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ABSTRACT

Previously, research has created several scales for measuring different facets of the dining experience and suggest the need to do more segmentation by age. This research does that by collecting panel data to determine if there are relationships between the generations (Silent, Boomers, Xers, Yers, and Nexters) and the four main types of restaurants (QSR, fast casual, casual, fine dining). This was also conducted in an online environment as most consumers are now researching before they buy using the internet. The results indicate that Casual restaurants are associated with Boomers and Nexters while Fast Casual restaurants are associated with Gen Y and Nexters. The heavy user subsegments for each generation are also analyzed. The implications of these findings for restaurant management are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The financial pressure on restaurants is building. Net profit is averaging under five percent (IBIS World 2015a and IBIS World 2015b). In addition, a number of food categories are seeing double digit increases, the labor unions are pushing the Fight for $15 initiative, and landlords are increasing rents. The simple solution of raising prices is not so simple given consumers price elasticity is significantly negatively correlated as it relates to the cost of eating out, especially in the quick service area (Okrent and Alston, 2012; Okrent and Alston, 2011). Restaurants will have to find other ways to maintain the bottom line or make serious adjustments in their profit expectations. One avenue may be to increase the marketing ROI. However, in order to do this, restaurant management needs a clear understanding of their strategy. Unfortunately, research on restaurant managers suggest that this clarity is somewhat lacking (Winter et. al, 2012; Sorenson and Sorenson, 2001). Further complicating this dilemma is the fact that more and more decisions are being made using the internet before actually visiting a place of business.

To better understand this, we decided to take a preliminary look at the relationship between the four primary categories of restaurants (quick service, fast casual, casual, and fine dining) and the five generations that comprise people who use the internet to find a place to eat out (The Silent

Generation, Boomers, Xers, Yers, and Nexters). This investigation will help to determine which generations tend to eat at which types of restaurants. This information should aid restaurants in determining how to segment their market, who to target, and how to position their particular establishments.

We begin with a review of the literature on impacting consumer intentions in a service setting and the scales developed for a restaurant setting. This is followed by a description of the sample, the methodology, and the results. We conclude by discussing the implications of these findings for the use of marketing dollars by restaurant management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of areas have been explored in attempting to explain consumer choices or intentions. Berry and Parasuraman (1991) and Bitner (1992) brought the term servicescape to the forefront to explain the physical surroundings which, when combined, provide a representation of the offering that is being made. The multiple components of the servicescape combine to help define categories of restaurants. The three dimensions of the servicescape were defined as: the ambient conditions, the spatial layout and functionality, and signs, symbols, and artifacts. Each of these has been studied extensively. Within the sphere of ambient conditions are numerous studies on the effects of scenting (Spangenberg, Crowley, and Henderson 1996), music (Yalch and Spangenberg 1990), light (Summers and Hebert 2001), color (Crowley 1993), temperature (Baker, Levy, and Grewal 1992), and other conditions.

Layout and functionality refer to furnishings, equipment and to the ways those elements are arranged such as to have a particular effect on customers and employees in a service environment. Many of the elements and components of this dimension were explicated in a later study (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, and Voss, 2002). They specifically looked at how each element or component could impact the service quality.

Signs, symbols and other aspects of the created environment relate to explicit or implicit signals that may impact the formation of impressions, expectations, and affect (Turley and Milliman, 2000). In this work, Turley and Milliman, suggest five categories for the physical environment. These categories are: external, general interior, layout and design, point of purchase and decoration, and the human element.

Among the hundreds of studies that have been done, there are three scale development studies that are particularly notable given the current research. First, DINESERV was proposed as a simple tool to measure how customers view the quality of a restaurant (Stevens, Knutson, and Patton, 1995). The 29 item instrument measured service quality across five dimensions: assurance, empathy, reliability, responsiveness, and tangibles. Second, TANGSERV was a scale developed to measure the tangible aspects of quality in the food service industry (Rajpoot, 2002). TANGSERV consists of three types of factors. Layout/design factors include interior design, building design, size of the space, location, and seating. The product/service factors include food presentation, size of serving, menu design, and variety. Ambient/social factors include light,

crowding, music, and temperature. Third, DINESCAPE was a scale developed to measure the physical and human surroundings in dining areas of fine dining restaurants (Ryu and Jong 2008). It is composed of six factors: facility aesthetics, ambience, lighting, table settings, layout, and service staff.

These studies suggested that by collecting age related data it may be possible for the practitioner to make a more precise determination of the proper practices and strategies to employ. However, directly asking consumers their eating out behaviors and demographic information in an online environment was not done. The current study seeks to fill this gap.

