CHAPTER-1

Sonic Prelude

This chapter serves as the prelude to the thesis, providing an overview of the entire research project, much like the prelude to a piece of music. In order to facilitate understanding of the next chapters, it also covers the key concepts and terminology utilized throughout the research.

"We cannot close our ears; we have no ear lids"- R. Murray Schafer

1.1. Introduction

In the year 1998, Pine and Gilmore stated in their paper titled "Welcome to the Experience Economy " in the Harvard Business Review that the service economy would be replaced by the experience economy. In order to gain competitive advantages in the market, business houses need to work on providing customer experiences (Akhoondnejad et al., 2024). In the restaurant industry, this concept has also received a lot of attention. Where traditional restaurants used to employ taste and pricing to attract consumers, with the advent of the experience economy, restaurants have tried to attract consumers by offering a distinctive "dining experience" as a unique selling feature (Yan & Felicen, 2021; Lin et al., 2021). Today, visiting a restaurant is considered a leisure activity (Kleinhans et al., 2016). It is much more than just eating outside the home, rather called a social experience where diners want to spend quality time with their friends and family (Edwards, 2013). There is a rise in the trend of eating out in India (Upadhyay et al., 2007; Shashikala & Suresh, 2017). It is evident that a change from traditional to modern food consumption patterns is also increasing as a result of the increased urbanization. India has seen an over 4% increase in urbanization over the past ten years as a result of a growing number of people choosing to work in services instead of agriculture (O'Neill, 2024). Urbanization also leads to more nuclear families and a rising proportion of working women, leading to dual income and a changing lifestyle of consumers.

Therefore, dining out has become more common in urban areas (Anand, 2011; Bose, 2015). Diners seek a better dining experience in the restaurant. Dining experience consists of interrelated components, making it a complex phenomenon for the service providers. Thus, a combination of both tangible and intangible factors provides the basis for the overall assessment of the dining experience (Mhlanga, 2015; Shashikala & Suresh, 2017). Therefore, businesses frequently use experiential marketing to attract customers and strengthen customer loyalty.

The dining experience starts with the patrons engaging all of their senses even before tasting the food at the restaurant (Kleynhans, 2003). With no exception to the food

service industry, consumers are placing significant value on the hedonic benefits of foods and are looking for particular attributes that engage their senses, which make for the most gratifying experience (Krishna, 2012). As such, customers are not really interested in functional products, but rather in satisfying experiences (by way of product differentiation) that can bring them the service as per their expectation (Do Carmo et al., 2022). This perception of sensory experience is largely affected by many factors, and one important factor is the environment in which the food is consumed (Farias, 2014). Even though the food served in the restaurant is the primary component, the environment in which the food is consumed greatly affects the diner's overall experience. In other words, consumers seek a 'dining experience' which includes tasty food, quick service, good ambience, and entertainment in the service setting. The environment or servicescape filled with multi-sensory cues of visual, aural, olfactory, and tactile factors (Kotler, 1973; Sliburytė et al., 2017; Ifeanyichukwu & Peter, 2018; Hulten, 2011) plays a vital role in shaping extraordinary sensory experiences for consumers. Therefore, with the increased consciousness on the concept of experience, it is very essential for the restaurant businesses to design the atmosphere of the restaurants in such a way that it offers quality and comfort at the same time. In reality, today's customers' desires are driven by the sensory trend, and they are continuously on their search for intriguing, pleasurable, and meaningful sensory experiences (Schmitt, 2010).

