

Acoustic Appetite: How Restaurant Soundscapes Shape Dining Experiences

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Abstract

There has been a rapid growth of restaurants and eateries everywhere. Now a days customers not only go to the restaurant for food but also for unique experiences. Restaurants use different sensory cues in its ambience to make the diners' experience a memorable one. Various studies discuss on visual, olfactory, gustatory, auditory and tactile senses in terms of different service industry but soundscape of a restaurant often go unnoticed. The present study tries to find out how the sound environment in a restaurant affects the diners' visit to the restaurant. The required data are collected using two Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The interview data were analysed using thematic template and content analysis. The findings of the study depict the importance of soundscape, music play a crucial role as it can positively affect the customer as well as negatively too. that traditional or ethnic music is a very important aspect in ethnic restaurants to keep intact the authenticity and association of food with the overall ambience and for creating a positive experience. The sources and levels of noise are different for everyone. Noise makes the experience unpleasant one. Furthermore, the study provides insightful implications for the restaurateurs to effectively address the soundscape in the restaurant.

Keywords: Soundscape, Ambience, Sensory cues, Restaurant, and FGD

JEL classification: M0, Z3

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Introduction

The store environment in any retail setting is pivotal in the decision making process of the consumer. The importance of the store atmosphere in the scholarly articles can be traced back till 1950 (**Martineau, 1958; Cox, 1964**). After decades, Kotler's 'Atmospheric as a Tool' underlined that, in addition to the tangible qualities of a product, the environment in which it is sold has an impact on consumers (**Kotler, 1974**). Customers want sensory enjoyment in practically every purchase they make, regardless of the goods or services they are purchasing. Consumers, including those in the food service business, place a high value on the hedonic advantages of foods and seek out specific features that engage their senses and provide the most pleasurable experience (**Krishna, 2012**). Products are not only restricted to providing utilitarian benefits, but rather symbol of a bigger construct known as the consumer experience, which is memorable, customizable, long-lasting, and filled with a variety of experiences and sensations (**Farias, 2014**). Although, the primary component of a restaurant is the food, the diner's total experience is greatly influenced by the atmosphere in which the meal is consumed. To put it another way, customers want a 'dining experience' that combines superb cuisine, rapid service, a pleasant ambiance, and entertainment in the service environment. The environment or servicescape, which is rich in multisensory cues such as visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile cues (**Kotler, 1973**), is crucial in producing extraordinary sensory experiences for customers. Because services are intangible, the utilisation of physical evidence (7th P in extended service marketing mix) or tangibilising the intangibles along with experiential elements are critical throughout the service delivery. All the factors like colour, lighting, fixtures, temperature, merchandise, cleanliness, scent, taste sensation and sound including music, pitch, tempo, noise, volume etc. seem to have an impact and affect consumer perception of the service environment (**Sliburytė, 2017; Berman and Evans, 2001**). **Ryu and Jang (2007)** examined the impact of elements of atmospherics on customer's behavioral intent and found that appearance of the employee, sound, temperature and the aroma influenced the customers.

Review of Literature

Auditory cues can modulate consumer perception and behavior in service environment (**Spence, 2010; Radicchi, 2020; Syed & Yilmazer, 2023**). Sound, despite of being a significant aesthetic structure oriented towards customer, often ignored by the restaurateurs and sensory scholars. Physical and artificial environments each have their own acoustic profiles that help identify, generate, and mould one's sound perception. The soundscape is all of the sounds that a human ear perceives or listens to in a given environment. When it comes to marketing, soundscape refers to the auditory or aural cues that a person encounters while availing or consuming a service offer. Soundscape study is concerned with how people perceive, experience, and comprehend the acoustic environment as a whole, including both indoors and outdoors (**Schafer, 1977**). Office and shopping mall soundscapes have been extensively analysed, and the impact of music in such auditory contexts has been thoroughly investigated (**Areni and Kim, 1993; Bruner, 1990; North and Hargreaves, 1997; Sterne, 1997; Jain & Bagdare, 2011**). Restaurants are complicated places that engage all of our senses. Background music, co-customer voices and conversations, kitchen tools and utensils, and other more or less designable sound sources are thought to be crucial in regard to the overall experience of the soundscape (**Lindborg, 2016**). However, there have been few studies on the quality perception of the auditory environment in eating establishments, such as restaurant soundscapes (**Emma Frid, 2013**). According to a study conducted by Rohrmann (**2012**), customers have unique preferences, and their satisfaction with a restaurant visit is influenced by their assessment of the music soundscape they witness.

