



Turizm Akademik Dergisi

Tourism Academic Journal

www.turizmakademik.com



Examination of Customer Reviews of Virtual Reality Restaurants on Tripadvisor*

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Abstract

Virtual reality is used as an effective tool in food and beverage businesses as well as in many sectors. Restaurant businesses are preparing the basis for a new generation restaurant concept by integrating this effective technology into their systems. Thus, virtual reality restaurants can differentiate, change, and affect restaurant operations, customers, and dining experiences. Therefore, it is important to examine these restaurants to understand the effectiveness of virtual reality in the restaurant experience. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to investigate customer comments on virtual reality restaurants on TripAdvisor and to understand the role of virtual reality in the restaurant experience. The data for this study consists of user reviews posted on the TripAdvisor platform between July 15, 2012, and November 27, 2024, regarding the restaurants Ultraviolet by Paul Pairet in Shanghai, China; Sublimotion Ibiza in Spain; and Sublimotion Dubai in the United Arab Emirates and 301 customer comments were analyzed with descriptive analysis. The findings obtained were interpreted under the name of VR restaurant experience. A new generation dining experience staged with virtual reality is being created. This new generation dining experience, "VR Gastro-Theater" significantly contributes to customer satisfaction, revisit intention, service quality, and restaurant experience. It also increases people's curiosity, provides extraordinary multi-sensory experiences, and enables people to accumulate unforgettable memories by creating unique dining experiences. Apart from these positive approaches, the most complained about is the high prices. Virtual reality restaurants can be examined on different variables to reveal their relational and causal connections.

Keywords: Virtual reality restaurants, Customer reviews, TripAdvisor, Ultraviolet, Sublimotion.

Tripadvisor'daki Sanal Gerçeklik Restoranlarının Müşteri Yorumlarının İncelenmesi

Öz

Sanal gerçeklik birçok sektörde olduğu gibi yiyecek içecek işletmelerinde de etkili bir araç olarak kullanılmaktadır. Restoran işletmeleri bu etkili teknolojiyi kendi sistemlerine entegre ederek yeni nesil bir restoran anlayışına temel hazırlamaktadır. Böylece sanal gerçeklik restoranları restoran işleyişlerini, müşteri ve yemek deneyimlerini farklılaştırabilmekte, değiştirebilmekte ve etkileyebilmektedir. Dolayısıyla sanal gerçekliğin restoran deneyimindeki etkinliğini anlayabilmek açısından bu restoranların incelenmesi önem arz etmektedir. Bu nedenle çalışmanın amacını TripAdvisor'daki sanal gerçeklik restoranlarına ilişkin müşteri yorumlarının incelenmesi ve sanal gerçekliğin restoran deneyimi üzerindeki rolünün anlaşılması oluşturmaktadır. Çalışmanın verileri, TripAdvisor platformunda Çin'in Şangay kentindeki Ultraviolet by Paul Pairet, İspanya'daki Sublimotion Ibiza ve Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri'ndeki Sublimotion Dubai restoranlarına ilişkin 15.07.2012 ile 27.11.2024 tarihleri arasında yapılmış kullanıcı yorumlarından oluşmaktadır ve elde edilen 301 müşteri yorumu betimsel analiz ile çözümlenmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular, VR restoran deneyimi adı altında yorumlanmıştır. Sanal gerçeklik ile sahnelenen yeni nesil bir yemek deneyimi yaratılmaktadır. Bu yeni nesil yemek deneyimi "VR Gastro-Tiyatro", müşteri memnuniyetine, tekrar ziyaret niyetine, hizmet kalitesine ve restoran deneyimine önemli katkılar sunmaktadır. Ayrıca insanların merak duygusunu artırmakta, sıra dışı çoklu duyuşal deneyimler yaşatmakta ve eşsiz yemek deneyimleri yaratarak insanların unutulmaz anılar biriktirmesini olanaklı kılmaktadır. Bu olumlu yaklaşımların dışında en çok fiyatların yüksek olmasından şikâyet edilmektedir. Sanal gerçeklik restoranları farklı değişkenler üzerinde incelenerek ilişkisel ve nedensel bağları ortaya çıkarılabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sanal gerçeklik restoranları, Müşteri yorumları, TripAdvisor, Ultraviolet, Sublimotion.

JEL CODE: J28, J81, L83

Article History:

Received : January, 30 2025
First Revision : April 8, 2025
Accepted : May, 26 2025
Article Type : Research Article

Yersüren, S. (2025). Examination of Customer Reviews of Virtual Reality Restaurants on Tripadvisor, Turizm Akademik Dergisi, 12 (1), 167-179.

*This research is among the research that does not require ethics committee approval

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INTRODUCTION

The advancement of technology has brought many innovations. Virtual reality (VR), one of these innovations, shows itself in many areas, as well as in food and beverage businesses, with the realistic experience it creates. VR contributes to the development and change of restaurant operations and dining experience by creating radical changes in traditional restaurant operations with the innovative dining experience it offers. This innovative technology transforms the restaurant experience beyond filling the stomach and turns it into a staged VR Gastro-Theater experience. This new experience-oriented understanding enables people to accumulate unforgettable memories by offering an extraordinary, unique dining experience. In addition, VR establishes a strong bond between the customer and the restaurant. Thus, customer satisfaction and the pleasure felt from the dining experience are increased to a higher level. VR, which takes the restaurant experience to a completely different level, is becoming an effective technological tool preferred in restaurants with the effect it creates. VR restaurants using this technology offer a holistic experience that combines food and spectacle by activating people's senses. VR restaurants take people on a sensory and emotional journey beyond the ordinary dining experience and make the restaurant experience more entertaining and fascinating. VR restaurants present the food theatrically as a work of art, while making the customer feel like the star of this show. Therefore, it can be said that the traditional restaurant concept has been replaced by the VR Gastro-Theater experience. This innovative restaurant concept can be evaluated by customers on online platforms. Technological developments and the development of the internet make this possible. Customers can share their experiences through online platforms. Reviews and comments about restaurants can be made on TripAdvisor, which is one of the leading platforms, and this affects customer preferences and perceptions. Therefore, online customer reviews should be taken into consideration for restaurant businesses. In this way, restaurant businesses can correct their deficiencies and mistakes and increase customer satisfaction. Therefore, it is important to examine customer reviews about VR restaurants. This study aims to examine customer reviews of VR restaurants on the TripAdvisor platform and to reveal the role of VR in the restaurant experience.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Developments in technology and digitalization are creating significant changes in food and beverage businesses, as in many other areas. These changes contribute significantly to the ability of food and beverage businesses to compete, differentiate themselves, sustain

