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Kogi Truck Culture

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With featured spreads on the BBC and in the *New York Times*, and *Newsweek*, the Los Angeles-based Kogi Korean Taco Truck's fame has certainly spread beyond the limits of Southern California. Dubbed "America's First Viral Eatery" by *Newsweek* (Romano, 2009), excitement has hardly dimmed since its "opening" in November of 2008. The truck's number of Twitter followers was reaching nearly 76,000 as of October 7, 2010. Founded by Mark Manguera, Caroline Shin-Manguera, and Chef Roy Choi, the Kogi Truck cuisine is a fusion of Mexican eats with a Korean flair. Chef Choi recounts how "these cultures—Mexican and Korean—really form the foundation of this city … Kogi is my representation of L.A. in a single bite" (Romano, 2009). With a current fleet of four trucks (named Roja, Azul, Verde, and Naranja) devoted followers rely on Twitter and the Web to track the trucks' locations.

"Kogi," meaning "meat" in Korean, is certainly a reflection of what they serve most. Their popular menu items feature tacos and burritos stuffed with Korean BBQ short rib or Korean spicy pork. According to Ben Bergman of National Public Radio, the most well liked entrée consists of the "short rib taco stuffed with marinated beef and topped off with lettuce, cabbage chili salsa and cilantro relish" (Bergman, 2009). But it is not simply the unique combination of flavors that attracts curious customers, but also the prices. As Chef Choi puts it, "Our vinaigrette has 14 ingredients, our marinade has 20 ingredients, our meats are all natural meats … And we sell it for $2" (Bergman, 2009). There are often rotating specials from week to week, which the menu will not explicitly mention. The menu thus remains the same, with a listing under "Chef's Specials" saying "Black Jack Quesadilla and more, just ask…." The only way to directly know of these specials is either to check the website or blog at http://kogibbq.com, the Twitter feed, or to ask the person who takes food orders.

Twitter messages usually update the trucks' locations, whether items/trucks have been sold out, specials, or when there is no line. An example for a location feed, sent on February 12 at 8:51 am, is "LUNCH RUUUN! 12-3PM: *ROJA@UCLA (Gayley & Charles E Young Dr.); VERDE@Market Lofts (645 W. 9th)." Another message on February 10 at 7:36 pm read "Roja in North Hollywood no line. Try our combo deal or our tress [sic] leches." Followers can subsequently use some of these updates to gauge whether they would like to make the trek to a nearby truck.

Gearing Up to Examine the Kogi Information Flow

The popularity of food trucks, with their colorful and edgy designs, catchy names, fusion-style cuisines, and utilization of current social media outlets, is a recent craze (as opposed to being branded a shady street vendor with dubious credentials), and this particular theme has yet to be studied extensively. The

current study should be noted at the outset as preliminary, and more study is needed to explore issues further. Studies on information-seeking behavior have focused largely on professional occupations such as scientists, engineers, journalists, and so forth, as well as roles such as students and gatekeepers (Case, 2007, p. 251). Julien and Duggan (2000) have found that the most common user group studied in the field of information behavior is that of academic groups such as students or scholars (arguably due to convenience sampling), which from 1984 to 1998 comprised 38% of user groups analyzed during that period (p. 306). This paper departs from these earlier studies through its focus on consumers and their behaviors, and distinguishes between gatekeepers and non-gatekeepers.

A number of studies on queue culture (Mann, 1969; Larson, 1987; Baker & Cameron, 1996) have focused on topics such as tension management and how queues exhibit characteristics as a social system. Former Harvard University professor Dr. Leon Mann (1969) points out that "behavior in queues is a function of many variables: kind and length of queue; the importance of inputs and the value of the commodity; cultural and subcultural differences in respect for time, order, and the rights of others; and individual differences in such personality characteristics as aggressiveness and assertiveness" (p. 352). While each individual contributes to the culture of the queue, and the queue in turn impacts each individual, my unit of study is more upon clusters of people and their interactions with one another. Indeed, while in line, one may experience what Dr. Mann calls "manipulation of the system itself to blend with the environment ... [in which] the queue, rather than a single file of people, consisted of numerous knots of people, two and three abreast, who sat [or stood] side by side to facilitate efficient communication and social interaction" (p. 351). Moreover, the queue as a whole demonstrated an awareness of space by being situated to the right of the sidewalk, closest to the curb in anticipation of the truck's arrival. The observations discussed here focus more on these "knots of people" (the "micro") in the queue and less on queues as a giant social system (the "macro"). This is to place in the foreground the exploration into the role of gatekeepers in a food truck line, and delve more into models for individual "profiles."

Professor Hari Nath Prasad (1992), head of the Department of Library & Information Science in Banaras Hindu University, has expressed information-seeking behavior as "the integrative utilization of the three basic resources: (i) people, (ii) information, and (iii) system. [Furthermore] It can be said that the behaviour which yields the highest information satisfaction is the best" (p. 40). In the Kogi line, asking interpersonal sources (friends, family, and other on-hand social contacts) seems to have yielded the highest information satisfaction. We must keep in mind, however, that information-seeking behavior is highly dependent on the individual's information environment which includes: the individual's background and traits, type of information needs occurring,

information providers on hand, information providers' capacity for response, hurdles between information provider and seeker, and satisfaction level of individual when presented with at least one possible information provider for response (Chen, 1982, p. 205, as cited in Prasad, 1992, pp. 42-43). As previously noted, many different factors come into play with regards to how one goes about gathering information. The background of the individual cannot be explored in depth here, but the rest of the factors' impacts can be seen in the line, which will be examined in further detail.

