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**Headline: More patrons dining out as F&B sector reopens fully, but customer satisfaction dips**

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More people are dining out now than in 2021, but fast-food outlets and restaurants are falling short in terms of customer satisfaction and perceived quality of products and services such as takeaway and food delivery.

The findings were part of a Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore survey, the results of which were released on Friday.

The annual survey by the Institute of Service Excellence (ISE) at the Singapore Management University assesses consumer attitudes towards the food and beverage, and tourism sectors.

A total of 2,600 people were surveyed online in 2022 between July and September.

With the easing of Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, such as capacity limits, there was a significant increase in people preferring to dine at restaurants, fast-food outlets, cafes and coffee houses than in the same period in 2021.

Overall, 59.4 per cent of customers surveyed said they had most recently dined out, compared with 34.8 per cent a year ago.

Respondents who chose to dine out for meals went up from 46.4 per cent to 74.2 per cent at restaurants; from 21.5 per cent to 44.7 per cent at fast-food restaurants; and from 35 per cent to 52 per cent at cafes and coffee houses.

Compared with 2021, restaurants, in particular, were given the thumbs down in terms of quality of the dine-in, take away and food delivery experience. Their perceived quality score took a hit, falling 3.4 per cent year on year to 74.4 points., owing largely to dissatisfaction with takeaway.

Issues raised by respondents included poorer ordering and process experiences such as approachability of staff, than when they dined in, or ordered food via a delivery platform.

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Overall, respondents were also less satisfied with food delivery platforms.

Fewer respondents ordered food through delivery platforms in 2022 than in 2021.

At cafes and coffee houses, for instance, people who ordered items through food delivery platforms, such as GrabFood, foodpanda and Deliveroo, fell significantly from 98.8 per cent to 72.2 per cent.

ISE executive director Neeta Lachmandas noted that while F&B businesses have rebounded strongly following Singapore's full reopening, they are still in a transition period in terms of allocating resources.

"F&B and tourism operators have to deal with higher numbers and they are trying to manage processes," she said.

"With everything ramped up back to 100 per cent... restaurant owners are... trying to rebalance. Their resources are finite and with dine-in getting busier.... they will have to figure out where and how to best allocate resources."

While takeaways had proven to be a viable revenue stream for F&B establishments during the pandemic, factors such as significant manpower challenges continue to plague the industry, noted Ms Neeta.

On the tourism front, Singapore's attractions scored 74.1 points in terms of customer satisfaction, a 1.7 per cent dip year on year.

Tourist arrival numbers are on track to close the year at the higher end of a Singapore Tourism Board forecast of four million to six million visitors in 2022.

There were 4.5 million visitors to Singapore in the first 10 months of 2022, or around 40 per cent of pre-Covid-19 levels.

The study found a notable increase in the older visitors segment, with the proportion of visitors aged 50 and above rising 4.9 percentage points year on year to 28.6 per cent.

However, this segment had a lower perceived service quality score of 73.6 points than that of younger visitors aged between 18 and 29, whose score was 78.3 points.

Factors such as entertainment and educational value of the attraction, staff knowledge and clarity of directions within the attractions were found to be contributing factors for this lower perception of quality.

"With travel restarting at a brisk pace and expectations for the healthy return of visitors to attractions, it will be essential for operators to identify the needs and desires of potentially new groups of customers, seize the momentum, and build the buzz that will drive positive word-of-mouth and return visits," said Ms Neeta.