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Will The Chef Serve This? Insights On Placing Ghanaian Dishes On The Hotel Menu

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Abstract

Aside its gastronomic qualities, food is identified as a means through which tourism destinations can be promoted. Suggestions are made for local dishes to be served in tourism-oriented establishments to increase their acceptance as tourism products. Generally the discourse on food tourism has largely been from a demand perspective with relatively little emphasis being placed on the supply-side dimensions, particularly the decision making processes that surround the placement of Ghanaian food on the hotel menu. This study uses the Theory of Planned Behaviour as the substratum to enquire into the attitudes and intentions of menu decision-makers in hotels towards adding more variety of Ghanaian dishes unto their menu.

Adopting a qualitative research design, in-depth interviews were conducted with menu decision-makers from twelve purposively selected 1 to 3-star rated hotels in Accra, Takoradi and Kumasi. Interpretation of the results was based on the factors that are considered by menu-decision makers when deciding on menu items as suggested by the literature and described using the narrative technique, summaries and representative quotes. The findings indicate that while there is a general desire by chefs to increase their placement of Ghanaian dishes on the menu, factors such as customer acceptance, and managerial support play a constraining role in the slow adaption of local dishes unto the menu.

Key words

Ghana, local dishes, chefs, hotel, restaurant, menu

INTRODUCTION

Globally, a case has been made for the importance of local food in hospitality and tourism development. Local food is identified by the Scottish National Tourism Organisation

(SNT02010) as a key sector in the development

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of the hospitality and tourism industry. SN-TO's survey findings showed that more than 70% of potential visitors to Scotland want to taste local dishes, regional specialties and fresh local produce.

A report on CNN (Quest, 2011) indicated that Georgia is reviving its ancient recipes as part of its efforts to attract visitors to the country. Thus, besides being a support service to tourists, food can thus also be conceptualized as an attraction in itself. In Ghana, the importance of the dualistic role of food within tourism has long been recognised.

The Ghana Tourism Authority (the country's tourism regulation agency) has made various efforts to encourage hotels to serve more varieties of indigenous dishes. Pre-research investigations carried out prior to this study in hotels in the Central and Western Regions of Ghana suggest that this call is unanswered.

Averagely, foreign dishes formed 85% of the menu offering in these hotels. The variety of Ghanaian dishes was limited to eight varieties, some of which were not readily available, thus a 24 hours notice was required for the order to be executed.

There are economic, cultural and culinary tourism implications to all of these developments. Importing foreign ingredients to prepare foreign dishes connotes some kind of leakage in revenues accrued in the hotel sector in the country as found by Telfer (1996) in a study in Indonesia.

Culturally, instead of high profile visitors and other visitors to the country to be overwhelmed in their hotel with an assortment of Ghanaian cuisine, they are rather spoilt for choice for an assortment of cuisines from various parts of the world, the new trend being

Chinese dishes.

The question then arises, what then will be the participation of Ghanaian hotels' in the currently developing global culinary tourism market? It is from this backdrop that this study seeks to understand the attitudes of menu decision-makers towards local dishes, based on which their intentions to place more varieties of the dishes on the menu can be predicted.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour predicts the occurrence of a specific behaviour provided that the behaviour is intentional. According to the theory, human behaviour is informed by three factors; attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms and, perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991).

The proponents suggest that a positive attitude towards a behaviour originates from a person's strong believe that a behaviour would result in positive outcomes. If a person believes strongly that a behaviour would result in negative outcomes, that person would have negative attitude towards that behaviour.

Ajzen and Fishbein (1977) explain subjective norm as the extent to which a person perceives that people important to that person think that the behaviour should be performed. Perceived Behavioural Control was conceptualised as the perceived ability or position to perform the given behaviour. As such, the greater a person feels in control of a behaviour, the stronger the intention to perform that behaviour.

Based on the above, three issues arise as follows:

1. Are menu decision-makers in hotels in favour of adding more Ghanaian dishes unto

the menu ('attitude')?

2. How much do they feel social pressure to do so ('subjective norm')?

3. Do they have the power to put local dishes on the menu ('perceived behavioural control')?

Literature review

Authorities such as Kivela (2001), Magris and McCreery (2001), Molt (2006), Kotschevar and Withrow (2008), Davis et al (2008), Lillcrap and Cousins (2010) and Foskett and Paskins (2011) have proposed many factors that are considered in developing a well thought out menu to meet prescribed standards.

