



Topic:

Behavioral Patterns in the Food Industry:

Consumer Behavior at Food Joints in Sunyani Metropolis.

WILLIAM MAWUTOR KOFI ANYIGBA

Abstract

This research is an introduction to the study of consumer behavioral patterns in the Sunyani Metropolis. There is an exploration of the many factors which can influence why people buy particular cooked food products. As an introduction it there is a concentration on one set of product, food with a Ghanaian perspective in Sunyani. The organizing framework of the research covers factors which can have an impact on purchase behavior.

Food is an interesting commodity in that we necessarily have to take it in order to survive; what people buy is obviously affected by availability. Many food products in the city vary in seasonality and in such circumstances; consumers go in for substitutes or continue their purchase pattern despite price hypes for such seasonal products.

The price itself may be manipulated as a result of trade barriers or the operation of middlemen and market queens. Many food products have only become available in recent times due to technological innovations to improve yield or post-harvest storage life. People buy food not just because they are hungry or because it is available at an affordable economic price but also because of cultural and social reasons. Consumption is affected by a person's cultural religious and historical routes. The research also considers a range of cultural and social influences on consumers' individual psychological variables.

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Introduction

The purpose of the study is to first describe general prototypes of consumer behavior and to identify factors influencing food purchase and food choice in particular. Consumers will want to survey the market trend and know what to buy or not to buy and what time patronize a product. The study therefore is aimed at understanding individual customer decision making processes. This research also assesses elements that have influences on the consumer from groups such as family, friends, reference groups, and society in general. An important influence on what consumers buy and eat in the food joints in Sunyani Metropolis is what is readily available in the restaurant. In Sunyani, supply of food is mainly the result of private sector enterprise. Clearly, of all the elements that influence an individual's choice and purchase behavior, it is obvious that his income as well as the price of item is considered to be of major importance to customer in the Sunyani Metropolis.

Culturally, some tribes in the city find it difficult to understand why some tribes from some other parts of the country eat dogs and cats because these animals prompt them of people and as such are treated as pets and substances of love. Jonathan Bareham (1995) indicates that cows have special religious significance to Hindus in India so they do not understand why people eat them. The French eat horsemeat and frogs just as the Chinese which the British abhor. In fact, if biological reasons alone were to be the source of clarification of what people eat, then dishes all over the world would be similar. However, this is impossible because what and when we eat, how it is prepared and served is a reflection of a people's cultural background.

Ghana's Food Industry

Discussions about food in Ghana focus on influencing factors such as food security, food prices, food choices and food purchases. In Ghana, although government devotes ample time regulating and providing for the agriculture sector, a corresponding investment does not seem to be reflected at the end of the value chain where the produce is sold and consumed. The growing expatriate community in Ghana is increasing organized grocery retail, while returning Ghanaians from abroad are simultaneously driving up demand for local produce. The connection between grocery stores and a desire for standard farm produce initially seems loose, but these seemingly divergent endpoints lead to the supposition that Ghana's public and private sectors need to strategically capitalize on the food industry.

The contribution of the food and beverage service in Ghana, and for that matter the Brong Ahafo Region of the country cannot be overemphasized. The industry has contributed to the overall rise in the standard of living of the people. The industry has created employment for several people. It is no gainsaying that tourism which encompasses hotel and catering is now Ghana's fastest growing service industry and a key foreign exchange earner. Today, the nature of food served to guests in foodservice operations and the service delivery have all changed in the foodservice joints in the Metropolis. This is because, those patronizing the products are becoming more sophisticated and will not accept just anything at all in any form. Unlike now, people just took it for granted that it was just a matter of filling the stomach and did not care so much about the eating environment and experience but now food and beverage industry has changed entirely to cope with the times. The Tourism and Hospitality Industry must have qualified staff at all levels well equipped with the knowledge, skills and appropriate attitudes to satisfy the demands of this

ever-changing industry. The department of Tourism and Hospitality of the Sunyani Polytechnic has taken cognizance of this and offering short certificate courses for individuals to upgrade their skills. Since the industry is now global our curriculum is designed to cover global training so hospitality operator can be equipped and versatile in the industry's programs.

