
Volume 7 | Issue 1

9-19-2022

Tourist Behaviors When Dining – Part Two

Joel Reynolds
DePaul University

Mary Jo Dolasinski
DePaul University

Chris Roberts
DePaul University

Follow this and additional works at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/ichrie_rr



Part of the [Food and Beverage Management Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Reynolds, Joel; Dolasinski, Mary Jo; and Roberts, Chris (2022) "Tourist Behaviors When Dining – Part Two," *ICHRIE Research Reports*: Vol. 7: Iss. 1, Article 2.

Available at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/ichrie_rr/vol7/iss1/2

This article is brought to you for free and open access by the International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education (ICHRIE). It has been accepted for inclusion in *ICHRIE Research Reports* by an authorized editor of DePaul University School of Hospitality Leadership. For more information, please contact rr@depaul.edu. The compilation of the journal issue is copyrighted by ICHRIE, but authors retain the copyright for their article.

Tourist Behaviors When Dining – Part Two

Joel Reynolds, Ph.D.
Mary Jo Dolasinski, Ph.D.
Chris Roberts, Ph.D.
DePaul University

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This series of three reports was developed to discuss tourist behaviors in three key areas of the hospitality industry: lodging, dining, and activities and events. A primary purpose was to provide insights from the user's perspective, as the majority of content comes from the provider's point of view. One paper focused on tourist's behaviors in lodging and another focused on tourist's behaviors in activities and events. This paper focused on tourist's dining behaviors. The goal was to provide valuable insights to assist practitioners in better understanding tourist's behaviors and to develop strategies to provide the best experience possible.

INTRODUCTION

Eating is an essential behavior to sustain life. At its core, dining is eating. Our behavior when dining is influenced by various factors such as the location of the dining, the company with us, and the dining setting. There are also numerous other factors that dictate our eating behaviors. There are essentially three main settings for dining: 1) in our home; 2) in our local community; and 3) while traveling away from home. Previous research has shown that dining is one of the main activities' tourists participate in while traveling (Vu, Li, Law, & Zhang, 2019).

Roberts, Shea, and Johanson (2018) proposed that there are specific steps that occur depending on the dining location. They determined that “when we eat at home, we take on the multiple roles of [1] identifying the food we wish to eat, [2] securing the desired provisions, [3] equipping our kitchens with cooking and food storage facilities such as ovens, microwaves, sinks, refrigerators, cupboards, and pantries, [4] providing tools such as pans, plate ware, and utensils, and [5] learning some basic culinary skills. We then [6] produce the meal and [7] consume it. After eating, we [8] clean everything and [9] store unused portions. When we eat away from home, either in our local community or while traveling afar, we only engage in two of these functions: [1] identifying the food we wish to eat and [7] consuming it.” This illustration shows the difference in degrees of involvement in the actual preparation and cooking process (when at home) versus simply ordering and eating the food (while away from home). Yet it does not capture the differences in behavior of what we eat and how we eat it when dining at these varied locations. The following sections discuss the differences in dining behaviors, comparing at home dining to away from home dining (either local community or traveling to a destination).

The Dining Location

Our behaviors will be different if we are eating at home versus eating away from home. When we are eating at home, we are comfortable in our environment and have privacy to dress however we like. For example, if we choose, we could have dinner while wearing pajamas. However, when eating away from home, social norms tell us that wearing pajamas out to eat is not acceptable. There is a certain level of dress code that is required for dining out. The concept of a dress code is further explained by the location where the dining is occurring. For example, we may be on a trip to the beach and decide to get a slice of pizza after swimming in the ocean. In this situation, the location dictates the behavior of wearing swim apparel at a dining operation is acceptable. Yet, in a different location such as in a city, this bathing apparel would not be acceptable.

Another difference in dining behavior and social norms are the manners which we display when we are eating. At home, we may be much more casual in our dining etiquette. We may drink juice straight from the bottle or eat ice cream directly from the carton. Additionally, at home we can consume our meals in various locations, such as the dining room table, the kitchen counter, or the living room couch. In contrast, when we are dining outside of the home, we tend to follow socially acceptable dining etiquette such as using the correct utensils, sitting at a table to eat, and not making unappealing eating noises (like slurping pasta noodles or gulping soup from the bowl).

An additional point to consider when discussing dining behavior is the culture and cuisine of the destination where we are dining. There can potentially be a dramatic difference

between the culture of a destination where we are dining while traveling and our dining at home culture. Consider this: when traveling, we must still eat but we no longer have the privacy and facilities of our own home. We may be in a location with a unique cuisine that we cannot get at home. For example, we might be traveling to New England and wish to experience a lobster roll or clam chowder, prepared in the manner of the locals. Though we might be able to prepare these dishes in our homes, the experience of being at the destination makes it different. We often are just not able to replicate that difference.

The Company We Keep

Research has shown that customers' dining behaviors tend to make restaurant selections to satisfy pleasures through experiential socialization among other factors (Vu, Li, Law, & Zhang, 2019). The restaurant a guest selects is often based on the desire to interact with others as well as immerse in an authentic experience. It is certainly important to consider the reason for the dining experience. Is it for business or leisure? With whom are we dining? Answers to these questions will most certainly have an effect on our dining behavior. When we are dining in a business setting, we will act a certain way. For example, we may order foods that will not give us bad breath (garlicy or pungent flavors), or perhaps we will follow others and order similar foods to maintain the status quo.