Customer needs

It is important for any business to find out customers' demands, this would be the basis for the development of the product and services offered to the customer (Miller, 2008). A comprehensive menu, according to Kotschevar and Withrow (2008), helps to meet the needs of customers. Very often, customers' expectations are unknown, even to themselves, until they are given alternatives (Miller, 2007).

Although, it is difficult to ascertain customer needs, market survey and research such as interviewing customers directly or indirectly (as studied by) can unearth their favourite meals, which could be added to the menu. For example, Amuquandoh and Asafo-Adjei (2013) undertook a similar exercise and found that Fried ripe plantain and beans stew was amongst the favourite local dishes of tourists.

The selection of menu items should begin and end with customer preferences because according to McVety, Ware and Ware (2009), the customer is the one who ultimately

determines the operation's success or failure. The menu planner must, therefore, aim at planning menus that would satisfy the needs of all customers, regardless of their socio-demographic backgrounds (Fuller & Waller, 1991).

In following these arguments, the question then arises; At what point will the customer be introduced to novel items if the concentration of the menu decision-maker is on what the customer prefers? This suggests that there is the need for a strong positive attitude and conviction of the benefits that the business would accrue when such dishes are added to the menu.

Food taboos, superstitions and religious beliefs

Taboos, superstitions and religious beliefs of customers are also important considerations when planning a menu. According to Davis et. al. (2008), the contents of the menu would vary based on the segment of the market, the occasion, the country and the region amongst other factors. Many countries, cultures and religions have their own set of believe systems, cultural rites and festivals and their accompanying superstitions and taboos.

In Ghana, Gadegbeku, Wayo, Ackah-Badu, Nukpe and Okai (2013) unearthed that Fifty-seven percent of foods prohibited because of superstition and taboos in a section of Accra were of animal source while forty three percent were from plant. Patil, Mittal Vedapriya, Khan and Raghavia (2010) posit that every social group has their own beliefs and practices that are based on occasions and situations.

Some of these beliefs, according to Park (2007), may be useful while others may be

harmful. Some of these beliefs and practices are food related. They prescribe what food should be eaten and which specific individuals in specific situations should not eat them. While some foods may be regarded as fit for consumption by a particular group of people, others may not view them as such. Gadegbeku et. al. refers to those foods that are rejected food taboos.

Labour and equipment consideration

The number, availability and skills of the kitchen brigade and service staff are key in planning and designing a menu. According to Gordon and Brezinski (2001), irrespective of a restaurant's adopted style of food or food service and the grade of its operations, the menu would best be delivered when one has the requisite number of well-trained chefs, cooks, waiters and waitresses.

Kivela (2001) further argues that having the requisite number and expertise of staff is key in menu planning. Hence, restaurants should recruit competent staff to aid the restaurant to deliver good menus to their clients in conformance to their operational concept. Furthermore, staff should be given continuous training to update their skills and techniques.

Gordon and Brezinski (2001) add that the availability of well-qualified and trained kitchen employees should be a strong consideration in the menu decision (p. 21). A restaurant's equipment availability, sitting capacity and design of the dining area also has an influence on the manner in which menus are planned.

Thus, menus are designed in conformance to these facilities. Restaurants, therefore, install the right quantity and quality of equipment in order to support and facilitate the production

of the various menu items (Magris & McCreery, 2001; Molt, 2006).

According to Kotschevar and Withrow (2008), storage/preservation equipment facilities must be taken into account when planning a menu. Frozen, refrigerated and dry storage areas must be able to accommodate foods both before and after preparation to make it wholesome for consumption. As a matter of fact, a menu should only include dishes that the kitchen is capable of producing, whether the kitchen prepares everything from scratch or uses prepared or partly prepared food products.

Product availability and profit considerations

It is important for menu planners to consider the availability of food items and their quality before such foods are added to the menu (Gordon & Brezinski, 2001). Certainly, it would make little sense to put on menus items that are not available and or items that are not of good quality.

Thus, menu planners ensure that menu items are readily available and at affordable prices so that they could produce to meet the needs of their target customers. It should, however, be noted that seasonal ingredients are usually easy to find and are reasonably priced. Out-of-season ingredients, however, are likely to be more expensive, more difficult to source and may not be of required quality.

The main aim of operating a restaurant business is to make profits. Hence, they are to operate bearing in mind their estimated and or projected profit or break-even points. According to Gordon and Brezinski (2001), this could best be achieved when menu planners do due diligence when pricing the menu

items. Pricing has to be done by taking into consideration fixed cost, variable costs and overheads (Molt, 2006).

