

Optimizing Taste Perception to Increase Purchasing Decisions at “Warung Nenek”

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of the culinary sector has created a highly competitive environment, compelling businesses to innovate and implement strategies to attract and retain customers. This study focuses on Rumah Makan Nenek, a popular dining spot near the State Islamic University of North Sumatra, known for its distinctive flavors and affordable prices. Despite its appeal, the restaurant faces challenges from an increasing number of dining options around the campus. Taste perception, a crucial factor in consumer purchasing decisions, plays a significant role in customer satisfaction and loyalty. This research employed Deep Interviews to gather detailed consumer feedback on taste perceptions and used Education and Training methods to enhance flavor quality and restaurant management. Additionally, Collaboration methods were applied to boost the restaurant's visibility. The findings reveal that a thorough understanding of taste perception is essential for maintaining high customer satisfaction and optimizing sales. Strategies recommended include focusing on ingredient quality, innovating recipes, conducting regular staff training, and utilizing social media for marketing. Ensuring a positive overall dining experience, including friendly service and a comfortable atmosphere, is vital for building customer loyalty and attracting new patrons. The study highlights the importance of integrating taste with other factors such as service quality and ambiance to sustain and grow in a competitive market.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The growth of the culinary sector is currently rapid, compelling business actors to continually innovate or apply strategies that can attract consumer attention to remain competitive. Entrepreneurs must be creative in developing their businesses to entice consumers to try their offered products. The restaurant business is highly sought after due to its high-profit potential. However, the current market competition makes it easy for consumers to switch between dining options (Siregar et al., 2021). Restaurants are a sector that continues to evolve and contribute significantly to the local economy. The menu of food and beverages in restaurants needs to be designed in such a way as to stimulate consumer appetite (Tombeng et al., 2019). One of the restaurants popular among students is Rumah Makan

Nenek, located near the State Islamic University of North Sumatra. Rumah Makan Nenek is known for offering a variety of dishes with distinctive flavors and affordable prices, attracting many students. However, with an increasing number of dining options around the campus, Rumah Makan Nenek faces the challenge of retaining and increasing its customer base.

Taste perception is a major factor influencing consumer purchasing decisions at restaurants. Students, as the primary consumers, have specific preferences and expectations regarding the taste of the food they consume. Variations in these perceptions can impact their purchasing decisions, which ultimately affects the restaurant's revenue and business sustainability. The importance of taste perception in influencing purchasing decisions cannot be overlooked, especially in a competitive environment such as around a campus. Taste is a selection of food that must be distinguished from the food's flavor; it encompasses appearance, aroma, taste, texture, and temperature. Flavor itself results from the work of taste buds located on the tongue or mouth, which is a part of taste and is crucial in food preparation (Adi, 2016). Taste is a biological perception, such as the sensations produced by materials entering the mouth and the nose. Taste is primarily experienced by aroma receptors in the nose and taste receptors in the mouth. The taste of a food item plays a critical role in a restaurant.

A distinctive taste at a restaurant also reflects the service provided by the establishment. The quality of service given to consumers will determine the progress of a business. Service, in this case, is closely related to customer satisfaction; good quality service can provide high satisfaction, making consumers feel more valued by the company (Dita, 2018). Students have the option to choose dining places that match their taste preferences. If Rumah Makan Nenek fails to meet or exceed students' taste expectations, they may switch to other restaurants that are perceived to better align with their tastes. Previous studies have shown that taste is a key determinant in purchasing decisions in the food and beverage industry (Amelia, 2019). According to research by Andraresta (2020), taste perception not only affects customer satisfaction but also plays a role in customer loyalty. However, specific studies linking taste perception with purchasing decisions among students are still limited, especially in the context of restaurants in a campus environment.

Utjiawan and Japarianto (2014) state that higher customer satisfaction at a restaurant leads to greater customer loyalty towards the restaurant, which is due to the satisfaction felt by customers. According to Kotler (2005), customer satisfaction is the feeling of pleasure or displeasure a person experiences after comparing the performance of a product with their expectations. Cengiz (2010) suggests that customer satisfaction is an abstract concept that varies from individual to individual based on each person's expectations of the product. Customer satisfaction increases when customers feel that the seller has been fair in the transaction (Kennedy et al., 2001).

