

The Impact of Prolonged Waiting Time of Food Service on Customers' Satisfaction

(M.Sc. Conclusion)

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of waiting time on customers' satisfaction in order to define the factors of critical waiting time to achieve customers' satisfaction. The study's objectives are the definition of the causes of the prolonged waiting time, the correlation of the service waiting-time to customers' satisfaction, the definition of the critical waiting time, the assessment of the optimal operation time standards for sequence of service and the assessment of the effective waiting-time management techniques.

Concerning research methods, the data for this research gathered primarily from a field study carried out at fine dining restaurants of five-star hotels in Cairo. According to its aim, the methodology includes four steps. The first step was to gather operation time standards manual from the leading hotels of the world (LHW) and the best performing hotels in Cairo (Four Seasons Hotel) according to the customer's opinion. These standards are considered a benchmark for the entire hotels investigated in this study. The second step was to gather the data from the customers of fine dining restaurant at five-star hotels in Cairo through survey instrument. In addition, the third step was to investigate the relationship between the waitingtime and the customers' satisfaction. Finally, the fourth step was to explore the effective waiting time management techniques. About 1000 surveys were distributed to the customers of five-star hotels in Cairo during December 2009 until March 2010 over a period of four months.

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations that should be considered. One of the limitations of this study is related to the small sample

size, which may have reduced the versatility of the study result. Another limitation is that customers' expectations are firm-specific and environment-specific. Thus, this study may not be generalized for different restaurant setting. For example, fast food restaurant. Future study is needed for other food service sectors, i.e., fast food restaurant or casual restaurant.

The study concluded that there is a high significant effect of actual waiting time on customer satisfaction at 0.05 levels, this means that the waiting time is one of the determinants of customer' satisfaction. The effect of the expected waiting time is more than that of the actual waiting time on customer satisfaction, this means that the expected waiting time is an important and a stronger determinant of the customer' satisfaction than the actual waiting time. Consequently, the managers should focus on the expected waiting time more than actual waiting time on managing the length of waiting time in order to achieve customer satisfaction.

There is a medium negative relationship between actual waiting time and customer satisfaction at 0.01 levels, consequently, the longer a customer waits, the more dissatisfied he or she becomes with the service. Moreover, the customers have tolerance for the service delay. The study results disagreed with the $WTS = EWT - AWT$ formula (*waiting time satisfaction = expected waiting time - actual waiting time*).

The researcher relied on previous studies and field study methods for the design of the CWTS model. According to previous studies method, the researcher proposed CWTS model, then he tested the model by a field study which stated that the level of waiting tolerance affects the level of waiting time satisfaction. The study proved that the level of customer's waiting time satisfaction is affected negatively only when the waiting time is more than adequate waiting expectation. The researcher designed a model (*CWTS model: Customer's Waiting-Time Satisfaction*) to measure the customer's satisfaction with waiting time during the waiting process. This model designed in forms of mathematical and diagrammatical, the mathematical formula stated that:

$$WTSD = (EWT - AWT) + (AWE - DWE)$$

As *waiting time satisfaction/dissatisfaction = (expected waiting time – actual waiting time) + (adequate waiting expectation – desired waiting expectation)*. If the WTSD value is positive (+) or (0), this leads to the waiting-time satisfaction (WTS) and if the WTSD value is negative this leads to the waiting-time dissatisfaction (WTD). In other words, if the result value is positive, this means that the customer is satisfied and the service is fast by the result value. In addition, the manager saves the result value in minutes for the customer. If

the result value is negative, this means that the customer is dissatisfied and the service is delayed by the result value. In addition, if the result value is zero, this means that the gap between the expected waiting-time and the actual waiting-time (EAD) is equals with the amount of time in which the customers are willing to accept waiting time (CZWT).

Service manager could apply the CWTS model, this need to define the expected waiting time, actual waiting time, minimum acceptable waiting time, maximum acceptable waiting time and the customer's zone of wait tolerance. If the gap between expected waiting time and actual waiting time is negative and more than the customer's zone of wait tolerance, manager should decreases the actual waiting time by the discrepancy between the expected and actual waiting gap and the customer's zone of wait tolerance. Consequently, *waiting time reduction = the gap between expected waiting time and actual waiting time – the customer's zone of wait tolerance*. In addition to the CWTS model, the researcher designed the WCR model to define the waiting customer's reaction toward the length of waiting time during waiting process. Service managers could use the WCR model and have to try to keep waiting time below customers expected waiting time at least or in the customer's zone of wait tolerance, or under the critical waiting time at most to satisfy customers. Finally, the service managers need to look for ways to minimize the impact of waiting time on their customers.

The results reflected a numbers of recommendations could be suggested for managing waiting time effectively. These recommendations are summarized as follows:-

1. Service manager could apply CWTS model in order to manage waiting time effectively. If the gap between expected waiting time and actual waiting time is negative and more than the customer's zone of wait tolerance, manager should decreases the actual waiting time by the discrepancy between expected/actual discrepancy and customer's zone of wait tolerance. Consequently, *waiting time reduction = the gap between expected waiting time and actual waiting time – the customer's zone of wait tolerance*.
2. Keeping waiting time in range of customer' expected waiting time or in customer's zone of wait tolerance, or under the critical waiting time to satisfy customers.
3. Using WCR model to define the waiting customer's reaction toward the length of waiting time during waiting process.
4. Assessment of the optimal waiting time standards to present the desired service for the customers.

5. Provision of the suitable facilities in waiting area and offer of the suitable compensation for the waiting customers might make them occupied, entertained, comforted and not anxious.
6. Defining the average number of customers on the tables to provide the tables that suits this number in order to make the best use of the available capacity.
7. Encouraging customers to have a book their meals.
8. Focusing on the expected waiting time more than actual waiting time on managing the length of waiting time in order to achieve customer satisfaction during pre-process waiting.
9. Looking for ways to minimize the impact of waiting time on customers, such as:
 - Making the customers occupied during waiting time;
 - Try to make customers not to wait long time through pre-process waiting stage;
 - Entertaining customers to prevent anxiety during waiting
 - Informing the customers the amount and the reason of time they should waited for service;
 - Applying the "First-Come, First-Serve" (FCFS) rule;
 - Making the waiting area comfortable for waited customers; and
 - Keeping customers from feeling that they are being ignored or are not important.

This study presented some scientific contributions that help in measuring waiting time satisfaction and managing waiting time effectively. The overall results of this study contribute to the existing knowledge pertaining to the waiting time management and customer' waiting time satisfaction.

1. Designing the CWTS model that measures the level of customer's waiting-time satisfaction during the waiting process.
2. Designing the WCR model that defines the waiting customer's reaction during waiting process.
3. Assessing the critical waiting time
4. Suggesting the effective waiting time management techniques.
5. Presenting the optimal operation time standards in order to set a sequence for service stages.
6. Correlating the waiting-time to the customer' satisfaction.
7. Offering some suggestions for service managers on effective management of waiting time in order to achieve customer satisfaction during the waiting process.
8. This study can help in understanding the impact of different variables (gender, reservation, satisfaction level, and psychological reaction, reaction

- towards long waiting, return and recommendation frequency) on waiting time.
9. Defining the causes of the prolonged waiting-time during the pre-process waiting stage.