PROPOSED PREVENTIVE AND CORRECTIVE MEASURES FOR HANDLING CUSTOMER' COMPLAINTS

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Abstract

This study ventures into the effective management of customers' complaints and its impact on the goodwill recovery. Customers' complaints cannot be avoided. They are always accompanied by problem or dissatisfaction which makes the customers call for an immediate response or action from the managers or supervisors.

The main objective of this study is to address customers' complaints using Facebook comments, personal communication and discount offerings. The problems complained by customers are described in terms of appearance and taste of food being served, attitude and behavior of food servers, atmosphere and ambiance of the place and price of food.

Based on the results, it is revealed that the price of food is the leading complaint, followed by atmosphere and ambiance of the place, attitude and behavior of food servers and the appearance and taste of food being served. In managing customers' complaints, the leading strategy is personal communication, followed by Facebook comments and discount offerings.

It is recommended that fine-dining restaurants must be aware of customers' needs. Regular and continuous training and assessment of staff, innovation and creativity in making dishes and giving the right price will eliminate complaints and disappointments of customers.

Key words: Management, Complaints

Introduction

"The customer is always right." This simple statement may be heard by every customer, restaurant staff, manager and supervisor and has become a cliché that comes out of the lips of customers who have felt or experienced dissatisfaction in a particular service, product, item, or food that they received. It is significant to note that the life of a business depends on the customers who will avail or buy the products or services being offered to them. Thus, any business, be it a restaurant or a hotel, must maintain its high quality of services and products so that the customers would feel that they are treated with cosmopolitan royalty and prominent class.

It cannot be avoided that there are times a particular customer is not satisfied with the product or service received; hence, complaining will be the next part of the discussion with the responsible people such as the managers. They are the ones who handle customers' complaints so that proper attention and solutions will be given to the problems being complained by the customers.

In the restaurant industry, this scenario of a customer complaining and arguing with the manager is one of the challenges that can either make or break the business. This is why a manager who handles complaints of customers must be knowledgeable, polite and effective in communicating with customers (Hale, 2015).

According to Castrejas (2016), customers' complaints can never be avoided especially in the food industry. With the different expectations and orientations of customers, it is inevitable that there would be no complaint from a customer or consumer. This signals the urgency to take actions on the part of the management in order to address the problems and maintain the good reputation of the business.

Likewise, paying attention to the needs of the customers is a good indication of high quality service (Thrace, 2015). Any restaurant for that matter would like to create a very good impression that would last in the minds of the customers. Paying close attention to every detail being asked or requested by the customers is an impressive and applauding behavior.

In the article of J'abbar (2016), it discussed the significance of managing the complaints of customers in the food industry. Since food is the number one product being consumed by people in all parts of the world, it is of great paramount to note that customers' complaints should be handled with careful attention and offer several options

to resolve the inadequacy or dissatisfaction on the part of the customers. Through this conduct, disputes will be resolved and the good impression will still be maintained.

The good reputation of any restaurant is very important because it helps in drawing customers who will avail of the services and products that they like to get or experience. If a customer has a complaint, the manager must immediately attend to it to avoid more serious problems (Chen, 2017). The skills and knowledge of a manager in handling customers' complaints would contribute to the recovery of a business especially the trust of the customers.

With the aforementioned problems and cases concerning the management of customers' complaints and the impact on goodwill recovery, the researcher delved into finding out the effective management of customers' complaints and the created impacts on restaurants' goodwill recovery.

The main objective of this study is to describe and address customers' complaints. Specifically, the researcher answered the following corollary questions: (1) How are the problems being complained by customers described in terms of appearance and taste of the food being served, attitude and behavior of food servers, atmosphere and ambiance of the place, and price of food?; (2) How do restaurant managers manage customers' complaints in terms of Facebook comments, personal communication, and discount offerings?; and (3) Based on the results of the study, what preventive and corrective measures can be designed for customers' complaints?

Methods

This study is a quantitative form of research that utilized the descriptive method.

