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Dining Duration and Customer Satisfaction

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Dining Duration and Customer Satisfaction

Abstract

Restaurateurs may be tempted to speed up the pace of their customers' meals during busy periods in a bid to increase table turns. While selling more covers should boost revenues, a study of restaurant patrons finds that strategies aimed at reducing dining time should be applied carefully. By dividing a dining experience into three segments, one can assess the effects of duration-reduction efforts at each point in the process. On balance, restaurant patrons do not want to feel that they are being rushed nor do they want to be unduly delayed. Indeed, it is the perception of the speed (or lack thereof), rather than the actual time spent dining, that carries the most weight with restaurant patrons. If a perceived wait is longer than what guests expected, their satisfaction is likely to diminish, along with their assessment of the server's abilities and their likelihood to return. By the same token if a meal proceeds at a tempo much faster than expected, diners will feel rushed and will conclude that their server is not willing or able to attend to their needs. In particular, restaurants should approach the actual meal, that is, the in-process stage of the dining experience, with care. On the other hand, the pre-process stage, when guests are ordering drinks and reading the menu, and the post-process stage, when guests are receiving and settling the check, can be hastened in certain situations. The study found that patrons in casual and upscale casual restaurants are more willing to accept duration-reduction strategies than are patrons of fine-dining restaurants, where an appropriate pace is essential to satisfaction.

Keywords

restaurants, dining during, service pace, guest satisfaction

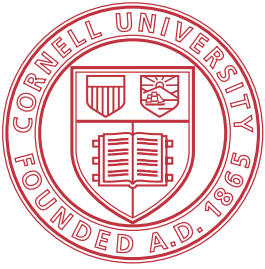
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Dining Duration and Customer Satisfaction

**By Breffni Noone, Ph.D.,
and Sheryl E. Kimes, Ph.D.**

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Dining Duration and Customer Satisfaction

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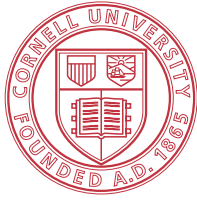
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Dining Duration and Customer Satisfaction

By Breffni M. Noone and Sheryl E. Kimes

RESTAURATEURS MAY BE TEMPTED to speed up the pace of their customers' meals during busy periods in a bid to increase table turns. While selling more covers should boost revenues, a study of restaurant patrons finds that strategies aimed at reducing dining time should be applied carefully. By dividing a dining experience into three segments, one can assess the effects of duration-reduction efforts at each point in the process. On balance, restaurant patrons do not want to feel that they are being rushed nor do they want to be unduly delayed. Indeed, it is the perception of the speed (or lack thereof), rather than the actual time spent dining, that carries the most weight with restaurant patrons. If a perceived wait is longer than what guests expected, their satisfaction is likely to diminish, along with their assessment of the server's abilities and their likelihood to return. By the same token if a meal proceeds at a tempo much faster than expected, diners will feel rushed and will conclude that their server is not willing or able to attend to their needs. In particular, restaurants should approach the actual meal, that is, the in-process stage of the dining experience, with care. On the other hand, the pre-process stage, when guests are ordering drinks and reading the menu, and the post-process stage, when guests are receiving and settling the check, can be hastened in certain situations. The study found that patrons in casual and upscale casual restaurants are more willing to accept duration-reduction strategies than are patrons of fine-dining restaurants, where an appropriate pace is essential to satisfaction.

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Dining Duration and Customer Satisfaction

By Breffni M. Noone and Sheryl E. Kimes

One way for restaurant managers to increase their revenues for a busy meal period is to reduce dining duration. As much as managers might like to reduce duration and make more money, though, they should be concerned with how any reduction in duration might affect customer satisfaction. If customers feel as though they are rushed, they may become unhappy and may not return to the restaurant. Questions that arise in connection with this quandary include the following: (1) Should dining duration be reduced?, (2) If so, how should it be reduced?, and (3) What effect would reduced duration have on customers' satisfaction and their intent to return to the restaurant?

Because we have seen little research conducted in relation to these questions, we conducted the study described in this report to examine the potential effect that dining duration might have on customer satisfaction.

To study this matter, we first conducted a series of in-depth interviews with restaurant customers. We then developed the survey shown at the end of this report, which we used to measure customers' perceptions of dining duration and satisfaction, as well as their perceptions of a number of additional factors that restaurant customers identified during the interview process as influencing the effect that duration has on their satisfaction with dining experiences.

In this report, we begin by examining the potential revenue and customer-satisfaction implications of reducing dining duration. We then describe and present the results of the interviews and the survey that we used to examine the relationship between dining duration and customer satisfaction. Finally, we discuss the implications of our findings for restaurant operators.

Implications of Reducing Dining Duration

Restaurant operators can apply a number of different approaches to reduce dining duration, including streamlining the service-delivery process, changing reservation policies, and redesigning menus.¹ With reduced dining duration, quoted wait times for tables will decrease, in turn reducing the likelihood of losing customers due to excessive waits, and ultimately increasing covers and revenues. While these outcomes are appealing, a key issue to consider is whether reducing dining duration will diminish customer satisfaction.

Most of the research that has been done in relation to how long a customer is in a restaurant has focused on wait time. In that regard, a lengthy wait has been shown to reduce customer satisfaction and customer evaluations of service in such diverse service businesses as restaurants, banks, and airlines.² The nature of the wait is critical. It has been shown, for instance, that it is perceived wait time, not actual wait time, that has the greatest effect on customer satisfaction.³ Moreover, the stage of the experi-

ence during which customers have to wait can influence their reactions to waiting.

