



Do pictures help? The effects of pictures and food names on menu evaluations

Yuansi Hou (Lecturer)^a, Wan Yang (Assistant Professor)^{b,*},
Yixia Sun (Assistant Professor)^c

^a Lecturer in Marketing, Durham University Business School, Durham University, United Kingdom

^b The Collins College of Hospitality Management, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, CA, USA

^c Business Administration, School of Management, Zhejiang University, China

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 June 2016

Received in revised form 31 August 2016

Accepted 11 October 2016

Keywords:

Menu design

Picture effect

Food names

Menu labeling

Menu pictures

Consumer information processing style

ABSTRACT

Presenting pictures along with food names on menus is a common practice in the restaurant industry. However, it is not clear whether adding pictures to menus always leads to positive effects. In addition, since more restaurant practitioners are creating ambiguous names for their dishes, it is valuable to study how pictures with different types of food names impact customers' attitudes and behavioral outcomes. In the current study, we examine the joint effect of pictures, food names, and individuals' information processing styles on consumers' attitudes, willingness to pay, and purchase intentions. The results reveal that for common descriptive food names, adding pictures have a positive effect on consumers' attitudes toward the menu item, their willingness to pay and their purchase intentions. More interestingly, for ambiguous food names, pictures have a positive effect only among verbalizers. Visualizers exhibit less favorable attitudes and behavioral outcomes after viewing ambiguously-named dishes with pictures than those without pictures.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In the restaurant industry, especially in the fast food and casual dining restaurants in the U.S., menus often feature pictures of items along with their names to convey additional information and increase sales. Unlike dish names, pictures typically occupy a large part of limited and precious menu space. Although many hospitality scholars have studied restaurant menu design (e.g., Bowen and Morris, 1995; Hou et al., 2015; Kincaid and Corsun, 2003; Kreul, 1982; Miner, 1996; Naipaul and Parsa, 2001; Pavesic, 2005; Reynolds et al., 2005; Yang et al., 2009), the extant literature provides little guidance on the effectiveness of presenting pictures along with verbal information on menus. Marketing scholars have focused on the effect of pictures in marketing communications, especially in advertising. However, the results regarding the effects of adding pictures to verbal information (Wyer et al., 2008). In the current study, we argue that the verbal information on menus (i.e., food names) may moderate the effect of pictures on restaurant menus.

Careful observation of food names reveals an interesting trend that more and more items are being given descriptive names (e.g., tender grilled chicken) instead of regular names (e.g., grilled chicken) (Wansink et al., 2001, 2005). This trend is becoming quite popular in the restaurant industry; the “Quesadilla Explosion Salad” offered by Chili’s Grill & Bar (an international casual dining restaurant) and the “Caribbean Passion Smoothie” offered by Jamba Juice (a California-based juice shop featuring smoothies) are two excellent examples. Wansink et al. (2001, 2005) initially attempted to investigate the effect of food names on sales and sensory perceptions. However, their studies were limited to comparisons between descriptive names and regular names. Nowadays, many restaurant practitioners have gone a step further and begun to use another type of food names, ambiguous food name, which is more abstract and atypical than both descriptive names and regular names. Some industry examples can be identified: “Wonton Chicken Happiness” (a Chinese chicken salad offered by Souplantation, a U.S. buffet-style restaurant) and “Joan’s Broccoli Madness” (a broccoli salad offered by Sweet Tomatoes, a U.S. restaurant featuring fresh ingredients). Similarly, a popular Chinese dish of clear noodles with ground pork is called “Ants Climbing a Tree” on many Sichuan restaurants’ menu.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: y.hou@surrey.ac.uk, jessica623cc@gmail.com (Y. Hou), wanyang@cpp.edu (W. Yang), sunyixia@zju.edu.cn (Y. Sun).

Few scholars have investigated this new trend and it is not clear whether such ambiguous food names are more appealing to customers than regular names. To bridge this gap, we employ Miller and Kahn (2005) typology and focus on two categories of food names: common descriptive names and ambiguous names. A common descriptive name is a typical and specific (e.g., Chocolate Cake) whereas an ambiguous name is atypical and unspecific (e.g., Midnight Madness Cake). Moreover, as suggested by extant studies on verbal information, different product names may trigger different levels of imagination (Lutz and Lutz, 1977). In most cases, ambiguous names stimulate the imagination more than common descriptive names. When accompanied by pictures, different product names trigger different processes of verbal and visual information integration that interfere with the effect of images (Lutz and Lutz, 1977; Miller and Kahn, 2005; Wyer et al., 2008). Therefore, we argue that the effect of adding pictures to menus may vary depending on the types of food names (common descriptive vs. ambiguous).

