

Analysis of experiential Marketing in customer satisfaction in the gastronomic sector of Guayaquil

Análisis del Marketing experiencial en la satisfacción del cliente en el sector gastronómico de Guayaquil

 <https://doi.org/10.21803/adgnosis.13.13.664>

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How to cite this article:

Cristellott, A., Cueva, J. y Sumba, N. (2024). Análisis del Marketing experiencial en la satisfacción del cliente en el sector gastronómico de Guayaquil. *Ad-gnosis*, 13(13). e#664. <https://doi.org/10.21803/adgnosis.13.13.664>.

Abstract

Introduction: Gastronomy in Ecuador has become a key economic engine of the country. Therefore, experiential marketing appears in the gastronomic industry, seeking to transform the visit to a restaurant into an unforgettable experience, strengthening the connection between establishments and their customers; **Objective:** to analyze experiential marketing in customer satisfaction in the gastronomic sector of Guayaquil, Ecuador; **Methodology:** an empirical, non-experimental research design was developed, with a descriptive approach and of a cross-sectional nature. Observation was used as a scientific tool to identify the experience marketing strategies being employed by restaurants; and an ad-hoc questionnaire was designed and applied to 384 consumers of theme restaurants to determine their perception of the various strategies implemented by the restaurants; **Results:** The gastronomic diversity of Guayaquil, enriched by multiple cultures, stands out. Consumers value experiential marketing strategies, mainly emotional and sensory. **Conclusions:** It is recommended to innovate in strategies, such as menu customization and use of digital technology, and to adopt sustainable practices. The findings, although focused on Guayaquil, may have relevance in similar cities, suggesting the need for future quantitative research.

Keywords: *Experiential marketing, gastronomy, satisfaction, customer, restaurant.*

Resumen

Introducción: La gastronomía en el Ecuador se ha convertido en un motor económico clave del país. Es por ello, que el marketing experiencial aparece en la industria gastronómica, buscando transformar la visita a un restaurante en una experiencia inolvidable, reforzando la conexión entre los establecimientos y sus clientes; **Objetivo:** analizar el marketing experiencial en la satisfacción del cliente en el sector gastronómico de Guayaquil, Ecuador; **Metodología:** se elaboró un diseño de investigación empírico, no experimental, con un enfoque descriptivo y de naturaleza transversal. Se empleó la observación como herramienta científica para identificar las estrategias de marketing de experiencias que están empleando los restaurantes; y se diseñó un cuestionario ad-hoc, aplicado a 384 consumidores de restaurantes temáticos para conocer su percepción referente a las diversas estrategias implementadas por los restaurantes; iv) **Resultados:** Se destaca la diversidad gastronómica de Guayaquil, enriquecida por múltiples culturas. Los consumidores valoran las estrategias de marketing experiencial, principalmente las emocionales y sensoriales. **Conclusiones:** Se recomienda innovar en estrategias, como personalización de menús y uso de tecnología digital, y adoptar prácticas sostenibles. Los hallazgos, aunque centrados en Guayaquil, pueden tener relevancia en ciudades similares, sugiriendo la necesidad de investigaciones cuantitativas futuras.

Palabras clave: *Marketing de experiencias; Gastronomía; Satisfacción; Cliente; Restaurante.*

Códigos JEL: M30, M31, M39

1. Fuentes de financiación: La Universidad Politécnica Salesiana proporcionó los recursos financieros para el desarrollo del presente artículo.

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Introduction

Competitiveness implies the ability of companies to maintain and improve their position in the market, in relation to other companies in the same sector, as well as the ability to provide goods and services with quality adapted to the needs of the global market and with competitive prices (Ibarra et al., 2017). In this sense, Medeiros et al. (2019) argue the existence of several influencing factors, such as: innovation, quality, operational efficiency, strategic management, adaptation to change and the ability to satisfy customer demands. It is worth clarifying that successful organizations tend to constantly seek ways to improve and differentiate themselves from their competitors, whether through technology, process improvement or consumer approval.

It is worth mentioning that differentiation is a business strategy that seeks to establish unique and distinctive characteristics in the products, services or image of a company, with the goal of standing out in the commercial arena and generating a competitive advantage (Celi and Campuzano, 2015). There is no doubt that it is essential for differentiation to be sustainable in the long term and to adapt to changing market demands, and that the company must be willing to constantly innovate and evolve in order to maintain its competitive advantage and remain relevant to customers (Bernasconi, 2015). With all of the above, it is appropriate to indicate that business competitiveness is a crucial factor for the management of any organization. The current research was based on the gastronomic sector. In the same vein, the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC, 2015), indicates that in Ecuador, companies that focus on the hotel and restaurant industry represent 29%, and 33% of companies in the service sector belong to the coastal region.