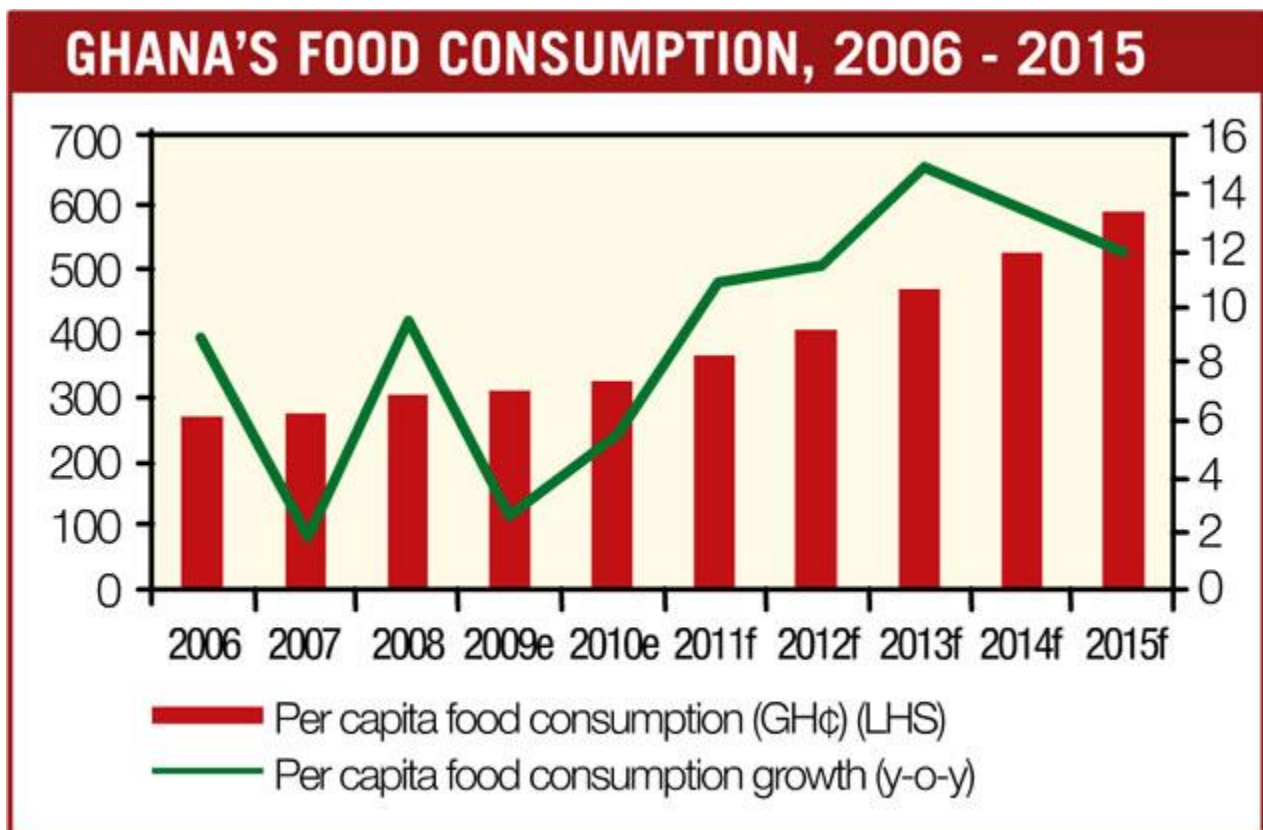
Responsiveness of Buyers

Ghana's food shopping experience is dominated by outdoor markets. Markets in the country including as Kotokoraba Market in Cape Coast, Kejetia in Kumasi, Nana Bosoma Market and the iconic Makola Market in Accra, continuously thrill the public with business activities on daily basis. However, the phenomenon of organized distribution outlets in Ghana is providing a totally new experience. As Ghana moves into a middle-income status with the attendant increase in investor activity and multinational corporations setting up shops, there is the need to satisfy the contemporary sophisticated consumers. Many of them do not wish to negotiate prices as is typically required in the Ghanaian open market setting and will therefore expect price transparency from dealers.

The potential for retail marketing in Ghana is enormous. For example, Koala, now a fixture in the Osu area of Accra, was followed by MaxMart, Melcom Plus and Sneda supermarkets. However, unlike the market chains as observed in the developed world, these entities are yet to develop into retail chains across the country. However, the opening of the Accra Mall has changed the Ghanaian shopping experience. As a result of its success, mega market places are fast becoming the preferred destination for event launches and other divergent activities. The emerging supermarket business has had the expected spillover effects, igniting the already hot property development market in Ghana.

Good Meal

Whereas food processing is dominated by multinationals and distribution is carried out by corporate partnerships, food preparation is an industry that can be, and is, predominately run by locals. It is the main means of livelihood for many urban low-income women and helps feed large masses of the population. A recent study by the Ghana Tourism Authority shows that demand for traditional Ghanaian dishes such as *banku and okro* soup, *gari fotuo* and *omo tuo* and *tou zaafi* in restaurants has been rising in recent years. The visits of US President Barack Obama and the country's performance in the South Africa World Cup have raised the country's profile so much that even Ghanaian restaurants abroad have more customers than ever.



Source: African Development Bank

A number of entrepreneurs in the hospitality and food industry in Sunyani have taken advantage of the increasing demand for local dishes to launch several food joints in the City. The growth in the fast food industry in particular has not only created avenues for employment but also creates ready markets for local food growers since the organized retail space is geared toward high middle-income individual shoppers. In fact, most restaurant operators buy directly from the farmers thus creating ready market for producers.

Additionally, presentation and packaging of food in the city is often an afterthought but becomes more important when looking to cater for a wider customer base using the take home disposable plates thus presenting a new business opportunity. In deed if Sunyani wants its food industry to thrive both for local and the growing number of foreigners visiting the city, the Food and Drugs Authority and the Ghana Tourist Authority must take their respective mandates to heart and begin to control and enforce food industry standards. Growing disposable incomes in the Metropolis has created a substantial demand for higher standard and quality food. Food joint operators must give attention to the end market of the food industry as they have done for the agricultural side of the value chain because that is the ultimate recipe for success.