Chen (1982, as cited in Prasad, 1992, p. 43) also identifies the factors that influence "human seeking behavior" as: payoffs and costs, obtainable resources, speed and pacing of updates, how much information is available, "diagnosticity" of data, distributional qualities of the data, and contrasting sources. The main factors seen operating in the Kogi lines are hunger, cost, available information and the rate at which available information is provided, accessible resources to glean information, and readily available sources to consult. Due to the environment, this leads most people to turn to interpersonal sources, conveniently situated in the queue as well, to satisfy the "influences of their behavior," to get information, and to make their decisions.

Setting/Entrée

I chose to study the Kogi Truck dynamic for several reasons. Before my observations, I had never tried Kogi food, but had my first taste of the food truck phenomenon while at Abbot Kinney in Venice, CA. Later, a status posting from my brother on Facebook read ambiguously "Kogi truck!!" followed by several comments of how others wished they had seen it as well. The topic would not resurface again until two trucks had started to appear daily on the UCLA south campus as I would walk to and from my classes. The trucks changed daily, but some that I saw several times included the Grilled Cheese Truck, Nom Nom Truck, and Calbi Fusion Tacos & Burritos. I was curious as to how this Kogi Truck fared among the myriad trucks I had seen, only to find out it was the very catalyst that had propelled the fusion taco and food truck phenomenon. John T. Edge (2010), a writer for the *New York Times*, mentions Kogi's Roy Choi as "the pioneering force" behind the culinary fusion on wheels (p. 1). This further piqued my interest, and I narrowed the scope of my study to focus exclusively on Kogi.

Prior to this observational study, I had never seen or been near a Kogi Truck intentionally. Nevertheless, I would consider myself both an insider and an outsider type of Kogi consumer. On a spectrum, I might be leaning towards the role of outsider, simply because I was not familiar with the food and how to order. I had consulted the Kogi website to determine when the truck would be at a location close by, and briefly looked at their menu items. Hence, I was not

starting my investigation entirely from scratch, nor was I well versed in the process. Like any person who had just whimsically decided to give the Kogi Truck a try, I was without recommendations. Perhaps I would get an idea of popular items while observing and listening to those around me.

The setting itself is what Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland (2006) would deem a "quasi-public place," where "continuing presence is dependent upon engagement in a limited range of activities or one or more personal attributes" (p. 34). Most people are there to order and eat food specifically from the Kogi truck. The basic process typically involves: ordering (or inquiring about items), giving a name to the cashier, grabbing utensils and take-out materials, waiting for the name to be called, and picking up the order from the next window. Since most people eat elsewhere, many customers would grab several pieces of foil to wrap an extra layer over their food and position items in bags to avoid potential spills. People who have visited several times may look around at the food previous customers have ordered, and appear just as liable to switch or add on to their anticipated orders. If there was some distinction in action among "insiders" and "outsiders," it may have been the speed with which they ordered, got their food, and left. Insiders would most likely maintain a consistent, quick pace in ordering, payment, gathering materials (napkins, utensils, plastic bags, and foil), and packing everything to go.

Methodology

My questions going into the study were regarding main information sources and decision-making in food truck lines. How do people with differing levels of knowledge about a food truck end up in line, and what do they order? Are there any similarities among individuals across these "knowledge levels"? How are orders mainly influenced? Through friends, through technology, by looking at the food people had already ordered? One limitation of this study involves the factors surrounding how people arrived at the location. Some people may mention their individual motivations and desires in the course of conversation with others in the queue, but all the variables and motivations remain unknown.

My study involved a participant-observational method and included visiting the Kogi truck location along Gayley and Charles E. Young Drive (near the University of California, Los Angeles), and observing social interactions in the lines. A friend accompanied me to serve as a point to measure the validity of my observations and to detract from outstanding behavior. My objective in my observational study was to be in as natural an environment as possible, with as little intrusion as possible. No probing or prompting questions were asked of

people in line. Unless a question was directly addressed to me, I did not converse with others in the line (aside from my companion).

Field notes were recorded throughout the course of observation, and each note was documented with the time of the observation to allow for temporal analyses. The qualitative analysis was based on my observations and notes written about social interactions. Evidence is based upon speech and quotations, with time noted next to each quote, as well as noted actions (such as checking Twitter by mobile phone).

Observations

Before recounting my experiences and observations in the Kogi Truck lines, I would like to reiterate that the study described here is primarily exploratory. Certainly additional research is needed, but the following are the results of this initial exploration. I visited the Verde Kogi truck parked along Gayley and Charles E. Young Drive on January 14, 2010, and February 11, 2010, with crowds of about 25-35 people each time. I arrived at the truck locations around 6:20 pm and 6:05 pm, respectively. The first visit lasted an hour and a half, while the second was an hour. The truck's scheduled times both days were from 6-9 pm; both times, the truck arrived later than planned. As an article on the Serious Eats website reveals, such timing is due to "traffic or the Kogi crew. They'd rather open up 20 minutes late, ready to go than on time and unprepared" (Lee, 2009). From my observations, it would also appear that waiting past the expected arrival time builds anticipation. Seeing the long line gathered—without any apparent reason as to why—surely raises not only questions, but a few eyebrows as well.

I arrived at the location on January 14 around 6:20 pm, and the line already reached the end of the block. The truck had not appeared yet, and people did not seem to mind. Some seemed comfortable in sweats and comfortable wear, some were texting or playing games on the cell phones, some individuals wore ear buds and were most likely listening to music to pass the time, and certainly many were talking to friends or other people waiting in line. For some, the Kogi line served as a place to meet up with friends. Those in the line were predominantly Asian.

Around 6:30 pm, the girl behind me checked the Twitter feed through her cell phone and remarked, "10 more minutes." Upon the truck's arrival, clapping commenced and a Kogi employee rolled a large trashcan out around the side of the truck, lifted a metal panel revealing eating utensils and soda dunked in an ice bath, signaling that it was nearly time to begin taking orders. Several people passing by expressed curiosity and wonder. One jogger exclaimed to the Kogi line, "What are they serving in those, man? Crack? Crack burritos?" Another onlooker

commented to her friend that "there's a legit line for this place." One even mentioned that the current line was "pretty short," establishing the popularity of Kogi in the local area.

