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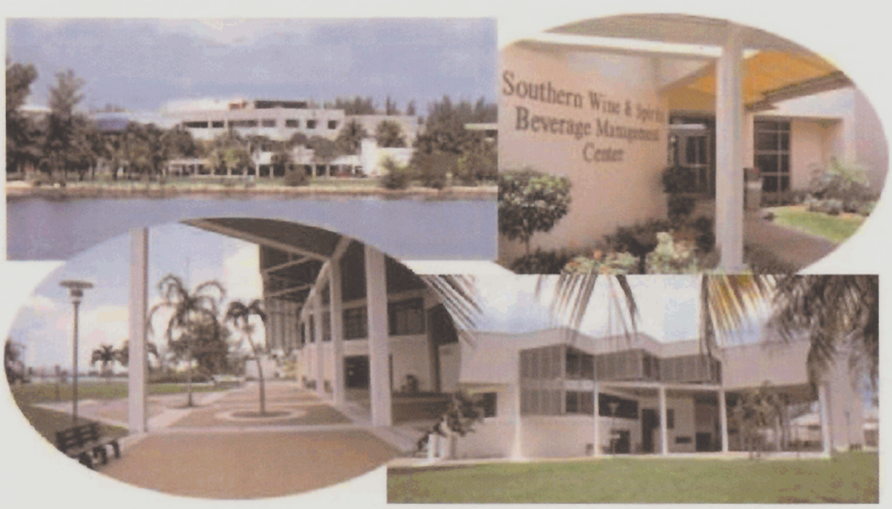

Florida International University
School of Hospitality and Tourism Management
North Miami, Florida

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
Miami's public research university

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Review

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Hospitality and Tourism Review

Florida International University
School of Hospitality and Tourism

Editorial for the FIU *Review* by Dean Joseph West, Ph. D.

Welcome to a new Florida International University School of Hospitality & Tourism Management Review. Our new format is largely the result of two events; first, our budget for the FIU *Review* was significantly impacted by budget cuts coupled with the rise in printing costs. Secondly, we opted for a larger format in order to increase the FIU *Review*'s readability. Our editor, Marcel Escoffier, is getting old enough that he was not willing to read the "contract size" type we have used for 23 years. I hope that you will enjoy our new format and look forward to receiving your comments.

We begin this issue with several related articles on travel and tourism. Esther Periera explains why ecotourism needs knowledgeable tour guides, we then see what Lilleheim, Mykletun, Quain and Engstrom found when they survey those who participated in our School's South Beach Wine and Food Festival, and Mark Bonn along with Leslie Furr and Mo Dai studied the effects the overall economy has on visits to them parks.

The issue then looks at several management issues of importance to everyone; how management compensation may affect the restaurant manager's decision to stay (Murphy and DiPietro), and what hotel managers can do to satisfy guest's service quality desires (Loizos and Lycourgos).

Next we present a study by Leung and Law concerning what Information Technology issues have been addressed through publication in our top academic journals.

Finally, our new expanded format allows us to publish more articles than in the past, so we conclude this issue with an interesting look at a relatively new social phenomenon: people who "dine" while driving. David Walczak relates to us what his students in a research methodology class found concerning dashboard dining..

Again, let me express my enthusiasm for our first attempt at a new format. Marcel Escoffier and I will be making further revisions to the journal's format in future issues, so I encourage you to email him with suggestions at Escoffm@fiu.edu.

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Guidelines for Authors

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The article should:

- Have a cover page with the article title and the name of the author(s), their title, school, address, a telephone number and e-mail where they may be reached, and such other identification as may be appropriate.
- Begin with a preface or abstract, usually no more then five sentences, which briefly summarize the article. This will be printed on the first page of the article if accepted for publication.
- Be written in the third person or otherwise written so as not to identify the author(s). Our policy is not to print articles written in the first person.
- Include no more than five tables, charts, or exhibits none of which exceed 35 lines in length and seven inches in width.
- Written using the APA style of citations.
- Range from 10 to 25 pages in length, including all tables and graphs.
- Include sub-headings, in bold, within the text.
- *The submission should be the sole work of the author(s) and must not have appeared in whole or in part in any other publication prior to the date of submission to the Florida International University Hospitality and Tourism Review. It is considered unethical and unacceptable to violate this policy.*

The authors guarantee that they have secured all appropriate authorizations to disclose the information contained in their articles and certify that they have followed all appropriate procedures in their studies using human subjects.

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Ranking of U. S. Hospitality Graduate Programs: 2002-2003

By Michael G. Brizek and Mahmood A. Khan

Compared to other disciplines, graduate programs in hospitality and tourism management are in their infancy. Rapid changes within the business environment have prompted students in this field to develop a higher level of problem solving skills and scholarship. As the number of graduate programs in hospitality and tourism grows to meet this demand, the need also arises to evaluate each program's resources and contributions to graduate education. This study examines both masters and doctoral degree granting programs in hospitality and tourism management. All institutions were evaluated and ranked based on selected tangible criteria. Rankings of the programs, which were strictly based on their strengths and resources as reported by the surveyed institutions, are reported in this paper.

Introduction

Compared to other disciplines, graduate programs in hospitality and tourism management are in their infancy. Rapid changes and intense competition within the business environment demand students to graduate with thorough understanding of the application of theories and problem solving skills. This requires a unique blend of academic and research studies to be infused into graduate studies. Recently many institutions have developed graduate degree programs in hospitality and tourism to fulfill the needs of the academia as well as the industry. The quality of these programs is directly related to the available resources and research facilities. Since these resources vary from institution to institution, national rankings have been provided by several reputed organizations for other fields of study. Although several business-related programs are ranked, hospitality and tourism management is not ranked separately in those national rankings. Currently there is no other updated published source related to the ranking of hospitality and tourism management programs. The demand for ranking these graduate programs comes not only from prospective students, recruiting officers, but also from academic institution administrators who are responsible for the overall evaluation and improvement of their related programs. Taking into consideration the importance of ranking, this ongoing research work was undertaken.

Published research related to this subject has addressed the emergence of graduate education in hospitality and tourism. Khan and Olsen (1988)researched the present and future needs of institutional resources towards graduate programs in hospitality and tourism management. Khan (1992) commented on the "value-added" effects that graduate programs place on undergraduate education in hospitality and tourism. Bosselman (1999) commented on the emergence and strength of graduate programs within the last thirty years, including the quality and quantity of graduate research publications. Recently Tepeci, Seo, Upneja, and DeMicco (2001) researched the current supply and demand for hospitality and tourism faculty within the United States. Their study reviewed hospitality and tourism doctoral programs within the U.S. and the current state of doctoral graduates emerging from these programs. Their conclusions suggest that as the demand for terminal degrees within the field grows, more doctoral programs will continue to emerge and increase in size to address the demand issue and the quality of doctoral graduates in the field of academia.

Earlier studies were limited to rankings of undergraduate and graduate disciplines related to business, education, law, engineering, and allied health, that relied primarily on prestige rankings by deans and program chairs. Related information used in some rankings included program size, GMAT/GRE scores, graduation rates, and size of the faculty. Similar qualitative assessment of institutional resources was addressed within the hospitality and tourism field by publications such as Calnan (1988) and Kent, Lian, Khan, and Anene (1993). Recently, research by Brizek and Khan (2002) and Gould and Bojanic (2002) addressed the evaluation and ranking of hospitality and tourism undergraduate programs by using quantitative assessment. They evaluated the individual strengths of undergraduate programs by replicating the previously published 1993 study and adding survey responses from industry recruiters. Attribute ratings were established and programs were ranked in order based on six attributes (curriculum, students, facilities, faculty, career services, and overall quality). The Brizek and Khan study examined results from previous studies conducted from 1988 and 1993 and developed a pre-tested questionnaire which was finally sent to deans, chairs, and directors of hospitality and tourism programs. Attributes included in this questionnaire focused on faculty, students, curriculum, resources and facilities, and alumni support. Responses were then compared using a pre-developed quality point scale, which translated data into actual quantitative value. Eventually, programs were ranked on the basis of the total cumulative quality point score. This method was used for both masters and doctoral level programs. This methodology was adapted from and is very similar to the ranking methodology traditionally used by the *U.S. News and World Report*. Their ranking of graduate programs is primarily based on GMAT/GRE scores; academic experience of graduate candidates; and graduation and employment placement rates. The researchers in this study added additional criteria to address commonalities associated with a graduate hospitality and tourism program such as alumni contributions and program's overall resources.

Methods and Determinants of Rank

A pre-tested five-page questionnaire was distributed to forty-eight masters degree granting programs in hospitality and tourism management which were listed in the *International CHRIE Guide to Colleges and Programs (7th edition)*. Similar questionnaires were distributed to eleven doctoral programs offering Ph.D. degrees in related fields. These schools were identified through a previous study conducted by Tepeci et al., which focused on the supply and demand for hospitality and tourism doctoral graduates. Texas Tech University was added to the original list of programs, since the university had instituted a doctoral program in hospitality management.

The questionnaire used for master degree programs was similar to the one used in the 2002 study for undergraduate degree programs with added focus on three key areas: curriculum, the student body, and institutional resources. Curricular issues assessed included core/elective course offerings; and curriculum evaluation and development activities. The student body section focused on enrollment, admission requirements, assistantships offered, and institutional funding for student development. In resources section items evaluated library holdings, external funding support, and electronic/Internet services to faculty and students. These criteria were carefully selected after several discussions with colleagues and comments received from presentations of earlier studies by the researchers at national meetings and conferences. Moreover, criteria used are identical to what are used by the *U.S. News and World Report*.

For the doctoral programs, similar criteria used to investigate the master's programs, were used which included assessment related to the student body and available resources. However under each section questions selected solicited responses which are most appropriate for doctoral education. For example, greater emphasis was placed on research requirements of students, course requirements, and faculty involvement with students. In addition, teaching loads and number of doctoral advisors within the program were considered. The intent was not only to evaluate the competence of each doctoral program, but also the overall success of the program, in relation to completed doctorates in the field and their scholarly contribution to the field of hospitality and tourism management during and after the student's residence within the program. Inclusion of above mentioned evaluation parameters addressed some of the questions and deficiencies mentioned by earlier authors such as Tepeci et al. pertaining to the quality of master's and doctoral level education in hospitality/tourism management.

The last section of the questionnaire focused on graduate faculty members and solicited information related to faculty members' qualifications; teaching loads; research responsibilities; and their overall contribution to research and scholarly activities; and grantsmanship both in writing grants and securing grants.

In summary, the questionnaire consisted of three distinct sections: master's degree programs, doctoral programs, and graduate faculty. Scoring on each question under each section was conducted using carefully allocated points. These points allocated for each question was carefully selected after receiving a variety of input from colleagues and comments received on our earlier surveys. These scores were predetermined and were applied uniformly to all questionnaires once they were received. Five undergraduate students from the Department of Hotel and Restaurant Management at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore evaluated and scored all of the returned questionnaires in order to provide for accuracy and to eliminate any possible bias by the researchers. Scoring was heavily based on strengths related to graduate studies. For example, two points were given to each journal listed under resource section and two points for graduate courses offered under curriculum section. Similarly, ten points were given for each faculty member who has an earned doctoral degree. This type of scoring system did not restrict scores to a maximum or minimum number of points since the number of courses offered, number of graduate students, or the size of faculty varied from institution to institution. Rankings were based on the highest points achieved by each program.

Respondents were also asked to rank the top six institutions strictly based on their perception of the status of the hospitality/tourism management programs. This "status ranking" for each graduate degree offering institution was used to validate and compare the evaluations from earlier studies. The "status ranking" was also used to mirror the methods used in the past by *U.S. News and World Report* for evaluating different graduate programs. To help avoid any bias, the name of the institution from which the responses came were deleted if those were included in any of the top six names. Scoring for status ranking was based on six points being awarded to institutions that were ranked first on the questionnaire, five points to the second, four points to the third, three to the fourth, two points to the fifth, and one point to the sixth. This system was similar to that used in earlier studies by Calnan and Brizek and Khan.

Results

Of the forty-eight questionnaires that were distributed, thirty were received, yielding a response rate of 62.5%. Once the master's questionnaires were received, each one was reviewed and each response was scored using the predetermined quality points discussed above. Scores were added for each category and then an overall score was computed from each of the three sections to give an overall quality score for the program. Based on the total scores, each institution was ranked, selecting the top 20 master's degree programs and the top nine doctoral programs. The rationale for the rankings was based on two factors. First, when the master's degree scores were tabulated there was a distinct difference between the top 20 score and the following 21 to 25 scores. The doctoral degree in hospitality and tourism related field was offered by nine programs. One program, Texas Tech University introduced their Ph.D. program in the fall of 2002 and does not have established data to participate in this study at that time. To be as fair and inclusive as possible, institutions that had matching scores and were placed in the top twenty (masters) and top nine (doctoral) were awarded the same ranking but did not displace another institution with a different score and ranking. This rationale was used in order to be as inclusive to all institutions as possible and to recognize the breadth of programs in this field. In a change from the undergraduate study of Brizek and Khan, the decision to add extra weight to scores in certain responses allowed for more dispersion in overall responses and fewer scores that recorded the same results. This decision was in response to suggestions made by administrators and educators during the ranking symposium at the International CHRIE conference in Orlando, Florida, 2002.

Master's Degree Programs

The overall results of the master's degree program section show the top five institutions to be: University of Nevada, Las Vegas (390 points), Pennsylvania State University (292 points), Virginia Tech (286 points), University of Massachusetts-Amherst (282), and Purdue University (269) (Table 1). (*The tables for this article are located at the end of the article* – editor). It should be noted that adding graduate faculty points to the total scores have skewed some of the results. Therefore, the total scores for curriculum, student body, and institutional resources were also computed and listed in Table 1. On the basis of this score, Virginia Tech moves to rank one and University of Nevada, Las Vegas moves down to third rank. Similarly, other institutions will be able to compare their scores to other schools. All of these institutions were found to be consistent in the level and amount of courses offered, the quality and level of graduate faculty at the institution, and the amount and extent of their institutional resources. Slight differences were found in the results of the ranking compared to the previous perceptual studies and prestige rankings referred to in this study. What was different to note from previous research is the emergence of some other institutions of hospitality/tourism management that might not have been previously recognized or noted. Of particular importance are those institutions that are offering graduate degrees under different programs such as Human Resources, Consumer Sciences, etc. In addition, we witnessed multiple degree offerings or areas of concentrations at the graduate level. This was clearly evident from the majority of responses we received. Overall it is fair to assess from the total points received that the majority of hospitality/tourism programs ranked within the top 20 in this study are very similar in nature and based on enrollment size and amount of available resources, are growing and increasing in stature.

Doctoral Degree Programs

Doctoral degree programs in hospitality/tourism are relatively new compared to doctoral programs in other disciplines. The need for higher credentialed faculty with research backgrounds has prompted colleges/universities to offer terminal degrees in hospitality/tourism. Although not many differences were found amongst doctoral program curricula in hospitality/tourism management, differences prevailed in the size of the doctoral programs, the number of students enrolled, and the nature of standards and requirements (qualifying exams, preliminary exams, refereed publications, residence requirements, etc.). Results of the doctoral survey in order of rankings and respective scores (Table 2) are: Virginia Tech (196), Pennsylvania State University (180), Purdue University (172), Ohio State University (168), Oklahoma State University (164), Kansas State University (163), University of Nevada, Las Vegas (154), Auburn University (151), and Iowa State University (151). It should be noted that the graduate faculty scores are not included in these rankings and are kept separate in order to highlight each doctoral program's resources and strengths.

Tables 3 and 4 show status rankings based on respondents' perceptions of Master's and Doctoral programs respectively. As mentioned earlier these evaluations were conducted in order to follow up on our earlier studies as well as other published studies such as Kent et. al in 1993. Among the top five, Cornell University was consistently viewed by its peers as among the top two hospitality/tourism programs in the U.S. The following four: The Pennsylvania State University (master's and doctoral), Virginia Tech (masters and doctoral), Kansas State university (master's and doctoral), Purdue University (master's and doctoral) and Florida International University (master's) were viewed by its peers as top programs on the basis of responses received. In comparing the quantitative ranking with the perceptual ranking, it is important to note that for the most part the more detailed quantitative ranking enhanced the perception of an institution to a much greater extent by displaying each programs' strengths and weaknesses.

Limitations of the Study:

During the annual I-CHRIE Conference in Orlando, Florida (2002) discussions were made during a panel symposium regarding ways to enhance the methods of this type of research. Comments such as determining categories based on the mission of the college/university and more weighted scores based on programs' strengths were discussed. It was observed during the conference that most researchers/educators favored this type of research in order to compare program resources; however, fine-tuning is needed to make the results of the study more applicable. For future surveys refinements will be made in order to make the survey instrument as reliable and consistent as possible. Some suggestions recommended by the panel included separate categories for each program's college or university's mission or historical background. Other suggestions or comments posed were an evaluation of the program's overall student body and comparisons of similar programs based on student body size. Finally, one scholar suggested an extension of the original ranking research to include an additional study to investigate a program's strength based on alumni data that would include career placement, longevity of alumnus in chosen career, and alumni advancement in the field.

As in the original 2002 Brizek and Khan's undergraduate study, more participation from other programs is needed in future studies in order to receive a true picture of all educational programs in hospitality/tourism management. It will need a concentrated effort by all administrators involved with International CHRIE to participate in these types of studies to ensure a greater representation of all programs and promote the discussion and comparisons of program resources.

Conclusions

It is important to note that the 2002 undergraduate study and this graduate study were designed for administrators and faculty to evaluate and compare resources and program strengths in hospitality/tourism education. It is recommended that administrators view the criteria presented in this study and utilize parts of the results to evaluate/enhance their own programs and develop a comparative basis for the curriculum and resources already in place. The intention of this study is not to put one program higher than others, but to allow for a benchmarking tool for programs to measure themselves and compare with their peers. Our earlier studies were solicited and used by many higher level administrators to allocate resources and we hope this study will further help in building the strengths of hospitality and tourism management programs. As noted earlier, the body of research involving the evaluation and comparison of academic resources has developed over the past twenty years towards more sophisticated qualitative and perceptual measurements. As in the past, being the principal researchers of this topic, not only encourage debate on this topic but also future research to address advancement involving this area of research. Researchers will be glad to share specific information if desired, since it was not possible to discuss all sections in detail.

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Table 1: Ranking of Masters degree program

Rank	School	Department	Year Founded	Total	Grad Faculty	Curriculum	Student Body	Resources	Total (C/SB/R)
1	University of Nevada, Las Vegas	The William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration	1982	390	237	29	64	60	153
2	Pennsylvania State University	School of Hotel, Restaurant, and Recreation Management	1986	292	131	35	66	60	161
3	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	Department of Hospitality Tourism Management	1991	286	123	36	67	60	163
4	University of Massachusetts-Amherst	Department of Hotel, Restaurant, and Travel Management	1974	282	132	35	60	55	150
5	Purdue University	Department of Hospitality Tourism Management	1929	269	138	26	50	55	131
6	Florida International University	School of Hospitality Management	1975	267	132	23	54	58	135
7	Ohio State University	Department of Hospitality Management	1983	266	139	25	56	46	127
8	University of Hawaii at Manoa	School of Travel Industry Management	1999	261	117	30	54	60	144
9	Auburn University	Department of Nutrition and Food Science	1990	259	136	29	37	57	123
10	University of Houston	Conrad N. Hilton College	1989	252	119	28	52	53	133
11	Oklahoma State University	School of Hotel and Restaurant Administration	1997	244	100	29	60	55	144
12	University of South Carolina	Department of Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Management	1991	241	104	28	58	51	137
13	Iowa State University	Department of Apparel, Education Studies, and Hospitality Management	1942	238	118	25	45	50	120
15	Johnson & Wales University	Alan Shawn Feinstein Graduate School	1986	231	84	37	55	55	147
Tie 15	Rochester Institute of Technology	School of Hospitality and Service Management	1981	229	96	33	40	60	133
Tie 15	Texas Tech University	Department of Restaurant, Hotel, and Institutional Management	1989	229	107	20	47	55	122
16	Kansas State University	Department of Hotel, Restaurant, Institutional Management, and Dietetics	N/A	228	104	24	47	53	124
17	Washington State University	The School of Hospitality Business	1985	226	115	23	41	47	111
18	Michigan State University	*The* School of Hospitality Business	N/A	222	103	31	40	48	119
19	University of Wisconsin-Stout	Department of Hospitality and Tourism	1985	212	101	27	33	51	111
20	Florida State University	Dedman School of Hospitality	2001	208	95	20	47	46	113

Table 2: Ranking of Doctoral Degree Programs

Rank	School	Department	Year Founded	Total	Curriculum	Student Body	Resources
1	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management	1991	196	53	129	14
2	Pennsylvania State University	School of Hotel, Restaurant, and Recreation Management	1988	180	51	115	14
3	Purdue University	Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management	1989	172	52	107	13
4	Ohio State University	Department of Hospitality Management	1948	168	48	107	13
5	Oklahoma State University	School of Hotel and Restaurant Administration	1998	164	51	100	13
6	Kansas State University	Department of Hotel, Restaurant, Institutional Management and Dietetics	1970's	163	54	96	13
7	University of Nevada, Las Vegas	William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration	1993	154	49	92	13
Tie 8	Auburn University	Department of Nutrition and Food Science	1994	151	52	86	13
Tie 8	Iowa State University	Department of Apparel, Education Studies and Hospitality Management	1947	151	53	85	13

Table 3:
Status Rankings of Master's Programs in Hospitality/Tourism

Rank	School	Cumulative Points
1	Pennsylvania State University	212
2	Cornell University	201
3	Purdue University	185
4	UNLV	164
5	Florida International University	145

Table 4:
Status Rankings of Doctoral Programs in Hospitality/Tourism

Rank	School	Cumulative Points
1	Cornell University	230
2	Purdue University	195
3	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	180
4	Pennsylvania State University	176
5	Kansas State University	170

Restaurant Customer Loyalty: A Qualitative Assessment of Niche Brands

By Billy Bai, Matthew Buxton, Gail Sammons and Stowe Shoemaker

Using the Loyalty Triangle framework developed by Lewis and Shoemaker (1999) and focus group methodology, the study examined how a niche brand restaurant best achieved long-term loyalty. Results indicate that customers are loyal to a niche brand because of the unique characteristics inherent to the brand. Customers have higher perceptions of such qualities as the presentation of service, consistency of product, and the benefits offered by the loyalty program than characteristics that are shared across all brands. Niche brand restaurants can be more effective in developing these qualities to promote customer loyalty.

Introduction

Loyalty is exemplified by customers who repurchase the same brand over a period of time. It has been shown that truly loyal customers are highly satisfied, display behavioral and attitudinal characteristics, are willing to pay a premium, and act as advocates for the particular brand. Many companies have developed reward programs as a value incentive to generate loyalty. Both academic and practical perspectives on loyalty have also been researched (e.g. Dowling & Uncles, 1997; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; and Verhoef, 2003). The focal point has been on the retention of customers by creating loyalty. In hospitality businesses, Lewis and Shoemaker (1999) developed a theoretical loyalty triangle to explain how a company can best achieve long-term loyalty. The triangle has three sides including (1) process; (2) value creation (value-added and value recovery strategies); and (3) database management and communication.

However, there is a scarcity of research that has been done connecting various brand types to loyalty. There are many types of brands other than just traditional whereas much greater research can be developed. Because of this, loyalty methodologies are important as they relate to niche brands, characterized as having small market share, a unique product, and more loyal followers. Therefore, this study meant to fill the void in the stream of loyalty research by investigating how niche brands could extend their loyalty program through acquiring and retaining more customers in a restaurant setting.