The dining experience can be broken into three stages: (1) the pre-process stage, which extends from a customer's arrival at the restaurant until he or she orders the meal; (2) the in-process stage, which involves placing an order and consuming the meal; and, (3) the post-process stage, from check settlement until the customer leaves. Customers have been shown to be more upset when a delay occurred during the pre-process or post-process stages of the dining experience than when a delay occurred during the in-process stage, even though the de-

Restaurant patrons do not want to be rushed through their meal.

lay was of the same length in each stage.⁴ This suggests that, to minimize the negative effect of wait time on customer satisfaction, restaurant operators should endeavor to avoid delays at the beginning and end of dining experiences.

While these findings in relation to wait time provide a clear indication that excessive dining duration will create a dissatisfying experience for customers, particularly when there's unnecessary wait time, the findings do not provide insight into how customers will react to strategies designed to reduce duration. For one thing, customers' reactions to duration may be influenced by the type of restaurant. Customers may want to minimize overall dining duration for fast-food dining, for instance, but this may not be the case for dining experiences in full-service restaurants. A number of articles recently published in the popular press provide anecdotal evidence of negative customer reac-

¹ S.E. Kimes and R.B. Chase, "The Strategic Levers of Yield Management," *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1998), pp.156-166.

² For example, see: S. Taylor, "Waiting for Service: The Relationship Between Delays and Evaluations of Service," *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (1994), pp. 56-69; G. Tom and S. Lucey, "A Field Study Investigating the Effect of Waiting Time on Customer Satisfaction," *Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 131, No. 6 (1997), pp. 655-660; and A. Pruyn and A. Smidts, "Effects of Waiting on the Satisfaction with the Service: Beyond Objective Time Measurements," *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (1998), pp. 321-334.

³ For example, see: K.L. Katz, B.M. Larson, and R.C. Larson, "Prescription for the Waiting-in-Line Blues: Entertain, Enlighten and Engage," *Sloan Management Review*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (1991), pp. 44-53; and Pruyn and Smidts, *op.cit.*

⁴ L. Dubé-Rioux, B.H. Schmitt, and F. Leclerc, "Consumers' Reactions to Waiting: When Delays Affect the Perception of Service Quality," *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1989), pp. 59-63.

tion to practices employed by restaurant operators to reduce service duration (and also by golf course operators).⁵ These anecdotal findings underscore the necessity to gain a clearer understanding of the relationship between dining duration and satisfaction.

The Customers' Perspective

Given the lack of research on the relationship between dining duration and customer satisfaction, we conducted a series of in-depth interviews to try to gain some insight into this relationship. Based on a combination of these interview data and previous research, we then developed a survey to empirically evaluate the relationship between duration and customer satisfaction.

Interviews with Restaurant Customers

Our interviews involved both customers with restaurant expertise (i.e., people who had experience working in the restaurant industry) and typical (non-expert) customers. The rationale for including customers with restaurant expertise was that these customers typically have a heightened awareness of the restaurant environment. As it turned out, however, we found a high convergence in the responses from the experts and the more typical customers, and so we did not differentiate between the two groups in the presentation of results. We conducted sixteen interviews, eight with each type of customer, lasting one hour on average. At the start of each interview, the interviewee was asked to take a few minutes to think about recent occasions that he or she had eaten in a restaurant and then to describe those experiences and answer a number of questions in relation to them.

A matter of pacing. One of the first things that we discovered during the interview process

⁵ P. Suchman and W. Tesoriero "Hurry Up and Putt—With Iron Hand, Golf Marshals Get Rough on Slow Duffers: Mr. Blanco's Marching Orders," *Wall Street Journal*, April 9, 2004, p. W1; and P. Bhatia, "Hurry Up and Eat," *Wall Street Journal*, June 21, 2002, p. W1.

was that, rather than describe duration in absolute terms of how long or short the experience was, interviewees tended to describe the duration in terms of their perceptions of the pace at which the meal progressed. Interviewees tended to be less satisfied with dining experiences where they perceived that the pace of the experience was either much slower or much faster than they expected. In keeping with earlier research, our participants identified excessive wait time as being the key driver of their dissatisfaction with a slow pace. On the other hand, when a fast pace caused dissatisfaction, participants tended to attribute this dissatisfaction to feeling rushed. For example, interviewees typically used phrases like "I felt hurried" and "I felt as if the server was rushing me along" to explain their dissatisfaction with fast-paced meals.

Interview data also suggested that customers' perceptions of the pace of dining experiences can affect their evaluations of the server's performance. For example, a slow-paced experience reduced interviewees' perceptions of their server's responsiveness to their needs and their perceptions of the promptness with which they received service. In some cases, a slow pace also led interviewees to question their server's skill level and knowledge and led to decreased trust in their server's ability to provide what they considered to be good service. At the other end of the scale, fast-paced dining experiences often led interviewees to question their server's sensitivity towards their needs, as well as the server's ability and willingness to provide them with individual attention. Given the research which has shown that the perceived performance of service employees affects customers' evaluations of service,⁶ when customers' per-

⁶ For example, see: M.J. Bitner, B.H. Booms, and M. Stanfield Tetreault, "The Service Encounter: Diagnosing Favorable and Unfavorable Incidents," *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (1990), pp. 71–84; M. Guiry, "Consumer and Employee Roles in Service Encounters," *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1992), pp. 666–672; and K.F. Winsted, "Evaluating Service Encounters: A Cross-Cultural Industry Exploration," *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1999), pp. 106–123.

ceptions of pace damage their perceptions of a server's performance, that will, in turn, reduce their satisfaction.