2. METHOD

This article employs the Deep Interview method to obtain detailed information from consumers about their experiences and perceptions of the taste at Rumah Makan Nenek. Additionally, the Education and Training method is used to provide information and training to the owners or staff on how to enhance taste quality and restaurant management. The Collaboration method is also applied to work with other parties, such as business partners, culinary experts, or communities, to increase the visibility of Rumah Makan Nenek. The article utilizes primary data, with the population consisting of customers who have visited Rumah Makan Nenek. The sample size in this article is 30 individuals.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on community service results, even though Rumah Makan Nenek is known for its distinctive flavors, the company realizes the need for a deeper understanding of how taste perception affects customer satisfaction. The intense competition from various other eateries requires Rumah Makan Nenek to continuously improve and maintain the quality of its flavors to remain appealing to consumers. To address this challenge, a training program titled "Taste Perception Enhancement Strategy for Improving Customer Satisfaction" was designed to help marketers understand the importance of taste in attracting and retaining customers. This training includes an analysis of how taste perception can influence customer satisfaction and marketing techniques that can leverage taste to enhance product appeal. Additionally, the training teaches how to evaluate taste experiences and make necessary adjustments to ensure that the flavor remains superior in a competitive market. The results of the training show that with a better understanding of the role of taste, Rumah Makan Nenek's marketers can maintain high customer satisfaction and optimize sales. The program also provides additional insights on how to use taste strategically to build customer loyalty and enhance consumer satisfaction. With this strategy, Rumah Makan Nenek is expected to continue growing and better meet market needs.

Discussion

The impact of taste on customer satisfaction at Rumah Makan Nenek is highly significant, especially in the culinary industry, which heavily relies on consumers' sensory experiences. Taste encompasses various elements such as flavor, aroma, texture, and food presentation, all of which contribute to how consumers perceive and evaluate a dish. In the context of Rumah Makan Nenek, which may feature traditional or distinctive cuisine, taste becomes a key factor that can attract customers and influence their satisfaction or their decision to return or recommend the place to others. The strong taste of dishes at Rumah Makan Nenek can serve as a major differentiator from competitors. For example, the use of unique spices, traditional cooking techniques, and high-quality ingredients can create a unique dining experience. When consumers feel that the food served is not only delicious but also authentic and characterful, they are more likely to form an emotional connection with the place. This can enhance customer loyalty and encourage repeat purchases.

The dining experience at Rumah Makan Nenek encompasses not just the taste of the food but also the ambiance, service, and interaction with the staff. Outstanding taste can be overshadowed by other negative experiences, such as slow service or an uncomfortable atmosphere. Therefore, it is crucial for the restaurant owners to ensure that all elements of the consumer experience contribute positively to customer satisfaction. Customer feedback regarding taste and the overall experience should be taken seriously to improve services. In terms of marketing, Rumah Makan Nenek's marketers should highlight taste in every campaign they undertake. Using social media to showcase appetizing food photos, cooking process videos, or testimonials from satisfied customers can create buzz and attract attention. Collaborating with food bloggers or culinary influencers can also help expand market reach and attract new customers who may not yet be familiar with the place.

While traditional taste is crucial, menu innovation can also draw consumer interest. Marketers need to stay attuned to current food trends and adapt to evolving consumer preferences. For instance, offering healthier, vegetarian, or vegan menu options can broaden the market share and attract new customers who might not be interested in traditional menu choices. Customer feedback on menu innovations should also be considered to ensure that changes meet their expectations. Although taste

is a key factor in customer satisfaction, it is important to remember that other factors also influence customer satisfaction. For example, price, location, and the restaurant's ambiance also contribute to consumer choices. Therefore, Rumah Makan Nenek's owners should conduct in-depth analyses to understand how taste and other factors interact. Further research, including customer surveys and competitive analysis, can provide more comprehensive insights into consumer preferences and behaviors.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the article, it was found that to continuously improve the taste of its dishes and ensure that Rumah Makan Nenek remains popular despite numerous competitors in the area, the following strategies should be implemented: First, focus on the quality of ingredients by using fresh and high-quality products to ensure a consistent and authentic taste. Second, innovate by developing new recipes that retain the authenticity of the cuisine while offering interesting variations to customers without compromising traditional flavors. Rumah Makan Nenek should also conduct regular training for kitchen staff to ensure proper cooking techniques and satisfying presentation. Collecting and analyzing customer feedback actively to understand their preferences and expectations, and adjusting the menu based on this input. Utilize social media and digital marketing to promote Rumah Makan Nenek's unique flavors and attract potential customers with appetizing visual content and positive testimonials. Additionally, maintain an overall positive customer experience by ensuring friendly service and a comfortable atmosphere, as a pleasant dining experience can strengthen customer loyalty and attract new visitors.

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