Statement of the Problem

In our everyday lives, sound has an essential existence. The majority of studies on practical approaches concentrate their conclusions about the impacts of sound on physical sound parameters, such as sound pressure levels (Marry & Defrance, 2013). A comprehensive understanding of soundscapes could lead to better living conditions. We are all exposed to sounds in restaurants, hence the topic of restaurant soundscape is one that is growing. Furthermore, eating out of the house is becoming more and more popular worldwide, especially in Asian nations. Therefore, it is vital to comprehend how people perceive the sound levels in restaurants and whether or not these perceptions, when combined with other elements of the restaurant servicescape, affect patrons' overall level of happiness (To and Chung 2019).

Need of the Study

There are concepts which are predominant in the field of service marketing such as servicescape, musicscape, dinescape and there are tools to measure the service quality called SERVQUAL, dining quality called DINESERV developed from SERVQUAL to measure diners' satisfaction of service quality in a restaurant. But there is a dearth of understandability and research in the field of soundscape in restaurants and measuring the customer experience of the soundscape in the restaurants is essential in the present context. For people not only go to the restaurant for food but desire for an overall favourable experience from their visit to the restaurant. Moreover, sufficient research in the same domain has not been conducted in Assam, India which gives the researcher a scope to explore the unexplored. As this study is purely a qualitative study, therefore the study shall try to highlight the elements of soundscape in the restaurants from the point of view of the persons who have appropriate knowledge of restaurants such as food bloggers, restaurateurs, and diners. The study shall also focus on the elements of soundscape in building diners' experience as being reported in the FGD.

Objectives: This study has been carried out with the following objectives:

- 1) To highlight the elements of soundscape in the restaurant.
- 2) To illustrate the affect of soundscape in building diners' experience.

Hypotheses of the Study

H₁: Sound generating from playing music affects in building diners' experience.

H₂: Noise in the restaurant affects dining experience.

Research Methodology

In consumer behaviour qualitative research has gained much importance due to the fact that it has many advantages. Qualitative research allows one to investigate how things happen in each action, ensuring that the study findings are accurate and matches with the reality. Qualitative research is used to find patterns in ideas and attitudes, as well as to go further into a problem (Patton, 2002). In qualitative research, the primary data for the study is the shared experience of the participants. (Bryman, 2016). According to Yildirim & Simsek (2008), qualitative research can be defined as "research in which qualitative data collection techniques such as observation, interview, and document analysis are used, and a qualitative process is followed to disclose perceptions and activities in the natural environment in a realistic and comprehensive manner." A qualitative inductive research design approach was considered necessary to gain an initial and exploratory insight and theory generation, given that soundscape—a crucial element in determining diners' experiences—is an emerging research area with limited theoretical understanding (Soetan et al., 2021; Lenzi & Lindborg, 2021). The study employs a constructive and interpretivist epistemology and ontological framework. Semi-structured interviews were used as the technique of data collection, giving participants the opportunity to provide

comments and descriptive details regarding the soundscape (Saunders et al., 2019). This data collection strategy is in line with earlier studies (Farinloye et al., 2019; Mogaji et al., 2021; Wolny & Charoensuksai, 2014), where in-depth interviews have been considered an essential qualitative research tool for numerous consumer behaviour and management studies.

Sampling Design and participants:

The study includes two Focus Group Discussions and the participants include those who have at least for once visited a restaurant. For the discussion, food bloggers, restaurant customers better called as diners, restaurant owners, renowned chef of the study area (Assam) formed the group. The homogeneity of the group was based on some kind of relation with restaurants. This was done so to gain insights into their knowledge, preferences, expectations, and behaviors, which are crucial for understanding the experiences with the sound environment. The researchers surfed the internet and basically social networking platforms to find out the correct match for creating the group. Despite being conducted virtually, only participants belonging to Assam were allowed to participate in the discussion.

