ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH AND CONTENT ANALYSE IN DETERMINING SMALL BUSINESSES' AND OWNER MANAGERS' PERFORMANCE PERCEPTION: FETHIYE F&B FIRMS FOCUS

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ABSTRACT

This research is aiming to measure the small food and beverages businesses such as eating houses, restaurants, cafes, and bars from their owner-managers' perception. In the research, data collecting tools of interview, observation and document review; and qualitative analysis technique have been used. As a result, it is seen that the owner-managers of small businesses perceive external dynamics negatively; and internal dynamics and performances positively.

Keywords: Food and Beverage Firms, Ethnographic Research, Owner-Managers, Performance, Fethiye

JEL-Classification: L83

Küçük İşletmeler ve Sahip Yöneticilerinin Performans Algısını Belirlemeye Yönelik Etnografik Araştırma ve İçerik Analizi: Fethiye Yiyecek İçecek İşletmeleri Örneği

ÖZET

Bu çalışma lokanta, restoran, kafe, bar vb. taksonomide yer alan küçük ölçekli yiyecek içecek işletmelerinin performansını sahiplerinin algısından ölçmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmada görüşme, gözlem ve doküman inceleme veri toplama araçlarıyla nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Sonuçta küçük işletme sahiplerinin dış çevre dinamikleriyle ilgili algılarının olumsuz, işletme içi dinamikleri ve performanslarıyla ilgili olumlu algıya sahip olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yiyecek İçecek İşletmeleri, Etnografik Araştırma, Sahip Yöneticiler, Performans, Fethiye

Introduction

Nowadays, interest on qualitative performance indicators; rather than quantitative ones are growing rapidly (Vinuesa and Hoque, 2011; Evliyaoğlu and Hemedoğlu, 2012). Quantitative (financial) measures are not enough for an effective performance evaluation (Kaplan and Norton, 1996); and qualitative (non-financial) performance dimensions should be evaluated for success and development (Kennerly and Neely, 2002).

In this research, the performance of small food and beverages businesses which are managed by their owners like eating houses, restaurants, cafes, bars etc., is measured from their owners' perception. This research also enabled to release some properties of these firms. This study is original since it handles the small food and beverages firms which have not received enough interest in the tourism literature and it lights the way for future studies on this kind of firms. Since the research interprets the results through culture and dimensions, this is an ethnographic research.

Literature Review

Food and Beverages Firms

Contemporary societies consume the products and services of food and beverages industry, which has reached an important magnitude, at a progressive rate. The origin of demand for products and services presented by food and beverages industry is "eating out". In Turkish literature, while household spending on food and beverages out of house has been studied; the food and beverages firms could not receive enough attention (Özdemir, 2010). It is seen that consumers consider several factors when selecting the firm to eat and drink. The criteria, which are defined as quality of food, variety of choices in the menu, price, ambiance and eligibility (Lewis, 1981), are developed including variety of food, quality of food, price, place, speed of service, suggestions, new experiences, opening hours and facilities for children (Auty, 1991) in the following years. Nowadays, regarding the changes in preferences and expectations of consumers, changes and developments in the concepts is are expected.

It is accepted that, food and beverages firms present experiences more than products and services (Johns and Kivela, 2001; Gustafsson 2004). The food and beverages firms which are beware of this fact apply qualified services perception and consumer focused management systems in order to obtain customer satisfaction. The drawbacks that effect the functions of firms that are heading to new searches; creates difficulties for them in competition. Food and beverages firms are the most widespread kind of small businesses; because it is attractive for entrepreneurs since the barriers to entry to food and beverages market are low, the managers who are not efficacious and able are allowed, and experience and capital requirements are not high. However, the same factors are effective in failure (Güler, 2007).

In the literature, the researches that analyse these firms in the customers' point of view are widespread (Warde and Martens, 2000, Anderson and Mossberg, 2004; Hansen et al., 2005). The number of researches that analyse food and beverages firm in business perspective are relatively low (Pettersson and Fjellström, 2007). This research contributes to the literature since it approaches the subject in owner-managers', therefore business perspective.

Small Business Performance and Current Debates

The differences between small businesses and large businesses, success and failure criteria, organization types, contributions to and effects on economy are subjects are found attractive by the researches (Storey, 1994). The rapid changes in technology, economics and social area effect all businesses regardless of time. As a result of change in qualification of small business in recent years, small businesses are gaining importance on economic, social and political areas. Before that, small businesses meant businesses that could not grow because of its own failure; sentenced to remain small as a result of this failure; an obstruction to economy; and are always in need of assistance (Müftüoğlu, 1989). Recently, this paradigm has changed and small businesses are perceived as businesses that are dynamic because of their flexibility and ability to follow rapidly changing conditions; creative and innovative because their non-bureaucratic structure; able to catch demand niches quickly and utilize opportunities on time (Şahin, 2009). In plans and policies of the countries, small businesses have an important place (European Commission, 2015).

