



Article

Capabilities of Restaurants To Attract Loyal Customers

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Abstract: This study explores the capabilities of restaurants to attract and retain loyal customers in an increasingly competitive environment. Customer loyalty is examined as a crucial factor for sustainable success in the restaurant industry, with particular attention to food quality, pricing strategies, customer service, ambiance, loyalty programs, and online presence. The research employs a mixed-method approach based on descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Data was collected via an online survey distributed through social media platforms, primarily targeting respondents from Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Microsoft Excel was utilized for quantitative data processing, and open-ended responses were thematically categorized to enrich the qualitative findings. The findings reveal that food quality, service excellence, and fair pricing are the primary determinants of customer loyalty. Although loyalty programs were deemed important by 75.7% of respondents, actual participation remained low at 24.2%, indicating a gap between perception and practice. The study highlights the significance of emotional connection, brand image, and transparency in communication as additional factors influencing loyalty. Addressing negative customer experiences effectively was also found to significantly impact return intentions. The research concludes that restaurants must adopt a holistic, customer-centric approach encompassing superior service quality, customized loyalty programs, robust online presence, and emotionally resonant branding to build sustainable customer loyalty. These insights contribute practical recommendations for enhancing the restaurant industry's competitiveness, particularly in the local Uzbek context, and provide a foundation for future regional and sectoral comparisons.

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1. Introduction

The restaurant industry is a fluid, ever-changing environment. Competition for customer patronage is fierce, although the pleasure of good food always remains the same. Diners have a lot on their plate when it comes to choosing between different types of food, environment and cost range. But keeping loyal customers is sometimes much harder. This paper explores what restaurants can do to ensure that they have a reliable base of loyal customers.

This study seeks to identify the factors that determine whether or not a customer will return to a given restaurant. In addition, these determinants help in developing appropriate strategies which may assist restaurants in encouraging loyalty of their clients.

These capabilities are significant for an individual eatery and the whole industry it falls within. If eateries place customer loyalty as their priority, they can achieve sustainability over the long-term and enhance the diversity of dining options available.

The challenge of customer loyalty in the restaurant industry

The restaurant business is growing because it attracts new customers every day. However, there are many competitors in this sector, which makes it very difficult for businesses to retain loyal customers. When it comes to dining, consumers are no longer limited to one restaurant as they now have so many options. Fierce competition calls for a focus on retention strategies that can turn one-time customers into repeat customers.

Aims of This Thesis

This study examines how restaurants attract and retain their regular customers. It also seeks to identify what factors drive consumers to revisit certain dining locations. The study examines aspects such as menu offerings and levels of service quality, as well as general settings and customer engagement ideas. By selecting these important elements, this study aims to find practical ways that food businesses can use to expand their loyalty.

Significance of This Research

It is important for both individual restaurants and the industry as a whole that its ability to maintain customer loyalty is determined. For restaurants, having regular customers means higher profits and stability. Loyal customers not only return frequently but also tend to spend more per visit. Furthermore, their positive word-of-mouth recommendations can attract new customers, propelling further growth. On a broader scale, a focus on customer loyalty within the industry contributes to a vibrant and diverse dining landscape. Restaurants that prioritize loyalty programs and exceptional service experiences create a competitive environment that benefits both restaurants and patrons alike.

Literature Review

The intense competitive nature of the restaurant business industry necessitates that it is able to pull and keep loyal customers in order for it to be able to continue being successful. This literature review seeks to bring together the existing research and scholarly thoughts relating to the abilities of restaurants in attracting and retaining loyal customers. The review has been divided into several main issues that affect customer loyalty within a restaurant setting which are; food quality, pricing strategies, customer service, ambiance, loyalty programs and online presence.

Food Quality

Food quality is widely recognised as a determinant of customer satisfaction and loyalty in the restaurant industry. Research indicates that consumers look for taste, freshness, and presentation when they evaluate their dining experience[1]. In another study by Lee and Hwang, perceived food quality was found to have positive effect on overall customer satisfaction leading to repeated purchase intentions and favorable word-of-mouth referrals[2]. Moreover Choi and Lee opines that food authenticity and uniqueness can set restaurants apart from other rivals thereby promoting customer loyalty.

