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# The Moderating Effect of Equity on the Links between Perceived Expectations, Quality of Service, Emotions, Satisfaction and Loyalty: Case of Restaurants

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**ABSTRACT:** This article focuses on the consequences of perceived expectations on quality, satisfaction, emotion and loyalty in the restaurant industry. After a clarification of the concepts of perceived expectation, service quality, emotion of satisfaction, loyalty and fairness in relation to expectation, we propose a research model. This model is based on the hypothesis that in the context of catering, perceived waiting has an impact on perceived quality, emotion, satisfaction and loyalty. Moreover, fairness with respect to expectation moderates the relationships between these variables. Data from a survey of 400 restaurant customers in the city of Antananarivo were processed using structural equations. The results partly confirm our hypotheses, in particular the influence of perceived waiting on quality, emotions and satisfaction. We conclude our article on the limitations of the study and the prospects for future research.

**KEYWORDS:** Perceived waiting times, perceived quality, emotions, justice of wait, satisfaction, loyalty, restaurant

## I. INTRODUCTION

Madagascar is said to be the "country of moramora". The country bears its name well because whatever we do, whatever we want, wherever we want to go, we will have to be patient. In everyday life, Malagasy people go there "despacito", and human relations also respond to the principle of moramora. Associated with the principle of "fotoan-gasy" or "the Malagasy time", it seems that there is another notion of time for the Malagasy and the services of the restoration do not escape this rule.

In the food service industry, waiting time for service is usually the first direct interaction between customers and most delivery processes. Indeed, investigations in the food service industry conclude that waiting time is a major customer concern [1]. Researchers have argued that service delays can be controlled by two techniques: operations management or perception management [2]. Thus, the limitations of operations management with respect to waiting time is inherent in the restaurant's limitation of not being able to predict demand with certainty. This limitation intuitively leads to a growing interest in managing perceptions of the waiting experience. To do this, it is important to understand the variables that influence perceptions of waiting and the possible impact of waiting on service evaluations. Despite this inevitable reality, empirical investigations in this area are limited and there is little research examining how organizations might reduce the negative effects of waiting. Thus, this paper responds to this call for research.

From other perspectives, although perceived waiting time, quality of service, emotion and fairness are important in shaping satisfaction, it is rare to see all three concepts simultaneously in the same model and furthermore, this relationship has not yet been empirically tested in the context of catering. Furthermore, the moderating role of equity has not yet been fully studied in the literature. The objective of the present research is to combine perceived expectation, perceived quality, fairness and emotions in the same model in order to explain consumer satisfaction and behavioral intention in the context of catering. On the theoretical level, our study makes several essential contributions to the literature. Firstly, we empirically validate the notion that expectation leads to negative emotions and, moreover, has an

impact on service quality, consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Second, we analyse the moderating effect of equity on the effects of waiting time. A finding that there is too little research adopting this perspective leads us to take a closer look at the subject. Methodologically, more investigation in areas such as restaurants and other cultures is needed to establish the validity of the research.

The article begins with the conceptual background and the development of hypotheses. We then discuss the methods used and the results of hypothesis testing. Finally, we present a discussion of the management and research implications of the results, as well as an identification of the inherent limitations of the research.

## II. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

### 2.1 Waiting time

With income and price, time can be considered a constraint in consumers' purchasing choices [3]. Defined as the time from when a client is ready to receive service until the service begins [4], waiting time has four aspects: objective, subjective, cognitive, and affective [3]. Objective waiting time is the elapsed time, measured by a stopwatch, before service is consumed (before being served, before being received, etc.). Subjective waiting time is the consumer's estimate of the waiting time. In the literature, the subjective aspect of waiting is measured using perceived waiting time [5]. The cognitive aspect of waiting refers to the assessment of waiting as acceptable, reasonable or tolerable [6]. Finally, the affective aspect of waiting is assimilated to the emotional reactions of waiting such as irritation, boredom, frustration, stress, pleasure, happiness, etc. [6]. Investigations have shown that individuals are poor at estimating the actual length of waiting time [5]. Furthermore, for consumers, perceived waiting time is more likely to be the source of consumer dissatisfaction than objectively measured waiting time [5]. Thus, this research focuses on perceived waiting time rather than actual waiting time.

