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A theoretical and empirical approach in the restaurant sector

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Abstract

This study is based on the literature review of the tourism industry in the world and in Albania with a main focus on the restaurant service offer. The restaurant sector has experienced different challenges in the last decades in Albania since the creation of the market economy. It is an important sector that may significantly impact the tourism industry. This article aims to offer some important theoretical and empirical evidence from the existing literature related to the marketing practices, service quality and customer satisfaction in the restaurant business. It wants to assess the marketing means used by the restaurants in Albania. Based on the review of the literature, a semi structured questionnaire was created. The questionnaire aims to offer a critical assessment of the restaurant sector from the management point of view. The study gives data and figures of the actual situation of tourism in the world and in Albania in order to offer a realistic look of the present situation. The data from the semi structured questionnaires showed that marketing is considered as a significant element in the restaurant business and important on keeping actual customers and gaining new ones but marketing procedures are not properly and empirically used and assessed by practitioners. Based on the findings, there are given some recommendations for practitioners and researchers.

Key words: *Restaurant sector, Service quality, Satisfaction*

1. Introduction

Tourism industry has been considered an important economic driver for many countries. More people are travelling abroad despite the troubles that the world has experienced during the last years. This fact has been supported by the data of

World Tourism Organization, showing higher numbers of travelers each year. The table shows these data during the last years.

TABLE1. INTERNATIONAL tourist's arrivals

	International tourists arrivals (million)		
	2010	2013	2014
World	949	1087	1133
Advanced economies	513	586	619
Emerging economies	435	501	513
Europe	488.9	566.4	581.8
Southern/Mediterranean Europe	173.3	201.0	214.9

Source: UNWTO (2015)

As an industry generating many benefits to countries, the tourism industry has been part of many developing strategies worldwide. Developed and developing nations are embracing every initiative that generates tourism and activities related to it. The emerging and developing nations have put a great emphasis on tourism as a significant mean of improving their economies. The data from World Tourism Organization reinforce these endeavors and show that this trend is expected to continue for the next years, stating that between 2010 and 2030, tourists arrivals in new and emerging destinations (+4.4% a year) are expected to increase at twice the rate of those in advanced economies (+2.2% a year) (UNWTO, 2015).The market attracted from emerging and developing economies has shown great increase in the past (from 30% in 1980 to 45% in 2014) and this tendency is expected to continue in the future years (it is expected to reach 57% by 2030, equivalent to over 1 billion international tourist arrivals) empowering these nations with the great opportunity of being at the center of the attention of many worldwide travelers (UNWTO, 2015).

Europe has experienced 3% increase in the last year in the number of international arrivals while this region's growth was driven largely by Southern and Mediterranean Europe (+7%) and Northern Europe (+6%)and it continues to be the world largest source region by generating over than half of worldwide international arrivals (UNWTO, 2015).In the Southern and Mediterranean Europe (part of which Albania is) the top major destinations continue to be countries with significant experience in tourism development like Greece (23% increase), Spain (7% increase), Portugal (12% increase), Italy (2% increase), Malta (7% increase), Croatia (6% increase) (UNWTO, 2015). The same observations show that Albania has experienced a double digit increase which is very significant

for this country despite the difference in numbers of international arrivals with other established tourism destinations. The tendency observed in the last years is that the majority of international travel takes place within travelers' own regions, with about four out of five worldwide arrivals originating from the same region. The long-term forecast of UNWTO shows that tourism in the emerging nations will grow by the double of that of advanced economies. Mentioning that Europe is the largest region of tourism source, these data show a significant market opportunity for the emerging countries within the European region and for Albania also. The outlook for the year 2016 is positive (growth of 3.5% - 4.55% in Europe) although slightly lower than the previous years (UNWTO, 2016). Not only there is great emphasis toward tourism development but this attention has shifted toward sustainable development and as by December 2015, UNGA (United Nations General Assembly) approved the adoption of 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development.

The restaurant sector is considered an important part within the tourism industry. It has the potential to attract, satisfy and maintain tourists with its variety and quality by improving the whole touristic experience. The World Forum on Gastronomy has underlined the significance of local communities and cultures in gastronomy. It stressed the importance of using gastronomy tourism as a tool for promoting destinations, their cultural and bio diversity.