Pricing Strategies

Additionally, this issue of how and what to charge can affect consumers' choices and views about value in a dining setting[3]. While price is important for buyers, there are other factors that come into play such as the perceived value which will determine whether customers are ready to pay more or buy again from them. Many research works have reported that value-based pricing, bundle pricing, and dynamic pricing were effective in attracting new clients or holding on to the existing ones without undermining profits.

Customer Service

The researcher suggests that customer service is an important part of running any successful restaurant and it plays a critical role in increasing customer satisfaction rates as well as loyalty among them[4]. Moreover, it has been demonstrated by many studies that favorable contact with restaurant employees including their quickness of response and promptness do influence customer's attitudes and behavioral intentions towards the organization they work for[5]. This is also achieved through personalization of service delivery so as to meet these expectations surpassed by customers thereby increasing their faithfulness and advocacy for the hotel.

Ambiance

The overall experience of a restaurant is usually influenced by the atmosphere and ambiance that are present in it hence influencing the kind of behavior and perception that customers will have. According to Kim et al. aspects like lighting, decor, seating arrangements, as well as music enhance diners' emotional and sensory experiences, thus affecting their satisfaction levels and loyalty. Spangenberg et al. posit that when creating dining experiences that are strong and memorable there should be harmony between the atmosphere in a restaurant and its concept[6].

Loyalty Programs

To promote repeated visits among consumers for instance restaurants widely engage loyalty programs aimed at fostering customer loyalty. This implies that for example good rewards, personal benefits or exclusive reasons would contribute greatly towards bettering consumer retention rates thereby raising customer lifetime value thereof ... On top of that such programs provide platforms through which valuable information on customers can be collected so as to support targeted marketing campaigns and initiatives in relationship-building.

In the restaurant business, this indicator is crucial and very important because the costs of attracting a new restaurant guest are several times higher than maintaining the old one. In addition, according to Deloitte's studies, restaurant customer loyalty programs have received their positive trends and examples of uses: "Loyalty consumers use their memberships multiple times a month, and some report using them weekly". This statistic not only repays the costs of obtaining a new user but also increases the average check and lifetime cycle of the client in a particular restaurant. Additionally, findings from Toast, a specialized point of sale system for restaurants, underscore the growing expectations among guests for loyalty rewards programs, with 37% expressing an anticipation for such offerings, particularly in fast food, cafes, pizzerias, breweries, and fine dining establishments, see Figure 1. This synthesis of research emphasizes the pivotal role of customer loyalty initiatives, such as rewards programs, in enhancing patronage and sustaining competitiveness within the restaurant sector.

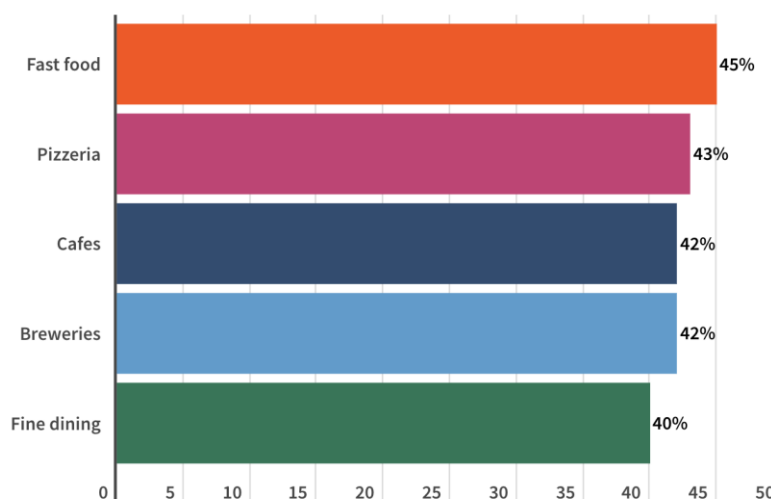


Figure 1. Top 5 restaurant types where guests say loyalty/rewards is a must-have.

The same Toast research from Deloitte also conducted the frequency that guests try new places based on their age, see Figure 2.