Food Services

Food services are among the most visible locations around Sunyani. While some restaurants have already taken advantage of the many opportunities available to them, it was observed that for some of them, there is still room for improvement across the industry. Modern day food operations are continuing to improve in quality of food and the service on offer. Some of the restaurants have sent their staffs to train at the Department of Tourism and Hospitality and therefore, professionalism is increasing through better training and development, and there is

much greater understanding of customer needs. Additionally, the quality of service is now becoming the principal differentiating factor when customers are choosing between different establishments so operators are now eager to improve upon the quality of operations.

The Determining factor of Food Choice

The food joints in Sunyani are becoming complex and competitive. This may be attributed to reasons such as the rapid development of the city and its state of homogeneity, entry of qualified caterers into the food industry and intra-regional movement of consumers of meals among others. There are increasing varieties of dishes in the food industry in the city and the socio-economic changes indicated early on have resulted in increased interest in the fast food and traditional restaurant sectors among the population of Sunyani. Sunyani has quite a number of fast food joints and traditional restaurants and. Investments in the fast food industry and the traditional restaurants have also grown in the city as operators have recognized the potential for its growth due to its infiltration heights and levels of organization.

Given the priority for population nutritional change food joint operators must have an in-depth knowledge of the factors that affect food choice in Sunyani. This study examines the major influences on food choice with a focus on those that are amenable to change and discusses some successful interventions. Everyone knows that the fundamental reason for eating is of course to quench one's hunger. However, whatever meal one chooses to eat is not determined uniquely by physiological or just nutritional needs. An individual's choice of what to eat can be influenced by biological factors and economic elements such as cost of the dish, individual's income and availability of the preferred choice of food. It is an unimpeachable fact that the price of food is a key element of food choice. Whether the price of a dish is considered exorbitant will depend essentially on a person's socio-economic position. Low-income earners will have the notion that

anything is worth taking and care less about balancing their diets. Naturally, humankind need energy so as to live and is bound to answer to the natural feelings of hunger and satiety. When food is palatable an individual will have the pleasure to patronize it but this phenomenon is dependent on the taste, smell, texture and appearance of the food. In the Metropolis, customers consider physical determinants such as access to the joint, level of education of the operator, catering skills in cooking and timeliness of service delivery. The Social interface is another strong determinant for choice of food. Individuals that patronize food joints are influenced by their cultures, immediate family, friends and meal types. People are psychologically influenced as to their choice of food. The mood of an individual can determine his choice of dish to patronize and beliefs and knowledge about food is another determinant. It will be surprising to see a non-dog eater choosing to eat in a food joint where dog eaters enjoy their taste. Therefore, food choice is obviously a complex situation in the food industry in Sunyani.

Menu Planning

According to Davis et al., (2008), “menu planning is the most important part of the caterer’s work”. In planning our menu, the Polytechnic restaurant assesses the type of meal required by customers, the largeness or otherwise of the kitchen in terms of equipment and availability of both production and service staff. Because it is an institutional restaurant, it is unique with its menu but on rare occasions, the restaurant offers the classic menu sequence where there are starters, main dishes and afters. Restaurant operators who think they can prepare any type of meal at all in the city will have to desist from that notion and know that the restaurant’s menu is the selling tool of their establishments. For the customer, the menu identifies the food items that are available for a particular day that should meet the food joint’s marketing objectives, the restaurant’s policy and entity’s financial policy.

There are basically two types of menu: the table d'hôtel and the à la carte menus. Some restaurants operate strictly à la carte menu where each dish is priced separately and the customer is free to make a choice while others operate the table d'hôtel where food prices are fixed. In the restaurant business, the content of food menus varies according to the category of consumers it aims at, the occasion, the food cost available and the Ghanaian traditional set-up. The Sunyani Polytechnic restaurant operates a menu of *fufu*, *tuo zaafi*, *banku* and *ampesi* and the normal catering meals of fried rice, *jollof* and plain rice for the Polytechnic category of workers.

In the established restaurants, the menu is the key marketing and selling tool and so it is meticulously prepared and ensured that it works successfully towards profit. Most of the restaurants' menu and the physical environment of the facilities contribute to the level of expedition from their customers' primary objective of the restaurant. Because the menu plays a pivotal role in overall concept design of the restaurant, it is important at the planning stage to set the location right. Majority of the facilities studied ensured that their planned menu type has an existing market within its catchment area.

Because it is located in the commercial center of the city Good Mark restaurant has a high customer patronage with high quality food items but the Stone House Food Joint located in the rich Estate Residential area with affluent people with all its high quality items achieves a low volume of customers. The Sunyani Polytechnic restaurant which is in a less affluent location with a high student and worker population has a restricted à la carte menu and so has a very high customer patronage. Sunyani Polytechnic restaurant menu is displayed on all notice boards on campus and easy to read, clear and precise and entices the Polytechnic community to visit the restaurant.