Data Collection:

A total of 34 people got shortlisted based on the filter criterion (having a link with restaurant). Further, we gathered interview data from 21 participants who took part in the research interview, based on their responses to our filter questions (which included restaurants, music, noise, and sound) and their availability at that time. Table 1 shows the participants' demographic information. The focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted on a Friday at 7 pm and Sunday at 6 pm (evenings of weekends) using the Google Meet platform. In accordance with the literature review an interview guide was prepared and adhered to while conducting FGD (Murukutla & Puri, 2020; Schulze et al., 2022). The interview guide allowed the moderator to ask open-ended questions and initiate a discussion about the participant's actions, behaviour, and attitudes and experiences towards soundscape. The main topic of discussion in this study was how a restaurant's sound environment—which includes the music playing, the general ambiance noise, and the overall sound—affects the diners' experience there.

The participants received assurances regarding their confidentiality, and all other ethical measures were taken to provide them with further comfort. Each interview was videotaped and lasted ninety minutes.

Validity and Reliability

The study maintained a consistent level of trustworthiness, covering the fundamental ideas of validity and reliability in qualitative research (Sattarapu et al., 2023). Despite the absence of standardised tools to evaluate validity and reliability, qualitative researchers take great care to assure the validity and reliability of their findings. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are all covered by this guarantee. According to Lim (2019), confirmability is the degree of objectivity that permeates the findings of a research study, guaranteeing that participant replies are free from the prejudices or personal preferences of the researchers who conducted the study. The present study endeavour adhered strictly to the confirmability concept (Abdulquadri et al., 2021; Lim, 2019). In order to ensure the validity of the study, the researchers acquired ethical permission and adhered to all relevant ethical protocols, which included obtaining the participants' informed consent. The participants were made aware that the interviews would be videotaped, that the information gathered would only be utilised for scholarly research, and that their personal information would not be disclosed. The members of the study team met for debriefings to confirm and talk about the topics. Furthermore, the study's traceability and credibility were enhanced by the utilisation of the clustered themes, which are

displayed in Table 2 and demonstrate the various phases of data analysis (Mogaji & Nguyen, 2021).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The researcher transcribed the audio-visual portion of each interview, stored it as a PDF file, and exported it into the qualitative data analysis programme NVivo. Due of its iterative structure and ability to reveal implicit meanings in participant activities and responses to the restaurant's auditory environment, qualitative data analysis was selected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The study involved close engagement with people's stories regarding the affect of soundscapes at restaurants, particularly with reference to Assam. It involved meticulous data preparation, coding, categorization, and theme analysis. The results clearly show that this method of conceptualising the phenomenon abstracted themes without reducing the voices of the participants.

The data analysis procedure for this study adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps of thematic data analysis. Reading interview transcripts allowed one to become acquainted with and immersed in the data during this procedure. The creation of themes (child nodes) highlighting the difficulties and possibilities that surfaced from the transcripts of the participants and from firsthand observations came after this phase. After that, these child nodes were assessed and combined to create parent nodes. For the parent nodes, a deductive theme analysis approach was used. The analysis resulted in a thematic table with 70 sub-themes (thematic analysis) and twelve main themes, as shown in Table No.2, following a thorough analysis and discussion with co-author and colleagues regarding the sub-themes and their optimal alignment with the key themes.

Analysis of our results is consistent with the thematic analysis presented in the previous section (as listed under section 4 of this study), which sought to understand the concept of soundscape as a crucial factor in determining the diners' experience. These themes are then discussed and supported by pertinent quotes from the participant responses to the interviewed questions.

Various Sounds in the Restaurant

The participants (n=21) were very interested to discuss on the very topic. Participants recognized the importance of the topic and adverse impact of noise to the listeners be it diners or staff. The participants realized and said that music has a special space in every one's life.

Participants shared their experiences of different sound that they encounter during their visit and stay in the restaurant.