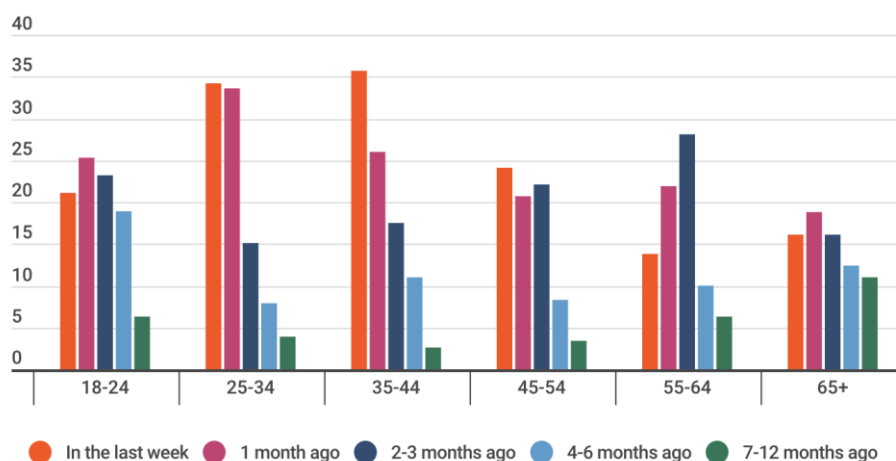


Figure 2. Millennials try new restaurants more often than other age groups.

It's not surprising that millennials tend to explore new dining options more frequently than other age demographics, potentially posing a challenge in cultivating their loyalty. However, despite their propensity to diversify their dining experiences, millennials and Gen Z patrons are actively engaged in customer loyalty programs, with 64% of Gen Z and 61% of millennials participating in such programs at one or two of their preferred table-service restaurants, in contrast to 37% of Gen X and 27% of baby boomers, as indicated by PYMNTS research. While delivering exceptional food quality and consistent guest experiences remains crucial, especially in a competitive restaurant landscape, the provision of compelling and personalized loyalty programs may emerge as a decisive factor in fostering customer loyalty within the restaurant industry[7].

Online Presence

In the present digital era, an online presence has proved to be a central element in restaurants marketing and customer engagement strategy. As per studies consumers tend to use these forms of online platforms and social media sites to identify, evaluate and interact with their favourite restaurants. Through its well-structured website, lively presence on social media and user generated content; an outstanding online presence

boosts awareness, authenticity, brand recognition and eventually fosters affinity for clients hence capturing more customers which increases their loyalty levels.

In conclusion, this section of literature review brings out the various facets that make restaurant able to retain most customers[8]. Restaurants can enhance customer satisfaction, create loyalty as well as drive business performance in a competitive market by using food quality pricing strategies: ambiance: service: programs for loyal customers and online presence among others[8]. Thus it is necessary for restaurant operators and marketers to employ holistic approach which are focused on customers thereby keeping adjusting or changing accordingly what they offer because of the ever changing needs of modern consumers[9].

2. Materials and Methods

This section outlines the study approach utilized in this thesis to examine eateries' potential to draw in devoted patrons. The approach is centred on using a survey questionnaire to collect data and then analysing the answers to determine the main variables affecting customer loyalty.

Google Forms was used to develop and create a survey questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather information from restaurant customers about their eating preferences, habits, and reasons for returning to a specific location. There were a combination of open-ended (9), and closed-ended (1) items in the poll. Open-ended questions allowed for more in-depth and nuanced answers, whereas closed-ended questions offered respondents pre-defined answer possibilities to choose from.

The survey link was distributed through social media platforms, specifically Facebook (private account) and Telegram (general groups). Social media offered a cost-effective and efficient way to reach a broad audience of potential respondents. Utilizing private Facebook accounts ensured some control over the target audience, while Telegram general groups provided access to a wider demographic[10].

A total of 67 individuals completed the survey. The majority of respondents (55) were citizens of Uzbekistan, with the remaining participants being foreign citizens. This indicates a slight bias towards a local Uzbekistani perspective. In terms of location, most respondents were situated in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, further reinforcing the local focus of the data.

The results of the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Microsoft Excel served as the primary tool for analyzing the collected data. Closed-ended questions were analyzed by calculating frequencies and percentages of responses for each answer choice. This facilitated the generation of visuals such as pie charts and bar charts which effectively depict the distribution of responses. Open-ended questions were analyzed thematically, identifying recurring patterns and key themes within the responses.

One important thing that must be understood is the limitations of this research methodology. This made the sample biased towards social media active individuals because it was distributed on social media. Besides, the relatively small size of the sample (67 people) could reduce the overall quality of results[11]. Moreover, by exclusively focusing on Samarkand in Uzbekistan through its private Facebook account and Telegram groups introduced a geography and cultural bias into our data.