their existence, and create unique experiences. They can also meet the needs of today's experience-oriented customer profile (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Today's restaurant customers are looking for extraordinary and unique experiences that stimulate the mind and activate all senses beyond just filling their stomachs. This is possible with multi-sensory integration (Spence, 2010). At this point, virtual reality (VR) is among the leading technological tools. VR has begun to be used in food and beverage businesses, as in many other areas (Demirezen, 2019; Güner and Aydoğdu, 2022). VR is defined as a three-dimensional virtual environment created by a computer, where a person can navigate, interact, and create an immersive experience that feels real by providing real-time sensory feedback to the person (Burdea and Coiffet, 2003; Sherman and Craig, 2003; Gutiérrez et al., 2008; Guttentag, 2010; Diemer et al., 2015). VR has unique capabilities in providing perceptual simulations of real situations. In this way, realistic experiences can be offered in a virtual world (Diemer et al., 2015). These realistic experiences are made possible by the virtual environment created by VR's software and hardware features, the sense of presence, real-time sensory feedback, interaction with the virtual environment, and immersion in the virtual world by breaking away from the real world. Thanks to these features, it is possible to simulate reality. Experiences can become extraordinary with the created perception of reality and unlimited content creation. Thus, multi-sensory and three-dimensional restaurant experiences can be created. This transforms the dining experience into a staged theatrical show (Spence and Youssef, 2022).

Restaurant businesses can present this show using VR. VR creates radical changes in the operation of restaurant businesses and customer experiences and moves the dining experience from the traditional structure to a more experience-oriented phase. It also plays an effective role in enriching the restaurant experience and creating unforgettable memories. At this point, Sublimotion and Ultraviolet restaurants are among the leading VR restaurants (Çıtak, 2023; Çöl et al., 2023). In these restaurants, VR plays an important role in providing a multi-sensory staged dining experience by accompanying quality food and drinks. In the creation of this experience, engineers, scriptwriters, illusionists, chefs, architects, and designers work together to integrate VR with gastronomy. This impressive experience is realized in a specially designed room with elements such as 360-degree wall projections, table projectors, multi-channel speakers, beam speakers, dry scent projectors, lighting, lights, sounds, music, smells and virtual environments, and staging that change according to the food. This holistic structure is used for the staged

dining experience, creating the feeling of eating in different environments and offering an immersive VR dining experience. VR enriches the avant-garde dining experience offered and takes customers on a multi-sensory journey. Thus, a VR Gastro-Theater experience is provided. For example, in the menu of the Ultraviolet restaurant, customers travel through VR in various natural environments from the first act “Sea” to the second act “Land”. Throughout these two acts, a wide range of natural elements, landscapes and ecosystems are recreated: the green islands and native campfires of New Zealand (Abalone Primitive), the undersea wildlife of the ocean floor (Very Sea Sea Scallop), the coastal wildlife (Carabineros), the meadows and lush grasses (Pasturage), the thickets of the forest (Mushrooommssss), and so on, all of these applications integrate virtual reality, food and spectacle. All the elements in the menu sequence “Very Sea Sea Scallop” – a sea urchin and seaweed dish; cold meringue, strong white wine, the sound of waves, projected ocean images, and the scent of the sea waft – make diners feel as if they were in the ocean. This experiential trend therefore responds to people’s longing for mobility and their strong desire to travel quickly from one place to another without restrictions. Thus, customers can enjoy being in very different places while in a VR space and can exceed the limits of human perception and physical abilities throughout the experience (Yemsi-Paillissé, 2020; Meeroona, 2022; Sublimotion, 2024; Ultraviolet, 2024). Another example is that it can offer a journey through different times, places, and emotional stages, from the cabaret of the 20th century to a futuristic dinner with friends in 2050, or it can create the feeling of dining at the seaside. Therefore, VR restaurants can create multiple virtual environments and provide extraordinary experiences. Since customers are immersed in the experience in these multi-sensory virtual environments and have a sense of being there, they can have realistic restaurant experiences. In addition, this experience intensifies the tasting experience and can make it unforgettable (Yemsi-Paillissé, 2020; Negüzel et al., 2021; Meeroona, 2022). This immersive experiential journey takes the perception of flavors, the presentation of dishes, and environmental factors beyond the traditional dining experience (Spence and Youssef, 2022).