The performances of small businesses have been a subject of debate for a long time in strategic management literature (Blackburn et al., 2013). While some studies research the effect of entrepreneurship orientation (Wiklund and Shepherd, 2005), gender (Rosa et al., 1996; Kalleberg and Leicht, 1991), social capital (Cooke and Wills, 1999; Bosma et al., 2004), long term planning (Orpen, 1985) on small business performances; there are studies regarding the properties of owner-manager (Blackburn et al., 2013).

Firm growth is taken as the center in the contemporary studies on small business and entrepreneurship have often placed firm growth at the centre of their inquiry (Steffens et al., 2009). Owner-managers are argued to be the most important resource within a firm, and their commitment to growth is accepted to be effective in shaping performance and growth (Smallbone et al., 1995; Mazzarol et al., 2009; Hansen and Hamilton, 2011). Their multidimensional nature of the growth has been captured by quantitative studies; and qualitative studies have begun to emphasise the influence of owner characteristics on business goals, processes and performance (e.g. Barringer and Jones, 2004).

Recently, there is a growing interest on qualitative performance indicators; rather than quantitative ones (Vinuesa and Hoque, 2011; Evliyaoğlu and Hemedoğlu, 2012). For an effective performance measure, more than quantitative (financial) measures are needed (Kaplan and Norton, 1996); and qualitative (non-financial) performance dimensions which will be effective in success and development (Kennerly and Neely, 2002). USAID (1996) accepts customer satisfaction measurements and innovation indicators as important performance dimensions. In this study, performance perceptions of small food and beverages firms' owner-managers are researched through qualified techniques. For qualitative performance measurement; increase in market share, increase in competitive force, improvement in service and product quality, increase in innovative practices, increase in employees' job satisfaction, increase in customer satisfaction and overall performance perceptions are measured. In addition, this study aims to analyse which problems are perceived as the most important by the owner-managers; and which practices they value to solve these problems. In this regard, this study contributes to the other related studies in the literature that approaches performance with owner-managers' perspectives.

Methodology

The universe of this research is the owner-managers of small food and beverages businesses in Fethiye. Since the study has the aims of understanding a certain market, culture or environment, catching a fresh point of view, collecting information about current and future needs and aspirations of producer and customer for proactive strategy development, it is an ethnographic study (Elliot and Jankel-Elliott, 2002; Butnaru, 2015). Ethnography is full or partial description of a group; and it helps identifying common threads, leadership characteristics, group orientations, social relationships or management style (Goulding, 2004). Ethnographic researches take place in qualitative paradigm and they are used to identify behaviors, and cultural or symbolic sides of behavior (Whitehead, 2005). Ethnographic techniques are used based on the understanding that tangible properties or goods contain social meanings (Goulding, 2004). Further, Stebbins (1997) showed that ethnographic research could be used to study lifestyles and the cultural and sub-cultural context within which they are enacted; and Arnould and Wallendorf (1994) discussed between market-oriented ethnography and developing strategy. In time, ethnographic studies became widespread (Boyle, 1994) and critically appraised (Brownlie, 1997). Ethnography is a highly flexible, creative, interpretive, reflexive and constructivist process and it requires the recording of field notes (Whitehead, 2005). In this study, small food and beverages businesses in Fethiye are taken as a group, and their management styles, profile of owner-managers are analyzed in behavioral and cultural context and with an ethnographic approach.

The reason why this region is selected as a research area is not only the intense existence of food and beverages businesses in Fethiye, an international tourism destination (Fig. 1a and Fig. 1b), but also the physical and legal availability for the researchers, as a requirement of scientific initiative. Research time is set as March, which is the beginning of the season. In March, the owner-managers are supposed to complete their own evaluations and plans about business performance; therefore presenting more realistic and clear information in interviews. As stated in Glaser and Strauss (1967), since the subject is not studied before and a strong theoretical frame could not be drawn, the size of sample is decided to be determined through theoretical sampling approach (Kish, 1965, Miaoulis and Michener, 1976). According to this approach, data collection continues until the emerging concepts start repeating similarly, in other words the satisfaction point is reached.