Several investigations support the idea that waiting time is an important factor in customer satisfaction. In fact, perceived waiting time is inversely related to customer satisfaction. Thus, the less customers wait, the more satisfied they will be [7]. According to Oliver [8], satisfaction is above all an emotional variable. Therefore, according to the causal cognitive-affect ordering [9], cognitive evaluations such as wait times are antecedents to satisfaction.

H1: Perceived waiting time influences satisfaction.

Previous studies have shown that longer perceived waiting times have a negative effect on consumers' perceptions of the quality of services [10] and on their attitudes towards a service provider. In fact, service delay is thought to negatively influence several attributes, and thus the overall assessment of service [11]. This idea is supported by Berry and Parasuraman [12] who state that promptness or timeliness is an important element of service reliability, an important attribute in the overall assessment of service quality. Empirical investigations undertaken in the airline industry have supported the argument that waiting time has a negative influence on the overall assessment of service quality [4]. These ideas support the following hypothesis:

H2: Perceived waiting time influences perceived quality.

Consumers engage in a service transaction to achieve a certain result [9]. As a result, those who prevent them from achieving goals such as service expectations can create a sense of «desire-outcome-conflict" that can trigger negative emotional reactions to the situation [5]. Expectations lie between consumers and the achievement of desired goals and, as a result, often create a sense of frustration. According to other ideas, a client's waiting experience consists of a perceived waiting time and their emotional reaction to the wait, with emotional reactions being inherent to the wait itself. These ideas support the following hypothesis:

H3: Perceived waiting time influences negative emotions

### 2.2 Service quality

In the literature, the definition of quality proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry [13] is widely used. From this perspective, quality of service refers to an overall assessment of the attributes of the product or service. Another definition proposed by Bitner [14] defines quality of service as the customers' general impression of the relative inferiority/superiority of a service provider and its services. As such, it is considered to be similar to the customer's general attitude toward the firm [13].

Although researchers admit that, like satisfaction, perceived quality mobilizes the paradigm of disconfirmation of expectations, the concept differs from satisfaction [14]. Perceived quality is a form of attitude related but not equivalent to satisfaction. In the literature, several ideas underline the difference between the two constructs. First, perceived quality is a long-term global assessment, whereas satisfaction is a transaction-specific measure. Second, there is some difference in the operationalization of disconfirmation. On this point, in the framework of quality of service, the

comparison is made on what the consumer should expect, whereas in the framework of satisfaction, the comparison is made on what the consumer should expect.

Bagozzi's [9] idea of the "result-desire" relationship can be used to explain the relationship between perceived quality and satisfaction. Indeed, individuals generally engage in activities (e.g., buying a product, a service) out of a desire to achieve certain results. If the individual assesses that the expected result is achieved, then the "desire-result" is achieved, which will subsequently be followed by an effective response (such as satisfaction) [9]. From this perspective, individuals engage in the activity of purchasing a service or good because they desire a certain level of quality in relation to those they purchase. Following an evaluation, if the required quality (result) is achieved, satisfaction will follow. These ideas form the basis of the hypothesis:

H4: Quality of service influences satisfaction

In addition, quality of service reinforces the propensity of customers to buy again, buy more, purchase other services, become less price sensitive and talk about their positive experiences. Empirical investigations have identified a positive relationship between perceived quality and loyalty [15]. Indeed, there is a relationship between service quality and purchase intention, recommendation and resistance to better alternatives. Following the idea that purchase intention, recommendation and resistance to better alternatives constitute loyalty, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H5: Quality of service influences loyalty

### 2.3 Emotions

The human being presents himself as the most emotional animal. Among other characteristics, emotion is presented as what makes humans unique [16]. It so happens that no other subject has aroused as much interest as emotion in the field of sociology. On this, the importance of the subject lies in the fact that emotions not only play a fundamental role in survival [17], but they also constitute the primary motivation system for the human being [18], and moreover communicate a signal of intentions [19]. Within the framework of consumer theory, affective is an important area for studying behavior.