These restaurants combine virtual and physical reality to offer enjoyable dining and theme-oriented experiences. Restaurants that successfully use VR technologies can change the environment so that people can have a good time while eating. In addition, environments that are impossible or very difficult to encounter in daily life can be created thanks to this technology. It is thought that all these situations will increase satisfaction and enrich the dining experience

(Negüzel et al., 2021; Çöl et al., 2023). Such gastronomic experiences constitute the future of new generation restaurants that will meet the demand of gastro-tourists for authenticity and unusual experiences, and for more experiential, immersive, and digitalized dining experiences. These VR restaurants appear as a multi-sensory establishment that offers a new type of gastronomic, touristic, and aesthetic travel experience. Thus, they provide an immersive and interactive experience (Pimentel and Texeira 1993). It can be said that VR restaurants create a digital experience economy by making food and beverage experiences unique and unforgettable, and thus, they can establish stronger relationships with customers. In addition, restaurants can touch the senses, emotions, and minds of customers, which is the basis of experiential marketing, by using VR. These restaurants, which offer enriched experiences, enable differentiated food and beverage experience while also allowing restaurants to leave a mark on customers. In addition, the customer, who is surrounded by the experience and is the subject of the experience, can also pay more for the food and beverage experience. Therefore, it is possible to say that VR can be used as an effective experiential marketing tool for restaurants. Thus, restaurants can provide customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and competitive advantage by using VR.

VR restaurants can take customers on a sensory journey. Thus, beyond a gastronomic dinner, customers can also experience concepts such as “restaurant vacation” and “phygital gastronomy” (Yemsi-Paillissé, 2020). Today, the traditional restaurant experience is being replaced by the gastro-theater experience created by reality technologies such as VR. In addition to meeting physical needs, this experience can offer extraordinary experiences. This experience offered through VR increases customer satisfaction by making flavor moments unforgettable and improves the dining experience to an advanced level. In addition, VR environments affect flavor perception and emotional response (Torricco et al., 2020; Negüzel et al., 2021; Çöl et al., 2023). VR can offer exciting new eating experiences by stimulating the senses (Crofton et al., 2019) and attract customers’ attention with the fun and enthusiastic experiences they offer. VR plays an important role in the preference and proliferation of these restaurants (Spence and Piqueras-Fiszman, 2013; Torricco et al., 2020; Negüzel et al., 2021). VR restaurants can change the perception of taste with the sensory journey they offer and the virtual environment they create. In addition, the dissatisfaction that will be created by meals that are not at the expected level of taste can be tolerated, or the perception of taste can be changed thanks to the VR experience (Stelick et al., 2018; Gere et al., 2021). In addition, VR restaurants

create the opportunity to meet new people and enable them to socialize with the interaction they create (Berger et al., 2006). It is thought that this innovative approach will radically change the traditional restaurant experience and lead to a transition to a new generation understanding, the “VR Gastro-Theater” experience.

It is seen that VR makes significant contributions to the world of gastronomy and creates a new generation of restaurant experience. Therefore, it is important to examine customer reviews to understand the role of VR in restaurants. At this point, with the development and widespread use of the internet, internet-based platforms have come to the fore. Examples of these platforms include applications such as TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Facebook, X, and Instagram. TripAdvisor is at the forefront of these applications. TripAdvisor stands out as the most preferred review site. At this point, it is stated that prioritizing customer review sites such as TripAdvisor will yield effective results (Aydın, 2016, p. 17). It is stated that this platform is also prioritized by restaurants (Lei and Law, 2015) and is widely used in the field of gastronomy. When we look at the studies conducted, it is seen that inferences are made by examining customer reviews on this platform (Hökelekli and Yıldız, 2024). At the same time, it is seen that customers trust the reviews made on the TripAdvisor platform (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008; Jeacle and Carter, 2011; Levy et al., 2013). Platforms such as TripAdvisor are becoming an important source of information for consumers. Thus, restaurant businesses can understand the satisfaction and complaints of customers. This helps restaurant businesses improve service conditions by providing a better understanding of customers. These platforms help businesses to market themselves and improve themselves by evaluating customer comments. In addition, shared customer comments can also affect people's preferences. Negative comments negatively affect the attractiveness and image of the restaurant, while also causing customer losses. At this point, businesses can learn the aspects and deficiencies that need to be improved by paying attention to customer comments. In this way, they can ensure customer satisfaction, loyalty, and create a competitive advantage. At the same time, it is possible to improve negative customer comments and customer perception. Therefore, restaurant businesses can make their lives longer (Kitapçı, 2008; Pantelidis, 2010; Gal-Tzur et al., 2018, p. 2; Dixit et al., 2019). Positive reviews can make customers return to the same restaurant and play an important role in recommending the restaurant to others. Therefore, customer reviews can influence people's decisions (Albayrak, 2013).

TripAdvisor is an effective online platform that guides consumers and businesses, where people

can learn about businesses, share their experiences, and interact. Many restaurants and customers with various cuisines and different features benefit from this effective platform. At this point, VR restaurants such as Ultraviolet and Sublimotion also take their place on the TripAdvisor platform. Many researchers in the international and national framework benefit from this platform and make inferences by examining customer experiences (Lei and Law, 2015; Aydın, 2016; Ganzaroli et al., 2017; Zhang and Hanks, 2018; Şahin, 2021; Hökelekli and Yıldız, 2024). Dalgıç et al. (2016) concluded in their literature review that those complaints are mostly about restaurant atmosphere, staff service delivery, food and beverage content, price, originality, and attractiveness. Their study states that the taste element has a critical role and is important in people's expectations and motivations. They explain other elements as staff attitude, food originality, and fair price problems. In another literature review, Erdem and Yay (2017) found that customer complaints are about food and beverage, price, staff behavior and cleanliness, menu, restaurant atmosphere, cleanliness. In their studies, they state that complaints are mostly about staff, food and beverage, service, price, service environment, and menu. Şahin (2021), on the other hand, concluded that customers are generally satisfied with their dining experiences as a result of the literature review, but they are not satisfied with the service (staff and service) and value (cost-price-benefit)-oriented elements and the atmosphere evaluations are at a medium level, while in his study, he states that the focus should be on changing the negative perceptions formed in food and beverages, service approach, design and concept, pricing. Sökmen (2010) states that complaints are mostly about taste, presentation, price level, menu, and lack of variety. Lei and Law (2015), Arseven Otamış (2015), Aydın (2016), and Kuday and Yazıcı Ayyıldız (2023) state in their studies that one of the most critical elements is price performance evaluation. However, it is possible to say that monetary value is not effective after the dining experience in restaurant preferences (Albayrak, 2013, p. 199). The negative perception of customers in terms of price performance can cause the meals to be described as tasteless (Yetgin et al., 2020).