“When I visit a restaurant I prominently hear few of the sounds like, sizzler ordered by other guests, which make me to buy one for me, music, conversations of others.”- Female, Food Blogger (FGD 1)

One of the participants, River Cruise owner, FGD1 said- *“guests like to hear the breeze, nature while I taking food in the cruise restaurant.”*

Some of the participants had a strong opinion about the appealing sound environment of the restaurant and one said , *“ The restaurant I visited last night had a loud music system, strong sound which made me could not properly talk with the waiter to place order”- Male, Frequent visitor, FGD 2*

Another participant added that-“sometimes the noise created by the fan, AC and other mechanical gadgets hampers the total environment. And of course the loud music.” Male, Owner, FGD 1

“When I visit resort and take cruise ride I love the natural sound, I like retro rock when I visit Café and I often get annoyed by the cutlery sound made by the restaurant staff while fixing the things.”- Male, Food Blogger, FGD1

When people visit different eateries, they encounter different types of sound that’s present in the environment.

Role of Music in Diners’ Experience

Participants are aware that restaurants play music. But it is seen that restaurateurs/managers/operators play music of their choice. The presentation may or may not be favorable. Participants provided their opinions in a similar line.

One participant shared her experience:

“50% restaurants or places doesn't know the concept of what music to play , what a ambience they are providing to customers, whether the ambience matches with the cuisine that they are providing to the customers or not.”- Female, Food Blogger & Jury Member, Guwahati Food Awards, FGD 1

Another participant (Female, Customer,FGD 2) reiterated this point

“Music and ambience of the restaurant falls under the psychological presentation. It's all about how you are presenting it. Not only is the food, providing a nice ambience along with the music and musical ambience a psychological study and a marketing of the whole process.”

“Guests make a request for a song and they play that song. It's a kind of interaction process. People do not go to such type of restaurants just to eat but for experience in such type of restaurants. There are restaurants which I have visited the surrounding is good, the vibes is good, and they play just a piano or a very mild music.”- Male, Customer who frequently visits restaurant, FGD 1

Another interesting comment by a Food Blogger, Male, FGD 1-*“Sometimes with me what happens? I walk out of a restaurant because a very bad music is played there.”*

“As we entered into the restaurant the music was so, so loud. That it's a kind of noise. We were unable to talk with each other. My friend was saying something, I was saying something. We were like the interaction with my friends was not so good. Doesn't matter the song choice that is played in the restaurant was good but the volume was very loud.”- Female, Customer, FGD 2.

It is evident from the above expressions of the participants that definitely music play a crucial role as it can positively affect the customer as well as negatively too.

Genres of music liked by the customers (across Gender and Age) of Assam

When participants were exposed to question of liking towards different genres with respect to gender and age. It was revealed by most of the participants that the liking of genre does not necessarily depends upon gender and age. This not only happens in Assam but across India also. Reflecting on this, a participant said:

“The older generation like the songs of Bhupen Hazarika and Jayanta Hazarika and it doesn't mean that our new generation does not like this type of songs while dining.”- Male, Food Blogger, FGD 2

“It is not the age of the crowd, but the vibes of the crowd.”- Male, Restaurateur, FGD 1

“There is an important thing to say that there is a difference in choices between girls and boys.

In case of music is concerned. If I say that the crowd is a mixed one, then I generally play Bollywood music.”- Female, Restaurateur, FGD 1

Another participant who himself is a renowned chef of Assam, Restaurateur and writer said- *“That is why when a person starts to open a restaurant, one should think of what food you are presenting, what type of ambience you are presenting? Type of crowd you want in your restaurant such type of things are very important to study in because in Assam this type of thing is not seen.”*

It is clear from the above descriptions that the choice of music does not depend upon someone being male or female or of what age. It depends upon the liking and interest.

