

OFFER STRUCTURE AND DESIGN OF THE MENU IN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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Abstract

Purpose – Proper structure of menus, number of meals, information about the food and complete design to a large extent affect the selection of dishes by the customer and the entire business. This paper should show all the elements of relevance for structuring and designing of menus such as: balance, variety, composition, description, the accuracy of the menu, marking of menu, specification of items and sizes, then paper, font, colour, as important for the sale of food, in accordance with the theme of the restaurant.

Methodology – The survey was conducted by direct and indirect collection of written bids (menus) in a la carte restaurants for food and drink throughout the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (northern part of the R. Serbia). Collection was followed by systematization of data obtained by examining the sampled specimens according to the established methodology. The data were analyzed with descriptive statistics and presented graphically in this paper.

Findings – The Research has shown that catering facilities do not have properly structured and designed menus, which is in line with all the theoretical principles and previously conducted researches in this field.

Contribution – The data provide a general overview of the situation in the hospitality industry of Vojvodina and guidance on ways of elimination of all irregularities and an improvement of menu appeal for the guest. Proper structuring of menus, giving the required food information and design of menus can be critical in business of restaurants, and how to eliminate them will be shown in the paper.

Keywords: menu, gastronomy, structure, information, design, hospitality

INTRODUCTION

Menu presents a written offer of each restaurant and is a reflection of its business (Antun and Gustafson 2005). World literature often equates the concepts of a la carte and table d hot menu. According to local hospitality profession the menu includes a list of dishes for a meal and carte is a list of dishes that one restaurant offers (Kovačević and Nikolić 1999, 207; Kincaid and Corsun 2003; Ozdemir and Caliskan 2014). Cartes, their proper structure, numerical strength of meals, information about dishes and complete design to a large extent affect the guests' choice of dishes and the entire business (McCall and Lynn 2008; Magnin and Kim 2015).

Development and design of a menu include design of elements such as:

- specification of items and balance;
- diversity and composition of offer of meals;
- descriptions, accuracy about dish and information about facility (name, type, logo, address, visiting hours, etc.);
- size and design of covers and
- paper, print quality and color.

For the creators of written offers that is, managers of restaurants, it is important to have a basic knowledge of all these elements and to define exactly what they want in order to create a lovable and stimulative menu for the guests (Lončar and Lončar 2004; Tešanović 2011, 52; Ozdemir and Caliskan 2014; Gagić 2014, 75). When it comes to opening a new restaurant, entire process begins with a feasibility study as demographic characteristics dictate to a large extent, type of menu and restaurant. When the style of the restaurant is defined, menu planning can begin, and it dictates: the theme of production-service program and decor, then equipment, which dictates the types of prepared dishes, number of served people and kitchen staff (Morrison 1996; Jones and Mifli 2001).

After performing necessary research and making decisions about the kind, type and style of operation of the facility, determination of norms and type of meals that will be prepared and served, it follows the design and graphical development of menu (Bowen and Morris 1995; Kwong, 2005; Tešanović 2009, 48; Markovic et al., 2010).

The aim of this study is to answer the following research questions:

- Do caterers respect the rules of stating the items in the menu and the structure of offer between groups of dishes?
- What structure of dishes is used?
- What information the menu gives to guests?
- What cover design is used?
- What quality of paper and printing is used, and whether it is easy to read?

Previous studies have shown that the proper structuring and making of written offers, information on meals that are offered and design often undermine the transparency and user-friendliness and thereby understandability of food offer within restaurants (Lorenzini 1992; Wansink et al. 2001; Kwong 2005; McVety et. al. 2008, 140; Markovic et al., 2010; Magnin and Kim 2015).

The resulting data provide a general overview of the situation in the hospitality industry of Vojvodina and guidance on how to eliminate all irregularities and increase the attractiveness of menus for guests. Proper structuring offer of meals, specifying the necessary information about the dish (fasting, vegetarian, organic, spicy, allergens) and design of carte, can be critical in operation of hospitality facility, and how to remove them will be shown below.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Specification of meals and their balance

Specifying dishes (items) in menus is carried out according to the order in which dishes will be served and consumed, as it is often done in two ways:

- by the type of foods that are used for food preparation or
- by the method of heat treatment of dishes.

There are some variations between cultures. European hospitality industry is characterized by a salad that is stated in the menu before desserts, and the Americans and some other countries specify salads after the soup.