Albayrak (2013) and Arseven Otamış (2015) state that the business atmosphere is also criticized by customers and that this element is an important factor in restaurant preferences, affecting the general satisfaction of customers and their loyalty to the business. Kitapçı (2008) highlights service quality as the most prominent complaint theme. It is said that in customer satisfaction, delicious food, service quality, attentive staff, ambiance, design, decoration, food presentation, menu variety, restaurant location, view, and price suitability are the determinants, respectively (Yetgin et al., 2020).

Pantelidis (2010) associates customer satisfaction with food, service, and atmosphere. Liu and Jang (2009) emphasized in their study that food quality (primarily taste) and service quality (primarily service reliability) are fundamental to success, while stating that food atmosphere, food originality, and fair price elements contribute to satisfaction and behavioral intention. When the studies conducted are examined, it is seen that customer complaints converge at similar points, while different determinations are also made. It can be said that these differences are because the studies are carried out in different regions, different restaurant types, and different work areas. Restaurant businesses can improve and develop their services by taking these results into account. In addition, customers can benefit from customer evaluations of their restaurant preferences. Therefore, it can be said that examining customer reviews on the TripAdvisor platform is a guide for both restaurant businesses and customers. In the literature review, many restaurant businesses were examined, but no study was found examining customer reviews of VR restaurants on the TripAdvisor platform. With this study, people can learn about new generation restaurants, such as VR restaurants, and provide restaurant operators with new perspectives in terms of innovative restaurant operations. Thus, significant contributions can be made to the food and beverage sector. In addition, it can create new areas of study for researchers and provide academic gains. In line with this information, this study focuses on examining customer reviews of VR restaurants on the TripAdvisor platform and aims to reveal the role of VR in restaurant experience. Therefore, this study is important in terms of understanding the effectiveness of VR on the restaurant experience.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological section is structured using a qualitative research approach and is completed with an analysis process based on a case study design that examines TripAdvisor reviews using document analysis and content analysis methods.

This study, which focuses on qualitative data, aims to examine customer reviews of VR restaurants on the TripAdvisor platform and to reveal the role of VR on the restaurant experience. This study is important in terms of understanding the effectiveness of VR on the restaurant experience. The universe of the study consists of VR restaurants, while the sample consists of VR restaurants with customer reviews on TripAdvisor.com. The TripAdvisor platform is preferred because it has the largest online network on a global scale, provides comprehensive coverage of customers' independent evaluations, opinions and comments, is

a popular online site for examining customer reviews and provides a strong platform for interaction between people (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004; Buhalis and Law, 2008; O'Connor, 2008). Due to the limited number of VR restaurants on the TripAdvisor platform, not all VR restaurants could be reached. The data of the study consists of the restaurants Ultraviolet by Paul Pairet-Shanghai, Sublimotion Ibiza, and Sublimotion Dubai, which were listed on the TripAdvisor platform between July 15, 2012, and November 27, 2024.

These VR restaurants are preferred because they receive many reviews, have similar features, offer a multi-sensory experience, benefit from virtual reality technology, and the dining venue is designed to offer a virtual reality experience (Çıtak, 2023; Çöl et al., 2023; Aksu et al., 2024; Yemsi-Paillissé, 2024). 301 customer comments of these restaurants were analyzed using the descriptive analysis technique. Descriptive analysis can provide researchers with summary information about the research topics and is a frequently preferred analysis technique (Büyüköztürk et al., 2008). Descriptive analysis makes it possible to reach and interpret concepts and relationships that can explain data, establish cause-effect relationships, and make comparisons between facts (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008; Karagöz, 2017). Thus, the findings of the research can be created by making evaluations and interpretations in line with the purpose of the research. This research is among the research that does not require ethics committee approval.

FINDINGS AND COMMENTS

The study examines 301 customer reviews of Sublimotion Ibiza (56 reviews), Sublimotion Dubai (6 reviews), and Ultraviolet Shanghai (239 reviews). The evaluations of the data obtained are presented under the title of findings regarding VR restaurant experience. Customer reviews of the restaurants are abbreviated as Sublimotion Ibiza (SI), Sublimotion Dubai (SD), and Ultraviolet Shanghai (U).

Findings on VR restaurant experience

Designed by Chef Paul Pairet in 1996, the Ultraviolet virtual reality restaurant opened in Shanghai in 2012 and has 3 Michelin stars. It is ranked 25th out of 17,012 restaurants in the region on the TripAdvisor platform. When 239 customer reviews are examined, it is seen that the evaluations are excellent (224), very good (7), average (4), bad (1), and terrible (3), and it has received a full score of 5 in the overall evaluation. The evaluations are in English, French, Russian, Chinese, Spanish, Japanese, Italian, German, Korean, Portuguese, and Dutch, and many of them are in English and French.

