

MASTERCOM
Politehnica Graduate Student Journal of Communication
Politehnica University Timișoara
Faculty of Communication Sciences
Communication, Public Relations and Digital Media
VOLUME 9, ISSUE 1, 2024

Customers' Perception of Electronic Services in McDonald's Restaurants

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Abstract: *The article focuses on users' perception of the change in customer service in the McDonald's restaurants, where human employees have been replaced by electronic displays for placing orders. 123 opinions have been collected in a McDonald's restaurant in Timișoara, Romania, and the findings point to a dominantly positive perception. The replacement of human employees by electronic services is a new and powerful trend in services worldwide, McDonald's being a forerunner in introducing and promoting innovative marketing solutions. However, some proposals have been formulated to improve the collection of customer perceptions of this means of service provision.*

Keywords: *electronic services, customer satisfaction, digital use, kiosk*

1. Introduction

The present article focuses on customers' perception of the use of electronic equipment in McDonald's restaurants. McDonald's Corporation, which is the largest fast-food restaurant chain in Romania, entered the Romanian market in 1995, when the first restaurant was opened on the ground floor of the Unirea Shopping Centre in the capital (Stan, 2014).

Currently, McDonald's is the largest fast-food restaurant chain in Romania. By 2018, the company had invested over 50 million dollars in the opening of Romanian units, with constant investments in technology and modernization (Chirita, 2018). Worldwide, McDonald's has a global turnover of around 20 billion dollars and a net profit margin of over 10% (McDonald's, 2023).



Fig. 1. McDonald's logo

The McDonald's marketing department focuses on 6 main directions (Rotundu et al., 2014):

- to provide a unique experience to each customer
- to build a close relationship with the customers to identify their preferences and expectations
- to engage in community involvement
- to promote the company's products and experience

- to increase sales and profitability
- to enhance QSC&V (quality, service, cleanliness and value)

Along these lines, McDonald's is a forerunner in trying out new forms of customer service. In an ever-changing world, digital technology is becoming a vital necessity to thrive in the 21st century. The era of digitisation has made technology present and indispensable in retail. The company's experience in "constant innovation in restaurants", by introducing tools to ease the interaction with customers or by bringing customers' favourite products to the comfort of their homes, through McDelivery, has proved extremely successful over time.

In recent years, a lot of technology has been implemented in restaurants. This paper presents customers' reactions to one of these novelties: electronic kiosks for placing orders (Restaurante, 2022).

2. Research methods

The survey on customer's satisfaction with placing orders at electronic kiosks was conducted in February 2024, on site at the McDonald's Circumvalațiunii restaurant in Timișoara, Romania, with the approval of the restaurant management and the help of the employees.

A questionnaire was used to interview random customers on the premises. A set of concise, relevant questions had been prepared beforehand in the interview protocol, to get the best results in optimal time. The customers were selected randomly for the interview and, after an effective introduction that generated interest, were asked whether they were willing to take part in the survey.

Their kindness and availability, the interest with which they responded and their sincerity were very much appreciated. There were 123 respondents, both men and women from the urban area, aged between 18 and 65+.

3. Results

“Experience of the Future” is a concept that has changed McDonald's restaurants around the world. It offers customers new options, both more comfortable and accessible; in short, a new and unique experience.

Customers can easily and safely order their favourite products at ordering kiosks, pay contactless or cash, opt for table service or personal pick-up at the counter. “Experience of the Future” has already been implemented in 41 restaurants across Romania, and McDonald's continues to invest in the remodelling and digitisation of the remaining restaurants. As a result, customers no longer have to wait in line, and can enjoy more quality time spent with friends or family. Also, Experience of the Future comes with a major benefit in the product serving process (Future, 2019).



Fig. 2. Kiosk Model

In addition, the big investments made by McDonald's have led to the implementation of table service in restaurants, which is also managed electronically, and which has been embraced both by employees and by customers, who can now sit comfortably at the table

waiting for their order instead of crowding in front of the counter (Kiosk, 2019).

What can kiosks do?

Interactive, digital signage kiosks provide a unique experience to customers, through easy access to information and applications, quality and fast services. Some customers said they enjoy the screens that have replaced the physical interaction with the employees.

Over the years, the kiosks have been used by customers as much as possible, due to their animated, intuitive and colourful light panels. The kiosk is a useful and practical device that highlights attractive offers and allows customising the menu. In addition to providing information, placing orders and scanning the barcode or the QR, payments can be made by card or cash at the cash register, based on the ticket with their order number. The kiosks aim to sell. However, restaurants can also use them to post various advertisements, thus promoting McDonald's products. Digitisation creates a unique, fast and quality customer experience, which makes customers return to the restaurant and which fosters a connection with the brand.