The practice has imposed the rule that the most profitable dishes in the group should be listed as the first or the last. The most popular and less profitable items should be listed in the middle. Studies have shown that a guest reads down the column in any offer, usually looking firstly at the first-listed items, skipping the central part, and then reading the last few meals before moving to the next column (Kelson 1994). The most popular items are likely to be ordered, regardless of their place on the menu (Kwong 2005; McVety et. al. 2008, 140).

The authors point out that the best location for the most profitable items is first half of the foursquare of one-sided menus. When a guest opens the menu from right to left, the first pages seen in the foursquare is the second station. Because of reading from left to right, the customer will start to read from the upper left quadrant, but he will actually firstly see the second quadrant, that is, the upper right rectangle (Tešanović 2011, 59; Lorenzini 1992).

The authors note that the main courses should be listed on the right side after stating appetizers, soups and other dishes, on the right. Highly profitable main courses, such as chicken and pasta should be listed first, under the heading of main course, followed by lobster, beef and veal.

It is believed that the menu is balanced when the number of items in different groups is proportionally distributed. For example, if a menu has 12 starters, two soups, four salads, 20 main courses and 8 desserts, it is considered as well-balanced. If there is a higher number of main courses than other dishes, this is neither acceptable nor recommended because the main courses are the focus of the menu and often the most expensive items in it.

1.2. Diversity and the composition of offers of dishes

Diversity is critical for a good menu not only because of the number of dishes offered within a group, but also because of the way the dishes are prepared. Guests appreciate diversity in the menu. It is also a reflection of the creativity of the chef.

Matching dishes is important in planning the menu. Planner must assess how well an item will go with certain main course. Generally, when the main course is quite tasty, side dishes should not prevail over the dish. On the other hand, if the main dishes are less richly, side dishes should be much more attractive. Another aspect of the composition of the dish that affects the good acceptability by the customers is diversity and colour matching of side dishes and main course resulting in attraction at first sight. Colours of food can be very striking when properly used in creating the menu and attractiveness significantly increases guest satisfaction (Kelson 1994; McVety et al. 2008, 152; Tešanović 2011, 62).

1.3. Description, accuracy and menu labeling

Description provides an explanation of how certain dishes are prepared and served. The description is the one that helps to sell food on the menu. The authors believe that the main dishes on the menu are supposed to have the most detailed description (Wansink et al. 2001). They explain significance and role of description of the dish in the following way:

- exclusive menus with very high prices of items should have a considerable amount of description because when a description of the dish is shorter it suggests that guests who eat this type of food at a certain price, stay in the restaurant for a half to two hours while menus with more extensive description keep the guest much longer in the restaurant;
- rapid profit-making requires little or no describing what ensures rapid turnover rate, expecting the client to stay in the restaurant just 15-20 minutes, food choice is limited and simply presented, along with the price so that it reduces the time required for guests to decide what they want to order and
- style of family organization lists dishes such as appetizers, desserts and drinks and provides a description for soups, salads and main courses, because this type of organization wants customers to enjoy approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Menu accuracy means that each item described on menu must be true. In addition, caterers, as well as all other vendors, are bound by legislation on consumer protection. It is not allowed to deceive guests and falsely advertise since serious judicial and inspection measures are provided. National Restaurant Association in the United States has issued instructions "Accuracy on menu" in 1977 as an attempt to help creators of the menus to create a description that precisely presents the items listed in them (Tešanović 2011, 49).

Menu labelling means that everything stated in it must be true and verifiable. This applies particularly to the nutritional statements and statements regarding health benefits of food, which if entered into menus, must be scientifically proven and provable. All this requires the management and professional workers in the hospitality industry to follow legislation in this area and to implement it in practice. Nutritional claim means stating presence of an ingredient in food. Words such as cholesterol-free, fresh, healthy, natural, nonfat, light and reduced, are often used in cartes and menus (Hwang and Lorenzon 2008). Health claim reports that there is a link between the dish or meal and prevention of some diseases, such as for example the claim that fruits and

vegetables provide prevention against cancer. Portion size is another important information about the food (Ledikwe et al. 2005), and the studies have shown that it greatly improves the turnover and satisfaction of guests (Gase et al. 2015).

1.4. Size of menu and cover design

Menu size should be such as to show the dishes and at the same time it should not be too crowded. Too large menus may be unwieldy. The most popular size of menu is 21.59 cm x 27.94 cm. The authors note that too small menus should be avoided, because guests have difficulties to read them. Most menus consist of four pages. Covers make the first and the fourth page, and the list of dishes is on the second and third page. This is not the case with the sampled menus that have more than 10 pages (Kelson 1994).

