

CUSTOMERS' PERCEPTION ABOUT SAOJI CUISINE: A STUDY OF SAOJI BHOJNALAYAS OF NAGPUR CITY

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Abstract *The present study aims to study the customers' perception about Saoji cuisine in the Saoji Bhojnalayas of Nagpur city. Also to study about the customer's satisfaction with the food experience in the Saoji Bhojnalayas. These issues are addressed within the context of Nagpur, an emerging smart city in Vidarbha, Western Maharashtra.*

To serve the objective a descriptive research design is used and primary data is collected from 150 customers with the help of questionnaire. Data is analyzed with the help of mean & chi-square test. It has been concluded that the customers' overall experience with food product, bhojnalayas' services, it's cleanliness, dining environment and cuisine is good.

Keywords *Customers' Perception, Saoji Cuisine, Saoji Bhojnalaya, Nagpur, Food*

INTRODUCTION

Nagpur is the heart of one of the fastest growing city in India. With India's integration with the global economy, policy planners have re-discovered Nagpur's strategic location. Nagpur is not only at the core of India but is also the central location between South Africa and North East Asia, Russia and South East Asia, Europe and South East Asia, Europe and Australia.

The existing land in Asia's biggest industrial area is almost full. Therefore M.I.D.C. is set to acquire another 4000 acres of land towards Hingna and Butibori. Reliance Energy Ltd. ACC Cement, Voltas, KEC International, Indorama Synthetic India Ltd., Welworth, Morarji Brebana Ltd., SKG Refractors Ltd.; are some of the prominent industries which are working at present in Butibori industrial area. The Indian government is making sure Nagpur has the infrastructure to cope with the massive activity it is set to witness in the coming years. With about Rs 5,864 crore being pumped in to augment the city's infrastructure - roads, transport system and traffic management, water supply and distribution, and solid waste management - Nagpur will have what it takes to keep the growth engine humming.

The hospitality segment is getting a spin with many big companies foraying into the market. The Taj Group, Radisson, Sun-n-Sand, Accor, Kamath's, to name a few,

are coming up with their investments in the city, the work being already started. Nagpur is being promoted as a Tiger Capital of India. Nagpur's forested areas cover is around 37,251 sq. km and the region is rich in wild fauna and flora. Thousands of foreign and domestic tourists visit the tiger reserves of Nagpur. Some soul enticing national parks around Nagpur include: Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve, Pench National Park, Nagzira-Navegaon Tiger Reserve, Melghat Tiger Reserve, Bor Tiger Reserve and Umred Karhandla Wildlife Sanctuary. Even researchers across the globe are attracted to visit the reserves in order to study the cause of the animals here.

With Nagpur proceeding to be a Tier I city, it should also boost of its local traditional cuisine. Traditional foods and cuisine are an important element of the any cultural heritage and a decisive economic input to many regions (European Commission, 2007). Saoji cuisine is the traditional food of the Halba tribe. It is one of the key elements in the preservation of the Halba tribe culture. The Saoji Bhojnalayas are the torch bearers of this cuisine.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Halba Tribe

Halba is a tribal community of India. It is mostly found in the states

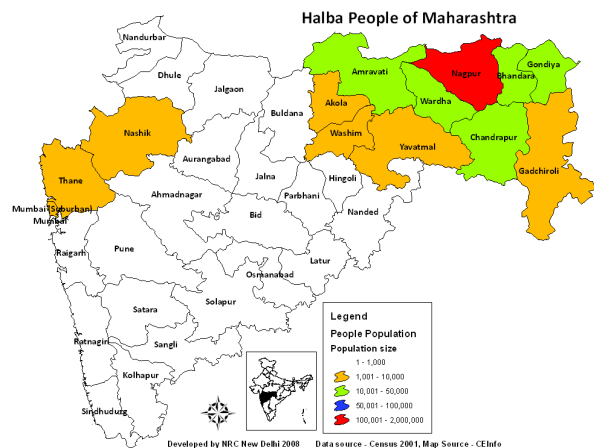
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of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra. The word Halba is derived from word *hal* (“plough”). The Halba were farmers and landlords. The Halba tribes were one of the major and most influential tribal groups of the state of Bastar in the 17th century. Halba tribes were active in the politics and military of Bastar State. The goddess of the Halba tribe is Ma Danteshwari. The language of the Halba tribe is Halbi, which is a combination of Hindi, Chhattisgarhi, Orissa and Marathi. The Halba/Halbi tribe has no sub-castes.

The Halba tribe is included as a Scheduled Tribe in India. There are no facilities for this Tribal people. They are still untouchables and backward in education, jobs, politics, government.