Emotional theory postulates that environmental stimuli influence an individual's emotional state, which in turn affects his or her reactions [20]. In a restaurant setting, many stimuli can influence the emotional state of the customer. These stimuli can be tangible or intangible such as service aspects. According to other ideas, consumers engage in a service transaction to achieve a certain result [9], however, waiting creates psychological tension by blocking the rapid achievement of objectives. According to these ideas, the negative effect of the experience influences the consumer's evaluation of the overall service. The consumer's mood following the waiting experience influences his or her opinion of the overall service experience [10]. These ideas provide the basis for the following assumptions:

H6: Negative emotions impact perceptions of service quality.

H7: Negative emotions affect the perception of satisfaction.

### 2.4 Satisfaction

Satisfaction is a central concept in marketing and has therefore been the subject of numerous investigations over the years. In spite of a good number of writings on the subject, the authors have not found any consensual definition of the construct. The discrepancy is more about its apprehension in a temporal framework than about its very nature. From a temporal point of view, some authors support the idea that satisfaction refers to the most recent transaction where it is defined as an evaluation or experience in reaction to a particular transaction with a product, episode or service. Other authors define satisfaction as a cumulative evaluation of experiences with the product or service made by the consumer, or an addition of all perceived satisfactions. Despite these differences, customer satisfaction has long been recognized as a central concept and an essential objective of all business activities.

For companies operating in competitive markets such as food service, loyalty is inherent to survival. Loyalty increases profits by reducing the costs of acquiring new customers. In addition, loyal customers are less price-sensitive and are associated with lower operational costs due to their familiarity with company procedures [21]. Several studies show that there is a direct and strongly positive link between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty [3]. Customer satisfaction is recognized as an antecedent of customer loyalty. Indeed, satisfaction has a positive effect on attitudinal change in the period following the buyback [22] and these positive attitudes effectively reinforce buyback intentions. These ideas support the following hypothesis:

H8: Satisfaction impacts consumer loyalty.



**2.5 Equity as a moderating variable**

One aspect of perceptions of expectation concerns social or procedural justice [23]. Procedural justice concerns individual perceptions of procedural fairness and is distinct from distributive justice, which concerns fairness in the distribution of desired outcomes. According to investigations, perceived justice is described as a key variable in social analyses of expectation [24].

According to evaluation theory, consumers consciously assess threats to their goals and well-being [25]. In an expectation situation, when the expectation is perceived to be fair, the perceived threats to goals are not high for consumers, therefore, the consumption experience will not be negatively evaluated. On the other hand, if the expectation is perceived to be unfair, consumers evaluate this situation very negatively. Furthermore, according to social justice theory, when a long wait is associated with an unfair procedure, it increases consumer distress and therefore reinforces negative evaluations.

H9a: Perceived justice of the wait moderates the relationship between perceived waiting and satisfaction.

H9b: Perceived justice of the wait moderates the relationship between perceived quality and satisfaction.

H9c: Perceived justice of the wait moderates the relationship between perceived expectation and perceived quality.

