

Double-Servicescape for Enhancing Social Capital —A Case of Chinese Tea Restaurant—

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【Abstract】 This paper explores how the Chinese tea restaurant's service structure satisfies the customers. A Chinese tea restaurant consists of two parts, one is restaurant part where serves food, and the other is tea room part with entertainments. This means Chinese tea restaurants contain two servicescapes under one management body. We name it “double-servicescape.” We have conducted interviews to the managers and questionnaires to the customers in Chongqing, China. We have found that the double-servicescape of Chinese tea restaurants fulfills the manager needs, i.e., more sales, and the customer needs, i.e., nurturing social capitals called Guanxi among their friends and co-workers.

【Keywords】 Double-servicescape, Chinese tea restaurant, Social capital, Guanxi

1. Introduction

Teahouse is a traditional service industry, with thousands of year history in China. In particular, in the past three decades, along with the development of the economy of China, the improvement of living standards and the increase of leisure time, the teahouse industry in China has been prospering. The total number of teahouses in China has become 100,000, and its economic output has reached about 300 billion Yuan. Among a variety of teahouses, a special type of teahouse, named “tea restaurant” that consists of a restaurant part and a tea room part, is growing up fast recently, almost one-third of 100,000 teahouses are the tea restaurants. As shown in Fig. 1, customers can enjoy meals in the restaurant (see the left photo), tea drinks and other entrainments such as chess at the same table in the tea room (see the right photo).



Fig 1: A restaurant service (left) and a tea service (right) in one Chinese tea restaurant

2. Literature review

The earliest form of teahouse was appeared in Jin Dynast (Xiuming, 1995). The teahouse appeared because the merchant and residents need a social space to exchange information. Chinese people like to go to teahouses to have tea. It is a lifestyle (Qingrong, 2007). Amusement activities appeared in teahouse from Song Dynasty, and gambling activities come into teahouses from Qing Dynasty. The leisure activities include reading newspapers and playing Chinese chess or mahjong. The main reason people go to teahouse is to meet people and talk to people (Xiuming, 1995). Chinese people usually go to teahouse to promote Guanxi or build a new Guanxi (Qingrong, 2007). Note that sociologists have linked Guanxi with the concept of social capital (Wikipedia:Guanxi).

In the paper, we propose the concept of double-servicescape. Servicescape is the environment in which the

services are assembled and in which the sellers and customers interact, combined with tangible commodities that facilitate performance or communication of service (Bitner, 1992). In one Chinese tea restaurant, there are two kinds of servicescapes, We name the two combined servicescapes as a double-servicescape. It has five features: (1) It exists in one facility; (2) It is belonged to one management body; (3) Customers can pay cash at one single cashier; (4) The employees of the two services are common. (5) Customers can consume one service or both at their own will.

We indicate in the followings that the double-servicescape of Chinese tea restaurants has clear value for both of the customers and the managers.

3. Research methodology

From November 22th to 29th, 2013, 115 questionnaires and 6 interviews were conducted at tea restaurants in Chongqing, China (Table 1). Note that Chongqing is one of the old tea cities in China. The people in Chongqing love to drink tea. In fact, there are many teahouses in Chongqing, on a hundreds of meters of the main street.

Table 1: Data collection in Chongqing, China

Tea restaurants	Questionnaires	Interviewees	
		Managers	Employees
Shui Shi Jian	48	1	1
Long Men Yu Fu	22	1	1
Shui Shi Jian	32	1	1
other restaurants	13	0	0

4. Research findings

4.1 Questionnaires analysis results

By analyzing the questionnaire data, we found that families are only 7%, and most of them are friends and co-workers (Table 2). That indicates that the tea restaurant is the place mainly for friends and co-workers to communicate for developing mutual understanding and relations (1). This means that the tea restaurants are important places for Chinese people to cultivate good relationships to others in the society, namely, to nurture Guanxi.

Table 2: Summary statistics of the questionnaires

Characteristics	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	59	51
	Female	56	49
Age	10-30	41	36
	31-50	37	32
	Over 50	37	32
Customers' relationship	Family	8	7
	Friends	79	69
	Co-worker	28	24
Numbers of customers	1-2	47	41
	3	32	28
	Over 3	36	31
Duration time	1 hour	12	11
	2-3 hours	75	65
	Over 3	28	24
Consume patterns	Food	15	13
	Amusement	40	35
	Food & amusement	60	52

Table 3: Comparison between weekends and weekdays

Characteristics	Category	Weekends		Weekdays	
		N	%	N	%
Gender	Male	11	47	48	52
	Female	12	53	44	48
Age	10-30	7	30	34	37
	31-50	9	40	28	30
	Over 50	7	30	30	33
Customers' relationship	Family	2	9	6	7
	Friends	7	30	72	78
	Co-worker	14	61	14	15
Number of customers	1-2	12	52	35	38
	3	7	31	25	27
	Over 3	4	17	32	35
Duration time	1 hour	5	22	7	8
	2-3 hours	16	69	59	64
	Over 3 hours	2	9	26	28

Very interestingly, we found that friends are more than co-workers in weekdays, but co-workers are more than friends in weekends (Table 3). It could be interpreted that the nurture of the Guanxi in the workplace is very important for career development, and thus people go to the tea restaurants even in weekends as after-hours business contacts.