The restaurants are complex urban spaces that appeal to all five senses. The comfort level of the patrons during the entire dining experience is determined by the quality of the interior sound environment, along with other components. Sound is really an important aspect in experiential marketing that affects users' overall experience (Rohrmann, 2012; Aburawis & Dokmeci, 2018). Sound interacts with and interprets people's everyday surroundings and environment to elicit strong reactions in them. Aburawis and Dokmeci (2018) stated that with the use of sound, one can define their position of where they are, and the direction of where they want to go. It has a connection to the quality of life of an individual within a space (Erfanian et al., 2019). The environment of a space has its own acoustic profile which makes it distinct from one another. One's experience of sound perception can be identified, created, and shaped by one's environment, whether it be natural or artificial. Thus, all the sounds present in a particular setting that a human ear may pick up, hear or listen is called as *soundscape* (defined in section 1.2.iv). In an environment, a person may perceive a

soundscape as a single sound or as a combination of several sounds. By taking reference from the term originally used in the scientific article written by the Michael Southworth (1969) in the field of architecture, city planning, urban planning, and design, R. Murray Schafer, a Canadian composer and naturalist, used the term "soundscape". After Schafer popularized the term, researchers from several fields presented a multi-dimensional taxonomy for soundscape (Axelsson, 2020). According to medical studies, sound has an impact on both the peripheral and central nervous systems' movement and functioning. The human body and brain react to a variety of sounds, including music, anthropogenic sounds, and natural sounds, all the time (Erfanian et al., 2019). In terms of scientific works, soundscape is a physical phenomenon. In fact, soundscape research is the study of how people hear, experience, and comprehend their surroundings, both within and outside of buildings (Aletta et al., 2016). According to Brooks et al., 2014 a radical change has been witnessed in terms of soundscape research. The study of soundscape was pioneered in human sciences and social sciences (such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, architecture, and medicine) before physics. The study of soundscapes is multidisciplinary. However, its presence is basically studied from an acoustic background. It also takes into account the diversity of soundscapes from place to place and across cultures. The emergence of soundscape publications using various holistic techniques across several fields by using case studies, surveys, experimental research, etc., which explore soundscape within a particular context (Andringa et al., 2013; Axelsson, 2020; Blesser & Salter, 2009) (For details, refer to Chapter 2). When discussing soundscape in a marketing environment, it can refer to the auditory or aural cues that a person experiences when taking advantage of or consuming a service offer.

Marketers are aware of the strategic importance of music as a way to stand distinct from the competition and enhance store image (Berman & Evans, 2007). Due to the difficulty in identifying and controlling different types of sound in an environment, music is regarded as the primary aural element (North & Croeser, 2006). Sound is a crucial design component of a built area intended for customers, despite the fact that it is a frequently underappreciated aesthetic structure. Depending on the situation, there are various methods to interpret soundscape quality. The impact of music in such acoustic contexts like offices and shopping malls has been intensively investigated (Areni & Kim, 1993; Bruner, 1990; North & Hargreaves, 1997; Stern, 2015).

Restaurants are intricate settings where the auditory senses are active. The auditory cues can modify various elements of consumer perception and conduct. The perception of the soundscape is thought to be influenced by a variety of sound sources (Lindborg, 2016). The qualitative perception of the acoustic environment in eating establishments, or restaurant soundscapes, has, however, received relatively little attention (Frid, 2013). These days, restaurants amuse their diners with both live music and pre-recorded music. By doing this, restaurants hope to foster a favourable impression of themselves in the eyes of their patrons. Another important dimension of the soundscape is noise. Background noise can influence the intake of food and beverage behaviour through physiological, psychological, and physical pathways. Depending on subtle variations in the sound's physical characteristics, the surrounding environment, and the characteristics of the individual exposed to the sound, sound can evoke either positive or negative emotional reactions (Fastl & Zwicker, 2001; Alamir et al., 2019). Sometimes businesses make use of prepared soundscapes and background music to hide distracting noises (masking) from their surroundings and to improve the aesthetic appeal of their establishments (Lang, 2014)

Therefore, with the customers' growing demand for restaurants, and the growth of eateries, it is strategically important to look after the overall diner's experience. Auditory comfort in managing the different elements of soundscape and determining the overall diners' experience is becoming essential on the part of marketers. Diners' experience management is, therefore, crucial for the success of the restaurant because of the intense competition. Disappointed clients and bad word-of-mouth have caused several eateries to lose business (Susskind, 2002; Zhang et al., 2021). A good customer experience will result in happy, loyal customers and long-term financial success. Before moving further, let us discuss a few important terminologies that will be used in the study.

