teaching note

Cultural Dimensions in a Restaurant Setting

Introduction/Summary

This case presents a scenario of a foreign couple who has travelled to the United States for vacation purposes and dines at an American casual-dining restaurant located on International Drive, in Orlando. There are a lot of potential differences in perception identified between the employees' perspective and customers' perspective. The scenario presented a couple of whose national origin is not mentioned. However, these differences in perception is not only linked the couple in the scenario but other foreign customers as well. The case aims to generate discussions about how restaurants in Orlando can accommodate tourist's wants, needs, expectations and perceptions. Hence, these discussions can be the basis of strategies for restaurants to be more inter-culturally sensitive.

Teaching Objectives

This case presents an American employee's and an International tourist's perspective on the same service encounter at an American restaurant. This case aims to:

- Demonstrate cultural differences in a restaurant setting.
- Explore fundamental elements of a dining experience that are crucial to overall customer satisfaction with the restaurant experience such as: tipping norms, waiter/waitress greeting styles, friendliness and overall behavior, service pace, dietary concerns, importance of restaurant environmental elements and ambiance, dining time perception, restaurant customs and norms (other important norms).
- Emphasize the important of accommodating cultural differences.
- Generate discussions about how restaurants in Orlando can accommodate tourist's wants, needs, expectations and perceptions.

Learning Objectives

Based upon discussions and research assignments, students taking part in this case study will be able to:

- Identify various restaurants eating norms of at least 10 different countries.
- Identify at least five to seven different elements of a dining experience through another culture's perspective.
- Discuss basis of strategies for restaurants to be more inter-culturally sensitive and accommodate cultural differences.
- Create recommendations on what changes American restaurants could incorporate to better serve their international customers with a goal of making the customers feel more comfortable with their dining experience.

However, it is important to note that throughout this research, topics should be focused on casual-dining restaurants and research findings and recommendations should be specific towards casual-dining restaurants as well.

Discussion Part I

Students will be divided into 10 groups. According the Office of Travel and Tourism Industries in the United States (2012), the Top 10 overseas tourist markets are: Canada, Mexico, Japan, UK, Brazil, Germany, South Korea, France, China and Australia. Each of the 10 student groups will be assigned one of these countries to research, or another of the professor's choosing. Each student group will be asked to research and be ready to discuss the following topics for the country assigned to them.

- Tipping norms.
- Waiter/Waitress greeting styles, friendliness and overall behavior.
- Service pace.
- Dietary Concerns.
- Importance of restaurant environmental elements; ambiance (students can also research smoking and music norms).
- Dining time perception.
- Restaurant customs and norms (other important norms not mentioned in any other category).

Students are free to use a variety of sources to research this information. Sources can range from academic articles, journals, books (e.g. Hungry Planet: What the world eats by Menzel and Aluisio), magazines (e.g. Travel and Leisure magazine), online articles and blogs, travel-advising sites (for example: tripadvisor.com or lonelyplanet.com). Research for these topics will extend to informal means of research as well. For example, students are allowed to gather information from friends or relatives originating from the country pertinent to their research. Furthermore, students can use social media (e.g. facebook.com or twitter.com) platforms as a means to gather information as well.

Questions related to the case study

- Should restaurants in Orlando, which cater to international tourists, change their tipping policy by including it on checks? Or making gratuity suggestions when the customers receive their checks?
- Should restaurants alter their table turnover policy for restaurants catering to tourists?
- Is it beneficial for waiters and waitresses to be trained on cross-cultural training or intercultural sensitivity, so as to better accommodate customer's preferences and differences?
- What boundaries or limits on wait staff friendliness should be taken into account with international customers?

- Are their some environmental attributes expected by international customers when eating at a casual-dining restaurant?
- What are some dietary concerns regarding international tourists that can be taken into accommodation?

Discussion Part II

The class may begin with an open discussion on which students have travelled to any of the 10 countries listed for this research work (UK, Japan, Germany, Brazil, France, South Korea, China, Australia, Italy and Spain). Students can share any of their foodservice related experiences from those countries (15-20 minutes). Each student group (country) then begins discussing their research findings in a systematic manner, with the intentions to cover all possible topics of foodservice research for each country. The class will then be displayed a diagram in the form of an excel sheet. The diagram can look as the following:

Each student group (country) will be asked to share their research findings. All findings will be placed in bullet point format for each category.