There were 50 respondents involved in this study. These were fine-dining restaurants' customers who had the experiences of complaining the restaurants' food, staff and services. A validated research instrument on the problems being complained by customers in terms of appearance and taste of the food being served, attitude and behavior of the food servers, atmosphere and ambiance of the place and the price of the food and the conduct of handling customers' complaints by the managers in terms of Facebook comments posted on the Facebook page of the restaurants, personal communication and discount offerings was distributed to the respondents in selected fine-dining restaurants in Metro Manila. The researcher considered the availability and existence of the Facebook page of the selected fine-dining restaurants since it was one of the variables that will assure the validity of data.

The research instrument used in this study was constructed by consulting several studies and books concerning management of customers' complaints and the conduct of handling customers' complaints by the managers. The researcher looked for some indicators that fit the aspects mentioned in the statement of the problem. After coming up with the needed indicators placed under each aspect in problems one and two, a four-point Likert scale instrument was produced and the validation of the research instrument was conducted. The researcher made a letter for the validators to evaluate the constructed instrument. The validators were three professionals with the expertise in educational research, restaurant management and food manufacturing industry. Comments and suggestions given by the validators were incorporated in the final revision of the research instrument. After doing the final revision, the researcher submitted a letter to the College Dean seeking her approval to conduct the study. Upon the approval of the College Dean,

the letters of request and permission to distribute the copies of the research instrument were submitted to the managers of the selected fine-dining restaurants. With their approval, the researcher personally distributed the copies of the research instrument to the managers and she requested them to assist her in distributing the copies to the customers to ensure that the copies could be retrieved easily. After the retrieval of the answered instruments, the researcher tallied the raw data and submitted the final tally sheet to the statistician for statistical treatment.

To obtain the results based on the raw data given by the respondents, the SPSS was utilized by the statistician. Weighted mean was used to determine the description for each indicator under each aspect. The indicators were ranked based on their weighted means.

Results and Discussion

Upon obtaining the results from the statistical treatment performed through SPSS, the data are presented in tabular forms with corresponding textual presentation, analysis and interpretation of data.

The following tables show the problems being complained by the customers in terms of appearance and taste of food being served, attitude and behavior of the food servers, atmosphere and ambiance of the place and the price of the food.

Table 1
Problems Being Complained by the Customers
in Terms of Appearance and Taste of Food Being Served

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation	Rank
1. The food has unpleasant smell.	3.00	Agree	4.5
2. The presentation of the food is not pleasing to the eyes.	3.00	Agree	4.5
3. The taste of the food is awful.	3.42	Agree	2
4. The appearance of the food shows that it is not new and fresh.	3.32	Agree	3
5. The overall appearance and taste of the food annoy the customers.	3.68	Very Much Agree	1
Average Weighted Mean	**3.28**	**Agree**	

Table 1 shows the problems being complained by the customers in terms of appearance and taste of food being served. It can be noted that indicator number five with a statement **"The overall appearance and taste of the food annoy the customers."** got a weighted mean of 3.68 interpreted as very much agree and ranked first. On the other hand, indicators one and two with the statements **"The food has unpleasant smell."** and **"The presentation of the food is not pleasing to the eyes."** Both got a weighted mean of 3.00 interpreted as agree and ranked 4.5. In general, the average weighted mean in terms of appearance and taste of food being served is 3.28 interpreted as agree.

Based on the results obtained, it is very important to consider the overall appearance and taste of the food that would please the customers to consume it and appreciate it. Customers' appetite is very important so the food to be served to them should have a very good effect to their appetite so that they would order more and try other dishes indicated on the menu (Mendoza, 2017). Indicators one and two are actually covered by indicator number five because the aroma or smell of the food as well as its

presentation on the plate contribute to the appetite of the customers. Though both of them are the last in rank, it can be inferred that the smell of the food and the presentation can greatly affect the desire of the customer to taste the food immediately as dictated by his or her hunger.

