Enhancing the Dining Experience through Emotional Tableware Design

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**ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** At present, the tableware used represents the image of the restaurant as it is able to create a visual attraction or known as ‘visual synchronisation’ with food. Emotional tableware design is able to influence the behaviour of people through the dining experience. This is due to the attractive visual design of the tableware which will have an indirect influence on the aroma and taste of the cuisine being presented as well as the surrounding ambience.

**Methodology:** The three levels of design theory which include visceral, behavioural and reflective play a significant role in providing an impact or having a great influence on the fine dining experience. Consequently, amplifying the integration of senses, interaction and response towards emotions.

**Findings:** An emotional tableware design will lead to a more positive experience. This positive experience will elevate positive emotions through its functionality, convenience and satisfaction. A tableware designer is able to evoke such emotions as the emotional design has no specific rules or clear protocol. The positive experience that is emotionally inspired will lead to a better life experience or make life more interesting.

**Implications:** The use of an emotional tableware design by chefs in fine dining has elevated the dining experience to a whole new level which amplifies the deep impact that this concept has on the world of tableware design.

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Introduction

By having meals together, it will help develop healthy eating habits while providing the golden opportunity to spend quality time with loved ones especially family members. In this fast-paced world we live in today, having meals together will strengthen the bonds with loved ones. In addition, this habit of dining together will have a tremendous positive impact on the physical condition as well as the psychological state of mind of people. The more frequently people dine together with their loved ones, the happier and more satisfied they will feel as it serves an opportunity to establish a connection with others through establishing open communication. These positive effects are not possible if an individual dines alone as he will feel disconnected from others. According to a study conducted by the Oxford University, it was found that 76% of respondents stated that dining together with others is clearly the best way to get to know other people.

Fine dining provides ample time to diners to thoroughly savour their meals at leisure. Fine dining usually comprises 5 to 7 courses. It normally begins with an appetiser and ends with a dessert. The number of courses presented in fine dining will provide the diners with the experience of savouring the food while interacting with their loved ones. The fine dining experience presents the opportunity to communicate with others while spending quality time with loved ones. This will lead to better digestion which will increase the process of hydration. Besides that, weight control and maintenance will not pose a problem as the portion of each course is relatively small.

It is a well-known fact that unhealthy eating habits will lead to numerous health problems. Other leading factors include high stress levels and an unhealthy lifestyle which revolves around a hectic and busy life. All of these factors will lead to adverse effects that will lead to a poor quality of life. Moreover, the short-term effects include developing various diseases which could lead to a premature death in the end. Nowadays, it is apparent that the act of dining together is no longer practised. Some of the causes include a demanding career and lack of prioritisation of quality time with loved ones. Besides that, some people in this modern era appear to believe that dining together is a tiresome and annoying chore as they prioritise their work over quality time with loved ones. According to Robin Fox, an anthropologist from the University of New Jersey, the practice of dining together with loved ones will help create a polite society that is more cultured and refined.

Clearly, it is crucial to promote the fine dining experience for all to gain the various positive effects by inculcating healthy eating habits of consuming more fruits, vegetables and other nutritious foods while avoiding processed and unhealthy foods. Besides the consumption of healthy foods, people will also form a stronger bond with their loved ones when they frequently dine together. Moreover, other positive effects include developing the ability to socialise and improving communication skills which will have a significant impact on the mental and physical condition of people in the long run.

Emotional Tableware Design Elevates the Fine Dining Experience to Great Heights

In the past, books on social and dining etiquette have emphasised the use of white porcelain tableware to showcase the creativity of a certain cuisine. However, in the beginning of the new millennium many high-end restaurants did not take the risk of showcasing their cuisine in an artistic manner. Moreover, the current trend is not to use white porcelain tableware in high-end dining establishments. This is in line with the practice of the majority of chefs in the gastronomic world today.