Fig. 1. (a) Location of Fethiye in Europe (www.google.com/maps/place/48000+Fethiye). (b) Fethiye F&B Businesses' Density

After deciding interview technique, preparation of interview questions, which is an important phase in data collection, has started (Kvale, 1996; Hollowitz and Wilson, 1993). First of all,

the topics that will be subject to analysis and data collection are stated; and open-ended questions are prepared. While setting interview questions, studies in the literature are also used (Morisson and Teixeira, 2004). Interview is composed of three main parts. In the first part, there are questions about demographics of participants. In the second part, the questions are on general information (field of activity, tenure of activity, number of employees, number of managers, shareholder situation etc.) about the business that the participant is owning and managing. These questions form the first two parts so that the answers will help the interviewer to gain an understanding of the business and the participant; and to lead questions accordingly. In addition, these easy to answer questions will create a chatty climate and interaction; and they will motivate the participant. In the third part, there are semi-structured questions aiming to measure business performance in owner-managers perspective. The interview is completed after asking the participant if there is anything (s)he wants to add.

In order to collect data from the businesses that are set as the universe for this research, required permissions from Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Fethiye Chamber of Merchants and Craftsmen (FCMC) and Fethiye Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FCCI) are completed. Interviews are done with the participants that accept to cooperate with the researchers. First, a pre-interview is done to set date and time for interviews; then interviews are completed on the set time. In order to support the completion of area notes and create an increase in the observation ability, the interviews are completed at least by two researchers. In February 2015, pre-interviews are completed with 32 food and beverages firms; and interview demand is delivered. 6 of them denied to participate in the interview because the manager is not present there; 4 because they do not have enough time; 2 because they think that the subject is not interesting. 5 of them could not be a part of the research since they wanted to set an interview time for a later date, such as May 2015. In total, interviews with 15 owner-managers are completed. After it is seen that the answers are repeating themselves similarly, it is decided to end the interviews and data collection phase.

The interviews are started with a short information about research topic and researches. It is seen that, declaring that the study is a project proposal, effect the decision of owner-managers to participate in a positive way. Before starting the interview, an allowance form the participants to use voice recorder is taken. The answers of the participant are both written by the researchers as detailed as possible (Seyidoğlu, 1997) and recorded on the voice recorded for the allowed interviews; therefore trying to prevent any data loss.

Consistent with what Sekaran (2000) suggested, in order to lead the participants to the research topic, the interview started with questions about general information of the firm. Questions oriented to the same answers are addressed in different styles more than once; aiming to prevent deviation from the research topic and to complete crosscheck. The interviews lasted 35 – 90 minutes; 50 minutes on average. In the end of the interview, the researchers have expressed thanks to the participants for their time and contribution. Area notes, which are composed as a result of interviews, are formed as a whole text with the help of voice records. Answers to demographical questions and general information about the firm, are stated as a table for presentation and exploration convenience. After typing all answers to all open ended questions, 36-pages text is formed in total and analyzed.

Analyses and Results

First of all, research data are arranged and summarized according to parts of interview questions. In the process of direct interviews, current state is determined without any

interventions on participants and conditions. Through descriptive analysis, the data are arranged, interpreted and presented in a way that is easy to understand (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Content analysis is applied in order to deeply analyse the relatively superficial findings and state the relationships among the data collected (Butnaru, 2015).

Table 1 presents the demographic information gathered from the answers of owner-manager participants. It is seen that, most of the participants are male (73½; N=11) and married (60%; N=9). While the ages of the participants lay between 25 and 62, the average age is 38,13. If the education levels are analysed, it is seen that most of them are high school graduates (47%; N=7), followed by university graduates (33%; N=5). More than half of the participants (53%; N=8) can speak English. Work tenure is between 3 and 35 years and the average work tenure is 15,9 years. In addition, their tenure as an owner-manager changes between 1 and 20 years and it is 6,5 years on average.