Once a customer reaches the front and places an order, the cashier asks for the customer's name and hands over a receipt. Food typically comes out fairly quickly—within 5 minutes—and once a customer's name is called, the receipt is essentially exchanged for food. Nearly everything is self-service, as sporks, napkins, plastic bags, and foil are all grabbed at the discretion of the customer. The posted menu is incomplete, as there are rotating specials; customers must either inquire about them, or find out beforehand via the Internet or Twitter.

The scene on February 11, however, was a comparably different setting. I arrived at the location around 6:05 pm and only two other women had already arrived. As usual, the truck was late by more than half an hour and people were getting antsy. There were many questions of "Is this the line?" being exchanged as the number of people gathered gradually increased. Nevertheless, the entire process was orderly: this environment featured rules that were "uncodified and informal but still widely understood" (Lofland et al., 2006, p. 134). People had naturally formed a steady line without line cutters or random congregations seemingly "halfway" in line. Most of those in line appeared to be in groups of two or three, with several individuals and larger groups.

When a shaved ice truck appeared, rather than the Kogi truck, some heckling occurred. Comments such as "We're not here for you!" or "Can we ask where is the Kogi truck?" sprung up. As soon as such talk died down, conversation among people in line mainly shifted to the topic of "other food trucks." Thirty minutes after the scheduled time of arrival of the truck, comments about the waiting time had sprinkled back in. Comments revealed slight irritation and edginess as to the elapsed time, such as, "She is so lucky she didn't come with us," and an exchange of:

"It's never been this late has it?"

"Yeah it has, remember last time we got here 30 minutes later and we were in the back of the line."

"Well now we're in the front. But we still have to wait."

Some customers, tired of standing, began sitting on the sidewalk. Around this time, any truck that resembled the shape of a food truck was inquired about with an, "Is that it?" While there was no clapping upon the truck's arrival, there were loud exclamations of "Yes!" and people standing up from their previous sitting or crouched postures.

Comparably, this second observation period had fewer people looking at the menu, which may have been due to either fewer newcomers or the high volume of Kogi recommendations floating around. With so much talk and food

items to be seen as people walked back to their cars or apartments, there was hardly a need to look at the posted menu. Another curious observation is that the same shaved ice truck had appeared and parked in the spot behind Kogi both days I visited. It seemed particularly strategic, as the large crowd might be tempted to also grab a cool dessert after having eaten their fill of meats and starches.

Motif Models

Theme One: Gatekeepers

The first theme that emerged from observing the Kogi truck phenomenon is "gatekeeper behavior." A common notion of a gatekeeper is "one who controls the flow of information over a channel: shaping, emphasizing, or withholding it" (Barzilai-Nahon, 2005; Rifkin, 2000; Shoemaker, 1991, as cited in Case, 2007, p. 300). Gatekeepers characteristically "provide linkages between their communities and the appropriate information resources" (Liu, 1995, p. 128).[1] In this case, the "community" represents the sphere of acquaintances and friends who the gatekeeper would like to "link" to the experience of Kogi. The "information resources" may be the Kogi Twitter feed, the Kogi website, recommendations and raves from a variety of sources, or even Kogi food, as any of these resources have the likelihood of leading the person to approach a Kogi truck in the future.

More specifically however, and more apt in regards to this article, is Cheryl Metoyer-Duran's characterization of a gatekeeper. As "receivers and disseminators of information, influencors [sic] of public opinion, or facilitators of cultural adaptation," this depiction of a gatekeeper describes the "gatekeeper" in the context of the Kogi Truck lines (Metoyer-Duran, 1993, p. 23). Along similar lines, these gatekeepers might be considered interpersonal influencers. Feick and Price (1987) mention the two types of influencers for interpersonal influence: "the opinion leader and the early purchaser or adopter" (p. 83). Opinion leaders would demonstrate a great deal of knowledge regarding "product class" (p. 84). In this case, "product class" may include other food trucks and their respective food items. The two roles appear to be more conflated where Kogi Truck lines are concerned. Of course, there also exists one or the other, but one individual displaying both roles is not uncommon either. Early adopters, exhibiting expertise resulting from "product usage or purchase experience," would be those who mention the newest items or current specials (p. 84). Typically, early purchasers of Kogi tend to also be the opinion leaders for the new visitors in their group. These are the people who have been following Kogi early on, thus having the most experience in tracking the truck locations, being in the Kogi lines, and most likely having tried more menu items.

Generally speaking, the gatekeeper's ability in line to control information based on what they say is apparent, but they also do so in a way that may shape

public opinion. When they asked the more experienced customers for recommendations or what they had ordered, people tended to order based on the gatekeeper's opinions. For example, starting a conversation by saying, "I already know what I'm getting," lets others immediately distinguish some preferred menu items. In this case, many people would remain in line without ever going up to look at the menu.

Additionally, while they may link unfamiliar Kogi visitors with the relevant information resources, gatekeepers also assist in providing a cultural link. Discussions regarding well liked and disliked food trucks seem more round-table, and facts regarding ethnic cultures are not limited to those more familiar with Kogi. Rather, I would propose the "cultural link" being forged here is specifically for the culture surrounding Kogi. Given the extremely large fan base and dedicated queues, it appears that something akin to a "culture" has been formed around the truck that seemingly "started it all." With the ability to track a mobile truck through its digital message feeds, and given increased popularity of food trucks, the number of followers gradually continues to climb. One chief way cultural linkage comes about involves the gatekeeper's role in imparting initial impressions and anecdotes to their audience. For those visiting for the first time, the received impressions and anecdotes add a small layer of the familiar. The cultural link, in this sense, allows for those entirely unfamiliar with the Kogi Truck to become acquainted at the very least.