Table 2
Problems Being Complained by the Customers
in Terms of Attitude and Behavior of the Food Servers

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation	Rank
1. The food servers are not polite to customers.	3.30	Agree	5
2. Proper way of serving the food is not observed.	3.42	Agree	4
3. The food servers do not have pleasant appearance while serving the food.	3.62	Very Much Agree	2
4. Customer's needs are not attended properly.	3.58	Very Much Agree	3
5. The food servers do not know the proper etiquette in serving and removing utensils.	3.76	Very Much Agree	1
Average Weighted Mean	**3.54**	**Very Much Agree**	

Table 2 exhibits the problems being complained by the customers in terms of attitude and behavior of the food servers. It can be noted that indicator number five with the statement **"The food servers do not know the proper etiquette in serving and removing utensils."** got the highest weighted mean of 3.76 interpreted as very much agree and ranked first. Indicator number one with the statement **"The food servers are not polite to customers."** got the lowest weighted mean of 3.30 interpreted as agree and ranked fifth. The average weighted mean in terms of the attitude and behavior of the food servers is 3.54 interpreted as very much agree.

Based on the results, it can be inferred that the proper etiquette of food servers in serving and removing utensils is the number one reason for a customer to lose his or her appetite and this leads to disappointment and dissatisfaction. Observing proper etiquette in serving and removing utensils would make the customer feel safe, secured and relaxed as he or she dines. It is very important to note that fine dining restaurants should have a certain level of class and sophistication in every move of the food servers because this may also add to the atmosphere of the place. A systematic and organized set up of the table creates a pleasant feeling because the customers feel that everything placed on the table is clean and in good condition (Farrell, 2016). Being polite to customers is also a good sign that the food servers are given proper training and skill in serving the customers with utmost care and decency.

Table 3
Problems Being Complained by the Customers
in Terms of Atmosphere and Ambiance of the Place

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation	Rank
1. The place has unpleasant atmosphere.	3.70	Very Much Agree	1
2. The ambiance of the place does not encourage the appetite of the customers.	3.34	Agree	5
3. The surroundings and the arrangements of the chairs, tables, and utensils are not conducive to dining.	3.46	Agree	4
4. There is no enough space to move while dining.	3.66	Very Much Agree	3
5. The physical arrangement seems crowded and not systematic.	3.68	Very Much Agree	2
Average Weighted Mean	**3.57**	**Very Much Agree**	

Table 3 showcases the problems being complained by the customers in terms of atmosphere and ambiance of the place. It is evident that the leading complaint of customers is the unpleasant atmosphere of the place with a weighted mean of 3.70 interpreted as very much agree while the least complaint is the ambiance that does not encourage customers' appetite with a weighted mean of 3.34 interpreted as agree. The average weighted mean in terms of the atmosphere and ambiance of the place is 3.57 with an interpretation of very much agree.

It can be gleaned from the table that customers' satisfaction is guaranteed by a very good atmosphere. An atmosphere that is conducive to dining and relaxation (La'O, 2016). Customers are more enticed to dine in a restaurant that is noise-free and pollution-free. This gives them the assurance that the food is safe and clean. On the other hand, unpleasant atmosphere in a fine dining restaurant creates a disturbed appetite among customers and this can have a negative impression that they would no longer dine in that restaurant. The ambiance of a fine dining restaurant can also make or break the appetite of customers. A good ambiance is something that makes the customers crave for food especially when they see the menu. One indicator of a good ambiance is the cleanliness of the place and the proper choice of decors. This creates a feeling among the customers that they will enjoy the whole time of dining.

Table 4
Problems Being Complained by the Customers
in Terms of Price of the Food

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation	Rank
1. The price does not justify the quality of the food and the serving.	3.74	Very Much Agree	1
2. The ingredients do not confirm the real price of the food.	3.64	Very Much Agree	3
3. Some of the expensive dishes are overpriced.	3.44	Agree	5
4. The price is too high even for the simple and ordinary foods.	3.58	Very Much Agree	4
5. The price of the food would not encourage customers to dine again.	3.72	Very Much Agree	2
Average Weighted Mean	**3.62**	**Very Much Agree**	

Table 4 projects the problems being complained by the customers in terms of price of the food. It is evident that indicator number one with the statement **"The price does not justify the quality of the food and the serving."** got the highest weighted mean of 3.74 with an interpretation of very much agree. On the contrary, indicator number three with the statement **"Some of the expensive dishes are overpriced."** got the lowest weighted of 3.44 with an interpretation of agree. The average weighted mean in terms of the price of the food is 3.62 with an interpretation of very much agree.