2. The tourism industry in Albania

During the last decades Albania has undertaken important steps toward tourism development. From a country closed to the world, with a limited number of structures and activities dedicated to tourism it has developed to a country with many accommodation buildings and service offering organizations. These changes have been done in a short period of time and with very little or no attention from the regulatory institutions. During the last 20 years the tourism development has not been in line with the sustainable development principles and has not responded to the expectations of the population and tourists. Many problems have been faced during the last years as the absence of tourism planning, capacity deficiencies, many problems related to service offerings, poor or absent infrastructure, lack of coordination and collaboration between different levels of institutions in the central and local level and chaotic investments by private organizations (MUDT, 2015). Many informal buildings in the form of houses or businesses (hotels, restaurants etc) were built without a urban plan and has changed the look of many touristic sites.

The positive benefits related to tourism are very important to Albania. During these years, tourism development has been one of key issues of the country

strategies and politics aiming development and prosperity. Different national strategies have focused tourism development as the Tourism Strategy 2007-2013 and the National Strategy for Tourism 2014-2020. The key scope of these strategies have been offering some regulations means on the industry functioning, setting standards and regulations in the way the tourism should develop, improve the services offered by businesses, creating and improving the infrastructure of tourism through linking different activities in the industry (as accommodation, transportation, travel agencies, regulatory role of institutions etc.) and giving directions for the future development of tourism in Albania.

The data from the institutions show a steady increase on the number of tourists traveling to Albania in the last ten years. The table 1 shows the data about international arrivals in Albania during the last years.

**TABLE 2:** International arrivals for the period 2006 – 2013
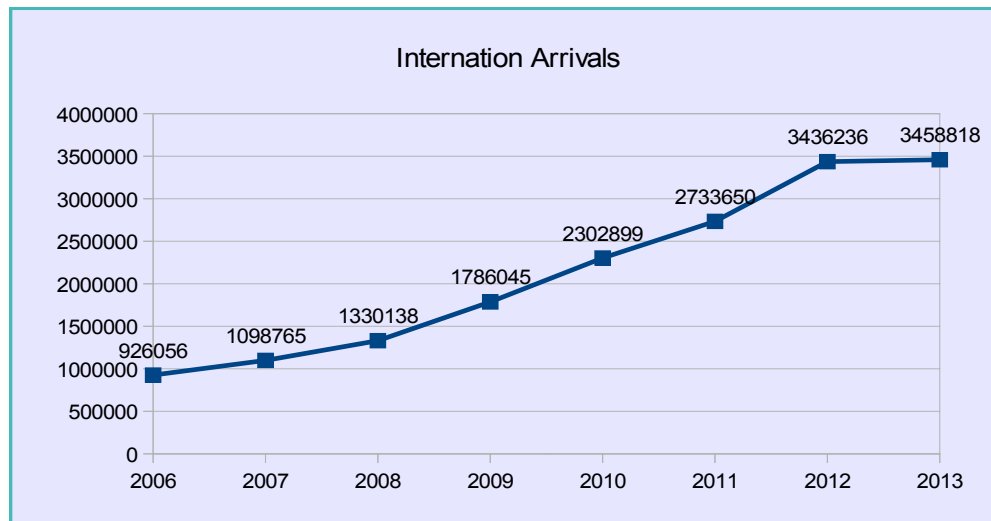
Source: Ministry of Urban Development and Tourism, 2015

The Albanian Institute of Statistics shows also the numbers of international arrivals in Albania during the year 2014 and 2015 are 3.373.000 and4.131.00 respectively (IS, 2016). Although there have been undertaken some actions (and underlined in the strategies of tourism development) for developing different kinds of tourism during all the year period in Albania, the main foreigner tourists arrival remains mainly a seasonal activity. Activities from different groups and organizations have aimed to the development of different kinds of tourism as the sun and sand tourism, adventure tourism, cultural and historic tourism etc. and these could expand the time of tourist arrivals. Despite that, the highest number of tourists is concentrated in the summer, reinforcing the sun and sand tourism

which is the main kind of tourism developed in the country. The table 2 shows this trend.

