

Impact of Soundscape in Diners' Experience: A Study in Assam

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CHAPTER-10

Conclusion

This chapter presents a brief overview of the study. It also includes contribution to the body of knowledge, specifies the practical implications of the study and outlines the scope of future research.

The previous chapter dealt with the major findings of the study. This concluding chapter of the study is carefully divided into four sub- sections. Section 10.1 provides a precise objective-wise summary of the entire study. Section 10.2 mentions the theoretical contribution of the study to the existing body of knowledge. Section 10.3 outlines the managerial insights that stem from the findings and can be adopted by managers and restaurateurs while figuring out marketing strategies in order to maximize profits and outshine the competition. Lastly, Section 10.4 specifies the directions for further research in the area.

10.1. Overview of the Study

Diners seek an experience when they visit restaurants. That experience encompasses a variety of elements within the restaurant including the sound environment. The acoustic richness present in the restaurant offers a reasonable opportunity to investigate sound perception in a contextual setting. This study has been carried out in order to examine in detail the impact of soundscape in diners' experience. Initially, the study investigates how music affects diners' experiences. For doing so the study employs exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify two major factors that are related to music and diners' overall dining experiences. The "Dining Euphoria" is the first factor which has eleven items on dimensions and "Sonic Flavour" being the second factor with five items. Next, the role of live music in creating a positive customer experience for diners is measured. A comparison between live music and pre-recorded music on restaurant customers' experience is also offered. This study as well measures the role of ethnic music in enhancing diners' experience in ethnic restaurants. In addition to these, another important element of soundscape i.e., noise is investigated for its effect on diners' experience. With these the role of music as a noise avoider is also examined. The study has been carried out in three parts-

1. Survey

Chapter 5 covers the analyses of the perception of diners on the overall soundscape including role of music, live music and the effect of noise on their overall experiences. It is found that the diners' perception of the sound environment is not only influenced by the conviviality of the ambience or attention to music alone but by the combined effect of both. The most pleasant

assessments of the sound environment are linked to the welcoming ambience. Even mild or passive awareness of the music enhances perceptions of the sound environment making the experience a pleasant, calm, eventful, less annoying, less chaotic and less monotonous one compared to complete disengagement with music. Results also confirmed that attentiveness to music enhances engagement with and appreciation of the sound environment making it more exciting for diners. Paying attention to music enhances dining euphoria, particularly for diners with higher satisfaction levels. Although, satisfying restaurant experience alone does not directly affect sonic flavor perception but attention to music influences the perception of sonic flavors. Apparently, the volume of music and not the tempo influences the level of music experienced in the restaurant. Despite the diners enjoy live music in general, they mostly tend to prefer it during special occasions. It is also found that the diners prefer pre-recorded music over live music while dining. However, they prefer pre-recorded music and live music over no music at all. The diners believe that other than music, the restaurant soundscape is primarily influenced by kitchen sounds, followed by interactions among co-diners and background noises emanated from dragging of furniture to fans or electronic devices etc. Diners' overall experience of noise is impacted by their level of noise sensitivity. Someone may be high in noise sensitivity and may be affected by a sound which may not affect the moderate or low noise sensitive diners even in the same environment. High noise sensitive diners like restaurants with a set volume, which can be build up by pre-recorded music. Diners who are moderate and highly sensitive towards noise are likely to avoid a live music condition in restaurant. It may be due to the fact that they may perceive live music to be noisy. Restaurant patrons who are highly sensitive to noise prefer music as a thin linen to mask the unwanted and undesirable sounds. They are fairly certain that listening to music will enhance their experience. This finding indicates that music plays the role of a noise avoider in context of the study.

2. Experiment

Although the survey tries to fulfill both the objectives but to bring into focus the ethnic music and to determine its role an experiment with a intervention group termed as Ethnomusicological Group (EG) and a Control Group (CG) is

conducted. It is found that ethnic instrumental music in the restaurant is associated with the food served in the ethnic restaurant. It is also found that there is a strong musical fit with Assamese cuisine, Bodo cuisine, Naga cuisine and Bengali cuisine with the ethnic instrumental music respectively. There exists a strong value of ethnic music while consuming ethnic food in a restaurant on enhancement of the dining experience. Presence of ethnic music enhances authenticity. The dining experience is influenced by the restaurant's selection of music. Customers are willing to pay more because of the presence of ethnic music. Hence, it is established that the presence of ethnic music builds a congruency effect with the ethnic restaurants and elevates the overall dining experience.