Literature Review

Types and Phases of Loyalty

There are many definitions used by researchers to explain loyalty. Each places an emphasis on different characteristics of loyalty. Oliver (1999) places importance on the frequency of purchase and the effects of switching behavior. He states that loyalty is "...a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" (p. 33). He also states that satisfaction becomes less relevant when other loyalty mechanisms set in like fortitude and social bonding at the personal level.

Oliver (1999) makes the case that there are four phases of loyalty: cognitive, affective, conative, and action. A consumer can pass through all four phases until he reaches the action phase, also called action inertia. Cognitive loyalty is the first phase and is based on a customer's information only. A person who is in this phase is merely loyal to the performance of the product or service and has minimal loyalty. It is more directed at the costs and benefits. If it fails in either of these two categories, then the customer is easily swayed to another brand. Affective incorporates cognitive attributes but goes one step further. It incorporates behavior based on repeated purchase of the brand. Sensory perception and enjoyment begin to take hold at this stage. However, it may be subject to switching if competitors can enhance their product or service while putting down the original brand. The third type of loyalty, conative loyalty (also called behavior intention) is motivation based and is influenced by repeated purchase. It incorporates an intent and commitment to repurchase. The fourth and final phase of loyalty is also the strongest. It is action-loyalty and incorporates all of the previous stages but adds the dimension of a customer being willing and ready to act. In addition, it incorporates a commitment level equal to overcoming obstacles presented by brand competitors that may inhibit a customer from purchasing the product. Referring to the action phase, Oliver (1999) concludes that "...only insurmountable unavailability would cause such a consumer to try another brand" (p. 37).

Behavioral and attitudinal elements are key components of loyalty. Using the loyalty typology developed by Backman and Crompton (1991), Baloglu (2002) demonstrates four types of loyalty. The most sought after type of loyalty, true loyalty, is distinguished from others as having both a high degree of behavioral and attitudinal elements. Like Oliver's (1999) action-loyalty, customers in this level are committed to the brand, act as advocates, and have a high propensity to repurchase. The second type of loyalty is latent loyalty, characterized by low behavior and high attitude. This means that customers may advocate for a product or service and be highly committed to it. However, they may be unable to purchase the item on a regular basis. It could be because they limited by distance, or may be low on finances. A third type of loyalty described here is spurious loyalty, also described as artificial loyalty. This type of loyalty is characterized by high customer behavior, but low attitude. This means that they regularly purchase the item, but hold no emotional attachment to it. Spurious loyalty has many examples. Perhaps they purchase habitually or for convenience. Possibly there is a financial motive (inexpensive, discount, or reward), or, there are not alternative brands to choose from. Finally, the fourth level is low loyalty, characterized by low behavior and attitudes towards the brand.

Loyalty Drivers

Now that action loyalty has been shown to be the most sought-after type of loyalty, it is essential that there is a clear presentation of how organizations can maximize their ability to develop action-level loyalty among their customer base. For the purpose of this research, these necessary loyalty ingredients will be called loyalty drivers. If action loyalty is to be achieved, these ingredients must be present. As will be shown, some drivers are more important than others.

The creation of value is seen by many researchers as the most important driver of loyalty. Neal (1999) believes that value predicts choice. This value is determined by a decision set in the minds of the customers. Managers or researchers can measure value by placing weights on each of these decision sets. They include utility of price, tangible attributes of the product, switching barriers, and brand-related image drivers. Neal (1999) reports that "If you are measuring and reporting satisfaction, but not value, you may be in the right woods but barking up the wrong tree" (p. 23).

Oh (2000) claimed similar findings. Oh conducted a study in a restaurant to determine whether quality, value, or satisfaction was the clearest indicator of customers' behavior and propensity to return. Oh found that satisfaction was not measured to have long-lasting predictive power. Value was the most significant factor of the customers' intentions before and after the meal indicating that managers may want to incorporate strategies that will place quality as a component of value.

At the core of most loyalty definitions is the customers' behavior of repurchasing a particular brand. Various characteristics of this behavior have been explained by different researchers. Matilla (2001) explained that emotional bonding is a necessary ingredient of commitment, the main characteristic of true loyalty and stressed the importance of attitudinal behavior in her research. She mentioned that there are two types of commitment levels necessary for loyalty to exist. They are cognitive and affective commitment. Cognitive commitment refers to the customers' beliefs about the brand. The deeper and more important commitment level is affective commitment. Affective commitment is distinguished from cognitive commitment by customers' feelings towards a particular brand. It is an emotional attachment. Fournier (1998) stated that emotional bonding is a prerequisite to strong brand relationships. Matilla's (2001) study reveals that affective commitment discourages customers from switching to another brand, encourages advocacy, and forgives service inadequacy.

Likewise, Baloglu (2002) found that attitudinal variables carry more weight than other characteristics when it comes to loyalty. On one hand, behavior measures can be described by time spent and cooperation with the business or brand. This form of loyalty at least has the appearance of loyalty. Attitudinal variables, however, measure the truest forms of loyalty including trust, commitment, emotional commitment, and advocacy. These variables measure how a customer feels about the brand and can be displayed not only by their ability to repurchase, but also by their propensity to spread positive word-of-mouth and share information with the company. By separating and measuring behavioral and attitudinal attributes, managers can learn more about why their customers are loyal and determine the best relationship marketing tools. This finding has the best implications for companies that attempt to build loyalty through developing higher customer attitudes. Customers have a higher lifetime value because of their commitment to repurchase and spread positive word of mouth. Customers on the low attitude side (spurious and low) are subject to switching due to their lack of enthusiasm about the brand.

Fullerton (2003) conducted research separating commitment into the two separate categories of affective and continuance. Continuance commitment is related to a binding or necessary commitment. The terms of this commitment are contractual and binding. Continuance commitment is often sought after when there is a lack of competitors, to avoid high switching costs, or, when vendors are not easily replaceable. Like Matilla (2001) and Baloglu (2002), Fullerton's (2003) study supported affective commitment in that affective commitment develops strong relationships between the customer and the brand and encourages positive word-of-mouth. Customers who have affective commitment also are willing to pay more for a brand. The stronger the bond, or, the stronger one feels a part of the organization's shared beliefs and values, the stronger the commitment. Both affective and continuance commitment have a positive affect on customer retention. However, continuance commitment leads to "dependence and entrapment" while affective commitment leads to "attachment and identification," a much stronger type of attitudinal behavior. Fullerton (2003) concluded by stating that companies can realize a stronger type of loyalty through "positive affect and identification rather than continuance."

The Loyalty Triangle

Lewis and Shoemaker (1999) developed a three sided triangle known as the Loyalty Triangle to explain how a company can best achieve long-term loyalty. They mention that a company must pay equal attention to each side in order to foster the most loyalty from their customer base. These sides are known as process, value creation, and database management.

Process is concerned with how the service works. It is characterized by analyzing the parts of the service encounter that make up the whole. In order for the process to be effective, each step of service must be developed to its full potential. It includes looking at the service from the perspective of the customer. It involves every part of the service encounter. For example, in a restaurant, it could mean everything from picking up the telephone and making a reservation to the time customers are thanked as they are walking out of the restaurant at the end of their meal. Process is described as effectively managing the first three gaps as related in the GAP model of Service Quality (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996).

The first of these, GAP 1, is concerned with the difference between how the company perceives customer expectations and the actual customer expectations. The best way to close this gap is for management to find out more about their clientele through personal encounters or by research. Gap 2 is management in favor of an operationally-driven mentality versus a customer driven mentality. It includes a poor service design. A company with a wide gap here might be cutting corners to save costs without concerning itself with how it affects the customer. Finally, Gap 3 is the difference between the service design/delivery and the reality of implementation by the staff responsible for delivering the service. This gap presents a case for communication and follow through. Sometimes it is easy to come up with the ideas, but, much harder to fully implement. An example might be getting a hotel clerk to mention room upgrades to every customer that checks in. However, when the manager's back is turned, the clerk decides not to provide this service. Hiring and training the right staff, setting standards of service, and effectively getting a buy-in from the line staff is essential to shortening this gap.

The second side of the Loyalty Triangle described by Lewis & Shoemaker (1999) is value-added and value-recovery strategies. The goal here is to enhance the customers' perceptions of the rewards versus the costs associated with the brand. Strategies to more keenly build upon the existing relationship and strengthen the commitment level are the most beneficial to the company or brand. Value-added strategies are concerned with increasing the rewards associated with the customer and the brand. Many companies offer their best customers preferential treatments. Examples of this would be offering special promotions, discounts, upgrades, recognition, or personalized service encounters. Many companies offer some type of reward or frequency program to create the value proposition in the minds of their customers. These programs typically offer points in return for money spent on the product or service. These points can then be exchanged for cash, airline tickets, discounts, vacations, or just about anything you can think of. It is hoped that as purchases are made, these rewards engender loyalty to the core product, and not to the promotion itself. However, many companies in a crowded market are necessitated to offer these programs as a way to stay competitive. Brand switching can occur when the reward has been realized. These problems are worrisome to any company who attempts to add value by offering a reward program.

Value-recovery strategies are concerned with rewarding the guest when there is a service failure. These are sometimes seen as moments of truth, when the customer is paying special attention to see what type of reaction they will have with the service staff from whom they are dealing. When service fails and nothing is done, it is easiest for most guests to say nothing and switch brands. However, when the failure is turned around in favor of the customer, trust and loyalty can result. For example, a restaurant patron is overcharged by having two drinks charged to his/her check instead of the one ordered. When the issue is brought to the attention to a conscientious food server, the server then offers an apology, takes both drinks from the check, and requests that the guest ask for the food server personally the next time so that better service will be guaranteed. When mistakes are turned around in favor of the guest, it often creates a memorable experience that results in repeated business and affective commitment.

The third leg of the Loyalty Triangle (Lewis & Shoemaker, 1999) is database management and communication. This is an essential part of loyalty creation because "it is the foundation of one-to-one marketing" (p. 363). A smart company will keep track of their customers' preferences and offer services that cater to those preferences during the service encounter. Understanding the spending habits, likes and dislikes, beliefs and behaviors of their customers is marketing power. This power can be exemplified from the top of the organization down to the service personnel who interact with the customer on a personal basis. The more a service staff knows about the customer, the more comfortable the customer feels towards the organization as a whole, and, the more likely they are to purchase and repurchase on a greater scale. The attitudinal variables of bonding and personal fortitude can set in when customers begin to feel like they are known and rewarded by the organization.

Methodology

Study Setting

The chosen restaurant chain has several restaurants in the US and franchise operations overseas. The study setting was in their Las Vegas location in Nevada, USA. The restaurant has a frequent diner program, known as VIP Program. This loyalty program attempts to build loyalty through rewarding repeat customers with discounts and reward certificates. There is a $20 enrollment fee for each individual that wants to become a member. Enrollment entails filling out a short application giving the names of an individual and spouse, as well as, immediate family members under the age of 18. Telephone numbers and email addresses are taken for marketing and reward distribution. Initial incentives include the mailing of a reward's card, $25 reward certificate, and a personalized restaurant chain's seasoning salt and pepper. After this offering, members enjoy reward certificates that are mailed on birthdays and anniversaries. In addition, members are rewarded with $25 reward certificates for every $250 spent in the restaurant. Points show up after a food server places the points into a computer software and provides the guest with a receipt. Members can check their accounts by looking at the receipts or calling a 1-800 number and speak with VIP services to ensure credit was given. Members receive a quarterly newsletter discussing the happenings of each restaurant and any special promotions that may be scheduled.

Marketing for VIP memberships are done in various ways. A table tent on every guests' table explains the basic criteria of the program. Food servers are required to verbally mention the VIP program to each guest table and explain the benefits. There are VIP brochure/applications displayed in the restaurant lobby for customers in waiting. The VIP program is also extended to local hotel concierge workers. This is done by members of the restaurant's host department who are designated with hotel accounts. The host department contacts the hotels monthly to sign up concierge members who will call the restaurant for reservations from hotel guests and visitors looking for a place to dine. The restaurant chain tracks the reservations and provides the participating concierge with the points accumulated from the accompanying check.

Research Design

Qualitative research, comprised of four focus groups, was used to determine the characteristics of the chosen niche brand restaurant and its most loyal customers. Data derived from focus groups have been proven (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2002) as an effective way to generate hypothesis and consumer questionnaires; it can provide product background information and secure impressions on new product concepts. Based on the research by Lewis and Shoemaker (1999), a moderator's guide was developed to organize the questions. The attributes that make the niche restaurant brand unique and foster loyalty were also determined. Data was collected internally in one of the niche brand restaurants in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA, during March 2004. The research examines responses given by participants in four focus groups. Members in each group were asked by a restaurant manager either in person or over the telephone if they would like to participate. A $50 dinner-for-two letter was provided as an incentive for each participant. Individual members of the focus groups were screened to ensure that they met the qualifications set forth below.

The first two focus groups involved guests that were VIP members and had displayed regular dining habits. The first group had seven members that dined at least once per month. This group was referred as "true loyal." The second group was comprised of ten members that dined once every one to three months. This group was referred to as "moderately loyal." These groups were considered to be competent resources for the focus groups based on their regular patronage and use of the VIP program. The third group involved the restaurant co-workers that sell the loyalty program. It was comprised of ten members, nine food servers and one host. Each of these members had been trained to sell the VIP program. Prior inquiry had shown that food servers had become accustomed to presenting the VIP program to the guests that dined at their tables. The single host was accustomed to selling the program to hotel concierge members, as well as, presenting the program to inquisitive guests in the lobby of the restaurant. The purpose of conducting this research from the restaurant co-workers was to explore their perspective about the restaurant and the effectiveness of the VIP program. The fourth group was comprised of 3 hotel concierge agents that participated in the loyalty program as agents and as guests. By placing reservations for guests and visitors at the restaurant, they acted as agents by advocating the restaurant. Due to their dining behavior, they are qualified as guests of the restaurant. The purpose in obtaining information from this group was also to get their perspective about the restaurant and the effectiveness of the VIP program. The same questions were asked of this group as the first two groups. However, additional questions were posed to determine how and where they make reservations. Connections were made relating to their VIP membership and their willingness to suggest the restaurant to their guests.

Each focus group session lasted for approximately one hour. All interviews were recorded by a tape recorder and the collected data was transcribed into text. General themes and contrasts were derived after examining the converted text from the four focus groups.

Results and Discussions

The focus groups effectively provided the conclusion that the studied restaurant could be considered a niche brand. While there were many restaurants in the market, none had the unique qualities found at the chosen one. None of the groups interviewed could place the restaurant into a specific restaurant food category along with other restaurants. As one respondent put it, "It's in a class of its own."

Both true loyal and moderately loyal groups made comments that they loved the restaurant and felt a close association with the brand. These comments showed a close emotional attachment and affective bond felt by the groups' members. Because the respondents were chosen for the focus groups based on their high degree of loyalty, it could be said that attitudinal qualities are strongly associated with the concept of true loyalty. The more strongly the groups felt about the brand, the more likely they were to buy the brand and advocate it to others. In the case of the restaurant being a niche brand, the uniqueness of the product and service was what drove their commitment. The qualities that make a niche brand can be successfully developed into strategies that foster loyalty. It was discovered that customers had higher perceptions of the qualities that characterize niche brands than qualities that are shared across all brands. Such qualities were the presentation of service, consistency of product, and its VIP program.

Similarities and differences between the studied restaurant as a niche brand versus competing brands could be shown within the constructs of the Loyalty Triangle. Aspects of process similar to competing brands were the reservation/seating process and all guests getting the same treatment (VIP members and all guests). Many restaurants utilized reservations and standard seating procedures. The comment that it was difficult to get through to a reservationist could mean there is a problem with the reservation system. It indicates that other guests may be having the same difficulty, which could lead to a loss of potential reservations. Once the respondents were in the restaurant, it was viewed that the restaurant gets the reservations seated on a timely basis. Respondents mentioned that they rarely had to wait longer than 10-15 minutes. They were given no preferential treatment as a result of being VIP members at the front desk or in the restaurant. While these attributes were mentioned by the group, they were not emphasized as leading factors in their decision to choose the restaurant over competing brands.

There were many mentions, relating to process, that would distinguish it from competing brands. One of these is the execution of service. This presentation was viewed as something that they could not get anywhere besides the studied restaurant. The presentation of the spinning bowl salad and being carved prime rib in silver carts were not only unique, but also considered essential in their decision to choose the restaurant.

In developing a VIP program, the restaurant had created a reward feature that is generous to guests and fosters loyalty. Very few restaurants in general, have a rewards program. The characteristics of this VIP program relating to process includes extending the VIP program to restaurant guests and concierge members, accruing points for rewards, and the transferability of rewards.

In extending the rewards to restaurant guests, there is a major difference between the restaurant's objectives to sell the VIP program and the actual line-level implementation. The only area that the restaurant has been effective in selling the VIP program is to local concierge members. The restaurant co-workers displayed a stout unwillingness to sell the VIP program to restaurant patrons, although it is a job requirement. They believed that it was time consuming and that it cultivated low-tipping customers. Their attitude would preclude any program from being successful because the co-workers need to be enthusiastic about the program in order to sell it. However, research of true loyal and moderately loyal group members indicated that nearly all of the members tipped on the pre-discounted amount, implying that the co-worker's belief was unfounded. There could also be a psychological effect that they remember the bad tippers more than the good tippers.

One aspect of the VIP reward process that the respondents enjoyed was their ability to transfer their reward certificates as incentives to friends or relatives. This would happen because the respondents would sometimes not always be able to use the certificates or wanted to get others to try the restaurant. Respondents acted as advocates and gave these certificates to family, friends, and work associates.

The value-added component of the Loyalty Triangle by Lewis and Shoemaker (1999) can be broken into two categories: first, qualities that are inherent of most competitors within the market, and, second, qualities that are unique to the studied restaurant as a niche brand. Characteristics that were similar include location, ambiance/atmosphere, seating arrangement, special occasion offerings, and value-recovery.

The location of the restaurant was seen as convenient for everyone participating in the focus groups due to its centrality within the city. The art deco ambiance/atmosphere was also seen as an advantage, but there are other restaurants that have the same type of dining environment. Many other restaurants have a comfortable, yet classy, dining atmosphere. Here, the only complaint was that they did not like sitting under the dome or sitting in the middle banquettes. The restaurant may want to analyze the functionality of these areas of the restaurant in order to make everyone's experience more comfortable.

Special occasion offerings were mentioned to include birthday and anniversary desserts. This type of offering was not unique to the studied restaurant. Most restaurants offer the same value offering. There may be an opportunity for the studied restaurant to develop something unique to distinguish itself from competing restaurants in this area.

Value-recovery responses showed that group members in the true loyal and moderately loyal category were over-compensated by management or a food server when there was a service failure. This indicated that the studied restaurant reacts well to problems experienced by dining room guests. However, while the respondents viewed value-recovery as a necessary component of customer service, it was not perceived as a major loyalty driver.

There were several value-added strategies that set the studied restaurant apart from its competition. These strategies (shown to be related to the restaurant qualities as a niche brand) are precursors to action loyalty. These included the high level of food quality/consistency and incentives provided by the VIP program.

While the studied restaurant is essentially a one-item concept, the respondents were united in their declaration that the restaurant had a more-consistent, higher-quality product than its competitors. The comments made indicated that they always know what to expect whenever they dine at the restaurant. While other restaurants have similar goals to meet the consistency standard, the studied restaurant maintained a competitive advantage as a result of this perception. This one attribute led some to say that they would be loyal with or without the VIP program.

A possible value-added recommendation listed by the respondents was to carry more menu offerings. Such a decision could prove beneficial if the offerings are limited and the consistency is not sacrificed by adding too many items. The VIP program was also a major component in the minds of the respondents that drives their loyalty. It is also a component that distinguishes the studied restaurant from its competitors and more fully establishes it as a niche brand. The concierge members, familiar with many restaurants in Las Vegas, mentioned that there was no other restaurant frequency program that provided as many incentives as the one that the studied restaurant offers. They viewed the relationship that they had with the restaurant's hostess and marketing manager as a leading reason to send people to the restaurant. From the responses, it is clear that developing loyalty among concierge members could be accomplished through personal contact and reward disbursement. This would indicate that relationship marketing is an essential part of value perception and affective commitment, precursors to true loyalty. This finding indicates that it would be highly beneficial for the studied restaurant to maintain this program. The concierge advocates spread word-of-mouth and increase the amount of business.

All respondents that participated as members in the VIP program were highly satisfied and enjoyed the rewards for points, birthdays, and anniversaries. These were considered value-added incentives for their patronage. Although highly satisfied, it would seem beneficial for the studied restaurant to consider the recommendations for making the VIP program even better. Making exceptions for expired certificates by extending or creatively redefining the offer was mentioned. Other suggestions included creating a tiered or variety-based incentive program that incorporates the restaurant unique style of service and product. Combining certificates or offering other reward alternatives could also prove beneficial. While these suggestions could enhance the value proposition, it would prove detrimental if the rewards already offered were taken away without a careful strategy.

Results of this study indicates that in order for a loyalty program to be successful, value must be created and perceived at the external and internal customer level. The studied restaurant co-workers provided multiple responses suggesting that loyalty program sales are not being initiated by the co-workers at the level expected by the restaurant. The suggestions to automatically add the gratuity or to disclose the proper tip procedure on the check would only upset the customers leading to a negative perception of the program or the brand. The suggestion to give the loyalty program away for free or to provide a larger incentive for selling the program could increase sales, however, it could also increase the costs of maintaining the program and build a larger, non-loyal database. Dropping the check with a VIP brochure was a good suggestion to introduce the program. It would increase sales based on a repetitive and visual sales approach.

If selling the VIP program is truly a mandatory part of the food servers' job, then holding co-workers accountable for reaching sales levels would be an appropriate measure. At this point, it is unclear if management is willing to enforce the sales requirements. Doing so would almost guarantee the desired increase of sales and prove that management is serious about selling the program. Holding sales contests or posting sales results could also rally the co-workers into selling more memberships.

In the area of database marketing, the studied restaurant had several promotions going on that is similar to the competition. This included mailings, advertisements, and special event promotions. Each of these areas was respectively mentioned by members of the groups, however, none was shown to link loyalty to the various promotions being offered. Most of the database marketing techniques used by the studied restaurant involved the VIP membership database. Once again, the VIP program is proven effective as a niche strategy to increase repeat-purchase behavior. The restaurant use of this database creates a list of their most loyal patrons. It is used as a tracking device to see who is dining, when they dine, and how much is spent during each experience. This database has been used to send VIP members reward certificates, newsletters, and promotional materials. The newsletter, for example, was read and deemed informative by most group members. Some had even attended events as a result of reading it. Overall, the members enjoyed the frequent contact of receiving the rewards and newsletters. More importantly, they felt a stronger association and desire to dine as a result of receiving the material in the mail.

Email blasts were also used to promote special events and keep the VIP members updated about the happenings at the restaurant. The concierge members were especially enthusiastic about the email blasts because they check their email on a daily basis. One idea is to create a subgroup of concierge members' email addresses to enhance the marketing relationship. As the concierge membership gets larger and more difficult to manage, emailing would provide an easier way to keep in touch and promote special offers.

