Practical Use of Service Design, Personas: A Case Study on Alchon, a Franchise Small Restaurant

Kyung Mi Bae¹, Chul Jin Bae², Youn Sung Kim³

Abstract

This study examines service operations of a small restaurant by using service design tool, personas in discovery and define stages of Double Diamond Design Process Model. Among many service design tools introduced to the industries, personas together with service blueprint are the ones wellknown to the public. Creating fictional characters, personas help the understanding of the customers' needs, expectations, experiences, behaviors and goals. As a case study, one of the Alchon franchises in Incheon, Korea, a small restaurant around the school area will be analyzed to examine its practical use in service designing. The design tool will be applied to the service process of the Korean style snack bar, bunshik, in order to bring attention on initial idea and determinate problems of the store. Through this study, personas in real practice suggested several ways to improve the service process by making the menu more visible, rearrangement of the tables and seats, delegation of the servers’ tasks, and improvement in sanitation. In conclusion, the tool is found applicable and practical in service designing for a small restaurant.

Keywords: persona(s), Alchon, service design, service process, scenario

1. Service Design Tool, Personas

Service design begins with the new service development process which reflects service concept, improves design details of operations management, and connect the design of service delivery process and the system [1]. Erlhoff from Koln International School of Design firstly introduced it as a design disciple [2], and used as business strategy for many companies and

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industries such as Google, Disney, Starbucks, Apple, and Nike. Many service design tools have been introduced and practiced together with the design process for example, Liedtka and Ogilvie’s Four Questions and Ten Suggested Tools [3], Four Phases of Work by New Zealand Government WEB TOOLKIT, and Double Diamond Design Process Model by UK Service Design Council.

Among the service design tools, personas has become regular practice for many human centered design study fields to conduct research and personify certain trends and patterns [4]. The tool represents a person as type of user which is based on the real information and research, and useful in the understand phase of New Zealand Government Web Toolkit [5]. Personas are useful in the discovery phase which is a starting point where the project begins with an initial idea or inspiration and the define phase where problems are defined and interpreted [6]. By building each persona based on a fictional character, it can help service designers to create good user experience for their target user group which can be a model character representing from her/his social and demographic characteristics, to her/his own needs, desires, habits and cultural backgrounds [5][7].

2. Literature Review and Methodology

Personas in service design are fictional characters created to represent a user group which might use a site, brand, or product in similar manner [8]. They are hypothetical archetypes of potential customers and user models described in details having the key attributes of the social group they are representing [9]. The concept was developed by Alan Cooper, a software developer in prototyping of what the personas would become using data in 1983 [7]. In 1993-4, Angus Jenkinson developed the concept of understanding customer segments as communities with coherent identity [10][11]. Michael Jacob, a director of Stepping Stones who is specialized in internal and external relationships and loyalty development, realized Jenkinson’s approach in a series of studies which describe an imaginal character in the real setting, behavior, and attitudes with the brand and the idea [12]. The approach was also adopted by OgilvyOne Business, United Kingdom’s largest B2B marketing agency.

Lene Nielsen describes four perspectives to ensure the design: goal-directed personas, roles-based personas, engaging personas, and fictional personas [13]. In this study, the perspective of goal-directed personas is applied for examining the process and work flow of the customers would wish to use in interacting with the product or service. This is based on the perspective of Alan Cooper that 1) creates persona by defining who the story is about and giving the
character attitudes, motivations, goals, and pain points, etc.; 2) establishes goal by defining what the persona wants; and 3) elaborates scenario by defining when, where, and how the story of the persona takes place [14][15].

To build personas, the following elements are suggested by the user persona layout: profile, personality, referents and influences, archetype and quotes, technology expertise, experience goals, devices and platforms, must do or must never, and relationship with the brand and the product [16]. In this study, ethnographic research method is used to create a number of archetype users based on the user persona layout above excluding the elements of technology expertise and device platforms.

3. Service Design for Alchon by Personas

3.1 Alchon, A Franchise Small Restaurant

Alchon is a franchise small restaurant specializing in Korean mixed rice food, albab, which is served with flying fish roe. The dish is similar to bibimbap; the signature Korean dish consists of rice with a variety of cooked and fresh vegetables, stir-fried beef, egg, and gochujang (Korea’s chilli paste). The franchise started as a small Korean style snack bar(bunshik), called Nobel-bunshik, striving simplified menu since 1995 and it has created its signature dish, Nobel-albab [17]. The 8 pyeong (26.45m²) size bunshik has turned into a company having 25 franchises around Korea and 2 in Shanghi and Weihai, China focusing on its brand identity as a fusion cooking fast food restaurant under Alchon’s philosophy: keeps the price of food low at 3500 won ($3.25) for its signature menu, promises its fast service, and makes nutritious and tasty food.