Based on the results, it can be inferred that customers should be given the best quality of food they order with the correct price. Overpricing and insufficient serving of food leads to customers' dissatisfaction and this can create an image that the fine dining restaurant is only after the profit that they can make from the customers. Giving the right serving of food with the right price makes the customers satisfied. This creates an impression that even if the price is high as long as the serving is sufficient they will not

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mind the cost. High quality and right amount of serving of food should be priced right (Willeys, 2015).

Management of Customers' Complaints

The following tables show the management of customers' complaints in terms of Facebook comments, personal communication and discount offerings. These three means of handling the complaints of customers in fine dining restaurants are the most commonly used strategies by the managers or supervisors (Rothfoss, 2015). Through them, the complaints of the customers are properly attended and resolved in order to achieve a restaurant's goodwill recovery.

Table 5
Management of Customers' Complaints
in Terms of Facebook Comments

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation	Rank
1. Comments are immediately addressed.	3.86	Always	1
2. Feedback on customer's complaints is sent to the management for proper dissemination.	3.70	Always	3
3. Customers who filed the complaints are immediately informed of the actions done by the management through FB accounts.	3.44	Sometimes	5
4. Improvements are included in the advertisements on Facebook.	3.82	Always	2
5. Facebook comments are answered politely and with assurance of addressing the complaints as soon as possible.	3.68	Always	4
Average Weighted Mean	**3.70**	**Always**	

Table 5 shows the management of customers' complaints in terms of Facebook comments. It is evident that indicator number one with the statement **"Comments are immediately addressed."** got the highest weighted mean of 3.86 with an interpretation of always while indicator number three with the statement **"Customers who filed the complaints are immediately informed of the actions done by the management through FB accounts."** got the lowest weighted mean of 3.44 with an interpretation of sometimes. The average weighted mean in terms of Facebook comments is 3.70 with an interpretation of always.

It can be inferred that customers are delighted when they see that their complaints are immediately addressed. This simply connotes the sincerity and diligence of the managers in resolving the problems encountered by the customers. Through this, customers feel a certain level of importance as far as the business is concerned (Grant, 2016). On the other hand, customers who are informed through Facebook is still considered a good strategy though it got the lowest rank maybe because the customers are not always online to check if their complaints are addressed by the management. Still, the management directly reports to the customers through their Facebook accounts the actions undertaken to resolve the complaints.

Table 6
Management of Customers' Complaints
in Terms of Personal Communication

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation	Rank
1. Customers are entertained politely in the designated office.	3.50	Sometimes	5
2. Replies to complaints are sent via snail mail or email containing the actions done.	3.78	Always	2
3. The customers are properly pacified and given assurance that such complaints will be resolved immediately.	3.84	Always	1
4. A friendly treatment is given to customers who filed a complaint.	3.72	Always	4
5. The customer who filed a complaint is notified immediately regarding further actions or questions.	3.74	Always	3
Average Weighted Mean	**3.72**	**Always**	

Table 6 exhibits the management of customers' complaints in terms of personal communication. It can be noted that indicator number three with the statement **"The customers are properly pacified and given assurance that such complaints will be resolved immediately."** got the highest weighted mean of 3.84 with an interpretation of always while indicator number one with the statement **"Customers are entertained politely in the designated office."** got the lowest weighted mean of 3.50 with an interpretation on sometimes. The average weighted mean in terms of personal communication is 3.72 with an interpretation of always.

It can be gleaned from the table that customers prefer to be given an assurance that their complaints will be addressed at once through face-to-face interaction. This creates a good impression that customers are treated like royalties. Pacifying the customers through verbal communication is an effective way of consoling them that

everything is going to be good (Adalia, 2016). Having a personal communication with the complaining customers will help in putting out the fire caused by the problems encountered by them. The words used by the managers serve as a reliever for the complaints. Managers and supervisors should be effective communicators in order to persuade and convince customers to stay calm as they are being attended by them.