The comment that promotions were directed at guests that consume alcohol suggests that the studied restaurant could benefit from conducting further research into the desires and spending habits of their VIP members. It could be that the restaurant isolates many members because their promotions include the sale of alcohol. It also suggests that alternative promotions should be considered when choosing a marketing program.

In accruing points for VIP rewards, there were mixed responses with some saying that they were completely satisfied and others saying that they were unsure. When promotions such as double-points were offered, the VIP members were unable to immediately view the additional points on their receipt. While co-workers agreed that they make an earnest effort to give the points, they do not always succeed. This would suggest that there is a lack of consistency with accumulation and disbursement of the rewards. If the customers do not get their rewards, this could lead to a negative effect on guests' trust and commitment levels and have an opposite effect on loyalty. Also, if database promotions are utilized, co-workers should be informed and be able to give information about programs and events to the customers.

Conclusion

The study presented a qualitative analysis of customer loyalty as it pertains to a niche restaurant brand by demonstrating a successful application of the Loyalty Triangle theory. Because the respondents were chosen for the focus groups based on their high degree of loyalty, it could be said that attitudinal qualities are strongly associated with the concept of true loyalty. It attests that for a restaurant being a niche brand, the uniqueness of the product and service, value creation, and effective communication are what drive their commitment that leads to long-term loyalty. Limitations of focus groups are that they produce qualitative responses that may not be generalized and limited to the number of participants questioned. It would be useful to conduct quantitative research at the niche brand level, to determine the spending habits and demographics of members that participate in frequency programs. Also, calculating the lifetime value of members that participate in frequency programs would be beneficial to determine if the costs outweigh the benefits when implementing such a program.

There are opportunities to conduct an abundance of research as it relates to niche brands across industries. This might include research that looks at the commitment attributes that distinguish users of niche brands from common brands. Also important would be to consider at what point a niche brand becomes a common brand.

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Would a Restaurant Menu Item by Any Other Name Taste as Sweet?

By Tim Lockyer

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the use of words on a restaurant menu, and to evaluate the impact that they have on the selection of menu items. The research comprised two distinct parts. First, four focus groups were held examining responses to five menus, each with the same menu items but using different wording. The results from the focus group analysis were used to develop a survey which was more widely distributed. From the focus group it was revealed that the occasion and participants in the dining experience influence the wording for menu item selection. Respondents discussed the mystique of the menu and confirmed a desire for menu items that would not normally be prepared at home. It was also of interest the "mouth watering" effect that the words have on potential customers and what a strong persuader these words were. The survey reinforced the focus group research in many ways, also stressing the positive effect of descriptive words such as "Tender", "Golden" and "Natural" to the choice of menu items.

The research has identified the importance of the choice and use of words in the design of a menu that operations management need to be aware of.

Introduction

Menu analysis and engineering is the accepted phrase used for the management of the items on a restaurant menu relating to which Jones and Atkinson (1994) identify two broad categories. The first relates to average spend analysis, which includes techniques suggested by Kreck (1984) to compare the menu average against the guest average spend for a particular menu, and work by Miller (1987) which is based on taking the average amount spent by a guest and creating from that a frequency distribution. The second approach is that of menu engineering as proposed by a number of authors (Miller, 1987; Kasavana and Smith, 1982; Uman, 1983; Pavesic, 1985). The analysis undertaken by Kasavana and Smith (1982) used a four quadrant matrix with the X and Y coordinates being the popularity and sales contribution margin respectively. Those items that had high popularity and high contribution margin were placed in the top right quadrant, while those with low popularity and low contribution margin were placed in the bottom left quadrant. Each item on the menu was placed in its relevant quadrant, and then analyzed to evaluate how or if the items could be moved to increase the menu's overall contribution margin. The basic premise of this work is the manipulation of menu items in order to achieve the desired overall level of profit required. One of the factors that menu engineering analysis seeks to determine is how one item on the menu sells in relation to other items on the menu (Miller, 1987). This is important because each item on a menu has a different contribution margin in relation to food cost, labor and facilities. A restaurant normally wishes to sell those items with a high contribution margin and not those with a low contribution margin (Beran, 1995; LeBruto Quain & Ashley, 1997; Hayes & Huffmann, 1985). As suggested by Jones and Mifli (2001), in comparing these two approaches there has not been a clear consensus as to the efficacy or otherwise of the alternatives. In addition other researchers have proposed a number of different modifications to these approaches (LeBruto Quain & Ashley, 1997; Beran, 1995), and a third has been proposed, which takes into consideration additional factors that affect the cost of the menu item such as the labor cost required to prepare the menu item (Hayes and Huffman, 1985; Bayou & Bennet, 1992).

When considering the physical design of the menu and how it is laid out, gaze-motion theory has been identified (Miller 1987; Mooney 1994; Davis Lockwood and Stone 1998). The purported theory behind this is that customers read sections of a menu card in a specific order (not from top to bottom), and because of this it is suggested that the location of items on the menu are important as they influence the level of sales of items. Bowen and Morris (1995) in an empirical study concluded that if a menu was re-designed following the suggested principles it did not result in increase sales.

When further considering the actual menu a review of the literature reveals little in relation to the use of the language used. The following extracts give a feeling of the current understanding of menu language (Dittmer Griffin, 1994, 297):

> "... the language used to describe menu items may make a good impression and induce customer orders. The description of foods may make the customer hungry and may help to increase the number of sales ... A food and beverage operator can exercise great influence over the amount of the average check by using written descriptions that make menu items sound interesting. Customers tend to react positively to foods that are appealingly described and negatively to those that are not."

It is clear from other disciplines that the use of words is an important part of communication. Bearing in mind that language 'denotes, connotes and emotes' (Paulson, 2003) the effect of the use of words in this medium is especially important. The words on the menu are there to entice a dinner guest to choose or purchase and so are in fact an 'advertisement' of the food that is on offer. Karasik (2003) considers selling to be a lot like acting, where an actor's job is to convince and persuade an audience by evoking emotions. This can be likened to the words on a menu evoking mental images of the choice of food. The perception of the customer contemplating the meal which aids the purchase decision is what the menu is seeking to shape.

There has been much research into the effect that words have in the marketing and advertising environment (Westphal, 1997; Paulson, 2003; Simmons, 2003). One example is work done on language in services advertising, where Stern (1988) reports that one purpose of advertising research is to 'ascertain the meaning of messages and thus enable advertisers and marketers to communicate effectively with their targeted customers... Standard approaches to research involve examination of advertising verbals and visuals to interpret what the messages mean to the perceivers" (Stern, 1988 p 3). Applying these principles to a menu in a restaurant could provide useful information towards increasing restaurant returns. When a menu is read, the guest seeks to gain an idea or understanding of the food that will be ordered so they can make a choice. Words create moods in many ways and each word contains a powerful magic (Lesesne, 2000). The words help to blend an image of what is to come. Imagery, as a literary construct relies on words appealing to the senses, and the sensory associations can bring an imaginatively exciting dimension (Stern, 1988), in this case to the menu's message.

Methodology:

The research for this paper took place in Hamilton, New Zealand. Hamilton is the fourth largest city in New Zealand after Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. New Zealand is a culturally diverse country which includes Maori, Polynesian, European, Asian, South African, Indian and other mixes of people. This research comprised two data collection methods; the first was through the use of a focus group and the second through the use of a convenience survey conducted among a random selection of the population of Hamilton, which resulted in a data set of 200 usable surveys. The objective of the research was to understand the impact that words have on the selection of restaurant menu items.

Focus group:

This part of the research comprised four focus groups with a total of 48 participants. The participants were self-selecting; a letter was delivered to the mail boxes of randomly selected homes in the Hamilton area, inviting the participation. This letter included a phone number to call and information about a NZ$30 book voucher that they would receive if they participated, plus refreshments. No attempt was made to have people with high or low restaurant usage or to specify any particular demographic characteristics. Randomness of selection was part of the recruitment process, and it was decided that diversity in the groups was appropriate (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999). As there was no reason to believe that a group of randomly self selected focus group members in any particular area would have different views from others in New Zealand, the members of the focus groups were recruited solely from people resident in Hamilton. The focus group meetings followed the same procedure for each of the four meetings: a modified nominal group approach was used for the main discussion component, plus a written survey form was given to participants for the collection of demographic information. All data collected was done so anonymously using randomly assigned numbers.

Survey

The objective of the survey was to measure the validity of the findings from the focus group after the focus group meetings. To accomplish this a survey was prepared and delivered to randomly selected areas of Hamilton, this included an addressed freepost return envelope. Approximately 1,800 surveys were delivered which resulted in 200 usable responses. As indicated the survey covered the same areas identified as significant from the focus group meetings, and comprised both open and closed questions plus questions about demographics. The closed questions included ranking, seven-point Likert-style questions.

Results:

Discussion – Focus Group

At the start of the focus group meeting the participants were asked to complete some basic demographic information. Over all the focus group meetings 28 percent of participants were male and 72 percent were female. Just over 23 percent of participants were aged between 21 and 30 with the same percentage aged between 41 and 50. The smallest number of participants (12.8 percent) were aged older than 61. In relation to family income the largest number (40.4 per cent) had an annual income of between NZ$40,001 and NZ$60,000. The next largest group (21.4 percent) had a family income of NZ$60,001 to NZ$80,000. The smallest number (2.1 percent) had an income less than NZ$20,000.

Throughout the discussion and analysis the following five menus in Table 1 were used. Each menu represents the same menu items but presented using different words. To begin with, several menus were designed, which involved visits to local restaurants to investigate the use of words in different types of establishment to determine how the words were used to denote particular characteristics. The items on draft menus were adjusted according to how successfully they leant themselves to types of descriptive wording. The objective was to obtain five clearly defined menus but with each as closely as possible repeating the first menu.

TABLE 1:

Five Menus Used in The Analysis

FRENCH STYLE MENU (1)	*ENGLISH WITH FRENCH MENU (2)*
Consommé julienne Poulet sauté chasseur Pointes d'asperges au beurre Pommes au lard Charlotte aux pomes	Clear soup garnished with a julienne of vegetables Chicken sautéed in butter and served with sauce Chasseur Asparagus points au beurre Potatoes au lard Apple Charlotte
SEASONAL MENU (3)	*ELABORATE STYLE MENU (4)*
Spring vegetables garnished in a fresh clear soup Spring chicken cooked and served in a sauce flavoured with new season mushrooms, shallots and tomatoes New season asparagus points with dairy fresh butter New season potatoes cooked with fresh onions and bacon New season apples in a mould of fresh buttered bread	A delicious flavorful clear soup garnished with the freshest, most tasty vegetables The most tender chicken cooked till golden and served with a delicious sauce finished with tomatoes, shallots and mushrooms Asparagus points quickly cooked to perfection and served with rich creamery butter Potatoes cooked to perfection with the addition of the flavors and aroma of bacon and onions The finest apples gently cooked and finished in a mound of delicious buttered bread
ORGANIC STYLE MENU (5)	
Naturally grown ingredients made into a crystal clear soup served with organic slivers of vegetables Free range organic chicken cooked and served with mushrooms, shallots and tomatoes in a naturally produced sauce Organically grown asparagus points served with natural butter Naturally grown farm potatoes, cooked and served with onions and bacon Orchard fresh apples cooked and served with natural grain, buttered bread	

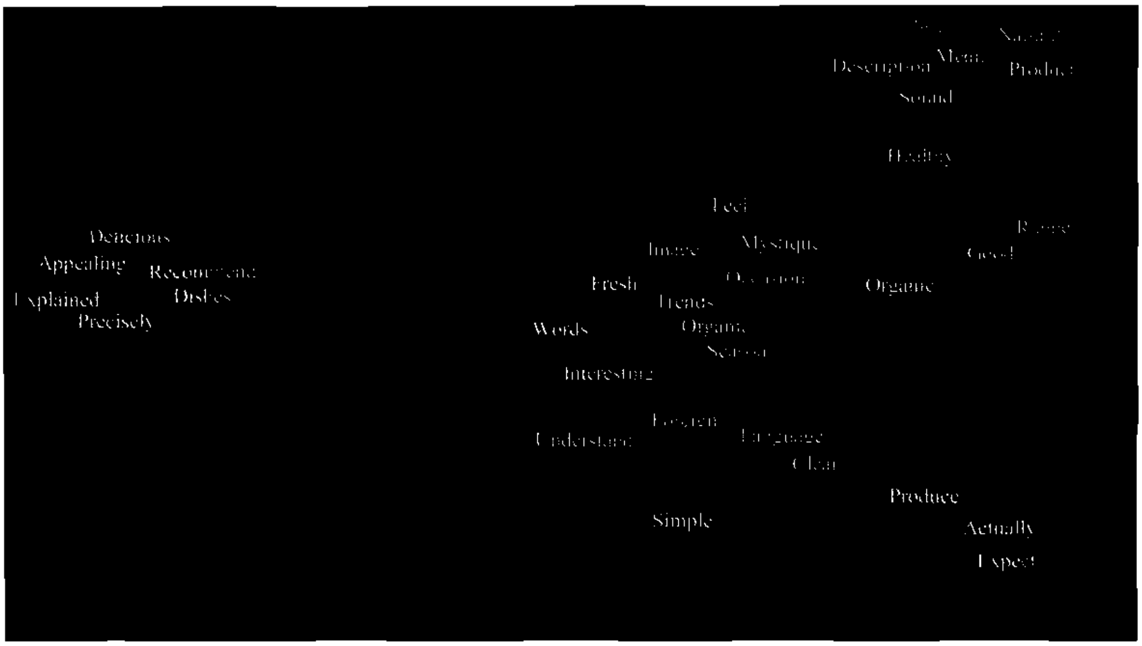
Using the menus in Table 1 the respondents were asked: "Please indicate using the following scale how appealing each menu is to you". The participants were given a five point scale from 1 = most appealing, to 5 = very unappealing. The results are presented in Table 2 and the rating with the highest mean is highlighted. As can be seen the results were mixed for some menus. For menu number one 19 persons (42 percent) rated it as "Very Unappealing". For menu number three 19 persons (42 percent) rated it as the one with the highest appeal, while menu five had 12 persons (27 percent) indicating very appealing and 10 persons (22 percent) very unappealing. Although the sample set is small, there is no statistical difference between gender, age, income or night attending the focus group and the rating of the menus by participants.

The participants were then asked to write down on large sheets of paper why they had indicated their very appealing menu and their very unappealing menu. These sheets plus that rating of the menus were used for the focus group discussion.

Table 2:

Menu Appeal	Menu 1		Menu2		Menu 3		Menu 4		Menu 5	
	Participants' selection	Mean Percentage	Participants' selection	Mean Percentage	Participants' selection	Mean Percentage	Participants' selection	Mean Percentage	Participants' selection	Mean Percentage
Very appealing	1	2	9	20	**19**	**42**	4	9	**12**	**27**
Appealing	6	13	6	13	14	31	12	27	7	16
Neither Appealing or Unappealing	10	22	13	29	10	22	5	11	7	16
Unappealing	9	20	**15**	**33**	1	2	11	24	9	20
Very Unappealing	**19**	**42**	2	4	1	2	**13**	**29**	10	22

Figure 1: Spatial Map of Menu Discussion



Because of the nature of focus group discussion this process generated a lot of transcribed text to be analyzed, for which content analysis was used. In using content analysis there is always some concern about the reliability of the findings; this has been defined as the extent to which a measuring procedure yields the same result (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). To assist with this a computer content analysis program, TextSmart[tm] was employed, which is primarily for the analysis of open-ended survey response. The program uses cluster analysis and multi-dimensional scaling techniques to automatically analyze key words and groups text into categories. Thus it can code without the requirement of a user-created dictionary, which has the effect of reducing coding biases.

The spatial map in Figure 1 was developed using TextSmart(tm) by loading all the menu related responses from the focus group discussions. The first task undertaken is to 'cleanse' the data. The purpose of this is to minimize irregularities by using a number of tools including spelling correction and the development of alias and exclusion lists. The object of this is to get some common meaning in words. Care must be taken during this process to ensure that the underlying meaning is not changed. These adjustments are done in a live interactive environment where the results of any change can be immediately seen, and inappropriate changes can be undone. During this process the categories as illustrated in the various colors are created. The visualization features of the software are used where the colors illustrate category plots of word associations. Also a process of "brushing" allows for the verification and integration of the data using on-screen functions to highlight specific words, responses and categories.

Looking at Figure 1 an interesting category is that slightly to the right of centre. The first part of that grouping included the words "Words, Fresh, Interesting". It was clear from the focus group discussion that the words used on the menu can give the guest a definite feeling for the menu, in this case that the items on the menu are both "Fresh" and "Interesting". The second identified grouping, "Feel, Image, Mystique", emphasizes an important part of the group discussion in that the menu is more than a list of items but it also is used to entice and is in fact the beginning of the dining experience. The focus group particularly discussed how important "Mystique" is but that was also closely related to "Occasion". There was in the focus group a clear relationship between the "Occasion" of the meal and "Mystique". The last group, "Trends, Organic, Season" indicates the changes in current trend towards menu items that reflect that the produce is both "Organic" and "Fresh".

The next grouping to be discussed is that of, "Menu, Pure, Natural, Products", "Description, Sounds, Healthy". From the focus group discussion these terms were emphasized in relation to the feelings that the words on the menus give. The subsequent grouping comprised "Good, Range, Organic"; it was stated in the discussion that the "use of these words give a good feeling when reading the menu". They also reflect this modern trend or fashion which leans towards a specific appeal for organic produce.

To discuss the grouping on the bottom right, "Produce, Actually, Expect", it was stated that there is a need to have an explanation of how the product was produced, and this description needs to relate directly to what is "Actually" served and be in line with what the guest "Expects".

The category next to that contains the single word, "Simple" but with the words "Understand, Foreign, Language, Clear" surrounding it though not in the category. The importance of ensuring that the language and other aspects of the words used is "Simple" indicates that guests require the menu to be understandable and that the terms used are those "acceptable in the right circumstances".

The final category on the far left of Figure 1 has three parts to it: 1). "Appealing, Delicious", "Recommend, Dishes", "Explained, Precisely" This referred to the need expressed by the focus group of two areas: that of the "importance of an explanation" of the menu and the second is that this is done in an appealing way.

This next section of the research discusses the comments made by the focus group participants in relation to each of the five menus.

Discussion – Survey

As previously indicated there were 200 usable survey responses, of which 28.7 percent were male and 71.3 percent were female. In relation to ethnic mix, 63.9 percent were European/Pakeha, 9.0 percent were Maori (approximately 16 percent of the New

Zealand Population is Maori), 22.2 percent Asian and 5.3 percent other. Table 3 gives information on the age and family income of the survey participants. As is evident from Table 3 the largest age group of participants was between 31 and 40 years with the smallest group being those over 61 years. Also from Table 3 it is evident that the largest family income group was those $20,001 to $40,000 followed by those earning $40,001 to $60,000 (New Zealand dollars). The current average salary in New Zealand is NZ$28,808 (Pink 2004).

Table 3:
Age and Family Income of Survey Participants.

	Frequency	Percent
20 years or less	16	8.2
Between 21 and 30	75	38.7
Between 31 and 40	33	17.0
Between 41 and 50	26	13.4
Between 51 and 60	29	14.9
Older than 61 years	15	7.7
Total	194	100.0
	Frequency	Percent
Less than $20,000	45	24.1
$20,001 to $40,000	58	31.0
$40,001 to $60,000	36	19.3
$60,001 to $80,000	23	12.3
$80,001 to $100,000	20	10.7
More than $100,000	5	2.7
Total	187	100.0

It was evident from the focus group discussion that there were clear differences in what menu items would be selected based on the occasion of the dining experience. For example: romantic dinner, family reunion, meal with the mother-in-law or a business meeting. Therefore, the first four questions in the survey asked about the menu selection for each of these different dining experiences to determine if there was any measurable difference. Appendix A (*see last page of this paper*) illustrates how each of the different four parts of the question was asked. The example in Appendix A is for romantic dinner; the same style of question was used for family reunion, etc.

As part of each set of questions as illustrated in Appendix A, the survey participants were also asked to comment why they picked their top rated item. A simple form of content analysis was used to evaluate these comments. This involved careful examination of the transcripts with the organization of similar comments into groups. These were then ranked according to frequency of comment. To keep the analysis focused on the main points from the lists of comments, the top eight comments were selected as follows:

Menu item #1 - Poulet sauté chasseur:

Feel romantic
It looks like very romantic
The dish name sounds romantic
Could not understand the meaning of "Poulet Saute Chasseur"
French language is romantic
It is exciting to try something that sounds fancy
Sounds sophisticated
Very expensive

Menu Item #2 - Chicken sautéed in butter and served with sauce chasseur:

It appears to have the nicest flavor
Sounds exotic different, but I can guess what it is
Good for old people
Nice and Rich – "better her up:
Not too heavy a meal
Seems delicious
Sounds cheap
Sensible, not to over the top

Menu Item #3 - Spring chicken cooked and served in a new season mushrooms, shallot and tomato flavoured sauce:

Easy to understand what it is
It tastes good and looks nice
Wording not too fancy, not to simple
Sounds new, nice and healthy
The description showed the most delicious
Description more romantic than other
Easy to read, tells a bit more, not too fussy
Because it tells me basically what I get

Menu Item #4 - The most tender chicken cooked till golden and served with a delicious sauce finished with tomatoes, shallots and mushrooms:

Like chicken tender
It sounded more 'lovingly' prepared and special
Only the best sounding things
Because the chicken is the most tender and the color golden sounds very good
Only menu description I felt confident I know what I was getting
Mouth watering description, very suitable
Because when the chicken cooked till golden it will be so nice
Because it explained what was in the dish clearly and used words 'tender' and 'delicious'

Menu Item #5 - Free range organic chicken cooked and served with mushrooms, shallots and tomatoes in a naturally produced sauce:

Sounds the fresh less likely to contain chemicals
I like to know what I am eating
It sounds healthier and more naturally flavorsome and a romantic ???
Organic chicken
I like the sound of the food being organic-makes you think it is fresh and ???
Whole family members are organic lovers
Please everyone and take care of the possibility of any food ???
Sounds healthy

It is evident from the above that the different ways of writing the same item on a menu has various the impact on the potential purchaser. For example "Poulet sauté chasseur" is romantic, harder to understand and sounds sophisticated and expensive, while for the most popular item, "The most tender chicken cooked till golden and served with a delicious sauce finished with tomatoes, shallots and mushrooms", comments of 'lovingly prepared', 'only the best', 'tender' and 'delicious', 'confident that the guest knows what they are getting' and 'mouth-watering description' were reported.

As illustrated in Table 4 (next page), for all the different dining experiences menu item number four was rated as "Most likely to select"; this was different than for the focus group. Although for a meal with the Mother-in-law menu item number five was co-top rated and for a Business meeting item number three was co-top.