While waiting in line, many people talked about their previous experiences with Kogi, usually offering their recommendations to those in their group who were either entirely new, or less experienced. These gatekeepers typically exuded a sense of control and guidance, as they were also the ones who might check Twitter and announce to their group, "10 more minutes till the truck comes." Interestingly, even those who had never tried Kogi before exhibited characteristics of gatekeepers. In a group of adults, a woman remarked, "I heard from my friend that it's 15 minutes in line, and 15 minutes to get the food." When all of her companions were waiting for their food, she asked each person, "What did you get?" as if she were checking up on their experience so far.

Metoyer-Duran (1991) developed a multi-dimensional, taxonomic approach to profiling gatekeepers. This model is based upon that of Rogers, classifying the "readiness of those individuals adopting new agricultural and technological practices to use information that would enable them to accept change" (Rogers, 1962, as cited in Metoyer-Duran, 1993, p. 25). Metoyer-Duran describes the model as "a user-centered framework which is language and culture-sensitive," consisting of "a set of profiles, [which] interpret the cognitive and affective attributes of the gatekeeper's information-seeking behavior" built upon taxonomic frameworks by Bloom (1956), Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1964),

Kurtz (1966, 1968), Dervin (1976a, b), Snyder (1976), and Frand (1983) (Metoyer-Duran, 1993, p. 27).

Metoyer-Duran (1993) remarks that the profile reflects a snapshot of an individual in that it depicts only a point in time, and as such, one may have different profiles depending on situation and fluctuating degrees of knowledge (p. 32). This model can likewise be applied to those people in line exhibiting the traits of a gatekeeper. As there are a variety of gatekeeper types, characteristics will differ, resulting in different model structures.

The Metoyer-Duran gatekeeper model involves three axes of measurement: Concept Usage, Data Usage, and Affective. Concept Usage and Data Usage for information management comprise the Cognitive Domain. Some components appear to be more applicable than others in the case of this specific Kogi setting. Concept Usage contains terminology, applications, integration, and strategy. This domain encompasses an array of cognitive facets—"terminology" refers to basic comprehension of concepts and meanings tied to the information environment. This may involve names of popular menu items, the specials, as well as terminology featured in the Twitter feeds. "Applications" by and large involves the capacity to apply information in a cross-situational manner, as well as connect conceptual associations. "Integration" alludes to the ability to incorporate many information resources, and also to realize limitations. Finally, "strategy" accounts for the gatekeeper's malleability in altering information-gathering based upon community or environmental changes.

Data Usage is another cognitive domain that includes input/output, resource management (abbreviated as "Resource Mgmt" in the model below), data structures, and model structures. "Input/output" concerns complying with instructions or exercising elemental principles, including the "basic level of operational literacy needed to utilize information resources" (Metoyer-Duran, 1991, p. 331). This may include knowledge of the social environment around the truck and how to progress through the line smoothly in terms of ordering, gathering utensils, getting food, and efficiently packing it all to go. "Resource management" implies an understanding of the rules and modules of the systems that aid the storage, access, and retrieval of information, while "data structures" distinguishes apprehension of the resource management systems' internal configuration. Last, "model structures" pertains to the gatekeeper's aptitude in applying theoretical paradigms to a dilemma which cannot be dealt with through the currently available information systems.

The Affective axis features impeding, neutral, and facilitating aspects in regards to qualitative judgments involving information transfer. The "impeding" trait refers to a gatekeeper who is opposed to change, while "neutral" represents an unbiased or traditional predilection, and "facilitating" implies that the person is enthusiastic about seeking information and utilizing a variety of sources to do so.

With a number of different elements and dimensions, there will undoubtedly be a number of gatekeepers as well. As it is also possible for the friends or acquaintances of gatekeepers—as well as individuals—to be featured on this model, the Metoyer-Duran diagram has therefore been adapted to reflect several types of people in line for Kogi. While there are many factors that may contribute to the changeability of the linked points below, they represent a generalized representation of the bulk of what has been observed. The following descriptions and their associated figures are an application of the Metoyer-Duran model, adapted to describe the queue culture of the Kogi truck (Metoyer-Duran, 1993, p. 31).
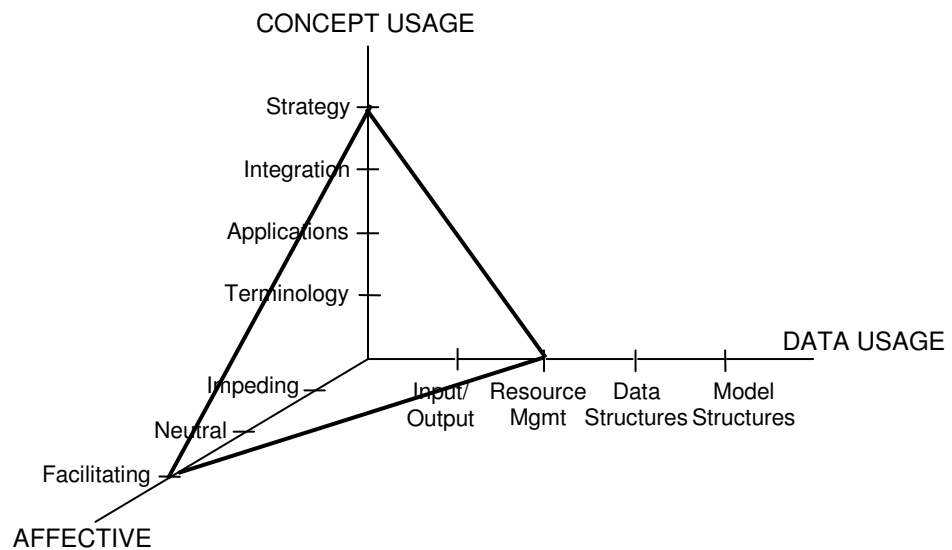
Experienced Gatekeepers

Figure 1. Profile of Experienced Gatekeepers

Gatekeepers who have made several Kogi trips certainly differ from those who have never eaten Kogi food before. This category comprises those who know and are accustomed to the many resources to get the latest information about Kogi creations and truck whereabouts. Skilled gatekeepers will incorporate what they know about the people in their group, and perhaps even current moods, and give custom recommendations.