Live Music and Pre-Recorded Music in Customer Satisfaction

Furthermore, our analysis tried to find our significant impact between live music and pre-recorded music in customer satisfaction. Participants opined in this way:

“When the crowd increases, restaurant use live bands from 9:00 pm to 10:00 pm in the evening. Everything depends upon the guests, they make a request for a song and band plays that song.....”- Customer who rarely visits restaurant, Male, FGD 2

“In case of live music when a person goes to a restaurant where live music is played, there may be two kinds of crowd. One is very much enjoying in the crowd and they are in a loud mood. But one part of the crowd is just sitting idle, so people must themselves determine where they want to go, how my friends are, how is the gathering? What about my family and think considering this people should determine where they want to go. If they go by this choice, then they does not become the odd one out there.”- Female, Customer, FGD 1

“After a year of our establishment and suddenly we saw another government river cruise started operation. They provided live music, live band. So what we realize that for a cruise, the food not only matters, but a kind of experience people seek for. In case of our business, we maintain the quality of the food, but what we realized is that people in a cruise, people does not expect a lot about the food when they go in a cruise. They go for the ambience and they wanted a music. Again, we resumed our business with a live band, but personally we do not like loud music, so we kept the choice of the music to be a very mild one. We restricted our choice to either Assamese or Hindi slow songs.”- Restaurateur, Female, FGD 1

“.... and suddenly the musicians change their music from Rock to a very slow kind of song and sang yeh sham kuch aajeeb thi and the crowd turn so romantic with the song that this is the thing how the live musicians connect with the crowd and it's a kind of treat not just song it's a kind of treat connecting the crowd connecting your guests really understanding the vibes of the crowd is a treat.”- Customer, Male, FGD 2

“Sometimes it is seen that at some point of time in case of live music setting, the guest also want to sing a song in the karaoke which needs to be controlled.”- Manager, Male, FGD 2

“There should be sync between the food and music. But to a large extent, I would relate mood to mean experience that I want to consider. I mean if I have to go to a restaurant, I know my mood and I have my choice of restaurants that I will decide according to that. If I am really stressed out, maybe I would like to chill out a bit. I would choose a pub rather, I would prefer a more interactive music like live music, where on I can talk about the music, forgetting about what was going on at my background at back of my head. But if I want to spend some time with you, with my loved ones or my baby, my peer and I want to talk. Then I would prefer foreground music. This live music is something I would not appreciate because that would take away a lot of conversational time.”- Food Blogger, Male, FGD 2

The above discussion has opened a way to choose between live music or pre-recorded music according to the choice of customer, companion, conversation intention etc. of the diners in determining customer satisfaction.

Sources of Noise in the Restaurant

Participants are very conscious about the noise prevailed in the restaurant. They stated in this way:

“Loud Bollywood music is played. In that case, people would not prefer.”- Manager, Male, FGD 2

“Soothing sounds are always positive, but annoying sounds should also be taken care of in the restaurants. Sometimes what happened that we forget the soothing sound, but we cannot forget and always remember the unpleasant or the annoying sound.”- Food Blogger, Male, FGD 1

“I visited one restaurant in Guwahati for business talk with my client, there my co-diners were talking so loud along with that another family joined in, the baby was crying so hard that we had to leave the restaurant early. I did not like the surrounding.”- Male, Customer, FGD 2

One participant added that, *“In case, if a guest want to order, say a glass of warm water to the waiter. And the waiter in that circumstance because of the loud music, is unable to hear what the guest is saying and the guests try to make understand what he is asking for and his decibel increases, the guests decibel increases. Voice becomes loud, disturbs others. Sometimes the restaurant have that sound control in their hand” – Customer, Male, FGD 1*

The sources of noise are different for everyone. Some may feel the surrounding very annoying early and some may have more resistance towards noise sensitivity. However, it is true that noise makes the experience unpleasant one.

Role of Music as Noise Avoider

Participants revealed that the acoustic of the restaurant can be improved by structural improvements. But another way is to use music to work as noise avoider.

One of the participant said, *“Music to remain enjoyable and pleasant has to be medium, loud with strong bass may not be liked by all customers.”- Female, Food Blogger, FGD 1*

“I visited a restaurant once, where the music that they were playing was so exciting and eventful that I did not noticed co-diners, kitchen sound etc.” – Female, Customer, FGD 2

Music Transform a Bad Experience of Food to a Positive one

There are mixed opinions and expressions of participants regarding how music transform a bad experience of food to a positive one.