Table 4: Rating of Menu Item for Survey Participants

Item 1 Poulet sauté chasseur

Item 2 Chicken sautéed in butter and served with sauce chasseur

Item 3 Spring chicken cooked and served in a new season mushrooms, shallot and tomato flavoured sauce

Item 4 The most tender chicken cooked till golden and served with a delicious sauce finished with tomatoes, shallots and mushrooms

Item 5 Free range organic chicken cooked and served with mushrooms, shallots and tomatoes in a naturally produced sauce

	Item 1		Item 2		Item 3		Item 4		Item 5	
	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent
Romantic Dinner										
Most likely to select	2.00	18.03	5.00	10.17	2.00	25.56	1.00	35.75	3.00	17.58
Likely to select	5.00	10.93	2.00	19.77	3.00	23.33	2.00	26.82	3.00	17.58
Neither Likely or Unlikely to select	4.00	12.57	3.00	18.08	1.00	26.11	3.00	15.64	2.00	25.82
Unlikely to select	3.00	15.85	1.00	41.24	4.00	16.11	4.00	15.08	5.00	10.44
Most Unlikely to select	1.00	42.62	4.00	10.73	5.00	8.89	5.00	6.70	1.00	28.57
Family Reunion										
Most likely to select	3.00	9.78	4.00	9.94	2.00	28.02	1.00	37.70	3.00	20.44
Likely to select	5.00	7.07	3.00	13.26	3.00	27.47	2.00	28.96	2.00	22.65
Neither Likely or Unlikely to select	3.00	9.78	2.00	19.89	[illegible]	[illegible]	3.00	14.75	1.00	24.86
Unlikely to select	2.00	19.57	1.00	48.07	4.00	8.24	4.00	10.93	4.00	11.60
Most Unlikely to select	1.00	53.80	5.00	8.84	5.00	7.14	5.00	7.65	3.00	20.44
Mother-in-law										
Most likely to select	4.00	10.50	4.00	12.29	2.00	26.23	1.00	34.97	1.00	24.73
Likely to select	3.00	13.81	3.00	17.32	3.00	25.68	2.00	23.50	3.00	17.58
Neither Likely or Unlikely to select	4.00	10.50	2.00	18.44	[illegible]	[illegible]	3.00	18.03	2.00	23.08
Unlikely to select	2.00	16.57	1.00	[illegible]	4.00	11.48	4.00	16.39	5.00	12.64
Most Unlikely to select	1.00	48.62	5.00	11.17	5.00	9.29	5.00	7.10	4.00	21.98
Business Meeting										
Most likely to select	2.00	20.65	3.00	18.89	1.00	[illegible]	1.00	[illegible]	4.00	16.94
Likely to select	3.00	15.22	2.00	21.67	3.00	19.34	1.00	[illegible]	3.00	17.49
Neither Likely or Unlikely to select	5.00	12.50	4.00	15.56	1.00	[illegible]	3.00	19.55	[illegible]	[illegible]
Unlikely to select	4.00	14.67	[illegible]	[illegible]	4.00	13.81	3.00	19.55	5.00	15.85
Most Unlikely to select	[illegible]	[illegible]	5.00	10.00	5.00	10.50	5.00	11.73	2.00	27.87

Discussion and Conclusion

Understanding the words used on a menu and the impact that the words have on a potential purchaser is a very complex question. Previous research into menu engineering and related areas has helped practitioners to understand some of these complexities and has in many respects looked at mechanical approaches to the management of menu items sold to guests. This research was based solely on the words used on a menu, to gain an understanding what impact those words may have and under what circumstances they impact the purchase of menu items.

It was evident from the focus group discussion that there were broadly diverse views, but it was also clear that menu number four was the most popular. For this menu words such as "Fresh", "Tasty", "Clear explanation" were attached. Another area that was very strongly emphasized was that of "Mystique"; it was clear that many people going to a restaurant for a meal are looking for something that they would most probably not cook at home, and something that adds a small though appealing amount of mystery to the dining experience. This was also evident in the discussion when the participants were asked if they would try a dish on a menu if they did not know what it was, but just to experiment. Many of the focus group participants indicated that they would, but that cost was important, that they would try different things if the portion size was small and also the cost was low. This principle could be applied by regularly adding one or two new items as 'tasters' especially in small portion size items.

Although each of these points are important, overall there was a clear preference from the focus group for items on the menu that were clear, tasty, mouth-wateringly described, fresh and natural.

The survey was conducted to measure if similar results would be produced away from the focus group. However, similar characteristics were identified as important in the selection of menu items.

It was identified from this research that the wording of items on a menu does have an impact of the selection of items. But it is also evident that additional research is required. The next step would be to find a few restaurants that would allow the wording of one item on a menu to be changed, possibly every week, and then to measure the level of sales for that item. As yet the writer has not been able to persuade a restaurant to undertake such an approach as it could impact on revenue. Perhaps a training institution with a restaurant which students operate for the public may be interested – if so, I would be keen to hear of it, and perhaps pursue joint further research in this area.

One last comment which was not mentioned in the research analysis, it was surprising the number of people in the written survey who took the trouble to write that they did not like mushrooms!

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Appendix A

Example of how each of the four questions were asked
Listed below are five items that may appear on a restaurant menu. Imagine that you are going out for a **romantic dinner**, Please rate each of them from 1 to 5 with 1 = most likely to select to 5 = least likely to select and put the number in the box. Please use each number only once:

Poulet sauté chasseur	
Chicken sautéed in butter and served with sauce chasseur	
Spring chicken cooked and served in a new season mushrooms, shallot and tomato flavoured sauce	
The most tender chicken cooked till golden and served with a delicious sauce finished with tomatoes, shallots and mushrooms	
Free range organic chicken cooked and served with mushrooms, shallots and tomatoes in a naturally produced sauce	

Why did you pick your number 1 = "most likely to select"? ______________________

A Study of Online Hotel Reservations on Asia Pacific-based, European-based, and North American-based Travel Websites

By Rob Law and Andrew Cheung

This paper reports a study that examined hotel reservation services on travel websites. Using a systematic search, 90 travel websites were selected with an equal number of North American-based, European-based, and Asia Pacific-based websites. These regions represent the areas of the world with the most Internet users. Based on the developed framework of information quality, the contents of the selected travel websites were evaluated. The empirical results indicated that the travel websites achieved different levels of quality in online information, and that North American-based websites performed significantly better in some attributes.

Introduction

The recent development of Internet technology has attracted many people to turn to this virtual environment to search for information and make online bookings. eTforecast (2005) predicted that there will be 1,466 million Internet users in the world in 2007, up from the 44.6 million in 1995. Nielsen//Rating claimed that there was a 4% increase in the number of Internet users from 2001 to 2002. The growth in Internet applications is not merely in number of users but also in business revenues. It has been found that the growth in retail e-commerce in the first quarter of 2005 was 24% on a year-over-year basis. The direct relationship between vendors and customers on the Internet directly reflects the situation in the travel and tourism industry. Various statistical data have shown that there is a large demand for using the Internet for travel and tourism. HarrisInteractive (2002) found that travel is one of the largest e-commerce applications in 2001. In the same way, Valhouli (2003) stated that online travel and tourism is the fastest growing and leading business in e-commerce, comprising about half of all online sales. In addition, after airfares, hotel room reservations are the second-largest source of online reservations in the travel and tourism industry, with an estimated transaction volume of US$17.5 billion in 2005, up from US$6.3 billion in 2002. Similarly, Greenspan (2003) stated that the share of hotel room sales from traditional travel agencies will drop from 21% in 2001 to 18% in 2005. Starkov and Price (2005) further predicted that over 50% of all hotel bookings will be performed online in 2009. When reservations are made, most travelers prefer third-party travel websites to hotel sites. Likewise, TravelCLICK (2004) showed that travel agency websites are the most frequently used online channel for hotel bookings.

In spite of the increasing popularity of online bookings for hotel rooms, there have been few published articles on the contents of hotel reservations on travel agency websites. The most closely related study, to the knowledge of the authors, was the one conducted in 2001 to compare the contents of 60 travel websites in Asia and North America. However, 20% of the selected websites in that study did not function properly. To reflect the fast-changing nature of the online travel industry and to achieve a broader geographical representation, this study aims to examine the hotel reservation services on selected travel websites based in North America, the Asia-Pacific region, and Europe. According to the Internet World Stats (2005), 90% of Internet users in the world are from these three regions. Therefore, the findings of this study are expected to help both consumers and practitioners better understand the hotel booking services that are available on travel websites in different regions.

Having introduced in the previous paragraphs the background of this study, the next section reviews the growth of online applications in general and those relating to the hospitality and tourism industries in particular. The section after that discusses the methodology used in this study, the development of the framework of information quality for hotel reservations on travel websites, and the sampling and data collection processes. An empirical results section that analyzes the research findings is then presented. A discussion section follows which offers an overview of the study. The last section summarizes the study, and suggests opportunities for future research.

Online Hotel and Tourism Applications

Ever since the removal in the early 1990s of requirements for official support to join the Internet, there has been a proliferation of Internet applications in business in general and in the hospitality and tourism industries in particular. Such a proliferation is primarily attributed to ongoing improvements in network technology, the low cost of acquiring personal computers, and the increasing competitiveness of online prices. More specifically, the Internet enables e-travelers to search for information and purchase products or services through direct interactions with online businesses. As such, the purchases that consumers make are primarily based on the cyberspace appearance of the product, such as pictures, images, and video clips, not on actual contact with the product. For this reason, the promise of electronic business and online shopping depends, to a great extent, on the users' perceptions of the availability of services. Moreover, their overall perceptions on the presentation of information, ease of navigation, and order fulfillment in an interactive medium are all important factors in building an e-business that do not exist in the traditional retailing environment.

The Internet provides an unprecedented communications link for the flow of information by improving the efficiency, accuracy, and accessibility of websites for global e-travelers. Similarly, hospitality and tourism businesses can deliver their information to suppliers, vendors, customers, and employees throughout the entire value chain.

In travel and tourism, statistics have shown that two-thirds of Internet users used the Internet to plan trips, and with slightly more than one-third of these users having subsequently made a purchase. In the United States alone, more than 64 million people, representing 67% of all travelers, used the Internet in 2003 to search for travel-related information, and more than 42 million of these travelers actually made an online purchase afterwards. This was an 8% increase over the previous year. Lastly, 29% of online bookers made all their travel arrangements online in 2003, and 11% of online travelers had made a spontaneous trip because of e-mail promotions or offers. All of these figures indicate a promising demand for Internet applications in travel and tourism.

The exponential growth of Internet access provides an entirely new means for tourism and hospitality businesses to create a sustainable competitive advantage in the global marketplace. Therefore, most, if not all, businesses have established an online presence in order to gain a share of the market. Through e-business, hospitality and tourism practitioners can take advantage of Internet technology by expanding their market opportunities, improving their efficiency, and having more productive operations. Inevitably, the emergence of Internet technology will change (and possibly reduce) the role played by costly physical infrastructure or distribution networks in making it possible for hospitality and tourism businesses to penetrate into a geographical area. With virtual storefronts, online catalogues, and network security for purchases on the Web, websites serve as an ideal channel for e-travelers to make their online queries and purchases without any geographical and time constraints.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study comprised a detailed content analysis of the online hotel reservation services that were available on the selected travel websites.

Prior to the website evaluation process and drawing on the findings of prior studies, a framework on website information quality was formulated, which hypothesized that the overall quality of information on a travel website is determined by the dimensions of; i) information completeness, ii) navigation quality, and iii) ease of use. The first dimension refers to the extent to which users can find the information they need to make a reservation; whereas the second dimension relates to the simplicity of moving around on the website and whether the website generally works well. The last dimension generally concerns the organization of the website, and the availability of simple and clear directions for use. Each of these dimensions further consists of multiple attributes that measure the availability of specific functions or services on a website.

An initial list of attributes for the proposed framework was developed by adapting related prior studies. The developed list of attributes was then reviewed at the end of 2004 by a group of 30 experienced online travelers using a Delphi method. After three rounds of evaluations, the participants finally agreed to a list of 23 attributes. Three of these attributes further consisted of sub-attributes. The first dimension consisted of eight attributes, the second dimension had nine attributes, and the remaining six attributes were in the last dimension.

Prior to the actual selection of travel websites, the most popular search engines of Google, Yahoo, and MSN were tested in January 2005 for the lists of results that they returned when the keywords "online travel booking" were inputted. Although Google returned the largest number of matches, its maximum number of displayed matches was less than that of Yahoo. The same result was obtained when the word "hotel" was added to the list of keywords. Hence, Yahoo was chosen as the search engine for selecting the travel websites used for analysis.

Using Yahoo, a total of 90 travel websites that offer online reservation services for hotels and airfares were chosen using a systematic sequential search from the list of returned virtual links. In this study, 30 North American-based travel websites were first selected. The selection was determined by the location of the headquarters of the travel websites or the target destinations served by the websites. The same process was also applied to the 30 selected Asia Pacific-based and 30 European-based travel websites. To rectify the problem of accessing errors that was encountered by a similar study, only workable websites that provided at least online reservation services for hotels and airfares were included. Table 1 lists the 90 selected websites, and the next section presents the empirical findings of the website evaluations.

Table 1:

The Selected Travel Websites

1	www.expedia.com	www.manningtravel.co.uk	travel.indiatimes.com
3	www.travelocity.com	www.easyt.se	www.anytours.com.hk
3	www.orbitz.com	www.travel-market.dk	www.fastnet.com.au
4	www.itn.net	www.mytravellite.com	www.travel.com.hk
5	www.tiss.com	www.lonsdaletravel.co.uk	www.zuji.com.hk
6	www.travelweb.com	www.a3btravel.com	www.arrowtravel.com.hk
7	www.travelonline.us	www.reservetravel.co.uk	www.chinatravel1.com
8	www.viptraveldeals.com	www.ebookers.com	www.asiatravelmart.com
9	www.universal-travel.com	www.opodo.de	www.morethailand.com
10	www.taca.com	www.amadeus.net	www.goa3u.com
11	www.lodging.com	www.kilroytravels.dk	www.etravelgate.com
13	www.hotwire.com	www.thomascook.co.uk	www.chinaetravel.com
13	www.travelbookingonline.com	www.eazy-travel-spain.net	www.citiwelltravels.com
14	www.tixtravel.com	www.thomson.co.uk	www.priceline.com.hk
15	www.airwise.com	www.travelline.co.uk	www.ooschina.com
16	www.travelersnet.com	www.airline-network.co.uk	www.webjet.com.au
17	www.cheaptickets.com	www.deckchair.com	www.liberty-travel.net
18	www.travels-web.com	www.onlinetravel.com	www.welcometravels.com
19	www.cbw.com	www.yespleasebookit.com	www.naxtravels.com
30	www.travelnow.com	www.flightfind.co.uk	www.impressions.com.my
31	www.bmdtravel.com	www.hotelsreservation.co.uk	chaintravel.advantage4travel.com
33	www.gonow.ca	www.firstchoice.co.uk	www.11thhourvacations.com
33	www.lastminute.com	www.bargainholidays.com	www.3waytravel.com
34	www.trazura.com	www.eztrip.com	www.4thetravel.com
35	www.bookingscompany.com	www.korculainfo.co.uk	www.airfare.com.au
36	www.economytravel.com	www.traveloverland.de	www.amextravel.com.hk
37	www.searstravel.ca	www.travelukonline.com	www.bidontravel.com
38	www.travelape.com	www.lastminutos.com	www.chinatraveller.com
39	www.travelhero.com	www.rejsefeber.dk	www.e-ticket-travel.com.au
30	www.voyagenow.com	morrisontravel1.vacation.com	www.e-tour.com.cn

Results and Analysis

The website evaluation process took place in the period from March to May of 2005, during which each of the selected websites was examined and checked for the availability of services or functions pertaining to the 23 attributes in the three dimensions of the developed framework. Tables 2 to 4 present the evaluative empirical findings for the 90 websites.

Table 2:

Results of Completeness of Information

Variables		Asia Pacific (n=30) No.	Asia Pacific (n=30) %	Europe (n=30) No.	Europe (n=30) %	N. America (n=30) No.	N. America (n=30) %	χ^2	d.f.	*Sig.*
Member										
Not necessary		26	86.67	26	86.67	20	66.67	1.47	2	.083
Necessary before an information search		0	0	1	3.33	1	3.33	8		
Necessary after the information search & reservation stage		4	13.33	3	10	9	30			
Advanced search										
Yes		22	73.33	20	66.67	23	76.67	.30	1	.192
No		8	26.67	10	33.33	7	23.33			
Room rate discounts										
Yes		2	6.67	1	3.33	4	13.33	.078	1	.346
No		28	93.33	29	96.67	26	86.67			
Special promotions										
Yes		5	16.67	1	3.33	7	23.33	.311	1	.082
No		25	83.33	29	96.67	23	76.67			
Extra bonus for repeat customers										
Yes		2	6.67	2	6.67	7	23.33	.278	1	0.07
No		28	93.33	28	93.33	23	76.67			6
Availability of regulations and rules										
Yes		25	83.33	25	83.33	30	100	.278	1	0.06
No		5	16.67	5	16.67	0	0			
Summary of selected itineraries										
Yes		16	53.33	22	73.33	28	93.33	1.2	1	0.002*
No		14	46.67	8	26.67	2	6.67			
Customer support										
Local	Yes	29	96.67	30	100	30	100	.011	1	0.37
	No	1	3.33	0	0	0	0			2
International	Yes	10	33.33	14	46.67	15	50	.233	1	0.39
	No	20	66.67	16	53.33	15	50			5
24 hours	Yes	3	10	4	13.33	11	36.67	.144	1	0.34
	No	27	90	26	86.67	19	63.33			1

Remarks:
*** significant at α=0.05**

Completeness of Information

Eight attributes were included in the dimension of information completeness. Table 2 shows that the North American-based websites had the highest percentage of offerings in most of the attributes than their Asia Pacific-based and European-based counterparts. A significant difference among the three regions was seen with respect ot the attribute of the summary of selected itineraries. In particular, 53% of the Asia Pacific-based websites offered this function, whereas the corresponding figures for European-based and North American-based websites were 73% and 93%, respectively.

Table 3:

Results of Navigation Quality

		Number and Percentage of Website Offers								
		Asia Pacific (n=30)		Europe (n=30)		N. America (n=30)				
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	χ^2	d.f.	*Sig.*
Free entry of destinations										
Yes		13	43.33	21	70	29	96.67	2.13	1	0.000*
No		17	56.67	9	30	1	3.33	3		
Free entry of check-in / out date										
Yes		26	86.67	30	100	29	96.67	.144	1	0.06
No		4	13.33	0	0	1	3.33			4
Warning of incorrect date / time entry										
Yes		26	86.67	30	100	28	93.33	.133	1	0.12
No		4	13.33	0	0	2	6.67			
Date/time not available for booking										
Yes		3	10	1	3.33	1	3.33	.044	1	0.43
No		27	90	29	96.67	29	96.67			8
Ability to choose hotel environment										
Yes		8	26.67	17	56.67	22	73.33	1.67	1	0.001*
No		22	73.33	13	43.33	8	26.67	8		
Number of travelers										
Yes		23	76.67	22	73.33	28	93.33	.344	1	0.10
No		7	23.33	8	26.67	2	3.33			8
Hotel preference										
Chain hotel	Yes	4	13.33	6	20	17	56.67	1.63	1	0.000*
	No	26	86.67	24	80	13	43.33	3		
Independent hotel	Yes	3	10	4	13.33	3	10	.011	1	0.89
	No	27	90	26	86.67	27	90			7
Motel / Inn / others	Yes	1	3.33	2	6.67	5	16.67	.144	1	0.17
	No	29	96.67	28	93.33	25	83.33			2
Hotel choices										
Less than 5		0	0	0	0	1	3.33	.011	3	.932
Between 5-10		5	16.67	4	13.33	3	10			
More than 10		25	83.33	26	86.67	26	86.67			
Nil		0	0	0	0	0	0			
Choices of hotel class										
Yes		20	66.67	24	80	20	66.67	.178	1	.43
No		10	33.33	6	20	10	33.33			
Remarks:										
*** significant at α=0.05**										

Table 4:

Results of Ease of Use

		Number and Percentage of Website Offers								
		Asia Pacific (n=30)		Europe (n=30)		N. America (n=30)				
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	χ^2	d.f.	*Sig.*
Room rate selection										
Less than 2		9	30	8	26.67	5	16.67	.844	3	.161
Between 2-5		15	50	19	63.33	19	63.33			
More than 5		4	13.33	3	10	6	20			
Nil		2	6.67	0	0	0	0			
Choices of amenities										
Yes		7	23.33	13	43.33	11	36.67	.311	1	.259
No		23	76.67	17	56.67	19	63.33			
Reservation steps to follow										
Yes		30	100	30	100	29	96.67	.011	1	.372
No		0	0	0	0	1	3.33			
Assistance for reservation and payment										
Yes		30	100	30	100	29	96.67	.011	1	.372
No		0	0	0	0	1	3.33			
Secure payment system – message display										
Yes		28	93.33	28	93.33	29	96.67	.011	1	.814
No		2	6.67	2	6.67	1	3.33			
Payment option										
Credit card	Yes	30	100	30	100	30	100			
	No	0	0	0	0	0	0			
E-Payment	Yes	0	0	0	0	0	0			
	No	30	100	30	100	30	100			
Offline payment	Yes	6	20	0	0	3	10	.344	1	.007*
	No	24	80	30	100	27	90			
Remarks: *** significant at α=0.05**										

Quality of Navigation

Somewhat similar to the first dimension, North American websites generally provided more services than other websites with regard to the attributes in the second dimension (Table 3). In addition, significant differences were found for the attributes of free entry of destinations and ability to choose hotel environment, and the sub-attribute of chain hotel in hotel preference. More specifically, only 43% of the Asia Pacific-based websites enabled their users to enter their destinations freely, but 70% of the European-based and 90% of the North American-based websites had offered this service to their users. Similarly, only 27% of the Asia Pacific-based websites allowed their users to choose a nearby hotel environment, such as one near the airport or a shopping arcade but such a service was made available on 57% and 73% of the European-based and North American-based websites, respectively. Lastly, 13% and 20% of the Asia Pacific-based and European-based websites provided the service of selecting chain hotels, but the corresponding number for North American-based websites was 57%. All of these findings showed the superiority of North American-based websites in terms of quality of navigation.

Ease of Use

A comparable performance in terms of the availability of online services among the three regions was generally seen with the six attributes included in the dimension of ease of use. In other words, the selected websites achieved a similar level of service provision with regard to ease of use. The only significant difference was found in the sub-attribute of offline payment. None of the European-based websites offered this service but the service was available on 20% and 10% of the Asia Pacific-based and North American-based websites, respectively.

Discussion

Generally speaking, most websites provided an adequate level of reservation service for the included attributes. Travel websites normally do not require users to be members to search for information, although only registered members can proceed after searching for information on a few websites. Such an outcome is not unexpected, as travel websites would have protective measures to reduce potential risks. An example of such a protective measure is the use of credit cards for online payment.

It is somewhat surprising to note that the majority of selected travel websites did not provide any room rate discounts and special promotions. This absence of discounts could be attributed to the seasonal pattern during the data collection stage. Jeong, however, has advocated the importance of putting enough emphasis on the purchase motivation on hotel websites. Travel websites should therefore consider offering discounted rates to their users. Also, it is interesting to note that many websites had claimed that the room rates for their recommended hotels were the lowest. Hospitality and tourism researchers and practitioners have been touting the importance of customer loyalty, but the empirical findings of this study show that few incentive schemes are in place to attract repeat customers. It seems that low room rates are the commonly used practice to induce consumers to make a purchase. Another notable finding relating to the issue of completeness of information is insufficient customer support. This is especially true for the Asia Pacific-based websites which primarily provide local support with limited working hours.

The superiority of service provision for North American-based websites basically extends to quite a few attributes in the dimension of navigation quality. The performance of the attributes in the dimension of ease of use was fairly similar among the websites in the three regions. As expected, credit cards were the mostly commonly accepted means of payment but it was a bit surprising to note that none of the websites accepted e-payments such e-cash or e-checks.