Cover design is very important in marketing sense because the front and back covers make it possible for indescribable advertising power. Menu covers should reflect decor and type (theme) of the restaurant or other catering facility (Lorenzini 1992; Tešanović 2011, 51).

1.5. Paper, print and colour of menu

To start the process of creating a menu, it is first necessary to choose high-quality desired paper. It has to keep in mind how often the menu will be used. If it will be changed frequently, then it should be cheaper and less durable paper. It does not have to be coated. On the other hand, a menu that will not be changed frequently requires a permanent, covered, hard, waterproof and stain-resistant paper. Durability is very important when choosing the paper for covers (Reynaldo 1998).

When selecting the paper, it must be considered the following factors:

- strength;
- texture;
- colour and
- opacity (reduction in transparency of print on the other side of the paper).

Font of the menu should be easy to read. It is vital to font on menu is of appropriate size. There are different styles of font (Doyle and Bottomley 2004). The three main are:

- Latin alphabet is characterized by a combination of thin and thick features, it is easy to read and should be used for description on menu;
- Modern font does not have thin and thick features that can be found in the Latin alphabet, its letters are fuller and black, can be used for headings and subheadings of menu;
- Italic font looks like handwriting, difficult to read and should only be used for headings and subheadings of menu, that is, for the names of the dishes (Kelson 1994; Diemand-Yauman et al. 2011).

Menu planner must also decide on font size. Font size is measured in points, beginning from 6 to 192 points. Most menus should use at least 12-point font. Smaller font is too hard to read. For a description, space between lines must exist, and it is called spacing. Spacing is also measured by points. When there is no space between the lines, then it is called firmly tight. It is important that font style is appropriate for style of the restaurant. If the restaurant is modern, the menu should also be modern (Mooney 1994, 48; Tešanović 2011, 51).

Lower letters should be used for description and upper letters should be used for headings or subheadings on the menu.

Italic version makes the menu more difficult to read (Diemand-Yauman et al. 2011). This form of font should be used for the heading or subheading or to highlight some items on menu.

Font colour is also important. Menu font should be dark, and background light. Light blue background with dark blue font is very attractive. When font is white and background is dark, this is referred to as reverse printing, which is avoided for the inside of the menu. But the reverse printing is acceptable for menu cover. Selected colour paper and font on menu should be compatible. Red background with yellow letters, for example, would be a disastrous choice. On the other hand, white paper might well agree with red letters (Elliot and Maier 2012).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Sampling

The survey was conducted by direct and indirect collection of menus in a la carte restaurants in the region of Vojvodina (northern part of the Republic of Serbia). The collection was carried out in the period from January, 2014 to February, 2015. According to the then census, Novi Sad had 225 hospitality facilities for providing food and drink (125 restaurants), of total 748 restaurants in the whole territory of Vojvodina. The collection was carried out by free sampling eliminating establishments which offer did not suit the needs of restaurant offerings, such as fast food facilities: kebab shops, sandwich bars, salad bars and the like.

For the purposes of the research we analysed the menus of 65 restaurants, of which 28 international and 16 national, including as authentic regional restaurants, 15 written offers from cafe-restaurants and 6 traditional hospitality facilities by the rivers (sr. čarda).

2.2. Data collecting

Information on collected menus are systematized on the basis of the formed combined assessment list and entered into the appropriate tables, based on objective evaluation of five professional judges. Some data are entered on the basis of numerical strength of certain parameters (number of meals, group of meals, data, etc.), and part is entered on

the basis of descriptive characteristics of scale: bad, partly bad, medium, partially good and good (for elements relating to the design), which are converted into values from 1 to 5 after which the mean values for the analysed parameters are presented in this paper.

2.3. Data processing

All data were statistically analysed by application of descriptive statistics, presented in tables and graphs.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Analysis of specification of meals and their balance

On the basis of the research, it was concluded that the dishes are properly listed in order of consumption in 77% sampled menus, while in 23% it was not properly done.

Research of menus in the hospitality industry of Vojvodina showed that caterers in 71% of facilities do not know and do not implement the rule of the upper right corner in the promotion and sale of their most profitable dishes. From the aspect of prices dishes are unsystematically distributed within their groups.