Nutritional Awareness

Studies indicate that the level of education of a food joint operator can influence dietary behavior during adulthood (Kearney et al. 2000). On the contrary, education and knowledge in nutrition and good dietary habits are not strongly interconnected as far as food joint operators are concerned. The question is “how many food service providers have the basic knowledge about health which could lead to direct action when individuals are not sure of what to eat for what kind of nutrition?” In the Sunyani Metropolis, information circulated on nutrition comes from a variety of sources and viewed as contradictory or is disbelieved, which discourages individual motivation to change. It will then be important to provide the appropriate and reliable messages through various radio stations by health professionals on food packages.

Factors that influence food choice

Whatever people eat is informed and controlled by conditions that are basically social and cultural. An observation from some food joints in the Metropolis revealed that cultural influences lead to the difference in the habitual consumption of certain foods. As a heterogeneous city, some cultural influences are however changing as people move from other places and work in the city thus adopting particular food habits of the local culture. Although food is normally eaten in the home, an increasing population now prefer eating outside the home. The eating environment can affect food choice and therefore food joint operators will need to adhere to operational modules.

The Drivers of choice

If a new chop bar or a traditional restaurant were to open somewhere in Sunyani and an individual decided to visit the place, he would not at that instance have had the direct experience

of having been there before. His ability to get there would either depend on a mental or an actual sign post. Whether in his mind or by a signboard, the individual will have a model of where he will need to go which in turn guides his behavior. If the price of a commodity like tomatoes in the market were to go up, food operators might still buy them. However, even before the buyer gets to the market he will probably have decided that if the price has risen by 50 percent, then he will do without tomatoes and go in for something cheaper. Here, again, he will have a mental model, a link between hypothetical prices and his purchase behavior. Food joint operators must know that models in the consumer behavior arena attempt to give a basic clue of the relationship between elements and behavioral influence. A change in one factor or price equally affects behavior towards both the product and other variables.

Customer Behavioural Patterns.

A cursory survey in food joints in Sunyani revealed that a variety of consumer behavior patterns exist. Personal interviews unearthed some assumptions. Some interviewees provided scenarios of comparison between colleagues in various divisions of life. For example provided scenarios assuming that for some years a colleague and the researcher in Sunyani Polytechnic taught a course on food Marketing. His background was in Economics, and the researcher's was in Applied Psychology. Obviously, he would argue that people were lucid while an applied Psychologist will argue that life was more complex than just level-headedness. He was interested in what to the researcher were unsophisticated expectations about the behavior of a group of people. If the price of bread goes up in Sunyani, people in general buy less of it. The economist was not too worried about why consumers of bread will act in that way. However, as a Psychologist, the researcher would be more interested in the set of individuals and the process which affect their reaction to the price change in bread.

The study also revealed that consumer characteristics were notable between relational motivations (between people) or intrapersonal inducements (within people). The food joint operators in the city have their marketing stimuli whereas the environmental incitements were driven by communal influences centered on the economic and cultural circumstances of the heterogonous society in Sunyani. The response of majority of consumers of meals in the Metropolis pointed to a conscious and cogent assessment process which revealed that consumers may have recognized eminent eating problems. However, in certainty, it was observed that many consumers may not have been aware of determined problems at the food bases when taking decisions on patronizing a particular food joint.

Decision - making

These models are concerned with the stages consumers go through in reaching a decision. The emphasis is on internal cognitive processes. Consider the simple proposition of someone wanting to eat *tuo zaafi*. It is not likely he would simply go to the food joint for the dish. First, he would need to have decided he wanted to satisfy his physiological need. It is either he is veering into a northern meal in his life for the first time or that he had had enough of dishes of the southern part of the country. He would look around to see the available food joints that serve *tuo zaafi* or ask friends and perhaps respond to radio adverts he may have listened to previously but ignored. On the basis of information about quality and price, he would then make a decision on going in for the dish and keep evaluating its quality once the dish had been purchased. In some cases of a daily patronage of food, the decision process is much shorter, unconscious or non-existent. The decision-making process goes with influential communication. Food joint operators indulge in persuasive communication in order to change an individual customer's attitude on the assumption that this will lead to a change in consumer behavior. In this sense, advertising on

radio and the ambiance of the food joint and oral information from friends are all persuasive communications that will impact on the consumer.

Purchase Decision

Observations at some food joints in the city revealed that some customers will visit a food joint and when the client's alternatives have been positively evaluated the customer is ready to make a purchase decision. It was interesting to note during the study that purchase intention after all did not result in an actual purchase. Some customers exhibited high levels of indecision by asking for one meal and quickly opting for another instead. Some customers even after standing by for some time will leave the premises for the reason best known to them. It is obvious that culture determines the norms of a particular group and has an effect on what and why people have some food products as delicacies while those products are abhorred by others. Food is necessary to provide calories and other essential ingredients to the human being. Some foods become part of family or religious rituals or celebrations and therefore take on a meaning associated with the event. Chicken and rice is an obvious example associated with Christmas in Ghana a clear indication that the particular culture in which we live affects the availability of a product.