The dissimilarities among the websites of the three regions could be attributed to the nature of the websites and their target customers. North America, being the leading provider of Internet technology, was able to provide the most comprehensive level of hotel reservation services on their websites. European-based websites also closely matched their North American counterparts. Asia Pacific-based websites, however, were still lagging behind in quite a few attributes. Such results, however, are not unexpected as prior studies on Internet usage have revealed the existence of geographical and cultural differences.

Concluding Comments

This study has examined the extent to which the selected travel websites could provide online hotel reservation services based on the developed framework of information quality. Apparently, people can use the Internet to search for and book their hotel rooms without much difficulty on travel websites. Still, the empirical findings showed the existence of disparities among the websites of different regions. The findings of this research are, therefore, expected to help hospitality and tourism practitioners to better understand the performance of their websites as compared to the international standard. Appropriate Internet strategy resolutions can then be formulated accordingly. According to Starkov and Price, it is important for hoteliers to continuously re-evaluate their exposure in indirect online distribution channels. A comprehensive search engine marketing strategy should be performed as 80% of overall website visits begin from a search engine or directory service.

Although the findings could be of use to the industry, the limited scope of the examined websites makes it difficult to come to any generalized conclusions about hotel reservations on travel websites. Therefore, a natural extension of this research would be to include more travel websites, and to conduct a more comprehensive overview of the reservation services. In addition, other reservation services such as airfares and car rentals could be examined in future studies. Lastly, since Internet technology is changing rapidly, it would be beneficial to repeat the study in a longitudinal way in order to observe the changes over a period of time.

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Examining the Impact of Service Times on Overall Guest Satisfaction Perception in the Casual Dining Environment

By Eric R. Tobin, and Lynn M. Huffman

A mystery shopper study was used to examine the influence of service times on customer satisfaction. The impact of management emphasis on service quality was also examined. In the restaurants studied, service time influenced customer satisfaction. Management attention to service time improved performance in direct relationship to the level of emphasis.

Introduction

In today's increasingly competitive restaurant industry, many establishments have been forced to reconsider all of the elements that contribute to customer satisfaction as a means of attempting to cultivate a loyal following. Traditionally one of the most salient determiners of overall customer satisfaction has been maintaining a reasonable service time. This factor has become much more important amidst the growing popularity of restaurants that focus on providing a casual dining environment. As aspects of the dining experience such as sophisticated cuisine and refined atmosphere have diminished in their value to the average customer, the rapidity and timeliness of the service time have increased in their significance (Johnson, 1987).

Service Quality

There is a broad consensus among hospitality industry analysts that overall perception of service quality is one of the most important elements in determining customer satisfaction. A particular establishment's ability to maintain minimal service times is a key component of perceived service quality (Yasin and Zimmerer, 1995).

Yasin and Zimmerer (1995) examined the use of benchmarking in developing standards of service quality within an organization in the context of the hospitality industry. Noting that increased competition has raised the stakes on developing a distinctive service environment as a means of ensuring repeat patronage, hospitality establishments must dedicate themselves to ensuring quality on a continual basis.

Within the hospitality industry, and particularly within the context of intangible components such as quality service, it is important for establishments to assess themselves and assess the achievements of competitors on a regular basis. The benchmarking process consists of making a survey of one's competitors and assessing which of them exhibits superior achievement in the many aspects that comprise the good or service being offered. Through this assessment process, as well as the evaluation of competitors' procedures and standards, it is possible to formulate specific goals to achieve in terms of measuring service quality.

Johnston (1987) remarked on the increased need for excellent service quality within the competitive environment of the service industry. Assuming that the quality of the tangible products being offered has been maximized, service issues become important for the retention of a loyal customer base. Parasuratiian, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) pointed out that determining the quality of tangible goods is a much less formidable process than assessing quality of service, since there are many immaterial aspects that comprise either a positive or negative perception of service quality. In addition, many of these factors are subjective, varying significantly between individuals. Taken together, these elements render an objective measure of service quality difficult. Because of the subjectivity that is inherent in customers' individual perceptions of quality, Johnston (1987) concluded that although customers' perceptions of the standards that define service quality may vary widely, firms can formulate strategies to ensure that perceptions of their service are optimized. The process of creating such strategies involves cultivating the perception of quality and concern in every aspect.

Wong, Dean, and White (1999) noted that the honing of distinctively excellent service is emerging as a strategic method for maintaining a competitive edge in today's hospitality industry. Using standard instrumentation can lead to greater practical applicability of the data gathered in future studies of hospitality industry service quality studies. The study calls into question the reliability and accuracy of the service quality scales that are often used in research, such as SERVQUAL. Through an analysis of these standard measures, the authors assert that the most important aspects of service quality within the hospitality industry are employees, tangibles (such as food quality), and reliability, with the single most important factor in shaping customers' perceptions of service quality being the establishment's employees.

Guest Satisfaction And Serving Times

An extremely important component of overall service quality within the hospitality industry is reasonable service times. This relationship is particularly significant within the context of casual dining establishments since other elements of the traditional restaurant experience are scaled down to better fit the needs of the rapidly emerging casual and fast-casual target markets.

Lee and Lambert (2001) examined the impact that various waiting times had upon customer satisfaction in a cafeteria foodservice environment. The authors sought to determine whether expected waiting times were consistent with perceived waiting times. After examining the results, it was shown that the waiting times that customers deemed as reasonable prior to dining were significantly different than the actual wait that the customers experienced. While an individual might have stated beforehand that a fifteen-minute wait would be reasonable and easy to withstand, that customer tended to characterize an actual fifteen-minute waiting period as too long.

The authors of this study concluded that on a general basis, there was an inverse relationship between what was perceived as an overlong waiting time and overarching customer satisfaction. However, because of the subjectivity in perception of passing time that the authors cited in their own review of literature, the relationship between waiting time and customer satisfaction was not always strictly based on actual waiting times. Instead, a number of additional factors seemed to tend to influence the way that customers perceived lengths of waiting time. The overall customer satisfaction was only negatively impacted when the customer perceived the waiting time to be longer than what they deemed reasonable. The complexity of the relationship between actual and perceived service time is an important one to consider in strategizing the quality of the casual dining experience.

On a more general level, Berry, Seiders, and Grewal (2002) described the phenomenon of convenience and how it functions within the service industry as a whole. Literature on this subject has paid insufficient attention to the factor of convenience within the service sector; this oversight is inexplicable as the public's expressed need for convenience continues to grow exponentially. The perception of convenience is particularly relevant in a discussion of the casual dining niche market, as the need for convenience has played a major role in the development of this category of dining establishments. In contexts where the implicit goal of the establishment is convenience, service time plays a significant role in determining customers' perceptions of overall service quality and, by extension, overall satisfaction. The authors describe waiting as largely inimical to a perception of service as being convenient. More research must be conducted before a greater understanding of the complex psychological criteria for convenient service can be fully understood. Particularly in business environments that by their very nature promise convenience, organizations must not overlook this aspect of providing quality service.

Because of the clear connection between minimal service times and higher customer satisfaction, it is imperative casual dining establishments implement procedures that serve to diminish the waiting period experienced by guests. Ruggless (2000) discusses the ways in which restaurant management can leverage new technologies in the process of minimizing service time for customers. According to the author, proper use of technologies such as the Internet to handle inventory functions, human resources procedures, and point-of-sale transactions can all shave crucial minutes off of a dining experience. On a more general level, Chase and Hayes (1991) also confirm the efficacy of attaining efficient operations as a means of securing customer satisfaction.

Within the context of the restaurant industry, and particularly in the casual dining niche, minimal service times are crucial to increasing customer satisfaction. The restaurant sector offers so much quality in tangible offerings that quality service is the avenue establishments must take in distinguishing themselves from their competitors (Allen, 1999). This involves constant, critical reevaluation of service levels within the restaurant. There have been many surveys of a number of new Technologies that have been used with success by restaurants seeking to improve the quality of their customer service, including lobby electronic games to soften wait times, databases of customer preferences to personalize the experience, and sophisticated point-of-service systems to speed internal processes. However, the author advises that technology cannot substitute for human engagement, concern, and empathy by the staff (Bertagnoli, 1999).

Although few studies have been conducted specifically measuring service times in the casual dining context, excessive service times can have a stultifying impact upon customer perception of quality and of the dining experience as a whole. As such, restaurant management and staff must focus their efforts upon minimizing service times whenever possible.

Methodology

A two-fold study was developed to examine issues related to serving time and perceived restaurant quality. The first portion of the study examined the impact of wait times at various stages of the service process on perceived customer satisfaction. The second portion dealt with the impact of company training activity on service time efficiency. In addition, the time for table turns was measured as an indirect benefit of enhanced service time efficiency.

A convenient sample of eight restaurants operating in medium-sized metropolitan cities in southwestern part of the United States were involved with this study. Each restaurant was part of the same casual dining chain and had a weekly sales volume greater than $40,000. The units selected had scored between 88% and 95% on previous mystery shopper reports.

In order to examine the impact of training activity on service times, the restaurants were divided into groups. Managers at four restaurants talked about service time issues to the service staff every shift during a pre-shift meeting. In addition, two of those restaurants tracked both appetizer times and entrée times on a shift by calling out the time lapsed between the orders was taken and it left kitchen. The four remaining restaurants added no additional training or discussion about service times.

An anonymous shopper program that reported the results of four shops per month for a three-month period tracked the service times of the restaurants. Data was transferred from each shopper report for the eight restaurants over the three-month period and the information was analyzed to compare the service times of each restaurant with the company guidelines on service and table turns. Table 1 details the specific response time incidents and the corresponding company standard.

Table 1:

Response time incidents for a meal in a restaurant and corresponding company standards.

Quality Measure	Company Standard
Arrival greet: time lapsed before guest was greeted at door	15 seconds
Seating time: lapsed before guest was greeted at the table	30 seconds
Drink Service: wait time after order was take	3-4 minutes
Order time: amount of time lapsed after order was taken	12-19 minutes
Check back time: time lapsed after food was received	5 minutes
Payment time: how long guest waited for change/Credit Card Slip	3 minutes
Table turns	53 minutes
Overall quality score	
Excellent	>95
Above average	92-95
Good	90-92
Improvement needed	88-90
Poor	<88

Results

Based on reports from mystery shoppers, the quality service standards for the eight restaurants were evaluated. These results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2:

Service standard achievement for restaurants participating in customer satisfaction study based on responses from mystery shoppers.

	Restaurants							
	Service Time Standard Met (%)							
Service Quality Measures	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
Arrival Greet Time	100	100	100	100	66	75	83	58
Seated Greet Time	100	100	91	91	75	75	58	58
Beverage Service Time	100	100	100	100	83	83	91	83
Entrée Order Time	100	100	92	92	75	66	58	75
Check Back Time	92	100	92	92	83	83	66	58
Payment Time	100	100	92	100	75	66	50	58
	Time (minutes)							
Table Turns	44	41	48	48	51	52	53	52
	Quality Score (%)							
Overall Rating	99.8	100	97.0	96.7	90.0	86.6	91.9	89.9

Greet time

The amount of time a guest waited to be greeted by a member of the restaurant staff upon entering the building is referred to as greet time. The time standard for the arrival greet should be immediate, which is defined as less than 15 second from the time the guest walked in the front door. Three of the four restaurants that focused on service times greeted each guest at the front door within 15 seconds of the guest's arriving at the restaurant. The four restaurants that did not focus on the service times greeted the guest with in 15 seconds only 71% of the time.

Seated greet time

Seated greet time is the length of time a guest waited to be greeted by a server after being seated for their meal. The time standard for the service greet was within 30 seconds after the guest was seated. The initial greet did not have to be done by the actual server but had to be done by a member of the service staff or a manager. The four restaurants that focused on service times greeted each guest at the table 96% of the time within 30 seconds after the guest had been seated at their table. The restaurants that were not focusing on the service times greeted the guest at the table within the standard only 68% of the time.

Beverage service time

The amount of time a guest should wait for a drink after the order was taken was 3 minutes for all drinks except frozen bar drinks that were allowed 4 minutes after the order was taken. The four restaurants that focused on service times served all beverages within the standard time set out for the service. The other restaurants served the guest within the standard only 85% of the time.

Entrée order time

The amount of time a guest should wait for their entrée after the order was taken is 12 minutes at lunch and 15 minutes at dinner. The exception to this would be when a meal involved a medium well steak the restaurant was allowed an additional two minutes and a well done steak was allowed four additional minutes for up to 19 minutes total. The two restaurant that focused on the entrée time during the service meeting before each shift and called out the entrée times before the food left the kitchen served all items within the allowed service times. The two restaurant that focused on the service times only during the service meeting before each meal served the entrée 92% within the allowed times. The four restaurant that did not focus on service times served entrees only 69% of the time within the standard.

Check back time

The service staff was trained to check back on the guest after the entrée was served to make sure the guest was satisfied with their meal. The standard allowed for this experiment was five minutes. The guest must receive a follow-up visit from the server or a member of management within five minutes of the entrée being served. The four restaurants that were focusing on service times checked back on the guest within the five- minute standard 94% of the time. At the restaurants not focusing on service times, the check back at the table was completed properly only 73% of the time.

Return of change on payment

The amount of time a guest should wait for change or the credit card voucher after presenting their form of payment is three minutes. Once a guest has finished the meal, they are usually eager to leave and every minute they wait for change seems much longer. That is why the prompt return of change to the guest is one of the most important factors in successful guest service. The four restaurants focusing on guest service times returned change to the guest within the standard 98% of the time and the four restaurants not focusing on the service times returned the change to the guest in the allotted span only 65% of the time.

Results of the table turn times

Table turn time is the length of time a guest would occupies a table at the restaurant. The company average is 53 minutes for each guest visit. This means the restaurants were able to turn each table once every 53 minutes during the day. The two restaurant that focused on at service times during the service meeting before each shift and called out the entrée times before the food left the kitchen had a table turn time in the low 40 minute range. The two restaurants that focused on the service times only during the service meeting had an overall table turn time of 48 minutes. The four restaurants that did not focus on service times had a table turn time of greater than 50 minutes. It also must be noted that restaurant number 2, 5, and 8 are all non-smoking restaurants, and table turn in those restaurant are typically lower than a smoking restaurant by 3 to 4 minutes.

Impact on mystery shopper results

Mystery shoppers are asked to rate the restaurant on multiple items. However, service times were the most heavily weighted items when the total quality scores are calculated. The overall rating of the shoppers score are categorized in the following way:

- 95% or better was considered an excellent rating,
- 92% - 94.99% was considered an above average rating,
- 90% - 91.99 was given a good standing,
- 88.0% - 89.99% was considered a below average rating with improvements needed, and
- 87.9 or below was considered a poor rating.

The two restaurants that focused on service times during the service meeting before each shift and called out the entrée times before the food left the kitchen had a shopper rating near 100% for both restaurants. The two restaurants that focused on the service times only during the service meeting had an overall shopper rating of 97%. The other two restaurants which did not focus on service times received a shopper rating in the 90% - 92% range and were rated below 90% overall.

Recommendations

The results of this study established that for this restaurant group response times appear to impact customer satisfaction. However, the understanding and implementation of this was limited. Consequently, the management group developed a number of recommendations for consideration by management:

1. **Awareness raising:** Managers should be made aware of the impact response time has on customer attitudes and behavior. Critical incidents in the service provision should be highlighted and action taken systematically to address those areas most in need of attention.
2. **Improve data collection:** Response times should be more specifically incorporated into "mystery guest" reports.
3. **Redesign:** In some cases, the service delivery systems should be redesigned for all operations in order to reduce slow response times.
4. **Occupy time:** Attention should be given to providing distractions to customers who have to wait. Use the waiting time for selling to customers by the provision of ancillary products.
5. **Fairness:** Specific attention must be given to the style of queuing systems employed for different types of service incidents.
6. **Promise:** Promise what can be delivered, not what the customer wants to hear.
7. **Uncertainty:** Remove uncertainty by telling customers what is happening-
8. **Out of line:** Encourage customers to seek service at off-peak times.
9. **Sensitivity training:** Service employees should be sensitized to the different needs of waiting customers. *Ad hoc* observations suggest three types of customers: "watchers" enjoy the bustle and do not mind waiting too much; "neutrals" display neither enjoyment nor frustration; "impatient" hate waiting, will try queue-jumping and are likely to complain.

These recommendations have been brought to the attention of operations staff and trainers who build them into training programs. The measurement of time standards on a regular basis is an important part of meeting these recommendations. However, the wide variation in restaurant design means that it may be desirable for managers at a unit level to customize the recommendations in the context of their specific restaurant.

Conclusions

Although the theory of waiting lines and concept of blueprinting service operations has been known for a number of years, many service firms are reluctant to act without first authenticating this with its own operating focus groups or research. In designing the research an attempt was also made to demonstrate the "bottom-line impact" of response times on customers. Once satisfied, restaurant managers can implement a range of different ideas that are best suited for their particular circumstances.

This limited study gives some support to the eight propositions proposed by Czepiel, J., Solomon, M., and Surprenant, C. (1985). The study was not designed to investigate these specifically, but to provide evidence for management that action on response times was needed. A more rigorous research design is needed to confirm completely each of the propositions, although this study and the actions of many other service firms suggest that the proposed psychology of waiting lines is valid. Another small-scale research project is currently under way aimed at comparing customers' perception of waiting time with the actual time taken. Customers queuing in a restaurant will be observed and their waiting time measured. When their transaction is completed they will be asked to state how long they have waited. Waiting conditions will also be monitored to see if perceptions change under different conditions.

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Searching for the Holy Grail of International Education: Feedback from Hospitality Management Study Abroad Participants

By Hubert B. Van Hoof

This article reports on a study done among hospitality management students who participated in study abroad programs between January 2001 and May 2003. The participants in the study were both incoming students to the US and outgoing students from the US. The study investigated, among other things, why they had decided to study abroad, why they had selected a particular institution, how their home institution compared to the partner institution abroad, and what they perceived to be the benefits and relevance of their international experiences. It was found that respondents were generally very positive about the study abroad experience. Some interesting differences of opinion were found when the perceptions of the incoming students were compared to those of the outgoing students. The results of this study may be of particular interest to hospitality management administrators and faculty who create and administer international exchange programs.

Introduction

As educators and administrators involved in study abroad programs we are constantly searching for the holy grail of international education, the perfect study abroad experience. Many of us have studied and written about the value of an international experience in higher education, and generally it was found that a mandatory or optional international component in a four-year program of studies is of benefit to our students, not only for developmental and educational reasons, but also because it helps them adjust to the challenges of life in the workplace once they leave college. See, for example, H. De Wit, 1997: E. Roberts 1998; C. Stangor, K. Jonas, W. Stroebe, and M. Hewstone, 1994: H. Van Hoof, 1999, 2000, and 2001.

What does the perfect study abroad experience look like from our perspective? First, we would like our students to have the ideal academic experience. This means not only that they acquire relevant and up-to-date knowledge in the subjects of their choice, but also that there is a perfect fit between what they study abroad and what they are taught at their home institutions. We would like for credits to transfer easily because the host institutions abroad teach what their syllabi say they are supposed to teach, and for course contents abroad to be comparable to course contents at our own institutions.

Second, we would like our students to have the perfect personal experience, one that enriches them, and helps them mature. If they can handle life as an exchange student at an institution abroad, and deal with the inevitable hurdles while living in another country and culture, they can deal with any challenges in their future careers as general managers, marketing directors, controllers, or food and beverage directors. See, for example, D. Lawson, D. White, and S. Dimitriadis, 1998; N.C. Frisch, 1990.

We would like our students to have the perfect cultural experience. They should come back as culturally sensitive individuals who will not only survive in an increasingly multi-cultural environment but flourish in it too. They should be familiar with people of different race, color, language and beliefs. They should be able to consider things from multiple perspectives, and, more than anything, they should be tolerant and appreciative of diversity related issues in the workplace.

We would like our students to have the perfect social experience. Housing at the host institution should be arranged ahead of time, and should reflect the needs and wishes of our students. They should have many friends while abroad, and come back with lifelong contacts around the globe, so that they always have a place to stay no matter where they travel later on in life. They should travel and see something of the world first hand, while learning from the experience.

Unfortunately, however, we have not found this holy grail of international education yet, and our students will probably never have a perfect, flawless experience. Some might argue that the experience should not be flawless, as students learn from overcoming challenges. Yet, we keep trying to make the study abroad experience better every semester, not only for the students who leave home to go abroad, but also for those who come to us from other countries, and we try to improve academically, as well as with regard to housing, social contacts, transportation, safety issues, and cultural exposure.

Besides that, we are constantly looking for new ways of enticing our students to study abroad. We find new exchange partners in countries where we have never had programs before, and we offer them semester programs, year-long programs, double degree programs and international internships. We send faculty abroad, and ask international faculty to come and teach in our programs, all in an effort to make our international programs as appealing as possible. And still we keep searching...

When we review our academic programs and the courses we teach, in our efforts to make them better and more relevant to our students, one of the tools we use is the course evaluation. This is generally conducted at the end of the semester, and the input received is of vital importance to faculty, in that it helps them determine what worked and what did not, at least according to the students. The results of the evaluations are also important to programs in general, as they provide administrators with information on the effectiveness of their entire faculty, on how a program prepares students for life after school, and on how courses relate, interconnect or overlap.

Study abroad programs can benefit from student evaluations just as much. The information obtained from asking study abroad participants about their experiences will tell us how these programs fit in with our own academic mission, and will provide us with additional information that is vital for the long-term success of our international efforts. Moreover, we will learn how relevant the students felt the experience was to their personal development and their careers of choice, and how close we are to making the experience a perfect one.

This article reports on a study designed to illicit student feedback on the study abroad programs at Northern Arizona University (NAU), in a format reminiscent of regular course evaluations. Its specific intent was to investigate what students saw as the biggest benefits and challenges of the experience, why they decided to go abroad, how the education they received abroad compared to that at their home institution, and what the relevance of the experience was to their personal and professional development.

Methodology

Survey covers both incoming and outgoing exchange students

The survey which provided the data for the study was conducted during the months of March, April and May 2003. The population under study was all the hospitality management students who had participated in study abroad programs during the period of January 2001 to May 2003. Included were students who had left NAU to study at a partner institution abroad as well as those who came to NAU from a number of foreign countries and partner institutions. Not included in the survey were international students pursuing a four-year degree at NAU. Personal information (name and e-mail address) of these students was obtained from the data base of students at the International Office at Northern Arizona University.

Design and data collection keep student population in mind

The questionnaire which provided the data for this study was designed to gain insights into the perceptions of students about their study abroad experiences. As stated earlier, its intent was to provide the administrators and faculty involved in these programs with information that could help them in creating better programs and more worthwhile experiences.

It was decided to use a Web-based survey format in this study. The primary reason for doing so was that it could be distributed to a large target audience at a much lower cost and more quickly than a traditional mail-out survey. Moreover, data collection and conversion could be done automatically, and the target audience could be encouraged to participate by means of a personal e-mail message. The most important benefit, however, was the convenience for both the respondents and the researchers. These issues are addressed by, for example, M.P. Couper, 2000; D.R. Schaefer, and D. A. Dillman, 1998; A.M. Schonland, and P.W. Williams, 1996; and, A. C. Tse, 1998. In particular, the researcher felt that the respondents in this particular age group would be more likely to respond to an electronic format than to any of the other more traditional survey tools. An important concern about Web surveys is their low response rate. Yet, in this case, the population under study was relatively small, and it was anticipated that these students would be interested in sharing their opinions about their international experiences.