Discussion Part III

As a result, once the results of the discussions at the table are complete, the students will be asked to create recommendations for restaurants in Orlando that may be considered in order to accommodate these nationalities norms and perceptions. At this point, students make suggestions on what changes should restaurants undergo to cater to its international customers. These changes must be recommended as per the topics assigned for country-specific discussion purposes.

- What tipping changes can be made not only to make the customer feel more comfortable? But also for the waiters and waitresses not to feel like they have not performed their service

levels due to a lesser tip that may be accustomed to the home countries of the customers?

- How should waiters/waitresses be trained to be more interactive in order to relate to the norms of the customers their serving?
- What dietary concerns should be taken into consideration when suggesting entrées to the customers?
- What restaurant environmental attributes need remodeling?
- How can the concept of "table turnover" be modified to cater to international tourists' service pace and dining time perception, so customers are not feeling rushed when it may be customary to take their time when eating?

Discussion Part IV

There have been several studies indicating the dimensions of national culture. Hofstede (1984, 1989) suggest that the dimensions of a national culture are: Power distance, Individualism, Uncertainty avoidance, Masculinity and Long term orientation. Power distance is the extent to which power is distributed unequally through society. In the case of a service encounter in a restaurant setting, the United States is low in power distance (Hofstede, 2013) since they expect relationships to be personal and informal, even from a server. However, students will find that other cultures do not expect the same aspects from their server. Similarly, students will be able to explore other aspects of Hofstede's dimensions that are relevant to the case presented.

Certain attributes are deemed more important to certain countries rather than other countries. As a result, the recommendations created by students may be accommodating the needs of one country and not accommodating the needs of another country. Throughout this discussion process, each student group is expected to act as an

Table 1

Country-specific diagram

COUNTRY	Tipping Etiquettes	Waiter/Waitress Behavior	Service Pace	Dietary Concerns	Environmental Elements	Time Perception	Restaurant customs and norms (other)
Canada							
Mexico							
Japan							
UK							
Brazil							
Germany							
South Korea							
France							
China							
Australia							
Other							

advocate for the country it represents its research results performed on. Students will have to negotiate and come to a create recommendations that manage to balance the needs and wants of all countries. In this process, the professor leading the class will act as the country "United States of America" and be prepared to dispute a recommendation that may not seem fit to America.

This discussion allows students to critically think of ideas that can fit the situations the students came up with as to the results that the international customers may expect or need to feel more "at home". Catering to international customers has already become a fast growing reality for restaurants and there is an important need to provide the right dining experience to this important market segment (Edwards, 2013).The main goal of these discussions is to enable the restaurants serving international customers the need to feel comfortable with every aspect of their dining experience. The American restaurants duty is to make every customer feel comfortable whether the customers are from the States or from another country.

Learning Outcomes – Possible Recommendations

1. Tipping suggestions: Adding any form of service fees to the menu prices can save tourists from a lot of confusion and hassle when trying to understand their dining bills. Currently, there are restaurants in the United States aiming to include the cost of service in the price of food (McGeehan, 2013). However, students should be able to analyze tipping norm implications for restaurants that cater to international tourists.

2. Wait staff behavior: "Friendliness" is part of the American culture, therefore it is not recommended to be reduced completely. However, the limits on friendliness may have to be addressed. Some cultures prefer wait staff to be professional rather than friendly. Also, some cultures may perceive it rude if a server continuously interrupts their meal.

3. Service pace: Restaurants will have to decide whether they prefer dissatisfied customers waiting too long for a table, or a customer being dissatisfied for feeling as being rushed out of a restaurant. If one customer is satisfied, then other customer is dissatisfied. Therefore, restaurants will prioritize their objectives with table turnover. Restaurants expected rates on table turnovers may have to be reduced to provide international guests with a complete satisfactory dining experience.

4. Dietary concerns: Some cultures have dietary restriction (e.g. no pork, no meat, and no alcohol). Therefore, restaurants may need to expand their menu selection to accommodate these needs. Cultural and diversity training equips wait staff with the knowledge of a few customary dietary restriction of some countries in order to provide efficient recommendations. Additionally, wait staff should always be trained to ask tourists if they have any special dietary needs that can be accommodated.

5. Environmental elements: Some countries may be accustomed to certain genres of music playing inside their restaurants, whereas some countries may have no music playing at restaurants at all. Additionally, even though smoking is not permitted inside American restaurants, restaurant owners may want to consider creating patios or any other forms of outdoor smoking spaces. Furthermore, restaurant ambiance can also be a part of customer expectations which need to be clearly identified by country.