However, this research attempts to gain useful insights despite these limitations. To address these limitations in future studies, different methods could be utilized whereby a more diverse set of samples are chosen such as those using online survey platforms or conducting surveys at restaurants. Increasing the size of our sample would also enhance the generalizability of our findings.

A survey questionnaire was used to collect data from customers' loyalty in restaurants using this method. The next part will analyze descriptive statistics with regard

to the collected data. However, this study has limitations; nonetheless, it offers valuable insights about Uzbekistani restaurant market and lays foundation for further investigations on customer retention within broader restaurant industry context.

3. Results

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the capabilities of restaurants to attract and retain loyal customers. The data collected from the survey, coupled with secondary research, highlight key factors that significantly influence customer loyalty in the restaurant industry. This section discusses the findings related to food quality, pricing strategies, customer service, ambiance, loyalty programs, and online presence, and their implications for restaurant managers and marketers.

The survey investigated respondents' dining habits through a closed-ended question inquiring about their restaurant visit frequency. The results are depicted in Figure 3. A significant portion of respondents (45%) indicated they dine out frequently (at least once a week), highlighting a strong interest in the restaurant industry. Additionally, 38% reported occasional visits (2-4 times a month), suggesting a regular engagement with restaurants. While a smaller percentage (15%) dines out rarely (once a month or less), only 2% stated they never frequent restaurants[12]. These findings suggest a sample population with a relatively high frequency of dining out, which strengthens the relevance of the collected data on customer loyalty factors within the restaurant industry.

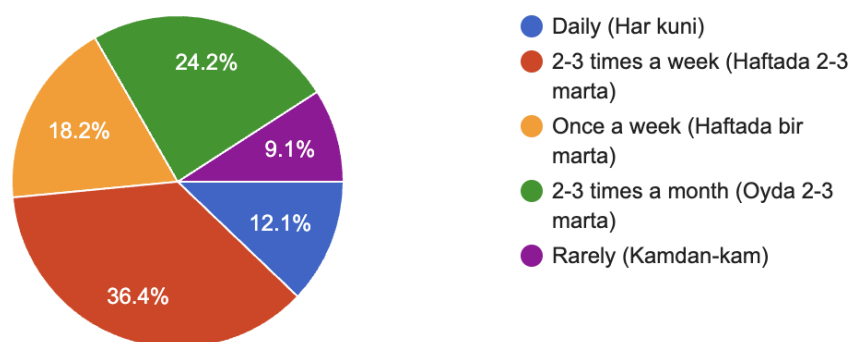


Figure 3. How often do you dine out at restaurants?

Figure 4 presents the thematic analysis of open-ended questions regarding factors influencing customer loyalty. Food quality emerged as the most prominent factor, with 78.8% of respondents highlighting its importance. This aligns with previous research by Bowen & Chen (2001) emphasizing the significance of culinary excellence in customer satisfaction. Price also emerged as a significant factor, influencing 63.6% of respondents' decisions to return to a restaurant[13-14]. Customer service (57.6%) and ambiance/atmosphere (42.4%) were also identified as influential factors, further supporting existing research by Ladhari. These findings demonstrate the multifaceted nature of customer loyalty in the restaurant industry, where not only food quality but also pricing strategies, exceptional service experiences, and a welcoming environment play a crucial role in attracting and retaining customers.

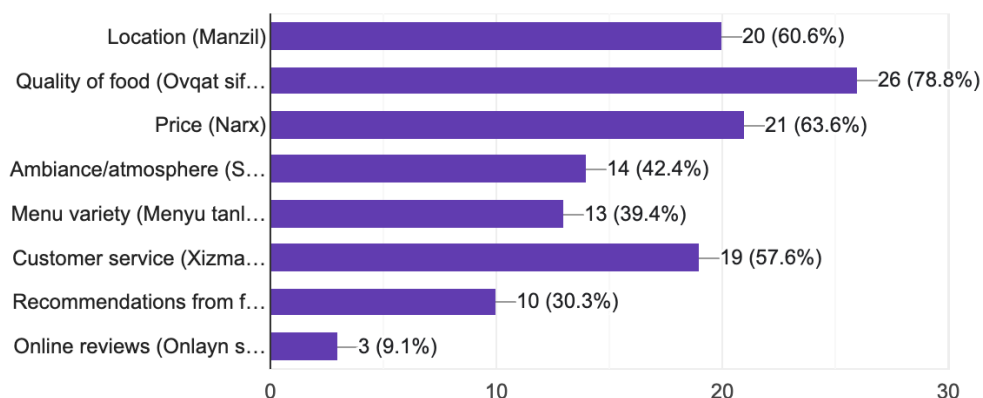


Figure 4. What factors influence your decision to visit a restaurant?