Important to note is that the variables mentioned previously will vary in importance as the target market and type of restaurant changes.   This holds true across all segments of the restaurant industry and is not limited to type of restaurant but also extends to what is trending (Njite, Dunn and Kim, 2008), other demographic variables (Knutson, 2000; Moschins, 2003), and a number of other characteristics (Gupta, et al., 2007; Towers and Pratten, 2003).

In fact, the importance of the factors will vary even within the same generation based upon the type of eating establishment (Lim and Loh, 2014). As such, it is important to determine directly if there is a significant relationship between type of restaurant and generation when those determining a place to eat out are doing so online. This not only becomes the foundation on which restaurant management can build their strategy but also narrows the focus for management and points to potential sources of reduced marketing costs while maintaining or even increasing effectiveness. To test these relationships we propose the following hypotheses:

H1a: Quick service will be associated with the Silent Generation
H1b: Quick service will be associated with Boomers
H1c: Quick service will be associated with Xers
H1d: Quick service will be associated with Yers
H1e: Quick service will be associated with Nexters

H2a: Fast casual will be associated with the Silent Generation
H2b: Fast casual will be associated with Boomers
H2c: Fast casual will be associated with Xers
H2d: Fast casual will be associated with Yers
H2e: Fast casual will be associated with Nexters

H3a: Casual will be associated with the Silent Generation
H3b: Casual will be associated with Boomers
H3c: Casual will be associated with Xers
H3d: Casual will be associated with Yers
H3e: Casual will be associated with Nexters

H4a: Fine dining will be associated with the Silent Generation

H4b: Fine dining will be associated with Boomers
H4c: Fine dining will be associated with Xers
H4d: Fine dining will be associated with Yers
H4e: Fine dining will be associated with Nexters

METHODOLOGY

To collect the data, we hired the professional research division at Survey Monkey to put together a panel that is representative of the state of California. Included in the criteria were which generation the respondent belongs to, the frequency of dining out, what type of restaurant they eat out at, and the percentage of the time they choose the different types of eating establishments (QSR, fast casual, casual, fine dining). The generational parameters were determined by using the criteria set forth by the U.S. Census Bureau and the research done by Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2010), that is, the Silent Generation (before 1946), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Gen X (1965-1976), Gen Y (1977-1994), and Nexters (1995-present).

SAMPLE

Prior to preliminary analysis, a total of 509 potential participants expressed interest by beginning the survey instrument. Of the 509 who expressed interest, 419 participants (82.3%) met the screening criteria of residing in California and completing the survey. Of the total sample (N=419), 45 (10.7%) were Silent Generation, 137 (32.7%) were Baby Boomers, 89 (21.1%) were Gen X, 124 (29.6%) were Gen Y, and 24 (5.7%) were Nexters.

RESULTS
Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 proposed that Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) will be associated with the Silent, Baby Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y and Nexters generations of restaurant customers. To test Hypothesis 1a, the correlations (n = 45) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) and the Silent Generation. The results overall do not support Hypothesis 1a that the Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) correlates with the Silent Generation.

To test Hypothesis 1b, the correlations (n = 137) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) and the Baby Boomer generation. The results overall do not support Hypothesis 1b that the Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) correlates with the Baby Boomers.

To test Hypothesis 1c, the correlations (n = 89) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) and the Gen X generation. The results overall do not support Hypothesis 1c that the Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) correlates with Gen X.

To test Hypothesis 1d, the correlations (n = 124) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between the Quick Service Restaurants (QSR)

and the Gen Y generation. The results overall do not support Hypothesis 1d that the Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) correlates with Gen Y.

To test Hypothesis 1e, the correlations (n = 24) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between the Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) and the Nexters generation. The results overall do not support Hypothesis 1e that the Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) correlates with Nexters.

Table 1
Correlation between the Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) and each generation

Quick Service Restaurants (QSR)	Pearson r	Sig
Silent Generation	-.010	.834
Baby Boomers	.035	.479
Gen X	-.035	.477
Gen Y	-.008	.874
Nexters	.020	.678

* p<.01 **p < .05 ***p<.1

Hypothesis 2

To test Hypothesis 2, correlations were calculated to determine the similarity between Fast Casual (FC) and Silent Generation (H$_2$a), Baby Boomer (H$_2$b), Gen X (H$_2$c), Gen Y (H$_2$d), and Nexsters (H$_2$e).To test Hypothesis 2a, the correlations (n = 45) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between Fast Casual (FC) and the Silent generation. The results overall do not support Hypothesis 2a that Fast Casual (FC) correlates with the Silent Generation.