One Participant said, *“music is essential in creating a good experience but music alone will not work if the food is not good. I am not willing to come to such type of restaurants next time.”- Male, Customer, FGD 2*

“Actually, music creates a mood. At one point of time I forget about the taste and gets involved in the ambience.”-Female, Restaurateur, FGD 1

“Music has a positive relation with food. Music has a vital role in the field of eatery and the even in the field of serving food. But it depends on how the owner controls, how the musician control. how the DJ plays his number. Maximum DJs take decision on the basis of their own choice”- Male, Chef, FGD 1

Another participant added that it's not like that music transforms a bad food experience to positive one but also good food experience to a negative experience because of the music. She

stated,” *I did not like the crowd, the music was so noisy. As a result I couldn't enjoy the food. But my experience there was not something that I will be looking forward to. So sometimes what happened that food become secondary and the experience become primary.*”- Female, Customer, FGD 1

“Sometimes what happened that we forget the soothing sound, but we cannot forget and always remember the unpleasant or the annoying sound. Yes, food is important in a restaurant, but experience is more important than that because the time that I spend there is important for me. I'm ready to pay more if the experience is good. In one of my experience in a very popular restaurant in Guwahati is that I do not remember the food actually, but I remember the quality time that I spent there because of the ambience in that restaurant.”-Female, Food Blogger, FGD 2

Role of Music in Ethnic Restaurants

When participants were prompted to reflect on the role of music in ethnic restaurants, their responses were overwhelmingly positive, conveying a optimistic view on use of ethnic or traditional music with ethnic food. One of the participants revealed that:

“When I'm going to a restaurant to eat aloo petika, Maas 'or tenga, Gahori Managxo i.e, all ethnic cuisine of Assam then I am not comfortable if a loud Bollywood Song is being played there. It's a kind of psychology. When food is served in the restaurant, food is not only the taste, not only flavours it is a total visual presentation of psychological presentation. Music and ambience of the restaurant falls under the psychological presentation.”- Female, Food Blogger & Jury Member, Guwahati Food Awards, FGD 1

One of the participants added that, “*I am sharing a personal experience again so I have visited a ethnic restaurant and there I did not find them playing any music but I have seen in the roadside dhaba that all throughout the season throughout the calendar year people are playing Bihu songs. It is not necessary to play Bihu songs entire 12 months instead they can play some tokari geet or Borgeet even at the backdrop. Also if they play such type of songs then it gives a very pleasant kind of experience.*”-Male , Manager, FGD 2

“If you're going to ethnic restaurant and a Bollywood song is played there, then we might not like that. Restaurants should keep in mind the time, When?, Which type of genre to be played? It's not that we will be able to satisfy all the customers, but at least if in our ethnic restaurant if the songs of Khogen Mahanta is played then that might create a good experience.”- Female, Food Blogger, FGD 1

The opinions of the participants revealed that traditional or ethnic music is a very important aspect in ethnic restaurants to keep intact the authenticity and association of food with the overall ambience and for creating a positive experience.

Findings

This study represents a significant advancement in the field of soundscape research within the restaurant industry. Our main goal was to broaden our understanding of how diners' experiences are impacted by the sound environment in restaurants, creating new ground by building upon conceptual papers.

Even though our study's sample size and scope may seem limited given that we only collected qualitative data from participants based on Assam, interested in restaurants. It's important to acknowledge that the soundscape study is still an unexplored field of study. As such, gathering a sizable, diverse sample that fairly represents the soundscape study will likely prove to be a difficult task. As a first step towards a more thorough understanding of consumer behaviour in

relation to a sound environment, our research paves the way for future, larger research endeavours (Shashikala & Suresh, 2017; Axelsson, 2020; Schulte-Fortkamp & Fiebig, 2023).

In the process, we offer insightful information about how a restaurant's sound environment—which includes the music playing, general ambient noise, and overall sound—affects the diners' experience. The impact of live performances and recorded music on audience satisfaction. Moreover, to find out if there is any connection between ethnic music and food.