The food revolution inspired by Jamie Oliver in his book “Jamie Oliver’s Kitchen” has inspired many people and evoked an interest to begin consuming healthier foods. Chefs have also jumped on the bandwagon by being more creative in their food presentation. The use of the appropriate tableware is seen as an extension of the delicious food being presented. The delicious cuisine is akin to an artist’s canvas that has its own unique message. These days, the fine dining experience has been truly elevated to new heights as it is no longer the act of merely consuming delicious food but a way of delving into the world of the culinary arts.
There are numerous contributing factors that affect the fine dining experience and one of them is the use of tableware design in its cuisine. The use of ceramic in tableware plays an important role in the visual presentation. Before a meal is consumed, it must first tantalise the other senses namely the visual senses and then the aroma, taste and so forth. The texture and colour are important elements in the presentation of the food and will affect how the food will be interpreted by the diners. The other factors such as a cosy ambience, soothing background music and luxurious décor of the restaurant will add more value that will lead to a better dining experience. At present, artistic elements are also reflected in the way the cuisine is presented. From an objective perspective, an individual will use all of his senses such as sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch while dining. All of these senses will be stimulated and will give a response during the dining experience and interacting with others.

The Oxford Dictionary of Current English (1986) stated that emotions are feelings that are evoked internally particularly from a mental or instinctive aspect and are represented as love, anger, fear and happiness. From a psychological perspective, emotions are the medium which reacts physically from sensitivities due to internal and external (social) feelings. External influences will evoke a reaction in the mind or mental state. A passive mind normally accepts or receives any stimuli. When the mind begins to show a reaction to the feelings being experienced, this is referred to as emotions.

Tableware is the medium used to connect the diners with the food being presented. Moreover, the tableware is used to transfer or share food with others. According to a study in the journal Flavour, it is stated that the exploration of the use of different tableware will evoke a variety of responses towards the various cuisine being presented. However, the use of inappropriate or unsuitable tableware will adversely affect the dining experience and behaviour of the respective diners. Clearly, the style and pattern of communication will be further improved and also stimulate the senses with the use of emotional tableware design. Hence, it is crucial that emotional tableware design be produced as it is able to lead to a better dining experience as well as leave lasting indelible memories.

**Emotional Tableware Design Leads to a Refined Fine Dining Experience**

Although the emotional design theory has been established by several different experts there is still one striking similarity which is the experience created as a result of the emotional connection towards a product. Based on Norman’s Three Levels of Design, there are three stages of processing emotions related to the product design which have an influence on the fine dining experience.

**The Visceral Level**

At this level, it represents the aesthetic design which comprises sight, touch and hearing as well as the ability of using the product in question. The use of certain elements and design principle in the creation of the product will leave an indelible impression on the user of the said product. At this particular stage, emotions will be evoked upon seeing the visual representation of the respective product. Moreover, at this phase the aesthetic values of the product must surpass the emotions being evoked. However, failure in evoking a positive emotional reaction of a product will lead to an undesirable consequence where the product will be left unsold and unused.

Generally, an attractive visual representation of a product or aesthetic value will only heighten the positive emotional response. This is a result of the instincts that have evoked certain emotions which include comfort, excitement and safety.

The instinctual feelings will be reflected in the use of the chosen tableware design by the chefs to present their cuisine. A positive emotional response will be evoked through the use of appropriate design, colour and also texture of the food and also the tableware design.
Incorporating Food Features into the Shape of the Tableware

Lillian Torlen is an artist from Norway who uses ceramic in her work and has created ceramic products inspired by the workplace environment. She has created a series of tableware collection known as ADO’s or "Annoyingly Dependent Objects". The design is not smooth and need supporting material to make it stable. Torlen believes that tableware functions as a supportive structure for food. Her tableware design is a combination of plates and bowls. It has a multi-functional purpose as it saves space and fits the theme of fine dining as well as the décor of the restaurant which focuses on the natural environment. This will stimulate the visual senses during the dining experience while also heightening the sense of taste.