To test Hypothesis 2b, the correlations (n = 137) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between Fast Casual (FC) and Baby Boomers. The results indicate that a statistically significant, negative association exists between Fast Casual (FC) and Baby Boomers *(r = -.144, p < .003)*. This suggests that Baby Boomers tend to not eat at Fast Casual restaurants.

To test Hypothesis 2c, the correlations (n = 89) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between Fast Casual (FC) and the Gen X generation. The results overall do not support Hypothesis 2c that the Fast Casual (FC) correlates with Gen X.

To test Hypothesis 2d, the correlations (n = 124) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between the Fast Casual (FC) and the Gen Y generation. The results indicate that a statistically significant, positive association exists between

Fast Casual (FC) and Gen Y *(r = .109, p < .026)*. This suggests that Gen Y tend to eat at Fast Casual restaurants.

To test Hypothesis 2e, the correlations (n = 24) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between the Fast Casual (FC) and the Nexters generation. The results overall do not support Hypothesis 2e that the Fast Casual (FC) correlates with Nexters. Given the small sample (n = 24), these findings suggest that with a larger sample a more significant correlation may have been identified.

Table 2
Correlation between Fast Casual (FC) and each generation

Fast Casual (FC)	Pearson r	Sig
Silent Generation	-.066	.174
Baby Boomers	-.144	.003[*]
Gen X	.041	.401
Gen Y	.109	.026[**]
Nexters	.093	.056***

* p<.01 **p < .05 ***p<.1

Hypothesis 3

To test Hypothesis 3a, the correlations (n = 45) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between Casual (C) and the Silent Generation. The results overall do not support Hypothesis 3a that Casual (C) correlates with Silent Generation.

To test Hypothesis 3b, the correlations (n = 137) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between Casual (C) and Baby Boomers. The results overall do not support Hypothesis 3b that Casual (C) correlates with the Silent Generation.

To test Hypothesis 3c, the correlations (n = 89) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between Casual (C) and the Gen X generation. The results overall do not support Hypothesis 3c that the Casual (C) correlates with Gen X.

To test Hypothesis 3d, the correlations (n = 124) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between the Casual (C) and the Gen Y generation. The results overall do not support Hypothesis 3d that Casual (C) correlates with the Gen Y.

To test Hypothesis 3e, the correlations (n = 24) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between the Casual (C) and the Nexters generation. The results overall do not support Hypothesis 3e that the Casual (C) correlates with Nexters.

Table 3
Correlation between the Casual (C) and each generation

Casual (C)	Pearson r	Sig
Silent Generation	-.007	.894
Baby Boomers	.090	.066***
Gen X	.006	.899
Gen Y	-.051	.299
Nexters	-.084	.086***

* p<.01 **p < .05 ***p<.1

Hypothesis 4

To test Hypothesis 4a, the correlations (n = 45) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between Fine Dining (FD) and the Silent Generation. The results overall do not support Hypothesis 4a that Fine Dining (FD) correlates with Silent Generation.

To test Hypothesis 4b, the correlations (n = 137) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between Fine Dining (FD) and Baby Boomers. The results overall do not support Hypothesis 4b that Fine Dining (FD) correlates with the Silent Generation.

To test Hypothesis 4c, the correlations (n = 89) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between Fine Dining (FD) and the Gen X generation. The results overall do not support Hypothesis 4c that the Fine Dining (FD) correlates with Gen X.

To test Hypothesis 4d, the correlations (n = 124) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between the Fine Dining (FD) and the Gen Y generation. The results overall do not support Hypothesis 4d that Fine Dining (FD) correlates with the Gen Y.

To test Hypothesis 4e, the correlations (n = 24) were calculated using Pearson's r to ascertain the significance and direction of the alignment between the Fine Dining (FD) and the Nexters generation. The results overall do not support Hypothesis 4e that the Fine Dining (FD) correlates with Nexters.

Table 4
Correlation between the Fine Dining (FD) and each generation

Fine Dining (FD)	Pearson r	Sig
Silent Generation	.073	.138
Baby Boomers	.007	.885
Gen X	-.008	.872
Gen Y	-.038	.432
Nexters	-.021	.663

* p<.01 **p < .05 ***p<.1

After doing the hypothesis testing based upon all users in a generation, we conducted an additional test looking at the correlations with the heavy user subsegments of each generation. These results are presented in Table 5 in summary form.

