



Assessing the Impact of Tableware and its Influence on the Fine Dining Experience

***Haslinda Md.Nazril**, Faculty of Art, Computing & Creative Industry, Sultan Idris Education University, Tanjong Malim, Perak Darul Ridzuan ,Malaysia, MARA University of Technology (UiTM), Campus Seri Iskandar, Seri Iskandar, Perak, Malaysia

Abdul Aziz B. Zalay Zali, Faculty of Art, Computing & Creative Industry, Sultan Idris Education University, Tanjong Malim, Perak Darul Ridzuan ,Malaysia, MARA University of Technology (UiTM), Campus Seri Iskandar, Seri Iskandar, Perak, Malaysia

Noor Aileen Ibrahim, Abdul Aziz B. Zalay, Faculty of Art, Computing & Creative Industry, Sultan Idris Education University, Tanjong Malim, Perak Darul Ridzuan ,Malaysia, MARA University of Technology (UiTM), Campus Seri Iskandar, Seri Iskandar, Perak, Malaysia

*Corresponding author's email: korn_ide@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This research aims to study the influence of ceramic tableware in the fine dining industry and the experience of diners towards the design of the product. The final stage plays an important role in evaluating the emotional responses of diners towards the aesthetical values of the product which will be measured based on the user's experience (UX). UX is crucial in determining the success or failure of a product in the market. Therefore, the UX factor will determine the level of success of a product in the market.

Methodology: this study will focus on the experience of the diner based on the theory of

Findings: Norman's Three Level of Design. Emotion refers to the feelings felt by humans.

The succes of a product is not merely dependent on the advantages and great design of the product. However, the success of a product in the market is assured when it it based on the 7 UX factors which include: usefulness, usability, availability, accesibility, reliability, value, fulfilling the current demands and needs as well as comprehensibility.

Implications: Chefs have to be creative in creating a menu that will reflect a unique dining experience through the attractive and special presentation of the meals provided. The elite category of diners does not put an emphasis on price rather they are focused on gaining the ideal fine dining experience which not only has the perfect ambience but also create an unforgettable memory.



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Introduction

In the past, the hotel industry had not taken the initiative to make improvements or changes in terms of choosing suitable tableware to heighten the dining experience. Nonetheless, recently numerous famous restaurants and also hotel restaurants have begun to start using handmade ceramic tableware rather than the traditional white and shiny ceramic tableware. This is a rising trend in the world of fine dining. Since then, chefs have started to provide the use of handmade ceramic tableware to their discerning diners than the typical white porcelain tableware that had been in use for many years in the past. This positive change has created a luxurious ambience in fine dining as the tableware collection used complements the delicious food being served to the diners. Locally handmade ceramic tableware presents a wonderful visual to the senses as the tableware is exquisitely made to present culinary delights to the diners and provide a fascinating dining experience too.

Nowadays, the chefs of the culinary world have adopted a more naturalistic approach. These chefs have a desire to involve the community such as farmers, fishermen and designers. This particular meeting point will result in a unique dining experience and make restaurants more famous than ever before. The current trend of diners of uploading their dining experiences on social media such as Instagram is rather common. Apparently, to most netizens the use of dark and matte handmade ceramic tableware creates a better and appealing visual on social media than the traditional shiny white ceramic tableware. The designers of ceramic tableware are creative and always thinking outside the box which resulted in the creation of elegant and beautifully designed tableware that appeals to the senses than the conventional shiny white tableware which is considered plain. When restaurants started using more unique and elegant tableware, it will elevate the image of these establishments as the food served is considered haute cuisine. As a result, the choice of tableware used in restaurants will reflect the overall concept of the respective restaurant as the tableware in question has high aesthetical values which will create a better image for the restaurant. The beautiful tableware being used will only complement the food being served which will lead to a wonderful fine dining experience. By using the appropriate tableware, it will lead to a better dining experience. This is evident in the way the majority of hotel restaurants have chosen to provide a unique experience to their hotel guests particularly those preferring a more elite-style vacation experience by using exquisite fine dining tableware at their respective restaurants.

Literature Review

At present, the factors that determine the success of a restaurant is not solely based on the financial success it reaps but also on the food source of the restaurant, the ceramic tableware used, the decoration technique, the interior décor, and an efficient management system. All these aspects will serve to heighten the senses of the diners and the fine dining experience itself. At present, the current trend of restaurants is in focusing on the entertainment aspect to create the ultimate dining experience. The interior décor of the restaurant, the choice of food being served, the use of lighting and background music will create the perfect ambience which will leave a favourable and lasting impression. Therefore, the ambience being created will create an interactive opportunity for the diners to further find out and also explore the history of the meal being presented to them.