Additionally, it should be emphasized that in the companies that are part of the gastronomic sector there is still a lack of knowledge about the determining factors in the experiences of customers that influence them to return to consume. In this sense, Ortega-Vivanco (2019) points out that the hotel, food, beverage sector has not yet reached the level of development necessary to meet all the expectations of national and international customers. Therefore, the objective is to establish a solid structure that allows standardizing the service in those establishments interested in improving their quality, offering an experience that translates into long-term profitability. It can be indicated that the beneficiaries of the results of the present study will be: Beneficiary 1. Themed restaurants in the city of Guayaquil; Beneficiary 2.

2. The economic activity of the city of Guayaquil, since the results can improve the experiences that consumers will obtain when they visit a restaurant and therefore build loyalty among current customers and attract new customers. With all of the above, the research proposes the following question: What is the current situation of the gastronomic sector with respect to Experiential Marketing (EM) strategies in customer satisfaction (CS)?

Theoretical framework

2.1. Experience marketing

Narvaez (2018), indicates that EM focuses on creating memorable and meaningful experiences.

The company's customer experience is based on the premise that positive and emotionally impacting experiences generate stronger connections between the brand and consumers, which in turn can lead to more lasting relationships and customer loyalty. Likewise, Pine and Gilmore, quoted by Alfaro (2020), state that consumer behavior is not rational but emotional, and that emotions play a crucial role in the acquisition process, becoming an element that links the encounter, experience, use and consumption of products.

In this sense, it can be added that experience management involves several aspects: 1.- Customer knowledge, 2.- Experience design, 3.- Emotions and connection, 4.- Channel integration (Aguilar and Rodriguez, 2022). Unquestionably, companies must understand the demands, desires and predictions of their target customers in order to design relevant and engaging experiences, as well as make the experiences authentic and aligned with the values and expectations of consumers. This may involve the creation of events, the ambience of physical spaces, the development of digital interactions, among others. In this sense Nieto and Pérez (2017) point out determinant aspects in experience management. see Figure 1. The same authors point out that the dimensions of experience marketing may vary according to different perspectives or research approaches. Below, in Table 1, are some common dimensions mentioned in the academic literature on the subject.

Figura 1

Gestión de experiencias



Nota: Elaboración propia en base a Nieto y Pérez (2017)

Table 1*Dimensions of experiential marketing*

Dimensions	Description
Emotional	Generates a deep connection through the creation of experiences that evoke positive emotions, such as joy, surprise, nostalgia or gratitude.
Sensory	Use of sensory stimuli: visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory and olfactory to arouse emotions and create a deeper connection.
Intellectual	It relies on the consumer's thinking and mental processes, using creativity through mental games.
Interactive	Actively involves the customer in the experience, giving them the opportunity to interact, personalize and co-create the experience.

Note: Prepared by author based on Kotler and Keller (2012); Nieto and Pérez (2017).

2.2. Gastronomy sector

Prado (2021) points out that gastronomy is related to the technical administration of food and beverage companies, which includes food preparation and presentation, hygienic handling, combination of flavors and aromas, etc. This discipline has allowed many entrepreneurs to generate sources of income in return for people's indulgence (Hernández et al., 2016; Becerra, 2019). Likewise, for Tello (2019) it is the "engine of growth and economic development" (p.4), since all internal and external stakeholders can obtain benefits. In conclusion, because they combine histories and identities, they are a reflection of the culture, traditions and customs of societies and can be seen as an intangible heritage that is displayed in every dish. As a result, this field connects people, food and the environment using cultural and social considerations that transcend simple methods.

It is worth emphasizing that the gastronomic sector plays a significant role in a country's economy. The following are some key aspects: a) Generation of employment, b) tourism and visitor attraction, c) promotion of local products, d) promotion of culture and identity, e) promotion of the local economy. Therefore, it is important to consider a complete experience around the food and the visit to the establishment that contemplates the ambience and design, culinary excellence and presentation, customer service, sensory experiences, and history and narrative (Tamay-Chimborazo et al., 2021).