The questionnaire was a four-page, self-administered instrument. It was estimated that it would take respondents about ten minutes to complete, as many of the questions were closed-ended, requiring a choice from a number of alternatives presented.

In the first part of the survey the respondents were asked to provide some basic demographic information. They were asked to provide information about their gender, the country where they had studied, the institution they had studied at, their academic status (freshman, sophomore etc.), their major at the home institution and at their exchange institution, and the duration of their stay abroad.

The second part of the survey was divided into six sections and examined the students' perceptions about their international experiences. In the first section, two questions asked them what their reasons were for studying abroad, and why they had selected the institution in particular. They were then asked to rate their exchange programs (as compared to their home institution) on a five-point Likert scale with regard to 1. academics; 2.care for their general needs as students; 3. housing arrangements; and 4. overall levels of organization and structure at the exchange institution as perceived by the student.

The third section examined what they liked most and least about their exchange institution, and what they perceived to be the main differences between studying at home and abroad. Three questions (once again on a five-point scale) in the fourth section then asked them to rate the perceived relevance of their semester abroad to future job opportunities, their academic program at home, and their own personal development.

The fifth section contained four questions. The first two asked the respondents if they would consider studying abroad again at the same institution, and if they would study abroad again at another institution if it were possible. After that, they rated the quality of the academic program abroad specifically, and the overall study abroad experience in general. The final section asked them to describe the greatest benefits and challenges of studying abroad. This was done in an open-ended format.

On March 7, 2003 a letter signed by both the director of the International Office at NAU and the researcher was sent to all 136 incoming and outgoing hospitality management students in the database of the International Office at NAU who had participated in an exchange program during the January 2001- May 2003 period. In the letter the students were asked for their cooperation, and directed to a web-site which contained the survey. One week later, 26 respondents had completed the survey on-line. On March 24, 2003 a reminder was sent out to non-respondents. The web-site with the survey was kept open until the end of the Spring 2003 semester, May 9, 2003. At that time, a total of 48 students had responded to the survey, a 35.29% response rate. Given the concern that web-based surveys generally tend to generate a low response rate, this was deemed a good result.

Limitations exist

The main limitation to this study is that it was based solely on a database of students at one school at one university. All the incoming students studied at the School of Hotel and Restaurant Management at Northern Arizona University and all the outgoing students went to the institutions that were part of the international network of the school. Opinions therefore say more about Northern Arizona University and its foreign partners than about other universities and their partners, and the results cannot be generalized beyond the scope of the study. They might, however, be indicative of student opinions across the US.

A second limitation was the small size of the sample, which was attributed primarily to the small population it was drawn from. Finally, there was the issue of the quality of the academic e-mail addresses: as students move on in their careers their e-mail addresses expire or messages are never read.

This article will first discuss the demographic data, and look at the descriptive results of the analyses. After that, it will look at the outcomes of various comparative analyses and describe whether any observed differences between various groups of students in the sample (males/females, incoming/outgoing) were significant. Finally, it will summarize some of the predominant opinions about the benefits and challenges of studying abroad and offer some suggestions for future research. All quantitative analyses were done using SPSS 11.0.

Results

Of the 48 students who responded to the survey, 33 (68.8%) were female, and 15 (31.2%) were male. These numbers are reflective of a trend observed in international education, where females in these kinds of structured programs tend to outnumber males by a considerable margin. Fourteen students (29.2%) were incoming and studied at NAU, and 34 students (73.8%) had spent a semester abroad. The incoming students came from Belgium, China, Germany and the Netherlands, and the outgoing students had studied at universities in Australia, Germany, Mexico, The Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom. These locations were primarily driven by what was available in the School's international exchange network, although several students indicated they had found their country and institution of choice through USAC.

Most of the respondents were either juniors (25.0%) or seniors (66.7%), reflecting a common trend not to send students abroad too early in their academic careers. Finally, 29 respondents (60.4%) had studied abroad for only one semester, and 19 (39.6%) participants had been abroad for two semesters or longer (See Table 1).

Table 1:

Student Demographics (N=48)

GENDER	N	Valid %
Male	15	31.2%
Female	33	68.8%
STUDY LOCATION	**N**	**Valid %**
Incoming (to US)	14	29.2%
Outgoing (from US)	34	70.8%
ACADEMIC STATUS	**N***	**Valid %**
Sophomore	4	8.3%
Junior	12	25.0%
Senior	32	66.7%
DURATION*	**N**	**Valid %**
One semester	29	60.4%
Two semesters	15	31.3%
Three or more semesters	4	8.3%

In the first section of the survey, the respondents were asked why they had decided to study abroad, and were requested to rank a number of distinctly different reasons in order of importance. The three most important reasons for studying abroad in general were:

1. It is/was a good opportunity to travel;
2. It is/was a good opportunity to live in another culture;
3. I liked the country my exchange program was located in;
   It could be used as part of my degree program (tie).

When asked why they had selected a particular institution abroad, the three most important reasons were:

1. It was available as a partner at my home institution;
2. I liked the country it was located in;
3. People I know also go/went there.

Respondents compare home and host institutions

In four questions the survey then asked the respondents to compare the institution they had studied at abroad to their home institution in the areas of academics, care for their personal needs as a student, housing, and organization/structure. They did this on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 being "Much Worse/Much Easier", 3 being "Same," and 5 being "Much Better/Much More Difficult." This scale was primarily used to allow for comparative analysis of opinions later.

Half the respondents (50.0%), regardless of their origins, felt that the academic program they had participated in abroad was more difficult than the program at their home institution, 17.4% felt that it was the same, and 32.6% considered it easier or much easier. The mean rating of 3.15 was close to the middle of the five-point scale (See Table 2).

In terms of the care they received for their personal needs (such as staff availability, academic advising, and counseling for instance) the respondents were considerably less impressed with their host institutions abroad: 17.4% of the respondents rated it as much worse, 26.1% felt it was worse, and 23.9% felt it was the same. Only 10.9% rated it as better, and 21.7% thought it was much better than the care they received at home. In this case the mean rating was 2.93 (See Table 2).

Housing abroad is always a major concern for students and their parents/caregivers. The overall sentiment was that housing arrangements abroad were slightly better than they were at home, with 50.0% of the respondents feeling that the housing arrangements at the institutions abroad were better or much better than at home, 15.9% of the sample stating they were the same, and only 34.1% feeling they were worse or much worse than at their home institution. The mean rating of 3.18 reflected these generally positive sentiments (See Table 2).

Finally, when asked how they felt about the overall level of structure and organization at their exchange institutions as compared to their home institution, the respondents were clearly least impressed: only 28.3% rated it as better or much better, 21.7 % felt it was the same, and 50.0% thought it was worse or much worse than at home. The mean rating of 2.70 was the lowest score obtained (See Table 2).

Table 2

Student Assessment of Academic Difficulty, Care, Housing and Organization: Exchange Institution Compared to Home Institution

Academic Level of Difficulty: Exchange Program Compared to Home	**N***	**Valid %**	**Mean Rating:3.15**
Much Easier	3	6.5%	
Easier	12	26.1%	
Same	8	17.4%	
More Difficult	21	45.7%	
Much More Difficult	2	4.3%	
Level of Care for your Personal Needs: Exchange Program Compared to Home	**N***	**Valid %**	**Mean Rating: 2.93**
Much Worse	8	17.4%	
Worse	12	26.1%	
Same	11	23.9%	
Better	5	10.9%	
Much Better	10	21.7%	
Housing Arrangements: Exchange Program Compared to Home	**N***	**Valid %**	**Mean Rating: 3.18**
Much Worse	2	4.5%	
Worse	13	29.5%	
Same	7	15.9%	
Better	19	43.2%	
Much Better	3	6.8%	
Overall Level of Structure: Exchange Program Compared to Home	**N***	**Valid %**	**Mean Rating: 2.70**
Much Worse	12	26.1%	
Worse	11	23.9%	
Same	10	21.7%	
Better	5	10.9%	
Much Better	8	17.4%	

*Total N does not make 48 because of missing values for the variable

Students think study abroad experience is very relevant

Three questions asked the respondents to rate the relevance of their international experiences to future job opportunities, to the academic program they were enrolled in at their home institution, and to their own personal development. Ratings were on a five-point scale again, with 1 being "Completely Irrelevant," 3 being "Relevant," and 5 being "Extremely Relevant."

When asked about the relevance of the experience to future job opportunities, 58.5% of the respondents rated it as very or extremely relevant, 36.6% rated it as relevant, and only 4.9% felt it was irrelevant (Mean rating 3.80) (See Table 3). With regard to the relevance of the international experience to their academic program at home, 46.3% of the respondents considered it very or extremely relevant, 41.5% felt it was relevant, and 12.2% thought it was irrelevant (Mean rating 3.54).

When it came to determining what the experience had meant to their personal development, the respondents were most enthusiastic: 58.5% considered it extremely relevant, 24.4 % felt it was very relevant, and 17.1 felt it was relevant. Of interest here was the fact that none of the respondents felt that the experience was irrelevant to their personal development. This enthusiasm was reflected in the mean rating of 4.41 (See Table 3).

Table 3:

The Relevance of the Study Abroad Experience

Relevance of Semester Abroad Experience to: Future Job Opportunities	**N***	**Valid %**	**Mean Rating: 3.80**
Completely Irrelevant	0	0.0%	
Irrelevant	2	4.9%	
Relevant	15	36.6%	
Very Relevant	13	31.7%	
Extremely Relevant	11	26.8%	
Relevance of Semester Abroad Experience to: Academic Program at Home	**N***	**Valid %**	**Mean Rating: 3.54**
Completely Irrelevant	0	0.0%	
Irrelevant	5	12.2%	
Relevant	17	41.5%	
Very Relevant	11	26.8%	
Extremely Relevant	8	19.5%	
Relevance of Semester Abroad Experience to: Your Personal Development	**N***	**Valid %**	**Mean Rating: 4.41**
Completely Irrelevant	0	0.0%	
Irrelevant	0	0.0%	
Relevant	7	17.1%	
Very Relevant	10	24.4%	
Extremely Relevant	24	58.5%	

*Total N does not make 48 because of missing values for the variable

Students will do it again

Under the heading "Would you do it again?" the respondents' opinions and feelings about their semesters abroad were further analyzed. They were first asked whether or not they would study abroad again at the <u>same institution</u> if it were possible. After that, they were asked if they would study abroad again at <u>another institution</u>. They were also asked why they would or would not repeat the experience.

A little more than half (56.4%) of the respondents indicated they would study again at the <u>same</u> institution, and a large majority (79.5%) said they would study abroad again at <u>another</u> institution. This was a ringing endorsement for the study abroad experience, yet more so for the overall experience than for the institution they had studied at. A sampling of the reasons for not wanting to go back to the same program abroad included such comments as "courses are irrelevant," "been there, done that," "I got bored there," "too unorganized," and "I would like to get a broader perspective and experience something new."

Some of the reasons why students overwhelmingly endorsed the overall experience rather than the individual programs were: "the dynamics of an exchange teach you a lot," "I realize there are more opportunities now," and "my personal development was incredible, and I want to see more."

Overall ratings paint positive picture

Finally, when it was time to ask for some overall assessments, the respondents looked at the quality of the academic program they did abroad, and the quality of the experience in general, on a scale from 1 "Very Poor", 3 "Neutral" and 5 "Outstanding." As became apparent throughout all of the other questions, here again it became clear that the study abroad experience had had a much larger perceived impact on the students' personal development than on their academic careers. Whereas 58.9%% of them rated the overall quality of the academic program they had participated in abroad as good or outstanding (Mean rating 3.54), nearly all of the respondents (94.9%) felt that the quality of the overall experience was good or outstanding (Mean rating 4.38) (See Table 4).

Table 4:
The Quality of the Academic Program Abroad and the Overall Experience

The Quality of the Academic Program Abroad	N*	Valid %	Mean Score: 3.54
Very Poor	2	5.1%	
Poor	5	12.8%	
Neutral	9	23.1%	
Good	16	41.0%	
Outstanding	7	17.9%	
The Quality of the Overall Experience	**N***	**Valid %**	**Mean Score: 4.38**
Very Poor	0	0.0%	
Poor	1	2.6%	
Neutral	1	2.6%	
Good	19	48.7%	
Outstanding	18	46.2%	

*Total N does not make 287 because of missing values for the variable.

Comparative analysis shows significant differences of opinion

In order to determine whether any of the observed differences of opinion were significant or not, several means tests were used to compare the opinions of distinct groups in the sample. The study first looked at whether the gender of the respondent had any significant effect on his/her perceptions about the study abroad experience. As there were two separate groups based on the value of a single variable (male-female), and as the level of data provided by the questions using the five-point Likert scale was ordinal, this analysis was done by means of T-tests. In all instances, the null hypotheses assumed that the population means were equal, and the alpha level was set at .05.The study found no significant differences of opinion between male and female students about their opinions.

When the opinions of the incoming students were compared to those of the students who had studied abroad, some significant differences of opinion were found. A limitation here was that this grouping did not allow for a distinction among countries or institutions. A more detailed analysis of the data based on individual countries and programs, however, was deemed beyond the scope of this article.

The study found three significant differences of opinion between the groups (See Table 5). First, it was found that outgoing students (US natives) rated the housing arrangement at their host institutions abroad significantly lower than the incoming students. Second, incoming students rated the overall quality of the academic program they had studied at in the US significantly higher than the outgoing students. Yet, as opposed to that, outgoing students were significantly more appreciative of the overall experience than their incoming peers.

Table 5:

Effect of Origins on Perceptions: Incoming vs. Outgoing

		N*	Mean	St. D.	F	Sig.
Academic Level of Difficulty: Exchange Program Compared to Home	I	14	2.57	1.158	1.360	.250
	O	32	3.41	.946		
Level of Care for your General Needs: Exchange Program Compared to Home	I	14	4.64	.633	2.344	.133
	O	32	2.19	.896		
Housing Arrangements: Exchange Program Compared to Home	I	14	4.00	.784	7.430	.009***
	O	30	2.80	.997		
Overall Level of Organization/Structure: Exchange Program Compared to Home	I	14	4.50	.650	.732	.397
	O	32	1.91	.818		
Relevance of Semester Abroad Experience to: Future Job Opportunities	I	12	4.42	.793	.044	.835
	O	29	3.55	.827		
Relevance of Semester Abroad Experience to: Academic Program at Home	I	12	3.42	.996	.001	.970
	O	29	3.59	.946		
Relevance of Semester Abroad Experience to: Personal Development	I	12	4.08	.793	.003	.959
	O	29	4.55	.736		
Rate the quality of the academic program abroad	I	12	4.25	.452	.7.975	.008***
	O	27	3.22	1.155		
Rate the quality of the overall experience abroad	I	12	4.17	.389	6.596	.014**
	O	27	4.48	.753		

*Total N does not make 46 because of missing values for the variable

** Significant at the .05 level

*** Significant at the .01 level

Conclusion

Feedback drives development efforts

In our search for the holy grail of international education, the feedback we receive from the students who participate in our exchange programs needs to be taken very seriously and should be incorporated in our development efforts. Just like course evaluations at the end of each semester, surveys like the one discussed here provide us with valuable information on our study abroad programs, information that can help us create a perfect (if perhaps illusive) study abroad experience.

This study found that hospitality management students from Northern Arizona University who had participated in study abroad programs and their peers from abroad who had studied at the School of Hotel and Restaurant Management were generally very appreciative of the experience. Even though the reasons for studying abroad were more personal than academic (it was primarily seen as a good opportunity to live and travel in other countries and cultures, rather than a good academic experience), they felt that the experience also helped them in their future careers, and that it was relevant to their academic programs at home.

Of interest were the differences of opinion between incoming and outgoing hospitality management students: whereas students coming to the US rated the quality of the academic program they were involved in significantly higher, students going from the US were significantly more appreciative of the quality of the overall experience. Almost all of the respondents said that they would study abroad again if it were possible, which is the best endorsement possible for these programs.

When students were asked what they considered to be the greatest benefit of studying abroad, the most common answer was that it gave them a better understanding of other cultures in that it presented them with a different perspective on other people and on life in general. Many respondents said that, while they learned about other cultures, they also learned more about themselves and that they appreciated their own culture more because of the experience. Many of them felt they had grown as a person, that they had become open-minded and well rounded, and that they had learned how to deal with adversity. In the words of one respondent: "I learned more about the way the rest of the world functions, and how I function outside of the US."

When asked what they perceived to be the greatest challenges of studying abroad, the predominant issue was one of adaptation, adaptation to different customs, cultures, food, teaching styles, academic standards and systems, pace of life, and a different language. Many also felt that being away from friends and family, being pushed out of one's comfort zone and being alone was a challenge, as was having to cope with stereotypes that existed about Americans in other parts of the world. As one student put it: "My biggest challenge was being American, and having to deal with the 'cowboy attitude' the US has painted all over the world."

As administrators and faculty involved in study abroad programs we are convinced that these programs have merit. We know that a semester of studies abroad helps our students become more mature, more independent, more appreciative of other cultures, and also more appreciative of their own culture. Yet, do our students also know that? Only through immersion in other cultures, and through living abroad for a while, they learn to appreciate the experience fully and reap the benefits it may bring them.

In this study, we observed that we are at least comparable to our foreign partners in the area of academic level of difficulty in the eyes of our students, even though the way in which we educate students in higher education is very different from the way in which college level students are educated in different parts of the world, and that our housing arrangements are seen as better than the housing situations in other countries.

Exchange students not only gain an appreciation for other cultures when they return, but also look upon their own culture in a more positive light. They are more aware of the value of their own academic programs and home universities after they come back as compared to before they left. They feel out of place when they return from their semester abroad, and at the same time they feel comfortable about being back in their familiar surroundings, they are sad that their international adventure is over, yet happy to be back, they are aware of the large world around them, and pleased to be back in their own small world. In a sense they have the best of both worlds. What more can we really ask for?

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The Impact of Hotel Size and Service Type on Employee Job Satisfaction

By Daniel J. Mount and William D. Frye

There has been no research on the impact of hotel size and service type on employee satisfaction. Yet the distinction between service types (limited service and full service) has become commonplace and the dynamics and organization of these hotels are decidedly different. This study finds that differences are evident in certain aspects of employee satisfaction based on size and service type.

Introduction

Segmentation has become the standard for corporate development strategies in the hospitality industry. The leading hotel companies buy, sell and create brands targeted to specific markets. With the purchase of Promus by Hilton in 1999, the eight largest hotel companies controlled 66 brands. (Robert Shaw, 1999). In 2005, the eight largest hotel companies controlled 69 leading lodging brands. The American Hotel & Motel Association defined nine segments in its Directory of Hotel & Motel Companies. One type of segmentation is based on price. Within this segment, the AH&LA recognizes budget, economy, upscale and luxury segments. Another type of segmentation is based on the level of service provided to guests. Exhibit one provides AH&LA definitions for the extended stay, limited-service and full-service segments.

Exhibit 1

Definitions of hotel service type

Service type	Definition
Extended stay	Hotels catering to guests on long trips with amenities like kitchens, washing machines, and weekly housekeeping.
Limited-service	Hotels that offer fewer amenities and services in exchange for lower rates.
Full-service	Hotels that offer a full range of services and amenities, like restaurants, room service, and health clubs.

Source: Directory of Hotel & Motel Companies, American Hotel & Motel Association, p. xvi, (1997), New York: American Hotel Association Directory Corporation.

The hotel organization structure for each of these types of hotels is different. The extended stay and limited service hotels do not have a full range of food and beverage options. The extended stay and limited service hotels typically have less salaried staff and a lower number of employees per room. While a food and beverage department is, in theory, a separate structure from other operating departments, the presence of a food and beverage department may change the dynamics of the workplace.

Employee satisfaction has been positively related to employee turnover, guest satisfaction and guest retention. Employee satisfaction is a key link in Heskett, Sasser and Schlesinger's (1997) service-profit chain and Schlesinger and Heskett's (1991) cycle of success. This research focused on job satisfaction in a sample of hotel employees. The objectives of the research were to determine if hotel size and service type impacted the overall job satisfaction of employees.

Literature review

There have been some research efforts on studying the impact of organizational size on employee satisfaction. Most of the studies have found that the work environment in larger organizations is more rigidly structured than in smaller establishments. Scherer (1976) examined the relationship between the structure of work at different size establishments and workers' satisfaction with their jobs and found that for some measures of worker satisfaction, respondents at larger establishments expressed lower levels of job satisfaction. Stafford (1980) felt that larger organizations attempted to create common working conditions with "work-group-wide policies." Stafford concluded that there will tend to be a greater average level of dissatisfaction with the commonly set work rules as a greater number of workers provided different interpretations.

Oi (1983) theorized that employer size in the structure of the work environment is a predictor of an employee's job satisfaction. His theory is predicated on the exogenous distribution of managerial work talent, where larger firms are centered around more talented managers. In attempts to economize on the higher opportunity costs of these more talented managers, the firm organizes production in a more structured fashion so as to reduce required monitoring time and activities. Thus, greater rigidity in the working environment found in larger firms often adversely affects individual employee satisfaction due to constrictive work practices, higher degrees of job specialization, and lack of job enrichment opportunities.

Rahman and Zanzi (1995) studied the relationship between organizational structural orientation and job satisfaction by examining the mechanistic-organic characteristics that reflect the traditional, rigid, and bureaucratic model of organization versus a more adaptive, process-oriented, and open type of internal arrangement within CPA firms. Their findings reveal that though a mechanistic structure is less innovative, rule-based, and more hierarchical than on organic one, it does not conclusively result in lower levels of job satisfaction. While non-mechanistic organizational structures are more adaptive and less rigid in nature, they may not always be considered more suitable for stable and predictive environments. Research that examines the impact of hotel service type on satisfaction was not evident.

Job satisfaction describes a broad set of feelings that individuals have about their jobs, and is one of the most intensely recognized and studied topics in organizational behavior research. Job satisfaction has been defined, conceptualized, and operationalized in a variety of different ways, but is generally considered to be an individual's perceptual/emotional reaction to important facets of work. Locke (1976) defined job satisfaction as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences. Bettencourt and Brown (1997) have recently defined job satisfaction as an employee's overall perceived evaluation of the job situation.

As an independent variable, job satisfaction is studied as a predictor of absenteeism, turnover, and job performance. Job satisfaction has been found positively related to customer satisfaction among resort employees, cruise ship employees, and quick-service restaurant employees. Among hotel employees, satisfaction has been found negatively related to turnover. Quality of benefits – one facet of satisfaction – has also been found negatively related to turnover.

Methodology

The primary data for this study was collected for research in identifying facets of job satisfaction. Questionnaire items were compiled from a number of sources including the Job Descriptive Index, the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire, and the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire. Corporate executives and hotel general managers reviewed the set of items. Based on these groups' feedback, some items were reworded for clarity while other items were added or deleted to assure content validity. The final questionnaire contained thirty-two items; twenty-eight facet items and four different "summary measurements" to be used as dependent variables. The primary focus for this study is the single summary measure, "I am satisfied in my job." All questions were answered on a seven-point Likert scale with a 7 representing "strongly agree" and a 1 representing "strongly disagree." After the final form of the questionnaire was approved, a Spanish translation was developed so respondents could choose the form with which they were most comfortable.