TABLE 2: Foreigner tourists in seasonal bases
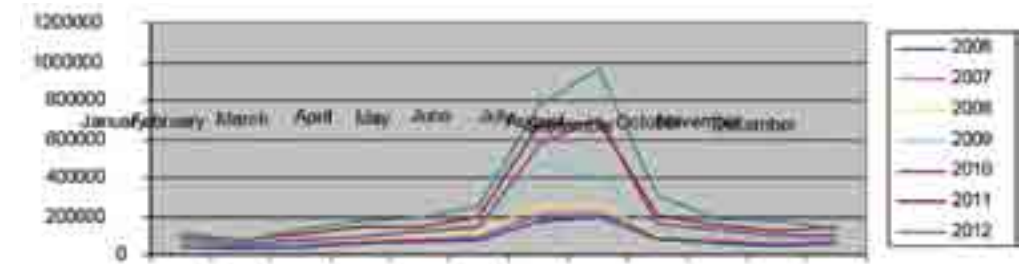
Source: Ministry of Urban Development and Tourism, 2015

This trend puts great emphasis on the activities related to the summer season and the services offered in this period. As the main demand for tourism services is concentrated in a few months, the local businesses have found difficulties to direct and concentrate their efforts in offering adequate services for tourists. The data from the institutions show that the quality of services remains very low and the overall experience of tourists is not as good. There are a set of factors related to the businesses offering the service and the whole infrastructure created and maintained by public institutions and businesses. The main problems are related to the road infrastructure, the electric system, wastewater sanitation, rubbish collection and administration in landfills, transportation systems, the problems related to informality of the properties and activities undertaken and the malfunction or absence of tourism information offices (MUDT, 2015). On the other hand, there are many problems related to the quality of the service offer. Poor quality is a phenomenon of different sectors within the industry, hotel businesses, restaurants and bars, travel agencies, transport organizations etc. and each of them have specific problems and issues to resolve.

The restaurant sector, including cafés and bars has experienced many changes and developments. It is widely widespread within the Albanian territory and offers a high variety of services. There are many different restaurants that offer traditional and international cuisine. These businesses have relatively low prices compared to the prices in the region and good food offer, remaining so a key point in the tourism offer in Albania. The restaurant sector is closely related to the hotel one as many restaurants are within the area of the hotels, a tendency known also in other countries. Despite the recent problems related with the food origins and controls and hygiene, the cuisine variety and taste of food remain as positive points for the sector. Apart from that, the other elements of the restaurants offering which is mainly related to the service delivered are still classified as poor performance and need to be developed (MUDT, 2015).

3. Literature review

The significant role of tourism industry has attracted the attention of many groups of interest. Not only the practitioners are interested on studies in the industry but also many researchers have focused their attention on tourism in order to explore the elements and benefits related to it. Early studies have been conducted in the developed countries as they were firstly focused on the tourism industry and during the last years other studies have been conducted in developing countries and regions. Many of them have aimed to explore the issues of tourism from the management point of view while others have put at the center of the study the customers or tourists and their perceptions. There are studies that have assessed different factors in the hotel sector (Kayaman and Arasli (2007), tour operators and travel agencies (Johns et al., 2004), restaurant sector (Chang et al., 2010), travel sector (Lai and Chen, 2011; Nadiri et al., 2008) and destinations (Chen and Tsai, 2007; Chi, 2012). These studies have aimed to explore the quality of the service, customer satisfaction, tourists' destination, intentions to repurchase, brand equity and other relevant factors.

The restaurant sector can create a positive experience for the tourists. The food and gastronomy experience can be an important element to attract tourists in a region. In different countries, institutions and organizations have establishes classification of restaurants based on the type of service they deliver but also classifications based on the performance of significant criteria. So, in different countries there are distinctions between businesses in the sector as quick-service restaurants, fast-casual restaurants, midscale restaurants and other types (Barrows et al., 2012). The spread of restaurants is also related to the adaption of these businesses within other activities as hotels, retail stores and shopping malls. They may also be organized as chain systems, franchise and independent ones. Despite the type of the offer to the customer, important issues remain the quality of food delivered, the quality of the service, the atmosphere and image, customer satisfaction and their impact on business profitability.