3. Focus Group Discussion

The focus group discussions basically reveal that both positive and negative emotions and reactions can be evoked by sound. According to participants, more than half of the restaurants are unsure about the selection of music. To enhance the dining experience, music selections should complement the meal and the entire ambiance. This is not only applicable to ethnic restaurants but also all the restaurant. Everybody experiences noise from different sources and at different intensities. Some people may become irritated with their surroundings quickly, while others may be more resilient to noise sensitivity. It is true, though, that noise distracts from the experience of dining. Sometimes music becomes a noise if the volume is raised up. However, sometimes music can be enjoyable and eventful that other noises are ignored. Diners' satisfaction of live music and pre-recorded music depends on to their own choice of music, companion, conversation intention etc. in determining customer satisfaction. Good music simply does not lead to positive experience if the food served in the restaurant is not good. However, only food alone cannot create a positive experience.

Therefore, the study objectives are fulfilled with the three different approaches adopted. The first objective on role of music is achieved with the survey and its sub objective on ethnic music is achieved with experiment. The second objective on effect of noise in diners' experience is achieved with the survey conducted.

10.2. Theoretical Contribution to the Knowledge

The present study represents a significant advancement in the field of soundscape research within the restaurant businesses. The main goal was to broaden the understanding of how diners' experiences are impacted by the sound environment in restaurants, creating new grounds by building upon the conceptual work.

The primary contribution of this study is that it lends greater understanding on the actual effect of the soundscape related factors. The study while identifying the impact of conviviality and attention to music on the perceptual rating of the sonic quality in restaurants specifies which factor is crucial in determining the perceptual feature of sonic environment.

The in-depth literature review which forms the basis of this study demonstrates that it is important to analyze soundscape in restaurant in terms of experience separately an issue that has so far received too little attention in hospitality and consumer behavior studies. Moreover, soundscape studies in perceptual context is although found in western countries and a few in China but other Asian countries including India very scant research are found. This study will prove to create a strong knowledge base for those researchers who wish to study soundscape of these regions.

The present study has also explored the different sound sources which are categorized as pleasant, unpleasant and neutral sound by the diners themselves. In the available literature attempts were made to find out the sources but categorization was not made by the subjects themselves.

The study, based on earlier research modified the Weinstein's Noise Sensitivity Scale and adopted it for further analysis. Based on the scores on each statement, different levels of noise sensitivity are identified.

The study used a mixed method approach for fulfilling its objectives. Triangulation of the findings of the three approaches – FGD, Survey and Experiment happens to strengthen the knowledge base of the soundscape research in restaurants. In addition to this integration by narratives and joint display along with meta inferences is one of the major contributions of this research.

Although experiment is a common design for acoustic and psychological research but most of the researches to find out congruency between ethnic music and ethnic food mostly conducted in university setting or laboratory experiments are done. This real setting experiment is unique in itself.

This study also highlights the very neglected area of research in terms of music that is live music. This study is going to provide a good understanding on the role of live music in restaurants.

The sentiment analysis used in FGD provides a framework for applying sentiment analysis through machine learning for auto-generation analytics, particularly in forum discussions, review analysis and qualitative content evaluations (Dake & Gyimah, 2023). In the process, the study offers insightful information about how a restaurant's sound environment, which includes the music, noise, and overall sound, affects the diners' experience. The impact of live performances and recorded music on audience satisfaction; and congruency between ethnic music and food is also showcased. In that way this study is essential and contributes towards the broader aspect of knowledge.

