

How the group composition influences customers' expectation of the waiting time in the restaurant setting

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ABSTRACT

In the perfect world, people do not have to wait to get anything. Business operations have the exact capacity available to serve every customer when the customer wants to be served, and no idle capacity. But in the real world, service providers have to match demand and capacity, especially when customers do not arrive at the service operations in perfect timing. In the restaurant setting, waiting time influences customers' repeat-purchase intentions. Previous studies examined how the purpose of dining impacts customers' expectation of waiting time. Nevertheless, according to the authors' knowledge, there are no studies evaluated how the composition of the dining members influence customers' expectation of waiting time. The purpose of this study is to investigate how the composition of group members influences customers' expectation of the waiting time.

Keywords: *restaurant waiting time, different customer groups, waiting time satisfaction, customer satisfaction, waiting time experience.*

INTRODUCTION

Customer satisfaction is important because it is usually related to whether customers will repurchase a product (Katz, Larson & Larson, 1991). Many factors influence customer satisfaction. In the restaurant business, waiting time is an important determinant. Dube, Renaghan, and Miller (1994) claim waiting time will affect customers' repeat-purchase intention to restaurants. Short waiting times result in high customer satisfaction. On the other hand, when a restaurant lets customers wait a long time before they get the service, customers will be dissatisfied (Davis, 1991). According to the previous studies, waiting time would influence customer satisfaction. It is also an critical factor for customers to determine whether they will return to a restaurant or not.

In Dube, Renaghan, and Miller's study (1994), different types of customers have different concerns about waiting time. For example, the study reveals 3.9 % of leisure customers think waiting time is an important element for them to make repeat-purchase

decisions, but among business customers, there are 8.5 % consider waiting time an important factor for them to make repeat-purchase decision. Comparing to leisure customers, business customers concern more about the restaurant waiting time than leisure customers. Previous studies examined how the purpose of dining impacts customers' expectation of waiting time. Nevertheless, according to the authors' knowledge, there is no studies evaluated how the composition of the dining members influence customers' expectation of waiting time. Would customers coming with family accept longer waiting time in a restaurant than a group of friends? Or will a couple be willing to wait longer than business associates? The purpose of this study is to investigate how the composition of group members influences customers' expectation of the waiting time.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Waiting time aspects

Service perishability leads to many problems for service providers and those problems become more serious when capacity cannot match with demand. In order to solve this problem, companies adopt strategies to match capacity and demand (Bielen & Demoulin, 2007; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2002; Bateson & Hoffman, 1999; Lovelock & Lapert, 1999). The first strategy adopted is to flex capacity to meet demand. During the period of peak demand, a company extends its capacity by adding more employees, facilities and equipments. Second, companies might use yield management, they will try to smooth demand. Companies will try to attract consumers during the slow time by providing promotions. They might also use reservation to control the demand. However, even with reservation, service providers still face some difficulties in minimizing delay during the service delivery. When demand and capacity cannot be matched, waiting lines will be found. Some researchers suggested that making waiting time more fun or tolerable will make customers become more patient (Bielen & Demoulin, 2007; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2002). Nowadays, many companies use some ways to make customers have more patients, such as let customers sit in the bar and order something for them, or offer customers a cup of drink while they are waiting. However, when customer waiting time is too long, consumers still will feel dissatisfied. Service providers may lose one or several sale chances, and even worse, such as lose a loyal customer (Bielen & Demoulin, 2007).

The waiting time has four aspects: objective, subjective, cognitive and affective: (1) The objective waiting time means the passes time as measured by customers before being served (Taylor, 1994; Katz et al., 1991; Davis & Vollman, 1990). (2) The subjective waiting time means the customers' estimation of waiting time. In previous researches, the subjective waiting time is measured by means of the perceived waiting time (Pruyn & Smidts, 1998; Hui & Tse, 1996). But the estimated time still depends on customers objectively measured passed time (Bielen & Demoulin, 2007; Antonides et al., 2002; Pruyn & Smidts, 1998; Hornick, 1984). (3) The cognitive waiting time means customers evaluate the waiting, and the waiting time has been evaluated as acceptable, reasonable, tolerable or not, as well as considered to be short or long (Bielen & Demoulin, 2007; Durrande-Moreau, 1999; Pruyn & Smidts, 1998). (4) The affective waiting time means during the waiting time, customers have emotional responses, such as, irritation, boredom, frustration, stress, pleasure, happiness, ... etc. (Pruyn & Smidts, 1998; Hui & Tse, 1996; Taylor, 1994). According to Pruyn and Smidts (1998), the affective and cognitive waiting time are evaluated by customers during the waiting period.

According to Maister (1985), the gap between customers' perceptions and

expectations for waiting period experience will determine the customer's waiting time satisfaction.

Determine the waiting time satisfaction

Previous research shows that the objective and subjective waiting time have negative effects on affective and cognitive waiting time evaluation. Taylor (1994) says that service delay will significantly influence the feeling of anger. Moreover, Pruyn and Smidts (1998) find out that the perceived waiting time will affect the cognitive aspect of the waiting time evaluation. Consequently, perceived waiting time will influence on customers' waiting time satisfaction.

There are other reasons that will determine waiting time satisfaction. In psychological theory, during the waiting period, consumers face uncertainty about how long they have to wait, and experience stress (Bielen & Demoulin, 2007). Some researchers suggest that any information provided during the waiting period can reduce the uncertainty of the wait and lower the level of stress experienced by consumers (Bielen & Demoulin, 2007; Maister, 1985). Moreover, the uncertainty waiting time will influence customers' emotional responses, and then the customers' emotional responses will affect their service evaluation to this restaurant (Bielen & Demoulin, 2007). For example, in some restaurants, when customers arrive, at the beginning, the host will ask them to wait around 30 minutes, but this 30 minutes just for waiting to get the beeper. After customers get the beeper, the host will tell them to wait another period of uncertainty time, in order to get seats. This situation will make customers feel this waiting period never ends and cause their anxious feeling.

The attractiveness of the waiting environment is determined by its physical design, such as, comfort, space, and decoration. Those physical designs will influence on the affective aspect of waiting time (Bielen & Demoulin, 2007; Baker & Cameron, 1996). A pleasant environment will make customers have better feelings. Pruyn and Smidts (1998), assert that when customers perceive attractiveness of the waiting environment will have positive influence on the affective response during the waiting period. For example, in Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. Restaurant in New York City, customers can enjoy the movie scene of Forrest Gump, and shopping in its gift shop which is connected with the waiting room of the restaurant.

METHODOLOGY

This study will be conducted in a casual dining restaurant at an East coast city. A convenience sampling method will be used, and the list of questions was developed based on previously literature review.

The respondents will be divided into different groups based on the composition of the group members. For example, family group, business group, and social gathering group.

During the interview, each group would be asked the same questions which related to their restaurant waiting period experience. Those questions included how long they usually would be willing to wait in a restaurant, what their worst and best waiting experience were, and what the restaurant owner or managers can do to keep them waiting longer, etc.

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