



## TO STUDY THE LACUNAE IN GUEST EXPECTATIONS AND MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE ON BUFFETS OFFERED BY SELECT HOTEL'S RESTAURANTS IN PUNE.

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### Abstract

It has been observed during the field research that there could be lacunae in the buffet lunch provided by the hotel and in guest expectations. This research work is an attempt to determine and to bridge the gap between the guests' expectations and limitations on the organizations, and still to ensure profitability in hotels and also maintaining higher guest satisfaction levels.

In this competitive market a guest has innumerable choices to choose from a la cart menu cards to elaborate buffets. Restaurants must provide buffet options in lieu with recent trends as well as guest expectations. Once the restaurant understands the guest needs, the management can focus in meeting those expectations Each guest has different expectations about buffet services, thus it is important to know their impressions and help management overcome the gap between guest expectation and performance.

The results of this research work shows that chefs, Food and Beverage Managers and Guests perceptions are concurrent at few points and differ on some. Chef's point of view suggests that guests are more quantity conscious and also more emphasis is to be given on appetizers and beverages served along with the meal. New products offered on the buffet would attract more and more guests. From Food and Beverage Manager's point of view guests are very cost conscious and expect a complete meal experience which include various other factors such as family area, multiple options in food selection and even some entertainment. From guest's point of view buffet should be much more than food-it should be an entire meal experience. Good taste, food maintained at right temperature, a warm and welcoming staff and a decent ambience are few of the important aspects.

**Key Words:** Buffet, Food And Beverage Service, Quality and Expectations, Meal Experience.

### Introduction

The buffet was popularized in 18<sup>th</sup> century France and quickly spread throughout Europe. The word first applied simply to the piece of furniture, also called a sideboard that held the food, but later grew to include the food itself. The practicality of buffet service contributed to its popularity even among the wealthy, who boasted a household of servants. Changing ideas about personal privacy also made the buffet concept popular, particularly at breakfast time.

The concept eventually spread where household staffs were generally limited in number. By serving food buffet-style, a hostess could entertain many more guests with the same number of staff members. It has been an experience that buffets are practical, fun and filling, offering an excellent alternative to traditional sit-down dining.

According to a report published by Grant Thornton in 'Unlocking the potential in the food and beverage services sector, 2015', the combined F&B service market in India which includes cafes, casual restaurants, quick service restaurants (QSR) and fine dine restaurants is worth INR 204,438 crore, growing at compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 23-24% and is expected to touch INR 380,000 crore by 2017. Nowadays, the trend of dining in restaurants has become quite prominent. Frequent restaurant visits are not only the reflection of satisfying hedonistic needs, but also the result of increasing number of single-person households as well as adjustment to the business hours. In an increasingly competitive environment, restaurants must be focused on guests using marketing concepts that identify their needs thus leading to their satisfaction and increased retention.

In order to be successful in the market it is not sufficient to attract new customers. Managers must concentrate on retaining existing customers implementing effective policies of customer satisfaction and loyalty. In hotel industry customer satisfaction is largely hooked upon quality of service. A management approach focused on customer satisfaction can improve customer loyalty, thus increasing the positive image. Hence, exploring the importance for customers of restaurant attributes in buffet selection is indispensable. Neglecting to pay attention to those attributes considered most important by guests, may lead to negative evaluation of the restaurant, thus restricting the chance of repeat patronage.



Identifying expectations is fundamental component which produce higher levels of guest satisfaction, which in turn leads to higher revenue from sales. Food and beverage quality, the quality of service delivery, physical environment and price fairness are analyzed as a key component of a good buffet restaurant experience.

### Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is primarily based on the buffets offered by Three Star hotel's restaurants situated in city Pune who offer buffet for lunch and some of them even for dinner. Each guest has different expectations about buffet services, thus it is important to know their impressions and help management overcome the gap between guest expectation and performance.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To study and analyze the gap between the guest expectations and products offered on buffets.
2. To analyze the factors that will contribute higher satisfaction levels of the guests in buffet service offered by a restaurant in a hotel through survey.
3. To devise a system which will ensure higher profitability and satisfaction levels for the select hotels.