6. Time perception: Every culture has its own eating norms with approximate time spans for their entire dining experience. Dining has been viewed in some cultures as a social act. For example, a couple may want to spend time with each other at a restaurant and have good food compared to a couple that may want to have good food and spend time with each other.

7. Other norms and cultures at restaurants: Some countries do not include sales tax as an extra charge on the bill, but rather include the sales tax into the menu prices. Additionally, some countries may not have any taxes incorporated into their legal system. Therefore, it may be recommended to add taxes to prices. However, in the United States, every state and county has a slightly different sales tax rates from the other. Hence, every menu would have to be customized for the county or city it is being used in.

References

Armstrong, R. , Mok, C., Go, F. , & Chan, A. (1997). The importance of cross-cultural expectations in the measurement of service quality perceptions in the hotel industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 16(2): 181.

Barker, S., & Charmine, E. (2004). Intercultural service encounters: an exploratory study of customer experiences. *Cross Cultural Management*, 11(1): 3-14.

Bloom, B. N., Hummel, E. E., Aiello, T., & Li, X. (2012). The impact of meal duration on a corporate casual full-service restaurant chain. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, 15(1): 19-38. doi:10.1080/15378020.2012.650591

Edwards, G. (2013). Tourists are coming: Is your restaurant ready to accommodate? Pizza Market, Retrieved from http://www.pizzamarketplace.com/article/213181/Tourists-are-coming-Is-your-restaurant-ready-to-accommodate.

Hofstede, G. (1984). Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values (2nd ed.). Beverly Hills CA: SAGE Publications.

Hofstede, G. (1989). Organizing for cultural diversity. European Management Journal. 7(4). 390-397.

Hofstede, G. (2013). The Hofstede Centre - USA. Retrieved from http://geert-hofstede.com/united-states.html.

Hwang, J. (2008). Restaurant table management to reduce customer waiting times, Journal of Foodservice Business Research, 11(4): 334-351. doi:10.1080/15378020802519603.

Kaynak, E., Kara, A., & Apil, A. (2011). An investigation of people's time orientation, attitudes, and behavior toward advertising in an international context. Journal of Global Marketing, 24(5): 433-452. doi:10.1080/08911762.2011.634327.

Kee-Fu Tsang, N., & Ap, J. (2007). Tourists' perceptions of relational quality service attributes: a cross-cultural study. Journal of Travel Research, 45(3): 355-363. doi:10.1177/0047287506295911.

Legohérel, P., Dauce, B., Hsu, C., & Ranchhold, A. (2009). Culture, time orienta- tion, and exploratory buying behavior. Journal of International Consumer Marketing, 21(2): 93-107. doi:10.1080/08961530802153029.

Lynn, M. (2001). Restaurant tip and service quality: a tenuous relationship. Cornell H.R.A. Quarterly, 42: 14-20.

Lynn, M. (2009). Determinants and consequences of female attractiveness and sexiness: Realistic tests with restaurant waitresses. Archives of Sexual Behavior, 38: 737-745.

Lynn, M., et. al. (2008). Consumer racial discrimination in tipping: A replication and extension. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 38: 1045-1060.

McGeehan, P. (2013). Tip 15, 20 or 25 Percent? Here, They Strongly Suggest Zero. New York Times. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/07/nyre- gion/sushi-restaurant-finds-tip-habits-hard-to-break.html

Reisinger, Y., & Turner, L. W. (1999). A cultural analysis of Japanese tourists: chal- lenges for Australian tourism marketers. European Journal of Marketing, 33(11/12): 1203-1227.

Shaw, S. (2005). Tipped off. The New York Times. Retrieved from http://www. nytimes.com/2005/08/10/opinion/10shaw.html.

Office of travel and tourism industries. (2012). 2012 monthly top airports for overseas non-resident arrivals. Retrieved February 23, 2013, from http://tinet. ita.doc.gov/view/m-2012-I-001/index.html

Office of Travel and Tourism Industries. (2012). Top 20 countries generating travel to the United States. Retrieved February 23, 2013 from http://tinet.ita. doc.gov/view/m-2012-I-001/index.html.

Walker, J. (2008). The Restaurant From Concept to Operation. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.

Winsted, K. (1999). Evaluating service encounters: A cross-cultural and cross- industry exploration. Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, 7(2): 106-123.

Zeithaml, V. , Parasuraman, A., & Berry, L. (1990). Delivering Quality Service: Balancing Customer Perceptions and Expectations. New York: Free Press.