.346	Partial Mediation	0.000	0.349
CA	CS	CL	0.501	0.708	0.175 (37%) *	0.302 (63%) *	0.477	Partial Mediation	0.000	0.335

Note:
- All the **co-efficient(s)** mentioned in this tables are in **non-standardized format**, according to the (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) method of finding the mediating effect.
- **Boot-Lower-Limit** and **Boot-Upper-Limit** values are verified for all independent variables
- Calculation done using the (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) macros for calculating mediating effect in SPSS
- IV-Independent Variable; DV-Dependent Variable; MV-Mediating Variable; DE-Differentiated Experience; IE-Immersive Experience; NV-Novelty; CA-Coherent Atmosphere; CS-Customer Satisfaction; CL-Customer Loyalty
- * Here Percentages indicate the share of the direct and indirect effect respectively in the total effect
- * Sobel p-value should be less than 0.05 for mediation effect to be significant
- * Complete Mediation occurs as the IV-Independent Variable becomes insignificant in presence of MV-Mediating variable (i.e. *p-value > 0.05*)

The output of the mediation analysis and the multiple regression as suggested by *(Baron and Kenny, 1986)* and *(Preacher and Hayes, 2004)* supports the hypothesis *H1a* that forecasted a positive relationship between DE and CL, mediated CS. The reason behind this is the use of customer centric approach to create differentiated environment compared to competitors, this difference is made by the themed environment in the restaurant. Customers remain loyal to restaurants providing differentiated experience, as they are more satisfied with the difference created by the retailers. The results indicate restaurant retailers should focus on delivering differentiated experience to its customers. This will help the retailers to establish them in a better way in the market.

H2c established a positive relationship between NV and CL, mediated through CS. The possible reason for this is that consumers like experiences that are newer, that are unfamiliar to them, and that are rare. NV helps in creating long term memory in the minds of *customers (Dijksterhuis and Aarts, 2010)*. Also, consumers have referred NV as an important aspect in choosing a restaurant and it is also reflected in our results *(Mitas and Bastiaansen, 2018)*. Restaurateurs hence should focus on innovating newer dining experience as it will help them in attracting new customers and hence greater customer acquisition.

H3c established a positive relationship between IE and CL, mediated through CS. Our study projects that IE is one of the most important factors in determining CL for restaurants in India. Therefore, restaurant retailers focus on delivering immersive dining experience to customers. This seems rational, as customers who are more involved in the experience tends to enjoy more and hence visit such restaurants frequently (Matzler and Sauerwein, 2002) and thereon benefiting restaurant.

H4c established a forecasted a positive relationship between CA and CL, mediated through CS. The possible rationale behind this could be that coherent atmosphere provides customers with more holistic dining experience. Due to coherent atmosphere, customers are able to clearly understand the brand image and hence they feel more connected with the restaurant. Due to this connection, customer finds the dining experience more authentic and therefore, they visit these restaurants more often. Restaurant retailers thus should focus on having coherent atmosphere, where all the atmospheric elements are manipulated in a unified manner. It leads to greater customer loyalty, which can also be validated by the results of the research.

Discussion and Implication for Research

We quantitatively examined the nature of relationship between constructs – themed restaurant parameters that is Differentiated experience (DE), Immersive experience (IE), Novelty (NV) and Coherent Atmosphere (CA), Customer Satisfaction (CS) and Customer Loyalty (CL). The results of the analysis indicate that the restaurant parameters positively affect the customer loyalty in organized restaurant retailing with reference to developing economy like India. These findings are consistent with the literature available on themed retailing and themed restaurant retailing. From the findings it can be said that themed environments in restaurants is an important aspect for restaurant retailers in creating customer satisfaction and thereby increasing customer loyalty. We also examined the effect of themed restaurant parameters on the customer loyalty mediated through customer satisfaction with the context of Indian restaurant retailing. The outcome of the study suggests that the customer satisfaction partially mediates the overall effect of themed restaurant parameters on the customer loyalty. The findings of the research emphasize on creating customer loyalty by themed restaurant practices like providing a differentiated experience, an immersive experience, novelty in offerings and a coherent atmosphere.

Among the themed restaurant parameters (DE, IE, NA, CA), restaurants should give special attention on CA-Coherent Atmosphere and IE-Immersive Experience with regard to time and investment as these two are important aspects influencing Customer Loyalty.

A. Managerial Implication

As the number of fine dining restaurants is expanding in recent years with each one offering its own unique proposition, there has been a steady decline in customer loyalty to a particular restaurant. This has an impact on restaurants' capacity not only to build brand equity but also to create sustained competitive advantage. The restaurant has limited capacity to control brand loyalty, as customers are looking for varied experiences. The best a restaurant manager can attempt is to provide an experience that will remain in the memory of the customer much after the event and thereby motivate the customer to visit again. One way of doing this is to create a dining experience that is based on a theme and which temporarily takes the customer to a different world of surprise, excitement, fun, and allows consumers to experience the place communally. This experience is expected to enhance consumers' view of the place. The challenge for the restaurant owner and manager alike is ensuring the value-adding potential of the theme. Evidence from recent studies suggests that this is becoming progressively difficult on account of growth in themed restaurants and the efforts put in by the restaurants to showcase a niche for themselves in terms of either the cuisine, décor, ambiance, or a combination of them.