Furthermore, the questionnaire analysis showed that most of the customers spend long time in tea restaurant. The customers over the half stayed at the tea restaurants more than three hours (Table 2). There could be two reasons. According to the history of teahouse, drinking tea in teahouse is a traditional lifestyle. People like tea, especially drinking tea in teahouses. Some even stay one day there. The other reason is gambles such as chess and mahjong, which appeared in teahouse since Qing Dynasty and fully meet with the demands of customers.

In the questionnaire, we also asked people about the value of tea restaurants. The customers showed high satisfaction with the conversations with the managers and employees. In the tea restaurant, the employees are the same in the restaurant part and tea room part. This enables the employees to give the customers good quality of services with their service history both in the restaurants part and the tea room part. This continuity of service exhibits another advantage of double-servicescape.

4.2 Interviews analysis results

The managers and employees in the three tea restaurants were interviewed. The analysis of the interviews supported the value of double-servicescape identified in the analysis of questionnaires. In particular:

- One manager said that one of the reasons she runs her tea restaurant is to meet the customers' long duration time demand. She also confirmed that it contributes to the increase of sales.
- One employee said that one of the reasons that the customers come to tea restaurants is to enjoy the conversation with the employees and managers.

Note that O'Neill (1992) states that the longer the customers stay in a leisure facility, the more money they will spend.

5. A theoretical model

A theoretical model we obtained is shown in Fig 2. The double-servicescape of Chinese tea restaurants results in long duration stay and convenience, because both of meal service and entertainment service are packed into one unified service at a Chinese tea restaurant. The long duration stay assures more sales for the managers of the tea restaurants, and the convenience nurtures Guanxi among the customers. These are the reason the Chinese tea restaurants have become popular in China recently.

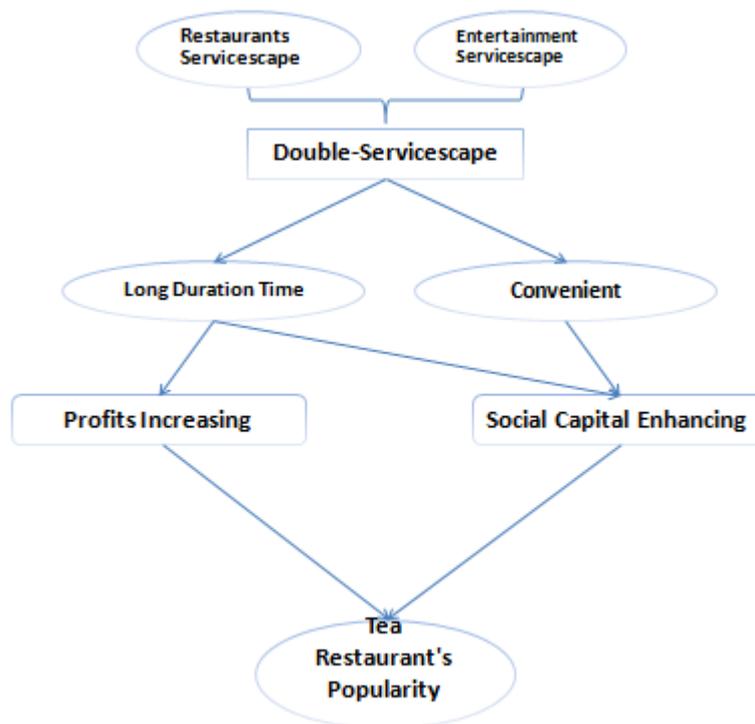


Fig 2: A theoretical model of double-servicescape in Chinese tea restaurants

6. Summary

Our research purpose is to find out why Chinese tea restaurants have become so popular recently. It is due to the double-servicescape of the tea restaurants, which satisfies the manager needs, i.e., more sales, and the customer needs, i.e., nurturing Guanxi among their friends and co-workers.

Note

(1) We guess that families could meet easily at home, and it is unnecessary to go to the tea restaurants so often.

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