CONCEPT USAGE

Strategy

Integration

Applications

Terminology

DATA USAGE

Impeding

Neutral

Facilitating

Input/ Resource Data Model
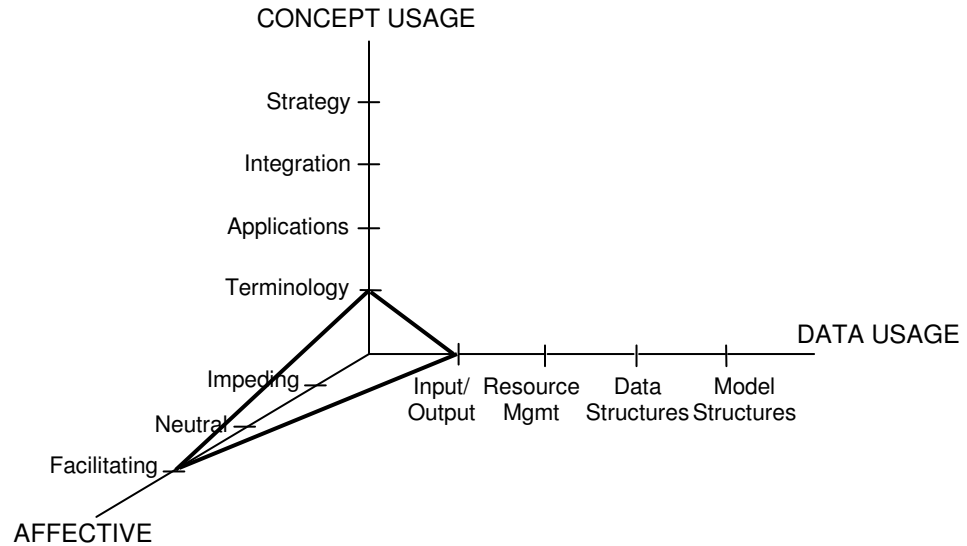Output Mgmt Structures Structures

AFFECTIVE

Figure 2. Profile of Inexpert Gatekeepers

Inexpert gatekeepers are those who have never tried Kogi, but are mainly responsible for their group—family, friends, coworkers, etc.—dropping by for the first time. They are proactive when it comes to new things, which in this case may be Kogi food, or possibly even the experience of buying from a food truck. Their terminology may range from knowledgeable to limited, depending on their source of information. For some, a "Hey, I heard Kogi is going to be here from 6-9 pm over at Gayley and Charles E. Young," is enough to spur a first-time visit. Others may like to look up ratings on Yelp,[2] for example, before deciding to give the food truck a try. They may also give recommendations based on what they know about ingredients, or from recommendations heard from others, but their familiarity with Kogi is still restricted to words at this point. The basis and certainty of their suggestions would not be as strong as the "experienced gatekeepers" group, which may also employ their sense of remembered taste to judge their commendations. Since this group of gatekeepers has hardly any familiarity with Kogi trucks, their knowledge of basic procedures and rules would typically be constrained. This dimension may also fluctuate depending on whether the gatekeeper has visited other similar food trucks.

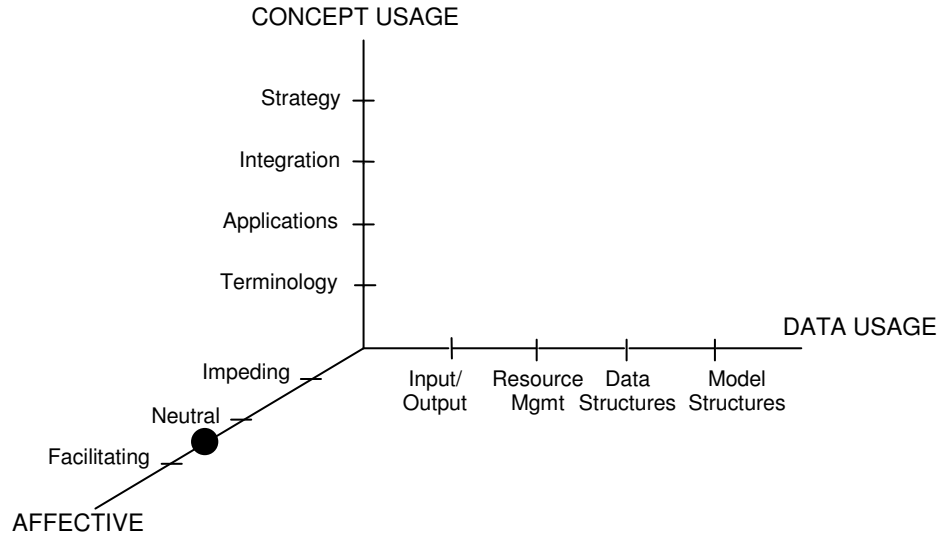*Friends/Acquaintances (in line accompanying gatekeeper)*