Cultural and Social Influences

There are long-term trends of what is acceptable in the Ghanaian society and in this wise, national and regional differences can influence our purchase and consumption patterns. It is no wonder therefore that the changing demographic structure of the Sunyani Metropolis and with its compositional organization of the workforce all have an influence on an individual's choice and consumption. As a cosmopolitan city, Sunyani is bound to experience different individual characteristics, attitudes and attributes that will be significantly influenced by social standards. Human beings are fundamentally communal creatures as individuals they significantly influence

each other. Paramount among these social norms is reference groups and others that arguably have a strong control on individuals. In the Ghanaian setting, the family still wields a significant influence on the kind of food item to be consumed as per that family's cultural upbringing.

An analytical framework of this influence on the individual is the reference group that comes in diverse forms. Some individuals stick to aspirational reference persons such as radio broadcasters who advertise the food joints in the Metropolis and base their patronage of joints on such adverts. Some others will just want to associate themselves with people who convincingly represent the individuals' current equals. These are groups that will move to the *omo tou, tuo zaafi, akrantie, okusie* and pork joints for patronage.

The study revealed a range of individual differences that impacted on consumer behavior that affected personal decision-making on choice of food items. It was observed that individuals or groups highly considered their value systems and tied this up with their personalities.

Religion, Cults and Scares

A cursory survey of traditional restaurants, established institutional restaurants and fast food joints in Sunyani revealed that people could not eat all foods that potentially they could do due to deep-seated beliefs about specific foods that are enshrined in religious doctrines. Denial of oneself from certain foods might be due to dictates of a cult that causes restrictions on behavior. Another identified factor that restricted individuals from patronizing a particular food was the myth attached to it. Some customers claimed that their parents have told them stories about what happened to people who ate a certain food and so they will never eat such foods. Most people that the researcher interacted with said they will never patronize foods like fried rice or any form of fast food because of scare. In 2004, there was a scare of several food poisoning incidents in

that caused serious adverse health consequences or death to people. This was due to contaminated vegetables from the producers. Others said they avoid fried rice because it is suspected of having adverse health effects.

It was observed that many of the factors that shape food choice and habits in the city are derived from religious laws. Religious restrictions all over the world apply in Sunyani as well. Jonathan Bareham(1995) proffered that Roman Catholics and most Protestants believed that individual choice is the best approach to eating while the Jews, Hindus and Muslims insist on strict dietary observance even if it means refusing food offered in friendship. Apart from prohibiting some foods, religious groups have time periods when consumption is restricted. Roman Catholics never ate meat on Fridays until recently when the canon was changed to apply to only Fridays in Lent. People, especially the religious in the city adhere to these religious dictates as far as consumption of food is concerned. Every restaurant in the city engaged a Muslim to slaughter their animals before they can use the meat for food. This is another angle of the religious demands which has been upheld by restaurant and food joint operators.

The study revealed that every customer the researcher interacted with had an impression of a class system in Sunyani and their own position in these classes. Many were those who agreed that people with certain income brackets or occupational circles definitely fall into categories which may be the same or different from theirs. Patronage of foods in restaurants in the city is dependent on lifestyle and psychographics that have to do with basic personality traits. If someone is asked if they will eat snails they will have an approach against or for the idea or remain hesitant. The degree of strength with which an individual's approach is held is likely to affect how easily it can be changed. For example if someone hates pork not for any cultural or

religious reasons he is unlikely ever to eat it. However, if that person is only mildly antagonistic and a friend was to hygienically cook wonderful pork with a tasty sauce, that person would probably eat it.

Food Operations in Sunyani

Some hotels in the Metropolis that are operating profitable food production departments do not even know that this department in the hotel is more complex than operating a profitable restaurant. Because they think that they have a solid customer base, they do not look for qualified food operation managers to manage the department. The end result is that they lose money for their hotels; they will have to be sensitized to see the need for the hiring of a competent food production manager who understands how hotel food is managed to enhance the effectiveness and profitability of this important department. In Sunyani, hotels such as Glamossy, Chesville, TYCO City and Eusbett operate or offer varieties of dishes from continental to traditional cuisine. These hotels offer food in the morning, serve lunch in the afternoon and diner with several complex situations and demands from customers. The typical traditional restaurants such as Good Mark, Supreme, Mandela, and Aba Fresh among others generally offer varieties of meals including *'fufu'*, *'ampesi'*, *'banku'*, *'tuo zaafi'* or plain rice.

Hotel Terminology at Work

Experienced Managers in star rated hotels in the city know that the food production department will not generate so much profit than the sale of rooms. In fact, in most cases, people go to the hotel because of their food. Glamossy, Chesville, TYCO City and Eusbett hotels overflow with conventions, conferences, meetings and events of all kinds. Due to their food product quality, guests patronize these facilities because of the quality and value of the food service offered. It is

an undisputed fact that these hotels have carved a reputation for quality food product, service delivery and affordable prices so people from outside the Region and within the community will want to spend time to eat there.