Halba Tribe of Nagpur: The Halba tribe settled in the Nagpur city.



HOW MANY ARE THEY TODAY?

The “Halba” tribes covers about a big part of total population of Nagpur. The Total Population of Halba tribe according to the 2001 census is approximately 2,42819.

Saoji Cuisine

Saoji is a style of cooking that belongs to the Halba tribe, a community of professional weavers. In the early 1970s, when power looms replaced traditional methods of weaving, the community was rendered jobless. Many weavers began making a living by cooking and selling home food in the Santra market. Earlier this food was enjoyed and purchased by the labourers in the market as they appreciated this spicy fare with alcohol more. Food is mainly cooked by the women of the house. It is typically spicy, authentic non-vegetarian fare, including offal such as khur (trotters) and sundari (the intestine and lungs) that is prepared and cooked served in the homes of weavers.

Saoji Bhojnalayas

Nagpur is a chief and third most inhabited city of the state of Maharashtra in India and is famous for its culture, cuisine and oranges. When it comes to food that could be relished in Nagpur, Saoji cuisine and Varhadi cuisine are the ones to be tried. Saoji cuisine is the cultural identity of Halba Tribe. The old-style food of Nagpur is widespread for quintessence and abundance of spices that are integrated in the food. These spices that are used in gravy of the cuisine of this region are cloves, cardamom, poppy seeds, black pepper, bay leaves, and ground seeds of coriander. Sundari, TariPohe, Wada Bhat, pithlabhakar, jhunkabhakar, sabudanawada, Soajichicken, Kothmirwadi, are the specialties to look out for when in Nagpur.

If Nagpur is on the country’s food map, it is thanks to a neglected and unfortunate community of weavers (Halba Tribe) specializing in Saoji food. This cuisine has grown so popular in the last decade that customers choose to relish at joints in shanties, where the finest meals in the most traditional way is prepared and served, rather than decorative restaurants that also have this modest cuisine on their bill of fare.

Saoji Bhojnalaya is a popular name among non vegetarian restaurants in many cities in Maharashtra. They can be found in Nagpur, Akola, Amravati, Pune, Mumbai, Sholapur and Satara and many other cities. There are many Saoji Bhojnalayas in Nagpur where one can taste this unique cuisine. Often, owned privately by the families and heirs of the Halba tribe. The term ‘Saoji ‘ implies that it is intended for Customers, who are non vegetarians and prefer spicy, rich food, simple and inexpensive food. This cuisine believes to be one of the hottest cuisines in the world. One has to taste it to believe it. Predominantly non vegetarian, the cuisine includes mouth watering hot rich gravies, infused with chilli powders and garam masala powder. This cuisine also uses a lot of oil in the preparations. Second’s later ones mouth is on fire but one just cannot stop having it more. The outlets are often shabby and dingy. This does not deter the food lovers. They are however popular among all age group of customers. Some of them used to offer traditional seating on wooden “patiyas” on the floor, but the custom is no longer popular and wooden tables and chairs are now more common. The food is served in steel thalis. Complimentary Onion slices and quartered lemon is served along with the food. Also unlimited gravy is served complimentary as people relish it a lot. Many customers enjoy drinking the gravy.

“The unique blending and balancing of spices makes Saoji food different,” It is a fact that Saoji can’t be relished by everyone and it requires an acquired taste and definitely is not recommended for the faint hearted. It is a blend of around 24 spices mixed in a certain ratio which remains a closely

protected secret." Lip Smacking food and warm hospitality are the reasons for Saoji Bhojnalayas popularity. The Saoji Bhojnalayas are the places striving to keep the food so niche and authentic.

OBJECTIVES

The Study has following Objectives:

1. To study the perceptions and experiences of the customers about Saoji cuisine at Bhojnalayas in Nagpur city.
2. To study customers' satisfaction with Saoji cuisine.

HYPOTHESES

The Study has following Hypotheses:

1. There is no significant relationship between food quality and customer satisfaction.
2. There is no significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Research Design:** To have a better understanding about the issue descriptive research design was used. To get the primary data close ended questionnaire was administrated.
- Sample Design:** 150 customers of Saoji Bhojnalaya were selected through convenience sampling.
- Analysis:** The data collected was analyzed with the help of arithmetic mean and chi-square test.

FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

1. General Information about Visit of Saoji Bhojnalayas in Nagpur City

- Respondents were asked that how many times they have visited Saoji Bhojnalaya to relish Saoji Cuisine and It has been observed that maximum number of respondents (N=51, Percentage=34) visited Saoji Bhojnalaya for more than 15 times. According to 32.67% respondents (N=49) they visited have visited Saoji Bhojnalaya for 5 to 10 times followed by 21.33% (N=32) respondents who visited Saoji Bhojnalaya for 11 to 15 times. Only 12% respondents (N=18) have been at Saoji Bhojnalaya for 1 to 4 times only.
- 9.33% customers (N=14) reported that they are vegetarian, 26% respondents (N=39) said that they are non vegetarian while maximum number of customers (N=97, Percentage=64.67) eat both types of food.
- When asked that what type of food they prefer at Saoji Bhojnalaya, majority of respondents (N=78,

Percentage=52) said that they prefer both types of food i.e. vegetarian as well as non vegetarian. 40.67% (N=61) respondents said that they prefer only non vegetarian food at Saoji Bhojnalaya while few respondents (N=11, Percentage=7.33) prefer only vegetarian food at Saoji Bhojnalaya.

- Respondents were asked that how frequently they visit Saoji Bhojnalaya and according to results majority of respondents (N=72, Percentage=48) indicated that they visit Saoji Bhojnalaya once in a month followed by 25.33% respondents
- (N=38) who relish Saoji cuisine in Bhojnalaya once in a quarter. According to 14.67% respondents (N=22) they weekly go to Saoji Bhojnalaya while 12% respondents (N=18) said that they go to Saoji Bhojnalaya once in a fortnight
- When asked about the reason for preferring Saoji cuisine, majority of respondents (N=56, Percentage=37.33) said that they prefer Saoji cuisine because they like the taste of food. 32.67% (N=49) respondents visited Saoji Bhojnalaya to change the taste, and 13.33% respondents (N=20) preferred Saoji Bhojnalaya to celebrate some special occasion. There were 12% respondents (N=18) who visited Saoji Bhojnalaya due to its nearness from residence and only 4.67% respondents (N=7) visited Saoji Bhojnalaya due to non availability of cooking time.

2. Customers' Experience & Perception about Saoji Cuisine

Customers were asked to indicate their dining experience at Saoji Bhojnalaya on five point scale starting from Very Poor (1) to Very Good (5). To get concrete results mean is calculated for each element and in addition following criteria is used for analysis part:-

The score among 1.00-1.80 means Very Poor

The score among 1.81-2.60 means Poor

The score among 2.61-3.40 means Average

The score among 3.41-4.20 means Good

The score among 4.21-5.00 means Very Good

- Customers' Experience with Food Product

It has been observed that customers had a very good experience with Variety of Non vegetarian dishes (Mean Score = 4.48), Food Freshness (Mean Score = 4.34) and Food Taste (Mean Score = 4.42). The customers' experience was good with Choice of food selection (Mean Score = 3.83), Food Appearance (Mean Score = 3.57), Availability of new items (Mean Score = 3.65) and Value for money (Mean Score = 4.04). In only

one category the customers' experience was average (Mean Score = 2.93) i.e. Variety of vegetarian dishes. The overall experience with food product was found to be good (Mean Score=3.91)

- Customers' Experience with Bhojnalayas' Services

It has been concluded that customers had a good experience with Efficiency of service (Mean Score = 4.00), Friendliness of staff (Mean Score = 4.00) and Hours of operation (Mean Score = 3.84). The overall experience with Bhojnalayas' services was found to be good (Mean Score=3.95)

- Customers' Experience with Bhojnalayas' Cleanliness

It has been observed that customers had a good experience with Eating areas (Mean Score = 3.49), and average experience with Staff hygiene (Mean Score = 3.35). The overall experience with Bhojnalayas' cleanliness was found to be good (Mean Score=3.42)

- Customers' Experience with Dining Environment

It has been observed that customers had a good experience with Location (Mean Score = 3.72), and ambience (Mean Score = 3.65). The overall experience with Bhojnalayas' dining environment was found to be good (Mean Score=3.57).

- Cuisine Experience

It has been identified that customers had a good or very good experience with Vegetarian (Mean Score = 4.02), and non vegetarian food (Mean Score = 4.39). The overall cuisine experience was found to be good (Mean Score=4.19)

3. Customers' Satisfaction with Saoji Cuisine

Respondents were asked that will you visit Saoji Bhojnalaya again and as a response majority of respondents (N=142, Percentage=94.67) said that they will revisit the Saoji Bhojnalaya while few respondents (N=8, Percentage=5.33) indicated that they will not come again to Saoji Bhojnalaya. So from the results it can be inferred that 94.67% respondents (N=142) are satisfied with Saoji Bhojnalaya while 5.33% respondents (N=8) are dissatisfied with the Saoji Bhojnalaya.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between food quality and customer satisfaction