Table 1. Demographics of Owner-Managers

	Gender	Marital Status	Age	Education Level	Foreign Language	Work Tenure (Year)	Tenure as an Owner-Manager (year)
1	Female	Single	53	University	English	8	6
2	Female	Single	41	University	English	6	6
3	Male	Married	32	University	English	5	5
4	Male	Married	42	Secondary Sch.	None	20	4
5	Male	Single	27	Master	English	3	1
6	Male	Married	36	High Sch.	None	20	15
7	Male	Married	39	High Sch.	English	17	1
8	Male	Single	23	High Sch.	None	12	5
9	Male	Married	34	High Sch.	English	15	3
10	Male	Single	30	High Sch.	None	13	2
11	Male	Single	25	University	None	13	1
12	Male	Married	62	Primary Sch.	English	35	20
13	Female	Married	44	Secondary Sch.	None	25	10
14	Male	Married	44	High Sch.	English	22	17
15	Female	Married	40	High Sch.	None	25	2

Table 2 contains the general functional information about food and beverages firms. Although there are variety of firm types, local fast-food firms are the first (33%; N=5), followed by Cafés/Bars (27%; N=4). The ages of the firms change between 1 and 45 years and the average age of firms is 9,23 years. Number of employees is between 1 and 10 and the average is 4,6. Only 2 (13%) firms have a professional manager other than owner-manager; whereas 11 (73%) of them have functional managers (chief or master). Most of the firms (73%; N=11) are founded by the owner-manager and only 3 (20%) of them has shareholders; the others (80%;

N=12) are managed by a single owner-manager. The firms are generally enrolled to chamber of merchants and craftsmen (87%; N=13). Although all of the firms stated that they serve both local and foreign customers, most of them (73%; N=11) state that they have local customers predominantly. All of the firms (100%; N=15) are functioning whole year, stating that business volume changes dramatically through the year.

Table 2. General Properties of Food & Beverages Firms

	Type of Company	Age of Company	No of employee	No of Supervisor*	No of Shareholders**	Established by	Member of***	Customer Profile	Run
1	Restaurant	6	2	1 chef	None	Owner	FCMC	Domestic	Year-round
2	Café & Bar	6	2	1 chief	1	Owner	FCMC	Internat.	Year-round
3	Café & Bar	5	3-8	1 chief	None	Owner	FCCI	Internat.	Year-round
4	Local Fast Food	45	1	0	None	Family	FCMC	Domestic	Year-round
5	Patisserie	1	2	0	None	Owner-manager (Franchise)	FCMC	Domestic	Year-round
6	Restaurant	15	2	0	None	Family	FCMC	Domestic	Year-round
7	Restaurant	1	12	1 captain, 2 chefs	1	Owner-manager (Franchise)	FCCI	Domestic	Year-round
8	Café & Bar	5	5-10	2 chiefs	2	Owner-manager	FCMC	Internat.	Year-round
9	Café & Bar	3	5	2 chiefs	None	Taken over	FCMC	Internat.	Year-round
10	Café & Local Fast Food	2	2	0	None	Owner-manager (Franchise)	FCMC	Domestic	Year-round
11	Café & Local Fast Food	1	3-4	1 chief	None	Owner	FCMC	Domestic	Year-round
12	Cafe & Local Fast Food	20	3-5	2 chefs	None	Owner	FCMC	Domestic	Year-round
13	Restaurant	10	4-8	2 chefs	None	Owner	FCMC	Domestic	Year-round
14	Cafe	17	7	1 captain, 1 chef	None	Taken over	FCMC	Domestic	Year-round
15	Restaurant	2	9	2 chefs	None	Owner-manager	FCMC	Domestic	Year-round

* Supervisors other than owner-manager ** Shareholders other than owner-manager

***FCMC: Fethiye Chamber of Merchants and Craftsmen; FCCI: Fethiye Chamber of Commerce and Industry

After questions about demographical and general information, questions on expectations and fears of small food and beverages businesses in the context of risk aversion cultural dimension (Hofstede, 1980) are asked. Table 3 shows the expectations and fears of owner-managers, sorted according to the frequency of statements:

Table 3. Risk Aversion: Future Expectations and Fears of Owner-Managers

Future Expectations and Fears of Owner-Managers	Number of Statement	Percentage of Statement
EXPECTATIONS		
Increase in number of customers	12	80%
Increase in total revenue	9	60%
Founding a place with a new concept	7	47%
Protecting present situation	7	40%
The ones who cannot foresee	5	33%
Founding new branches	4	27%
Becoming the landlord (Buying the building)	4	27%
Sustaining the business with a professional manager	2	13%
FEARS		
Fluctuations in the economics of the country / Inflation	8	53%
Losing the capital, bankruptcy / Failure to maintain	7	47%
Changing location	6	40%
Decrease in customer satisfaction	6	40%
Destroy of the building	3	20%
Lack of qualified employee (The master's (father) quitting the job)	3	20%

Although the expectations of the participants have a variety, the most widespread expectation is “an increase in number of customers”. Also, an increase in total revenue is widely declared by the owner-managers. In this concept, it could be said that the most common expectations are about monetary gains. In addition to these, expectations about innovativeness like founding a new place with a new concept or founding branches are stated. It is interesting that the main expectation of nearly half of the participants is to protect their present situation.