10.3. Practical Implications

The main objective of any managerial researcher is to be able to provide useful information and suggestions to the practitioners so that effective strategies can be formulated by them to attract and retain their customer base. Considering the rise of experience economy along with frequent failure in providing a better experience (Kranzbühler et al., 2018), this study offers some practical hints towards offering pleasurable experience. Visiting a restaurant is a social experience and regarded as a multisensory experience, There are factors like aroma, furniture, lighting, music influence the service evaluation and not only determined by the food (Wilczek et al., 2019). The way customers used to go to restaurants solely for food is long past. Customers today seek a unique experience in the offerings. The dining experience occurs before the food is served in the restaurant.

The auditory environment of the restaurant is critical in itself (Lindborg, 2016). Therefore, managers need to acknowledge the every minute detail in the servicescape to provide overall satisfaction of the dining experience. Restaurateurs specially need to

take care of the sonic environment for a better dining experience. In spite of this, there hasn't been enough thorough research done to examine how sonic environment influences the dining experience. This study has attempted to fill a number of research gaps and offer important insights into them. No comprehensive research has been found on the soundscape of restaurant having examined the different elements of soundscape under one study. This study delves in detail into the impact of soundscape across a range of age groups, genders, educational attainment, occupations, income brackets, treat type, and visit type. Dining establishments trying to formulate strategies may find this research piece a useful one in formulating strategies.

1. This research offers a good understanding of the different perceptual sonic quality in the restaurants. By understanding these sonic qualities marketers can develop their own auditory environment. Based on these they can understand when and which segment of the diners perceive the auditory environment to be pleasant, calm, chaotic, eventful, exciting, monotonous, annoying and adjust the sound sources to better suit them.
2. Results of the first objective on role of music provides insights into how paying attention to music leads diners to experience significantly higher dining euphoria than those do not pay attention to music during meal. Also, provide insight into how attention to music helps in enhancing the perception of sonic flavors. Marketers can try to make the diners to pay attention to music which can enhance their dining euphoria and sonic flavor, especially for those diners who already have higher satisfaction with their experience. Results suggest that cultivating a welcoming ambience in restaurants could have a meaningful positive effect on customers' enjoyment and experience. Moreover, aligning the level of volume of music with diners' preferences to maximize their sensory satisfaction may also be taken care by the restaurateur. Therefore, restaurants need to fine-tune the music volume to better meet diverse customer preferences. Although tempo may be less critical in shaping their perception of music volume it should also be taken into consideration while planning the auditory environment. The restaurant to provide a pleasant experience must aligns music level reasonably well with diners' preferences and expectations.
3. This demographic profile provides valuable insights for tailoring services and offerings to meet the needs and preferences of the economically active and

youthful group of diners. Diners differ in terms of gender, occupation and age on attentiveness towards music in restaurants. So, marketers need to address the issue by taking due care of the demographic profile of the diners. Therefore, restaurant management may think about creating spaces that naturally invite diners to listen to music, as this can improve the entire sensory experience of the establishment. On the other hand they must know that ignoring music completely cannot have the desired effect of improving the surroundings.

4. As far as live music is concerned although diners prefer live music but restaurants may prioritize live performances during holidays or celebratory seasons to cater to the need of diverse diner base and add on to the total ambience.
5. Restaurants may think about combining background music with subtle crafted kitchen sound and natural noises to create a well-rounded soundscape that caters to patron tastes and considered pleasant by diners. There may be a careful balance in allowing kitchen sound to be audible to the patrons as some operational sound like clinking of cutlery, sound of mixer grinder etc. might get unduly amplified creating a negative effect. Proper cushioned furniture can be used to mitigate the sound that may be caused by pulling of furniture. As a whole a more comfortable dining experience may result from efforts to establish a more balanced and controlled sound environment.
6. Results indicate that dynamic soundscapes could help restaurants to attract low noise sensitivity guests to improve their experience without disturbing high noise sensitivity diners. The variations in noise sensitivity levels emphasize how crucial it is to customize soundscapes to accommodate a variety of tastes, striking a balance to generate a pleasant and an enjoyable auditory experience.

Results show that the more sensitive a person is to noise, the more likely he/she to pay attention to or notice music while eating. Even, they prefer loud volume to cover the noise created by other sound sources. Restaurateurs may use this insight while using music to combat the negative sound bites.