Theming becomes a means of reducing the sense of sameness and thereby enhancing the attractiveness of its products or services. Customers visit restaurants not only to look for unique food menus at affordable prices, but customers are also looking for restaurants that are able to offer a great experience. If theming professionals wish to depict a particular theme, it is imperative for them to have an appreciation of its cultural and historical background to do justice to the context, which means the elements used to create a theme need to be impactful, coherent and harmonious with the desired theme.

The findings of the research suggest that the themed restaurant parameters play an important role in enhancing customer loyalty. Customers perceive the retail atmosphere in holistic terms rather than individual attributes. The current study proposes a model of consumer perceptions of the atmosphere and the different attributes which contribute to the themed experience. This should hopefully open new avenues of inquiry for researchers interested in themed retailing. The study ascertained that differentiated experience, immersive experience, novelty, and coherent atmosphere are significant elements of a themed restaurant, which play a role in facilitating a better dining experience to the customer as compared to a common casual dining place. If the restaurateur of the themed restaurant knows how to focus on these elements, they will be able to engage their regular customer and might as well increase the new customers to visit their restaurant. If theming professionals wish to enhance a particular theme, it is critical they know which elements to use to create a more impressive, coherent and harmonious themed environment.

Coherent atmosphere can be managed by the theming professionals by ensuring that the physical design in terms of the interior and exterior furniture could be uniquely decorated to tailor to the environment of the theme. The lighting and music could be appropriate in the context of the theme, which creates the right mood and ambiance. The frontline staff could play an important role by connecting with the customer by maintaining direct eye contact, providing a cheerful welcome, and sharing a short narrative about the theme. They could wear suitable attire matching the context and talk the language especially the salutations and slangs as spoken by the natives of that theme. The food served could be prepared in the traditional authentic style matching the theme. Also, the findings suggest that providing a coherent atmosphere to customers should be the priority for restaurant retailers as it has a good capability of affecting customer satisfaction, as seen from the analysis.

Immersive experience can be facilitated by actively involving the participants in the activity, rather than having them as passive recipients. Selling merchandise related to the theme could be one way to ensure an immersive experience that remains with the customers much after the dining experience. The frontline managers could be trained in story-teller, explaining the setup and meanings in a restaurant's ambiance and immerse the customer by interactively communicating with them.

Talking about football in a football-themed restaurant; chatter about the culture and customs in a Rajasthani theme, which includes a dessert set up with camels, folk music, traditional attire, and food; speaking about animation in a Disney themed restaurant; explaining plant/flower related knowledge in a forest-themed restaurant; mention about beach animals and life underwater in a beach-themed restaurant and the like will ensure a differentiated experience for the customer. In this way, the physical set up and design of the theme and the narrative could activate authentic contexts, which further increase involvement,

behavioral intention and transport the customer to another time and place. The differentiated experience can be popularized by effective marketing strategies like theme related event promotions at malls and other common public places, digital marketing, and regular posts on social media. A fan club and a loyalty program for frequent visits could be some of the ways to pull the crowd to the themed restaurant. Novelty could be offered by including theme related birthday celebrations, theme-related wedding ceremonies, baby shower functions and theme-related home parties and the like. The novelty could also come from the authentic food served by the restaurant and the innovative ideas used by the frontline and theming teams to make the context as real as possible.

Theoretically, this research extends the knowledge of the themed restaurant and will fill the literature gap to help the future researchers to explore more about the themed restaurant. The study also establishes that customer satisfaction mediates between themed restaurant parameters and customer loyalty. Thereby, if customers are satisfied with their experience at the themed restaurant, then they would surely become loyal and would visit the restaurant in the future, ensuring repeat sales. Practically, this study will help the existing and new restaurateurs to improve their services in offering a unique dining experience that will satisfy customers' needs and wants. Therefore, dining will be more enjoyable with less risk of unpleasant experience hence increase the chance of revisit from the customer.

B. Limitation and Further Scope of Research

This research had a few limitations. The survey was conducted online and therefore could impact the engagement levels of the respondents. To mitigate this problem, the questionnaire was drafted in such a manner that the total time to complete the survey did not exceed five minutes. Also, a telephonic conversation was done before sending the survey, to explain to the respondent the purpose of the study and also to check if they had visited a themed restaurant in the past six months. There might be a response error found in the data due to the design of the questionnaire. However, measures were taken to minimize the error in the data by carrying out pre-testing with the customers and academia. During pre-testing, subjects were asked to explain the meaning of each question to ensure that the questions are correctly interpretable to the customers who are going to answer the questions. The research involved the study of a themed environment in an Indian restaurant retail industry, before generalizing or extrapolating of the results or the conclusions are drawn, to various other Indian retail industries, there is the need to qualify them before applying to another retail environment. Also, the study was conducted in India and a broader sample could be collected to generalize the findings.

Cultural differences could act as a moderating variable when collecting multiple cultures' data sample. The respondents who had visited a themed restaurant in the past 6 months were selected for the purpose of the study. It is possible that their memory will be less exact and they might not remember the experience in its entirety. Future studies could look at the possibility of interviewing customers immediately after their dining experience. The involvement and employee engagement of the front-line employees play a critical role in ensuring a great experience of the themed restaurant and therefore future studies could incorporate parameters like employee engagement and satisfaction. Frequent visits to the same themed restaurant could reduce the novelty and uniqueness of the place and may not offer similar excitement during subsequent visits. Therefore, the impact of familiarity could be studied in more detail.

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