In line with the above, it is relevant to note that food and beverage tourism establishments are classified into seven categories: cafeterias (rates), bars (drinks), restaurants (te- nedores), discotheques (drinks), mobile establishments, food courts and catering services (Ministry of Tourism, 2022a). Within this context, it is worth recognizing the economic contribution of this activity in the province of Guayas, and the increase in sales in millions of dollars in 2022 compared to 2021.

Likewise, it can be added that restaurants stand out in the gastronomic industry because they provide products and services that benefit from the economic activity of the food industry. As Di Pietro (2017) mentions, these establishments have changed over the course of the

time, as a result of its adaptation to the needs of consumers. On the other hand, according to Art. 14 of the Food and Beverage Regulation (2018), restaurant is defined as a place where prepared food is prepared and/or sold, as well as where alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages can be purchased, cafeteria services are provided and self-service options are allowed depending on the category. Table 2 presents several typologies of restaurants considering different elements.

Table 2
Types of restaurants

Type	Description
By category	Luxury (five forks) First class (four forks) Second class (three forks) Third class (two forks) Fourth class (one fork)
By concept	Buffet Restaurant Specialty Restaurant Theme Restaurant
By type of cuisine	Market Cuisine Local Cuisine Gourmet Restaurant Fast Food Restaurant Traditional/creative cuisine (fusion)
By menu	A la carte A la carte Of the day Numbered Cyclical Of the house Of the pension Tasting menu
By customer role	Traditional or Self-Service

Note: Own elaboration based on Carhuajulca and Julca (2021).

In this order of ideas, the MINTUR establishes that in the year 2022 there was an increase of 1.49% of registered restaurants in the city of Guayaquil in relation to the year 2021, evidencing a reactivation of the sector after overcoming the pandemic. Table 3 presents the number of restaurants registered in Guayaquil according to the category to which they belong.

Tabla 3
Restaurantes registrados en la ciudad de Guayaquil

Categorías	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Primera	162	160	161	119	130
Segunda	435	478	470	365	316
Tercera	861	873	871	510	496
Cuarta	1.129	1.119	1.131	610	687
Lujo	4	4	4	3	2
Total	2.591	2.634	2.637	1.607	1.631

Nota: Ministerio de Turismo (2022b).

2.3. Customer satisfaction

According to Armstrong & Kotler as cited in (Carhuajulca, and Julca, 2022) satisfaction is defined as the degree to which a product, service or experience satisfies the needs and expectations of the customer.

It also results from the customer's subjective assessment of his or her purchase or consumption experience and his or her perception of the quality and value obtained. It should be noted that satisfaction is essential for both the success and reputation of establishments (Miranda-Cruz et al., 2021).

Similarly, Pastrana and Sedán (2020) point out that there are several models used to measure customer satisfaction and service quality. Among them are SERVQUAL, which is based on the discrepancy between customer expectations and actual perceptions; while SERVPERF is based on the evaluation of customer perceptions of the quality of service received, without taking into account previous expectations (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). SERVPERF focuses solely on customer perceptions without considering expectations as a reference point and is composed of 5 key dimensions (see Table 4).

Table 4
Dimensions of satisfaction

Dimensions of satisfaction	Description
Reliability	The ability to provide service with accuracy, consistency and timeliness. It involves meeting established promises and expectations.
Responsiveness	The attitude and willingness of employees to provide service in a timely manner and meet customer needs. It encompasses promptness in response and willingness to assist
Manner of care	The ability of the staff to transmit confidence, knowledge and skills necessary to provide the service effectively. It involves building trust and confidence in customers.
Tangibility	The physical and visible aspects of the service environment, such as the way the facilities look, the equipment used, as well as the presentation of the staff. It includes the perception of the quality of the tangible elements associated with the service.

Note: Own elaboration based on Pastrana and Sedán (2020); Carhuajulca, and Julca (2022).

These studies, among many others, demonstrate the importance of creating and managing positive experiences to drive customer satisfaction. Consequently, what we want to achieve with this research is: To analyze experiential marketing in customer satisfaction in the gastronomic sector of Guayaquil.

Methodology

The purpose of the study was to analyze experiential marketing in customer satisfaction in the gastronomic sector of Guayaquil. For this purpose, an empirical, non-experimental, descriptive and cross-sectional research was designed (Hernández, 2018), and data collection tools were applied to analyze qualitative and quantitative characteristics. To achieve the general objective, we first sought to characterize the gastronomic sector of the city of Guayaquil, and then to identify the experience marketing strategies most accepted by consumers of the main theme restaurants in the city of Guayaquil.