7. Although, both moderate and high noise sensitive diners indicated a very low preference for 'no music' but high preferences for pre-recorded music, it is meaningful to add some music to make the sonic environment appealing. Restaurants should balance the appeal of pre-recorded music with the option of

live music for diners with varying preferences. Restaurants may also facilitate special quieter settings for highly sensitive guests. Managers should formulate strategies in a manner to play pre-recorded music during normal days and live music during special days, on special patron occasions and possibly during weekends to cater to the diverse customer needs and preferences and avoid noisy environment.

8. The interplay of ethnic music and ethnic food significantly enhances the dining experience, leading to increased satisfaction and delight among diners. The study highlights that when cultural elements such as music and cuisine are harmoniously combined, they create a richer, more immersive experience that resonates with diners on an emotional and cultural level. It has been seen that if the music is familiar like in the Control Group (Bollywood instrumental music) diners do not return dissatisfied, but the experience becomes much more favourable if they can relate the music with the food. This makes the experience more authentic, and it is observed that while promoting the ethnic restaurants, the service providers play ethnic music with ethnic food. It is also found that customers do not hesitate to pay a little extra if they are getting a wholesome experience. In order to provide a seamless sensory experience, ethnic music establishes the mood and ambience while complementing the culinary theme. Thus, listening to ethnic music increases the overall enjoyment of the meal by evoking a sense of authenticity and cultural immersion. Positive reactions from diners may generate a profound psychological bond which can be used by the marketers to define and re-define their strategies to earn more profit. This insight might help the restaurant managers, especially those offering primarily ethnic dishes strategize delivery of their overall experience

Thus, the findings of this work are expected to be useful for dining establishment of similar (to the study area) or diverse environment also.

10.4. Scope for Future Research

Due to different constraints no study is free from its limitation and scope. Like other works, this study also has some loopholes of its own. These limitations pave the way and reflect the scope for further research to be carried out in the respective area.

1. It's important to acknowledge that the soundscape study is still an unexplored field of study (Refer to Chapter 2 and Chapter 7). As such, gathering a sizable and diverse sample that fairly represents the soundscape study prove to be a difficult task. As an initial step towards a more thorough understanding of consumer behaviour in relation to a sound environment, our research paves the way for future, larger research endeavours with different study area with diverse culture with methodologies (Shashikala & Suresh, 2017; Axelsson, 2020; Schulte-Fortkamp & Fiebig, 2023). India represents a wide array of culture. Studying culture from marketing perspective would be beneficial. Therefore, the same methodology can be used to carry out research in different regions and communities of India.
2. This study only covers the perception of the diner regarding soundscape in restaurant. However, studies meant for restaurant employees who are on regular basis exposed to that environment should also be carried out. The study could be carried out from diverse angles such as impact of soundscape on their work performance, effect of regular exposure to restaurant noise etc.

More studies exclusively highlighting live music can be carried out as there is very limited literature.

3. Experiments could also be conducted to measure noise in real settings to gain more insight.
4. It is found that high noise sensitive diners consider the sonic ambiance welcoming and the probable reason could be because of music, which may help them ignoring the noise. But low noise sensitive diners have found the same ambiance less welcoming and the probable reason could be that they may require more volume. This assumption could be taken up in future studies.
5. The moderately noise sensitive diners perceive more excitement in the sound environment than by the low noise sensitive diners. Empirical as well as experiment research can be further carried out to address this issue.

Sound influences our overall evaluation of the environment while dining in restaurant. Overall, this study provides a proper understanding of soundscape in restaurants and the role and the effects of its sources in terms of music, minor sound sources and noise. The soundscape of restaurant is dominantly created by music with other sounds. Music has a

special ability to stimulate and create an atmosphere, influencing consumers' feelings and actions with or without them realizing it. It can be concluded by saying that music plays a pivotal role in the assessment of the entire dining experience. The dining preferences and experience are also greatly influenced by noise. In fact, flexible soundscapes are required in restaurants to facilitate diners with varying sensitivity levels to make the overall dining experience a favourable one for all.