Who's in charge? The extent to which interviewees felt that they had control over the pace of the dining experience also affected their satisfaction with the experience. Higher satisfaction levels were associated with experiences where interviewees felt that they had control over—and, indeed, were driving—the meal's pace. This is consistent with previous research that has shown that enhanced perceptions of control contribute to the pleasantness of service experiences.⁷ Interviewees' descriptions of their experiences indicated that their perceptions of the amount of control that they had over the pace of dining experiences diminished with faster-paced experiences. The same held true when the pace of the meal was perceived as being slow. These findings suggest diminished customer satisfaction when an inappropriate pace interferes with customers' perceptions of control.

Interviewees' descriptions of dining experiences also suggested that the effect of the pace on satisfaction may be influenced by the norms that customers associate with a given type of restaurant. For example, interviewees indicated that they expect and will accept a faster pace in a casual restaurant than in a fine-dining restaurant. Thus, speeding up the pace may not damage customer satisfaction in casual-dining restaurants. In addition to the type of restaurant, their descriptions suggested that meal type (i. e., lunch or dinner) and the customer's reason for dining on a given occasion (i.e., social, business, or convenience) can also influence the effect of pace on satisfaction. This is consistent with previous research that showed that customer satisfaction is influenced by experience-based norms.⁸

⁷ M.K. Hui and J.E. Bateson, "Perceived Control and the Effects of Crowding and Consumer Choice on the Service Experience," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1991), pp. 174–184.

⁸ R.B. Woodruff, E.R. Cadotte, and R.L. Jenkins, "Modeling Consumer Satisfaction Process Using Experience-Based Norms," *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1983), pp. 296–304.

Survey of Restaurant Customers

Based on the insights provided by the interview data, we developed a customer survey to test the relationship between pace and satisfaction and to examine the factors influencing this relationship. We instructed respondents to recall a recent dining experience (lunch or

The extent to which respondents felt that they had control over the pace of their dinner affected their satisfaction.

dinner) in a sit-down restaurant (casual, upscale casual, or fine-dining), write a description of the experience, and then answer questions to measure their perceptions of (1) the pace of the experience, (2) the server's performance, and (3) the control that respondents had over the meal's pace.⁹ Additionally, we asked for (4) their satisfaction with the experience and (5) their intentions to return to and recommend the restaurant. The survey that we used is provided [in the appendix](#) at the end of this report.

⁹ We measured perceptions of pace, server performance and control for each stage of the dining experience. For the purpose of this study we defined a dining experience as beginning when a party is seated at its table and ends when the party vacates the table. It could be argued that the dining experience begins when the party enters the restaurant and includes both the interaction with the host and the time, if any, spent waiting for a table. However, the narrower definition used in this study reflects the revenue management objective of maximizing the revenue generated per unit of inventory. The unit of inventory in a restaurant context is a seat at a table, with the associated revenue management objective being to maximize the revenue generated by each seat that exists in the restaurant. Therefore, it is time spent at the table that was relevant in this study. Based on our definition of a dining experience we defined the three stages of dining experiences as follows: (1) Pre-Process Stage: Begins at the time that a party is seated at a table up to, and including, the point at which the first food course is delivered to the table. (2) In-Process Stage: Begins at the time that a party receives the first food course and lasts up until the point in time that either: (a) the party requests the check or (b) the server automatically delivers the check (i.e. without the party having requested it). (3) Post-Process Stage: Begins at the time that either: (a) the party requests the check or (b) the server automatically delivers the check, and lasts up to the time that the party vacates the table.

EXHIBIT 1

OVERALL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED PACE AND SATISFACTION

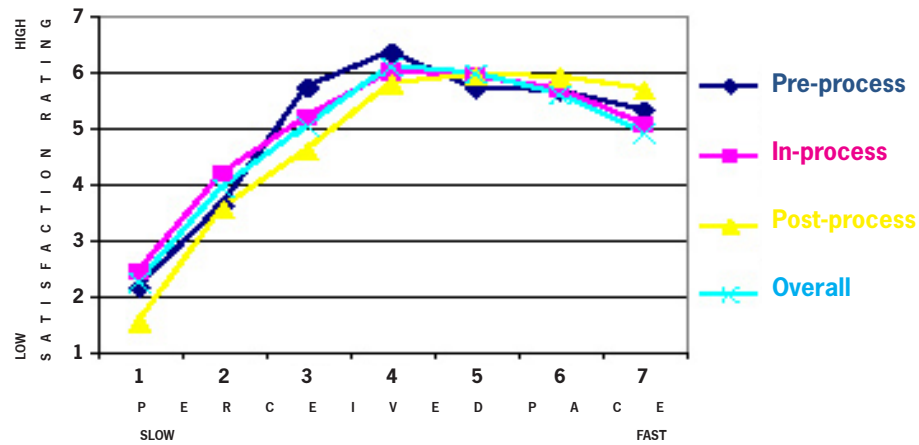
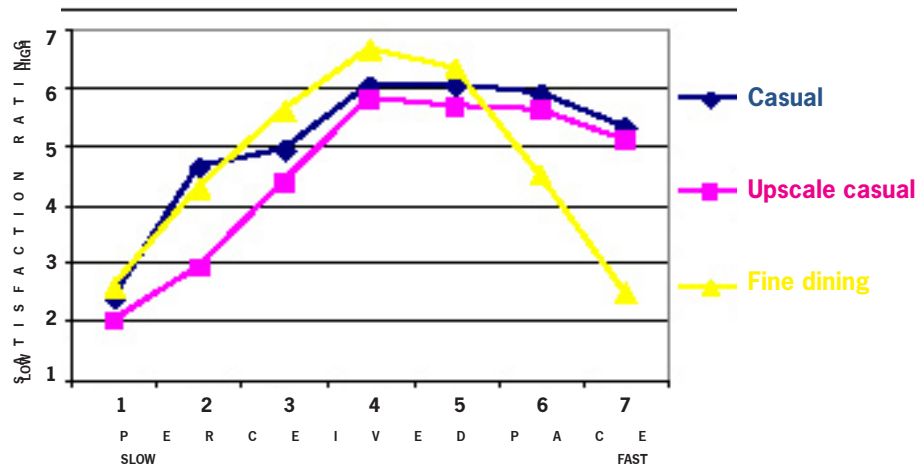


