

Section 1 – Part B. Experience

From Mariana's Supermarket Campaign Strategy:

B.) Experience:

In order to further gain an understanding of Mariana's Supermarket, I visited as a first time, non-Hispanic customer. The following is the details and insight gained in my experience.

Initially when I approached the store, I immediately noticed 3 things:

- 1.) All the customers on site and in store were Hispanic
- 2.) The music playing was appropriately Latin
- 3.) The windows were covered in images of the employees hugging and smiling and like family.

So, the immediate opportunity of a non-Hispanic clientele was obvious, and the music, and entrance was perfectly representative of culture, community, friendliness and family. I would normally have questioned the fact of seeing employees first instead of food first, as the product should be immediate. However, in this particular situation the lack of food first replaced by the values first is perfect, as it separated this grocery store from others. It welcomed me as a customer and promised me before entering the doors of what to expect in the delivery of the product – something other grocery stores do not do.

Inside, I saw a whole new world of grocery shopping. The usual stuff was there, food, beverage, etc. And even some extra grocery store features like check cashing services and a bakery, which many have, but not all; especially not all niche or culture-based markets like this one. Then as I walked around and explored, I was just in repeated moments of awe, and curiosity, and surprise. Firstly, I had been to a couple Mexican markets in California. Usually, they were confusing and very little in English. They also were often disorganized to my perception and somewhat random in display. Also, they were not usually staffed well, and if I had a question, it was not usually a smooth and ideal communicative and informative exchange, due to a combination of language barrier and uncertainty, but from which party, I am unsure.

But this was not that experience. I pulled out my phone and took photos of what I saw. And as I snapped photos, people stopped and smiled and posed for the camera. Hispanic customers and employees. I watched what I expected to be a half or less staffed environment, as even larger common grocery stores usually are. But here it was all hands-on deck! Everyone was working steadily. And not just sliding items over a scanner or stocking shelves, but baking pastries, slicing meats, preparing fresh tortillas, serving food at a small dine in area with ready-to-eat meals, and I even saw a woman walk from behind the dine-in counter area and approach the table of people eating and start interacting. I don't speak Spanish and I don't know if they were friend or family, or if she was asking about the food, but I believe she was. As if she were a manager checking on customer dining experience in a proper restaurant. And if they weren't friends or family, they certainly were now!

I saw a spice wall that was sent straight from the spice gods! I took photos because it was impressive. I love spices as I am Cajun, and we eat lots of spicy foods. And this was wow! I don't even know what they all were, but I would love to learn to use them in my recipes. I saw lots of familiar items, and many things in English, but not all. There was some opportunity there. Then my 2 favorite experiences happened. I am Cajun as I said before and we have a snack food that is pretty much unique to our culture that I know of. Everywhere in Louisiana, there are gas stations, and meat shops, and places to get Cracklin's. Cracklins' are pork skin with the meat and fat still on, fried and seasoned spicy and served in little nuggets of deliciousness. I miss them as I am unable to get them in my previous new home in California, and now here in Nevada. Everywhere has pork rinds, but that isn't even close to the hot, crisp, salty, spicy, fatty and devilishly unhealthy sweet sin of taste utopia!

And then I saw it! It was a giant! Like a mutant, freakishly gifted and larger than life Cracklin! I was so excited! I couldn't believe I found them, and it was the largest ones I had ever seen. And to think, they had been here all along, but known by a different name, in Spanish "Chicharron". And when I tasted, yep.... Home!

Also, as I waited for my food to be rung up at the register, behind two other hungry customers, I looked at all the fresh, ready to eat Mexican food walked a bit away. This caused me to fail to notice when my turn came in line, and I had abandoned my place in line. But others lined up behind where I had been, and they called out to me. "Sir", I heard in English. I turned and apologized as I hurried to reposition myself at the checkout counter, expecting some irritated manner from other customers and the cashier, as a dumb white boy was holding up the line. But, smiles, kindness and all. I thanked the cashier and turned and thanked the customer who called out to me, then walked away and as I did, I received a kind, friendly response from both.

Lastly, I had to visit the bakery, I mean, who doesn't love sweets? So, I went to the bakery and everyone was busy working and creating delicious pastries all new and curios to my tastebuds. My favorite pastry is a bear claw, and I saw some that looked exactly like them. Had to be them. So, I wanted to buy some. But how? Everyone was working and I needed assistance. So, I stood and prepared myself for the language exchange of confusion and shyness and hoped for the best. Then, customer came up and rang a little bell and the lady came quickly and assisted her. I stood and watched and waited after to see if I'd have the same experience. Once they both left, I rang the bell and someone else came immediately over and asked something in Spanish. I pointed and tried to communicate expecting a weird feeling of wishing I spoke the language and could appear all surprising and cultured to them! And you know, she understood and gave me my pastries. And you know, they weren't bear claws, but not so unfortunately so. They were the exterior taste and texture of bear claws, but with a cream filling. Pretty darn delicious.

So, now we summarize this full experience. The grocery store was much, much more than that. Much more convenient, clean, tidy, organized, and not confusing at all. It was very well staffed, and all were smiling, kind, helpful, and very busy and productive. There were so many different things that made it not a grocery store, which I suppose is why it is called a market. But still, most supermarkets, are just average grocery and convenience stores. Often even, markets can be less than grocery stores, but more like a larger gas station type food store. I was curious, surprised, engaged and interacted with in friendly ways. I was welcomed, I was treated, and I was fed deliciousness, with little expense. I clearly had a shopping experience in a culture, not of my own, yet I felt like I would like to visit more often and maybe I too could feel like part of the family.

This is the experience that Mariana's has the ability to deliver. They have all the tools to give this experience to everyone. They already do to many, as customers all seemed to be regulars and happily shopping. But we need more to experience this. I want others to experience this. I want to help make that happen. So, based on my knowledge, and my nationality, based on my experiences and my hesitations and concerns, I want to change the perception of others like me, and give them the push and encouragement and INVITATION to walk in and shop, dine-in and experience the family, friendly, community, convenience, food, and culture of Mariana's Market. And this is how I think I can help make that happen.