However, set prices should be affordable to customers and at the same time the restaurant must make profits, which implies that purchasing and cost control is paramount. Menu prices charged by catering establishments are, to some extent, based on the cost of the food (Pavesic & Magnant, 2005).

Variety, appearance, temperature and texture

Customers' search for variety, according to Bernstein, Ottenfeld and Witte (2008), is a major factor that has informed menu planning over the years. Hence, it has been noted that a food service outlet that aims at attracting more customers should endeavour to have a repertoire of dishes on its menu.

DiPietro, Roseman and Ashley (2004) have also argued that due to the changing preferences of customers' taste and their varying reasons for visiting food joints, there is the need for restaurant or eatery operators to have a variety of dishes on their menu. This would provide the guests with many options to choose from and the opportunity to try something new.

It is imperative for menu planners to also endeavour to plan menus in a manner that would make it appealing to customers. The colour and form of the foods augment their appearance. Reynolds, Merritt and Pinckney (2005) assert that colours well combined would enhance a food's attractive look and appeal to customers. Using varieties of ingredients, cut into assorted shapes in preparing and garnishing the food can achieve this desired result.

In addition to the appearance of the food,

it is prudent to ensure that foods prepared are kept at the right temperature and consistency (Glanz et al., 2007). Hwang and Lorenzon (2008) suggest that the texture and temperature of the food in consideration with the time of the day also counts in planning the menu since that matters to some customers.

Nutritional value and health considerations

With fitness awareness and numerous television programmes reminding people of health implications of certain categories of foods, menu planners must bear in mind healthy menu items when planning the menu. According to Kozup, Creyer, and Burton (2003), nutritional information should also be presented with the menu items and this has shown stronger effects on consumer food practices.

Research has shown that menu planners that take nutritional information into consideration before planning menus do so not to benefit only the customers but to a large extent the restaurants themselves (Hwang & Lorenzen, 2008). It is also necessary to take into consideration the nutritional needs of the different categories of customers such as children, teenagers and the elderly. Each of these groups may have different dietary needs and thus require special diets. Nutritional needs may also vary with age, gender, size, lifestyle habits, occupation and health.

Methodology

The qualitative approach to research was employed because of the study's aim to explore the experiential dimensions of the supply side of the adaption of more local dishes on the hotel menu. Twelve hotels were purposively chosen from Accra, Takoradi

and Kumasi based on their theme (six African themed and Six European themed).

The interviews were conducted between February and March 2014 in the hotels where the interviewees worked. In most cases, the respondents in the hotel consisted of the chef and the food and beverage manager because the sampling unit was the hotel and the respondents had to be strictly the menu-decision maker(s).

In one case though, the manager of the hotel joined in the interview. All respondents were very responsive and freely gave their

opinions on the matter. Interviews were semi-structured and conducted in English, but Twi was also used sometimes by the respondents to explain their points better.

Being proficient in both English and Twi, the researcher had no problem with the transcription of the audios. The first part of the interview sought to clarify the hotel characteristics. This included the star rating of the hotels, whether they had any and how many Ghanaian dishes on the menu, as well as the position of the respondents, as shown in Table 1

The second part of the interview sought

Table 1: Distribution of Students Sampled for the Study

Hotel Number	Location of Hotel	Star Rating of Hotel	Interviewee/s	Number of Ghanaian dishes on Hotel's Menu
1	Accra	3-Star	Chef	7
2	Accra	2-Star	Chef/ F&B manager	15
3	Accra	2-Star	Chef	6
4	Accra	3-Star	Chef / F&B manager	8
5	Takoradi	1 Star	Chef	0
6	Takoradi	3-Star	Chef	8
7	Takoradi	1-Star	Chef/ F&B manager	10
8	Takoradi	1-Star	Chef	5
9	Kumasi	3-Star	Chef	5
10	Kumasi	2-Star	Chef / F&B manager	6
11	Kumasi	2-star	Chef / F&B manager	5
12	Kumasi	1-Star	Chef	10

Source: Students' Records and Management Unit (UCC), 2013

respondents perceptions on Ghanaian dishes in general, the benefits, challenges and any other issues that pertained to adding more varieties of Ghanaian dishes to the menu. A detailed description of significant themes, which emerged from the interviews, is presented.