While not the most crucial factor, loyalty programs do play a role in influencing customer loyalty. As illustrated in Figure 5, a combined 75.7% of respondents indicated that loyalty programs are either "somewhat important" (42.4%) or "very important" (33.3%) in their decision to revisit a restaurant. This suggests that a significant portion of the customer base finds value in loyalty programs offered by restaurants.

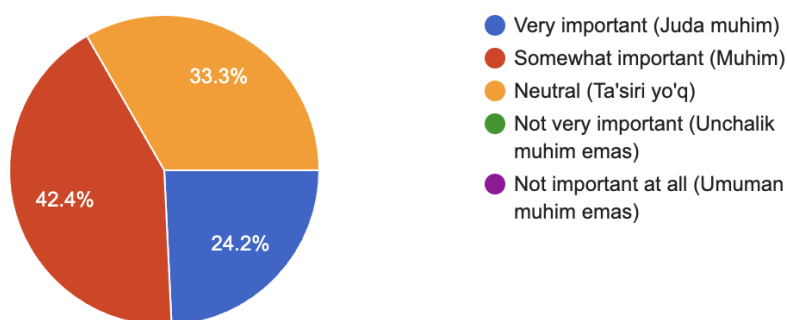


Figure 5. How important is loyalty rewards program in your decision to revisit a restaurant?

The survey results, as depicted in Figure 6, indicate that a significant majority of respondents, 75.8%, have never joined a restaurant's loyalty program, while only 24.2% have participated in such programs. This finding suggests that there is a substantial opportunity for restaurants to enhance customer engagement and loyalty through the implementation and promotion of loyalty programs[15-16]. Despite the potential benefits of loyalty programs, the current low participation rate highlights the need for more effective communication and value propositions to encourage customers to join and actively engage with these programs.

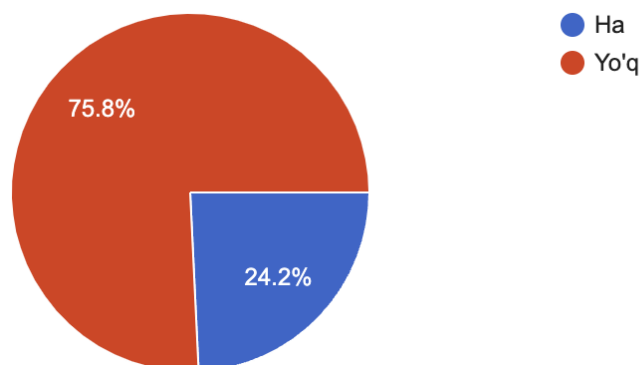


Figure 6. Have you ever joined a restaurant's loyalty program.

Figure 7 reveals that among respondents who have joined restaurant loyalty programs, the most appealing aspect is discounts on meals, with 66.7% selecting this option. This is followed by personalized rewards/offers at 15.2%, free items after a certain number of visits/purchases at 12.1%, and exclusive offers or promotions at 6.1%. These findings suggest that while customers highly value immediate financial benefits such as meal discounts, there is also significant appreciation for personalized incentives. Restaurants aiming to enhance their loyalty programs should prioritize these elements to better meet customer preferences and encourage repeat patronage.

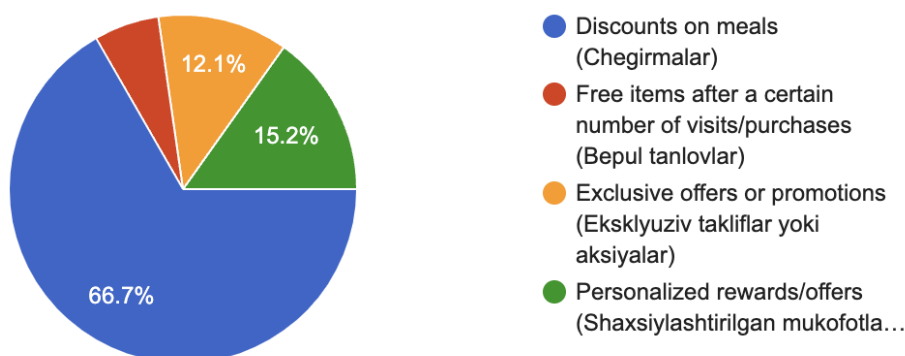


Figure 7. What aspects of the loyalty program do you find most appealing?