Service quality has been recognized as an important indicator in the tourism industry. It is considered a significant element of the restaurant sector also (Kim et al., 2009). The relationships of quality of the services offered; food and physical environment on several significant variables of marketing and consumer behavior, were at the center of the study of Ruy et al. and the authors found that these elements of restaurant quality were important determinants of restaurant image, perceived value, customer satisfaction and behavioral intention to frequent the same restaurant (Ruy et al., 2012). These elements are crucial to the performance of the restaurants and they can signal to management the perceptions of customers about their offering. Quality assessment becomes important because previous studies in the service quality-profit chain (known as the "Return on Quality" framework) proposed by Rust et al. (1995), considered service quality as very important to customer behaviors and organization financial profitability. Their study proved that the quality of the service delivered to customers has a significant influence on the business revenues, the market share and the organization profitability as it dictates high levels of customer retention and loyalty and also new customers'attraction.So, it becomes fundamental to explore the customers' perceptions of service quality.

When assessing quality an important factor is determining its dimensions so the key aspects of this element in a specific sector. The SERVQUAl model (Parasuraman et al., 1988) has been a significant instrument in assessing service quality in the restaurant industry. The three dimensional model of Brady and Cronin (2001) was based on the model of Gronroos (1984) and views quality as composed of interaction quality, physical environment quality and outcome quality. Stevens et al. (1995), based on the previous models proposed the DINESERV instrument. This instrument is specifically adopted for the restaurant industry and contains three dimensions named tangibles (all the physical elements that surround the customer), empathy (feeling created and instilled by the restaurant and its personnel) and reliability (timely, quickly and dependably service). It is used as a quality assessment model by several studies in the restaurant sector (e.g. Chang, et al., 2010; Ladhari et al., 2008). Other studies (Gazzoli et al., 2010) have focused on the antecedents of quality in the restaurant sector and have showed that empowerment of employees can create job satisfaction and their job satisfaction can be determinant in delivering high service quality to restaurant customers. These results present important issues for managers, owners and human resources specialists operating in the sector.

Another key element in the dining experience is the customer satisfaction. Customers who are highly satisfied with the service received in the restaurant have shown to have greater intentions to repurchase and recommend the restaurant to other people. In contrast, dissatisfied customers are more likely to switch, complain or spread negative word-of-mouth (Oliver, 1996). Different studies have found that satisfaction with the restaurant can positively influence post purchase intentions (Kivelaet al.,1999; Soderlund and Ohman, 2005), so the satisfied customers are more likely to re-frequent the restaurant again in the future. Also, Han and Ryu (2009), in upscale restaurant sector, found that improving customer satisfaction levels is essential to increasing revisit and recommendation intentions. These desired outcomes are positively related to customer loyalty and with new customers visiting the restaurant. These studies have assessed customer satisfaction by using single items such as measuring overall satisfaction or a set of different ones by measuring satisfaction with specific elements of the restaurant offer.

The study of Chow et al. (2010) aimed at studying the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction and repeat patronage in the China restaurant sector. They suggested that customer satisfaction and repeat patronage are important indicators of restaurant performance. They found that interactive quality and physical environment quality were important predictors of service quality and the high level of service quality was associated with customer satisfaction and frequent patronage. In the same way, the study of Chang et al. (2010) found that service quality positively influences customer satisfaction in the restaurant sector and customer satisfaction directly influences attitudinal and behavioral customer loyalty.

4. The study, data analyses and results

The literature review and the data presented above showed that tourism industry has the potential of improving ones country economic situation. This is related to the employment it creates, the income it generates from international arrivals and in the positive effects it creates between countries. In the light of these advantages it is essential to continually assess Albanian touristic offer and conduct empirical studies to gain knowledge of the situation. Despite the advantages generated by the industry and the significance of it to the Albanian economy, the studies that explore empirically the different sectors of tourism are just a few and many of them do not address critical variables of tourism offer.