The themes are organized according to the factors that are considered by menu-decision makers when deciding on menu items and described using the narrative technique, summaries and representative quotes. The quotes give a deeper understanding of interviewees' experiences and perceptions.

Issues presented have been categorised into eight headings and four sub-headings. The names of the hotels have not been used in the text in order to protect the identity of the respondents and ensure the anonymity of their establishments.

Results and discussion

Customer considerations and needs

The respondents (mainly the chef and food and beverage managers), were to submit their perceptions on Ghanaian dishes in the hotels. The responses that fell under the theme "customer considerations and food needs" are presented in this section. According to Miller (2007), it is important for any business to know what customers want.

This would be the basis for the development of the product and services that would be offered to the customer. Sub-themes that emerged were these: (a) familiarity and preference; (b) taboos, superstitions and religious beliefs; (c) health considerations; and (d) cultural experience and exposure. *Familiarity and preference.*

The view of serving hotel customers what they prefer and are familiar with is discussed in the literature. Mak et. al. (2012) have alluded to familiarity and past experience as factors that influence food consumption away from home. Some researchers (e.g Cohen & Avieli, 2004) are of the opinion that unfamiliar food in an unfamiliar environment can impede customer comfort, and thus, Murphy, Pritchard and Smith (2000) suggest that customers must be served food they are familiar with. Others are of the view that it is not all of the food desires of the customer that has to be met (Moulin, 2007).

The study results demonstrated the importance of familiarity and preference in their responses. This was seen in their assertion that they did not provide wide varieties of Ghanaian dishes because both their foreign and Ghanaian customers were not familiar with most of the varieties of Ghanaian dishes. A respondent from a hotel in Accra submits as follows:

Most varieties of Ghanaian dishes are not popular among the locals and the foreigners because there are so many different ethnic groups with a wide variety of ethnic foods. It is, therefore, difficult for the locals to even recommend these dishes to the foreigners. Some foreigners, on their own, may be uncomfortable or even afraid to eat the local dishes if the locals they know do not recommend it.

However, Arthur (2010) claims that Ghanaian dishes from various ethnic groups are eaten and appreciated in parts of the country and even beyond and not limited to the area of origin of the food. For example, wakye from northern Ghana can be found in all corners of the country. Again, banku and

okro soup, a dish associated with and originating from the Volta Region of Ghana is eaten in the Ashanti Region and elsewhere. The issue, therefore, is the lack of exposure of the customers (be it local or foreign) to those varieties of Ghanaian dishes.

But, according to Chang (2010), the act of eating itself, which involves body contact with the unfamiliar destination's culture, affects the neophobic tendencies of the tourist. On the other hand, for the neophilic tourists, the unfamiliar environment of the destination itself may act as a motivational factor for encouraging them to take their chances with novel and strange local dishes and beverages.

This may explain the hesitation on the part of some foreigners to eat the local cuisine without recommendations from trusted local acquaintances and supports the view of the interviewee from a hotel Takoradi who proffered as follows:

Most Ghanaian dishes require the customers to have acquired the taste before they can be enjoyed. Therefore, even when some patrons place an order for them, they eat very little of the portion provided. Such customers may not reorder the same food.

Yet another interviewee from a hotel in Kumasi thought that the hotel's local customers preferred foreign dishes to Ghanaian dishes. His words were as follows:

Ghanaian customers prefer foreign dishes because they feel that they eat the local dishes at home. Some customers also feel that local dishes are not prestigious; they deem them below international standard and, therefore, do not suit the image of dining in a hotel. The customers who come to this hotel, perceive continental (foreign) dishes to be

prestigious and so when they come to the hotel, they order foreign dishes.

Still, a fourth interviewee from a hotel in Accra stated the following:

Some of the customers have poor attitude towards Ghanaian dishes served in the hotel. There is a general distrust in the authenticity of the taste of Ghanaian dishes in the hotel. It is perceived that the recipes have been Europeanised to suit the taste of foreign customers.

From the comment given by the practitioner from the hotel in Kumasi, it can be said that Cohen and Avieli's (2004) suggestion that local food should be filtered through tourism oriented establishments so that the taste can be transformed by foreign influence to suit the taste of international tourists did not take into consideration the local clients of these tourism oriented establishments.