The collaboration among ceramic product designers has opened the path in creating unique and elegant ceramic tableware. In the past, the chef is only known for his culinary expertise. However, nowadays the chefs do not merely rely on their culinary skills at creating tantalizing culinary masterpieces but also attempt to incite the interest of the diners about the ingredients

being used and the origins of the food being served. This change has forced the chefs to only provide the best to the diners with discerning taste. One of the ways is by presenting the delicious culinary masterpiece with an added aesthetical value. Before one enjoys a meal, the visual senses must be stimulated first and this is done with the attractive presentation of the food by using high quality tableware.

Many dining establishments have chosen to procure their ingredients from local producers as this will ensure the freshness and quality of the ingredients. Consequently, this will help the local community to generate income which will lead to an increase in high quality produce being sold and made available. This results in a win-win situation whereby the chefs will be able to create delicious meals using the best and freshest ingredients while helping the local community. Thus, the contribution made by the local community is another significant factor in ensuring the success of a restaurant in providing high quality meals.

As the economy of a country flourishes so does the demands of the consumers in which case they will tend to gravitate towards luxurious and high-end products of high quality. Due to the high demand of consumers, the food and beverage industry is forced to make certain changes in the way service is provided. The new kind of consumers are highly educated, curious and want their dining experience to be unique and memorable. Thus, chefs have to be creative in creating a menu that will reflect a unique dining experience through the attractive and special presentation of the meals provided. The elite category of diners does not put an emphasis on price rather they are focused on gaining the ideal fine dining experience which not only has the perfect ambience but also create an unforgettable memory.

Tableware Plays an Integral Role in the fine Dining Experience

In the fine dining menu, the appetizer will be presented first. The appetizer plays a crucial role in projecting a favorable impression and create excitement for the next course. In one experiment, diners were given a salad as the appetizer but it was presented in three completely different ways. The first way the salad was presented was clearly messy while the second one was presented in a very plain or ordinary way. However, the third and final way the salad was presented was truly sophisticated and attractive. The results of this experiment have shown that diners were willing to pay more for a salad if it was presented in a sophisticated and pleasing manner.

The choice of the appropriate ceramic tableware which complements the interior design of a restaurant will create the perfect ambience that will lead to the ultimate fine dining experience. The choice of the appropriate tableware will reflect the image and give an added value to the respective restaurant.

The importance of colour or glaze of a ceramic product will bear a huge influence or impact on the user or diner. The colour of the tableware set also plays an important role. According to the research conducted by the Alicia Foundation in Spain, white is the preferred colour for tableware than black especially in presenting desserts. Nevertheless, the present trend is to use black tableware to provide an attractive contrast to the meal presented. Based on a study by Oxford university, when pink tableware is used it will connote the idea of sweetness of the meal being presented even before it has been tasted or consumed. However, when green tableware is used it represents the opposite: a bland or unsweetened taste. On the other hand, red is found to stimulate the appetite while orange will provide oxygen to the brain and increase the mental activity of an individual. Therefore, it is crucial to bear in mind that the colour being used for the tableware and the interior design have an impact on the dining experience.

Food is not merely consumed to appease one's appetite. However, food is connected closely to unforgettable moments. Before an individual begin to eat the food being served, the visual senses

need to be stimulated beforehand and this is the main reason that an attractive presentation is vital. Only upon giving a favourable visual impression will the other senses be stimulated such as aroma, taste and so forth. Nonetheless, if the first impression is not favourable then it will lead to a devastating experience to the diner. Hence, the use of appropriate tableware will provide the necessary added value to the meal being presented by making it look appealing and more tantalising as well as making the diners impressed with the service being provided.

The latest trend of every restaurant is in giving a personal and distinctive touch by having the restaurant logo or the signature printed on the tableware being used. The creation of a unique identity will elevate the status of the restaurant and this is done through the tasteful and captivating interior design of the respective restaurant. The trademark or identity of the restaurant is the exclusive right and property of the restaurant. The fine dining tableware along with the appropriate cutlery play a monumental role in serving to complement the elegantly unique presentation of the delicious meals being served at the restaurant. Consequently, this will lead to a higher level of satisfaction to the diners and generate a more profitable income for the establishment in question in the end.

The choice of tableware is dependent upon the type of restaurant and the overall concept of the restaurant in question. If the restaurant is a luxurious and high-end restaurant, it is crucial that the tableware being used should reflect and contain elements of luxury. To every chef, his culinary creations have their own unique identity which requires equally unique tableware as to create a positively surprising and exciting fine dining experience that is also unique to the discerning diners.