To characterize the gastronomic sector, scientific observation was applied to 5 thematic restaurants in the city of Guayaquil (Circa, Ganbaru, Asado bohemio, La madriguera, Grilling) in order to determine what type of experience marketing activities they carry out. On the other hand, a 21-question questionnaire was designed for the clients of the main theme restaurants in the city of Guayaquil, in order to measure the variables experience marketing and client satisfaction with the service and products received in the restaurants. The dimensions analyzed in Table 1 and Table 4 for each of the respective variables were used as the basis for the development of this instrument. The questionnaire used is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Questionnaire applied to customers in the gastronomic sector

EXPERIENCE MARKETING		
Dimension	Indicator	Question
Emotional	Surprise	1. I am satisfied with the different surprises that the restaurants offer at each visit.
	Joy	2. I am satisfied with the cheerful and fun atmosphere that the restaurant offers during my visit.
	Different emotions	I am satisfied with the different out-of-the-ordinary emotions I experienced during my visit to the restaurant.
Sensory	View	4. I am pleased with the striking design of the restaurant.
	Touch	5. I am satisfied with the freedom granted by the restaurant to select food and beverages considering my preferences.
	Taste	6. I find myself satisfied with the tasting of foods with different flavors and textures (sour, bitter, crunchy flavors) that the restaurant offers.
	Olfato	7. I find myself satisfied with the aromas perceived in the restaurant because they stimulate the sensation of hunger (the smell of popcorn).
	Ear	8. I am satisfied with the music that the restaurant offers in its environment because it brings me joy.
Intellectual	Think	9. I am satisfied with the activities that the restaurant proposes while I am waiting for my meal because they allow me to develop my thinking.
	Creativity	10. I find myself satisfied with the creative activities that the restaurant proposes, while waiting for the food.
Interactive	Participation	11. I am satisfied with the different experiences that the restaurant proposes because it allows me to actively participate.
	Passive participation	12. I am satisfied with the different experiences that the restaurant offers because it allows me to participate passively.
CUSTOMER SATISFACTION		
Dimension	Indicator	Question
With the product	Quality	13. I am satisfied with the quality of the products that the restaurant offers.
	Quantity	14. I am satisfied with the quantity of the products that the restaurant offers.
	Price	15. I am satisfied with the price of the products that the restaurant offers. Attention
With the service	to detail	16. I am satisfied with the service provided in the restaurant.
	Responsiveness	17. I am satisfied with the promptness of the restaurant staff.

Dimension	Indicator	Question
With the environment	Furniture	18. I am satisfied with the furniture offered by the restaurant.
	Lighting	19. I am satisfied with the lighting system offered by the restaurant
		20. I am satisfied with the ventilation system offered by the restaurant
		21. I am satisfied with the cleanliness offered by the restaurant.

Note: Own elaboration based on Kotler and Keller (2012); Nieto and Pérez (2017); Pastrana and Sedán (2020); Carhuajulca, and Julca (2022).

The information was processed with SPSS version 26 software, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used for the reliability analysis, and content validity was assessed through the judgment of experts in the marketing area (Lind et al., 2012). In this same vein, the study population considered was 1,016,082 economically active inhabitants of Guayaquil according to data obtained from the National Institute of Statistics and Census in 2010 (Hernández, 2021), considered as potential customers of this sector. Given that the population size exceeds 100,000 inhabitants, it should be considered infinite. To determine the probabilistic sample, a confidence level of 95% and a maximum error of 5% were applied, yielding a result of 384 consumers. The information was collected during the month of June 2023, where customers leaving the theme restaurants in the northern sector of the city of Guayaquil were approached in person to provide them with the web link so that they could complete the online survey.

Results and discussion

The main findings of the research are presented below, which show the fulfillment of the proposed objective, which was focused on characterizing the gastronomic sector, the application of experience marketing strategies and their perception by consumers of the main theme restaurants in the city of Guayaquil.

4.1 Scientific observation of the gastronomic sector from the perspective of experience marketing.

In the sensory dimension of experience marketing in Guayaquil's themed restaurants, the meticulous presentation of dishes and drinks stands out, which is essential to denote a superior experience. The combination of different flavors is a common tactic employed to delight customers' palates. Additionally, investment is made in the ambiance of the space, which includes everything from themed designs and décor to live music and karaoke areas, creating an immersive environment that goes beyond simple dining.