EXHIBIT 2

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED PACE AND SATISFACTION BY RESTAURANT TYPE



We mailed the survey to 580 people, including members of a handicraft association, a subset of a Cornell University undergraduate student parents' mailing list, and employees of a clinical research organization. A tiered drawing, comprising gift certificates for a range of different values and a number of service outlets, was used to provide an incentive to subjects to complete the questionnaire. We received 270 useable surveys for our analysis.¹⁰

¹⁰ Regression was used to analyze the survey data

Survey Results

Overall, the survey results provided empirical support for the relationships that we established from the interview data. The results are summarized below:

(1) *Pace and satisfaction.* Respondents' perceptions of the dinner's pace affected their satisfaction. Specifically, when respondents perceived the pace of a dining experience as being particularly fast or slow, their satisfaction was reduced. This relationship between pace and satisfaction held for the dining experience as a whole and also for each individual stage of the

EXHIBIT 3

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED PACE AND SATISFACTION IN THE PRE-PROCESS STAGE BY RESTAURANT TYPE

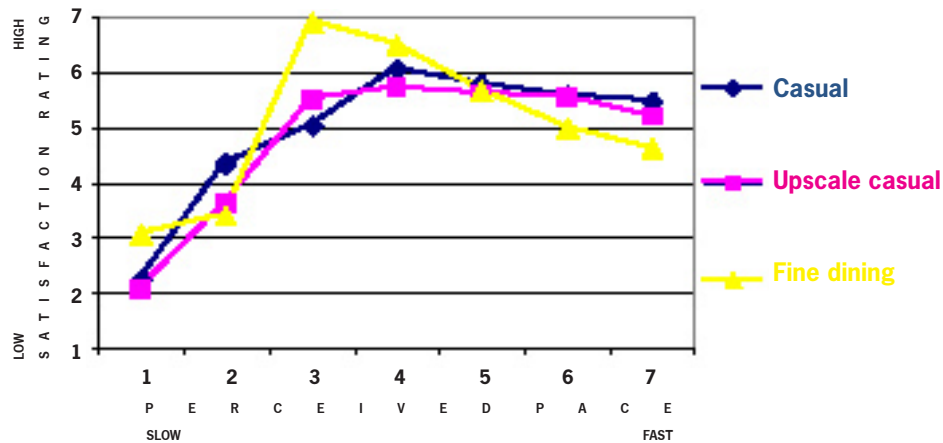
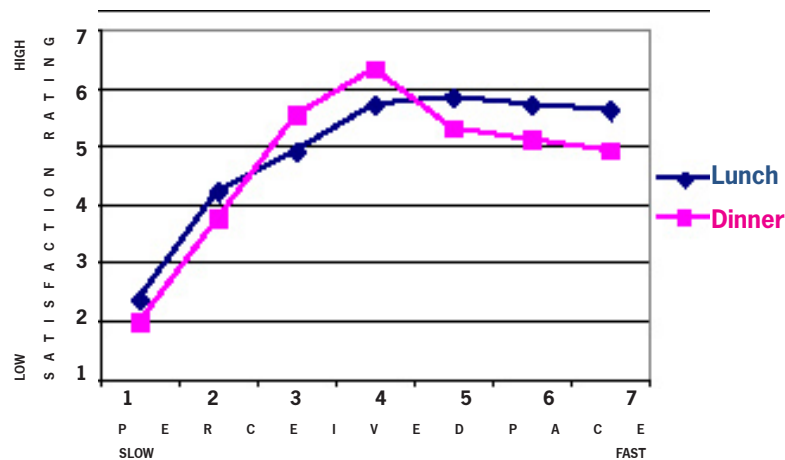


EXHIBIT 4

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED PACE AND SATISFACTION IN THE PRE-PROCESS STAGE BY MEALTYPE



experience. However, we found that respondents had a much greater tolerance for a fast pace in the post-process stage than during the pre-process and in-process stages (see Exhibit 1).

Norms. We found that the relationship between perceived pace and satisfaction for the overall dining experience was influenced by restaurant type. Specifically, lower satisfaction ratings were associated with a fast pace for fine-dining experiences than were found in casual or upscale casual experiences (Exhibit 2).

Interestingly, neither meal type nor reason for dining had an influence on the rela-

tionship between the overall pace of the dining experience and overall satisfaction. The stage of the meal did matter, however, in fine-dining restaurants and during dinner in all restaurant types. We found that a fast pace during the pre-process stage yielded lower satisfaction ratings for fine-dining experiences than did a fast pre-process pace in casual or upscale casual restaurants (Exhibit 3). Additionally, a fast pace in the pre-process stage reduced satisfaction ratings for dinner more than for lunch (Exhibit 4). The reason for dining, however, did not influence the relationship between pace and satisfaction during the pre-process stage.