Furthermore, it is also important that more attention and detail should be put into choosing the most appropriate type of tableware. The presentation of the culinary masterpiece is as important as the exquisite taste of the meal being presented to the guest. In addition, more emphasis should be given to the presentation of the meal in question. For instance; the colour of the meal presented, its texture, the table size, the tableware design, as well as the method and arrangement of tableware. Hence, this will create a favourable impression on the diners as all of these aspects have wonderfully been integrated and being given emphasis.

It is imperative to create a wonderful ambience of fine dining as the saying states “The first impression will leave a lasting impression”. The creative and organised arrangement of furniture in a restaurant will elevate the fine dining experience of its diners and also create a favourable impression of the hotel and restaurant. For luxurious and high-end hotels, the choice of menu being provided is as important as the tableware being used as both aspects will lead to a fascinating and outstanding dining experience.

Theory of Norman's Three Levels of Design

Therefore, this study will focus on the experience of the diner based on the theory of Norman's Three Level of Design. Emotion refers to the feelings felt by humans (Albin, 1986). According to Gorp and Adams (2012), emotion is the effect that can influence the way a person pays attention, makes a decision, behaves and expresses himself. This effect is an affective response of an individual which refers to the emotions felt by someone due to a certain event or stimulation. Desmet (2002) believes that there are four affective responses: emotion, mood, sentiments and emotional/personality trait. This theory comprises of three emotional processes which relate to the product as described below:

Visceral Level

At this level, it involves the aesthetical design of the product and also its usability. The use of unique elements and design principles in designing a product will evoke an unforgettable

experience among the users of the product. At this stage, an emotional response will be evoked upon seeing the visual aspect of the product. Furthermore, the aesthetical value has to surpass the emotional response created. However, failure to evoke a positive response will result in the user rejecting the product and not purchasing it in the end.

Behavioural Level

At this level, it is imperative that the designer consider the functionality and usability aspects of the product. It is also crucial to integrate qualities which include: convenience, ease of use, control, interactivity and heightening the user's experience.

Reflective Level

At this level, it includes the interpretation and understanding of certain aspects such as worldly evaluation and self-reflection. This reflective stage has been determined after execution and it surpasses the previous two levels mentioned above. This means that through the process of reflection, both automatic behavior and emotional reaction can be ignored. The reflective design is defined as the overall image of a product design. The designer will take into account certain aspects such as the message being conveyed, the cultural aspect, the meaning of the product and whether it will leave a memorable experience to the user.

Framework Model

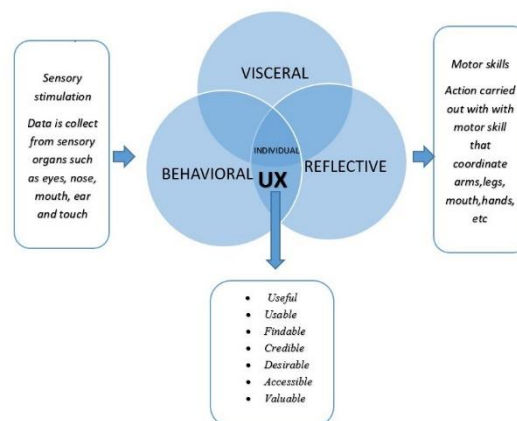


Figure 1: The Framework Model of Emotion design based on the Theory by Donald Norman

This study will use the conceptual, theoretical and principal approach as the research method. The framework of this study will involve the theory of *Norman's Three Level of Design*. This study uses the emotional design concept that relates to the theory of Norman's Three Level of Design that is based on 3 aspects of design : visceral, behavior and reflective. The result of integrating this concept, theory and principle has led to the framework of this study that will further explain the present study conducted.

UX = cognitive + emotion

The framework of this study aims to explain the way the individual thinks will control the emotions and behavior of that particular individual. At the Visceral level, the user responses quickly to a product through seeing, tasting, hearing as well as stimulation that will lead to a certain emotion or feeling being evoked. However, on the Behavioral level it functions to understand as well as control the daily usability, effectiveness and ergonomic features of a product and also involves daily routine such as talking and writing. On the other hand, the Reflective level involves the cognitive process that closely relates to memories, plans and experiences.

Emotions are evoked on every level as a result of the physiological and behavioral responses that are influenced by the reflective effects of the cognitive process. The main implication from this model is the affective characteristic that has given an impact on the way an individual processes thought. This is significant because it is focusing on the affective state of the user while using a certain product and the way this will affect the said product. Therefore, designers need to understand the physiological and emotional responses to design a good product.