In the interactive dimension, a strong connection between customers and restaurant staff is encouraged. Participation is observed when customers interact with employees, such as in dance situations. In the passive participation aspect, employees play a central role in celebrating customers' special occasions, such as birthdays, by singing and creating a festive atmosphere. The restaurants also have specific spots for customers to take photos and perpetuate their experience.

Finally, in the intellectual dimension, Guayaquil's themed restaurants seek to stimulate the minds of their customers through a variety of activities. This is evidenced by the availability of crossword puzzles, board games and Jenga, which are offered to encourage interaction among customers and add an element of fun and challenge to their visit, thus enriching their experience beyond the gastronomic component.

4.2 Perception of experience marketing by the gastronomic client.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was obtained for the questionnaire used to measure its reliability, resulting in a value of 0.802 for the 21-item instrument, which suggests that the questionnaire has good internal consistency to evaluate both variables: ME and CS.

To better understand the characteristics and dynamics of the population, a description of the sample is made using sociodemographic data such as gender, age and marital status. Of the 384 respondents, 51% were female (196) and 49% were male (188); in terms of age range, 15% were between 18 and 22 years old (57), 21% were between 23 and 27 years old (80), 39% were between 18 and 22 years old (57), 21% were between 23 and 27 years old (80), 39% were between 18 and 27 years old (80) and 39% were between 18 and 22 years old (57). 28 to 32 years of age (151), 15% are between 33 and 37 years of age (59), and lastly, 15% are between 28 and 32 years of age (151).

10% are over 37 years old (37). Regarding marital status: 24% (94) are married, 69% (264) are single, 5% (20) are in union and finally, 2% (6) are divorced. The descriptive analysis is continued by considering the age ranges with each of the dimensions that correspond to the study variables ME and SC, since expectations, interests and needs are aligned according to age.

4.2.1 Emotional dimension of experience marketing

As far as the emotional dimension is concerned, it deals with the generation of a deep connection through the creation of experiences that evoke positive emotions, such as joy, surprise, nostalgia or gratitude. Table 6 shows the perception of importance for the respondents in this regard. In this sense, Cueva et al. (2021) point out the importance of interaction between the company and the customer, personalization, authenticity and emotionality in the creation of positive experiences.

Tabla 6
*Tabla cruzada rango de edad * Dimensión Emocional*

Rango de edad	Poco importante	Ni importante ni no importante	Importante
18 - 22 años	3,5%	3,5%	93,0%
23 - 27 años	0,0%	15,0%	85,0%
28 - 32 años	,7%	8,6%	90,7%
33 - 37 años	3,4%	3,4%	93,2%
Más de 37 años	5,4%	21,6%	73,0%
	Promedio		86,98%

Nota: Elaboración propia con datos procesados en el software estadístico SPSS.

4.2.2 Sensory dimension of experience marketing

Regarding the marketing strategies related to the sensory dimension (use of sensory stimuli: visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory and olfactory to arouse emotions and create a deeper connection), Table 7 shows the importance of the strategies applied by the restaurants for the respondents. These results coincide with those of Cueva-Estrada et al. (2020) who conclude that the aroma of the food, the music, the ambience and the decoration typical of the region's culture make customers experience feelings of love and emotion before the projection of audiovisual content referring to the locality. In a study of gastronomic establishments in Recife, Brazil, Gomes et al. (2013) concluded that the restaurants studied that employed this aspect of marketing predominantly exhibit hedonistic characteristics, with marked sensory dimensions capable of offering customers unique and differentiated consumption experiences. Along the same lines, Patacón (2018) points out that restaurants that adopt sensation marketing strategies should seek to provide aesthetic pleasure, beauty, emotion and satisfaction through sensory stimulation.

Tabla 7

*Tabla cruzada rango de edad * Dimensión Sensorial*

Rango de edad	Poco importante	Ni importante ni no importante	Importante
18 - 22 años	0,0%	0,0%	100,0%
23 - 27 años	0,0%	2,5%	97,5%
28 - 32 años	0,0%	6,6%	93,4%
33 - 37 años	0,0%	8,1%	91,9%
Más de 37 años	0,0%	8,5%	91,5%
	Promedio		94,86%

Nota: Elaboración propia con datos procesados en el software estadístico SPSS

4.2.3 Intellectual dimension of experience marketing

For the intellectual dimension, Table 8 shows the respondents' assignment of importance. The intellectual dimension focuses on the consumer's thinking and mental processes, using creativity through mental games. This is how Mendoza (2018) suggests that proposals that provide added value in terms of knowledge and are relevant to well-being could be especially attractive to customers.