Nowadays, the trend of dining in restaurants has become quite prominent. Frequent restaurant visits are not only the reflection of satisfying hedonistic needs, but also the result of increasing number of single-person households as well as adjustment to the business hours. In an increasingly competitive environment, restaurants must be focused on guests using marketing concepts that identify their needs thus leading to their satisfaction and increased retention. Identifying expectations is fundamental component which produce higher levels of guest satisfaction, which in turn lead to higher sales revenue. Food and beverage quality, the quality of service delivery, physical environment and price fairness are analyzed as a key component of a good buffet restaurant experience. The results could be helpful tool for restaurant managers to invest their resources more efficiently, making changes to crucial quality attributes that elicit the guests' satisfaction level.

1. Fun time.
2. Nice meal out. The desire is to enjoy the satisfaction or enjoyment of eating out, being served, and getting good food, lots of it, at a reasonable price.
3. Craving. This refers to a desire for particular type of food; seeing or smelling this type of food can set off the craving.
4. Making sure that everyone is getting something to eat. This motivation comes from the hectic pace of everyday life, attempting to balance a variety of work and family schedules.
5. A lot of options to choose from.
6. Getting unlimited varieties at reasonable prices.

No matter how exotic or familiar the cuisine today's consumer desires a good overall restaurant experience. Attentive service, friendly, flavorful food, and a good atmosphere is critical for the success of a restaurant.

### Statement of Hypothesis

H<sub>0</sub>:Guests are satisfied with the present buffets being offered by select hotels.

H<sub>A</sub>:Guests are not entirely satisfied with the buffets being offered by select hotels.

### Research Methodology

#### Primary Data

- To collect feedback from the chefs of select restaurants offering buffets.
- To collect information from various guests who choose buffet over a la carte food.
- To collect information about managers perceptions about Food and Beverage sales through buffet.
- Research Design: Exploratory
  - Research Method – Survey
  - Research Instrument – Questionnaire
  - Sample Size –
- The Universe contains of approved 06 Three star hotels and 02 Four Star hotels as per the registration list published by the ITDC.
- The total number of units considered as sample size will be 03 hotels.
  - Sample Type – Purposive Sampling
  - Total 10 guests from each of the outlets: - 30 Guests.
  - 1 Chef/ Manager from each of the outlets:- 03 Chefs

**Total Samples: - 75**



**Secondary Data**

- Hospitality Journals and Magazines
- Research Papers
- Relevant e-journals
- Relevant Websites.

**Literature Review**

**Milley. A (2004) Restaurant Buffet:** All about Buffet Catering discusses the birth and evolution of word buffet and its progress over the period. The buffet was popularized in 18<sup>th</sup> century in France and quickly spread throughout Europe. The practicality of buffet service contributed to its popularity even among the wealthy, who boasted a house full of servants. Changing times and shortage of staff eventually contributed to the popularity of buffet styled food service.

In another reference **Dittmer and Griffin (1997) – ‘Buffet’** stated the definition as follow: A buffet is a type of service characterized by a long table or counter on which a selection of varied foods are attractively displayed on platters, in bowls, and in other suitable vessels. Plates are picked up by the guests and the desired quantity of the selection is helped directly from the buffet. The cutlery may be arranged on the tables. A set price is usually charged for each person, regardless of particular foods or quantities selected. This encourage diners to take smaller portions and revisit the buffet as desired.

According to **Lillicrap. D and Cousins’ (2008) Food and Beverage Service**, which is one of most popular book for the students of hospitality industry discusses about the Food and Beverage Service in detail and buffets in particular as:

- Visual presentation of the foods in the dining room for customers to select
- May include various levels of assistance from staff to fill plates, assist with selections, promote adequate nutrition and/or carry food plates or trays to the table for customers.
- May include choices of one or more meal components (appetizer, soup, salad, entrée, vegetables, and/or dessert)
- May include a “cooked-to-order” meal component as a choice (e.g. Breakfast eggs, grilled sandwich, stir-fry or toast )
- Buffet service may be used for a single meal per week (e.g. Sunday Brunch) or one meal per day, or several meals per week.

A published survey by **Wei-Chia Tung (2003) A CUSTOMER PERCEPTION AND SATISFACTION SURVEY FOR A CHINESE BUFFET** London: Phoenix discusses guest’s satisfaction is a result of what guests think will happen (expectations), interacting with what guests think did happen (perceptions). If the product’s performance falls short of the guest’s expectations, the guest is dissatisfied. If performance matches expectations, the guest is satisfied. If performance exceeds expectations, the guest is delighted. Smart food service operators aim to delight customer by delivering service and value more than they promise **Cardozo, (1965) An experimental study of customer effort, expectation and satisfaction. (Journal of Marketing Research)**

<b>Food Quality</b>	Tastiness of Food, Item Variety, Nutrition, Food Served at the right temperature, Healthy Options, Comfort Food, Freshness.
<b>Service Quality</b>	Employees willingness to help, Knowledge to answer questions, Interactions with the Chef, considerations of quest’s interests, appearance, friendly
<b>Physical Environment</b>	Décor, Ambience, Aesthetics, Lighting, Layout, Buffet Equipments
<b>Price Fairness</b>	Good value for money, reasonable price, overall value.

