

Communicating for Change: How Hospitality Employees Interpret and Influence Food Waste Prevention

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the contribution of hospitality staff to the reduction of food waste and especially the effects of messages against food waste on its prevention in a hospitality context. This study investigates how hospitality employees affect perceptions and practices concerning food waste, with five sub-research questions that guide the study: the reception of food waste messages, whether employees are active or passive in their message reception, the congruence of message understanding, the behavioural outcomes of reception, and the implications of message reception for communication strategies. Using a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 23 UK hospitality industry actors including employees, managers and business owners. The results indicated that food waste messages were received either instantaneously or with delay, and employees took active or passive roles in message reception. There was congruent interpretation among some employees, but most showed incongruent understandings. Thus, there is a need for tailored communication. It was found that changes in behavior resulting from message reception are maintained only when employees internalize the messages, thus highlighting the need for continuous efforts in communication. The paper highlights the importance of participatory communication strategies that fit the perceptions and contexts of employees in order to effectively control food waste. The study provides both theoretical insights and practical implications for developing more effective food waste prevention programs in hospitality settings.

Introduction

This paper looks at the role of hospitality employees in food waste prevention in their workplaces. This research addresses the gap on understanding how employees affect food waste awareness and management. The central research question focuses on the influence of hospitality employees on food waste perceptions and practices. Five sub-research questions guide this study: reception of food waste messages by employees, whether employees are active or passive in their message reception, whether the messages' receptions are congruent or incongruent, the behavioral results of reception, and the implications of reception in terms of strategy. It is a qualitative method employing structured research that begins with literature review, explaining the methodology, presenting the findings, and discussing the conclusion.

Result & discussion

This section reviews the existing studies on the influence of hospitality employees on food waste management, with special attention to the sub-research questions: message reception, active or passive roles, congruence of understanding, behavioural outcomes, and communication strategies. The literature shows gaps, such as limited understanding of message congruence, the passive reception of food waste messages, and insufficient exploration of behavioural outcomes. This paper is intended to fill in those gaps through qualitative insights.

- **Food Waste Message Reception**

The early research works were very much aware of the need for message reception in food waste awareness but failed to delve deeper into the manner in which messages are received. Later research incorporated models of message processing but were not able to capture individual variations in reception. Current studies have tried to bring psychological insights into the scenario but still fall short of explaining contextual factors that influence reception.

- **Active or Passive Role in Message Reception**

Initial research highlighted passive reception among employees due to hierarchical structures. Later studies examined active engagement through training programs but showed mixed results in sustaining proactive behaviours. Advanced research has started exploring interactive communication models, yet challenges persist in fostering consistent active participation.

- **Congruence or Incongruence in Message Understanding**

Early studies focused on message clarity, which often neglected individual interpretations. Subsequent research has included cognitive perspectives, which have demonstrated different levels of congruence in interpretation. More recent attempts to align messaging with employee values have been promising but still face challenges in achieving uniform understanding.

- **Behavioural Outcomes of Message Reception**

Early studies on behavioural outcomes were mainly descriptive, without much empirical strength. Later researches started measuring behavioural changes after the intervention but were unable to track for a longer period. Recent advancements in behavioural analytics provide better insights, yet the outcome of these behavioural changes should be related to the reception of the message.

- **Implications for Food Waste Communication Strategies**

Communication strategies were initially set as top-down approaches, and they have proven to be inadequate for long-term change. Further studies then looked into the participatory methods but struggled with scale. New strategies now focus on co-creation with employees, suggesting the potential for better messages and higher engagement.

Method

This qualitative research study is to understand the impact of hospitality employees on food waste management. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 23 UK hospitality actors that include employees, managers, and business owners. Data collection was through personal experiences and perceptions. The analysis adopted a sensemaking approach to understand the reception and enactment of food waste messages. This is rationalized because it has the capacity to capture the real-world complexities of message reception and interpretation.

Findings

The findings have highlighted key insights into how hospitality employees influence food waste prevention. They cover sub-research questions: reception of messages regarding food waste, active and passive roles, congruence in understanding, behavioural outcomes, and communication implications. The main findings include: Instant and Delayed Message Reception; Active Engagement and Passive Compliance; Congruent and Incongruent Message Processing; Behavioural Change and Message Impact; Strategic Implications for Effective Communication. In that respect, these research outcomes reemphasize a delicate dynamic interaction between reception and change, indicating an adapted message that may ensure maximum benefit to the effectiveness of the program of reducing food waste.

- **Instant and Delayed Message Reception**

The analysis reveals that food waste messages both hit almost instantaneously and accumulate with delays as a function of exposure and timing. This research proved through interviews that people understood or did not immediately understand; yet, the messages were meaningful personally sometimes with delay. This shows that processing occurs at some points as delay and that such is subject to timing on strategies, rather than message.

- **Active Involvement and Passivism**

The study identifies a spectrum of employee roles in message reception ranging from active engagement to passive compliance. Active participants often share insights and drive initiatives, whereas passive recipients comply without deeper involvement. This spectrum highlights the need for strategies that foster active engagement to achieve meaningful change.

- **Congruent and Incongruent Message Processing**

Findings reveal that there is variability in message understanding, where some employees process messages congruent with organizational goals, while others experience incongruence due to conflicting values. This variability implies that the message needs to be tailored for employees' perceptions to align with the desired outcomes.

- **Behavioural Change and Message Impact**

Conclusive findings indicated that the level to which food-waste messages achieve behavioural responses depends on whether they have been received or understood by employees. Only those that internalize it are prone to sustain in their behaviour, while for some, changes revert to previously held behaviour. This also emphasizes message reinforcement to perpetuate positive behavioural outcomes.

- **Strategy-based Significance: Improving effective communication**

The results indicate that effective communication strategies must take into consideration the various ways in which messages are received and processed. Strategies that involve incorporating employee input and addressing various interpretations are more likely to be successful. This also opens up the possibility of involving participatory approaches in helping to improve food waste prevention.

Conclusion

This paper provides a nuanced understanding of how hospitality employees influence food prevention through message reception and interpretation. Findings further point out the complexity in processing a message and its consequent outcome to a given behaviour, thereby challenging previous linearity-based communication models. These results hold theoretical and practical implications requiring adaptation of communication strategies that respect not just the individual but also their contexts. Although the results hold merit, the study confines its analysis to UK hospitality actors. Future studies should extend to other sectors and regions and include quantitative methods to validate findings further and expand on the applicability of the food waste management system.

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