Table 7
Management of Customers' Complaints
in Terms of Discount Offerings

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation	Rank
1. Discounts that equate the customers' complaints are given immediately.	3.54	Always	4
2. The customer has the options on any of the discounts available.	3.58	Always	2.5
3. Each item complained will be given a corresponding discount or not to be included in the bill.	3.58	Always	2.5
4. Discounts are only valid on the day and at the branch where the complaint is filed.	3.76	Always	1
5. Additional products are given for free to commensurate the complaints and the hassle created.	3.50	Sometimes	5
Average Weighted Mean	**3.59**	**Always**	

Table 7 projects the management of customers' complaints in terms of discount offerings. Indicator number four with the statement **"Discounts are only valid on the day and at the branch where the complaint is filed."** got the highest weighted mean of 3.76 with an interpretation of always while indicator number five with the statement **"Additional products are given for free to commensurate the complaints and hassle created."** got the lowest weighted mean of 3.50 with an interpretation of sometimes. The

average weighted mean in terms of discount offerings is 3.59 with an interpretation of always.

It can be inferred that customers accept discount offerings based on the complaints filed. The discounts are used as an immediate relief to lessen the gravity of the complaints (Villar, 2017). It is important to note that one of the best ways to address the complaints of the customers is through the giving of discounts right after verifying the complaints. In some cases, some customers would entertain products given by the managers for free in order to pacify the situation. This simply connotes that customers can be dealt with alternatives that would commensurate the complaints they filed.

Proposed Preventive and Corrective Measures for Handling Customers' Complaints

From the obtained results, it is suggested by the researcher to come up with the preventive and corrective measures that will cater to the complaints of the customers.

Customers' Complaints	Preventive Measures	Corrective Measures
Price of Food	➢ Right pricing of food/dish based on the ingredients, equipment and labor used ➢ Price comparison with other fine dining restaurants	➢ Additional serving of ordered dish ➢ Discount of 20% to 30% from the total cost
Atmosphere and Ambiance of the Place	➢ Regular checking of cleaning assignments ➢ Inventory and inspection of utensils and equipment ➢ Maintenance of the cleanliness of the whole place	➢ Immediate repair and renovation ➢ Provide a VIP room for the customers with complaints ➢ Discount of 20% to 30% from the total cost
Attitude and Behavior of the Food Servers	➢ Regular training and assessment for food servers ➢ Conduct simulation activity to test the staff and food servers	➢ Reliever for the staff or food servers ➢ Written memorandum for the food servers or staff being complained with corresponding sanction
Appearance and Taste of Food Being Served	➢ Comparison of dishes with other fine dining restaurants ➢ Taste test done by the head cook or chef	➢ Replacement of the food ➢ Discount of 20% to 30% from the total cost ➢ Food will not be included in the bill

The proposed preventive and corrective measures that can be applied to handle customers' complaints can immediately provide an instant remedy and solution to the problems encountered by the customers in fine dining restaurants in order to protect and retain the credibility and dignity of the employers, employees and the restaurants as a whole. The complaints on price of food, atmosphere and ambiance of the place, attitude

and behavior of the food servers and appearance and taste of food being served are just a few of those complaints that when handled properly can protect the name of the restaurant.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn (1) fine dining restaurants can avoid complaints from customers if a check-and-balance system covering all aspects and areas of the business is enforced from time to time, (2) effective communication strategies among managers and supervisors are needed in dealing with complaining customers to pacify and assure them that their complaints are attended properly, (3) regular training and assessment of staff promotes service excellence and professionalism, and (4) innovation and creativity in making new dishes as well as their presentation and serving promotes the business continuously.

Future Directions

With the findings of the study presented, the researcher offers the following recommendations: (1) fine-dining restaurants should conduct regular assessment of staff for further training and development to achieve customers' satisfaction, (2) the information derived from the findings of the study should be disseminated properly to the fine-dining restaurants for immediate action and intervention, (3) a similar study should be conducted for the Tourism program to check if there is similarity or difference in the variables and results, (4) membership and accreditation in some international organizations that promote quality excellence in services and administration can help fine-dining restaurants sustain the best service that they can offer to their customers, and

(5) fast food restaurants should be studied in terms of how they handle customers' complaints within their means.

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