EXHIBIT 5

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED PACE AND PERCEIVED SERVER PERFORMANCE

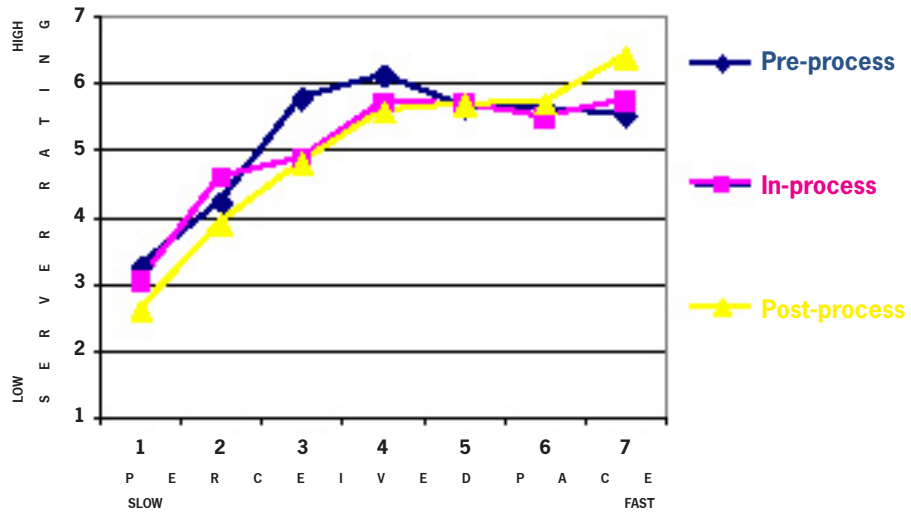
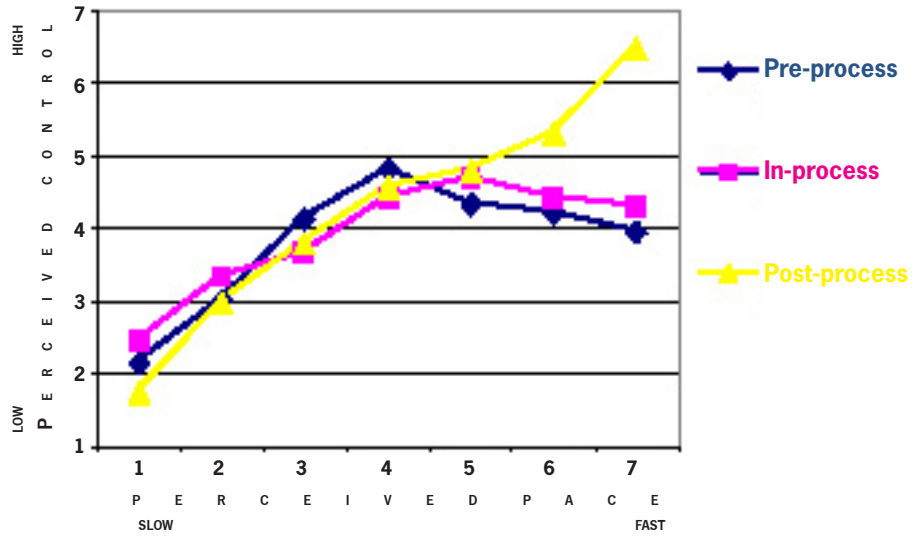


EXHIBIT 6

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED PACE AND PERCEIVED CONTROL



None of the three restaurant environments influenced the relationship between perceived pace and satisfaction for the in-process or post-process stages of the dining experience. That is, the negative effect of a fast pace on satisfaction held for both stages irrespective of the restaurant type, meal type, or reason for dining.

(2) *Pace and server performance.* Respondents' perceptions of the pace of dining experiences affected their assessment of the server's performance. For the pre-process and in-process stages, we found that when respondents perceived the pace as being extremely fast or slow they likewise lowered their perceptions of the server's performance. However, during the post-process stage we found a strictly linear relationship between perceived pace and perceptions of server performance, indicating that respondents' assessment of the server's performance improved as the pace increased (Exhibit 5).

(3) *Pace and control.* We found similar results for perceived pace and control as applied to server performance. During the pre-process and in-process stages, a faster pace reduced respondents' perceptions of the control that they had over the pace of their meal. As with server performance, we found support for a linear relationship between perceived pace and perceptions of control for the post-process stage (Exhibit 6).

(4) *Server performance, control, and service-stage satisfaction.* Consistent with previous research, the results indicated that respondents' perceptions of server performance and control rose in tandem with their satisfaction with each service stage. This suggests that a positive relationship of perceived pace with both server performance and control will, in turn, enhance service-stage satisfaction.

(5) *Service-stage satisfaction, overall satisfaction, and behavioral intentions.* Results indicated that satisfaction with the in-process stage had the greatest effect on respondents' overall dining satisfaction. Consistent with previous research, overall satisfaction with the dining experience had a positive effect on customer's likelihood to return to and recommend the restaurant.

Managerial Implications

We found that customers are sensitive to the pace of dining experiences. Not only can an inappropriately fast-paced experience reduce customers' satisfaction, but it can also damage their perceptions of the server's performance and of the control that customers have over the pace of their meal. Furthermore, the stage of the dining experience matters when it comes to pacing. This is the first empirical support

Respondents' perceptions of the pace of dining experiences affected their assessment of the server's performance.

for what experienced managers have long believed—namely, that customers favor a brisk pace during the pre-process and post-process stages of their dining experience, but that they dislike being “rushed along” during the in-process stage. Study findings also demonstrate the differential effect of pace on overall satisfaction in different types of restaurants and the effect of meal type on the relationship between pace and satisfaction.