3.2 Steps to Creating Alchon’s Engaging Personas and Scenarios

The 10 steps ideal process suggested by Lene Nielsen are applied in this study as described in the encyclopedia article, Interaction Design Foundation though some of the steps are not possible to include as she mentioned and they are the third, everyone accepts the hypothesis (partly by service designers of this work, but not by Alchon); the seventh, obtain acceptance from the company, Alchon; the eighth, disseminate knowledge (not by Alchon, but the participants in this study); and the tenth, make ongoing adjustments.

The steps for creating Alchon’s engaging personas are followed: collect data, form a
hypothesis, acceptance of the hypothesis by designers of this work, establish a number, describe
the personas, prepare situations or scenarios for each persona, disseminate knowledge to the
participants of this study as external partners, and everyone prepares scenarios. The last step,
making ongoing adjustments can be implemented by Alchon possibly upon the completion of
this study.

3.3 Personas in Service Design for Alchon

In this study, a total of seven personas are created based on the collected information from
different sources such as interviews with staff and customers. Then by creating an initial user
model of potential customers, in-depth interviews were conducted. Through this process,
number of patterns were spotted and defined and finally seven personas are created with
possible scenarios. The description is made in the Figure 1.

[Fig. 1] Personas and their objectives in Service Design for Alchon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2, 3</th>
<th>4, 5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Kim Doyoung</td>
<td>Ong Nyuen Chi Ahn</td>
<td>Lee Mina</td>
<td>Park Heji</td>
<td>Aadhira Patel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender/Age</td>
<td>Male/ 22</td>
<td>Male &amp; Female/ 21</td>
<td>Females/ 39, 6</td>
<td>Female/ 26</td>
<td>Female/ 81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupati on</td>
<td>Student at INHA College</td>
<td>International Students at INHA University</td>
<td>Housewife, Mom/ kid, daughter</td>
<td>International Student at INHA University</td>
<td>No occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>Reserved; picky eater</td>
<td>Not good in Korean; unfamiliar with Korean culture</td>
<td>Lee Mina: Tough; my kid always comes first attitude; dine out very often with my daughter Heji; I really care about sanitation Park Heji: innocence; cheerful; impatient; I like spicy food.</td>
<td>Active; a leader of international student organization; I dine out a lot with my members</td>
<td>Live alone; generous and like to laugh; bad eyesight and can’t hear well anymore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special demand</td>
<td>I expect the food to be very cheap and large in quantity.</td>
<td>We expect the place to be decent for two of us to eat; we hate spicy food.</td>
<td>Lee Mina: I expect the restaurant to be able to serve a group of people (7 and more) promptly; I do not eat meat, so prefer no meat on any food</td>
<td>I expect the menu with large characters so I can be able to read; I dislike strong-tasting food and prefer my</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The usual process of the original service design for the operations of Alchon is followed: 1) enter and find a seat 2) place an order, 3) help oneself with side food and soup, 4) main food served, 5) check out, and 6) leave the restaurant.

[Fig. 2] Alchon’s Service Design, Personas 1 & 7

Through the use of service design tool, persona in the discovery stage, possible scenarios have been made following the current service design practiced by Alchon as it shows in Fig. 2, two problems are defined during the lunch peak time between 11:40 am and 12:40 pm as the Fig. 3 below. While the persona 1, Kim Doyoung who is young person could place an order and helps himself for side food items and soup, the persona 7, Oh Chulgen encounters to two problems firstly having difficulty reading the menu and secondly delaying in placing her order. The objective of Kim Doyoung is to eat more food at low price, so he orders the double size. The old lady Oh Chulgen wants to just sit near the entrance since she has arthrosis and the menu is too hard for her to read from where she is sitting at. While the young man is serving himself side dishes after placing the order, the old lady had to depend on the server to place her order since she could not read the menu.

The restaurant hall is consisted with many tables for two or four guests, but there are a lot of guests coming alone like Kim Doyoung and Oh Chulgen during the lunch time. By creating seats for one person, they can sit more guests during the peak hours and reduce the waiting
time. These seats can be near the food corner and used for a group of people during the
dinner shift. The food station can be also moved to the center of the restaurant, so guests can
understand the self service system and easier to help themselves. Although the main target
group is students going to a college, giving consideration for different demographic segments
by improving the menu and interior to attract more customers. In addition, proper training and
monitoring the servers' performance can bring efficiency in the operation of the peak hours.