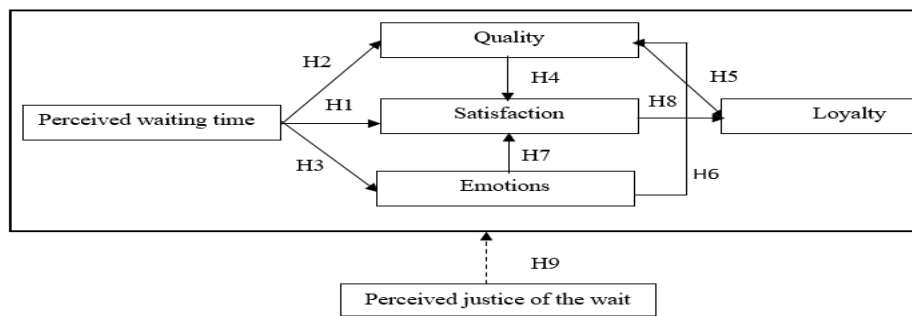


Fig. 1. The overall research model

**III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**3.1 Measures**

All of the measurement scales we have used are all taken from the literature. We have adapted them according to the context of the study. Perceived waiting time is adapted from the method used by Bielen and Demoulin [3]. On this basis, respondents were asked to classify their expectations into one of the following categories: less than 15 minutes, between 15 and 30 minutes, between 30 and 45 minutes, between 45 minutes and 1 hour and more than 1 hour. The measurement of emotions was inspired by Voorhees et al. [5]. Respondents indicated the intensity of their emotions after waiting. Satisfaction was captured according to Oliver's items [26]. Measures of perceived justice of wait are those initiated by Voorhees et al. [5]. The scale has a good psychometric property. The perception of service quality is that proposed by Jang and Namkung [20]. Finally, the measure of loyalty is adapted from the work of Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman [27], and the scale is used in various service activities.

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was refined through a rigorous pre-test, initiated to test the clarity of the questions. During the pre-test, 10 individuals were invited to comment on the questions and their wording. The comments of these 10 individuals formed the basis for the revision of our measurement scales.

**3.2 Subjects and procedure**

The research was conducted among consumers who made at least five purchases on Facebook in the same year. To ensure the reliability of the structural equation model, the number of responses must be 5 to 10 times greater than the number of items [28]. In this research, the scale with the highest number of items is the efficiency scale. The minimum number required to validate the scale is at least 25 responses, i.e. 5 times the 5 items. [29], for his part, puts forward the idea of a sample size of 100 to 200 individuals, and concludes that the model behaves correctly if the sample size meets this condition. Given these methodological recommendations, the difficulties related to the survey, the availability of individuals to question, and the length of our questionnaire, we conducted a face-to-face survey of 400 individuals.

### 3.3 Statistical analysis

The data obtained are processed with SmartPLS 3 software. First, the measurement scale was tested, then a modeling under structural equation was used to test the hypotheses put forward. These analyses allowed the following results to be obtained.

## IV. RESULTS

### 4.1 Measurement model

Prior to testing the structural model, the reliability, convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs must be established.

**TABLE 1. Scales of measurement**

Scale	$\lambda$	Reliability	AVE
<i>Emotions</i>			
Irritated	0.989	0.989	0.978
Annoyed	0.989		
<i>Perceived justice of the wait</i>			
To what extent was there an appropriate procedure used to determine who was to be served next?	0.918	0.927	0.864
To what extent was the method of receiving service fair to people?	0.941		
<i>Quality</i>			
The restaurant serves my food exactly as I ordered it.	0.952	0.953	0.871
Employees are always willing to help me	0.958		
The behavior of employees instills confidence in me.	0.887		
<i>Satisfaction</i>			
I am satisfied with my decision to choose this restaurant.	0.845	0.948	0.786
If I had it to do all over again, I would feel differently about my decision do choose this restaurant.	0.892		
My decision to choose this restaurant was a wise one.	0.904		
I feel bad about my decision to choose this restaurant.	0.870		
I think that I did the right thing when I decided to choose this restaurant.	0.920		
<i>Loyalty</i>			
I will say positive things about this restaurant to other people.	0.969	0.969	0.940
I will encourage friends and relatives to do business with this restaurant.	0.970		

The reliability test gave results greater than 0.7 (between 0.845 and 0.989), an acceptable threshold according to Nunnally and Bernstein [30], which confirms the reliability of the measurement scales used [31]. Concerning the validity test, Bagozzi and Yi [32] suggest that convergent validity is ensured by the  $\lambda$  above 0.7. Table 2 shows that all of the  $\lambda$  are above their recommendations. Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) are greater than 0.5, which establish the convergent validity of the constructs [31]. With regard to discriminant validity, it is established when the square root of the mean extracted variance (AVE) is greater than each of the correlations between constructs [31]. The results in Table 2 show that the conditions for discriminant validity are met.