Developing Teams in Foodservice

Effective performance in the foodservice industry is a team work. In Sunyani Polytechnic à la carte restaurant, whilst the meal is being prepared, customers have direct contact with several staff. As a definable team, with shared consciousness of purpose, there is a strong organizational climate which provides solution to issues and ongoing or recurring tasks. In other developments, it was observed that some operators did not know that poor performance will have a direct influence on the overall performance of the restaurant. As a key result area in the service industry, service employee performance is indispensable. The restaurant requires its employees to have a certain level of skills to operate effectively in its service to the community.

Production Excellence

LYNNWOORIF (1996) asserts that “the food industry embraces all enterprises or establishments involved in the handling of food”. In the restaurant if a manager fails to plan ahead, he must expect a resultant failure. This is because task in the restaurant can be carried out more effectively if the performance is planned beforehand. In the Polytechnic restaurant, there is always a plan for students to know their schedules and this enables them to use their special skills to perform tasks in a logical and relaxed manner. In the kitchen, the production team is conversant with the working schedule and particularly the menu to determine which dishes have to be prepared first since some foods will need extensive preparation time and must be prepared first.

Food Production

The food production system encompasses all activities involved from the moment the food is received until it is served to the customer. Managers should know that the food production unit organizes all activities needed to provide the desired menus of the restaurant. Food production staffs need to guarantee required level of production quality and ensuring that the resources of the facility are used effectively.

Serving

A phenomenon that affects food consumption is the service a customer receives. During service, the responsibility for product control is transferred from the production to the service personnel. After the kitchen staff has finished its engagement, management of food serving activities is of great importance to ensure minimum quality and product losses in the food service unit. In most of the established restaurants and joints visited during the study, service staff integrates the requests and desires of customers with the dining environment. The well selected smart service staff in their sparkling white shirt over black skirts with special attention to their ability to communicate with customers is a delight to watch. As they stand-by for service, they are given specific instructions to make sure that the dining rooms are set and table settings are complete with neat and clean tableware. They ensure that food items are received on time according to the menu of the day and commence with service at the correct time ensuring that there are enough servers to prevent delays in service delivery in the restaurant. As a training facility, the Polytechnic restaurant has established and practiced food service standards. The restaurant observes standard portion size adhered to and there is a careful control to the effect that all unsold food is accounted for and returned to the kitchen.

Market Research and Concept Development

Researching into the food market can be performed at various levels. Large food production businesses such as Glamossey, Chesville, TYCO City and Eusbett hotels among others invest so much resource in acquiring market information about the industry. The marketing departments of these facilities use consumer panels, questionnaires, interviews, sales analyses, market information from specialist publications and other generally available data to test the marketing waters. Small food restaurants such as Good Mark, Aba Fresh and A&A restaurants among others do not usually have a marketing development plan and in these instances the unit manager or owner-operator will perform the market research function. The researcher was at Mandela restaurant and the manager was going round asking customers how they felt about their services and products probably because the restaurant has not developed any market research plan to help him know what the market trend is.

The satisfaction derived from the food service industry may be physiological, economic, social, and psychological as the case may be. Customers visit the Polytechnic restaurant to satisfy their hunger and thirst, or to satisfy the need for special foods. Even though the Polytechnic restaurant is well located and has a good customer base, it still advertises the facility whenever the institution advertises academic programs to be mounted. New customers satisfy their psychological needs by responding to our adverts, wanting to try our products, and satisfying the need for their self-esteem. Economically, they want to have good value of life and a convenient location for fast service. Sometimes, people satisfy themselves through socialization with friends that brings them to us or for functions such as wedding receptions.

The Nature of Demand

Food demands are wants for specific foods is directed by the capability of the consumer to buy them and to meet the other costs which may be involved. Hotel restaurants in Sunyani make their products desirable, valuable, available and affordable. It must be noted that consumers choose food based on goals such as esteem, status, entertainment, romance, physiologies during others and some restaurants are able to satisfy the different goal sets of the customers. Individual consumers will have different priorities depending on their needs at the time. An individual may have convenience when buying *'kooko and masa'* on the way to work in the morning, low price meal at lunch time when he buys *'Waakye'* from *Ashai Waakye Base* and high level service and entertainment when he gets to Eusbett Hotel to purchase a celebration meal in the evening. As the times change, so are individual priorities and needs during their life-cycle. Their wants and demands change in relation to their circumstances. As a teenager, an individual might love to have a night club product, restaurant food during his hay days but a lower priced food product when on retirement.

Price, Value and Worth

Glamossey, Chesville, TYCO City and Eusbett hotels attach values to their numerous food products due to the perception of needs they can satisfy but the ability to realize those goals is dependent on the ability to pay by the consumer. These hotels' mouth-watering attractive *'tilapia'* is a delicacy and the patronage is overwhelming. Good value for a food operation is where the worth of one's money is perceived. Researching the market will facilitate the identification of consumer needs, wants, demands and goals and values as they relate to meals. Food joint operators will use variables as geographic, demographic, psychographic and behavioral segmentations. A food product such as *Cat Man Bread*, produced in the Metropolis,

targets capturing the bread market in Sunyani and consistently supplies the product to all its outlets. Glamorsey, Chesville, TYCO City and Eusbett hotels have demographically segmented the market using variables as age, sex, stage in family life cycle, income, occupation, education, religion and nationality among others. They also consider the class, lifestyle and characteristics of a consumer before providing a service. Some of these groups may prefer seclusion and formality when eating a meal while some may prefer informal and noisy atmosphere for which provision has been made. Attracting first-time visitors necessitates the identification of how first-time buyers behave. Another behavioral variable is how often the meal is patronized. A consumer may visit a food joint every day, once a week or twice a month. Identifying the usage rate enables the food joint operator to identify the needs, wants and demands of the segment that will contribute to food product and service design.