The sample for the study was all employees of 52 hotel properties owned and operated by a privately held hotel company. The 52 properties included 22 full-service hotels, 17 limited-service hotels and 13 extended-stay hotels, in 22 states. The units represented 13 brands with 3 independents, ranged in size from 40-343 rooms, and employed from 14 to 195. Table 1 presents background and response information by service type. The three-page questionnaire was administered during all-employee meetings at each property. All employees received both the English and Spanish versions. To insure anonymity, employees completed the questionnaire at the meeting, sealed it in a provided envelope and dropped this in a pre-addressed overnight mail package. The package was sealed and sent to the researchers.

Table 1:

Background and response information by service type

	(1) Extended Stay	(2) Limited service	(3) Full service	(4) Combined (1) & (2)
Number of hotels	13	17	22	30
Total number of rooms	1286	1855	3956	3141
Room range	40-151	50-149	95-343	40-151
Average size in rooms	99	109	180	105
Total number of employees	396	534	2143	930
Total number of usable questionnaires	255	350	1375	605
Usable questionnaires as % of total emp	64%	66%	64%	65%
Number of employees/room	.31	.29	.54	.30
Number of salaried responses/room	.03	.02	.06	.03

Corporate headquarters reported there were a total of 3,087 employees on the payroll on the date the questionnaire was administered. A total of 2,102 questionnaires were received, but questionnaires were discarded if there was evidence that the questionnaire was not read, or if there were missing data. 1,991 were considered usable, representing a response rate of 64% of all employees of the company. Individual hotel response rates ranged from 36-100 percent.

Results

To this point, three segments have been discussed. In practice, the extended-stay segment is usually also considered part of the limited service segment. In this sample, the extended stay hotels all met the requirements of inclusion in the limited-service segment. As presented in Table 1, information is offered regarding these two hotel segments (range in room size, average size of hotel in rooms) and their operating characteristics (number of employees per room, number of salaried managers per room). The mean satisfaction score difference for the two groups is insignificant. For the purposes of this research, the extended-stay and limited-service segments were combined. The background and response information by service type for the new combination is presented in the far right column of Table 1.

The literature would support the hypothesis that employee satisfaction would decrease with the size of the hotel. If the hypothesis were to hold true, a significant negative correlation should exist between employee satisfaction and number of hotel guest rooms. That is, as hotel guest rooms increase, the employee satisfaction should decrease. A simple correlation between employee satisfaction and number of hotel guest rooms reveals that there is a slight, but insignificant inverse relationship (correlation coefficient = -.22) between hotel size and employee satisfaction.

To control for the effects of service type on size of the hotel, similar correlations were calculated within each service type. Both the limited-service and full-service segments had a slight, insignificant inverse relationship (correlation coefficients of -.07 and -.10, respectively). Again, the results do not support the hypothesis that hotel size has an impact on employee satisfaction.

Independent samples t-tests were performed to test for the difference in satisfaction between service types. Results of the t-tests are presented in Table 2. There is a significant difference, $p<.001$, between the employee satisfaction means of the two service types.

Table 2:

Independent samples t-test for differences in employee satisfaction by service type

Service type	Mean satisfaction	Mean difference	df	Significance
Limited service	5.88	.32	1978	.000*
Full-service	5.56			

*p<.001.

To control for the effects of size on service type, similar hotel room size samples were extracted from each service type. In the limited-service segment, there were no hotels with more than 151 rooms. In the full service segment, there were no hotels with less than 95 rooms. Extracting all hotels with between 95-151 rooms from each segment resulted in the sample presented in Table 3.

Table 3:

Background and response information by service type for extracted sample

	Limited-service	Full-service
Number of hotels	22	10
Total number of rooms	2634	1302
Room range	97-151	95-150
Total number of employees	765	753
Total number of usable questionnaires	498	465
Usable questionnaires as a % of total employees	65%	62%
Average size in rooms	120	130
Number of employees per room	.29	.58

An independent samples t-test was again performed with this extracted sample. The results are presented in Table 4. Again, there is a significant difference on employee satisfaction between the limited-service and full-service hotels with a mean difference of .26, significant at $p<.05$.

Table 4:

Independent samples t-test for differences in employee satisfaction by service type for extracted sample

Service type	Mean satisfaction	Mean difference	df	Significance
Limited-service	5.88	.24	961	.014*
Full-service	5.62			

*p<.05

The inclusion of the full-service hotels brings in a new set of respondents. While there were a few responses in the food and beverage departments (restaurant, kitchen, banquets and lounge) in the limited-service hotels, there were a total of 436 food and beverage responses in the full-service hotels. If the proposition is that hotel service type does have an impact on employee satisfaction, this relationship should be observed in the departments that are common to all service types such as front desk, housekeeping and engineering. To begin the analysis, the three departments were grouped together to form a "Rooms division" response set.

Table 5 presents the results of independent samples t-tests on the mean differences between rooms division satisfaction scores on the full sample. There is a significant difference between the satisfaction means for the rooms division employees of the limited-service and full-service segments, $p<.05$. This would appear to support the proposition that hotel service type is related to employee satisfaction.

Table 5:

Independent samples t-test for differences in rooms division employee satisfaction by service type for full sample

Service type	Mean satisfaction	Mean difference	df	Significance
Limited-service	5.83	.20	1130	.041*
Full-service	5.63			

*p<.05

But within the rooms division, a different result appears when considering the extracted sample of hotels. Table 6 presents the same independent samples t-tests with the rooms division employee satisfaction means of the extracted hotel samples. There are no significant differences, the satisfaction means are nearly equal. This now seems to refute the proposition that hotel service type is related to employee satisfaction.

Table 6:

Independent samples t-test for differences in rooms division employee satisfaction by service type for extracted sample

Service type	Mean satisfaction	Mean difference	df	Significance
Limited-service	5.82	.01	602	.981
Full-service	5.81			

The fact remains that there were significant differences in the rooms division employee satisfaction scores in the full sample. The extracted sample removed the largest hotels from the full-service segment and the smallest hotels from the limited-service segments. Within the rooms division, size of the hotel may have a relationship to employee satisfaction. A correlation coefficient was calculated for employee satisfaction of each of the rooms division departments and number of rooms in the hotel by service type. Table 7 provides the correlation coefficients for each of the departments.

Table 7:

Correlation coefficients for rooms division departments and employee satisfaction by service type.

Rooms division department	Service type	Correlation coefficient	Significance
Front desk	Limited	.029	.877
	full	-.446	.038*
Housekeeping	Limited	-.243	.196
	full	.014	.952
Engineering	Limited	-.041	.841
	full	-.241	.280

* p<.05.

The only significant correlation coefficient, -.446, $p<.05$, was for the front desk department in the full-service hotels. Size of the hotel has a significant inverse relationship with front desk employee satisfaction in full-service hotels.

This issue remains that, in the extracted sample, there is still a significant difference in employee satisfaction means between limited-service and full-service hotels. Since the difference is not in the rooms division, the food and beverage division must be examined. First, similar to the analysis completed with the rooms department, correlation coefficients were calculated between each of the food and beverage departments (restaurant, kitchen, banquets and lounge) employee satisfaction means and number of hotel guest rooms to examine for effects of size within the full-service extracted sample. There were no significant correlations noted (restaurant significance = .306, $r = .360$; kitchen = .746, $r = .126$; banquets = .533, $r = -.224$; lounge = .671, $r = .165$). There were some limited-service food and beverage responses, 36 over the 30 hotels in the full sample. Employees in these hotels may be responsible for setting up the continental breakfasts or providing beverage service in a limited setting. The response size prohibits comparing food and beverage responses across service types. Since there is a significant difference in employee satisfaction between service types, and rooms division means have proven to be similar across service types, the analysis again returns to the food and beverage departments. Table 8 presents and independent samples t-test for employee satisfaction mean differences between rooms division, and food and beverage division employees in the extracted sample. There is a significant difference in the means between rooms division, and food and beverage division employees in the full-service extracted sample.

Table 8:

Independent samples t-test for differences in employee satisfaction means by division for extracted sample

Division	Mean satisfaction	Mean difference	df	Significance
Rooms	5.81	.43	398	.013*
Food and beverage	5.38			

* $p<.05$.

Discussion

The relationship between hotel service type, hotel size and employee satisfaction has not been researched. The research objective was to determine if hotel service type and hotel size had a relationship with employee satisfaction. If such relationships are noted, additional and more detailed research agendas may provide explanations as to why the relationships exist and ways in which management may address controlling satisfaction variables.

The initial findings indicate that hotel size does not have a relationship with employee satisfaction and that hotel service type has a significant relationship with employee satisfaction (Table 2). The findings in Table 2 would indicate that limited-service employees are more satisfied than their full-service counterparts.

When the initial finding was further explored, the results refuted the original proposition. To control for the effects of size within the full sample, an extracted sample was identified. Within the extracted sample, the significant relationship between the two service types was still evident (Table 4). Although the proposition that the difference should be evident in the departments common to both service types, the rooms division departments, was supported in the full sample (Table 5), it was not supported in the extracted sample of similar size hotels (Table 6). This indicated that hotel size may have a relationship to rooms division employee satisfaction. When studying the relationship of employee satisfaction for each rooms division department to number of guest rooms, a significant relationship was noted for front desk employees in the full-service hotels (Table 7). Employee satisfaction of front desk employees decreases with the increase in number of rooms in full-service hotels.

The question of significantly different employee satisfaction scores in the different hotel service types was answered in the analysis of food and beverage employee satisfaction scores. As with the rooms division, the relationship of each food and beverage department employee satisfaction score was correlated with size in the full-service sample. No significant relationships were noted. The final analysis indicated that there is a significant difference between the rooms division and the food and beverage division employee satisfaction scores within the full-service sample.

Although the question of the impact of hotel service type on employee satisfaction cannot be answered with this research, there are two key findings. The first is that front desk employee satisfaction is inversely related to the size of the hotel in the full-service segment. This may due to the added complexity and pressures brought to bear on the front desk position by the inclusion of additional departments and front desk business. Front desk employees at larger full-service hotels are exposed to greater interdepartmental interactions and responsibilities. The front desk is the communication center of hotels. Questions regarding billing, food and beverage functions, guest complaints, etc., usually flow through the front desk. The employee may have greater demands on their time, and may have difficulty in responding to issues that are outside their scope of knowledge or authority.

The second key finding is that food and beverage employee satisfaction scores are lower than the rooms division employee satisfaction scores. In this study, the difference is not a function of size of the hotel, and the hotel service type impact is moot. Simply, food and beverage employees are less satisfied.

Conclusions

The finding that front desk employee satisfaction is related to hotel size in full-service hotels is important. Managers should be aware that the complexities and dynamics of a larger full-service hotel may impact the satisfaction of key guest contact employees. Although empowerment of employees to handle more problems may be an argument, the issue at this point may be organizational knowledge. Hotels may want to focus on the orientation and training of new front desk employees. Efforts can be made to expose new front desk employees to the operations of the food and beverage departments. A better understanding of the operations may help the front desk employee understand and solve issues. Managers should also review the time management and job design issues for front desk employees. Further research should be undertaken that provides a more detailed study of how hotel size impacts front desk employee satisfaction.

The finding that food and beverage employees are less satisfied than their rooms division counterparts is difficult to address in the scope of this study. No relationship to hotel size was noted. Further research should be undertaken to determine if this is an industry-wide issue. There may be several variables that address the satisfaction of food and beverage employees, some may be outside the control of hotel management.

Although the selection of a sample with a common hotel management company helps control for management company impact, the study is also limited by this selection. Further research should be undertaken with other companies that examine the findings presented in this study. More importantly, future research should employ satisfaction models to provide a better study of why such differences found in this study exist. A more detailed study may help provide a more detailed response in dealing with the employee satisfaction issues.

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Visible Body Modification (VBM): Operationalizing Grooming Standards

By Nancy Swanger

The purpose of this study was to build on a previous one that focused on the effect of visible body modification (VBM) on employment. In this study, samples from actual employee manuals used in the hospitality industry were collected and analyzed, specifically looking at policies regarding visible tattoos and body piercings. Examples from those employee manuals are presented, along with suggestions for operators looking to change or clarify their grooming standards.

Introduction

The state of Wyoming is considering the banning of facial piercings in restaurants. (Wackerle, 2005) What could possibly be driving such an act? Consider the following case, which is real; however it occurred in the state of Oregon rather than Wyoming:

> A young woman goes to work at a very popular regional chain restaurant, which specializes in Italian food. The company has a very strict policy against facial piercings. The young woman, who is a server, realizes when she clocks in to begin her shift that she has forgotten to remove her tongue ring. Dutifully, she removes the piercing and places it in the breast pocket of her uniform shirt. The restaurant, which is always very busy, is especially busy on this particular evening. At the end of the night as the server was walking to her car, she reached into her pocket for the tongue ring...it was missing. While she was disappointed that she had apparently lost it, she really gave very little thought to what might have happened to it.
>
> A few days later, a family visits the restaurant for dinner. As they are enjoying their salads, the mother of the family bites into something hard. She removes the object from her mouth and discovers that it is a tongue ring. Imagine her disgust, along with the rest of the family members at the table, as she calls the manager over to her table to show what she attempted to eat with the salad. The manager apologizes profusely and tries to make things right. Unfortunately, from the customer's perspective, it will never be right and her business is lost forever—along with several friends and relatives who were told of the incident.
>
> Upon investigation by the manager, the owner of the tongue ring was identified and an attempt to piece the story together resulted. In this particular restaurant, the servers make their own salads at a station just out of sight of the guests. They are also responsible for restocking the salad items as they empty. Very large vats of salad dressing are kept in the walk-in cooler. The servers replenish their stock by bending over and ladling dressing from the vats into smaller containers. It is believed that when the server bent over to restock the dressing, the tongue ring she had placed in her pocket fell out into the dressing vat without her noticing. A few days later the dressing, along with the tongue ring, was placed into one of the smaller containers and was served.

Wyoming has apparently had its own share of stories like this and is attempting to do something about it. If, indeed, they ban facial piercings, they will be the first state in the country to do so. While Wyoming appears to be driven in their attempt to ban facial piercings by issues related to food safety and sanitation, operators across the country are faced with a growing trend toward visible tattoos and body piercings on employees.

What were once considered identifying marks for those who were in the military, prison, or part of the biker crowd, tattoos have become very popular in American society. Along with tattoos, body piercings—particularly on the face—have also risen in popularity in the last several years. Men and women of all ages are participating in the current tattoo/body-piercing trend.

While there are many issues involved in this trend (including raising the concern for safety and sanitation standards for "artists" who supply these services and determining the reasons some choose to "self-mutilate"), the purpose of this research is to provide hospitality industry employee manual examples and suggestions for operators who wish to change or clarify their grooming standards, whether the concern is for food safety and sanitation, as is the case for Wyoming, or for reasons related to image and appearance. The contribution of this research lies in helping operators establish policies dealing with visible body modification (VBM) such as tattoos and body piercings.

Piercing and Tattooing Reasons Presented

While several articles have been written on tattooing and piercing from the perspectives of art, medicine, anthropology, history, and ethnology, research regarding VBM and its effect on employment in the business literature is very limited. In a previous study, Swanger (2005) found that 86.67% of human resource managers and recruiters from the hospitality industry conveyed a negative feeling toward the appearance of visible tattoos and piercings on interviewees. With the exception of that study, most articles addressing the issue, from a business perspective, were found in newspapers or trade magazines.

"Everybody does something to their bodies to communicate who they are. Even if just to comb their hair." (Adler, 1999) According to Selekman (2003) body decoration is made up of three types: painting, adornment, and modification. While some of these are temporary, some are permanent and could be considered mutilation. Body painting is temporary and includes such practices as putting on make-up on a daily basis or face painting for children. Body adornment includes such practices as cutting/styling hair or wearing jewelry. Body modification is the most extreme and the most permanent of the three classifications of body decoration. These modifications include breast implants, cosmetic surgery, tattoos, and piercing (although pierced holes can eventually grow back together, there may be visible scars). Branding and scarification are the practices that some may view as mutilation.

"Although relatively rare in Western culture, body piercing with needles, rings, metal posts, bones, and other adornments predates human history. The literature of anthropology is replete with examples of exotic decorative and ritual practices involving piercing, scarification, and tattooing." (Stewart, 2000) From around the world, Stewart provides examples of piercing among Egyptian royalty; Greek and Roman slaves; men and women in ancient Persia and Babylon; Spanish women; the French and English; the Aztecs, the Mayas, and the Incas; those in India, Tibet, and Nepal; African and Middle Eastern puberty rituals; and American Nez Perce Indians. Painting the body with henna has been used for over 5,000 years in Asia and Africa. (Selekman, 2003)

Depending on the part of the world, the reasons for the tattoos and piercing vary greatly, including cultural, tribal, religious, assorted rituals, identification, markings for warriors, and others. Today, in modern Western society, the reasons for getting tattooed and pierced vary, as well. "Motivations include aesthetics; sensual pleasure or play; a symbol of commitment to a relationship, possession, or a rite of passage; or a sign of reclamation (survival of abuse, for example)." (Stewart, 2000) With many high-profile athletes and entertainers sporting tattoos and piercing, part of the attraction to "be like Mike" may influence young people to adopt similar looks. In addition, for some, VBM represents their desire to be nonconformists or rebels—just the opposite reason for those where such practices originated such as in New Guinea, Amazonia, and Sudan. (Gardner 2000) Regardless of the reason for getting the tattoo or piercing, those that are visible attract attention—and not all of the attention is positive.

Professionals Are Not Impressed

As the old saying goes, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression." This holds especially true during an employment interview. "One in every 10 Americans have tattoos, up from one out of every hundred three decades ago. Upper middle-class women between the ages of 20 and 40...fuel most of the growth." (Org, 2003). While VBM appears to be growing in popularity among the general population, service-oriented businesses do not appear to be allowing the look while on the job. From an article by Machado (2004), Richard Franco from Mallard's Restaurant in Stockton says:

> If they have a number of piercings, that's someone who doesn't belong in this restaurant or business. Those who do get hired are required as a condition of employment to cover their tattoos, men must remove all visible piercings, and women are allowed only a single earring in each ear provided it is not a hoop and not larger than one inch. We want to maintain our reputation of clean, healthy, professional service.

The retail giant, Wal-Mart, does not allow facial piercing and requires that tattoos be covered. Quick service restaurant leaders, Subway and McDonald's also limit piercing and tattoos; however, dictating the grooming standard for employees among franchised units is a bit more difficult. While corporate offices can specify the look for employees in their franchised operations through the operations manual, enforcement can be challenging. Starbucks, whose units are all company owned, allows no piercings other than the ears and does not allow visible tattoos or unnatural-looking hair colors. (Giron, 2000) According to a survey by Vault.com, a career information web site, (see Gibbons, 2003), fifty eight percent of managers would be less likely to offer a job to an applicant with tattoos or piercings.

Employers have a pretty wide latitude in what goes into their hiring and promoting decisions, and they are within their legal rights to take tattoos or piercings into consideration. That doesn't mean they'll necessarily make a big deal about it.

From the same survey, "...inked and pierced workers who responded to the survey reported a decided lack of equal opportunity: some 18 percent of employees and nearly a quarter of the managers surveyed said such body modifications have hindered their careers and dulled their prospects." While people may have the option to remove piercings or cover visible tattoos while trying to get a job, that becomes very difficult if the tattoos are on the hands, face, or neck.

"In a Sales and Marketing Management survey of 651 executives, Ligos (2001) related that an overwhelming majority said they would avoid hiring sales representative who were sloppily or unfashionably dressed, or those who had visible body piercings or tattoos." Those who are pierced and visibly tattooed will generally admit they are always being judged based on their appearance. Some people are afraid when they encounter someone with tattoos and piercings. While VBM has gained in popularity, it is still not common enough to not draw attention and remains controversial.

Governing Laws Explained

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and subsequent acts, protect classes of individuals from being discriminated against based on race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, and disability. Nowhere in the legislation is there specific protection from discrimination for those whose appearance is out of the business norm, except those associated with certain races or religious beliefs. However, even those practices may be called into question. When establishing dress codes, "employers are allowed to consider two factors: the safety or hygiene in the performance of the job and the image that is required to operate profitably." (Vanitzian, 2001) While foodservice operations have a very real concern for safety and hygiene, the hospitality industry, as a whole, needs to concern itself with how employees are representing their respective companies.

How are hospitality companies addressing VBM in their employee manuals? How can employers best convey their grooming standards?

Methodology

Employee Manuals Collected

The purpose of this research is to provide industry employee manual examples and suggestions for operators who wish to change or clarify their grooming standards. Employee manuals were collected from hospitality businesses for the purpose of providing actual examples of grooming standards' policies.

Employee manuals, or portions of them dealing with grooming standards, were obtained from hospitality operators who were willing to share them. As many parts of the manuals are proprietary in nature, business names attached to specific comments and/or policies will not be disclosed in this paper; however, examples of grooming standard verbiage are included.

Comments from 37 hospitality industry recruiters and human resource managers and 17 employee manuals were obtained, representing various industry segments. The subjects were informed of the purpose of the study and participation was voluntary. (While the sample size and number of manuals obtained is low, it is important to keep in perspective how difficult it is to obtain company information that may be considered proprietary—some is always better than none.)

Employee Manuals Reviewed

A review of the collected employee manuals was conducted to see exactly what companies were saying regarding visible tattoos and piercing, if anything. Manuals addressing the VBM issue were separated from those that did not.

Recruiters or human resources managers from 24 companies—including 10 hotels, 10 restaurants, 2 managed services companies, 1 theme park, and 1 recreation area—commented on their company's policies regarding visible tattoos and piercings. The employee manuals represented local, regional, and national hospitality companies. Table 1 contains a list of the companies represented in the study.

Table 1:

Companies Represented by Survey Respondents

ARAMARK
Best Western – University Inn
Marriott International
Choice Hotels International
Disney
Fairmont Hotels
Sunstone Hotels
Corner Bakery
Happy Day Restaurants (Arby's, TacoTime, A&W)
Hilton
Houston's
Jamba Juice
McDonald's
Old Spaghetti Factory
Red Lobster
Sawtooth Grill
Sheraton
Sodexho
Stevens Pass Ski Area
Subway
The Breakfast Club
Venetian
W Hotels
Westin

For the most part, the respondents in the survey were very candid about their company's position on VBM and, along with providing employee manuals or the specific section dealing with grooming standards, many were very up front with their personal position on the topic. Quotes from the respondents regarding interviewees with visible tattoos and piercings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2:

Hospitality Recruiter Quotes Regarding Visible Tattoos/Piercing on Interviewees

"Bottom line, it's not professional. In interviewing candidates with piercing, I evaluate that they are not personally ready to take the leap entirely into their professional career."

"I would definitely say that the tattoos and body piercing are generally frowned upon in the industry."

"The issue is one of customer impact and safety. Most employers denounce things such as nose rings and other visible piercings."

"I believe this to be the majority of public opinion that these types of items make people uneasy, especially in the corporate world, and due to the amount of public contact, future managers would be ill advised to take the risk of making this type of statement."

"A general rule I always used in conjunction with our guidelines was if something about the staff member caught my eye before their smiling face it probably was not legal."

"I do believe there is an unwritten rule that excludes potential candidates with brow, nose, cheek, or multiple piercings from getting past the first interview."

"Although I feel that an employee can still do their job well regardless of tattoos, etc., you would not believe the number of customer complaints that we receive on the subject!"

"While I do recognize trends and fads, I always look for an overall professional appearance and demeanor. It is difficult to underestimate the power of the first impression—both in interviews and with guests. This is the ultimate test for us; what will our guests think of our staff appearance?"

"Our standard for a 'business-like' appearance does not include visible tattoos or body piercing."

"We will not even talk to anyone if they want to wear that jewelry while at work."