TABLE 2. Correlation between the different constructs

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Waiting times	1.000					
Emotions	0.493	0.989				
Perceived justice	-0.058	-0.040	0.930			
Loyalty	-0.637	-0.464	0.597	0.970		
Quality	-0.545	-0.494	0.740	0.872	0.933	
Satisfaction	-0.515	-0.470	0.663	0.923	0.821	0.886

4.2 Structural model

To evaluate the structural model, the coefficient of determination (R2) of each dependent variable, the structural coefficients (β) and the level of significance (t-value) were examined. The values of R2 are above the recommended threshold of 0.10 (between 0.243 and 0.891) [33].

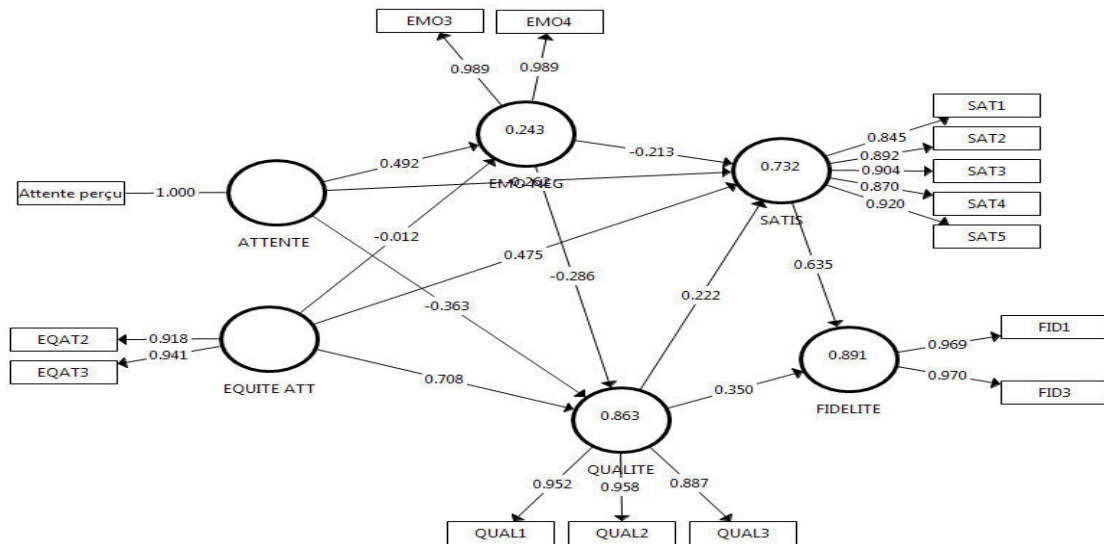


Fig. 2. The structural model

TABLE 2. Result of structural equation model estimates

Path	Hypothesis	Structural coefficient	t-value	p-value
Waiting times -> Emotions	H3	0.492	22.379	0.000
Waiting times -> Quality	H2	-0.347	16.583	0.000
Waiting times -> Satisfaction	H1	-0.128	3.004	0.003
Emotions -> Quality	H5	-0.288	13.969	0.000
Emotions -> Satisfaction	H6	-0.149	3.120	0.002
Waiting times (justice moderating effects) -> Satisfaction	H8a	0.598	14.120	0.000
Quality (justice moderating effects) -> Satisfaction	H8b	-0.046	1.120	0.263
Waiting times (justice moderating effects) -> Quality	H8c	-0.178	6.063	0.000

Quality -> Loyalty	H4	0.350	9.693	0.000
Quality -> Satisfaction	H3	0.701	6.444	0.000
Satisfaction -> Loyalty	H7	0.635	19.485	0.000