According to Wyer et al. (2008), the mixed result of adding pictures to verbal information could also be due to differences in individuals' information processing styles, which chronically influence the integration of visual and verbal information. Hence, we also consider the individual trait of information processing style in the current study. When presented with the same combination of pictures and food names on menus, different consumers may employ different strategies to process the information. According to Childers et al. (1985), individuals can be classified into two groups: visualizers and verbalizers. Visualizers tend to form mental images when processing either verbal or visual information and construct integrated visual representations of objects based on these images. In contrast, verbalizers tend to code information verbally without constructing mental images. The major difference between visualizers and verbalizers is whether they construct mental images when processing verbal information or not (Wyer et al., 2008). Consequently, the effect of adding menu pictures may also vary between visualizers and verbalizers.

In two experimental studies, we examine the joint effects of pictures, food names, and individuals' information processing styles on consumers' attitudes, purchase intentions, and willingness to pay for menu items.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. Effect of pictures

Since the use of images in marketing messages is quite common, significant attention has been paid to visual information processing in consumer behavior research. The first wave of studies revealed that the impact of adding pictures to verbal messages is mainly positive (e.g., Childers and Houston, 1984; Kisielius and Sternthal, 1984; Mitchell and Olson, 1981; Shepard, 1967; Starch, 1966). For example, adding pictures can increase the memorability of brand names and product information (e.g.: Kisielius and Sternthal, 1984; Starch, 1966; Shepard, 1967). Extant studies also suggest that pictures can improve consumers' attitudes and increase their purchase intentions. For example, Mitchell and Olson (1981) suggest that advertisements with pictures induce more favorable brand attitudes than those without pictures. More recently, Pennings et al. (2013) found that adding pictures to educational nutrition pamphlets can increase the length of time a consumer gazes at nutrition labels and consequently lead to a higher likelihood of making healthy food choices.

However, studies also have revealed situations in which presenting pictures with verbal information is rather ineffective (Adaval and Wyer, 1998; Miller and Kahn, 2005; Taylor and

Thompson, 1982; Wyer and Hong, 2010; Wyer et al., 2008). For example, Unnava and Burnkrant (1991) showed that when verbal information is highly imagery-provoking, adding a product picture does not increase recall. Similarly, Adaval and Wyer (1998) found that when vacation information is described using an unordered list, the addition of pictures actually interferes with individuals' evaluations.

These studies indicate that researchers have not reached consensus on the effect of adding product pictures to verbal information (see Table 1 for a summary of extant literature on the effects of pictures). In the current study, we argue that product names and individuals' information processing styles moderate the effect of pictures in the restaurant industry.

2.2. Common descriptive names and positive picture effect

When comprehending verbal information such as dish names, people tend to construct mental images (Wyer et al., 2008), or try to visualize the dish based on its name (Rane, 2009). The probability of a consumer constructing mental images when reading words (e.g., a food name) is called imagery value. Different product names have different imagery values and can stimulate the imagination to a different degree (Lutz and Lutz, 1977). In most cases, ambiguous names stimulate the imagination more than common descriptive names. For instance, when reading the common descriptive name (e.g.: Peach Tart with Almond Crust), consumers can easily picture the dish in their minds since the name is straightforward. When reading the ambiguous name for the same classical peach tart (e.g.: Sunset Beach), however, consumers may find it more difficult to form mental pictures because the ambiguous name may cause them to imagine various images of the dessert.

Several studies reveal that the ability to integrate pictures and verbal information determines the effectiveness of images (Edell and Staelin, 1983; Lutz and Lutz, 1977; Unnava and Burnkrant, 1991; Van Rompay et al., 2010; Wyer et al., 2008). For example, Van Rompay et al. (2010) manipulated the pictures provided on hotel booking websites as either easy-to-integrate or difficult-to-integrate, and their results demonstrate that the fluent integration of pictures and verbal information determines the positive effect of adding a picture to the verbal information. Moreover, Edell and Staelin (1983) demonstrated that providing images associated with verbal information can lead to better brand recall than the ones dissociated from verbal information. As suggested by Wyer et al. (2008), when a mental image based on verbal information is congruent with a provided picture, adding the picture will have a positive impact on consumers' product evaluations. However, if the mental image based on verbal information is incongruent with the provided picture, the presence of that picture may decrease consumers' evaluations. Unnava and Burnkrant (1991) also suggested that pictures have a positive effect only when verbal information triggers a lower level of imagination. In other words, when people put less effort to elicit a visual image when processing the verbal information, adding pictures will result in a positive effect.

Since common descriptive names are typical and straightforward, we argue that they are less likely to trigger a high level of imagination. Consumers can easily visualize a food item using the food name as a framework to encode the visual information. The mental images they construct when they read common descriptive food names should be congruent with the pictures on the menu (Edell and Staelin, 1983). When consumers are able to integrate verbal and visual information into one modality, they are likely to express the positive attitudes towards the products (e.g., Heckler and Childers, 1992). We argue that presenting pictures leads to favorable consumers' attitudes and behavioral outcomes in the common descriptive names condition. Thus, we hypothesize:

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5108290>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5108290>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)