The study revealed both positive and negative emotional reactions can be evoked by sound (in line with the findings of Cerwén, 2017). There is an influence of music and ambient in dining businesses. The participants pointed out that 50% of the restaurant are unsure about the appropriate music to play. To improve the eating experience, music selections should complement the meal and the entire ambience. For example, loud Bollywood music doesn't go well with ethnic Assamese cuisine. There are psychological and visual components to meal presentation, and music is an important one. Serving meals and playing music by Bhupen and Jayanta Hazarika, restaurant appeals to both younger and elderly patrons. Melodic songs played in the restaurant add to the whole experience and demonstrating the effect that music has on atmosphere. Moreover, our study recognized different main category themes under which sub-categories were established will contribute to the evolving discourse on the dynamic environment of the restaurant. The findings of the study go in line with the other research works. Sound priming is a powerful tool for influencing customer behavior (Elgendi et al., 2018; Hartmoyer, 2022). In the case of restaurants, ambient sounds and background noise are crucial in determining auditory environment (Biswas et al., 2019). Our participants also revealed their opinion in the same way. Restaurateurs can use sound strategically to influence consumer behavior and creating a delightful experience for them.

The study also revealed that everybody experiences noise from different sources. Some people may become irritated with their surroundings quickly, while others may be more resilient to noise sensitivity. It is true, though, that noise detracts from the experience. Because people spend a significant portion of their lives in socially enclosed settings without consciously noticing the sound quality, acoustic comfort should be given careful consideration. When more people occupy a dining area, the noise levels tend to rise because of the eating ware/ cutlery (Milo, 2020).

Suggestions

The results of our research provide insightful information that restaurant owners and other companies may use to help them understand the notion of soundscape and develop ways to interact with customers aimed towards enhancing customers experience. Using the opportunity for total customer satisfaction from their experiences, restaurateurs should plan ways to actively involve customers. Our research has three important managerial implications.

- 1) Restaurant Managers should prioritize strategies to effectively engage the customers/diners in providing a satisfactory experience in the restaurant. Managers should understand that only serving good quality food will not help to attract and retain customers. Rather, the ambience need to compliment the food served. They should try to understand the sound environment. Here, the old concept of being consistent with the quality of food becomes secondary now. People want a calm and relaxing place to overcome the stress.
- 2) Managers need to understand that only blowing the sound system with a random music will not work in today's competitive world. They must try to customize the music so that it conveys and links the psychology of the customer. As stated in the discussion its not the age of the crowd, the vibes of the crowd matters.

- 3) Regarding the ethnic music with ethnic food, the traditional beats, songs, varieties should be studied by the management of the restaurant and play the songs which resembles with the ethnic food being served.
- 4) Moreover, another important aspect of sound environment is the unwanted sound called the noise. The sources of noise should be veiled by the management and steps should be taken to address the issue by without affecting the experiences of any of the guests.
- 5) It is very well said that people forget the soothing sound, but what they cannot forget and always remember is the unpleasant or the annoying sound. So, the managers' duty is to look after the overall sound environment including the different sources of sound which might creep in a problem and do the needful. For example, regular servicing of the electronic and mechanical gadgets, maintain the requisite decibel of sound so that does not affect the ears of all the stakeholders who are exposed to the environment.
- 6) Efforts should be made to transform the negative mood of the customer to a positive one. And if a customer has entered the restaurant in a cheerful mood than that must be enhanced.

Conclusion

Our qualitative research offers insightful information on how consumers perceive the soundscape. Guests are very interested in the audio environment. However, the idea and components of soundscape beyond the music played in the restaurant were unknown to guests and service providers. Whether deliberately or inadvertently these aspects were overlooked not only by restaurateurs but also by academicians.

Limitations

However, the exploratory nature of our research and its restriction to a particular study area and participants' demographics cast doubt on how broadly applicable it can be. To further our understanding, we suggest study employing a quantitative methodology employing different designs , demographics, and international contexts.

Scope for Further Research

As a result, this paper poses a number of queries for additional study. A variety of components must work together to shape a diner's experience in a restaurant, as multi-sensory studies show the impact of numerous aesthetic and social variables on ideas surrounding dining. Furthermore, we cannot be positive that these criteria would apply to other restaurant designs, such as cafes, because our focus has been on restaurants that serve three-course meals. Furthermore, even though the eateries are used in this work, methodological pragmatism played a role in that decision. Since the many links and processes may draw attention to relatively diverse causes, processes, and relationships, we should approach spatial scale as an open research subject. Finally, it is suggested that future studies can be done to test quantitative data empirically.