Tabla 8

*Tabla cruzada rango de edad * Dimensión Intelectual*

Rango de edad	Poco importante	Ni importante ni no importante	Importante
18 - 22 años	3,5%	12,3%	84,2%
23 - 27 años	3,8%	11,3%	85,0%
28 - 32 años	0,7%	10,6%	88,7%
33 - 37 años	1,7%	13,6%	84,7%
Más de 37 años	8,1	21,6%	70,3%
	Promedio		82,58%

Nota: Elaboración propia con datos procesados en el software estadístico SPSS

4.2.4 Interactive dimension of experience marketing

Marketing strategies related to the interactive dimension focus on actively involving the customer in the experience, giving them the opportunity to interact, personalize and co-create the experience. Table 9 shows consumer ratings for this dimension. It includes participation in online contests and promotions, but also involves the management of interactive experiences at the physical location, such as wine tastings, tastings and cooking classes. According to Cueva et al. (2021) marketing strategies should incorporate interactive elements, such as contests, mobile applications, augmented reality experiences or QR codes.

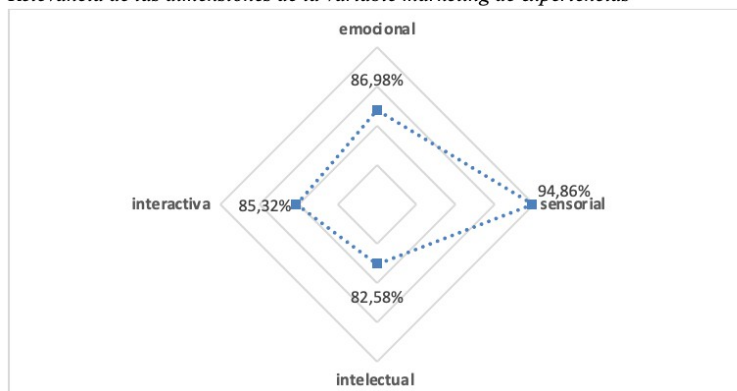
Tabla 9
*Tabla cruzada rango de edad * Dimensión Interactiva*

Rango de edad	Poco importante	Ni importante ni no importante	Importante
18 - 22 años	1,8%	7,0%	91,2%
23 - 27 años	0,0%	13,8%	86,3%
28 - 32 años	1,3%	7,3%	91,4%
33 - 37 años	1,7%	13,6%	84,7%
Más de 37 años	8,1%	18,9%	73,0%
	Promedio		85,32%

Nota: Elaboración propia con datos procesados en el software estadístico SPSS

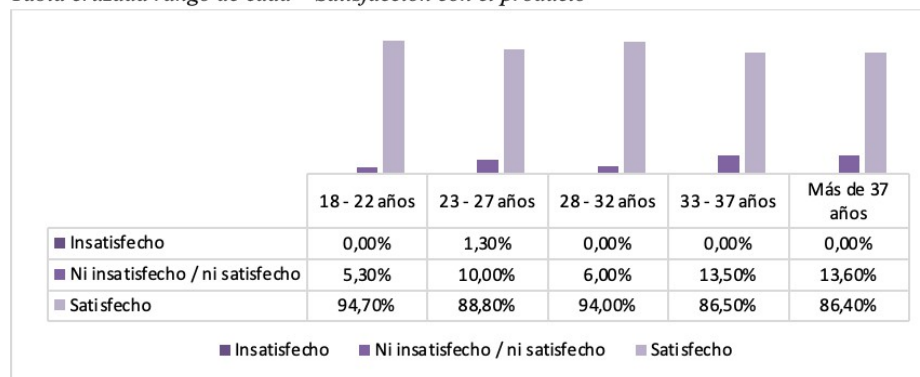
In line with these results, Cabrera (2013) points out that the gastronomic sector seeks through experience marketing to turn the moment of consumption into a memorable memory, and adds that emotional involvement and the development of meaningful experiences are key tools to achieve both customer satisfaction and loyalty, for which entrepreneurs or managers of the establishment must consider the motivations (safety, social, cultural and hedonistic needs) of customers related to the search for food satisfaction.