This study aims to give a first look at the restaurant sector in Albania. It offers some information from the restaurants managers' point of view about the different elements of their service offer. It wants to understand at what extent the businesses in the sector deal with marketing practices and the means used by them to deliver high service quality and customer satisfaction. First, it was built a self-administered questionnaire. Based on the literature review, the items aimed to gain information of different decisions and procedures taken that lead to high service quality, customer satisfaction which than lead to repurchase intention.

The questionnaire consisted of 9 items; three of them measuring the demographic variables of the restaurants and the other items assessing marketing tactics used by restaurants, procedures about employees, attention to tangible aspects, databases and records taken about customers, assessment of service quality and customer satisfaction from the customers point of view. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the agreement or disagreement of the respondents with the questions and for each question there was the necessary space for giving more detailed information. The semi structured questionnaires were distributed by e-mail to the addresses of the restaurants or their managers. The restaurants were assured about the anonymous of the questionnaires. There were distributed 100 questionnaires out of which 45 completed questionnaires were returned while 20 addresses were not valid. The demographic variables of the respondent sample are presented in the table below.

TABLE 3: Demographic variables of restaurants

| Experience in business	Experience in business	Nr. of employees	Nr. of employees	Nr. of tables	Nr. of tables
1-5 years	20 or 44%	1-5	33 or 73%	1-10	5 or 11%
6-10 years	12 or 27%	6-10	11 or 25%	11-20	13 or 29%
11-15 years	8 or 18%	11-15	1 or 2%	21-30	17 or 38%
>16 years	5 or 11%	>16	0	>31	10 or 22%
total	45 or 100%		45 or 100%		45 or 100%

The responses of managers/proprietors about the items in the questionnaire are presented in the tables below and are explained accordingly.

**TABLE 4:** The use of marketing instruments from the restaurants
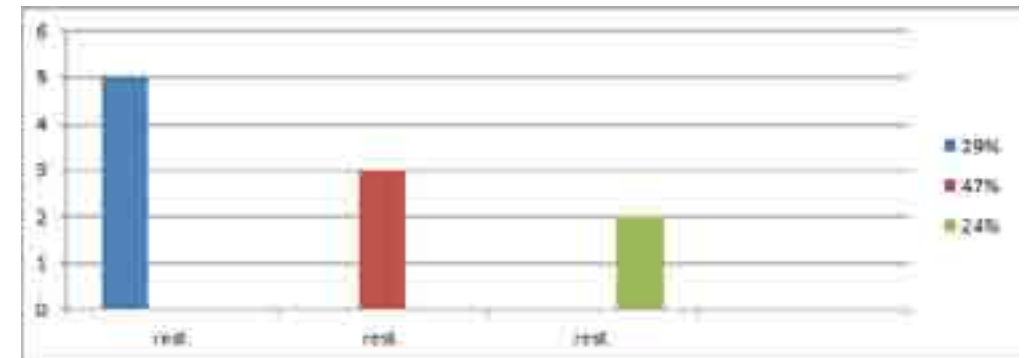
The data from the questionnaires show that 29% of the restaurants use marketing means to attract customers and attain attention toward their restaurant. They state that use radio advertising, are present at the trip advisors pages on internet and usually use leaflets particularly when they organize special events. An important mean of attracting customers is also the PR created by their owners or managers. They state to have an extended social network and this helps the restaurants in attracting customers. The actual customers, especially the repeated ones, serve also as a source of new ones as they usually bring other people with them when are pleased with the restaurant offer.