The survey results indicate a strong likelihood of restaurant loyalty program members recommending the restaurant to others (Fig. 8). Specifically, 36.4% of respondents rated their likelihood to recommend a restaurant at 4 out of 5, and an additional 18.2% gave the highest rating of 5. In total, 54.6% of participants are highly likely to recommend the restaurant, demonstrating the positive impact of loyalty programs on customer advocacy. Only a small minority, 9.1%, rated their likelihood as 1 or 2, suggesting that loyalty program participation generally correlates with a higher propensity to recommend the restaurant to others. This finding emphasizes the potential of well-structured loyalty programs to not only retain customers but also drive positive word-of-mouth referrals.

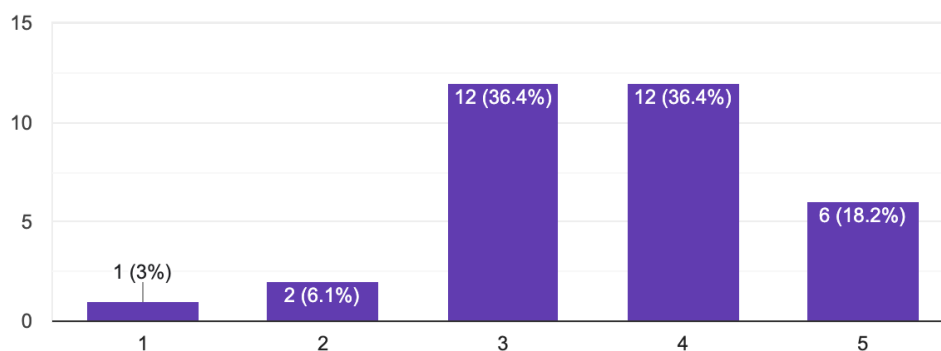


Figure 8. How likely are you to recommend a restaurant to others if you are a part of their loyalty program (Rate from 1 to 5, Five being the most likely)?

incentive for joining or actively participating in a restaurant's loyalty program, with 69.7% of respondents expressing interest in this option. Special birthday offers were also popular, attracting 51.5% of the respondents. Anniversary rewards appealed to 24.2%, while points for social media engagement were favored by 15.2%. Additionally, 21.2% of participants suggested other incentives not listed. These findings indicate that customers are particularly motivated by loyalty programs that offer escalating rewards based on visit frequency and personalized special occasion benefits, underscoring the importance of tailored and tiered incentives in enhancing loyalty program engagement.

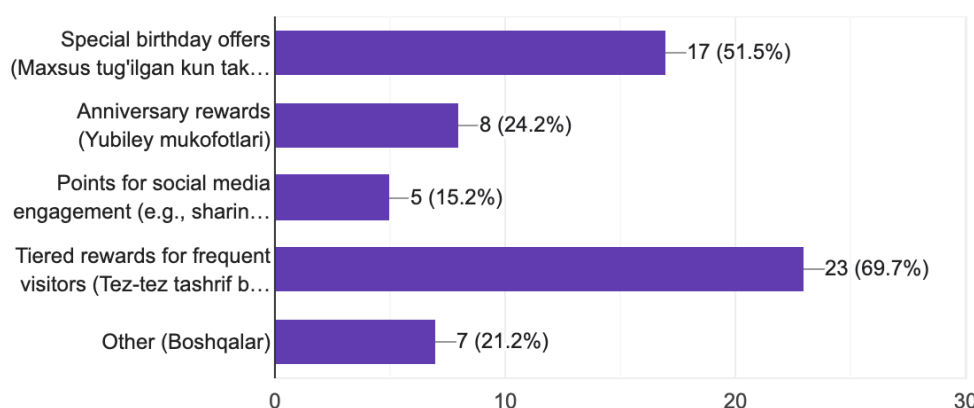


Figure 9. What additional incentives would encourage you to join a restaurant's loyalty program or participate more actively?