The objective of this section is to examine the causal relationships between perceived expectation, perceived quality, emotions, satisfaction and loyalty, and the moderating effect of equity versus expectation on these relationships. The results show that the perceived expectation inversely impacts satisfaction and perceived quality ( $\beta = -0.128, \rho < 0.05$ ;  $\beta = -0.347, \rho < 0.05$ ), therefore H1 and are confirmed. In addition, it positively impacts negative emotions ( $\beta = 0.492, \rho < 0.05$ ), thus confirming H3. Concerning emotions, they impact in an inverse way the perceived quality and satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.288, \rho < 0.05$ ;  $\beta = -0.49, \rho < 0.05$ ). As a result, H5 and H6 are confirmed. Concerning the perceived quality, it has a positive impact on satisfaction and loyalty ( $\beta = 0.701, \rho < 0.05$ ;  $\beta = 0.305, \rho < 0.05$ ).

As a result, H3 and H4 are confirmed. The same applies to the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty ( $\beta = 0.635, \rho < 0.05$ ), which confirms H7. Concerning the moderating effect of fairness in relation to expectation, if the latter moderates the relationship between: on the one hand, perceived expectation and satisfaction, and on the other hand, perceived expectation and perceived quality, it does not moderate the relationship between perceived quality and satisfaction. Therefore, if H8a and H8c are confirmed, it is not the cad of H8b.

## V. DISCUSSION

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. Firstly, it makes it possible to test a model that integrates perceived expectation, perceived quality and emotion in consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Second, it allows us to test the moderating role of equity in relation to expectation in these relationships.

First, the results indicate that perceived expectation influences both emotion, perceived quality and satisfaction. The link between perceived expectation, perceived quality and satisfaction confirms previous investigations [34], [35]. According to field theory, the objective of individual motivation is the achievement of the goal. A queue creates psychological tension by blocking the rapid attainment of the goal. The negative effect of the experience influences the consumer's evaluation of the overall service. Concerning the link between perceived waiting and emotions, it is confirmed that feelings of annoyance, irritation are often the result of delays. Indeed, delays are obstacles to service, and when an obstacle blocks the satisfaction of a need, frustration and anger result. Referring to field theory, a certain blockage to the goal creates a negative effect that leads to anger and frustration [10].

Second, the results of our research stipulate the impact of emotions on both perceived quality and satisfaction. The relationship between negative emotions and satisfaction confirms the ideas put forward by other investigations [36] indeed, positive and negative emotions influence satisfaction in a positive and negative sense respectively. According to the attribution theory, when the individual faces negative experiences, negative emotions are apprehended according to the agent, or who is responsible for causing an unpleasant event. When the agent himself or herself is deemed responsible, emotions such as guilt arise. When responsibility is inherent in others, anger and other negative emotions arise. Consumers use their momentary moods as a heuristic to infer their level of satisfaction with life in general. The relationship between satisfaction and negative emotions depends on the cause of the negative emotion. Thus, if the negative emotion is caused by the provider, the negative emotions influence satisfaction in the opposite way.

Negative emotions affect the perception of quality. It has been confirmed that the perceived length of an expectation is strongly related to a negative effect (negative emotions), which in turn has a negative impact on evaluations of service quality [10]. From the perspective of field theory, a queue creates psychological tension. As a result, the consumer's mood following the waiting experience colors his or her opinion of the overall service experience.

Third, perceived quality impacts both satisfaction and loyalty. Although the link between perceived quality and satisfaction is recognized in the literature, there is some controversy about the link. Indeed, the first idea is that incidents of satisfaction lead to a perception of service quality [13]. The other view is that perceived service quality is an antecedent of customer satisfaction [37]. Our results support the idea that perceived quality positively influences satisfaction. According to Zeithaml [38], perceived quality is defined as a consumer's assessment of the excellence or superiority of a product. On this basis, it represents the characteristics of the product that meet the customer's requirements and best satisfy his or her wishes. The idea of satisfaction resulting from the confirmation of expectations supports the idea that perceived quality would be an antecedent of satisfaction. Indeed, satisfaction can be seen as an emotional response from a cognitive perspective following the quality of the service or product. Moreover, it is also confirmed that in the restaurant industry,



