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Consumer behavior of diners at Korean restaurants in Danang city, Vietnam

Tran Thuy An NGUYEN¹, Mi Sook CHO²

1. First Author & Corresponding Author PhD. Student, Ewha Womans University, Korea.

Email: nguyentranthuyan@ewhain.net

2. Second Author Professor, Ewha Womans University, Korea. Email: misocho@ewha.ac.kr

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Abstract

In recent years, the trend of Korean cuisine has been more popular and quickly become the favorite flavor of Vietnamese youth. Restaurants serving Korean food are growing strongly in Danang market and are known by many classes of society. To better understand the taste and preferences of Danang people about Korean food, this study determined the behavior and assessment of diners who have used food and beverage services at Korean restaurants in Danang city. In addition, the study also identifies diners' desire to change the tastes of Korean dishes. The results show that Korean restaurants are attractive to young diners, from 18 – 25 years olds with income of \$220 - \$440, who appreciate Korean foods (especially grilled dishes) and most people intend to return to Korean restaurants in the next consumption. The study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods are used through analysis, evaluation and synthesis of previous studies to formulate survey contents, conduct surveys and propose solutions based on the collected results. Quantitative method applied SPSS 25.0 for descriptive statistics analysis. These findings will help Korean restaurant managers to identify target customers, improve the restaurant's dishes to increase sales and develop Korean dishes in Danang.

Keywords: Consumer behavior, Diner, Restaurant, Korean Food, Korean Restaurant.

Major classifications: Customer Eating-out Behavior, Restaurant Management.

1. Introduction

Since the 2008 economic crisis, there have been many large Korean corporations investing in Vietnam such as Samsung, Hyundai, LG, Lotte which have contributed to the development of the fields of electronics, real estate, manufacturing, distribution, entertainment, agriculture, food and so on. Korean corporations are constantly expanding their business, leading to a large number of personnel who are experts, engineers, and business people coming to Vietnam to live and work. According to data from the Korean Embassy in Vietnam, by the end of 2018, there were about 150,000 Koreans living in Vietnam with 80% concentrated in Hochiminh City and 20% in other provinces such as Hanoi, Danang, Binhduong. This led to the popularity of Korean foods in Vietnam.

According to Korea Agro-Fisheries & Food Trade Corporation, a large number of Korean food service companies expand overseas and there are 360 food services stores in Vietnam (7.6% of total). As of the end of 2018, 166 Korean food service companies operated under 184 brands in foreign markets, including 34 in Vietnam. According to a report released by Korea Food and Agriculture Corporation, 92 companies are hoping to enter the overseas market, of which Vietnam is the most popular destination chosen by 43% of these companies.

In addition, with the expansion of cultural exchanges between countries, especially culinary culture, foreign foods from famous culinary countries such as France, Italy, Japan, Korea, China, India, Thailand... are appeared more and more in Vietnam. In particular, the most favorite dishes of Vietnamese diners can be mentioned first are Korean foods. Because there are many similarities in processing methods and flavors, Korean food is very popular in Vietnam. Many restaurants serving this Kimchi country's food are opened a lot in urban areas of Vietnam such as Hochiminh, Hanoi and Danang city. Whether it is casual or fine dining, at any time of the year, these restaurants are often visited by diners. These restaurants serve familiar dishes such as seaweed rice rolls (Kimbab), spicy noodles (Ramyeon), mixed rice (Bibimbap), cold noodles (Naeng Myeon), grilled meat (Bulgogi), etc. to other exotic dishes such as chicken stew with ginseng (Samgyetang), crabs in soy sauce (Ganjang Gejang), and soup with stewed bones (Ppyo Haejangguk).

To meet the increasing growing demands of customers, a series of premium restaurant chains have also emerged as Korean restaurant chains: Seoul Garden, GoGi House, King BBQ. Even the concentration of restaurants in some neighborhoods has formed a unique food area. The attraction of these restaurants are the beautiful space and delicious food.

The taste of diners in each country is different, so foreign dishes may not be suitable for Vietnamese people. Therefore, restaurants serving foreign food often adjust the amount of spices in the dish to both suit the Vietnamese taste and still ensure the quality of the dish. For example, Korean traditional dishes are much spicy, so when Korean restaurants in Vietnam cook these dishes, they will reduce the spicy taste.