1.2. Basic Terminologies/ Operational Definitions

The operational definitions or key terminologies that are important to the study and are used throughout the thesis are defined in this part. Having a clearer understanding of these concepts will help the reader to comprehend the context of the study.

i) **Servicescape:** Servicescape refers to how a service company's physical facilities are planned and utilized for the efficient creation and delivery of services (Bitner,1992). Kotler, 1973 defined as "The totality of physical setting and ambient conditions designed and managed by service firms in which the service is assembled, seller and customer interact, and service delivery takes place." According to Hightower (2010), it may also be described as "everything that is physically present to the consumer during the service encounter." Servicescape, which represents the entire service environment, essentially encompasses both ambient circumstances and anything tangible with which the customer interacts and is exposed during the service interaction. Also known as "atmospherics," this concept is typically experienced through the use of visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile senses as described by Philip Kotler (Kotler, 1973).

ii) **Musicscape:** Oakes (2000) appropriated the term "musicscape" from Bitner's (1992) model of the servicescape, in which musicscape is positioned as one of the physical environmental factors (scent, air, quality, and temperature) that influence customers' and employees' attitudes from the perspective of their work environment. The Musicscape as narrowly defined, offers a thorough examination of the musical element in the context of service environment. The Musicscape focuses exclusively on consumer response and behaviour within the service environment, whereas the Servicescape evaluates both customer and employee response and behavior (Oakes et al., 2013).

iii) **Dinescape:** Dinescape refers to the man-made physical and human environment of the dining space of upscale restaurants (Ryu & Jang 2008). Unlike the servicescape, dinescape dimensions only consider the environment of the restaurant's dining areas; it ignores the environments of the other interior restaurant spaces (toilets, waiting areas (lounges), etc.) and the exterior restaurant spaces (parking lots, external restaurant building structures, etc.) (Ryu, 2005). As described by Mahalingam et al. (2016) dinescape is devised as a scale of dimensions for aesthetics, lighting, atmosphere, layout, table settings, and service personnel.

iv) **Soundscape:** The soundscape is defined as "the overall sonic environment of a space, from a room to a region." According to Schulte-Fortkamp and Fiebig (2023), a soundscape is "an environment of sound with an emphasis on the way it is perceived and understood by the individual, or by a society." Soundscape is a synthesis of sounds that originate from a social and creative setting (Hussin & Baptist, 2019). As opined by Lindborg (2016), the dimensions of soundscape in a restaurant include music played in the restaurant and the other sound sources present there in.

v) **Restaurant**: Under this study, the term 'restaurant' would include family restaurant, premium casual, and fine dining restaurants. The upscale restaurants which provide full service, including waiters' personal assistance, a wide range of menus, serving 3-course meals, etc.

vi) **Noise**: Noise is unwanted sound considered unpleasant, loud, or disruptive to hearing (Oxford Dictionary). Acoustic noise is any sound in the acoustic domain, either deliberate (e.g., music or speech) or unintended in a particular space. Environmental noise is the accumulation of all noise present in a specified environment, and in this study, the noise present in a restaurant setting is considered.

vii) **Congruence**-The quality or state of agreeing, coinciding, or being congruent (www.merriamwebster.com). Congruency can also be linked to learned associations (Jeong & Jang, 2011; Laurienti et al., 2004).

viii) **Diners' Experience**: Customers' dining experiences at restaurants "consist of their knowledge or observation of restaurant attributes acquired during the course of their dining experience." (Jeong & Jang, 2011). Dining experiences include both the utilitarian as well as hedonic aspects (Wijaya et al., 2013). It is the overall experience that the diner's experience in the restaurant.

