

Experiential marketing in a gastronomic attraction: the case of a teahouse

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PURPOSE

This paper is a comprehensive research of teahouse visiting experience components and the position of teahouse visiting experience in the industry of gastronomic attractions. The main research questions are determining sources of positive and negative experience in a teahouse, highlighting significant distinctive features of teahouse visiting experience and defining the main differences from a restaurant visiting experience. With the young consumers showing interest in gourmet quality tea and sophisticated tea drinking environments [FAO, 2018], teahouse visiting experience becomes a relevant topic of research.

RESEARCH METHODS

The methodology is based on content analysis and online survey. First, teahouse visiting experience was analysed according to Pine&Gilmore's framework. Second, content analysis of 141 online reviews was carried out and customer journey map was built. Reviews were collected from the biggest Russian search engine for places Yandex.Maps. A well-known teahouse in Moscow called "Teaworks" was chosen for consideration as an example of a bright experience tea drinking place. Lastly, an online survey was conducted and 146 questionnaires were collected in January 2021. The survey was designed according to the customer journey map (CJM) and included paths for different scenarios of visiting for each customer profile. The questionnaire contained separate sections about restaurant experience, teahouse experience and socio-demographic data. Data analysis was conducted in SPSS using contingency tables. The survey was mostly conducted among young people from 18 to 35 years old. 28% of respondents

visited a teahouse in Moscow. Some respondents (teahouse visitors) were recruited via social media from teahouse communities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the research the main purposes of teahouse visiting are to have a personal meeting or to enjoy drinks. In a teahouse visiting experience the focus is made on escapism (Pine&Gilmore's framework), however, other types of experience are not left aside. 5 experience design principles are properly used. Overall, teahouse visiting experience is significantly associated with the atmosphere, the interior and the quality of the tea and service.

As for the differences from restaurant visiting, teahouses are mostly visited with friends, while restaurants are also visited with lovers or relatives. Main teahouse choosing factor is an advice from relatives or friends, while for a restaurant previous experience and online resources are also important. Main visiting factors for both teahouses and restaurants are interior and service. Teahouse visitors pay less attention to taste of food and drinks and location but more to music. Positive experience predictors for teahouse are atmosphere, cosiness, interior and service, for restaurant it is less connected with atmosphere but more with deliciousness of food and drinks.

Teahouse visiting experience seems to be omitted in scientific research and lacks awareness in real life. This research fills the blank space and contributes to the current restaurant experience research. However, this research is limited to a certain city and behavioral patterns, so there is a lot more to discover in order to strengthen the basis for the teahouse visiting experience concept worldwide. Moreover, possibility to include teahouse experience elements into restaurant visiting and other possible business models for teahouses are yet to be discovered.

IMPLICATIONS

This research clearly highlights the promising position of teahouse visiting as a significant part of gastronomic attractions industry. Although the overall awareness about this type of experience obtaining is low, it appears to be a powerful source of experience (all the teahouse visitors of different teahouses in Moscow proved the experience to have been extremely satisfying). The elements of teahouse experience might be considered for implementation in a gastronomic industry to enhance overall experience. As for the existing teahouses, they should focus on perfecting the customer experience approach and improving the awareness stage.

KEYWORDS

Teahouse, customer experience, experiential marketing, restaurant, gastronomic attraction

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