Although learning about the consumption behavior of diners at Korean restaurants is quite important for the development of Korean cuisine in Vietnam, but recently, the number of studies on this issue is still quite limited. Therefore, with the purpose of developing Korean food in Vietnam, I conducted a survey on the consumption behavior, preferences and tastes of diners who have used the service at Korean restaurants in Da Nang. The results of the study provide useful information for Korean restaurant managers to develop food and beverage services in Danang city in particular and Vietnam in general.

2. Literature Review/ Theoretical Framework

2.1. Consumer behavior

According to (Nguyen, Pham, & Duong, 2011), consumer behavior overall reflects the overall decisions of consumers regarding the acquisition, consumption and elimination of goods, including products, services, activities and ideas, by decision-makers (people) over time. Among them, acquisition is the process by which the consumers receive the goods (including purchasing, borrowing, exchanging, renting, etc.); Consumption is the process by which consumers use the goods, this is considered a key factor of consumer behavior because it can affect other consumer behaviors. For example, if the consumers feel satisfied with products, they will continue to purchase next time and make good assessments about products or services, on the contrary, if they are not satisfied they can pass on bad experiences to others or complain to companies and responsible agencies that negatively affecting on the company's performance; Elimination is the process by which consumers dispose of an item. For example, if consumers are interested in the environment, they will pay extra for products that are biodegradable, or products made from recyclable materials that do not pollute the environment.

(Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2006) revealed that consumer behavior is activities directly involved in the acquisition, consumption, and processing of products and services, including decision processes before and after activities. While

(Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000) said that consumer behavior refers to people using their available resources such as money, time, and effort to make choices for personal or household products.

According to (Blackwell R. D., Miniard, Engel, & Rahman, 2017), consumer behaviors are all activities that are directly related to the process of finding, collecting, purchasing, possessing, using and disposing products or services. It includes the decision-making processes that take place before, during and after those activities.

Thus, some characteristics of the consumer behavior can be identified: (1) Consumer behavior is a process that allows an individual or a group of people to select, purchase, use or dispose a product or service. This process includes the thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and activities including human buying, using, and manipulation during the purchasing and consuming process; (2) Consumer behavior is dynamic and interactive because it is affected by factors from the external environment and reactive to that environment.

However, consumers are not only those who define needs or desires, search for the product, purchase the product and then consume the product to satisfy their needs, but also different individuals may be involved in this chain of events. For example, parents who buy food from restaurants bring home to their children, the buyer is the parent, but the user is the child. As a result, companies must study all the different individuals involved in the buying and consuming process. And it should also be noted that consumer behavior research is not limited to how a person buys tangible products, but also to intangible products such as food and beverage service at restaurants or accommodation services at hotels, etc. (Noel, 2009).

2.2. Diners

The diners who visit a restaurant are willing to spend only a certain amount of their disposable income on food outside of the home. They can choose from casual dining restaurant with low prices to fine dining restaurants with expensive prices, they can eat at the restaurant or buy foods take away. Usually, diners visit a restaurant for one of the meals of the day: Breakfast, lunch or dinner. Each meal has its different characteristics and services offered will also vary to suit the timing. For breakfast, diners are more likely to be distracted, thinking about the coming day or are more interested in their newspaper or a companion rather than interested in breakfast at the restaurant. For lunch, the diners are mostly office workers, having lunch with their coworkers or clients. Both breakfast and lunch need speed and efficiency. But in contrast, with dinner, diners feel more comfortable, they spend more time on dinner and enjoy the meal after a busy day (Barrows, Powers, & Reynolds, 2011).