Managing the Service Sequence

In developing the customer service specification, the capability of the operation needs to be considered. Once the customer service specification has been determined, the service sequence can be designed and managed in order to ensure achievement of the service specification. Food service systems are managed albeit at the same time (Cousins, 1988). There are the service sequence which primarily is concerned with meal service delivery to the customer and the customer process which is managing the experience of the customer.

Within the service areas, there are a variety of tasks and duties which need to be carried out in order to ensure that adequate preparation has been made for the expected volume of business and the type of service to be provided. This includes briefing of the staff to ensure that they have adequate knowledge of the product. One of the preparatory tasks is the taking of bookings. System need to be developed to ensure that bookings are taken in a way that ensures the

efficiency of the operation. In food and Beverage service, there are customers who pre-book and those who casual customers. For those who pre-book the order is made by them. Graham and Karon (2002), suggest that “a customer’s first impression can make or break the total dining experience”. Careful and thorough preparation of the dining area before guests arrive is very essential and it is the responsibility of all employees to maintain standards set by management through a demonstration of individual professionalism in their assigned tasks. It was disheartening to see that in some traditional restaurants, customers had to call for clearance of plates and cleaning of tables before they could eat their meal. The service sequence is in essence the bridge between the production system and the customer process. The choice on how the service sequence is designed planned and controlled one made taking in to account variables such as customer needs. The customer process involves service methods such as table service, assisted services, self-service, single point service or specialized.

Setting the Mood

The total dining experience is much affected by the atmosphere created for guests or customers. As a result restaurant operators must be educated to know which mood to create for their clients. They must be informed that the mood of the dining environment should reflect the time of day, the location and an atmosphere that is consistent with the desired character of the food joint. In the Sunyani Polytechnic restaurant for example, the dining tables are set to take best advantage of the views from the dining room and the cool background music is so soothing to set the mood. The restaurant’s décor is consistent to create a harmonious atmosphere for smooth dining experience. The Visual Arts Department does the warm, cold and romantic color selection for the dining experience. The dining room is also decorated with fresh flowers or artificial ones which are well placed to add beauty to the overall presentation and mood of the dining room.

Taking Food Orders

In the established restaurants in the city, though order-taking process is part of the procedure which feeds information to the production area and provides information for the billing method, it is tedious and time consuming. As a training facility, students of the Polytechnic restaurant are trained in order-taking methods. While the order-taking procedure is going on, there are several opportunities for the service staff to exploit the potential for personal selling that can be carried out by food service staff to contribute to the promotion of sales. Students are made aware that this is especially important where there are specific sales promotions being undertaken. The contribution of food service staff to the meal experience is vital in the areas of consumer perception of value for money, hygiene and cleanliness, service levels and the perception of atmosphere that the customer experiences. Within the context of selling the service, staff should be able to detail the meal on offer in an informative way and in a manner that will make the dish sound interesting and worth having. The food service staffs of the Polytechnic restaurant are told to use the opportunity to promote certain items of the restaurant when seeking orders from the customer. The traditional restaurants on the other hand lack knowledge in taking orders and for the sake of time, customers prefer queuing for their meals without resorting to servers at those restaurants.

Billing

The established restaurants and hotel food production departments in Sunyani adhere strictly to billing methods. In the food service operations, various forms of billing methods are used. These include bill as check, separate bill, bill with order which is service to order and billing at the same time prepaid where the customer purchases a ticket or card in advance for a specific meal or value. The choice of billing method will depend on the type of the operation. In managing the

billing method, staff must ensure that the method chosen supports both the order-taking method and the revenue control requirements. Customers in traditional restaurants and other food joints pay as they call.

Clearing

In every restaurant, after the service periods, there is a variety of tasks and duties to be carried out, partly to clear from the previous service and partly to prepare for the next. The efficient management of the clearing stage can have a dramatic impact on the potential re-use of an area. Included in this stage of the service sequence is the requirement for the management of clearing programs which must ensure that all clearing activities are coordinated.

A restaurant's surrounding atmosphere will affect customer's buying behavior. Clearing and tidying the dining room will speak volumes about the facility. The clearing method includes the collection of soiled ware by waiting staff to the washing area, or collection and sorting to trolleys by operators for transportation to dishwashing area. In developed countries, there is also the semi-self-clear where customers place soiled wares on conveyor tray collecting system for mechanical transportation to the dishwashing area. The study however revealed unhealthy scenes at some traditional restaurants where food debris were left on the floor crying to be swept and bowls waiting on tables to be cleared.