CONCEPT USAGE

Strategy

Integration

Applications

Terminology

DATA USAGE

Impeding

Neutral

Facilitating

Input/ Output

Resource Mgmt

Data Structures

Model Structures

AFFECTIVE

Figure 3. Profile of Friends or Acquaintances Accompanying Gatekeepers

This group represents a point on the graph rather than spanning all three axes of the Metoyer-Duran model. Those accompanying a gatekeeper, or gatekeepers, do not need to know about procedures or structures, nor do they require knowledge of information resources. Any rules, resources, or terminology are all provided by the gatekeeper(s) as a way of introduction or navigation through the Kogi line. This group experiences a sort of "learn-as-you-go" style of becoming acquainted with Kogi. To accompany, or agree to go with, the gatekeeper on a Kogi run entails a more or less agreeable or willing attitude towards trying the food.
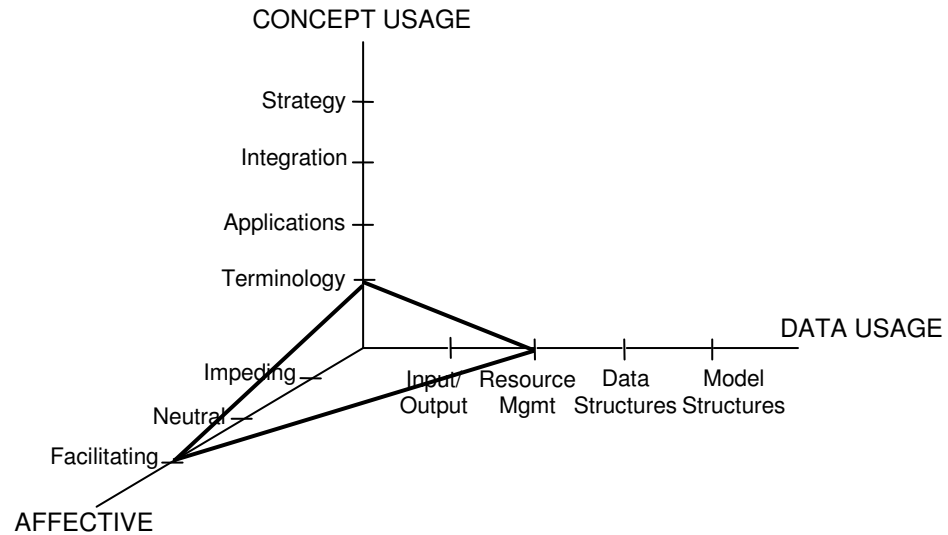
Experienced Individuals

CONCEPT USAGE

Strategy

Integration

Applications

Terminology

Impeding

Neutral

Facilitating

AFFECTIVE

DATA USAGE

Input/ Output   Resource Mgmt   Data Structures   Model Structures

Figure 4. Profile of Experienced Individuals

As the individual does not need to "strategize," "integrate," or "apply" when imparting information to others, their cognitive domain simply features knowledge of terminology of the Kogi environment with regards to their own inclinations. As experienced Kogi visitors, this group of people has the straightforward goal of going to the line, getting their food, and leaving. Sustenance, rather than conversation, is expected. Given this aim, individuals utilize their information resources to plan, as no one else will accompany them in such an endeavor. Some individuals in fact meet friends while waiting in line—sometimes as a planned meeting, other times as a coincidence. Nevertheless, extra preparation is required, as waiting by oneself can become monotonous. They are proactive in braving the chilled streets alone, perhaps to try the weekly special, or to get a quick snack before diving into their assignments.
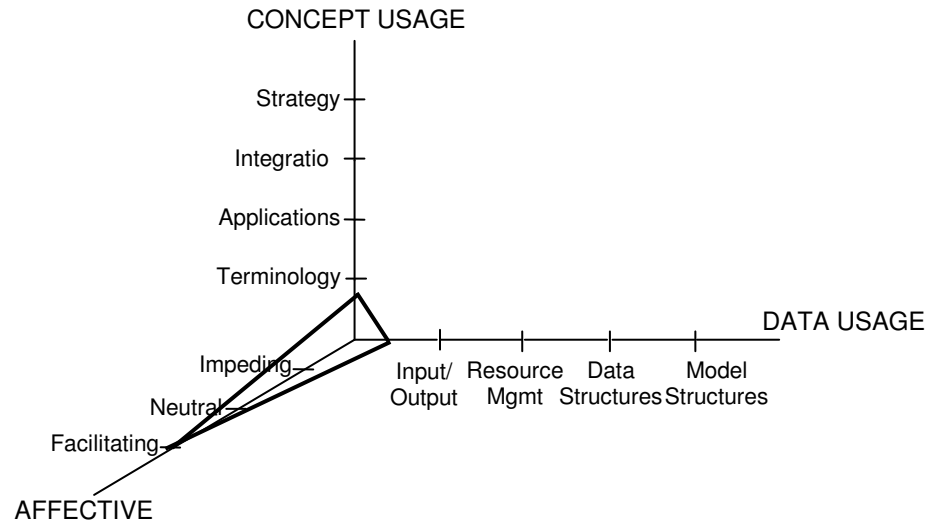
Inexpert Individuals

CONCEPT USAGE

Strategy

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Applications

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DATA USAGE

Input/ Resource Data Model
Output Mgmt Structures Structures

Figure 5. Profile of Inexpert Individuals

This group is possibly the most proactive of all the aforementioned groups, as they are new to trying Kogi food without any accompaniment. Not only are they unfamiliar with the blueprint and procedures of Kogi, but they have somehow utilized their information resources to locate the truck's whereabouts. Some may have coincidentally been walking by and, attracted by the line, decided to give Kogi a try. For these people, they usually have no prior recommendations to go by, and the only way to know of a special would be through conversation in line or by asking the cashier.

Theme Two: Conversational Foci with Respect to Time

Another perceptible theme has been the focus of conversation as a function of time and position in the line. The topics gradually shift from a more diverse range of subjects to a more concentrated one, which is typically a survey of what people are planning to order. Bitzer (1968) explains this theme well, as "it is the situation which calls the discourse into existence" (p. 2). As the situation shifts, so too does the discourse. In the Kogi line, the situation necessitates the need to think about what to order. As the person nears the cashier, this "need" and "readiness" to order becomes more and more compulsory.