3. Methodology

The study uses a combination of 2 qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods are used through analysis, evaluation and synthesis of previous studies to formulate survey contents, conduct surveys and propose solutions based on the collected results. Quantitative method applied SPSS 25.0 for descriptive statistics analysis. In this research study, a structured questionnaire was focused on diners' personal information, consumer behavior of diners at Korean restaurants, diners' assessment about Korean foods and intention to return to Korean restaurants in the next consumption. In order for the results to be highly representative, I have conducted a survey of 200 diners who used to use food and beverage services at Korean restaurants in Danang city. I conducted the survey through social networks (Facebook and Zalo) and the surveys were sent in the form of Google form. Customers are asked to answer the question "Have you ever used the service at a Korean restaurant in Da Nang?" first, if the customers answer "Yes", they would be sent a questionnaire and asked to answer the questions in the survey, if the customers answer "No", they would not be asked to answer the questionnaire. I have contacted 244 consumers, including 200 diners who have used food service at Korean restaurants in Da Nang and continued to participate in the survey. I selected samples according to the convenient sampling method, the time to collect data is from November 2020 to December 2020. After that, I conducted descriptive analysis and data processing in January 2021.

Survey sample characteristics: Survey results show that consumers participating in the survey are mainly women (Female: 56.0%; Male: 44.0%), aged from 18 to 25 years-old (Under 18 years-old: 2.0%; From 18-25: 48.6%; From 26-35: 27.5%; From 36-55: 19.0%; Over 55 years-old: 3.0%), income between \$220-\$440 (Under \$220: 24.5%; From \$220-\$440: 39.5%; From \$440-\$870: 20.5%; From \$870-\$1,300: 11.0%; Over \$1,300: 4.5%), the main occupation is office workers (Student: 21.5; Teacher/Lecturer: 22.0%; Office worker: 32.0%; Engineer/ Technician/ Specialist: 18.0%; Business: 3.5%; Others: 3%), the main educational background of the survey participants is university level (High school: 2.0%; College: 16.5%; University: 48.0%; Postgraduate: 33.5%). These characteristics show that the sample is highly representative of consumers in Danang city.

4. Research results

4.1. Consumer behavior characteristics

With the survey results in this research, it shows that diners at Korean restaurants in Danang city have the following consumer characteristics: Firstly, the frequency of visiting restaurants per month: 68.5% of diners eat at Korean restaurants 1-2 times, 24% of diners eat 3-4 times, and over 4 times it is 7.5%; Secondly, 56% diners often dine at Korean restaurants with their friends, 32.5% with their families, with colleagues and others accounted for 14.5%; Thirdly, the diners usually going on weekends accounted for 56%, going on weekdays and holidays respectively 19.5% and 19%, going on other occasions is 5.5%; Next, the amount of spending per diner per meal at Korean restaurants is mainly from \$8.73 - \$17.45 (60% of respondents spend this level, the expense less than \$8.73, from \$17.46- \$26.18, and over \$26.18 per meal at 18%, 16% and 6%, respectively); Finally, up to 56% of diners often choose budget eateries, 16.5% choose casual dining and 27.5% choose fine dining. (Table 1.)

Table 1: Statistics of some consumer behavior of diners at Korean restaurants

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Statistics on the frequency of diners coming to Korean restaurants per month				
1	83	41.5	41.5	41.5
2	54	27.0	27.0	68.5
3	23	11.5	11.5	80.0
4	25	12.5	12.5	92.5
> 4	15	7.5	7.5	100
Total	200	100	100	
Statistics of people who usually have a meal with diners at Korean restaurants				
Family	65	32.5	32.5	32.5
Friend	106	53.0	53.0	85.5
Colleague	25	12.5	12.5	98.0
Others	4	2.0	2.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	
Statistics of the time diners often go to Korean restaurants				
Weekday	39	19.5	19.5	19.5
Weekend	112	56.0	56.0	75.5
Holiday	38	19.0	19.0	94.5
Others	11	5.5	5.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	
Statistics on the amount of money diners usually pay at Korean restaurants				
< \$8.73	36	18.0	18.0	18.0
\$8.73 - \$17.45	120	60.0	60.0	78.0
\$17.46 - \$26.18	32	16.0	16.0	94.0
> \$26.18	12	6.0	6.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	
Statistics of Korean restaurant's types that diners often visit				
Budget eatery	33	16.5	16.5	16.5
Casual dining	112	56.0	56.0	72.5
Fine dining	55	27.5	27.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Source: Data analysis result of the research