In contrast, when we are dining in a leisure setting, we may order foods that we would not typically order in a business setting or even make for ourselves at home. This can also be true of the quantity of food that we might order in various situations. We might feel inclined to order less or smaller portions with professional colleagues, yet in a leisure setting we might order more than we would normally consume in the privacy of our own home.

There is another dimension of dining behavior to consider when traveling away from home that is not present in local community dining. While traveling to a destination, we are much less likely to know others at the destination. This is important to note because we often consider ourselves strangers while dining at a distant destination. Thus, our inhibitions and dining behaviors will be potentially lower due to our belief that no one we know is watching. Therefore, when dining at a distant destination, we might 'act out' or behave in a manner that we normally would not if we were at home or in our local community. For example, we might indulge in excess alcohol, be more adventurous in our cuisine selection, order large portions of food, or just be more willing to be extraverted. After all, no one we know is watching!

Our dining behavior could be different due to the type of occasion. For example, we would act differently when we are simply eating in the privacy of our own home, but if we are dining out for a special occasion or honoring a special moment in our lives, such as an anniversary or a birthday, we will act differently. Many people will decide to gather at a restaurant to celebrate these special occasions. In this circumstance, the food becomes less important and the experience becomes more about the celebration.

Finally, we need to consider the nationality and culture of our fellow diners. Vu, et al. (2019) stated, "The dining behaviors of tourists are complex and varied across different nationalities and cultures" (p. 166). That is, different cultures and countries have different cultural norms pertaining to dining behaviors. For example, in some countries it is only acceptable to eat with the right hand. Another example of differing dining behavior dependent on culture would be offering to split the bill at the end of the meal. This is considered highly rude in some cultures and perfectly acceptable in others.

THE DINING SETTING

The last main factor influencing our dining behavior is the actual dining setting itself. As previously mentioned, there are dramatic differences in the way we behave in the privacy of our own homes compared to eating outside of the home (either locally or traveling). At home, we are able to control the amount of time it takes to prepare the meal and consume it. There are different factors that may influence our at-home dining behaviors. These differences may include a lack of specialized equipment needed to prepare a particular dish. An example of this could be the desire to have slow smoked barbeque ribs, but we do not have a smoker in our home. In this case we would have to travel to a restaurant specializing in this cuisine. Another difference would be our skill level as a cook. Though we may consider ourselves a good cook, many do not possess the skill or knowledge to create restaurant quality cuisine. Consider this: we may be hungry for sushi but do not have the skill level needed to create a sushi roll. We would have to go to a sushi restaurant to enjoy this cuisine.

An advantage of dining behavior in the home is the ability to customize our meal as much as desired. In a restaurant, there is only so much customization that is allowed or socially acceptable. Cooks often feel ownership of their menu items and do not like customers asking to modify it too much because it changes the nature of the offering. So while that adjustment to a menu item may make the meal perfect to the diner, the ingredient may not be available or the change could alter that taste in unpleasant ways.

In any discussion of dining behavior, price should be considered as a factor. When dining at home, the price of the dining experience is limited to the cost of the food purchased. This tends to be significantly less costly than eating away while traveling. Typically, the price of food in a restaurant depends of the type of service and quality of the food. With this in mind, the type of restaurant plays a factor in how we behave. Restaurants can be classified in numerous ways, such as by the level of service or by the type of cuisine. We would behave differently at a quick-service restaurant such as a food truck or fast food, in which we would act casually and not dressed formally for the dining experience. Yet, at the other end of the spectrum with fine dining, we would act in a different manner, typically much more formal with our attire and the eating manners we display. Thus, the level of service often dictates the social behavior on display. We would not yell across the restaurant to another guest at a high-end establishment, but this could be acceptable at a food truck in which the dining room is outside. Similarly, it is certainly acceptable to bring a baby to a family style sit-down restaurant; however, it is not encouraged to bring a baby to a fine dining restaurant. The nature of the dining atmosphere and our social norms tell us that we should not disturb other guests while they are dining. A crying baby or rowdy children would indeed disturb others.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

Managers should be mindful that when consumers are dining out there is an expected level of service depending on the type of operation. Social norms play a role in the dining experience; therefore, management should ensure staff are trained on proper etiquette expectations and behaviors for the level of the service provided. Similarly, proprietors must be

aware of cultural expectations, ensuring staff are aware of various behaviors that contribute to cultural norms in a specific area. Guaranteeing that staff understand the various types of meetings and dining room styles is important to ensure the appropriate level of interaction with the customer.

CONCLUSION

Looking back in history, humans have travelled for various reasons that include religious pilgrimages to current day adventures. Traveling introduced the need for places to sleep, eat, and be entertained. When eating out, several factors need to be considered including the location of the dining facility, with whom patrons are dining, and the dining setting. These physical and social factors are drivers of behavior. Consistent throughout the patron's experience is that their behavior is often different when travelling versus being at home. Finally, with disruptors such as the technology explosion and the 2020-2022 pandemic, future research will need to explore changes in customer expectations and behaviors to inform the future of hospitality and tourism practices and research.

REFERENCES

- Roberts, C., Shea, L., & Johanson, M. (2018). Advancing a Model of Dining. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 42(5), 675-679.
- Vu, H. Q., Li, G., Law, R., & Zhang, Y. (2019). Exploring Tourist Dining Preferences Based on Restaurant Reviews. *Journal of Travel Research*, 58(1), 149-167.