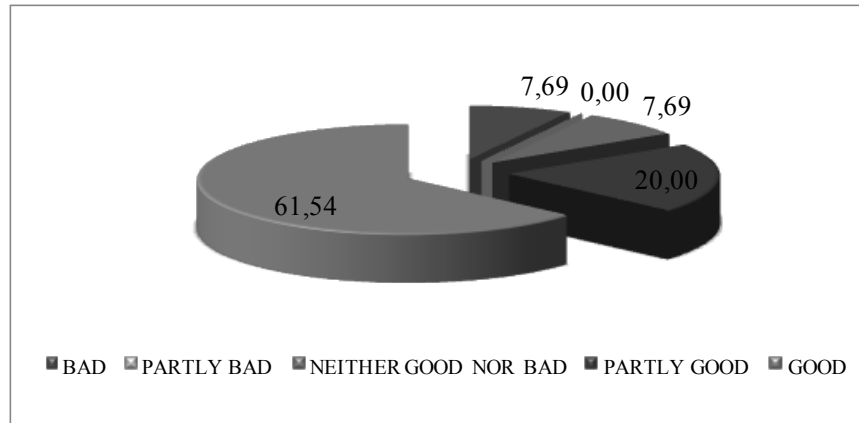
Number of group and total number of dishes in the menu of explored hospitality facilities are various (Table 1), so that structure within groups requires complex analyses. On average menus consist of 12 groups including mandatory group of pizza and pasta.

Table 1: Number of groups and dishes in restaurant offers (n = 65)

	Total	Average	Min	Max	σ	Cv
Total number of groups of dishes	751	11.55	7	23	3.18	27.54
Total number of dishes	6203	95.43	45	217	35.28	36.97

Structure of meals in menus revealed a good balance of offer in 62% of sampled facilities as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: **Balance of number of dishes among groups (n = 65)**



3.2. Analysis of diversity and the composition of offers of dishes

In observed menus it was found a variety when it comes to foodstuffs, with a high proportion of dough dishes such as pasta and pizza. Method of heat treatment which is mostly applied in the preparation of meals is the grill with a wide range of dishes that are processed by frying (fried cheese, meat, vegetables, croquettes, etc.).

In addition to defined side dishes in the menu, which are served with main courses, restaurant guests are offered throughout Vojvodina with option of changing and selecting the most acceptable to them, regardless to the rules and creativity of the chef.

3.3. Analysis of description, accuracy and menu labelling

An important element is the availability of menus in other languages, in the analysed catering facilities, 52% have a menu only in Serbian language which puts in question the ability to receive foreign tourists, 40% of restaurants have a menu in English, while less than 8% of establishments in addition to menus in Serbian and English have menus in one more foreign language such as German, French or Italian.

Analysis of written offers in the restaurants of Vojvodina shows that 35% of facilities do not have any detailed information of a meal besides price and name, only 34% of facilities have a description of a meal, 15% have portion size, 9% portion size and description, and only one sampled menu had indicated energy value of meals.

Special offers such as meatless meals, meals for children and vegetarian dishes, as well as an extremely significant (Gase et al. 2015) had only 3% of the restaurants. Meals designed for specific diet needs were not observed in the offer of Vojvodina restaurants.

Nutritional and health claims may not be always stated directly on menu or carte (Raynor 2014), but must be made accessible for all guests, either through some additional written sources (advertisements) or good familiarity of service staff.

3.4. Analysis of size of menu and cover design

Examination of menus in Vojvodina restaurants shows adequacy in size, with variations in design (Table 2), which depends on the type of the facility.

Table 2: Adequacy of size and cover design (n = 65)

	Bad (%)	Partly bad (%)	Neither good nor bad (%)	Partly good (%)	Good (%)
cover size	0.00	1.54	7.69	16.92	73.85
cover design	12.31	6.15	20.00	26.15	35.38

Front cover should have the name of the restaurant and distinctive symbol or logo of the restaurant. Back cover can specify the address and telephone number of the restaurant or any other information, such as information on credit cards acceptable in the restaurant. Opening hours, history of restaurant or delivery service may appear on the back cover. Surprisingly, about 50% of restaurants use the last page for advertising purposes.