In addition, according to a survey 200 people, most of them used grilled dishes (Bulgogi, Guun Saengseon, Guun Haesanmul) when eating at Korean restaurants (83.5%), followed by hot pot dishes (Kimchi Jjigae) (51.0%), dishes made from rice (Kimbap, Bibimbap) (39.5%) and noodles (Ramyeon, Naeng Myeon) (33.0%). This shows that Vietnamese people have high preference for grilled dishes because of many reasons such as the barbecue seasoning make grilled meat fragrant and sweet, the various side dishes (kimchi, vegetables, onions, radish, pickled cucumber, etc.), and a special dipping sauce that enhances the rich flavor of the grilled meat. On the other hand, maybe the tastes of Vietnamese people are quite similar to Korean people, Korean foods quickly became Vietnamese favorites. About beverages, most diners often choose non-alcoholic drinks when eating Korean food (76.5%), followed by fruit juices and beer (25.0% and 24.0%) and at least wine (13.0%). Because the weather in Danang city is quite hot, wine is not used as much as beer and other beverages. And 11.0% of diners do not use restaurants' beverages either because they bring their own drinks by themselves. (Table 2.)

4.2. Diners' assessment

According to diners' reviews about Korean food in Danang city, I received some positive feedback from the diners who participated in the survey. All the meanings of the factors are above the average index 3, in which the meaning of diners' intention to return is the highest 4.38, followed by the satisfaction with food and the taste of Korean foods respectively 4.24 and 4.23.

This result shows that the taste of Korean food at restaurants in Danang city is highly appreciated by diners and they are quite satisfied with Korean foods, and this leads to more than 85% of diner respondents intend to return to Korean restaurants for the next consumption. (Table 3.) This is completely consistent with the current reality, because of the influence of Korean culture on Southeast Asian countries, especially Vietnam. In the fields of Korean culture that strongly attract and influence the Vietnamese people, the preponderance of dramas and entertainment programs can be seen. In recent years, images of traditional food, street food, Korean traditional food culture on the screen, in entertainment programs, movies, etc. have had a significant impact on the preferences, habits and food consumption behavior of Vietnamese people.

Table 2: Statistics of the dishes and beverages that diners often choose

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Grilled dishes	167	40.3%	83.5%
Dishes made from rice	79	19.1%	39.5%
Hot pot dishes	102	24.6%	51.0%
Noodle dishes	66	15.9%	33.0%
Total	414	100.0%	
Non-alcoholic beverages	153	51.2%	76.5%
Wine	26	8.7%	13.0%
Beer	48	16.1%	24.0%
Fruit juices	50	16.7%	25.0%
No drink	22	7.4%	11.0%
Total	299	100.0%	

Source: Data analysis result of the research

4.3. The desire to adjust tastes of dishes

However, most foreign dishes when imported into Vietnam will also be adjusted to suit the taste of Vietnamese people, including Korean favorite dishes. This is demonstrated in the following research results. Research results show that the most diners had the opinion on the spiciness of Korean food (up to 43.4% of diners choose to change the spiciness), followed by the sweetness and saltiness (24.9% and 16.8% of diners respectively want to change sweetness and saltiness). The reason is due to the taste of diners in Danang city, most people in Danang city like spicy food, almost food are eaten with chilli like Quang noodles (Mi Quang), rice paper rolls with pork (Banh Trang Cuon Thit Heo), pancakes (Banh Xeo) and so on. In

addition, eating spicy foods makes them feel better. About saltiness and sweetness, it can be said that Korean food at these restaurants quite suit the tastes of Danang people, so there are not many diners want to adjust these tastes of dishes (Table 4.).

The features of Korean dishes have many similarities with Vietnamese tastes, so they are quite popular in Vietnam. Like Vietnamese dishes, Korean dishes have a mixture of many flavors, colors and especially nutritious proportions. In addition, Korean traditional food is not served separately, but served at the same time. Therefore, on dining-table of Korean people, we often see many different dishes which are very attractive and colorful. With all the above reasons, it is easy to understand why Korean cuisine has such a strong influence on Vietnamese youth.