Each guest has different expectations about buffet services, thus it is important to know their impressions and help management overcome the gap between guest expectation and performance.

Although the search for new locations to experience a new buffet experience is certainly the most important factor for many guests there is a good portion of guests that chose to repeat their restaurants for a variety of reasons

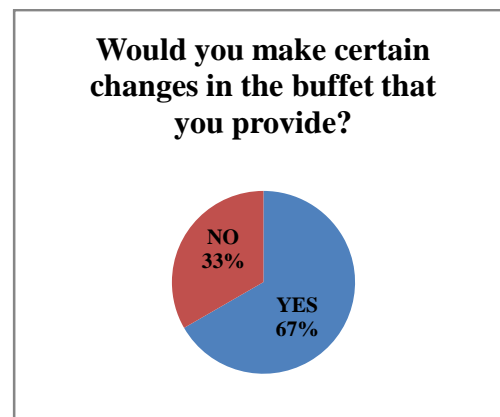
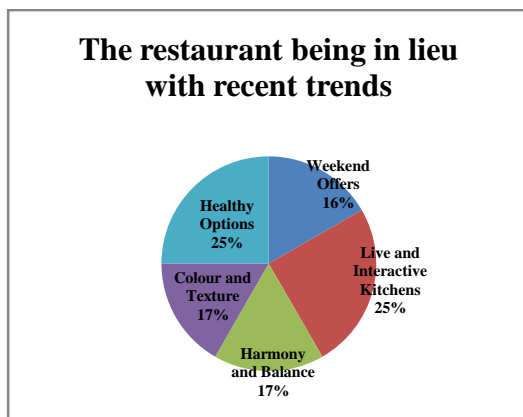
1. The desire to reduce the risk of making a mistake when choosing an alternative restaurant; as a certain amount of money is being spent.
2. The chance to experience the same buffet choices (tried and tested) ;
3. The emotional affection to a specific place;
4. The possibility to explore the place better ;
5. The desire to show the place to other people.

According to Churchill (1982) An Investigation into the Determinants of Customer Satisfaction in Restaurants (Journal of Marketing Research) Study shows customers who pay more at a restaurant buffet perceive the food as tastier than the same food offered at a lower price, shedding new light on the psychology of guests.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

#### From Chefs Point of View:-

- **Their perception of a customer's requirements of a buffet is as follows**
  - Buffet is all about the quality and quantity of food for a customer. A lot of variety to be offered is of primary importance which is of good quality.
  - A chef needs to showcase something new every week that will wow a guest at every step and make them come back looking for more. Innovation is the key for a wonderful buffet meal experience.
  - A buffet should be an overall experience for a customer with an equal mix of entertainment, and alert and warm service personals who provide exemplary service while being attentive to customer needs.
  - Some chefs also believe that major emphasis should be given to appetizers and drinks, which will be in lieu with buffet trends.
- **The recent trends being observed for a successful buffet are as follows**



Source: Fieldwork

The above Pie chart shows the answers of whether chefs would like to make certain changes in the buffet provided in their outlets. YES: 67%, NO: 33%

- **Certain chefs felt that the buffet that they provide are of good quality and in accordance with the recent trends, hence no changes were required.**

However, certain changes that Chefs wanted to apply were:-

- Regular changes to be made in the buffet in terms of the menu so that the guests keep coming back for more ensuring loyalty
- They would also like to offer healthier variety of products that are diabetic friendly or allergens free.