Given that reducing the duration (that is, increasing the pace) of a dining experience can boost revenues, the question becomes the following: How can restaurant operators minimize the potential negative effects associated with reduced dining duration? Based on the study results, we suggest the following.

(1) *Focus duration-reduction efforts on the post-process stage.* Restaurant operators should focus their duration-reduction efforts on the post-process stage of the dining experience. Results indicated that, regardless of the type of restaurant, meal type, or the reason for dining, respondents had a greater tolerance for a fast pace during the post-process stage than during either the pre-process or in-process stages. Furthermore, a faster pace during the post-process stage led to improved consumer percep-

Restaurant managers who want to adjust dining duration should consider the following points:

- (1)** Focus duration-reduction efforts on the post-process stage.
- (2)** Assess opportunities for reducing duration during the pre-process stage.
- (3)** Avoid the implementation of duration-reduction strategies during the in-process stage.
- (4)** Greater opportunity to reduce duration exists in casual and upscale casual restaurants than in fine-dining restaurants.
- (5)** Consider giving customers explicit control over the pace of their meal.
- (6)** Recognize the importance of maintaining a consistent pace throughout the dining experience.
- (7)** Evaluate tradeoffs connected with dining duration.

tions of server performance and customer control. Actions that could be taken at this stage could include reducing the time for check delivery and processing.

(2) *Assess opportunities for reducing duration during the pre-process stage.* While the survey results indicated that respondents reacted unfavorably to a fast pace during the pre-process stage, their descriptions of dining experiences suggest that a faster pace can be desirable with respect to certain pre-process activities. For example, a prompt greeting and prompt delivery of drinks was often favored by respondents. However, a deliberate pace may be necessary when a first-time customer is involved. For example, first-time customers are likely to require more time before placing their order due to their unfamiliarity with the menu.

(3) *Avoid the implementation of duration-reduction strategies during the in-process stage.* Any actions to streamline the in-process stage of the dining experience should be approached with caution. We found that customers are most sensitive to a fast pace during this stage of their meal. Not only did a faster pace reduce respondents' satisfaction with this stage of the experience, it also diminished their assessment of the server's performance and the guest's control. Additionally, given that satisfaction with the in-process stage was found to have the greatest impact on overall satisfaction, actions to reduce duration during this stage are most likely to reduce the likelihood that the guest will return to or recommend the restaurant.

(4) *Greater opportunity to reduce duration exists in casual and upscale casual restaurants than in fine-dining restaurants.* The greater potential for casual-dining restaurant operators to reduce duration comes particularly during the pre-process stage. Results indicated that a fast pace had less impact on overall satisfaction with dining experiences in casual and upscale casual restaurants than in fine-dining restaurants. The same was true for satisfaction when the pre-process stage was relatively speedy.

(5) *Consider giving customers explicit control over the pace of their meal.* When customers' per-

ceive that they can control the pace of the service encounter, they feel more satisfied. In this context, restaurant operators should consider the feasibility of allowing customers to dictate the pace of the dining experience. This could take various forms, from the virtually complete customer control over pace of the meal experience that a buffet set-up affords to allowing customers to take control over the pace of certain stages of the experience (e.g., asking customers to place their menu to the edge of the table to signal when they are ready to order).

That said, giving the customer full control of the meal's pace during peak periods can defeat the effort to speed table turns. Additionally, operators should be aware that this type of strategy may not be appealing to all types of customers. In particular, it may not be desirable to customers who prefer the server to take control of and manage the dining experience in a fine-dining or special-occasion restaurant, or when the party is relatively large and guests want to relax with each other rather than pay attention to how the meal is progressing.

(6) *Recognize the importance of maintaining a consistent pace throughout the dining experience.* In their descriptions of dining experiences respondents expressed a significant intolerance of inconsistent pacing within the dining experience. Thus, once an appropriate tempo is set, the server should try to maintain a consistent pace of service. This will not only be received favorably by customers, but any actions taken to improve the consistency of service delivery will likely also lead to reduction in average dining duration.

(7) *Evaluate the tradeoffs.* Few strategies are without their tradeoffs. While reducing duration can allow restaurants to serve more customers during peak demand periods, the potential benefit of the additional revenues generated could be outweighed by the negative long-term effect that reductions in duration may have on

customer satisfaction and the ensuing loss of revenues. However, as outlined above, this potential effect can be minimized by implementing duration-reduction procedures during certain stages of the service encounter.

Conclusion: Pacing Matters

Reducing dining duration during peak demand periods will enable restaurant operators to generate additional revenue, but only if duration-reduction strategies don't damage customer satisfaction. This study showed that customers' perceptions of the pace of a meal experience can reduce their satisfaction. In addition to the direct effect of pacing on customer satisfaction, the study also showed that the perceived pace of a meal can also affect satisfaction indirectly through its reduction of customer perceptions of server performance and control. A restaurateur who wants to apply duration-reduction strategies should note the appropriateness of those strategies to specific meal stages.

The limitations to this study should be addressed in future studies. First, study findings are based on a convenience sample and data were collected retrospectively (within three weeks of the experience as opposed to directly following the experience). Future research using other sampling techniques and methods is needed to determine the robustness of the results. Second, the study did not, nor was it intended to, capture all of the causes and consequences of customer satisfaction with dining experiences. There may be additional factors influencing the relationship between perceived pace and customer satisfaction that merit examination, for example, volume of customers, volume and type of music, and the comfort of the physical facilities. Finally, different approaches that restaurant operators can use to reduce duration should be assessed to establish their potential impact on customer satisfaction. ★★★★★

Service Experience Survey

The purpose of this survey is to gain a better understanding of customer evaluations of service experiences. The survey comprises two parts:

- In Part One you will be asked to recall a meal experience that you have had in a restaurant and to describe that experience.