"All that a display of these types of adornment can do is limit your chances. In the hotel industry it will never HELP you."

"I can tell you ... that I have a personal prejudice against interviewees with multiple piercings and they do not get very far in the interviewing process with me."

Table 3 contains examples of verbiage taken directly from employee manuals in the hospitality industry regarding piercing and tattoos.

Table 3:

Verbiage From Hospitality Industry Employee Manuals Regarding Grooming

Example #1: Tattoos are not permitted if they are visible to our Guests. They must be able to be covered by normal clothing or uniform. Jewelry should be professional and conservative. Pierced jewelry in visible locations of the body other than the earlobe (including but not limited to the nose or tongue) is not acceptable. Females – Earrings must be a simple matched pair in gold or silver tones that coordinate with a uniform or outfit. The shape of the earrings must be in good taste and compliment the outfit. Earrings may be clip-on or pierced and must be worn on the bottom of the earlobe. Hanging earrings larger than a dime or longer than one inch are not acceptable. No more that one earring may be worn on each ear at a time. Males – Earrings are not acceptable.

Example #2: Visible tattoos are not allowed for service staff. Employees may wear one earring per ear (except kitchen employees who may not wear any). No other visible piercings will be allowed, including tongue rings.

Example #3: Tattoos may not be visible when you are working. Remove all facial and tongue piercings before your shift. No more than three earrings in each ear.

Example #4: Men and women may wear three earrings per ear, posts are recommended. Avoid large dangling earrings. No other visible body piercing is permitted including tongue rings. Any jewelry that depicts violence, vulgarity, hatred toward any group, etc., is never acceptable.

Example #5: Visible tattoos are not considered to be in our best interest and are not permitted. The use of bandages to conceal a visible tattoo will not be permitted. Males – Jewelry may not be worn in any visible body piercing including, but not limited to, piercings in the ear, tongue, or nose. Females – One earring in each ear is permitted. Aside from earrings, jewelry may not be worn in any visible body piercings including, but not limited to, piercings in the tongue or nose. In addition, methods to conceal an unacceptable piercing, such as using a bandage, are not permitted.

Example #6: Only one earring per ear on females, and no dangling or extreme styles; no earrings on males. No facial ornaments, including jewelry. Body piercing or tattoos must not be visible.

Additional Questions Raised

Advertising agencies, technology companies, and the sports and entertainment fields have countless participants who are pierced and tattooed. While there are similar examples in the hospitality industry—such as W Hotels, Tokyo Joe's, and Hard Rock Cafes, to name a few—where visible tattoos and body piercing are allowed and maybe even encouraged, the majority of the hospitality industry remains somewhat conservative. However, will the tightness of the labor market have an effect on the company grooming standards for current and future hospitality employees?

The findings of this research are limited due to the sample size. However, the study does provide some baseline information about how hospitality companies view VBM and how the issue is addressed through grooming standards in their employee manuals. Replication of this research using a larger sample is needed to validate the findings for generalizability purposes.

Another area for future research is in determining if hospitality companies in different geographic locations (in the United States and around the world) have differing levels of tolerance for employees with visible tattoos and piercings. Also, if there is more tolerance for VBM in certain areas, what is the effect in those areas of attracting employees who do not have visible tattoos and piercings? Are prospective employees without tattoos and piercings "intimidated" by the thought of working with those who have them, and thus, choose not to apply?

The risk environment in which hospitality businesses operate can be rather large due to the number of employees required to get the job done. Have there been legal challenges to company dress codes, specifically any regarding visible tattoos and piercings?

Perhaps the most important research to be conducted on VBM needs to include customers/guests and their willingness to be served by employees with visible tattoos and piercings or their perceptions after having been served by such employees. Does VBM by a company's employees affect consumers' decisions to patronize certain hospitality businesses?

Conclusions

Operational Suggestions Presented

While there are many issues involved in employee dress codes—clothing, shoes, personal hygiene, cosmetics, and hair (including facial)—this research looks only at the issue of VBM and how it is addressed in employee manuals. Hospitality managers at the operational level are too busy to have to worry about being the "fashion police" for their employees as they come to work each day. Companies need to be very clear, right up front, about their standards of grooming.

As presented, the examples in Table 3 may provide some direction for operators wishing to change or clarify their company grooming policy. Additional suggestions include:

- Keep the guidelines simple and direct; do not allow for variations that will require a judgment call by the manager. What may appear "reasonable" or "in good taste" to the employee, may not be so judged by the management.
- Make the guidelines known right up front as people apply. Consider attaching a brief statement outlining the grooming standard to the application form to clear up any confusion right from the beginning. People can then choose to apply and abide by the standards or choose not to apply.
- As an employee manual can be considered a contract, it is always a good idea to have legal counsel review the document after development or when under revision to make sure all provisions are within the letter of the law.

- Once adopted, make sure grooming standards are adhered to all levels of the organization—nothing speaks louder to their importance than the consistent demonstration of them by all employees. When properly written, the standards become non-negotiable.

While there are a few exceptions, the hospitality industry overall tends to remain conservative in its approach to employee grooming. The law says that operators may impose a dress code when safety is an issue or the company image is at stake. As visible tattoos and piercings become more mainstream in the United States, hospitality companies that wish to maintain the "all-American boy and girl" look may need to reexamine their grooming standards. It's one thing to have a desired professional appearance in mind; it is quite another to try and enforce such a standard without defining it and making it very clear to current and potential employees.

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The Emotional Intelligence of National Automatic Merchandising Association (NAMA) Vending and Coffee Services Industries Executives: A Pilot Study

By Ronald F. Cichy, Richard M. Geerdes, and JaeMin Cha

The authors report the pilot study focused on identifying the emotional intelligence (EI) of leaders in the automatic merchandising and coffee service industries. The data were collected from 39 executives, members of National Automatic Merchandising Association (NAMA), who attended 2005 Executive Development Program on the campus of Michigan State University. Three elements of EI – IN, OUT, RELATIONSHIPS- for these leaders are discussed.

Introduction

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a set of abilities or capabilities utilized by a person to understand, use, regulate, and manage the individual's emotions. (Law, Wang and Song, 2004). As opposed to cognitive intelligence, measured by an intelligence quotient (IQ), EI attempts to assess the expression of emotions and feelings.[1] While some researchers have empirically linked EI to academic achievement and success[2] and management performance (Langhorn, 2004) others have demonstrated that EI skills and capabilities are contributors to effective leadership. (Goleman, et. al., 2001; Gardner and Stough, 2002; Carmeli, 2003.)

Leaders with high EI are capable of assessing how followers feel, and effectively utilize this information to influence the emotions of followers in service of organizational goals. (George, 2001) Past service industries EI studies have included customer service (Cook and McCaulay, 2002), nursing staff (Vitello-Cicciu, 2003), and restaurant managers. (Langhorn, 2004) In a soon-to-be-published study, the emotional intelligence of 926 private club industry leaders was studied. (Cicy, Cha and Kim, *Under Review*). This present study is a pilot study focused on identifying the EI of leaders in the automatic merchandising and coffee service industries.

Three models of EI defined

Cichy, Cha, and Kim conducted an extensive review of the EI literature prior to assessing the EI of 926 private club industry leaders. As the basis for developing the assessment tool, first for use with club leaders, and then for use with the leaders in this pilot study, the authors of this present study chose three major conceptual models of EI: Salovey-Mayer, Goleman, and Bar-On (2000).

Salovey and Mayer in 1990 were the pioneers in using the term Emotional Intelligence to describe the individual's ability to perceive, understand, and manage emotions in self and others. Their definition combined intrapersonal and interpersonal capabilities and emphasized the noncognitive nature of EI. Their model was subsequently revised to include four dimensions of EI:

- the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion;

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[1] See, for example, H. Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligence* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); P. Salovey and D. Mayer, "Emotional intelligence," *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* 9, no. 3 (1990), 185-211; D. Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It can matter more than IQ* (New York: Bantam, 1995); R. Bar-On, *The Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I): A Test of Emotional Intelligence* (Toronto: Multi-Health Systems, 1997).

[2] See, for example, K. Barcard, "Does emotional intelligence assist in the prediction of academic success?," *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 63, no. 5 (2003): 840-852; S. Woitaszewski and M. Aalasma, "The contribution of emotional intelligence to the social and academic success of gifted adolescents as measured by the multifactor emotional intelligence scale – adolescent version," *Roeper Review* 27, no. 1 (2004): 25-30.

- the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought;
- the ability to understand emotions and emotional knowledge; and
- the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth.

In 1995, Goleman (2001) published his book entitled: *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. Goleman brought a focus to the use of EI in the organization to enhance leadership effectiveness. Goleman's EI model includes four general abilities:

- self-awareness;
- self-management;
- social awareness; and
- relationship management.

Bar-On defined EI as "an array of personal, emotional, and social abilities, and skills that influence an individual's ability to cope effectively with his or her given environmental demands and pressures. Bar-On's abilities number 15, categorized into five composite scales:

- intrapersonal;
- interpersonal;
- adaptability;
- stress management; and
- general mood

The Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (2003), or MSCEIT, includes 141 items, both self-reported and evaluated by others. The Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I) assesses 133 items in a self-measurement of his 15 competencies placed into the five composite scales.

A new model of EI presented

In developing and validating a new scale of EI with private club leaders, the authors of this present study adopted the "ability model" originally introduced by Salovey and Mayer.

The authors also differentiated EI capabilities for oneself (we called these IN) and for others (we called these OUT) based on Goleman's model. In addition, we incorporated the emotional and social intelligence components of Bar-On and called these RELATIONSHIPS.

IN construct includes three elements:

- Awareness of self;
- Self-leadership; and
- Self-actualization.

IN is the ability to sense and lead one's own emotions.

OUT construct includes two elements:

- Empathy; and
- Awareness of others.

OUT is one's ability to be aware of, or relate to, and understand others' emotions.

RELATIONSHIPS construct is unidimensional, representing one's abilities to integrate emotional experiences with his or her own actions and thoughts, while interacting with others.

Vending and coffee service executives surveyed

The National Automatic Merchandising Association (NAMA) is the leading trade association for the vending and coffee service industries. In this pilot study of vending and coffee service executives, the authors of this current study surveyed 39 participants in the National Automatic Merchandising Association (NAMA) Executive Development Program (EDP) in attendance at the January 16-21, 2005 Executive Development Program on the campus of Michigan State University. The survey instrument consisted of 37 items, 20 representing the IN construct, 9 representing the OUT construct, and 8 representing the RELATIONSHIPS construct. All 37 items were measured with a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 4 (Very often or True of me) to 1 (Very seldom or Not true of me). In addition to responding to the 37 items, participants were asked to respond one open-ended question that asked: "If you were to give someone who aspires to be like you advice about emotional intelligence, what would you say?" Selected demographics of the attendees at the NAMA 2005 EDP are presented in Table 1

Table 1:

Demographics of participants

Title of participant	
Owner/operator	4.7%
President or vice president	18.6%
National sales manager / regional sales manager / regional manager	9.3%
Key account manager or district manager	11.6%
Account executive or sales representative	27.9%
General manager	11.6%
Business development manager / customer service manager / vending manager	7.0%
Operations manager or office manager or manager	7.0%
Food service director	2.3%
Years of Experience in Vending/Coffee Service Industries	
0-5	19.2%
6-10	15.4%
11-15	7.7%
16-20	34.6%
20+	23.1%
Number of Employees of Study Participants' Organizations	
50 or less	42.3%
51-100	23.1%
101-200	7.7%
201-499	3.8%
500+	23.1%
Annual Gross Sales (US$) of Study Participants' Organizations	
Less than $1M	8.7%
$1M-$5M	4.4%
More than $5M-$10M	26.0%
$10M+	60.9%
Gender	
Male	18.6%
Female	81.4%

Three elements of EI ranked

The mean values representing the averages for IN, OUT, and RELATIONSHIPS are presented from top to bottom in Tables 2, 3, and 4 respectively. In particular, Table 2 illustrates that three statements representing the IN construct were tied for the top rank:

- I look at the positive side of life with positive attitude, even in the face of challenges.
- I feel pleased with my life, like myself and others, and have fun.
- I make my own decisions in life, and do not depend on others to do things for me. The standardized item alpha (= Reliability) for IN was 0.82.

Table 2:

Mean scores and rankings for IN element

Rank	Item	Mean*
1	I look at the positive side of life with positive attitude, even in the face of challenges.	3.49
1	I feel pleased with my life, like myself and others, and have fun.	3.49
1	I make my own decisions in life, and do not depend on others to do things for me.	3.49
4	I have many exciting and interesting things going on in my life.	3.44
5	I am able to handle stressful situation without losing my cool.	3.41
6	I am good at identifying problems, and developing and putting into place effective solutions.	3.38
6	I am able to sense my own feelings.	3.38
8	I accept myself as I am, the good and the not so good.	3.33
8	I focus on what is practical and avoid unrealistic expectations.	3.33
10	I am able to use awareness of my feelings to be adaptable.	3.28
11	I am able to use my feelings in my thinking processes.	3.26
12	I am able to keep in touch with my own feelings as they take place.	3.23
12	I am able to understand and appreciate the meaning of feelings.	3.23
12	I can adapt my feelings, thoughts, and behavior even when circumstances change.	3.23
15	I am able to use awareness of my feelings to positively influence my behavior.	3.15
16	I am able to accurately perceive my own feelings as they develop.	3.13
16	I am able to understand information about feeling and how feelings work together and progress.	3.13
18	I am open to my feelings and am able to adjust them in myself to promote personal understanding and development.	3.10
19	I can recognize and understand my feelings, can tell the differences between them, know what caused the feelings, and why.	3.05
20	I am patient and can delay satisfaction or an impulse to act.	2.90

IN Mean = 3.27; Reliability = .82

*4 (very often or true of me) to 1 (very seldom or not true of me)

One of the core competencies of EI, as described by Bar-On, is optimism. A leader with an optimistic approach looks at the positive side of life with a positive attitude, even in the face of challenges. This optimism helps leaders become the best at what they do, as well as inspire others in the organization. Organizational life and personal life are not without its challenges. When a leader sees the possibilities, not just the problems, and focuses on the potential rather than the pitfalls, the leader helps his or her own self-motivation as well as building commitment from others on the team.

The next EI capability tied for the top rank was: "I feel pleased with my life, like myself and others, and have fun." This skill begins with self-understanding. One leader advised that you must "understand yourself – feed the body, soul, and spirit, and allow this to flow to others." Another wrote: "it takes a lot less effort to be nice and happy than mean and visibly unhappy." Being true to yourself and being your own role model were themes that surfaced relative to this EI capability.

The third EI capability tied for top rank is: "I make my own decisions in life, and do not depend on others to do things for me." This independence is a hallmark of emotionally intelligent leaders, particularly those who are self-starters. These leaders are grounded in reality but strive to reach exceptional expectations and results. This independence often stems from self-awareness, another critical EI skill. A leader must be in touch with his or her own emotions as a basis for independence. This leader also understands that he or she must have an adjustable leadership style to deal with varying personalities, emotional response, and situations.

Regarding other IN-related advice from our respondents, they wrote "listen to your gut;" and "in yourself, be consistent with your own emotional attitude." The IN construct summarizes the necessary intrapersonal EI skills.

For the OUT construct, the standardized item alpha (= Reliability) was 0.83. As Table 3 shows, the top-ranked item was: "I am sensitive to other people's emotions." One leader advised those who aspire to leadership positions to "pay attention to the little things like a person's body language and their comments in small talk both reveal a lot." Listening and being aware of others emotions, including body language, helps a leader become more emotionally intelligent.

Table 3:

Mean scores and rankings for OUT element

Rank	Item	Mean*
1	I am sensitive to other people's emotions.	3.36
2	I can read the feelings of other people.	3.33
3	I am aware of emotions of others.	3.31
4	I am able to perceive feelings in others.	3.28
5	I am able to be open to emotions in others to promote understanding and development.	3.23
6	I am able to accurately sense feelings in others and understand what is really taking place.	3.21
7	I understand what other people are thinking and feeling even when it is different that my own thoughts and emotions.	3.13
8	I am able to feel emotions in things. (e.g., art, music, objects, and stories)	3.10
9	I understand and appreciate emotions of others.	3.08

OUT Mean = 3.23; Reliability = .83

*4 (very often or true of me) to 1 (very seldom or not true of me)

Being sensitive to the emotions of others requires patience and understanding. Leaders must learn to listen to others and not necessarily try to fix problems. "Just listen unless you are asked for an opinion" is what one leader advised. Being patient and understanding before being understood are essential EI skills. Leaders try to put themselves in others' shoes and pay attention to the feelings of others.

The second OUT item is reading the feelings of other people. Listening to understand is an essential component of this EI competency. One leader advised to "not comment until you understand." Another wrote: "listen to what they are saying." Take time to ask questions that help you develop a deeper understanding of the other person's position." In so doing, the leader becomes aware of and sensitive to the feelings of others.

"I am aware of emotions of others" is the OUT EI skill ranked third. This awareness leads to the realization that everyone has different values and priorities that make them who they are. One leader suggested that "the more you understand what makes someone who they are, the better you will be able to inspire and lead that individual effectively."

In terms of the RELATIONSHIPS construct, the standardized item alpha (= Reliability) was 0.72. As Table 4 shows, the top ranked item was "people would say I am a cooperative, contributing, and a positive team member." One leader wrote: "you have to overlook the small stuff and try to find the positive in people." Another remarked: "Keep an open mind and don't sweat the small stuff." Always be positive seemed to emerge as a theme in the remarks about RELATIONSHIPS.

Table 4:

Mean scores and rankings for RELATIONSHIPS element

Rank	Item	Mean*
1	People would say I am a co-operative, contributing, and a positive team member.	3.43
2	I understand the effect of my feelings on particular people and situations.	3.19
2	I manage my feelings in the ways I respond to particular circumstances and individuals.	3.19
4	I am able to express and use feelings to communicate emotions with theirs.	3.14
5	I am able to clearly communicate in relationships with others.	3.11
6	I am effective in dealing with conflict in relationships with others.	3.08
6	I am able to use awareness of my emotions to manage relationships with others.	3.08
8	I can easily build and participate in mutually satisfying relationships characterized by openness and affection.	3.05

RELATIONSHIPS Mean = 3.16; Reliability = .72

*4 (very often or true of me) to 1 (very seldom or not true of me)

The next two RELATIONSHIPS items were tied for rank 2: "I understand the effect of my feelings on particular people and situations." and "I manage my feelings in the ways I respond to particular circumstances and individuals." Regarding understanding feelings, leaders suggested that one must "be aware of the inner self and work on what triggers your emotions and how best to use them in relationships." Another advised: "in the end, it is not all about what is in it for you. Keep that in mind."

Regarding managing feelings, one leaders wrote to: "be yourself and respect others the way you would like to be respected." An additional comment was to "maintain ethics and honesty in all decisions."

Two other comments from these vending and coffee service leaders bear repeating. One leader advised those who aspire to be a leader to "educate yourself with self-help and management books." This comment is particularly noteworthy since EI skills may be improved with practice. A second leader wrote: "Success is a journey that may never end, and tenacity is essential. Failures are certain and it is what you do with failures that determine your success." EI helps one cope with the failures and pressures that leaders face daily.

Future research recommended

Given the sample size in this pilot study, it was not useful to examine more sophisticated statistical analyses. Based on this pilot study, a future research project involving the membership of NAMA could provide sufficient numbers of usable references such that exploratory factory analysis (EFA) or confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) could be utilized.

Even though all scores of standardized item reliability were calculated for each of the three constructs (IN = .82, OUT = .83, RELATIONSHIPS = .72) and exceeded the recommended minimum of .70, more sophisticated statistical methods could not be applied in this pilot study. However, the findings indicate that vending and coffee service leaders participating in this pilot study tend to have high EI for all three areas – IN, OUT, and RELATIONSHIPS (Table 5). The differences among the three constructs are not statistically significant.

Table 5:

Summary EQ scores

	IN (20 items)	OUT (9 items)	RELATIONSHIPS (8items)	Total EQ score (37 items)
Maximum scores	80	36	32	148
Mean[1]	65.4 (81.8%)[2]	28.9 (80.3%)	25.3 (79.0%)	119.6 (80.8%)
S.D.	5.5	3.6	2.8	12.0

1) NAMA EDP participants (n=39)

Given the earlier research into the EI of private club leaders[23], and the ability to expand the numbers of usable responses for vending and coffee service leaders in the examination of IN, OUT and RELATIONSHIPS constructs, the authors of this present study could be closer to cross-validating the three-dimensional EI framework. That would allow the authors to begin to investigate whether our newly developed EI model is consistent and stable across different (i.e. varying populations of hospitality business leaders) cultures in terms of factor structure.

An additional study is underway of the EI of leaders in manufacturing, specifically the home improvements products industries. Unlike the private club leaders or vending and coffee service leaders studies, the manufacturing leaders study is longitudinal in the sense that the EI of the same sample of participants will be assessed and compared over a period of time. This study potentially has the ability to point out changes in overall EI, as well as the IN, OUT, and RELATIONSHIPS constructs.

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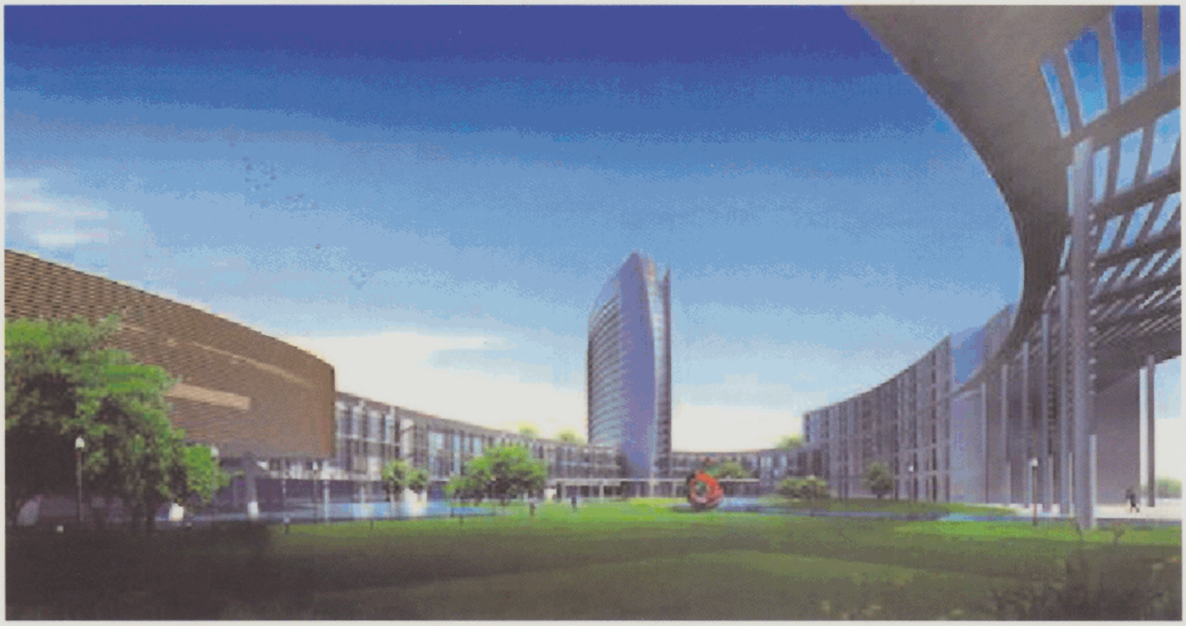

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