QR codes or Waiters: The future of dining?

Have you ever been to a restaurant and ordered food using a QR code system? In recent years, many restaurants have started using QR codes so customers can order food independently. This change is replacing old methods like waiters taking orders or paper slips. But what prompted the surge of the QR code trend in restaurants? The experience of Choi Fook Royal Banquet, a well-known Chinese restaurant, offers some intriguing insights.

Two months ago, Choi Fook Restaurant implemented a policy. Each customer is charged an additional $2 for every paper slip requested. This move is designed to actively encourage the use of QR code technology. There are two primary reasons for this.

On one hand, technological advancements have increased the popularity of online ordering systems, which can be conveniently used with just a mobile phone. By using QR codes for orders, customers can avoid the mistakes that might occur when orders are taken by waiters. Encouraging customers to order by themselves can reduce the workload of waiters. Consequently, they can focus more on tasks like cleaning tables and delivering food. This could potentially boost their productivity by improving workflow.

On the other hand, the minimum wage rate in Hong Kong has experienced a steady increase over the last decade. This trend has consequently led to a rise in labour costs for restaurants. To save on labour costs, Choi Fook has adopted QR code ordering systems as they can substitute for waiters taking orders. This can solve the problem of 'how to produce'. Moreover, restaurant workers and security guards are in competitive supply. The challenging and tiring nature of restaurant work makes many restaurant workers change to work as security guards, which reduces the supply of restaurant workers. As a result, there is a shortage of restaurant workers willing to work at the current minimum wage. This leaves restaurant owners unable to hire enough staff at this pay level.

Using QR codes seems like a good idea to solve the shortage of restaurant workers, doesn't it? However, Choi Fook had to stop charging for paper slips due to certain challenges. One significant challenge is the digital literacy gap, particularly among the elderly, who may lack the necessary IT skills. In addition, there may be resistance to change from customers who prefer paper slips or face-to-face interaction with waiters.

Mainland China has a higher rate of technology adoption than Hong Kong. This difference has led to more widespread use of online ordering systems and electronic payments in the mainland. Learning from this, the Hong Kong government has been encouraging electronic payments over the past three years through the Consumption Voucher Scheme. To promote the use of QR code ordering systems in Hong Kong, it might be necessary for the government and businesses to provide more education and incentives to encourage adoption. This could be achieved by offering training sessions to help elderly customers become familiar with the technology, or by incentivizing customers through measures such as waiving the 10% service charge for those

who use the QR code ordering system.

QR code ordering systems are a growing trend in the food industry, but it takes time for all consumers to get used to them. Adopting QR code ordering systems has the potential to enhance both efficiency and convenience within the sector. Thus, it could be a positive step towards building a more modern society.

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