Figure 2 presents a comparison of the relevance of each of the dimensions that make up the experience marketing variable in the gastronomic industry of Guayaquil. The sensory dimension tops the list with 94.86%, which underlines the importance of experiences that appeal to the senses in the gastronomy sector. Following in importance, the emotional dimension, which includes the customer's affective connection with the gastronomic experience, also shows a high percentage of 86.98%, evidencing that emotions play a fundamental role in customer satisfaction. The interactive and intellectual dimensions, although slightly less predominant, with 85.32% and 82.58% respectively, continue to be fundamental in encompassing customer participation and stimulating thought, which contributes to a complete and satisfactory customer experience.

Figura 2*Relevancia de las dimensiones de la variable marketing de experiencias**Nota:* Elaboración propia con datos procesados en el software estadístico SPSS

4.3 Experience marketing in gastronomic consumer satisfaction.

In the analysis of how consumers perceive their experience in restaurants that use experiential marketing strategies, the "Satisfaction with the product" dimension was evaluated first. This evaluation involved the study of indicators such as quality, quantity and price of the gastronomic offer. The results were consolidated in Figure 3, in which it can be seen how respondents - consumers have weighted the dimension.

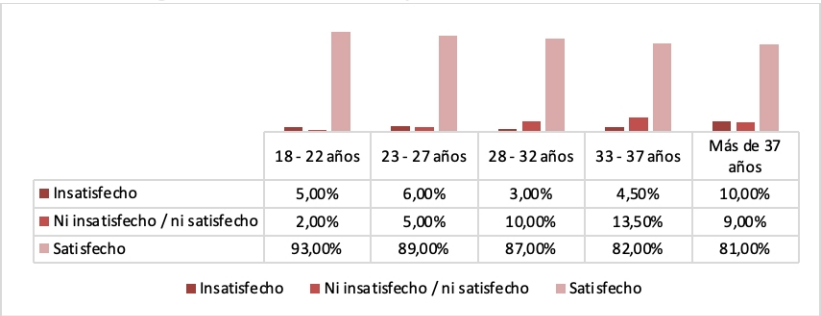
Figura 3*Tabla cruzada rango de edad * Satisfacción con el producto**Nota:* Elaboración propia con datos procesados en el software estadístico SPSS

The results are in line with Carvache et al. (2017) who conclude in their analysis of satisfaction in the gastronomic sector of Samborondón in Ecuador, that there is high satisfaction among consumers in this sector. In this sense, González (2019) adds that consumers seek establishments that offer a pleasant culinary experience, with quality services and products.

The dimension analyzed next was "Satisfaction with the service". This can be

The satisfaction level is described as the ability of the staff and waiters to inspire confidence, demonstrate knowledge, skills and the pertinent attitudes to offer their services, ensuring an adequate experience and attention to the diners. Figure 4 presents the distribution of the opinions of the respondents-consumers regarding the level of satisfaction.

Figura 4
*Tabla cruzada rango de edad * Dimensión Satisfacción con el servicio*

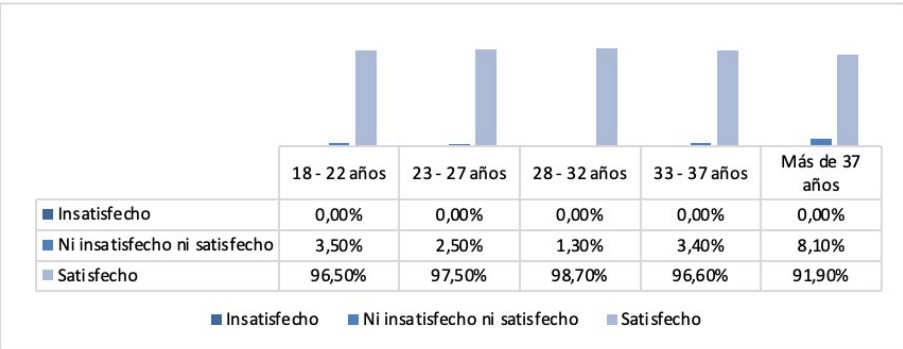


Nota: Elaboración propia con datos procesados en el software estadístico SPSS

The above results are supported by those exposed by García (2017) who points out that gastronomic establishments should strive to offer customer service that meets the expectations and needs of each demographic group, this adaptation will contribute to improve the customer experience and generate greater satisfaction and loyalty (Sosa et al., 2024).

Finally, with regard to "Satisfaction with the environment", the indicators analyzed were: furniture, lighting, ventilation, cleanliness, which are related to physical and visible aspects of the internal and external environment of the restaurant. Figure 5 shows the distribution of consumer responses regarding their level of satisfaction. Clearly noting a positive response in this regard.