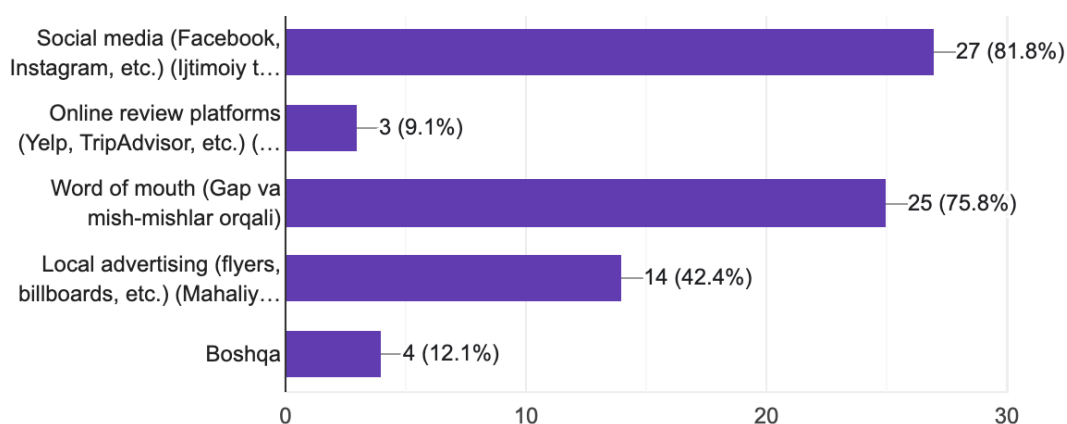


Figure 10. How do you typically hear about new restaurants?

Well-handled negative experience can significantly impact customer retention. If a restaurant manages a negative experience effectively, 21.2% of respondents indicated they are very likely to return, while 39.4% are somewhat likely to return in Figure 11. Conversely, 33.3% of respondents are not very likely to return, and 6.1% are not likely at all to return. These findings suggest that while effective resolution strategies can encourage a majority of customers to give the restaurant another chance, there remains a considerable portion of customers for whom a negative experience is difficult to overcome, emphasizing the importance of exceptional initial service.

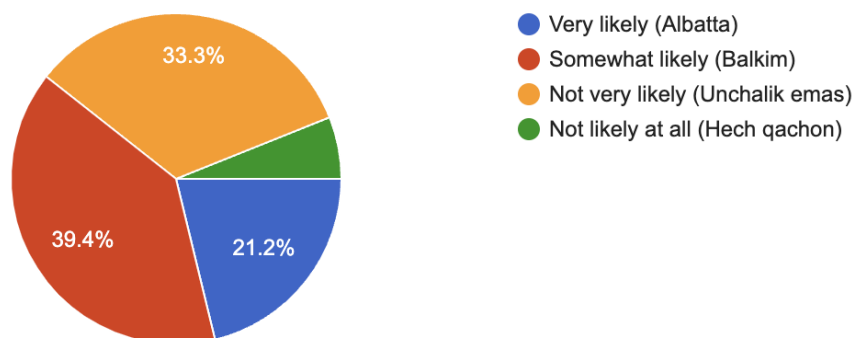


Figure 11. How likely are you to return to a restaurant if you had a negative experience, but the restaurant handled it well (e.g., provided a sincere apology, offered compensation)?

4. Discussion

The survey results provide valuable insights into customer preferences and behaviors, offering several implications for restaurant managers seeking to attract and retain loyal customers.

The outcomes of this research go hand in hand with similar studies on client loyalty. Food quality still remains a non-issue, as stated by Lee & Hwang and Kim & Kim [17]. Also, service quality remains a key issue, according to Wirtz & Mattila. As such, it is essential for restaurants to put both culinary skills and best customer care at heart of their operations.

This finding is well supported by what Haghghi et al. (2012) and Cha & Seo argued about perceived value in customer loyalty. Therefore, restaurants should set prices that reflect the quality and quantity of food they offer. Additionally, a theme like ambiance appears to be substantiated also in Mattila & Mount [18-19].

It is important to consider the limitations of this study especially the sample size and geographical bias while interpreting these results. The results provide valuable insights into Uzbekistani restaurant market; however further research need to carried out with more heterogeneous subjects so as to generalize this study for broader audience.

Restaurant managers and marketers should take note of the findings of this study. First and foremost, for customer loyalty to be maintained, high food quality is very important. To meet customer expectations, restaurants should concentrate on sourcing fresh ingredients, creating dishes that are not common in other places and ensuring consistent quality.