The experience of the user in using a product will produce an affective effect. The diverse range of emotions will influence all levels of cognitive activity.

The model of this study is most suitable for this research method that is based on the theory of Norman's Three Level of Design. For the Visceral level, it serves as a guide that include the physical aesthetic value, taste, smell and sound in creating a particular design. On the other hand, the Behavior level refers to the method that relates to the usability of the product in terms of ergonomics. However, the Reflective level relates to the meaning, experience and value of the product design within a certain cultural context. The entire product experience is a result of the three levels combined. The guidelines from this particular theory in relation to this model exemplifies the significant role that user or individual emotional responses have upon the aesthetics of a product.

At the final phase of this model, it plays a vital role in indicating the emotional responses of a user towards the aesthetic value of a product and is measured using UX (user experience). User experience (UX) is really vital in determining the success or failure of a product in the market. At present, UX has clearly evolved from merely indicating the usability of a product to encompass all aspects of the user experience that can lead to the success of a product in the market.

User Experience (UX) refers to experience of a user in using a certain product (Garret, 2011). This also includes the emotions and attitudes of an individual about using a particular product, system or service. UX emphasises the functional aspect of the external design of a product or when it is used within a particular context by the user. A good user experience or significant UX is one that fulfils the needs of a particular user in the specific context where he uses the product.

The following are 7 main factors that depict the User Experience according to Peter Morville a pioneer in the field of UX:

Useful

For a designer, when designing a successful product aspects such as functional design and usefulness should be considered. Failure to do so will lead to the lack of success of the said product in the market. However a product will be successful if it has the following criteria: functions well, useful, practical and high aesthetic value.

Usable

Usability of a product relates to the ability of the user in using the product in terms of ease of use, comfort and simplicity.

Findable

This refers to a product that can be easily found. However if that is not the case, there is a high chance that the product will not be purchased by the user.

Credible

Credibility refers to the level of trust that the user has in the product. The product should be functional and durable to withstand wear, pressure or damage.

Desirable

The designer should create such a desirable product and to do this will include stages such as branding, image, identity, aesthetics and an emotion-evoked design. A product that is considered desirable has the potential of being bought by users. Consequently, this will create a chain reaction among other users to also purchase a similar product upon seeing the popularity of the product

Accessible

Accessibility is often a neglected aspect in creating User Experience. Accessibility refers to the ability and ease of use which not only include ordinary users but also those with physical disabilities which include those that are blind, deaf or have learning disabilities. For instance, in creating a product a designer has to ensure that all types of users, including those with disabilities, understand the design features. If this aspect is neglected in designing a product, it will create a negative emotional effect among the users. These days, it is a must to consider the accessibility aspect in designing a product. Moreover, it is actually against the law and liable to a heavy penalty to design a product that does not provide accessibility to all types of users.

Valuable

Every design should has its own unique value. It should give added value to the designer as well as the user. Without the integration of this particular aspect into the design of a product, it would be of no surprise when the product is proven to be unsuccessful even at the initial stage.

Sample of Design



Figure 2. Ceramic handmade from Ilham Studio at Kayu Putih Restaurant, Hotel St Regis, Langkawi



Figure 3. Mr. Radzi's black bee honey, panna cotta sour honey gel, vanilla sponge, grapefruit pomelo, orange, Thai basil, lime sorbet



Figure 4. Ceramic handmade from Ilham Studio at Kayu Putih Restaurant, Hotel St Regis, Langkawi

Conclusion

Essentially, each product design should possess its own unique value. The product design should provide added value to not only the designers but also the users. If a product does not possess a certain value, it will meet with failure even at the initial stage as it will not fulfill the demands of the current market.

The concept used in this research is based on the user's experience according to the theory of Norman's Three Levels of Design. This is an in-depth study that explores the complex experience of interacting with the product. In comprehending the affective experience, a clear approach needs to be taken to discover the relationship between analysing the behaviour of the user and the experience related to the product design in the market.

The framework model proposed in this research shows that there exists a clear difference in emotional responses through the user's experience towards the product design that is available in the market. This method will evaluate the designer on whether the product design will lead to a different and unique experience.

The success of a product is not merely dependent on the advantages and great design of the product. However, the success of a product in the market is assured when it is based on the 7 UX factors which include: usefulness, usability, availability, accessibility, reliability, value, fulfilling the current demands and needs as well as comprehensibility.

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