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Table No.1 : Demographic Profile of the participants in the Study

Variables		FGD 1	FGD 2
Participants		12	9
Types	Restaurateur	3	1
	Chef	1	-
	Food Blogger	5	2
	Frequent Diner	2	3
	Rare Diner	1	1
	Restaurant Manager	-	2
Age	Upto 25 Years	3	3
	26-40 Years	4	4
	40 Years & Above	5	2
Gender	Male	7	8
	Female	5	1

Table No.2: Thematic presentation of soundscape in Diners' Experience

Main Categories	Sub-categories	Descriptions
Sound	Natural	River, birds, breeze
	Co-diner	Talk, baby crying, sound of table
	Food sound	crunch of a crispy dish, the sizzle of a steak on a grill.
	Mechanical and gadget sound	Back Music and music system, Air conditioner, fan
	Staff sound	Staff conversation, handling cutlery
Basis of diners	Age	Age is not a bar, young, old
	Co-diners	Family, idle crowd, loud crowd
	Expectation	comfortable with loud, uncomfortable with loud music
	Follower	visit as others are visiting
	Interaction Intention	Audible to interact, disturbance to interact
Eatery Type	Personality	music depends upon personality type, vibes
	Bar	live music, loud music, forget about what is going on in my mind
	Cafe	retro rock music plays, live music, interaction with guest for song, people not only go for food but want experience
	Dhaba	songs in loud volume, disturbing
	Ethnic Restaurant	sometimes bihu, tokari geet, borgeet, traditional songs, relationship between food and songs
	Fine Dining	space for people to interact, romantic song, ambience is romantic or cozy
	Resort	play songs ,serve food
	River Cruise	live music, live band, food not only matters, but a kind of experience people seek for, Assamese or Hindi slow songs, State wise customers demand varies, musicians change their music
	Restaurant	vibes is good, and they play just a piano or a very mild music
	Quick Service Restaurant	sell food without music
Ethnic Food	Uncomfortable Loud Music	did not find pleasure

	Bollywood Music	not appropriate
Experience	Bad	too loud music turned experience bad
	Family Time	go to restaurant for leisure with family, friends,
	Pleasant	music creates pleasant experience
	Pleasure	positive vibes
Presentation	Ambience	nice look
	Cozy	pleasant environment
	Customer Preference	customer choices vary
	Customize	adopted according to need of customer
	Flavour	not only food flavour
	Graffiti	total environment, small to big
	Music	bad music, genres, speaker, volume
	Noise	loud, negative, annoying
	Romantic	soft music
	Visual	match with restaurant, match with what we hear
Psychological	Presentation	hold the psychology of customer
Relationship	Connection	music relation with customer and genre, time, companion
Service	Blogging	prepare food and background music played, example of experience with music
Songs	Bhupen Hazarika	legends song
	Bihu Songs	folk songs but not all time
	Bob Marley	cafe
	Bor-Geet	morning , breakfast
	Classical Rock	river cruise
	Instrumental Music	fine dining
	Jayanta Hazarika	ethnic restaurants
	Jimmy Hendrix	cafe, young crowd
	Kishore Kumar	romantic, old is gold
	Live Bands	karaoke
	Loud Music	bar, not preferred during lunch
	Melodious	sudden music not good, melody of song and environment
	Mild Music	soothing sound, positive
	On Request	customized ,
	Retro Rock	young crowd
	Romantic Songs	cozy environment for couples
	Tokari Geet	making culture popular
	Khogen Mahanta	ethnic restaurants
	Zubeen Garg	not every time, selective songs
	Angarag Papon Mahanta	slow, ethnic song. Off beat music
Time	Calendar Year	not same genre
	Evening	mild, instrumental
	Sunset	romantic, cozy
Concept	Unknown	concept of soundscape not known

Acoustic Appetite: How Restaurant Soundscapes Shape Dining Experiences

	Adoption Cycle	restaurant can adopt from similar restaurants, influenced by friend circle
	Assam	new concept
	Experiential Marketing	customers want to experience
	Interaction Process	while delivering the service
	Marketing Process	understanding customers
	Psychological Study	customer behavior and preference, attitude, pleasant experience