Second, customers can be retained by using pricing strategies that emphasize perceived value rather than mere competitiveness. In addition, another way to increase customer loyalty is through customized offers and discounts that can meet unique dietary preferences and needs.

Outstanding customer service continues to be the primary motivator of loyalty. If staff members are taught to be proactive in their service and amiable towards clients' demands, the eating experience can be substantially enhanced. Businesses can also draw in devoted

clients by providing them with individualised services that help them feel important and understood.

Creating an attractive atmosphere that matches the restaurant's concept will help people remember their meals more vividly, and therefore increase the likelihood of future visits. The music, decor and lighting used in any restaurant should be consistent with its theme to enhance the overall customer experience.

Loyalty programmes should be thoughtfully designed, with substantial, personalised rewards being provided to make incentives relevant. Through personalizing rewards by using customer data, restaurants can boost the perceived worth of their loyalty programs as well as encourage greater customer engagement[20].

A robust digital presence is a must nowadays. Restaurants should have informative and user-friendly websites, interact with customers on social media platforms and manage online reviews effectively. This enhances visibility and also builds credibility and trust among potential and existing customers.

To sum it up, it is quite complicated for any eating point to attract and keep clients. It is also possible to have a client-oriented attitude in restaurants by focusing on food quality, pricing strategies, customer service, atmosphere, loyalty programs plus Internet presence that would help in increasing the loyalty of customers leading to business success. The results are helpful for restaurateurs who want to develop policies that will increase competitiveness and consumer loyalty among other things within the industry of restaurants.

5. Conclusion

The multifaceted nature of customer loyalty within the hospitality industry is only but one aspect that emerged from a study on restaurants' capability to attract repeat customers. Several vital insights have been obtained through all- round survey, which gives better understanding of what motivates clients and how restaurants can improve their strategies to cultivate loyal customer bases.

The results indicated that among major factors like food quality, competitive pricing, great customer service, and a good ambiance are key in attracting as well as keeping those who come back always. These aspects form the basis of a good dining environment, which is necessary to keep customers coming back. In addition, this study highlighted the role of an effective loyalty program, with dining discounts and tiered rewards being among the most attractive. This suggests that customers prefer things like food discounts and personal rewards over other perks offered by companies when they visit their establishments for dinner.

In addition, these results showed that social media is an important tool for consumers to discover new places to eat, thus suggesting that restaurants should have a strong online presence. Positive evaluations emphasise the value of providing exceptional service and satisfying consumers while acting as a strong inducement to draw in new clients.

Studies have indicated that a restaurant's response to unfavourable customer experiences can greatly affect its ability to retain customers. Sincere apologies and suitable compensation are two effective problem-solving techniques that can lessen the effects of a bad experience and entice clients to come back.

In conclusion, restaurants that aim to build and maintain a loyal customer base must adopt a holistic approach that encompasses high-quality food, competitive pricing, excellent service, a welcoming ambiance, effective loyalty programs, and a strong digital presence. By addressing these areas, restaurants can create a compelling value proposition that attracts new customers and fosters long-term loyalty.

The following are some suggestions to restaurant managers and other stakeholders in the industry on how they can improve their businesses such that they retain and draw attention of loyal customers:

1. Maintain High Standards in Core Areas: Food quality, pricing, service, and the ambiance should meet or exceed customer expectations. Continually seek feedback for improvements within the areas which are found wanting.
2. Implement Effective Loyalty Programs: Make sure that you come up with loyalty programs that have tangible benefits of significance like meal discounts as well as tiered rewards. Have programs that will be easily accessed by customers and friendly navigable systems while still considering preferences and behavior likelihoods for giving incentives.
3. Utilize Social Media and Online Platforms: Ensure a strong social media investment through coming up with interesting content which engages with clients as well as promotion of positive reviews. Use online review platforms to keep track of feedback from clients and handle their concerns appropriately so as to demonstrate commitment towards satisfying them.
4. Train Staff in Customer Service Excellence: The employees must have what it takes to ensure consistent delivery of superior service.

By following these recommendations, hotels will be able to build their capacities for attracting and keeping loyal customers over a long time period thus enabling them achieve sustained growth and prosperity. The insights gained from this study provide a roadmap for developing a strategic approach to customer loyalty that leverages quality, service, technology, and personalized engagement to create a compelling and rewarding dining experience.

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