perceived quality positively influences consumers' behavioral intention. Indeed, according to Dick and Basu [39], relative attitude (comparative evaluation) is likely to provide a stronger indication of the repetition of a purchasing behavior. Fourth, satisfaction has a positive impact on loyalty. Many researchers have provided empirical evidence of a positive relationship between client satisfaction and loyalty [37], [40]. According to these ideas, improving satisfaction levels contributes to customer loyalty in terms of the probability of redemption and price tolerance in the event of redemption. Furthermore, Cronin and Taylor [37] states that satisfaction is a key determinant of positive behavioral intentions.

Finally, the results of our investigations indicate that fairness with respect to expectation moderates the relationship between perceived expectation and perceived quality. The results reveal that, on the one hand, fair waiting procedures directly influence evaluations of the service experience, but on the other hand, they can also reduce the negative effects of waiting. On the other hand, fairness with respect to waiting does not moderate the relationship between perceived expectation and satisfaction. Defined as a dual concept, satisfaction also includes an affective dimension. On this point, fairness in relation to expectation moderates the relationship between perceived expectation and the perception of quality, which is a purely cognitive concept. Moreover, it does not moderate the affective feeling in relation to the consequences of the perceived expectation.

### 5.1 Managerial and strategic implications

In addition to the theoretical impacts, our results also have implications for managers operating in the restaurant industry. Firstly, knowing reasonable customer expectations is important for improving quality perception and customer satisfaction in the food service industry. Wait time management is of real importance for service evaluation. With this in mind, if restaurants are having difficulty reducing wait times, they could build on other elements to make the wait more pleasant. In fact, wait measurement is associated with the waiting environment that minimizes perceived waiting. Examples include distractions such as newspapers or access to Wi-Fi hotspots. These distractions aim to minimize the perceived waiting and make waiting more pleasant.

In the restaurant context, perceived quality is emerging as an important aspect in generating customer satisfaction and loyalty. Although service is fundamentally intangible, tangible elements such as decoration, food, beverages, seating comfort, etc. must be emphasized. Moreover, the relationship between restaurant staff and customers also determines perceived quality. On this, the quality of service can vary from one employee to another, from one customer to another. Although this may be perceived as a problem, it is a business opportunity insofar as it is possible to provide personalized service to customers. However, in order to meet the requirements of these personalization services, it is fundamental that restaurant managers hire qualified personnel and that these personnel also have the power to make decisions to modify certain characteristics of the service.

Due to the hedonic nature of restaurants, it is obvious that emotions play an important role in the evaluation of services. In addition, the service literature emphasizes the importance of employees expressing socially desirable emotions during service meetings. According to the theory of emotional contagion, the expression of positive emotions by service staff facilitates a corresponding emotional state in customers. Therefore, restaurant managers need to create an environment that stimulates positive emotions. It is recommended to improve interactions between customers and the provider, which would positively impact emotions. It is therefore important to recruit contact (front) staff with the appropriate social and interpersonal skills to work in a restaurant. In addition, the use of sensory marketing will be solicited through music, the color of the room or the smells diffused in the room, or the general atmosphere of the restaurant. These positive emotions will help customers to positively evaluate the service offered.

### 5.2 Limitations and future research directions

One of the limits of research is undoubtedly the measurement of emotion. Indeed, the information was collected through paper questionnaires (and a pencil). Although many research studies use the same procedure to measure the concept, its relevance is puzzling. Moreover, emotion is a complex phenomenon to capture and can be camouflaged or simulated. Moreover, in the present research, the concept of satisfaction is purely cognitive. It would be interesting to investigate the emotional component of the construct. Finally, a generalization of our results is excluded, as the survey focused on a few restaurants in a specified geographical area. If the survey had been extended to other localities and countries, the results could have been different.

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