Taylor (1962) points out that "the state of readiness is not … a fixed position, but a constantly shifting non-linear adaptive mechanism" (p. 394). Readiness is ever-changing according to various contextual, personal, and temporal considerations. At any certain point in the line for Kogi, there may be

criteria for the feeling of "readiness," which shifts as people approach the cashier. Taylor notes several elements which determine a person's level of readiness at a given moment, including "educational and experiential background, the degree of his familiarity with the specific subject, the amount and quality of relevant peripheral information he possesses, and his intuitive sense of analogy" (p. 394). All these factors contribute to the development and formation regarding feelings of adequacy for certain situations. Midway into the line, people tend to start thinking more about what they would like to order, but there is no need to definitively decide yet. The "state of mind" at that position is such that choices begin to narrow, but there can be several left to choose between. Readiness is changed again when the physical proximity is at a point where the customer decides that a selection needs to be made.

Decision-Making Model

These two themes of gatekeeper behavior and conversation in relation to time can be included in a decision-making model based on observed information-seeking behavior, thus portraying observations amidst the Kogi line. The model expressed in this paper differs greatly from other information behavior models. Models by researchers such as T. D. Wilson (1981, 1994, 1997, 1999); Byström and Järvelin (1995); Krikelas (1983); and Leckie, Pettigrew, and Sylvain (1996) (as cited in Case, 2007) go into cognitive processes or tasks which lead to an "information need," and then portray how such a need spurs information-seeking behavior. This model is created strictly from observation, so cognitive or social factors contributing to the "information need" (or an appetite for Kogi, in this case) are not directly incorporated. Rather, the model begins with "some unspecified form of mediation" or situation which brings the people to the line. Decisions are made in relation to this time of mediation, as well as time spent in line.

In this model, there are three main types of customers based on their role and accompaniment (either in a group or individual): gatekeepers, friends/acquaintances (in line with gatekeeper[s]), and individuals. Each group's Kogi experience tends to differ based on a multitude of factors: any previous knowledge or feedback for Kogi, whether they have tried food, previous truck or food sightings, and so forth. The following model aims to reflect these influential factors to the utmost ability, while also maintaining a general level adequate for such a representation:
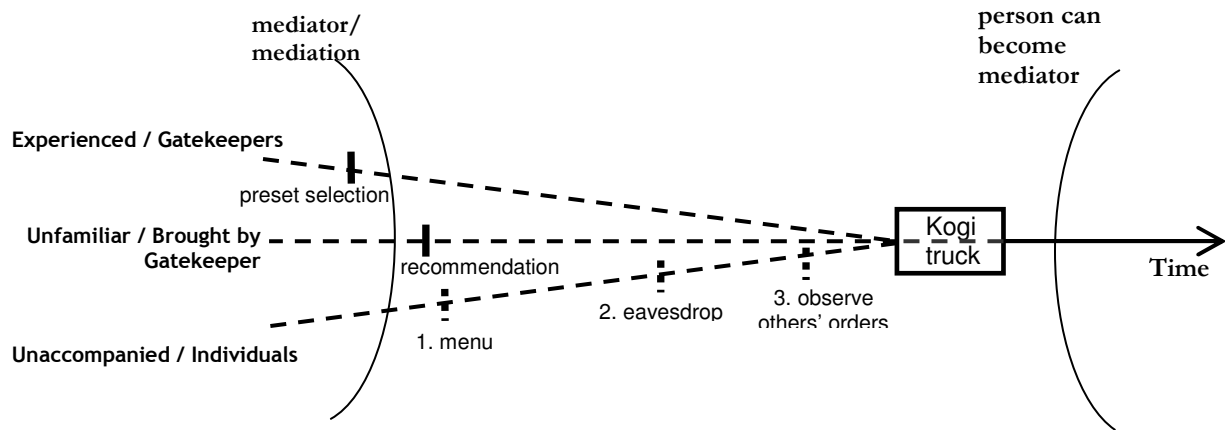
mediator/
mediation

person can
become
mediator

Experienced / Gatekeepers

preset selection

Unfamiliar / Brought by
Gatekeeper

recommendation

Kogi
truck

Time

2. eavesdrop

3. observe
others' orders

1. menu

Unaccompanied / Individuals

Figure 7. Decision-Making Model

The vertical tick marks represent decision points, and the model portrays what is observed in the Kogi line as people progress towards the ordering station (i.e., as a function of time). Dotted lines indicate that the paths or points are non-compulsory as there are several paths one can take; in the case of individuals, one may utilize one or several different methods to determine one's order. Nevertheless, there is an order in evaluating possible selections. For example, the individual must look at the menu first, then line up. Following with the second theme of conversation as a function of line progression, the individual's environment essentially reflects this environment. Although the individual is not actively contributing to such conversational flow, he or she is nevertheless a part of the setting and their actions and information resources are compliant and induced by the surrounding dynamics. Therefore, if they do in fact glance at the menu, it would be the first thing to do. If they eavesdrop on dialogue with those around them, it would be in line and there would be increasingly more suggestions to listen to as people near the cashier. Finally, when the individual has reached the physical point where food orders can be seen, then they may weigh their choices with this newly added dimension for assessment.

Gatekeepers have typically already decided on their Kogi order before they reach the line. Many have developed a favorite item or two and have established that any Kogi trip must include such orders. One gentleman standing around the middle area of the line, when asked by his friend what he would order, definitively answered, "Gonna get two Korean short rib tacos." He then went on to talk about his previous encounters with Kogi, such as when being short on cash one time, they had still taken his order. Gatekeepers frequently tell their friends about Kogi and recount previous Kogi excursions while passing time in line. "Definitely the short rib" was a popular recommendation among many crowds. The party would also discuss other food trucks they have tried and their experiences, such as the Grilled Cheese Truck or even the shaved ice truck

tactically parked behind the Kogi truck's parking space. There were also some people standing in front of the menu with their cell phones, taking their friends' orders. Gatekeepers are therefore mediating in a variety of ways, through online chatting, cell phones, text messages, and of course, face-to-face conversation.