Results and Analysis

Factors Affecting Food Purchase Decision

The relative importance of various food purchasing criteria was estimated for four different food categories, fast food and vegetables; food grains, and foods processed in traditional restaurants. Based on the categories of food products some parameters that respondents rated very highly for

food purchasing decisions were cleanliness, free from pesticides, freshness, good for health, and clean place of business. Value for money, overall quality, taste, variety of products availability at same place, seasonality, flavor, good display of food products and good ambience are some other parameters which were rated highly by respondents. Looking at the relative importance of different parameters separately for different product groups it became obvious that safety from health perspective is the prime concern when buying a meal. People in Volta find it difficult to understand that some Northerners eat dog. People from other regions wonder why Voltarians eat cats because they remind them of people and as such are treated as pets and objects of affection.

Characteristics of Culture

Human beings are not born with a set of behavior; they have to learn it. What they learn is dedicated to the culture into which they are born or within which they grow up. Some tribes eat snakes, others snails and others eat bats. If biological reasons alone were the major explanation of what people eat then diets around Ghana would be similar. But this is not so, because what and when we eat and how it is prepared and served a reflection of our cultural upbringing. People need food for physiological reasons. Obviously there are also psychological needs which are satisfied by food consumption. People get enjoyment from eating and from social interaction that often accompanies eating. In the Ghanaian context eating is also cultural event and as such fall within the remit of anthropology which is the study of knowledge, skills, beliefs, values and activities which are passed on from one generation to another. Culture we can say is about the way of life, the language, behavior, myths, symbols and signs which are passed on within a particular group.

While the culture of different groups in Ghana may vary, culture itself is a common characteristic of all human groups. It logically has a strong influence on ways of life and

therefore on the foods that people consume. In another way, the hospitality marketing environment is strongly affected by our cultural environment. An effective advertisement or a new food product in one culture may not be successful in another. Formal instruction comes from parents while informal ones come by imitating others. Fundamental technical instruction from parents is acquired through education in the home. This process leads to people absorbing their values, motivations and habits through the process of socialization. This goes on throughout life causing people to acquire attitudes and behavior which affect their consumption.

Cultural Influences on Purchase Behavior

It is obvious that culture determines the norms of a particular group and has an effect on what and why people have some food products as delicacies while those products are abhorred by others. Food is necessary to provide calories and other essential ingredients to the human being. Some foods become part of family or religious rituals or celebrations and therefore take on a meaning associated with the event. Chicken and rice is an obvious example associated with Christmas in Ghana a clear indication that the particular culture in which we live affects the availability of a product.

Findings and Recommendations

The marketing organization of most of the food joints did not enable the consumer to act on their purchase intention. Sanitation and safety are typical issues that some food production managers in the City ignore in their operations. In 2004, there were several food poisoning cases in the Metropolis and if food poisoning can be traced to one's operation, the costs in human suffering, salaries and productivity, medical and hospital expenses, bad publicity, and lost business can be

devastating. It was observed that the eating environment of most of the traditional restaurants was not appealing.

Food production managers have a responsibility to provide safe conditions for employees and guests and therefore the research recommends that issues of sanitation at every food joint must be addressed to avert health problems that might emanate from poor hygienic conditions. Management of hotels and restaurants must incorporate sanitation and safety practices into their operating procedures and train and encourage their staffs to take active part in sanitation and safety problems and safe work place procedures.

Conclusion

The regulatory environment in which food providers operate in the Sunyani Metropolis is however changing rapidly, due to regulatory measures in responses to several food poisoning incidents in 2004 that caused serious adverse health consequences or death to people. The food service industry in Sunyani Metro has contributed to the rise in the standard of living as it has created employment for several people. Today, the nature and quality of food served to guests in foodservice operations and the service delivery have all changed in the foodservice joints in the Metropolis. This is because, those patronizing the products are becoming more sophisticated and will not accept just anything at all in any form. Food service operators have also had some formal training so there is some amount of professionalism now in the discharge of tasks. Tourism and Hospitality operators in the Metropolis have qualified staff at all levels, well equipped with the knowledge and skills and prepared for the business. The department of Tourism and Hospitality of the Sunyani Polytechnic is offering short certificate courses for individuals to upgrade their skills in hospitality operations.

Menus have significant impact on attracting diners to an eatery. A good menu obviously becomes the talking point long after the customer had gone. It is the key selling tool of a restaurant and must as much as possible reflect the food product being sold so that customer expectation will be matched with restaurant delivery. Sanitation and safety are issues that food and beverage managers in the Sun City must uphold. In 2004, there were several food poisoning cases in the Metropolis and that was very devastating and so food and beverage managers have a responsibility to provide safe conditions for employees and guests and therefore address issues of sanitation at every stage of the food handling process. New entrants and existing operators need to conceptualize when wanting to get into the system. There is the need for a feasibility study which will provide the person a good knowledge of the environment that the business is supposed to be developed in. There must be a financial projection, preparation of a business plan, and considering the political, economic, social, technological and environmental issues. In food and beverage service, care must be taken in procuring food items, storage and food production through service to the consumer. In all these, quality delivery for profitability must be the watch word.

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