[Fig 3.] Scenario for Personas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persona</th>
<th>Scenario before Consumption of Service</th>
<th>Scenario during and after Consumption of Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Kim Doyoun</td>
<td>I want to eat a lot at very low price; Let me order the double portion. Wow, a plenty of food at very economical, I must come back!</td>
<td>11:40 am - 12:40 pm I am very satisfied with the fact that I can eat a lot at low price. Wow, there are a lot of people. I feel sorry for sitting at the table for two people; The place is too crowded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Ong Nyuen</td>
<td>Ong Nyuen: I don't like spicy food, I have no idea what is not spicy. Chi Ahn: I hope Nyuen could find a menu that is not too spicy for her.</td>
<td>5:30 pm - 7:30 pm Ong Nyuen: Wow, there are characters on the menu to indicate the spicy level. The food with only one character is not spicy at all. I like it Chi Ahn: I am glad Nyuen enjoys the non spicy food here. The characters are so helpful since we don't know Korean well. But our seat was not so comfortable since it is near the POS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Chi Ahn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 &amp; 5 Lee Mina Park Heji</td>
<td>Lee Mina: The place seems clean and neat, especially the lighting makes the place very good. Park Heji: I would like try spicy food.</td>
<td>5:30 pm - 7:30 pm Lee Mina: Heji seems enjoying the spicy food very much. They are quick in serving the food, but their sanitation is so poor. The server is running between the food counter and cashier's register.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Aadhira Patel</td>
<td>I wish there is a good place for my team can dine at reasonable price.</td>
<td>1:30 pm We could not sit, since the place was packed with guests. 7:30 pm Seven of us could sit together. I like the system I can pick my preferred side dishes myself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 7 Oh Chulgeon | Oh my poor knee joint, I should seat near the entrance. | 11:40 am - 12:40 pm A person like me should not come back to
| Oh letters are too small in the menu, I should ask for the server's help. This menu I ordered suggested by the server was 'little spicy,' but it tastes very strong; my table is so tiny. | this place. There are too many students and the eating table is too compact. I could not read a thing from the menu and the food tasted too strong for me. |

From the above scenario of the personas 1 Kim Doyoung and 7 Oh Chulgeon who have visited Alchon during the peak time of the day, four problems are discovered and they are firstly their menu being not appealing to guests, secondly, there are a lot of guests coming alone but there is no seat for one person, thirdly, the current operations focusing only on college students, so not pleasing elderly guests or other types, and lastly no fair delegation of the services for the servers during the peak time. Therefore, delegation and rotation of the servers' work tasks are suggested for improving on the efficiency in its operations management.

Through the scenarios of personas visited the restaurant in the evening, the concerns and complaints about the sanitary issues are being recognized, especially when only one server is working in between the food station and the cashier's register. By either implementing different system for the kitchen personnel to keep the food station and have the server to only focus on providing services to customers in the hall or assign additional staff in the hall to take care of the food station and cleanliness. In addition, the guests sitting near the check out cashier's register can have difficulty in and out of the table to help themselves.

4. Conclusion

Through the application of personas for Alchon, the service designers suggest Alchon to make changes in its interior for more single seats; develop a menu board with large fonts for improving its visibility and also menu on each table can be helpful; delegation of the servers' duties and responsibilities. Based on the practice of personas who visit the restaurant during the dinner shift, cleanliness and delegation of servers' duties and responsibilities also determined to be problems. In order to keep the price low as it is, Alchon can ensure its staff's service by proper training, ongoing monitoring, and establishing the vertical communication to bring service level to its standard and implement innovative approaches to attract a variety of demographic segments.

The use of personas as service design tools in the discovery and define stages are effective method to recognize not only problems of the products or services, but also strengths and positive factors as well. Alchon's effort on visualization of the spicy level by using characters
were effective and its philosophy on keeping the price low at 3500 won and serving a plenty of food for the customers recognized as the company's competitiveness. In service designing, personas works better with scenarios but there can be possibility missing or failing from detecting some problems. Therefore, participants in the process of building personas should be selected from different departments even from outside of the organization to keep the diversity for possible ideas or problems to be discovered and defined. The tool is easy to apply and practical in discovering and defining the both successful and failure factors of the product and services by possible scenarios reflecting the real situations in service designing.
References