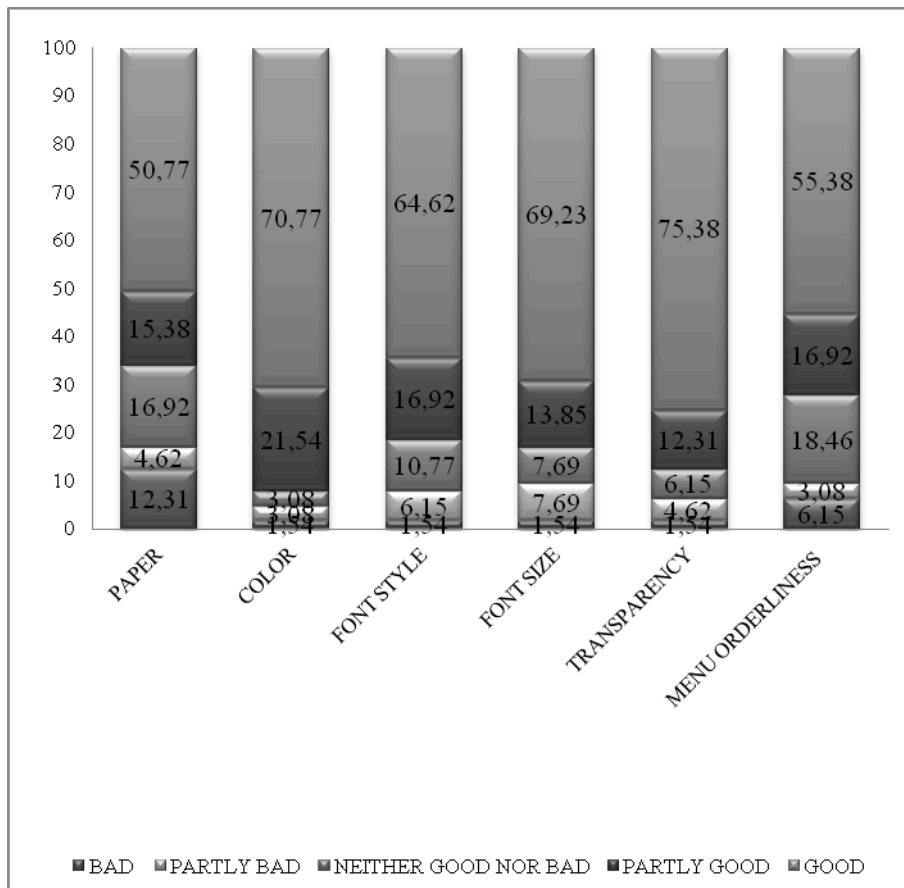
It is also important to remember that covers should be durable, waterproof and resistant to stains, unless the menu changes daily and if it is expendable.

Menu covers of researched restaurants contain various information about the facility, only 5% of facilities include name, logo, type and opening hours, 15% name, type, logo and address of facility, as much as 21% have only name and logo, while 13% name, logo and type, other facilities have incomplete information about facility.

3.5. Analysis of paper, print and colour of the menu

Analysis of paper, colour, style and font size, and visibility and orderliness of sampled menus is shown in the following figure (Figure 2). Processed elements are linked with the printing mode of prices which affects the design, in 65% of facilities the sales price are printed, but in 34% of facilities prices are handwritten, often glued and corrected, which seems messy.

Figure 2: Adequacy of font of the menu (%)



Based on the obtained data it can be concluded that type of paper and orderliness are most problematic elements in the menus of restaurants in Vojvodina.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on research of written offers in Vojvodina and consulted domestic and foreign literature in the field of management and marketing in the hospitality industry, we have come to the conclusion that hospitality establishments, that is, their managements are not sufficiently familiar with the rules of structuring and designing menus which can be associated with poor education of employees and neglect of contemporary trends in the hospitality industry, which implementation to a large extent can improve the service quality of facility and therefore the satisfaction of the customer. Adequately written offers have a significant influence on profit, because a lot of information and clues that can be found in clear and legible menus can to stimulate guests to greater consumption and satisfaction of service which would result in their loyalty. By paying more

attention to: specification of items and balance; diversity and composition of offer; description, accuracy about food and basic information on visited restaurant; as well as size and design of covers and paper, print quality and colour, restaurants would increase their level of service and comply with all the modern trends that are trying to remain in printed form of written offers.

This research will help managers of hospitality facilities for food and drink to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their written offers, and to correct them if necessary.

Future studies need to research the experience and perception of the menu by the customer, which would complement the statements of this research and thereby confirm and deny completely all theoretical principles of proper structuring and design of written offers presented in this paper.

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