1.3. Backdrop/ Overview of the Study

People encounter different types of sound in and around their surroundings. Knowingly or unknowingly, these sounds affect them as a social being and even as a consumer. Customers encounter different types of sound elements, be it reading or hearing the

brand name of a store or to the sounds they experience after entering that store. All of these sound elements affect the behaviour of the customers. Nevertheless, listening to music has become the backdrop to everyone's everyday life. Even though individuals do frequently sit down and listen deliberately to music, researchers have reported that there are a number of occasions on which they listen in the course of some other activity, such as driving, shopping, eating, or doing the housework (North & Hargreaves, 1997). Restaurants are complex environments where all our senses are engaged. Restaurant is also one of the service settings which is not an exception where diner experience various sound elements irrespective of whether they want it to hear or not. More or less designable sound sources such as background music, other customer voices and conversations, and kitchen culinary and utensils etc. are believed to be important in relation to the overall perception of the soundscape (Lindborg, 2016).

Music can be commercially used to produce a certain mood and responses of consumers. Companies use background music and prepare soundscapes to mask undesirable noise and sounds in the environment and to enhance the aesthetic appeal of their business (Lang, 2014). Restaurants not only use pre-recorded music but also live music to entertain their diners. By this, restaurants try to create a positive image in the minds of customers, which might lead to a pleasant customer experience. This is because any marketing strategy is driven by and is based on the S-0-R model wherein companies provide some cues in the form of brand name, music, different sound sources, etc., which customers process and respond in the form of present or future purchase. According to the Stimulus-Organism-Response paradigm, environmental stimuli (S) affect how people or organisms process these cues (O) and their emotional states (like pleasure, arousal, and dominance). These emotions then influence their actions or behaviors (R), such as approaching or avoiding something (Andersson et al., 2012; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Namasivayam and Mattila, 2007; Jang and Namkung, 2009). Moreover, live music played in the restaurant for the entertainment of its guests can also be treated as a cue to influence their behavior and experience. Keeping these observations in mind, it is important for restaurateurs and business owners to determine what type of music should be played to generate customer satisfaction. It is observed that the ethnic restaurants are rapidly increasing in urban areas, providing a scope for diners to enjoy ethnic food. It is necessary for the restaurateur also to provide these diners with an overall satisfactory dining experience.

While dining, the diners encounter different types of sound and may not like those sounds. Diners may get irritated and annoyed by these sounds, which may affect their dining experience.

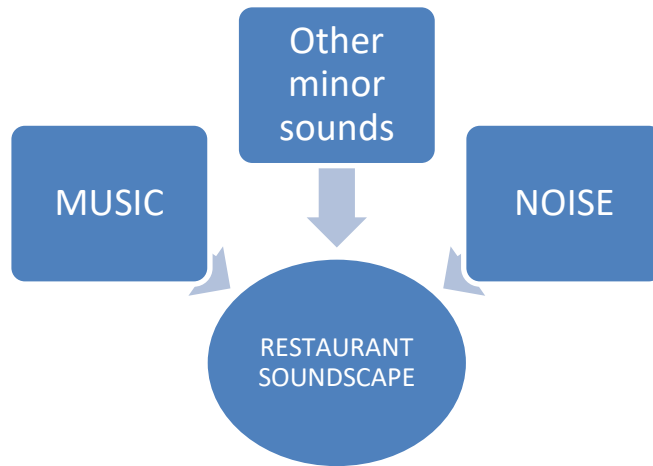## 1.4. Conceptual Framework of Soundscape in Restaurant

Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework of Soundscape in Restaurant

Source: Developed by researcher for the study

Let us understand the conceptual framework of the restaurant soundscape. When we refer to the "restaurant soundscape," we mean the aural setting of a restaurant. The soundscape of a restaurant can take on various forms (Lindborg, 2016). As it wasn't specified in several research studies very clearly, this framework has been created by the researcher using data from earlier studies and focus group discussions that were conducted for the study. When the diner enters the restaurant, the first moment of truth encountered by them with the ears (either one or a combination of all of these) could be music, other minor sounds or perhaps cacaphony. So, firstly, when we talk about music, it is the music played in the restaurant. The restaurant can use a wide range of music, from the pre-recorded to live music concerts to traditional/ folk music. However, the level of volume of music varies from restaurant to restaurant. The genre also plays a pivotal role in determining its volume.

