

WAITERS OR MACHINES?

A revolution is happening in the restaurant industry. New ordering systems such as tablets and e-menus are being introduced now in restaurants and bars. The well-known American restaurants Applebee's, Chili's and McDonald's have been the first ones in trying out this innovative system which is causing controversy among the thousands of people who enjoy eating out every week with friends and family.

The tablet-ordering system enables customers to order on the device instead of waiting or queuing. These tablets display an e-menu which makes the customer's choice easier and faster due to the visual content of the meals offered. This also guarantees less errors from the waiters and less confusion in the kitchen since everything is written clearly now. Considering that this new system is tech, futuristic and therefore attractive, the chances are it will be working in 80% of restaurants in ten years' time.

Needless is to say that ordering food is not the only function of these devices. Customers can also pay the bill and entertain themselves while waiting for the food. Watching a video, listening to music or checking the last updates of a social network might be a good way to avoid a boring wait or to make one's meal more pleasant. Families can even play games like Trivia on the tablets while they are sitting. As McDonald's owner operator in Kilkenny argued last month, "The design of the restaurant is focused on family and on creating a new experience for customers".

A last but not least argument in favour of this new service is the income that businesses are generating with this idea. More and more, parents feel enthusiastic about the idea of sharing food and technology with their kids so this implies a higher number of clients a day. Customers are also able to pay and get out faster, which means a quick turnaround of tables. It is also believed that people who use tablets tend to order more extras such as dessert or coffee. All this makes a profit.

Nevertheless, the debate is alive. One could argue that this system is not the ideal one in a food and beverage environment because of the heat and bacteria of electronic gadgets. Besides, buying so many tablets and paying for their maintenance also requires higher investment than using paper menus. Ordinary people also argue that eating out is a leisure activity and we must be able to forget about technologies for a while. We are actually tired of using our computer or phone so many times a day. But the most important downside by far is the virtualization of such a social activity and the consequent loss of personal contact.

1. Match these sentences with each paragraph of the text.

Paragraph 1

Paragraph 2

Paragraph 3

Paragraph 4

Paragraph 5

- a. The devices offer a wide range of entertaining possibilities.
- b. Drawbacks of the new service keep a heated debate among customers.
- c. Three restaurants are the pioneers in introducing a new trend.
- d. The earnings are considered as one important advantage.
- e. With tablets, ordering a meal is a more effective process.

2. Answer the following questions according to the information in the text.

- a) Why do tablets contribute to an easier and faster ordering service?
- b) Explain McDonald's owner's statement in your own words.
- c) Do owners make more money with this new service? Provide examples.
- d) How does the writer compare tablets with paper menus at the end of the text?
- e) What is the most important disadvantage of this new service?

3. Read the text again. Find words with these meanings.

Paragraph 1

Experimenting

Familiar, famous

Paragraph 2

Lining up

Probabilities

Paragraph 3

Gratifying, nice

Paragraph 4

Switch

Supplements

Paragraph 5

Drink, refreshment

Recreation, free time

Drawback