It can be concluded, therefore, that the perceived attitudes of hotel patrons do not encourage the menu-decision makers to have a positive attitude towards introducing more variety of Ghanaian dishes unto the menu. But in Takoradi, some of the respondents thought that introducing more of the local dishes unto the menu would enable them to cater for wider range of customer preferences. One of the chefs said: *The limited variety of Ghanaian dishes on the menu makes our local offering boring to the regular customers. I guess when we increase the variety of local dishes on the menu, we will maintain and attract customers who prefer local dishes and we will get more patronage from the local people.*

In Accra, the hotel menu decision-makers were optimistic that Ghanaian dishes appeal to their local guest, so introducing varieties

would attract more patronage from them. The majority of the menu decision-makers from the various hotels agreed to this assertion. This translated into the very high “yes” responses they gave to the question as to whether they intended to add more variety of local dishes unto their menus within the next two years.

Some of those from Kumasi, however, thought that the restaurant business was moving towards the production and service of Chinese dishes. A particular hotel in Takoradi in the Western Region had no intention of serving local dishes on their menu because, according to them, all their customers were foreigners who cared little about local dishes.

Taboos, superstitions and religious beliefs

According to Gadegbeku et. al., (2013), Ghanaians attach a number of superstitious and cultural beliefs to food because food is a key player in their culture, especially festivals and ancestral worship. These taboos and superstitions can be helpful or harmful. This phenomenon was played widely in Kumasi.

The Region is deemed to be the cultural hearth of the country. It was, therefore, not surprising that the respondents held these views. One of the F&B experts asserted that the attachment of superstitions to some of the local foods made them uncomfortable to serve those dishes on the menu. Below are his words:

A dish like aprapransa is perceived to be the food for witches. It cannot, therefore, be eaten if the eater or a person trusted by the eater did not prepare it. Moreover, palm oil, which is the main oil used in most Ghanaian stews should not be purchased or eaten at night because witches could sell or

serve human blood to you in place of the oil. Again in Kumasi, another interviewee added his voice to this phenomenon. He asserted thus:

Here in the Ashanti Region, some dishes are reserved for the gods. For example, anyone at any time cannot eat etc. It has to be eaten by people approved by the gods at the right time during rituals and festivals. You cannot, therefore, put such a dish on the hotel menu to be desecrated by anyone. That will be a desecration.

Yet another person from a hotel in Kumasi confirmed these perspectives.

Ghanaian customers perceive some of the local dishes as fetish because they are eaten during festive occasions and are used for ritual practices. Some other local foods are also perceived as dishes for witches because the primary cooking oil for most Ghanaian stews and sauces is red palm oil, which is equated to human blood. Some tribes are also forbidden to eat some of the ingredients in the soups and stews such as snails, which are not eaten by the Krobos

These insights are in conformance with Meyer-Rochow (2009) and Patil et. al. (2010) who also identified some taboos, superstitions and religious beliefs that hindered the patron age of certain foods within certain cultures.

Nutritional and Health considerations

The health and nutrition of a customer was also a factor that menu decision-makers considered in the introduction of more Ghanaian dishes on the menu. Research has shown that menu planners that take health and nutritional information into consideration before planning menus do so not to benefit only the customers but to a large extent

the restaurants themselves (Hwang & Lorenzen, 2008).

According to the sampled hotels, most of the times, Ghanaian dishes contain an assortment of ingredients, so it is easy to plan a nutritionally balanced meal. But, some require getting used to for it to be “kind to the stomach”. The respondents also thought that the heavy carbohydrate content of Ghanaian dishes was not too healthy for foreigners. According to one of them from Takoradi: *There is too much starch in our local dishes. White people cannot cope with it. Every time they order the food, they waste it by eating very little. Some of them also get sick from eating some foods.*

On the same topic, a second interviewee from a hotel in Accra said:

It is difficult for foreigners to eat Ghanaian dishes due to the heavy concentration of carbohydrates. . Some Ghanaian dishes can be hard on the bowels for first time eaters. This may discourage repeat consumption. Because most of the dishes contain a number of variety of ingredients, it is even difficult to list it all for the customer to decide whether they like it or not.

Davis et. al. (2008) posit that for health and nutritional concerns, description of dishes in menus should be informative, accurate and complete especially when the individual ingredients are mixed together and not separated. They further suggest that, to protect the health and nutrition of potential customers who would order local dishes, their dislike or intolerance for some components of the dishes should be taken into account.

Therefore, menu decision-makers would have to plan the menu book or card in a way that divulges all necessary information about

the local food they have presented including major processes used. According to Kozup, Creyer, and Burton (2003), nutritional information should also be presented with the menu items.