#### Chefs listed the following ways for managing cost constraints while making buffet preparations:-

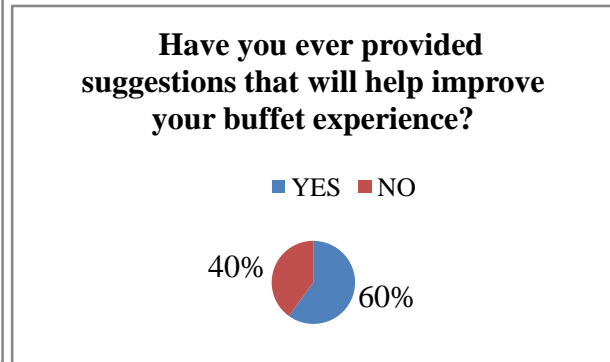
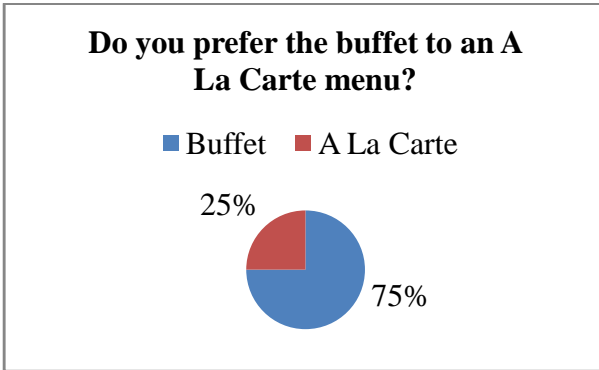
- Proper forecasting of guests is the most important when managing costs.
- Major focus should be given to menu planning with the available items at hand.
- Variation in the products being offered so that cost can be maintained
- Use of seasonal ingredients.

All the above points help in contributing to waste management and pilferage check.

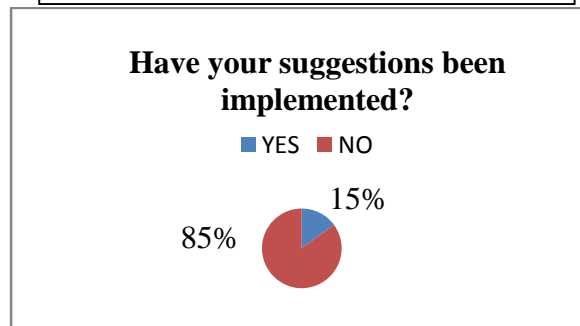
#### • The marketing strategies used by the organization to draw customer attention are as follows:-

- The use of social media like Facebook and Instagram to advertise the various offers.
- Highlighting special features offered by the organization in the print advertisements
- Ex:- Children play area and fun activities during the Sunday Bruch at Hyatt Regency Pune.
- Innovation and making unique items to draw customer attention
- Holding various food festivals
- Offering unique discounts and offers by the means of latest technology. Ex:- Happy Hours, Mobile App downloading, etc.

**From Guest's Point of View**



Source: Fieldwork



Source: Fieldwork

According to the inferences drawn from the feedback from the selective respondents, the ranking of "SERVICE QUALITY" expectations are as follows:-

- Crucial: Employees Willingness to Help**
- Very Important: Considerations of the Guests Interests**
- Important: Prompt Service**
- Not So Important: Knowledge to Answer Questions**
- Least Important: Interactions with the Chef/Manager**

According to the inferences drawn from the feedback from the selective respondents, the ranking of "INFRASTRUCTURE" expectations are as follows:-

- Crucial: Ambience**
- Very Important: Decor**
- Important: Layout**
- Not So Important: Lighting**
- Least Important: Buffet Equipments**

According to the inferences drawn from the feedback from the selective respondents, the ranking of "FOOD QUALITY" expectations are as follows:-

- Crucial: Tastiness of Food**
- Very Important: Item Variety**
- Important: Nutrition**
- Not So Important: Freshness**
- Least Important: Food Served at the Right Temperature**

According to the inferences drawn from the feedback from the selective respondents, the ranking of "PRICE FAIRNESS" expectations are as follows:-



**Crucial: Good Value for Money**  
**Very Important: Reasonable Price**  
**Important: Item Variety**  
**Not So Important: Overall Value**  
**Least Important: Offers**

### Findings and Conclusion

#### Finding 1:-

- Providing **tasty food** in a buffet is crucial to both the management and the guests when one thinks of the food provided in the buffet.
  - While guests feel that **Item Variety** is very important in a buffet, the management perception is that **Nutrition** in the products should be their prime focus.
  - The management feels that **Freshness** should be ranked in the third position, where as a guest is of the opinion that **providing healthy and nutritious food** is important.
  - The management perception is that, a guest would not mind having a lot of **Item Variety**, or that he wouldn't mind not getting his food at the **right temperature**: whereas a guest feels that **Freshness** of a product is something that he can adjust with.
  - Both the parties have ranked **Food Served at the Right Temperature** as least important.
- **Hence one can draw the following conclusions as:-**
- The Management has rightly identified its prime focus in the "Food Quality" as Tastiness in Food. The primary goal of the organization is making lip smacking dishes for the guests to taste.
  - However, there is a gap between what the guests expect and what the management perceives in the next rankings "Very Important" and "Important". The guest looks for Item Variety and Healthy and Nutritious food to choose from, while the management isn't stressing on Item Variety in the buffet, as they feel that whatever number of products they provide on the buffet should be nutritious and should be made with fresh ingredients.