- In Part Two of the survey you will be asked to complete a number of sets of questions in relation to the experience that you have recalled.

NOTE: Your participation in this survey is purely voluntary and you may stop answering the questions at any time and for whatever reason.

Part One

In this study we are interested only in customer experiences in sit-down restaurants. This includes a number of different types of restaurants: casual restaurants (Average check per person: \$12 to \$20 e.g. Applebee's, Chili's, T.G.I. Friday), upscale casual restaurants (Average check per person: \$20 to \$30 e.g. PF Chang, Houstons) and fine dining restaurants (Average check per person: above \$30 e.g. Ruth's Chris Steakhouse, Le Cirque).

Please take a moment to review the following definition of a meal experience that we are using in this study:

A meal experience begins when you are seated at your table and ends when you vacate your table. Typical activities that occur during this period include being greeted by your server, the ordering and delivery of drinks, the ordering, delivery and clearing of appetizers/entrees/desert and coffee and the request, delivery and return of the check.

Now we would like you to take a couple of minutes to recall a recent occasion when you were out for lunch or dinner in a restaurant where there was an instance, or instances, during the meal when you felt that the pace of the meal was fast. Note: Depending on the circumstances, fast could either be a **good** or a **bad** thing.

Can you recall this kind of experience? Yes ___ No ____

If you selected **yes**, please continue to the questions below.

If you selected **no**, please recall any recent occasion that you were out for lunch or dinner in a restaurant. Now please continue to the questions below.

Please answer the following questions in relation to your meal experience on this occasion:

1. What type of meal did you have on this specific occasion? Lunch ___ Dinner ___

2. Approximately how long ago did this meal experience occur? _____

3. What type of restaurant were you in? Casual ___ Upscale casual ___ Fine dining ___
Name of restaurant (optional): _____

4. Had you eaten in this specific restaurant before?
 Never ____ 1-5 Times ____ 6-10 Times ____ >10 Times ____
5. Why did you go to a restaurant on this occasion? Please select one only.
 Social (out for a meal with family/friends) ____ Business ____ Convenience ____
 Special Occasion/Celebration ____ Other (Please specify) ____
6. How many people dined in your party (including you)? Adults ____ Children ____
7. Who paid the check? You ____ Your spouse/partner ____ Split Check ____ Other ____
8. Did you have a reservation on this occasion? Yes ____ No ____
 If you had a reservation, did the restaurant honor it at the requested time? Yes ____ No ____
 If you did not have a reservation was there a wait for your table? Yes ____ No ____
9. Please rate the following elements of the restaurant environment on this occasion by circling the number on each scale that represents your answer. Select Cannot Recall if appropriate.
- Lighting** Very Bright 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not at all Bright Cannot Recall ____
- Music (Tone)** Very Loud 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not at all Loud Cannot Recall ____
- Music (Pace)** Very Fast 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not at all Fast Cannot Recall ____
- Volume of Customers** Very Crowded 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not at all Crowded Cannot Recall ____
- Any other comments about the environment?

Now we would like you to describe your meal experience on this specific occasion. Indicate in your description what it was about the experience that made you feel the way you did about the pace of the meal.

Part Two

In this part of the survey we would like you to continue to focus on the meal experience that you have recalled in Part One of the survey and answer a number of sets of questions in relation to that specific experience. There are four sections in this part of the survey. Please complete all sections.

Section One

In this section, we would like you to think specifically about the **first stage** of the meal that you have recalled.

For the purpose of this study, the following definition of the **first stage** of a meal is being used: The **first stage** of a meal begins at the time that you are seated at your table up to, and including the point at which your server delivers your first food course to your table. Typical interactions that occur during this stage include being greeted by your server, ordering drinks and delivery of drinks, ordering food and delivery of your first food course.

1. Please rate the service that you received during the **first stage** of your meal. Circle the number that represents your answer.

Service Experience Survey (continued)

To What Extent	Not at All			Extremely So			
Was your server friendly?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Did your server have the knowledge to answer your questions?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Was your server polite?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Did your server's behavior instill your confidence in him/her?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Was your server available when you needed service?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Did your server have your best interests at heart?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Was prompt service provided?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Did your server understand your specific needs?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Did your server give you individual attention?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Was the timing of the service that was provided oriented to your needs?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Was your server willing to help you?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Did your server give you the privacy that you needed?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. To what extent do you agree with the following statement?

I believe that I had the ability to influence the pace of the **first stage** of my meal.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

3. How would you describe the pace of the **first stage** of your meal?

Extremely Fast 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Slow

4. How acceptable was the pace of the **first stage** of your meal to you?

Extremely Acceptable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Unacceptable

5. How much control did you have over the pace of the **first stage** of your meal?

Complete Control 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Absolutely No Control

6. How would you describe the length of the **first stage** of your meal?

Extremely Short 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Long

7. How acceptable was the length of the **first stage** of your meal to you?

Extremely Acceptable: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 : Extremely Unacceptable

8. Overall, how would you rate the **first stage** of your meal?

It pleased me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 It displeased me

I was contented with it 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I was disgusted with it

I was very satisfied with it 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I was very dissatisfied with it

It did a good job for me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 It did a poor job for me

I was happy with it 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I was unhappy with it

This restaurant was a wise choice 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 This restaurant was a poor choice

Section Two

In this section, we would like you to think specifically about the **second stage** of the meal that you have recalled. For the purpose of this study, the following definition of the **second stage** of a meal is being used:

The **second stage** of a meal begins at the time that you receive your first food course and lasts up until the point in time that either: (1) you request your check or (2) the server automatically delivers the check (i.e., without your having requested it).