What cannot kiosks do?

Kiosks cannot replace employees, at least at this stage. Some customers believe that these kiosks can replace the employees, when, in fact, kiosks increase demand. Kiosks also allow more customers to order more food at the same time. It follows that restaurants like McDonald's need a lot more kitchen staff to prepare the food quickly and well, to fill the orders on time.

Also, the promotion of the product should be real; if the food does not taste good, no customer will be interested in attractive advertisements. Likewise, if the kiosks generate errors and do not allow mobile payment, customers will go elsewhere.

For McDonald's, "Experience of the future" is a major change in strategy. It facilitates order processing; all the products are prepared based on an order. Technology has improved the way in which customers are informed, the way in which they place orders and make payments. A few years ago, paying by card was not so popular. Today, most payments in McDonald's restaurants are made by card.

In restaurants where the full "Experience of the future" service is accessible, customers can order through the kiosks and pick up the order themselves when it is ready, within a reasonable time. The actual order completion time is shorter, because order preparation starts right after the customer has completed the order. Electronic kiosks will not replace cashiers completely in McDonald's restaurants, as there are still people who are not familiar with technology and prefer paying at the cash register, or who want to interact with the staff. Placing orders through digital kiosks is a new experience for those who are not familiar with the digital system implemented in some restaurants.

E-commerce process automation is one of the most significant changes McDonald's has seen in the last decade. The McDonald's e-commerce application provides a variety of interactive tools to customers, including an online restaurant locator that also provides details for each location. This allows customers to find restaurants quickly, especially in a new area, and to plan their events, such as meetings, based on the facilities available at each location. The app also allows customers to scan their loyalty card QR code to find information about the latest campaigns and favourite products, and to order food or various other products, such as T-shirts, caps, hoodies, pants, soccer balls and bags. Orders can be placed on the mobile phone on the restaurant premises, as well as from home, with subsequent pick-up from the restaurant. The QR code is a type of two-dimensional barcode (matrix code) that decodes the information quickly and allows customers to access product information.

Providing online services is a way to grow, keep track of customers and know their preferences. E-commerce helps McDonald's achieve

faster processes, synchronise and standardise their operations worldwide. Among other automation initiatives, McDonald's and MasterCard operate the OneSmart MasterCard PayPass transaction system. In some McDonald's restaurants, customers can tap their MasterCard on a PayPass reader to make a purchase or to pay by phone. This technology also enables quick, secure and efficient completion of small value purchases. Such initiatives help reduce costs and maximise revenue.



Fig. 1.3. Order Kiosk/ Order employee

4. Conclusions

Traditional ordering systems often lead to human error and service failure. For example, language barriers independent of the will of either party or the wrong wording of orders can result in long waiting times during peak hours.

Therefore, kiosks can provide a better alternative solution for customers, instead of waiting in long queues for direct service with the staff.

Kiosk interface have improved efficiency and have provided more time for menu selection, with detailed and clearer information when it comes to menu customization. By using the kiosks, customers get a sense of empowerment, because they have enough time to consider when choosing a menu. On the other hand, if customers had difficulty adopting the technology, their acceptance of the technology would be

slow. In the fast-food service industry, the relationship between user experience, perceived waiting time, waiting environment and customer satisfaction are key performance indicators (KPIs). McDonald's makes good use of all these indicators.

Premier Restaurants Romania is an example of success due to its longevity and development policy. The company blends the main features of fast-service restaurants (such as a wide range of products, dishes that can be eaten on the spot or takeaway dishes, 24/7 service, guaranteed hygiene and protection, friendly and available staff) with modern services, creating new expectations for the customers. They can order their favourite food very easily, customize their order using the kiosks, pay by phone, card or cash, at the cash register, and claim the offers from McDonald's mobile application, contactless.

The mobile application is one of the main development accelerators for the coming years. It currently has over 1.5 million users and constantly surprises customers with new offers to meet the growing demand for online orders. The McDonald's website allows customers to complete a customer satisfaction survey. At first glance, it seems like a facility accessible to any mobile phone owner; customers can answer the 10 survey questions at home, at the office or any other place. The survey can also be taken in the restaurant, at the recommendation of an employee, but the procedure takes time and is not so user friendly. A proposal for the future, based on my research, would be that McDonald's add an additional question to measure customer satisfaction. The question should come up once the customer has completed their order at the kiosk and should be a yes/no question or a smiley rating question. This proposal could be implemented immediately, with basic programming, and it would facilitate the swift collection of measurable data.

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