Coming to the other minor sources, include the sound from the kitchen, co-diners, staff, ringing of mobile phone, electronic gadgets, and the like. Another important element is the sound made from food such as sizzlers, drinks, crunchy items, etc., that is evidenced

and caught by the ears. Sometimes, there is sound from outside the restaurants depending upon the location, traffic, nearby industry, etc. Here, we can consider any sound that is not present at equal frequency in all the restaurants but might be present in any restaurant of its kind. In other words, which is not common for all the restaurants.

The third important element arising out of the above two elements if the volume of any particular element or combination of the elements is high or loud. So, noise is something that is not pleasant to our ears and turns into a cacophony. Diners often might get disturbed by or irritated with any sound present in the restaurant.

This study is an effort to understand empirically the impact of all these elements, especially the role of music and noise in diners' overall experience. And to see if the music played in the restaurant is potentially catastrophic or delightful.

1.5. Leveraging Marketing Via Sound Psychology

The atmosphere of any store affects how customers behave (Kotler, 1973). Marketing managers can strategically use various atmospheric elements to impact consumer moods, behaviours within a store, and perceptions of both products and establishments. Marketing managers can employ atmospherics to encourage or discourage specific behaviours as well as how customers may feel about the store overall, depending on the ultimate goal of the organization (Singh et al., 2014). The ambiance of an outlet can be altered, may be created or modified to influence the attitudes and actions of customers. Changes in the atmosphere are associated with the idea of priming because these atmospheric manipulations are frequently subtle and imperceptible to the conscious mind. According to Elgendi et al. (2018), priming is the enhanced response to specific stimuli brought on by earlier exposure to relevant visual or auditory cues. Priming is a powerful tool for influencing customer behaviour in three main atmospheric categories: auditory, visual, and fragrance (Hartmoyer, 2022). In case of restaurants, ambient sounds and background noise are crucial in determining the auditory environment (Biswas et al., 2019). Restaurateurs can judiciously make use of sound to influence consumer behaviour by pushing diners through decision-making processes or altering their perceptions of the things that are being offered to them (Hartmoyer, 2022).

Therefore, in the next chapter detailed discussion of the already available scholarly materials is provided. Chapter 2, consisting of the extensive literature, will help in identifying the research gaps and further carrying out the entire study.

1.6. Chapterisation

The thesis consists of a total of ten chapters which include each and every detail of the research conducted. The chapters (excluding Chapter 1) and the content of each of them incorporated in the thesis are presented here:

1. Chapter 2 – A detailed analysis of prior literature available on different aspects of soundscape is presented in this chapter. It is observed that several research studies have already been initiated on topics related to soundscape and dining experiences. However, the research gaps identified from the review of the literature conducted are highlighted in this section of the report.

2. Chapter 3 – Need for the study and research objectives are offered in this chapter. While pointing out the scope of the research conducted, the existing limitations of the study are also placed in this chapter.

3. Chapter 4 – Research methodology provides a framework for the entire research process. The methods and approaches used to carry out the complete study are presented in this chapter.

4. Chapter 5 & 6 – The statistical methods employed to arrive at the results of the survey are discussed in this chapter.

5. Chapter 7 – This chapter deals with the experiment conducted and the results arrived at while conducting the analysis of the data gathered from the experiment.

6. Chapter 8 – This chapter presents the analysis and findings of the FGDs conducted for the study.

7. Chapter 9 – This chapter outlines the summary of the overall findings of the study. The major findings under each objective and each research approach used are highlighted in different sections while outlining the triangulation of the findings of the different approaches.

8. Chapter 10 – The last chapter of the report offers the theoretical contribution of the study. It also describes the practical implications of the study carried out and based on these, directions for future research in this area are put forward.