The first experience restaurant, the Ultraviolet restaurant, serves 10 people in one service and offers an avant-garde set menu consisting of 20 kors. Another VR restaurant, Sublimotion, opened its doors in Ibiza in 2014. The restaurant, run by chef Paco Roncero, has 2 Michelin stars. It ranks 557th out of 1,678 restaurants in the Ibiza region. When the 56 reviews are examined, it is seen that these reviews are excellent (44), very good (3), average (4), bad (0), and terrible (5), and the overall evaluation is 4.5 points. These reviews are in Spanish, English, Italian, Russian, French, and German, respectively. Another Sublimotion restaurant opened in Dubai in 2022. This restaurant ranks 7,306th out of 10,874 restaurants in the region. When the 6 reviews are examined, it is understood that they are excellent (2), very good (0), average (1), bad (0), and terrible (3), and the overall evaluation is 2.5 points. It is seen that these reviews were made in English and German. The Sublimotion restaurants serve 12 people and offer Spanish avant-garde cuisine in 20 kors (TripAdvisor, 2024a; TripAdvisor, 2024b; TripAdvisor, 2024c; Sublimotion, 2024; Ultraviolet, 2024).

VR restaurants have a Michelin star, which is an indication of their service and food quality. In addition, when customer reviews are examined, it is understood that customer satisfaction is generally at a high level. However, it is seen that the Sublimotion Dubai VR restaurant's customer general score and ranking in the region are low. This situation can be explained by the fact that the restaurant has recently opened, and the number of reviews is low. It is seen that many of the reviews of Ultraviolet and Sublimotion Ibiza VR restaurants are excellent and very good. Therefore, it is understood that customer satisfaction is at a high level. While it is seen that Sublimotion Ibiza restaurant is mostly evaluated in Spanish due to its location and the cuisine it offers, this situation varies in the Ultraviolet restaurant. At this point, it can be commented that Ultraviolet restaurant has reached a wider customer portfolio, and the interest in the restaurant is more global. It is understood that VR restaurants focus on avant-garde cuisine and focus on a 20-course tasting menu. It is also seen that VR restaurants have a low customer hosting capacity. It can be said that the factors such as the very expensive installation of these systems, the desire to provide a more niche service, the negative impact on the quality of the VR experience in spatial size, and the decrease in service and food quality play a role in this (TripAdvisor, 2024a; TripAdvisor, 2024b; TripAdvisor, 2024c).

It can be stated that virtual reality restaurants differ from traditional restaurant operations in terms of the experience they offer to the customer and the value they create. VR restaurants interact with customers

throughout the entire process, from greeting to farewell. The story-based VR Gastro-Theater experience begins when customers go to the meeting point, where they are informed about. In this place, which has the feature of a preliminary introduction, customers have a small chat accompanied by special and expensive drinks. Afterwards, a shuttle goes to the restaurant where the real experience will take place for dinner - *the secret place* (SI, U). This journey is short, and the mystery of the destination is increased by deliberate deviations on the route. This mystery continues upon arrival at the restaurant. Customers enter the restaurant via a freight elevator in the garage and directly reach the VR experience area where the dining tables are located. Customers are greeted by restaurant staff and seated in their seats with their names projected on the table. This creates a *sense of nobility* in the guests (U). Afterwards, information is provided about the dinner and the presentation, the lights are dimmed, and the screens on the walls are illuminated. Thus, the created virtual environment covers the entire dining area. From this point on, customers now take their place as players in that VR world, and that magnificent experience begins. This dining area is described by *customers as a science fiction laboratory like the one in the movie The Matrix* (U). *The dining area is surrounded by high, pure white walls, and there is a long table and chairs in the middle. There (are) a projection and spotlights right above the table* (U). Each dish has unique flavors and goes beyond a dining experience with virtual reality. *The set menu offered is divided into different themes, and in line with these themes, the entire experience system, such as music, smell, 3D images, videos, and animations, elegant service sets* (SI, U), VR environment, act together to offer a unique VR Gastro-Theater experience. This experience is meticulously prepared in a planned manner, and professional employees carry out the service processes in synchronization with this experience. While *the dining experience lasts an average of 4 hours, the entire experience lasts an average of 5 hours and provides moments that evoke strong emotions* (SI, U). It is stated that *the long duration of the experience may create difficulties for the employees the next day* (U), which is very few comments made in this minimum. Therefore, it is possible to say that the customers are satisfied with this holistic experience defined as an *extraordinary experience* (SI, U). There are two breaks during the dining experience where personal needs are also met. The reason for the limited dining experience breaks may be that it will harm the holistic VR experience. At the end of this experience, customers can meet the chef, chat with him, and see the kitchen. In addition, *restaurants can make changes to the menus they create. Ultraviolet restaurant has A, B and C menus* (U).

Since VR restaurants serve 10-12 people, it can be very difficult to find a place in the restaurants. For this reason, it is *recommended to make a reservation 3 months in advance* (SI, SD, U). After the reservation, customers who are placed on the waiting list are informed via e-mail in case of cancellation. In this way, customers' waiting times can be reduced, but it is stated that they are generally long. However, these waits are not seen as a problem by customers. It is understood that the VR dining experience is worth the wait, and those who experience it see themselves as *lucky and privileged people* (SI, SD, U).

With the integration of virtual reality and restaurants, cuisine, art, and technology serve, transforming the dining experience into a *surreal, futuristic show* (U). Professionals from different fields, such as *chefs, designers, engineers, illusionists, set designers, architects, choreographers, and screenwriters* (SI, U) play a role in this show. VR restaurants create a multi-sensory experience and take customers on a *fantastic journey* beyond the age (SI, SD, U). This staged food show is *created using 360-degree images projected onto the entire surface from the walls to the table, and high technology, and customers whose senses are stimulated become the stars of this show stage* (SI, SD, U). *Virtual reality 3D visuals, animations* (U), a virtual reality environment shaped according to *the food, tools such as light, sound, music, and scent* (SI) are used to create a whole experience. Thus, it becomes possible to develop *unique dining experience by activating all the senses* (SI, SD, U). It can be said that the dining experience and restaurant operation take on a completely different form *-the food is not from this world, but a journey in this space* (U)- with the VR environment and the staged show. With virtual reality, *restaurants turn into a stage and customers into (stars)* (SD, U). Thus, it is possible to state that there is a transition from the traditional food experience to the staged surreal gastronomy experience. In VR restaurants, *there is a sophisticated experience that feels like it has gone to another realm, surrounded by a completely different (atmosphere) at which time and everything around is forgotten* (U). This makes virtual reality restaurant experiences unique and unforgettable. It makes dining experiences more enjoyable in the staged world by *stimulating the senses with the environment it creates* (SD, SI, U). Technology creates a *fusion experience* (SI) that combines art, taste, and senses. With the use of virtual reality technology in restaurants, the traditional restaurant dining experience goes beyond filling the stomach and turns into a gastronomy show. The dining experience is *no longer just a plate presentation prepared by chefs, but has evolved into a dining orchestra where engineers, designers, architects, scriptwriters, illusionists, choreographers, and stage designers work together as a whole* (U). This new