Tableware as Sensorial Stimuli

She has also designed cutlery which will promote a higher level of engagement with the food being presented. “It will take more time to eat if the spoon used is too heavy,” she explains. “It will also require more time to eat if the surface is unsuitable as this will make people to eat slowly and savour the dining process,” she elaborates. This is clearly a unique design aimed to create a whole different experience and emotional excitement. Nowadays, cutlery is mostly made of stainless steel. However, the taste of the food being consumed is dependent not just upon the ingredients of the meal in question but also the cutlery being used. The taste of soup will have a different taste depending on what the cutlery is made of such as stainless steel, silver or gold.
Improve Dining Experiences with Interactive Design Based on the Behaviour Level

At this stage, the tableware designers need to take into account the function and purpose of the product being created. It is important to incorporate many factors which include: usability, convenience, accessibility, interactive, as well as experience of the user. An interactive design will attract the user to approach and interact with the product. Hence, engaging the user will lead to a better and positive experience.

Will Fazackerley, a graduate of the Royal College of Art, has designed a series of experimental tableware collection “to evoke happiness and fulfil the need for edible excitement”. He has designed tableware which can be licked. Clearly, his tableware is a fresh take on the traditional idea of conservative tableware available at present. His tableware design incorporates the element of fun to food and has managed to attract the attention of diners to heighten their senses during the dining experience.

Figure 3: The Bowl Design experiment

Figure 4 and 5. Lick The piece is inspired by the act of licking the plate at the end of a meal or the spoon from a mixing bowl

Lick has been specially designed for foods in different shapes such as mousse, risotto, ganache and ice-cream. The gently curved design reflects the action of licking at the end of a meal. According to Fazackerley, “Lick is a set of tools which present excitement to the experience of eating. Licking from a plate or a spoon is a fun and exciting pastime although it is not in line with conventional dining etiquette.”

“Lick was designed to encourage an active and sensual behaviour – this tableware is made of organic stone and was inspired by the simple pleasures in life,” explains Fazackerley. He also elaborates that his experimental tableware collection also aims to tear down social barriers as it promotes the act of licking as just one of the simple guilt-free pleasures in life which brings comfort and happiness to the dining experience.

Improve Dining Experiences with Narrative Design Based on the Reflective Level
At this level, we will begin to interpret and comprehend certain aspects which include viewing the world and ponder upon self-reflection. This self-reflection phase has been determined upon execution or implementation as it encompasses two different levels. Through the judgement process, we do not take into account both types of automatic behaviour and emotional effects. The reflective design is defined as the overall or general overview of a product design. The designer will consider various aspects which include: the message being conveyed, the cultural aspect, the meaning of the product and the factor that will make it memorable or leave a distinctive mark. In this respect, chefs play an integral role in choosing the most appropriate tableware to convey a certain message to the diners. The tableware being chosen will create a whole new fine dining experience which will make it even more interesting. The food being presented using attractive and appropriate tableware will have its own impact on the dining experience to make it truly special and memorable.

Molecular gastronomy cuisine has since garnered a lot of attention the past few years. The main factor is the spectacular and tantalising preparation that reflects a sense of innovation and aesthetic values. Each molecular cuisine presents a wonderfully novel experience and is a delight to the senses particularly the visual senses.

Figure 6. Handcrafted artisan cheese selection served with chef signature condiment. Kayu Puti of St Regis

Figure 7. Japanese inspired crème brulee with pineapple, strawberry compote and coconut crumble. Kayu Puti of St Regis
Although innovation is created through the tantalising meal being served, the choice of tableware to present the dish cannot simply be ignored as it will further highlight the exquisite meal being presented. The depiction of a romantic meal as shown above has cleverly utilised the texture of the tableware to present a connection with nature or natural environment. Thus, it is evident that the use of the appropriate tableware design will lead to a more emotional response and create a different yet wonderful ambience in the fine dining experience.

**Conclusion**

An emotional tableware design is an important element in generating ideas in product design. It can help to establish a connection with the product through the servicing system or personal experience. An emotional tableware design will lead to a more positive experience. This positive experience will elevate positive emotions through its functionality, convenience and satisfaction. A tableware designer is able to evoke such emotions as the emotional design has no specific rules or clear protocol. The positive experience that is emotionally inspired will lead to a better life experience or make life more interesting. The use of an emotional tableware design by chefs in fine dining has elevated the dining experience to a whole new level which amplifies the deep impact that this concept has on the world of tableware design.

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