Figura 5
*Tabla cruzada rango de edad * Dimensión Satisfacción con el entorno*



Nota: Elaboración propia con datos procesados en el software estadístico SPSS.

Along these lines Pérez Uribe (2019) observes that the interior design of a restaurant is crucial to create experiences that engage all the senses, given that these experiences are derived from

how customers perceive and decipher the environment and its various elements. Therefore, it can be noted that the environment exerts a physical influence on how a person behaves, directly affecting their purchasing decisions and the experience they have when acquiring products or services, in this case, gastronomic. Further on, Alfaro (2020) points out that pleasant interactions and experiences throughout the purchasing process influence customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Table 10 illustrates the weighting of the different dimensions that contribute to customer satisfaction in the gastronomic sector of Guayaquil. The dimension "With the environment" stands out as the most significant with 96.24%, suggesting that the environment and the context where gastronomic products are enjoyed are essential for a positive customer experience.

Tabla 10

Relevancia de las dimensiones de la variable satisfacción del cliente

Dimensión	Relevancia
Con el producto	90,08%
Con el servicio	86,40%
Con el entorno	96,24%

Nota: Elaboración propia con datos procesados en el software estadístico SPSS

Finally, Figure 6 shows a word cloud derived from the research conducted. This cloud highlights the most frequent and relevant terms and concepts identified in the study. Each word represents a key aspect of the research, and its size indicates the frequency of its mention in the study. This visualization provides a clear synthesis of the main findings, focusing on experience marketing and consumer satisfaction.

Figura 6

Nube de palabras correspondiente a términos y conceptos revisados en la investigación



Nota: Elaboración propia.

Conclusions

The study showed that the city of Guayaquil has a diverse gastronomic sector that benefits from multiple cultures coming from different migratory sources. Restaurants in the city not only reflect the culinary heritage in Ecuador, but also incorporate varied international influences thanks to the migratory effect; the city has restaurants serving Arab, Mexican, Peruvian, Colombian, Venezuelan, Chinese, and Japanese food. This diversity is evident in the offer of gourmet, vegetarian and theme restaurants, which have grown and positioned themselves notably in recent years.

Consumers of theme restaurants in Guayaquil value experiential marketing strategies that appeal to all their dimensions, mainly the emotional and sensory ones. However, the research suggests enhancing, developing and applying innovative strategies in the intellectual and interactive dimensions, i.e. motivating consumer participation in the construction of the moment and experience. Taking into consideration the tastes and preferences of different age groups could be beneficial since it is known that their preferences change according to their age.

To increase the competitive position of companies and restaurants in Guayaquil's gastronomic sector, the study proposes that these commercial and service organizations implement and adopt innovative strategies. To this end, it recommends the customization of menus, in line with the preferences of their consumers and the collaboration of internationally recognized chefs. It is also recommended the creative use of the benefits that digital technology offers, such as the application of virtual and augmented reality and the use of creative online and live videos. It is also recommended to develop strategic alliances with other businesses in the same line or complementary ones.

The interaction dimension deserved a high weighting by the respondents. This preference highlights the relevance of proposing, offering or creating environments that are visually attractive and adapted to social media trends. In light of this, it is recommended that restaurants consider offering spaces that are Instagrammable and suitable for the creation of content on social networks such as Tik Tok. This will help improve the consumer experience and also serve as a brand visibility tool, motivating people to share their experiences, which increases the digital presence of the restaurant's name.

From a broader point of view, the research highlights the importance of restaurants applying sustainable and responsible practices and strategies, such as the use of local and organic products, which helps to boost the local economy on the one hand and, on the other, protects people's health. It also invites to seek strategies that allow the reduction and reuse of waste and food. This is not only visually positive, but can also become a strong and attractive strategy for conscious consumers concerned about the planet.

Finally, it is recognized that the results of the study are applicable to the city of Guayaquil, given that it is in this city where the study was carried out, but it is important to mention that the city of Guayaquil is the only city where the study was carried out.

The results obtained could be of interest to other large cities at the global level, as the general characteristics, economic dynamism and variety of culture are comparable to those of other large cities. The results of the study invite further quantitative research that measures the impact of experience marketing in terms of sales and brand reputation, at local, national and international levels. It also suggests exploring how emerging technologies, such as virtual and augmented reality, can be used to improve gastronomic experiences in this sector.

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