Those who came with one or several gatekeepers also decided their orders fairly early on in the line. This may be due to the gatekeeper's capability in matching a friend's preferences with an appropriate food item. The gatekeeper fundamentally acts as a filter for information related to Kogi, and metes out the information according to the situational circumstances. Hence, Kogi recommendations and details are more tailored and controlled. In any case, the chances of liking Kogi is more probable when someone has pointed out an item based on your tastes, rather than haphazardly picking an item from the menu. A suggestion may be offered by the gatekeeper, but sometimes the friend will ask for a recommendation. The process of settling upon a particular dish becomes a series of negotiations, with the friend ultimately deciding which item he or she is currently craving.

As individuals are without a specific person or conversation to keep them occupied (although some immerse themselves in texting or in music), they are able to be much more attuned to their surroundings. Consequently, they are also more inclined to eavesdrop. Therefore, even experienced individuals—much like inexpert individuals (although less so)—may take a glance at the menu, eavesdrop, and observe others' orders. Experienced individuals, like gatekeepers, may also be quite adamant about a particular food item, so they have no need to listen or look around. As always, each individual is different and has his or her respective unique habits or preferences. In general, however, most individuals first look at the menu before getting in line (as there is no one to guarantee their space if they step out), then they may eavesdrop on recommendations, and finally as they approach the ordering station, notice other orders. If interested enough, they generally will not hesitate to ask. I had ordered a weekly special, which featured two items for the price of one. After ordering, a girl came up to me and asked, "Can I ask you a random question? What is that?" After a minute or so, another young boy approached me and asked, "What is that?" Another lady had inquired, "Is that the mushroom special?" (which had been the special for the previous week).

Overall, information-seeking behaviors tend to be very fluid as opposed to rigid with a set, steadfast decision in mind. Consequently, decision-making for these individuals is also fairly whimsical depending on what they see, hear, smell, and so forth. People tend to change their orders in line while conversing. Many different audio and visual stimuli may contribute to a re-evaluation of what to order. Despite this, some people (usually experienced gatekeepers) are steadfast in their food selections if they are very regular customers.

Conclusion and Further Considerations

Along with new trends and phenomena come new ways of studying how people interact with the resources surrounding them. Tsoukas and Chia (2002) propose change as a "normal condition of organizational life" (p. 567). Subsequently, how change impacts our ways of gathering and organizing information presents more venues of study. By studying food truck lines, themes regarding information-seeking, gatekeepers, information technology, cultural bridging, signage, and social networks, among others, come into play. This particular setting is unusual because there may be some people who are brought to the location with hardly any understanding of how the process works. They are able to navigate successfully due to either their companions or through watching others. Furthermore, recommendations depend mainly on gatekeepers or come through eavesdropping. One girl had trouble deciding between ordering a burrito or a quesadilla, and asked the cashier for his advice. He did not quite know what to say, and simply mentioned that the two orders were "different." His answer almost suggested that he was not frequently asked the question, and therefore was not well versed in how to respond. The girl ended up ordering both items.

A few complications arose due to the placement of the menu. It was next to the ordering station and not easily accessible to those standing in line, which was especially problematic for newcomers who were waiting in line, only to realize that the menu was on the side opposite them. Moreover, the menu was not complete and had a sign that said, "and more, just ask…." The current set-up suggests that customers need to be "in the know." Furthermore, when lines are so long, customers are hesitant to "ask more," for fear of holding up the line even more.

This article has adapted the Metoyer-Duran taxonomic gatekeeper model to represent several types of Kogi customers—gatekeepers, friends or acquaintances of gatekeepers, and individuals. Typical methods of deciding what to order are considerably different for each group, as gatekeepers have frequently already settled their order before getting in line; friends generally rely on the gatekeeper's suggestions; and individuals may decide by the menu, eavesdropping on conversations, or viewing other ordered food items, or a combination of the aforementioned methods.

As this study involved one particular Kogi location which students commonly frequent, subsequent studies may be done to integrate a variety of sites. More locations may yield more diverse data and more revelations in Kogi truck information-seeking behavior. Nevertheless, the main featured themes which are sure to be found time and again—usually regardless of location and the specific food truck—are the presence of gatekeepers and conversation topics becoming more narrow as the ordering window nears. The lines will nearly always contain a

mixture of gatekeepers, those who are dragged by gatekeepers to come "try it at least once," more willing volunteers, and curious individuals. I believe the questions and findings from this study would be applicable in other types of cross-cultural settings involving people waiting as a crowd. A similar environment may arise in ticket lines for a play or performance, for example, standing in line to see a Russian ballet, or in some assembly admiring an artist's pieces of work. Similar themes may arise in observations among those familiar with the environment, those arriving for the first time, and the interactions between each other.

Notes

[1] From a more commercial perspective, "gatekeepers" may resemble what some call "mavens." Mavens are deemed "marketplace influencers," but their role is based more upon general knowledge and experience rather than specific product classes. Feick and Price (1987) differentiate that "the concept of the market maven, however, is distinct from the concepts of opinion leadership and early adoption, as it is predicated on a more general knowledge of markets" (p. 85). Since my focus is on food trucks—the Kogi Truck in particular—the term maven would be too wide a scope for the range of the observations noted in this paper.

[2] Yelp.com is a website with search capabilities and user reviews of nearly any sort of business or organization. The site is particularly popular for reading about local food establishments and what to order or avoid.

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