Table 5
Majority Use of Restaurants by Generation

Generation	Quick Service		Fast Casual		Casual		Fine Dining	
	R	Sig	r	Sig	r	Sig	r	Sig
Silent Generation (n=45)	.007	.884	-.048	.329	-.017	.736	.100	.040[**]
Baby Boomers (n = 137)	.087	.076***	-.131	.007[*]	.091	.062***	-.009	.855
Gen X (n = 89)	-.075	.127	.060	.218	.043	.383	.004	.931
Gen Y (n = 124)	-.027	.589	.057	.247	-.083	.091***	-.056	.252
Nexters (n = 24)	-.001	.982	.111	.024[**]	-.075	.126	-.013	.794

*p<.01 **p < .05 ***p<.1

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

It was hoped that the findings of this research would offer some clear directions for restaurant management. In terms of segmentation and targeting, this is true in the general findings for Casual restaurants (Boomers and Nexters) and Fast Casual restaurants (Gen Y and Nexters). In terms of the heavy user subsegment, the data suggests that the heavy user Silent Generation tend to use Fine Dining (FD) the most for their dining experiences, heavy user Boomers are split between QSR and Casual (C), heavy user Gen Y tend to use Casual (C), and heavy user Nexters tend to use Fast Casual (FC)*, .* In contrast, the data suggests that heavy user Boomers tend not to use Fast Casual (FC) for their dining experiences *(r = -.131, p < .007).*

The findings suggest that for these situations the restaurant management may be able to increase their MROI by focusing more of their resources on the generation that prefers that particular type of restaurant. The key is: what works with positioning the business for the generation? Following are some quick guidelines.

The Silent Generation suffered through the depression and World War II. They don't like surprises so the messaging needs to create a sense of certainty. They also want a good value proposition. They are not very adept on social media with many not having an email. Those that are online are gravitating toward online videos, news, and weather. This means more traditional forms of advertising and media will work best with this generation.

For Boomers, it is important to think in terms of the future not the past. This means speaking to their cognitive age not their chronological age. They want to think of themselves as still full of life with a lot left to do. They are the biggest consumers of television so, if the budget can afford it, this is a good media choice. In addition, Boomers have taken to social media in recent years. Their use of Facebook has almost doubled the last few years. They have also found YouTube and love it. The key is to develop trust, use proper language, and include the type of content that matters to them not their kids.

With Gen X, keep in mind that they are highly educated and very skeptical. As such, the messaging needs to be very clear and not appear to be hiding anything. Due to their difficult childhoods, an appeal to their past is not a good idea. They rely heavily on review and opinion sites so management needs to know what people are saying about the business on those type of sites. Take action to fix any of the bad reviews. Also, encourage customers to go on those sites and write reviews. Interestingly, Gen X does respond to direct mail. Just make sure it follows the above advice when crafting the message.

When trying to reach Gen Y, it is important not to try and tell them what to do but to tell a story that is relevant, fun, and personal. Participating in causes and building a community will resonate well with them. They go to their peers before making a decision so word of mouth is key. Over 80% use Facebook daily so you have to be there. Make sure the website is mobile enabled so they can use their mobile devices. If not then they will look elsewhere. They gather information from blogs so a good blog will win some customers too.

Concerning Nexters, or Gen Z, we are still getting to know them. The thing we do know is that the way to reach them is through texting and mobile videos. Make sure they can share the videos as they do this often. If unsure how to do this then look around the business and ask the employees who are Gen Z to show you how. They will be happy to help because they are the WE generation.

Unfortunately, the lack of support in the QSR segment suggests that management in this area has to pay attention to all segments if they are to maximize their top line. As such, it becomes critical to develop a CRM system and develop relationships with the customers. In terms of financial resources, this is a clear advantage to larger organizations that can distribute these costs over a larger number of units. However, it also suggests that the small, possibly single owner operated establishment can compete by investing the time to know the customers or by investing that time into teaching the front line employees the importance of developing those relationships. This will reduce the defection of customers to competitors and gain a larger share of wallet. This also allows the use of nontraditional marketing tactics which will increase the bottom line due to repeat sales not being based on traditional, and often costly, marketing expenditures.

LIMITATIONS

One of the limitations of this research is that the sample is just from California. Additional research needs to be done across other parts of the U.S. to determine if these findings are representative of the country as a whole or just California. While sample generalizability is a warranted concern, specifically when the response rate is small, this research was conducted to provide a preliminary assessment of a theoretical model. Because this study was not intended to generalize the results to a new population or project a statistic from a sample to a larger population, Hunt (1990) maintains that the non-response issue is of minimal concern in research such as this (as cited in Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p.28. Some may take issue with the use of a p< .1 cutoff being used as significant; however, in exploratory research this is not an unaccepted practice. Lastly, the Nexters were under represented in the panel. This may be due to the limitations that Survey Monkey has pertaining to the age limits of who can participate in a panel.

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