To measure the association between the food quality and customer satisfaction, chi-square test is applied on each parameter of food quality and results received are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Chi-Square Test Results to Measure Significant Relationship between Food Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Food Quality		Customer Satisfaction		Total	Calculated Value	Result
		Satisfied	Dissatisfied			
Choice of food selection	Very Poor	1	0	1	7.785	Accepted
	Poor	3	1	4		
	Average	37	0	37		
	Good	79	7	86		
	Very Good	22	0	22		
Total		142	8	150		
Variety of vegetarian dishes	Very Poor	16	1	17	3.15	Accepted
	Poor	35	0	35		
	Average	61	5	66		
	Good	5	0	5		
	Very Good	25	2	27		
Total		142	8	150		
Variety of Non vegetarian dishes	Very Poor	0	1	1	21.901	Rejected
	Poor	2	0	2		
	Average	13	0	13		
	Good	42	0	42		
	Very Good	85	7	92		
Total		142	8	150		

Food Appearance	Very Poor	11	0	11	31.57	Rejected
	Poor	3	3	6		
	Average	43	5	48		
	Good	57	0	57		
	Very Good	28	0	28		
Total		142	8	150		
Food Freshness	Very Poor	2	0	2	1.378	Accepted
	Poor	3	0	3		
	Average	13	0	13		
	Good	52	4	56		
	Very Good	72	4	76		
Total		142	8	150		
Food Taste	Very Poor	0	0	0	5.07	Accepted
	Poor	0	0	0		
	Average	15	0	15		
	Good	51	6	57		
	Very Good	76	2	78		
Total		142	8	150		
Availability of new items	Very Poor	7	1	8	8.078	Accepted
	Poor	8	2	10		
	Average	41	1	42		
	Good	52	4	56		
	Very Good	34	0	34		
Total		142	8	150		
Value for money	Very Poor	6	0	6	4.366	Accepted
	Poor	4	0	4		
	Average	29	4	33		
	Good	41	1	42		
	Very Good	62	3	65		
Total		142	8	150		

Level of Significance = 5%, Degree of Freedom = 4, Tabulated Value = 9.488

It can be observed that in majority of cases the calculated value of chi square is less than its tabulated value which leads to the acceptance of hypothesis and it can be concluded that there is no significant relationship between food quality and customer satisfaction.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

To measure the association between the service quality and customer satisfaction, chi-square test is applied on each parameter of service quality and results received are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Chi-Square Test Results to Measure Significant Relationship between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Service Quality		Customer Satisfaction		Total	Calculated Value	Result
		Satisfied	Dissatisfied			
Efficiency of service	Very Poor	1	0	1	6.646	Accepted
	Poor	4	0	4		
	Average	25	4	29		
	Good	72	4	76		
	Very Good	40	0	40		
Total		142	8	150		

Friendliness of staff	Very Poor	0	0	0	3.287	Accepted
	Poor	5	0	5		
	Average	24	0	24		
	Good	80	7	87		
	Very Good	33	1	34		
Total		142	8	150		
Hours of operation	Very Poor	1	0	1	4.511	Accepted
	Poor	5	0	5		
	Average	38	0	38		
	Good	72	7	79		
	Very Good	26	1	27		
Total		142	8	150		

Level of Significance = 5%, Degree of Freedom = 4, Tabulated Value = 9.488

It can be observed that in all of the cases the calculated value of chi square is less than its tabulated value which leads to the acceptance of hypothesis and it can be concluded that there is no significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

CONCLUSIONS

From this research following conclusions are drawn:

1. The overall experience with food product, Bhojnalayas' services Bhojnalayas' cleanliness Bhojnalayas' dining environment and cuisine experience was found to be good.
2. Majority of customers are satisfied with Saoji Bhojnalaya.
3. There is no significant relationship between food quality and customer satisfaction.
4. There is no significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS/ IMPLICATIONS

The main limitation of this study is that the sample customers targeted were only Saoji Bhojnalaya customers. Future research considering the Customers visiting other restaurants to enjoy other cuisines can be carried out.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study provides valuable insight to practitioners who are seeking to integrate local food (cuisine) into the tourism product.

Saoji cuisine can be promoted as destination cuisine

Enhanced knowledge about the wider role of Saoji cuisine in newly evolving and emerging smart city Nagpur's economies and societies can improve understanding of its importance for residents and tourists, helping in formulating strategies to meet needs.

This paper is the one of the first study of the customers' perception about Saoji cuisine in the Saoji Bhojnalayas of Nagpur city.

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