Cultural experience and exposure

In recent times, several others have studied the use of food as a tourism attraction. This concept has been labelled with various terms such as gastronomic tourism, food tourism and culinary tourism. In this respect, when local food is successfully implemented as the major attraction in the marketing of a destination, the food becomes an attraction in its own right (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Du Rand, Heath & Alberts, 2003; Barbayaneva, 2012).

The F&B practitioners in the hotels in Accra emphasised the role their food could play in promoting tourism in Ghana. Most of them were of the view that novel local dishes on their menus would make dining attractive and increase the cultural experience of the visitor. One said:

Ghanaian dishes in hotels will promote food tourism. It provides an avenue to present new dishes and showcase our culture for the customer to try. Novelty appeals to customers who want to experience other food cultures especially international tourists. Such customers sometimes complain about the monotonous local dish offerings on our menu. Once, there was an embarrassing situation when one of the customers walked to our chef and said, “good afternoon, I can close my eyes and tell you all the local dishes you have on your menu. It’s the same thing every day all over the country.

It is encouraging that the practitioners are undertaking such debates because in the world

over, food is gaining a lot of attention in the promotion of tourism (Hall & Sharples, 2003). Authenticity has for long been realized as a key motivator in tourism experiences (Chang et al., 2010). It has also been said to be one of the motivators that influence local food consumption in destinations (Kim et al., 2009).

Consuming local food is considered as an authentic experience. Local food served in a hotel's restaurant may offer a different aesthetic experience in comparison with the food eaten at home. The culture of an area and the environment in which people eat are part of the authentic experience.

When individuals eat food at home, they are acting out part of their usual life patterns. When people eat local food in a traditional restaurant, popularly known as "chop bar", they have an authentic and original experience. But, for the hotel to maintain this kind of authenticity, the establishment will need to put in more effort to stage a cultural setting to hype and create an authentic experience (Case, 2009).

Labour issues

Irrespective of the mode of operation adopted by a restaurant's food and beverage department, the menu is best delivered when the establishment has the requisite number of well-trained chefs, cooks, waiters and waitresses.

Kivela (2001) argues that having the optimum number and expertise of staff is key in menu planning. Hence, restaurants should recruit competent staff for the restaurant to deliver good dishes to their clients in conformance to their operational concept. In light of this, the interviewees gave their opinion

on the competence of their staff in relation to adding more varieties of local dishes unto the menu.

In Kumasi and Accra, the practitioners thought that the hotels lacked knowledgeable and skilled staff trained to cook Ghanaian dishes because the vocational schools and polytechnics they attended do not often have comprehensive curriculum on Ghanaian dishes. One respondent from a hotel in Kumasi said:

The staff we recruit for the kitchen have more knowledge on cooking foreign dishes than local dishes.

Yet another from a hotel in Accra added the following:

Our staff are not familiar with most of the Ghanaian recipes and ingredients. Most of the staff have not learnt to cook a number of the indigenous dishes from the house. This is because of the large number of ethnic groups and foods. The staff are only knowledgeable about cooking food from their own ethnic groups but not those from other ethnic groups, except the very popular ones like banku and Ampesi.

In contrast to these views, an interviewee in an African branded hotel in Accra was quite optimistic. He said:

Knowledge on Ghanaian recipes is readily available. If we decide to add more varieties we can easily train our staff to acquire the knowledge.

It must be added, however, that this was an exception to the majority of respondents from the other two regions that thought otherwise. In the same vein, a respondent from Takoradi with excitement alluded to the fact that their staff were more relaxed when the local dishes orders were more than that for

their foreign dishes. He said:

Our staff are more comfortable cooking local dishes because it is part of their tradition. There is a sense of joy, happiness and satisfaction in the kitchen when we get more orders for Ghanaian dishes.

In summary, while the majority of the practitioners thought they did not have the right competent staff to handle the production of more varieties of local dishes, a few also thought the knowledge and skills were readily available.

Price and profit consideration

Every business is profit oriented; so is the restaurant business in hotels. Cost of food, labour, equipment and supplies and pricing have been named among other issues, as important in the achievement of profits (Gordon & Brezinski, 2001; Molt, 2006). The prices charged by catering establishments for food are to a large extent based on the cost of the food (Pavesic & Magnant, 2005).