generation dining experience ensures that *customers feel like stars and leave the restaurant happy* (SD, SI, U).

The VR environment *changes (after) each meal* (SI, U). Thus, customers can integrate with the food they eat and embark on a sensory, *mental, and virtual world journey*. The VR experience differs with each meal theme *-when seafood is served, the wall and table image turn into the sea, even the fishy smell of the sea is felt, the seashore smell is felt while eating oysters* (U)- and this keeps the curiosity, excitement and fun related to the dining experience alive and offers an extraordinary experience full of surprises. The VR environment and *the employees running around the table make customers feel like Alice in Wonderland* (U). The experience created by VR makes it possible to live the moment in its entirety. Due to today's craze for taking photos and sharing them on social media, people cannot enjoy their dining experiences. However, VR can integrate people with experience and enable them to stay in the moment. Therefore, it is possible to reach the taste of every meal and the pleasure of that atmosphere. It can be said that the basis of this is the *fantastic experiences* (U). It is stated that when the presentation capabilities of VR combine with the taste of the food, the restaurant *service becomes flawless* (SI, U). It is said that this effect created by VR has gone beyond the food and entered an experience phase that *creates admiration* (U). The role of employees is also important in this new generation of service approach. From the welcome to the kitchen staff, from the service staff to the farewell staff, all employees and the entire restaurant operation are *meticulously managed* (U), and *this unique global experience is seen as the result of the combination of a great team* (SI). In addition to the chef, who is *described as a genius* (U), *the smiling faces, sincere, gentle, polite, and friendly attitudes of the other employees also* (U) play a role in characterizing VR restaurants as a *family environment* (SI). VR restaurants play an important role in *people's socialization* (U) and cultural interactions by allowing people from different cultures to share the same dining table. These restaurants make customers *feel as comfortable and cozy as if they were at a friend's house, and as if they were a group of party friends, even though they met there* (SI, U). Customers see VR restaurants as a place where they can spend time with their loved ones. In addition, VR restaurants seem to have the potential to meet the desire for entertainment, excitement, and different experiences sought by the new generation of postmodern customers.

Professional staff, a quality menu, and the harmony of accompanying drinks, high-level spatial features, a VR environment compatible with the food, a theatrical atmosphere, and VR shows integrated with the food, all these operations create a flawless dining experience.

Although it is understood that creating this experience requires high-quality restaurant features and involves high costs, it is understood that *customers are very satisfied with this gastro-theatre performance* (U). Most customers are *quite satisfied with the food and beverage pairings* (U). However, some customers *don't find the food and alcoholic beverage pairings -such as the wine selection- very appropriate* (SI, U), while there are also criticisms about the *lack of beverage varieties and poor quality* (SI, U), such as customers who *want to try a wider range of wines* (SI, U) (Sökmen, 2010; Erdem and Yay, 2017). In addition, the fact that the customer *cannot choose and pair food and alcoholic beverages according to their wishes* (SI, U) is another subject of criticism. However, many customers find these pairings magnificent and describe them as *sensational* (U). Another issue is that *non-alcoholic drinks are insufficient* (Sökmen, 2010; Erdem and Yay, 2017), and *alcoholic pairings are excessive* (SI, U). Although this situation is seen as a problem for those who do not drink alcohol, it can be compensated with *non-alcoholic drink pairings, although not all pairings are alcoholic* (U). Tastes regarding tasting menus of VR restaurants vary from person to person -*I do not like oysters and certain ingredients, my husband liked them all, my favorite is the foie gras on sticks* (U). In addition, although rare, there are criticisms about the food being *tasteless* (SD) (Sökmen, 2010; Dalgıç et al., 2016), and therefore customers make comments such as *I am still hungry* (SD, SI). This can be explained by the fact that customers have different cultural structures and tastes. Therefore, it can be considered normal to have these comments due to different taste perceptions and nutritional cultures. In addition, VR can eliminate the negatives regarding taste with the experience it creates. *It is stated that the food did not approach the quality of the VR show feast offered, the food was partially cold, and the speed of service made it difficult to try everything* (U) (Pantelidis, 2010; Erdem and Yay, 2017; Yetgin et al., 2020; Şahin, 2021). Virtual reality may have created shifts in the perception of time by integrating customers into the experience. Thus, the fact that the food was partially cold, and the service felt fast, may be because it was created by VR. The biggest criticism against VR restaurants is that *the prices are too high* (SD, SI, U) (Sökmen, 2010; Arseven Otamış, 2015; Lei and Law, 2015; Aydın, 2016; Erdem and Yay, 2017; Yetgin et al., 2020; Şahin, 2021; Kудay and Yazıcı Ayyıldız, 2023). However, *especially those who are aware of the great functioning behind the VR restaurant experience, and many customers who say that this immersive restaurant experience should be experienced in the world, consider these fees reasonable, and it is stated that this fantastic experience is worth it* (U). Another criticism is the problems experienced in refunding the fees incurred in reservation cancellations, and the fact that customers

in different countries *cannot make payments with the (PayPal) system* (SI). It is understood that this situation, which occurs rarely, *negatively affects the intention of customers to return* (SD). In addition, it is stated that *the explanations about the dishes in English can be difficult for those who do not speak English* (U). This situation can be overcome by creating different language options.