When evaluating the statements of owner-managers about their fears, it is seen that their biggest fear is failing to maintain the business because of the fluctuations in the economy. This fear is stated in various ways; such as inflation, lack of cash flow as a result of certain fluctuations in the country's economy, loss of capital and bankruptcy. Another factor of fear for owner managers is changing location. The requirement to move because of a rent increase by the landlord is not the only reason for changing location. Also, the owner-managers of firms that are located in the downtown stated that they are afraid of being forced to move to a different location because their building may be destroyed completely because of “urban transformation project”. This finding is important since it shows the effect of urban transformation projects, which are applied widespread in Turkey, on small businesses. A decrease in customer satisfaction, a change in customer profile and qualified employees', masters' or experienced family members' possibility to quit the job are other fear factors.

It is seen that owner-managers perceive themselves as very successful when they are asked questions about their own performances. With the help of the questions that are developed based on the problematic and troubled issues that are declared in the interview; it is seen that all subjects that can be evaluated as failure are attributed to external factors. Owner-managers

refrained carefully from using more than general statements about performance evaluations. According to the researchers' observations, this is because the confidence level in Turkish society is low. In order to overcome this problem, the researchers tried to measure the perceived performance on a 5-point Likert scale (Totally agree – totally disagree). The answers through this scale is presented below on Table 4:

Table 4. Findings About Performance Perceptions of Owner-Managers

Findings About Performance Perceptions of Owner-Managers		Frequency of Statement	Percentage of Statement	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Profitability;	completely satisfactory	1	7%	11	73%
	satisfactory	10	67%		
Sales;	completely satisfactory	4	27%	13	87%
	satisfactory	9	60%		
Customers;	are completely satisfied with the firm	8	53%	14	93%
	are satisfied with the firm	6	40%		
New product/service launch;	completely sufficient	2	13%	9	60%
	sufficient	7	47%		
	Neither sufficient nor insufficient (undecided)	6	40%		
Market share;	certainly good	6	40%	14	93%
	good	8	53%		
Competitive advantage;	certainly owned	6	40%	11	73%
	owned	5	33%		
Return on money, effort, time spent;	certainly amply received	2	13%	9	60%
	amply received	7	47%		
Credit in case of need	certainly can be found easily	7	47%	13	87%
	can be found easily	6	40%		
Success	certainly a successful firm	6	40%	15	100%
	a successful firm	9	60%		

As seen on the table, the owner-managers have a perception of satisfactory business performance in general. The two topics that perceived performance is at its lowest are new product/service launch and return on money, effort and time spent. For return on money, effort and time spent there are statements indicating negative perception; whereas for new product/service launch, there is not a negative perception, but the participants seem to be undecided. Except these two subjects; satisfactoriness of sales, accessibility of credit in case of need, profitability, having competitive advantage are the subjects that are perceived highly positive by owner-managers, successively. All of the owner-managers define their firms as successful or very successful.

Conclusion

According to the results of this research, the owner-managers of small food and beverages firms do not value the properties of the environment which provide future oriented useful information, do not struggle enough to improve environment or adapt to it, do not tend to develop skills, examine and knowledge; which means they have external locus of control. The owner-managers, who have adopted mutual behaviour, seem to be surrendered to willpower of the groups they belong to; such as local governments, state or families. Owner-managers

attach the future of their firms to social class they belong to, to history or to factors like God, destiny, luck, government; therefore acting in a deterministic way (Sargut, 1994: 143).

As a result, it is seen that the food and beverages firms that are functioning out of tourism predominantly in Fethiye have uncertainties about mission, vision, targets, strategic plan and orientation. These firms lack controlled, structured and conscious strategic processes. Budgets and programs in their strategic plans are insufficient. The conditions of the markets and competition situation are not considered enough. Strategies are directed by opportunities (such as development in tourism). The firms are in a simple structure which is sensitive to owner-managers' manipulation. These firms are managed through a extremely bounded nationality.

When the results are evaluated in the scope of ethnographic research, the effects of culture is obviously seen. Although there are several parameters that effect strategic management practices, this research have treated the subject through ethnographic approach and from the perspective of culture, management styles, behaviours and properties. Therefore the results are consistent with the expectations of researchers. This research is anticipated to help researchers to complete a deeper research with reaching all the small food and beverages businesses in the destination and analyse the results comparatively with the firms that are serving to foreign tourists.

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