Menu prices need also to represent value for money for the customer. Hence, Walker (2002: 261) proposed that “The selling price of each item must be acceptable to the market and profitable to the restaurant”. In light of these, menu decision-makers commented extensively on the financial consequences in adding more local dishes to the menu. In Takoradi, a menu decision-maker said:

Even though production cost for Ghanaian dishes is relatively low, we still maintain high prices to reflect the image of the hotel and pay labour and overhead costs. A number of the customers feel reluctant to buy local dishes at high price; they would rather pay that price for continental dishes. The patronage for local dishes is, therefore, not encouraging.

In Accra though, the respondents had a good perception of the profitability of local dishes. An interviewee from hotel A said:

The ingredients for producing Ghanaian dishes are cheaper; this makes the production cost lower than that of the foreign dishes we serve. But we still serve the Ghanaian dishes at high price to our customers so we get more profit from those dishes. They are ready to pay the high price because they appreciate the service and ambience offered by the hotel. The profit margin is bigger on Ghanaian dishes than continental dishes.

F&B practitioners interviewed in Kumasi shared a similar story. They were convinced that the introduction of more varieties of Ghanaian dishes on their menu would make the menu affordable and profitable. An interviewee from Takoradi admitted to these opinions when she said the following:

Our menu prices are expensive because we cook only continental dishes. I believe that if we add more varieties of Ghanaian dishes we would have cheaper dishes to meet the taste of a wide range of guests.

There is a general consensus thus, that producing and serving Ghanaian dishes is more profitable for the hotel than serving foreign dishes. The pricing may be suitable for some customers but may not be so for others. It is then important for menu decision-makers to evaluate the financial status of their clients and based on that decide on a reasonable price that would portray value for money for their customers as suggested by Walker (2002).

Food production and service

The production and service of food and beverages is the core duty of the kitchen and restaurant staff, superintended by the chef.

Their view of the ease or otherwise of the production and service of local dishes is thus important to how they perceive the dishes in general. Because most of these hotels run the a la carte menu service, the efficiency of the production and service process is very essential.

This is to ensure that the customer does not wait for unduly a long period for their food. Restaurants, therefore, install the right quantity and quality of equipment to support and facilitate the production and service of the various menu items (Magris & McCreery, 2001; Molt, 2006). Menu items, according to Kotschevar and Withrow (2008), are to be chosen carefully to avoid some equipment being over-burdened while others are under-utilised.

F&B practitioners in the hotel had a lot to say with regard to their perceptions on the production and service of local dishes. Most of them from all the regions sampled thought that it was difficult to prepare a number of the local dishes per portion, because of the labour intensive nature of the cooking processes involved in the preparation of the dishes. They were also of the opinion that the processing time of the dishes was too long, for example, one said:

Because of the elaborate and complex cooking process of most Ghanaian dishes, we prefer to cook it for functions and buffets so that we would have enough time prior to the service to execute the recipe. The production process for many Ghanaian dishes has not been technologically developed enough to aid preparation before service. It is easier to prepare Ghanaian dishes in bulk rather than per portion.

Another interviewee opined as follows:

“ The primitive cooking techniques make it difficult to apply quick efficient merchandised equipment to some processing methods for Ghanaian dishes. Again, due to the lack of pre-processed ingredients, cooking Ghanaian dishes starts from scratch, makes it time consuming”.

In a 1-star hotel in Kumasi, the menu decision-maker was concerned about the comfort of the customers and thought that the process of preparing local dishes could be a nuisance to their in-house guest. He said:

“We have not thought through and developed most of our dishes for commercial production and service in hotels. We still rely on traditional production and service methods that may not necessarily be compatible with hotel operations. Imagine us pounding fufu at ten o'clock in the morning for lunch service at twelve o'clock. We may end up disturbing the guests in the rooms with the noisy pounding. I shudder to think of the smell of momoni (salted fish) in the guest rooms”.

With regard to the service of the dishes, a respondent from Accra had this to say:

“Some of the dishes require elaborate service and more service equipment. The service of some of the dishes requires eating with the fingers rather than cutlery. This makes service cumbersome for our formal table setting. In addition, we have to provide bowls for the customers to wash their hands. It is difficult to make our service higher than that of the chop bars”.

In all, there are some perceived challenges regarding the production and service of more Ghanaian dishes in the hotel. A lot more thinking and planning must, therefore, go into the development of the production processes to aid quick and efficient service.