Typical interactions that occur during this stage include clearing of plates/glasses, delivery of entrees/dessert/coffee, receipt of dessert menu, ordering dessert/coffee, request (or automatic delivery without request) of the check.

1. Please rate the service that you received during the **second stage** of your meal. Circle the number that represents your answer.

To What Extent	Not at All	Extremely So
Was your server friendly?	1 2 3 4	5 6 7
Did your server have the knowledge to answer your questions?	1 2 3 4	5 6 7
Was your server polite?	1 2 3 4	5 6 7
Did your server's behavior instill your confidence in him/her?	1 2 3 4	5 6 7
Was your server available when you needed service?	1 2 3 4	5 6 7
Did your server have your best interests at heart?	1 2 3 4	5 6 7
Was prompt service provided?	1 2 3 4	5 6 7
Did your server understand your specific needs?	1 2 3 4	5 6 7
Did your server give you individual attention?	1 2 3 4	5 6 7
Was the timing of the service that was provided oriented to your needs?	1 2 3 4	5 6 7
Was your server willing to help you?	1 2 3 4	5 6 7
Did your server give you the privacy that you needed?	1 2 3 4	5 6 7

2. To what extent do you agree with the following statement?
I believe that I had the ability to influence the pace of the **second stage** of my meal.
Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree
3. How would you describe the pace of the **second stage** of your meal?
Extremely Fast 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Slow
4. How acceptable was the pace of the **second stage** of your meal to you?
Extremely Acceptable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Unacceptable
5. How much control did you have over the pace of the **second stage** of your meal?
Complete Control 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Absolutely No Control
6. How would you describe the length of the **second stage** of your meal?
Extremely Short 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Long
7. How acceptable was the length of the **second stage** of your meal to you?
Extremely Acceptable: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 : Extremely Unacceptable
8. Overall, how would you rate the **second stage** of your meal?
It pleased me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 It displeased me
I was contented with it 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I was disgusted with it
I was very satisfied with it 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I was very dissatisfied with it
It did a good job for me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 It did a poor job for me
I was happy with it 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I was unhappy with it
This restaurant was a wise choice 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 This restaurant was a poor choice

Section Three

In this section, we would like you to think specifically about the **third stage** of the meal that you have recalled. For the purpose of this study, the following definition of the **third stage** of a meal is being used:

The **third stage** of a meal begins at the time that either: (1) you request your check or (2) the server automatically delivers the check (i.e. without your having requested it) to the time that you vacate your table.

Typical interactions that occur during this stage include the server clearing dessert plates and other items from the table, refilling your coffee, delivering/ collecting the check and returning the check to the table

1. Please rate the service that you received during the **third stage** of your meal. Circle the number that represents your answer.

Service Experience Survey (concluded)

To What Extent	Not at All			Extremely So			
Was your server friendly?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Did your server have the knowledge to answer your questions?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Was your server polite?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Did your server's behavior instill your confidence in him/her?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Was your server available when you needed service?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Did your server have your best interests at heart?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Was prompt service provided?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Did your server understand your specific needs?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Did your server give you individual attention?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Was the timing of the service that was provided oriented to your needs?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Was your server willing to help you?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Did your server give you the privacy that you needed?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. To what extent do you agree with the following statement?

I believe that I had the ability to influence the pace of the **second stage** of my meal.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

3. How would you describe the pace of the **second stage** of your meal?

Extremely Fast 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Slow

4. How acceptable was the pace of the **second stage** of your meal to you?

Extremely Acceptable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Unacceptable

5. How much control did you have over the pace of the **second stage** of your meal?

Complete Control 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Absolutely No Control

6. How would you describe the length of the **second stage** of your meal?

Extremely Short 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely Long

7. How acceptable was the length of the **second stage** of your meal to you?

Extremely Acceptable: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 : Extremely Unacceptable

8. Overall, how would you rate the **second stage** of your meal?

It pleased me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 It displeased me

I was contented with it 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I was disgusted with it

I was very satisfied with it 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I was very dissatisfied with it

It did a good job for me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 It did a poor job for me

I was happy with it 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I was unhappy with it

This restaurant was a wise choice 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 This restaurant was a poor choice

Section Four

In this section, we would like you to think about the meal that you have recalled **in its entirety** and answer the following questions.

1. How would you rate your **overall** impression of this meal?

It pleased me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 It displeased me

I was contented with it 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I was disgusted with it

I was very satisfied with it 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I was very dissatisfied with it

It did a good job for me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 It did a poor job for me

I was happy with it 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I was unhappy with it

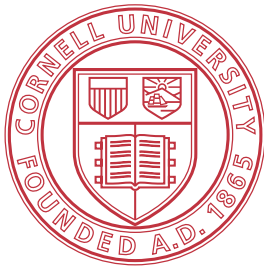
This restaurant was a wise choice 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 This restaurant was a poor choice

2. How would you describe the **overall** pace of your meal?
Extremely Fast: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 : Extremely Slow
3. How acceptable was the **overall** pace of your meal to you?
Extremely Acceptable: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 : Extremely Unacceptable
4. How would you describe the **overall** length of your meal?
Extremely Short: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 : Extremely Long
5. How acceptable was the **overall** length of your meal to you?
Extremely Acceptable: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 : Extremely Unacceptable
6. Have you returned to that restaurant subsequent to this occasion? Yes No
If NO, how likely are you to return to that restaurant in the future?
0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%
7. Have you recommended that restaurant to others since this occasion? Yes No
If NO, how likely are you to recommend that restaurant in the future?
0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

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