Virtual reality can have significant effects on customer experience. *It is seen that (no experience can) be surpassed by the VR restaurant experience, and that all instruments work in harmony like an orchestra, making customers feel like the leading actor in a real movie set* (SI, U). At the same time, the VR dining experience is interpreted as *Disney's culinary world* (SI, U). *Those who have experienced this state (say) that it should be done at least once in a lifetime, regardless of the cost, that people should not hesitate, and that they will be rewarded abundantly. It is said that this journey of emotions cannot be experienced anywhere else* (SI, U). The VR experience takes the restaurant *beyond a place where you eat and takes you on a multi-sensory culinary journey* (U). This innovative concept transforms *each meal into a work of art, providing an unforgettable adventure* (U). Customers see *the food services as a showstopper* (U), which shows how effective the experience is. This extraordinary experience is described as *a gastro-artwork*, and it is commented that *you must eat to get out of this experience* (U). It is defined as *an escape that should be done once in a lifetime* (U). Therefore, it is understood that VR takes customers away from reality and transports them to a different world, turning the dining experience into a staged theater show. This is an indication that the restaurant experience has entered another phase. Thanks to the VR experience, customers *leave the restaurant happily and want to experience this experience again* (SI, SD, U). In addition, customers state that *they have recaptured the pleasure of the first day on their second visit*. It is seen that *this experience is talked about and reminded (of) even years later, and that it has a value that can be experienced again and again* (SD, SI, U). Therefore, it is understood that the created VR experience maintains the excitement of the first day. It is stated that this VR experience *should be done by everyone at least once* (SI, U). While it is seen that some customers avoid giving information on the platform, they share in order *not to spoil the mystery and surprises of VR restaurants*, it is also stated that *it is much more than what is written, and a restaurant* (U).

Although it is stated that VR restaurants are partially inadequate compared to some of the Michelin-starred restaurants in terms of food, it is stated that *no restaurant can reach the experience of these restaurants*

and that *it is the best* among the Michelin-starred restaurants experienced before (U). People who have experienced this experience are *worried that they will never have a similar dinner again* (U). In addition, it is stated that in this VR Gastro-Theater staged, *the meal is seen as part of a performance*, the VR ambiance is *more than the meal* and forms the whole experience. This experience is seen as an *experiential gourmet entertainment* (U). While the comment that *this meal would be the best in China even if you ate it on the side of the road* describes the food quality of VR restaurants, the statement that *you will never forget this meal because you are in a unique place* also shows (U) the effectiveness of VR. It is stated that the full understanding of the VR dining experience value and making that moment unforgettable may depend on the people with whom the experience is shared. It is commented that this VR restaurant experience *cannot be fully understood by people who do not eat out much, eat sandwiches on the go, or order pizza for dinner* (U). However, it is stated that those who *eat out regularly and enjoy various culinary experiences* can fully feel the value of the experience (U). It is seen that in this dining experience, which is a shared experience, *the other people need to be fashionable, gourmet, and the conversations need to be fun* to experience that moment at the most optimal level (U).

Finally, VR restaurants also make significant contributions to tourism. People can make their holiday plans and destination preferences accordingly to experience this fascinating experience in VR restaurants. Another issue is that VR restaurants make people's *holiday experiences unforgettable* (SI). Therefore, it can be said that VR is an important tool in tourism. It is also stated that the VR restaurant experience is better than a holiday experience -*better than a weekend spent in a tropical beach resort, better than your favorite holiday destination* (U). VR can take people to completely different lands with the content it creates, the virtual environment, the feeling of being away from reality and being, and can make them experience different spatial realities. This shows that a new holiday concept, which can be explained as "Holiday in a Restaurant" has developed. It is also understood that VR can create an icon, a symbol in tourism (Yemsi-Paillissé, 2020). Like the Great Wall of China, which is a tourist icon of the region, the Ultraviolet VR restaurant is also a symbol of the region. It is interpreted that this structure also *competes with places like the Great Wall of China* (U). As a result, it is understood that virtual reality technology has radically changed the traditional restaurant experience and transformed it into a staged Gastro-Theater experience. In addition, virtual reality creates tourism attractions by turning restaurants into tourist icons.

VR restaurants, multi-sensory restaurant chefs, and new generation creative kitchens are becoming tourist attraction elements.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aims to examine customer reviews of VR restaurants on the TripAdvisor platform and reveal the role of VR in the restaurant experience. When customer reviews of VR restaurants are evaluated, it has been determined that the most complained element is the price (Lei and Law, 2015; Arsezen Otamış, 2015; Aydın, 2016; Yetgin et al., 2020; Kудay and Yazıcı Ayyıldız, 2023). However, thanks to the immersive fantasy experience offered in VR restaurants, it is understood that the monetary value paid is worth it and that VR restaurants lose their importance in preference (Albayrak, 2013). Another issue is the rare negative customer evaluations about food and beverage (poor food and beverage pairings, not leaving pairing preferences to the person, low variety of beverages, insufficient non-alcoholic beverages and excessive alcoholic pairings, some of the kors not being to the palate, being partially weaker than some kors of other Michelin-starred restaurants, explanations of the dishes being in English) (Erdem and Yay, 2017; Sökmen, 2010; Şahin, 2021). At this point, it can be said that while many customers liked the quality and taste of the food and beverages, the food quality of VR restaurants is at a high level. These negative evaluations may be due to price performance (Yetgin et al., 2020; Şahin, 2021). Another factor may be due to cultural differences and the subjectivity of taste perception. With the integration of VR and restaurants, cuisine, art, and technology serve, transforming the dining experience into a surreal, futuristic show. This impressive experience can positively affect the perception of taste. When the presentation capabilities of VR and the taste of the food are combined, the restaurant service becomes flawless. Finally, there are also individual comments about payment and refund (Erdem and Yay, 2017; Sökmen, 2010; Şahin, 2021). It can be said that this situation is due to the incorrect use of technological innovations and the problems experienced in online payment systems. In this study, negative criticisms, except for the price, are partially encountered. Customers are satisfied with the VR restaurant experience and leave the restaurant happily. In addition, the results of previous studies on customer complaints regarding restaurant atmosphere, staff behavior, cleanliness, presentation, and variety (Sökmen, 2010; Arsezen Otamış, 2015; Dalgıç et al., 2016; Erdem and Yay, 2017; Şahin, 2021) could not be reached. This can be explained by the fact that VR restaurant employees are polite, courteous, friendly, caring, and professional,

