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Two, Four, Six, Eight, How Many Ingredients Do You Appreciate? An Exploration of Cocktail Ingredients

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Two studies examine the effect of cocktail menu description on consumer order intention. Findings show that consumers are more likely to order a cocktail with a greater number of ingredients and the effect is driven by perceptions of beverage complexity and premiumness.

Introduction
A restaurant menu acts as the first point of communication between a restaurant and its customers. This sales tool provides the establishment with a crucial opportunity to convey information such as price, preparation, and ingredients before verbal communication with employees even begins. In addition to communicating information about the foodservice establishment, attributes of the menu can significantly impact consumer choices (Amsteus, Liljegren, Markovic, & Månsson 2016). Despite extant research examining how menu descriptions influence choice of food menu items, the impact of this sales tool in terms of beverages remains underexplored.

This area of research is of particular importance in the context of alcoholic beverages in the form of cocktails, where the description of the beverage is often formulated by the establishment and its management. One attribute that has not received attention is the number of ingredients included in the item description. For example, a simple cocktail like a Moscow Mule, the beverage description could say “vodka, lime juice, and ginger beer” or it could list all the beverage ingredients including the cubed ice and lime wedge. We propose, as the number of ingredients listed increases, the perceived complexity of the beverage also increases. Menu description complexity has been found to increase consumer evaluations (McCall & Lynn 2008) and value perceptions (Shoemaker, Dawson, & Johnson 2005). Thus, as beverages are perceived as being more complex, there is a greater opportunity for value creation leading to perceptions of premiumness. Within this context, premiumness refers to attributes such as consumers’ willingness to pay, product uniqueness, and quality (Velasco & Spence 2019). In turn, as there is increasingly a greater consumer demand for premium products (Velasco & Spence 2019), a higher number of ingredients should result in greater order intentions.

In sum, this research examines the underexplored area of cocktail ingredient menu descriptions, specifically, the effect of the number of ingredients listed in a cocktail description on consumer order intentions. We propose that consumers are more likely to order a cocktail with a greater number of ingredients and this effect is mediated by the perceived complexity and premiumness of the cocktail. Two online studies were conducted to examine our predictions.

Methodology

Study 1
Study 1 consisted of a single factor between-subjects design with two experimental conditions (number of ingredients: low vs. high). One-hundred and twenty-five participants completed the online study through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) in exchange for monetary compensation. Participants were randomly assigned to either the low number of ingredients or high number of ingredients condition. In both conditions, an image of a standard cocktail menu description was provided for “Cocktail XYZ”, which included the list of either three (low) or six (high) ingredients. After reviewing the menu description, participants were asked about their order intention using a two-item scale (Lefebvre & Orlowski 2018), “How likely are you to order this beverage?” (1 = not at all likely, 7 = very likely) and, “I am willing to try this beverage” (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) (r = .79). Demographic questions concluded the study questionnaire.

Study 2
Study 2 examined the underlying mechanism of the effect of the number of cocktail ingredients on consumer order intentions. A single factor design with two experimental conditions (number of ingredients: low vs. high) was conducted. Two-hundred and forty-nine participants completed the study through MTurk. Similar to Study 1, participants were randomly assigned to review a menu description of “ABC Cocktail.” In the low number of ingredients condition, participants were shown four ingredients and in the high number of ingredients condition eight ingredients were listed. Following the stimuli, participants were asked the two order intention measures from Study
1, followed by the complexity measures (“How would you rate the complexity of this beverage?”; 1 = very simple, 7 = very complex) and perceived premiumness measures (“How would you rate the premiumness of the beverage?”; 1 = low end, 7 = high end). Demographic questions completed the study.

Results

Study 1

The results of an independent samples t-test revealed that participants were significantly more likely to order the cocktail when it had six ingredients listed (M_{ingredients} = 4.78), than when only three ingredients were listed (M_{ingredients} = 3.86; t(123) = -2.93, p = .004). The results provide support for our proposed main effect of the number of ingredients on order intentions.

Study 2

To assess the underlying serial medial model, PROCESS model 6 with 5000 bootstrap samples was used (v3; Hayes 2017). Results supported the predicted serial mediation, where the number of ingredients (0 = low, 1 = high) influenced the complexity of the beverage (a = .76, p < .001), which in turn positively influenced perceptions of premiumness (d = .38, p < .001), and the perception of premiumness had a significantly positive effect on order intention (b = .605, p < .001). The serial indirect effect was significant (95% CI from .074 to .303), while the direct effect became nonsignificant. Further, the indirect effects involving the individual mediators were nonsignificant. Thus, we find support for full serial mediation as predicted.

Discussion

The results of two studies find support for the effect of the number of listed cocktail ingredients on order intentions through perceived complexity and perceived premiumness. The findings add to the limited literature on the influence of menu descriptions within the context of alcoholic beverages. As menu descriptions, particularly of cocktail menu items, can be designed in a variety of forms, an understanding of how order intentions can be influenced has particular implications for restaurateurs and marketers.

References