#### Finding 2

- The management as well as the guests feels that "**Employees Willingness to Help**" is **crucial** in getting an excellent service in an organization.
  - In the second ranking however, the management has identified that "**Knowledge to answer questions**" is very important where as the guests feel that management should stress more on "**Considerations of a guest's interest.**"
  - "**Prompt Service**" is important to both the management as well as the guest.
  - The gap identifies yet again is where the guests feel that "**Knowledge to Answer Questions**" isn't as important, whereas the management feels that they have correctly identifies what Guests need and hence do not give as much as importance to Guest's Interest.
  - Lastly both the organization as well as the guests feels that "**Interactions with the Manager/Chef**" isn't as important as the other points to provide an excellent service experience.
- **Hence one can draw the following conclusions as:-**
- The first step of providing excellent service, that is identified correctly by both the parties as "**Crucial**" is "**Employees Willingness to Help**". A guest may want certain guidance while he is enjoying the buffet and if there isn't any willingness from the Employee's side, the guest may never return to the said organization.
  - However, a guest feels that Management has to make certain considerations towards the guest's interest. They do not think that "**Knowledge to answer questions**" is as important. Hence the management should now focus on understanding what a guest wants or does not prefer in a buffet and strive to fulfill their demands.

#### Finding 3

- Providing the perfect "**Ambience**" is of crucial importance to the management. The guests too feel that, they look at the ambience provided by an organization when they think of "**Infrastructure**"
- The "**Décor**" of an outlet also plays a very important role in providing a complete buffet experience.
- Guests however feel that the "**Lighting**" provided does not an important role as much as the '**Layout**' of the buffet plays. While the organization seems to think vice versa.
- Both the parties give least importance to "**Buffet Equipments**" provided.

• Hence one can draw the following conclusions as

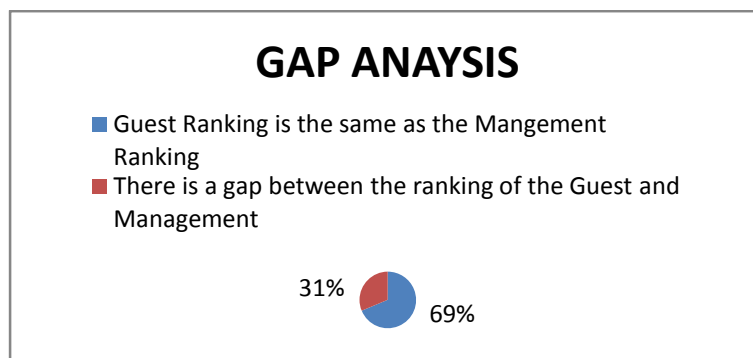
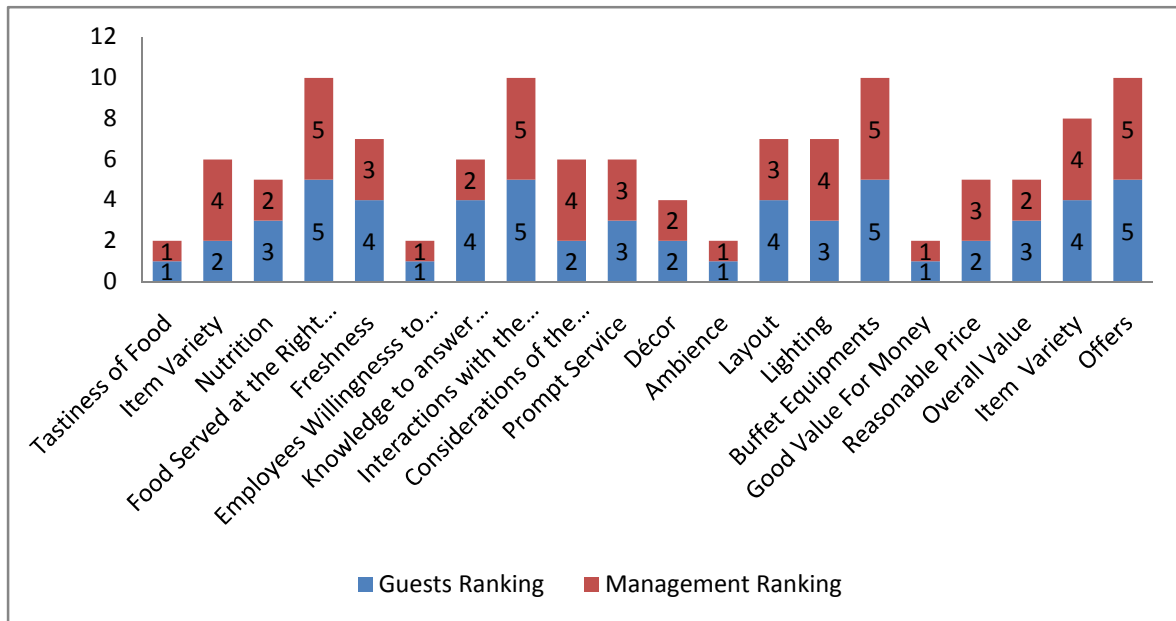
- As the Infrastructure of an organization is planned very carefully by skilled personnel's, they know how the "Lighting" of an outlet plays a psychological role in the food selected by their patrons. Hence if though there is a slight gap in this ranking of "Important" to a guest's ranking of "Layout" it isn't a huge gap as such.
- Both the parties have correctly identified the other rankings and there isn't any gap between the guests expectations and Management perception of an important factor such as the "Infrastructure"