the restaurant is meticulously managed, the restaurant has a diverse avant-garde menu, and an extraordinary atmosphere with an immersive VR experience consisting of different themes. In addition, this created VR environment can positively affect restaurant preference and loyalty (Turley and Milliman, 2000; Liu and Jang, 2009; Pantelidis, 2010; Albayrak, 2013; Arsezen Otamış, 2015; Yetgin et al., 2020).

It is predicted that VR will change the traditional restaurant concept. VR restaurants transform the dining experience beyond filling the stomach into a gastronomy show. This paves the way for the emergence of a new generation dining experience, the "VR Gastro-Theater". The dining experience is no longer just a plate presentation prepared by chefs, but is evolving into a food orchestra where engineers, designers, architects, scriptwriters, illusionists, choreographers, and stage designers work together as a whole. This sensory journey, which includes gastro-art works presented under different themes, transforms the VR dining experience into an unforgettable adventure and provides an experiential gourmet experience. In this staged dining experience, customers become stars and feel very special. In addition, customers wait a long time to taste this experience. However, this wait is not a problem. Those who experience this extraordinary experience feel lucky and privileged. VR restaurants, which offer immersive and multi-sensory dining experiences, turn dining into an entertaining show. Customers who are surrounded by this experience leave the restaurant satisfied with the food and service quality and VR atmosphere created, and they also intend to come back again (Liu and Jang, 2009; Pantelidis, 2010; Yetgin et al., 2020). In addition, this theatrical food show arouses people's curiosity, while those who have experienced it before encourage people with their posts and become the advertising face of VR restaurants. VR restaurants can provide a competitive advantage by getting ahead of other restaurants with the impressive and unique experience they offer. The basis of this is that the customer is the leading actor of the experience, and a realistic VR environment is created.

VR restaurants make people feel comfortable and relaxed thanks to the holistic experience they offer and their professional staff. They also allow people to meet new people, socialize, and spend their special time with their loved ones. Thus, VR restaurants can also serve as a tool for intercultural interaction. The most optimal VR restaurant experience is associated with the characteristics of the other people with whom the experience is shared. At this point, it is possible to say that VR restaurants pave the way for the creation of a new generation customer typology.

This new VR restaurant customer typology consists of people who regularly eat at different restaurants, are open to different tastes and cuisines, are fun, trendy, stylish, elegant, and gourmet. Therefore, it is obvious that VR restaurants will create a completely different food culture with their customer typology, VR Gastro-Theater-based restaurant operation, and service approach. VR restaurants are becoming more than traditional restaurants and are going beyond the classic food experience. Food is turning into a stage performance tool.

In today's restaurant experience, the VR experience takes precedence over food and can eliminate negative situations that affect taste. The VR experience is interrupted while the food is served, and this is not welcomed by some customers. This shows how much the VR experience affects people and creates an escape experience by disconnecting them from reality. In addition, comments that this experience should be done at least once in a lifetime indicate that VR turns the classic dining experience into an extraordinary, fantastic experience. Therefore, the VR restaurant experience is a unique, unparalleled experience and makes it possible to accumulate unforgettable memories. In addition, this magnificent experience can create the hedonic pleasure of the first day even when repeated.

Finally, the fascinating experience created by VR restaurants can direct the destination preferences and holiday plans of those who want to experience this pleasure. While VR makes people's holidays unforgettable, it can even be said that it can be better than a holiday spent in a tourist resort. At this point, it seems possible for the "Holiday in a Restaurant" concept to emerge. It is estimated that people can travel and spend their holidays in restaurants through VR. In addition, VR restaurants can become a touristic icon, a symbol, like the Great Wall of China. Therefore, VR restaurants are an important tourist attraction. As a result, it is possible to say that VR brings a new understanding to the restaurant and tourism experience.

There is a need to conduct studies on VR restaurants. Studies on VR restaurants can be conducted using quantitative data. The causal links between VR and restaurant experience can be explained through different variables. Customer reviews of all restaurants using reality technologies can be examined and comparisons can be made between these technologies. In addition, in-depth interviews can be conducted with customers who have experienced VR restaurants.

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Support Information: No aid/support in kind or cash was received from any individual or institution during the preparation of this study.

Conflict of Interest: There is no conflict of interest or gain in the article.

Ethics Approval: The author(s) declare that ethical rules were followed in all preparation processes of this study. In case of detection of a contrary situation, Tourism Academic Journal has no responsibility, all responsibility belongs to the article authors.

Informed Consent Form: Since this study uses secondary data, it does not require an informed consent form.

Contribution Rate of Researchers: Since the article is single authored, all contributions belong to the author. Author = 100%

Ethics Committee Approval: This research is among the research that does not require ethics committee approval.