Table 3: Statistics of the diners' assessment

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
The taste of Korean foods	200	1	5	4.23	.867
Food hygiene and safety	200	1	5	4.18	.849
Aesthetics in Korean food	200	1	5	4.04	.835
Nutritional content	200	1	5	3.93	.891
The uniqueness of Korean food	200	1	5	3.76	.824
Proportionality between quality and price	200	1	5	3.96	.870
Diners' satisfaction with food	200	1	5	4.24	.776
Diners' intention to return	200	1	5	4.38	.900
Valid N (listwise)	200	1	5		

Source: Data analysis result of the research

Table 4: Statistics of the desire to adjust tastes of dishes

	Tastes need to change			
	Spicy	Sweet	Salty	Average Percentage
Grilled dishes	51.5%	28.0%	15.0%	31.5%
Dishes made from rice	27.5%	28.5%	24.0%	26.7%
Hot pot dishes	51.0%	18.0%	13.5%	27.5%
Noodle dishes	43.5%	25.0%	14.5%	27.7%
Average Percentage	43.4%	24.9%	16.8%	

Source: Data analysis result of the research

However, according to research results of people who have used food and beverage services at Korean restaurants in Danang city, they still have the desire to adjust the tastes of dishes to be more suitable. In particular, due to the geographical features, diners in Danang prefer to increase the spiciness of grilled and hot pot dishes, and reduce the sweetness of dishes made from rice and noodle dishes. On the other hand, some noodles in Danang are seasoned too spicy by the chefs, so diners also want to reduce the spiciness of these noodles. On the contrary, the percentage of diners participating in the survey who want to change the saltiness of Korean dishes is very small (mostly less than 10%), and it can show that the salty taste of Korean dishes is quite suitable for diners in Danang city (Table 5.).

5. Conclusions

This study aims to determine the consumer behavior and assessment of Korean food by diners who have used food and beverage services at Korean restaurants in Danang city. In addition, the study also identifies diners' desire to change the tastes of Korean dishes. Therefore, I only analyzed data at descriptive statistics and in future research, I will continue to study the factors affecting the revisit intention to the Korean restaurants of consumers.

The results show that most diners in Danang who participated in the survey were satisfied with the dishes from the country of Kimchi, from tastes, aesthetics, food hygiene and safety to the price of the dishes, so up to 85% of diners will return to Korean restaurants in their next consumption. In particular, diners are more interested in grilled dishes than other dishes. This may be due to the unique and delicious flavors, idiosyncratic color, variety of side dishes and special sauce. However, diners still want to increase the spicy taste of the grilled dishes and hot pot dishes, and reduce the sweetness of dishes made from rice and noodle dishes. This is because most people in Danang city prefer to eat spicy more and sweet less than other cities in the North and South of Vietnam. And the saltiness seems to be suitable for the taste of Danang people, so there are not many diners want to adjust the saltiness of Korean dishes.

Thus, in order to develop Korean cuisine and promote the consumption of Korean foods in the Danang city market, Korean restaurant’s managers need to understand diners’ expectations, consumption characteristics and the target customers. In particular, Korean restaurants should adjust the tastes of Korean dishes to increase revenue for their restaurants.

Table 5: Detailed statistics of the desire to adjust the taste for each dish

Korean Food	N	Percent of Cases
Grilled dishes		
Reduce spiciness	39	19.5%
Increase spiciness	64	32.0%
Reduce sweetness	44	22.0%
Increase sweetness	12	6.0%
Reduce saltiness	14	7.0%
Increase saltiness	16	8.0%
Dishes made from rice		
Reduce spiciness	28	14.0%
Increase spiciness	27	13.5%
Reduce sweetness	47	23.5%
Increase sweetness	10	5.0%
Reduce saltiness	32	16.0%
Increase saltiness	16	8.0%
Hot pot dishes		
Reduce spiciness	43	21.5%
Increase spiciness	59	29.5%
Reduce sweetness	29	14.5%
Increase sweetness	7	3.5%
Reduce saltiness	12	6.0%
Increase saltiness	15	7.5%
Noodle dishes		
Reduce spiciness	50	25.0%
Increase spiciness	37	18.5%
Reduce sweetness	41	20.5%
Increase sweetness	9	4.5%
Reduce saltiness	14	7.0%
Increase saltiness	15	7.5%

Source: Data analysis result of the research

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