**TABLE 5:** The existence of the procedures for the employees
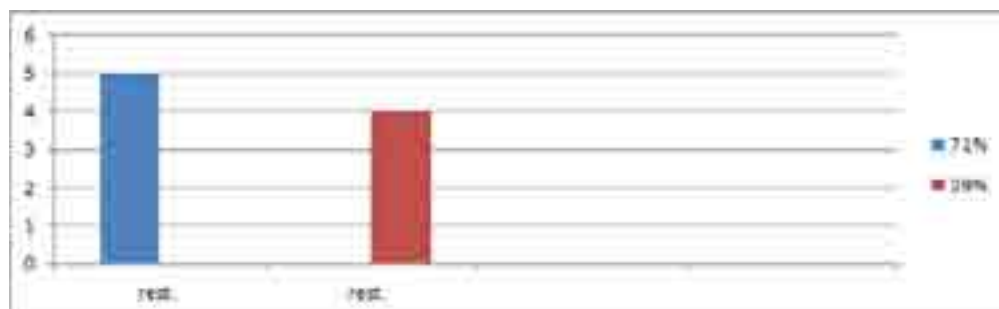
All of the restaurants parts of the study declare to have procedures about employees, although the majority of them state to don't have written or formal ones. Generally, they follow the basic steps of employee recruitment and selection while little is done about employee training, evaluation and compensation schemes. When there is shortage of employees they use announces in the restaurant ambience and rarely on the media. New employees are also recruited through their social groups of people and with the help of other employees. The manager checks for prior experiences, takes an interview with the recruit and after that observes the new employee during the first days. Based on some indicators (which are not formal or written) as time and accuracy of service deliver, the manager or owner decides about the employment of the recruit. Almost all the managers or owners who have responded to the questionnaires state that it is difficult to find the right employees especially when it is the case of the cuisine chief or a good waiter. Some of them have informal relationships with people working in the professional schools and have used these linkages to find trained people. This experience has yielded in good performance. Many of the respondents list the high turnover of the staff as a phenomenon that negatively impact to their business. In the past, they have had many troubles related to that and they are aware of the negative effect it may have transmitted to customers.

TABLE 6: The significance of the physical aspects of the restaurant
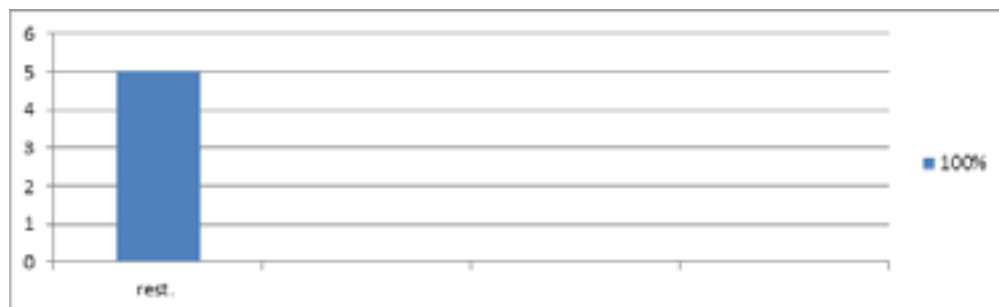
The physical aspect of the restaurant or tangibles is a very important element in the restaurant business. As the table shows, all of the restaurants have declared the maximum consideration toward it. The owners and managers consider it as a key element of their entire business. They relate this not only to the considerable sum of money invested in the building and its furnishing but also as a significant element that has a great impact on customers' frequentation of the restaurant. More than ten of them have used designers to design their restaurants and they think that this service has helped in attracting more customers. Meanwhile, the majority of the restaurants have been helped from their friends and relatives in restaurant's design. The responses about the physical elements are straightly related to the building and furniture without giving information about the cleanliness, order or atmosphere of the restaurant.

TABLE 7: Records taken about customers
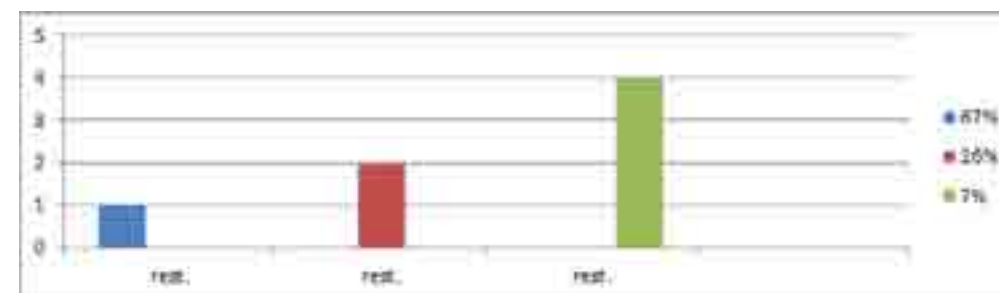
As the tables above show, the majority of the restaurants do not take data about customers. The restaurants that have rated this indicator at 1 or 2 have based their ratings on the informal records about customers, so in the recognition of the repeated customers and their preferences. This recognition is closely related to employee turnover as it depends on the knowledge and relationship between the customers and the employees who serve them. No one of the restaurants in the sample had formal registration or databases where keeping records about their customers. In this way the main records the restaurants have are based on employees who have been for a long time working in the restaurant and knowing the frequency and preferences of loyal customers or on the knowledge of the managers or owners who spend most of the time in the business.