**Finding 4**

- The guests feel that a buffet providing **Good Value for Money** is very crucial. This expectation has been rightly identified by the Management. The management strives to provide buffet with items and varieties that provide "Good Value for Money"
- A guest however expects the buffets to be reasonably priced, where as the management thinks that a buffet that provides an "Overall Value" should be very important. "Overall Value" takes into consideration the Service Quality, Infrastructure etc. The guest however only wants the focus to be on the buffet, wherein he has ample choice to choose from while at the same time it being "Reasonably Priced"
- "Item Variety" is of importance to both the guests as well as the management. A guest should have the freedom to choose from a variety of choices.
- Least Important to both are "Offers" as a guest does not pay as much as heed to offers provided in buffets.

**Finding 5**

After comparing all the parameters in a buffet which was ranked by the management and guests, we can draw the following conclusions





1. The above finding shows **only 31% of gap** between the parameters ranked by the guests and the management.
2. This proves the hypothesis statement **“Guests are satisfied with the present buffets being offered by select hotels.”**
3. **69%** shows a majority of understanding between what the guests expect and what the management perceives, however to reach optimum customer satisfaction this percentage must be raised to a maximum of **85%**.
4. Because an organization must try to exceed guest expectations to keep them highly satisfied and ensure that they become loyal customers.

### Suggestions

1. Make some live stations in an unique style, or even a specialty. It can even be your USP.
2. Offer items to the theme set by the outlet, but try to offer unique items in the menu, which makes a guests come back for more.
3. Because guest satisfaction is strongly tied to perception of the meal space, carefully plan your buffet design and food presentation. A good buffet should be placed in such a way that even if the outlet is crowded, the movement should be easy for the guests to admire the presentations and look at the options in a calm manner.
4. Emphasize freshness and consistent quality, but don't forget variety. Guests like some surprises on the menu. They like to be spoiled for choice. This also makes guests feel that there is good value for money from the buffet they have chosen.
5. Keep the presentations fresh by serving food in small containers and replenishing it often.
6. A well informed, professional, cheerful staff makes all the difference in a guest's experience. Be sure servers are well informed about ingredients so that they can answer questions for guests.
7. Plan your traffic flow so it's comfortable and harmonious. Avoid obstacles and bottlenecks.
8. Buffets of today should be giving more stress on items such as appetizers and soups. Many guests nowadays prefer having the Soups, Starters and Desserts, instead of choosing from so many main courses.
9. Dishes on the buffet need to explained in a simple manner, so that everyone can understand.
10. Try to implement certain suggestions offered by the guests and inform the same to them, as a majority of them feel that feedback offered goes unheard.
11. Control costs and production carefully to curtail waste and ensure a profit.

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