Availability of raw materials

Gordon and Brezinski (2001) assert that before any dish is put on the menu, there should be an assessment of the availability and quality of the ingredients in the market. Comments from the menu decision-makers also dwelt on this area. In Kumasi, a chef from one of the hotels said:

There is an abundance of raw materials for the cooking of Ghanaian dishes.

But in Accra and Takoradi, some of the respondents did not think so. One of the chefs had a different view:

Some of the ingredients for cooking local dishes are so traditional that it is difficult to get them on the open market outside the indigenous area from where it is eaten. Also, some of the ingredients needed for the production of the Ghanaian dishes are produced under traditional methods, mainly subsistence farming methods. The production and sales have thus not been commercialised. This induces shortages on the market, especially during certain seasons.

The menu decision-makers had divergent opinions as to whether the ingredients were available in commercial quantities all year round. Developing commercial supply chains for the identified ingredients would be very helpful to the hotels if they decide to add those local foods to their menu.

Ability to reuse leftovers

The use of leftovers in the restaurant industry is very important because it helps the kitchen to reduce wastage and maximise profits (Kugaji, 2013). All the menu decision-makers agreed that it was difficult to store and reuse left over Ghanaian dishes. One of them from

Kumasi articulated his concerns stressing the following:

It is very difficult to preserve Ghanaian dishes when they are not sold. The colour and texture of the food change when it is reheated. This makes it difficult to resell. In the case of a food like fufu, one of the most popular dishes around, it does not lend itself to reheating at all and it has a short shelf life.

Again, a respondent from a hotel in Takoradi concurred as below:

Ghanaian dishes are only prepared when a customer places an order for them. This is to ensure that the food prepared will be sold because it is difficult to store and reuse later when it is not sold fresh.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the reconnaissance survey revealed that some of the hotels required between 24 and 48 hour notice before they could serve Ghanaian dishes.

Appearance and presentation

Food should taste and look good. Reynolds, Merritt and Pinckney (2005) argue that colours when well combined would enhance a food's attractive look and appeal to customers. With regard to local dishes, the interviewees from some of the hotels in Accra who were used to the Europeanised presentation of food were of the view that they could not subject the local dishes to the same presentation techniques. They attributed this to the one pot nature of most of the dishes, where the vegetables and proteins went into the same bowl. One demonstrated this concern when he said:

It is quite difficult garnishing and presenting local dishes professionally due to the one pot nature of some of the foods. I can hardly apply my garnishing skills on it and achieve a satisfactory result

Yet another said:

It is the red oil that makes most of the stews appetising but in the hotels, because of the health of the customer, we have to skim all the oil which makes the dishes unattractive. Some foreign customers would not even eat the food when they see all the oil floating on top of it.

Hotel image and management support

Management support is essential in decision making in small and medium scale businesses. Most of the time, the managers are the owners and the final decision makers in small and medium scale businesses (Quaddus & Hofmeyer, 2007). Decisions thus cannot be implemented without the support of the manager (Alberts, 2010). On the whole, management support for the introduction of new dishes appeared to be limited because of the bad perceptions of the managers towards the dishes. The ensuing responses illustrate the point better: A respondent from a hotel in Kumasi said: *Management does not support the introduction of more Ghanaian dishes on to the menu, because they believe it will affect the image of the restaurant. The owner-manager believes that more Ghanaian dishes will give the restaurant a national image while assorted foreign dishes will give the hotel an international image which is what they prefer.* Yet another lamented as follows:

My owner-manager would be furious if I mention introducing Ghanaian dishes unto the menu. He is of the opinion that this hotel is meant for foreign customers and not for locals and so local dishes do not fit our corporate image and marketing strategy”.

For the managers who were supportive of the idea, the main reason was the anticipation of an enhanced image and competitive edge over their fellow contenders who mostly have a foreign concept of operation. One manager said:

More variety of local dishes on our menu will allow us to have a wide range of dishes on the menu. This would put us ahead of our competitors. They focus mainly on international dishes.

Conclusion

On the whole, it can be asserted with a fair degree of certainty that chefs are positively inclined towards introducing Ghanaian dishes on their respective menus. However this desire is mediated by the influence of factors such as customer acceptance and management support. Even though there were perceived difficulties that marred the perceived benefits, the profit and competitive advantage motive seemed to override the negative attitudes expressed by the respondents. It would be prudent for hotels to organise training sessions for their F&B staff to educate them on the production and service of the different varieties of local dishes.

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