TABLE 8: Assessment of customers' service quality and satisfaction

formal but based on their memory) of the customers who use tore frequent the restaurant. They state that as there are customers who continue to come back, they are satisfied with the quality of the food and service offered. Many of the answers relate the service quality with the fresh food used in the restaurants and with the tasty recipes they offer. They also state to offer good quality and customers' satisfaction as they offer different cuisines from the traditional one to the different international recipes (especially the restaurants whose chefs have international experiences). One way of increasing customer satisfaction is by offering special discounts or by preparing special recipes for repeated customers.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The tourism industry is considered as a mean of economic development for every country and also for Albania. It has a main contribution in generating more incomes and on improving rates of employment. Tourism industry in Albania is mainly developed in the last 25 years. Albania has declared to rely in the tourism industry as an important mean of improving its economy. In the light of that, it becomes important to conduct studies which explore different sectors of this industry not only to understand how is has developed but also to help practitioners improve their performance.

The restaurant sector, within the tourism industry, is an important part of the entire tourism offer in Albania. This study aimed to offer significant information about the marketing practices used by restaurants from the management point of view. It showed that restaurants use some informal instruments to offer good service but they have not established adequate and formal marketing procedures. The restaurants rely less on advertising and promotional materials and activities while are more dependent on their managers and owners social networks on attracting new customers and attaining the actual ones.

As the number of these businesses has increased and competition has grown faster, it has become imperative for them to use marketing means and continually assess the way their service is perceived by customers. Businesses in the restaurant sector should reinforce their attention toward healthy and high quality food as a key ingredient of their offer and continually assess their employees' performance. They should be engaged on hiring the right people who will be the one to create and maintain valuable relationships with customers though delivering high quality and creating satisfaction. The restaurants should stress employee training and evaluation schemes in order to slow the employee turnover and continually deal with the high competition. The perceptions of management and staff only are not a good indicator of service performance. The most important assessment would be the one from the customer point of view. So, restaurant businesses should pay attention to customers and the way they perceive the whole experience by continually asking them about their perceptions.

On the other hand, there is need for studies to explore different elements in the restaurant sector. Researchers in collaboration with practitioners should conduct empirical research and assess customers' perceptions about the variables that impact customer experience as service quality and customer satisfaction. Significant factors of the sector as the quality of food, the physical appearance, the atmosphere, employee behavior and kindness, trust and relationships created with customers, intentions to repurchase should be at the focus of future studies. There for, it could be created more insights in the restaurant sector and directions can be given to practitioners for improving their performance and increasing their competitiveness. In this way, this sector could positively contribute to the development of the tourism industry in Albania.

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Strategies for handling supply chain disruptions. A cross comparative case study approach

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Abstract

Interest in supply chain disruptions increased after 2001, due to the devastating effects of the recent disruptive event and due to the increasing vulnerability of the supply chains. Although research interest on this topic has been increasing, no such research has been done in Albania. Regarding strategies for handling supply chain disruptions exist different views in the literature, but nearly no one has considered why some companies were successful in handling the supply chain disruptions and some were not. To fill this existing gap, the actual research will attempt to give an answer to the question "Why the severity of the same supply chain disruption is different for companies in the same industry?" The methodology used was comparative case studies, respectively Dell, Nokia, Daimler, Meggle Albania and Fabjus case study. The analysis and comparison of the case studies concluded that the best strategy for handling supply chain disruptions is a combination of resilience and implementation of robust strategies. This research is important for managers as it will provide a specific framework for handling the disruptions. Managers should be aware that the severity of a disruption depends on the company background and organizational culture. These factors can increase the company resilience. Also, they determine the success in the execution of the strategies for managing supply chain disruptions.

Keywords: Supply chain disruptions, Severity, Robust strategies, Organizational culture, Company's background