



Automation and AI in Restaurants

1 IN 5 OF BRITS WASTE 12 HOURS A YEAR WAITING FOR A BITE TO EAT

Scott Muncaster, Managing Director of three rocks comments: "Our research found that there is a real appetite for automation and AI when eating and drinking out, as long as it provides a better service."

"What was surprising was the settings in which Brits were open to using technology rather than interacting with people, such as in fine dining restaurants. This wider acceptance may be a result of the pandemic with many more people now being used to contactless systems. We uncovered how many of the slightly older generations are keen to use automated systems when eating or drinking out. It's often assumed that baby boomers and Gen X customers want to interact with a person, however our data shows that this isn't always the case."

34% OF BRITS ADMIT THAT LONG WAIT TIMES ARE THE THING THAT ANNOYS THEM THE MOST IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

Research commissioned by **three rocks** and conducted by 3 Gem Research & Insights, has found that Technology has become an ever-present part of our lives, and businesses are using it more and more to attempt to provide better services and a more accurate experience to their customers. In this whitepaper "we discuss the risks and opportunities of using automation & AI in restaurants and how willing customers are to use technology."

Just 21% of British consumers stated that they 'always like a human to manage their needs' when dining out, with the remaining 79% open to using technology before or during their visit to hospitality businesses.

This shows the need for a flexible solution that suits the needs of your customer - knowing how to enhance their experience will be your superpower. Those that always like human interaction (21%) can still get that, but a blend of automation can ensure that your business stands out for what they are famous for and enhances customer experiences.



Matt Rawlins, three rocks' Chief Technology Officer comments: *"The exciting opportunity that technology offers us is the ability to make the customer experience as smooth and effortlessly efficient as possible. Sourcing customer data from front of house technology, we can gain valuable insights into behaviours and trends. Combining this with external forces, such as weather and local events, AI can begin to predict what a customer might want, before they know themselves."*

"This knowledge means we're always one step ahead of the game, enabling us to provide the best possible service for our customers and the smoothest running business models for our clients."

core findings

The study of 2,000 adults, revealed the top ways Brits are wasting time when it comes to dining out, with 29% waiting to be served and 23% waiting for food or drink, or waiting to pay the bill. On top of this nearly a third admitted that the cost-of-living crisis has made them less tolerant of poor customer service.

Fully automated restaurants

The research found that 62% of Brits would consider trying a fully automated 'robotic restaurant', while 56% would choose an AI or automated self-service system such as self-ordering kiosks or AI sommeliers over a human if it meant a faster, more accurate service when eating or drinking out. This figure rose to 76% among 18-24-year-olds.

Wait times

Researchers found that 34% of Brits admit that long wait times are the thing that annoys them the most about customer service when dining out, while 33% selected slow service. Nearly a third (30%) state rude or unhelpful staff as their biggest gripe, followed by waiters getting their order wrong (24%) and people receiving food at different times (20%).

Settings

When asked which hospitality settings they would be happy to visit if they were fully automated, 41% of respondents selected fast food chains, while a further 35% selected takeaways. On top of this, nearly a quarter (21%) chose cafés, with another 17% choosing pubs, and 17% selecting bars. Surprisingly, 11% of consumers stated they would be happy to eat at fully automated fine dining restaurants.

Andrew Kaplan, three rocks' Chief Data Officer comments: "For me well designed technology should enable you to do your job/order your food or drinks, without you having to work hard to get what you need from it. It should be intuitive and frictionless, and shouldn't feature high in your memories of the experience. In my view, the closer self service technology comes to this ideal, the more it will be accepted in any setting, even fine dining."

Scott Muncaster, three rocks' Managing Director comments: "I have always believed restaurants win or lose on their ability to deliver to a high percentage of guests the experience they are looking for. Restaurant experiences are judged on the food, the setting and the service provided, all measured against the guests' hopes, expectations and perception of good value. That's been true for many centuries and remains true today.

"What is also true is that tastes and expectations in the UK have changed and diversified over time. Over the last 50 years there has been a food revolution in the UK. We don't need to list all the wonderful ways our food options and choices have changed, but immigration, travel, TV chefs and the internet have altered our appetites and transformed the food we eat at home and in restaurants.

"The spaces we eat in have changed too, in that time, partly influenced by the cuisines we're eating, partly by health and safety, partly by good design for inclusivity and access... and partly by the elevation of children from tolerated tag-along to the primary taste and decision setter.

"Service too has changed – we're familiar with fine dining, casual dining, fast casual, quick service, and other sub-genres that have been defined and refined as our tastes have changed. But technology, at least technology in the hands of guests dining in restaurant, has only really landed significantly in the last five years. You'd be forgiven for not noticing or appreciating the scale and pace of this change, but it is happening.

"This research supports and qualifies the evidence we've seen with our clients and their guests; the appetite for and acceptance of technology in service settings is stronger and wider than we were expecting before Covid came along.

"Giving customers what they want would be reason enough to get serious about automation and technology, front of house in your restaurant business. Add in labour shortages and the rise in every single cost on your P&L and technology is a necessity.

"I'm not necessarily one of those who'd appreciate an entirely automated dining experience; I did enough dining from vending machines when I worked night shifts. But our research shows that some would consider it, and others are very open to aspects of their dining experience being managed through tech – especially where it fixes speed of service gripes or enhances the quality of information received."



key takeaways

Automation

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Human interaction

Just 21% of British consumers stated that they 'always like a human to manage their needs' when dining out, with the remaining 79% open to using technology before or during their visit to hospitality businesses.

Cost of living

Nearly a third (29%) of British consumers admit that the cost-of-living crisis has made them less tolerant of poor customer service.

Robotic Restaurants

The study discovered that nearly two thirds (62%) of respondents would consider visiting a Robotic Restaurant.

Long wait times

The things which annoyed them the most about customer service in the UK. 'Long wait times' was the top response with 34% of the consumers selecting it, followed by 'Slow service' (33%), and 'Rude or unhelpful staff' (30%). 'Getting my order wrong' (24%) was the fourth most selected issue, indicating the desire from British consumers for fast and accurate service.

Wasting time

A fifth (20%) of British consumers waste 6-12 hours a year waiting for staff to be of service when eating or drinking out. When asked what they wasted the most time on, three quarters (75%) of responses were related to waiting for staff. More than a quarter (29%) selected 'Waiting to be served', while 23% said they wasted the most time 'Waiting for their food/drink', while a further 23% selected 'Waiting to pay my bill'.

about three rocks

three rocks is a people-first tech company specialising in creating solutions that enhance experiences, working with some of the UK's largest restaurant brands such as Pizza Hut, TGI Fridays and The Big Table Group. Beyond hospitality, the company works with B2B clients across a multitude of sectors including wholesale, publishing and Internet of Things solutions.

The **three rocks** team have a vast background in designing bespoke technology solutions driven by data collection and analysis which transform businesses by enhancing customer, employee, and user experience.

The brand was created in 2023 when Adactus and Six Sevens, long-term hospitality technology providers, merged to form **three rocks**, the company is on a mission to bring transformative end-to-end experience enhancement software and data-led solutions to the hospitality and wider business sector.

From reservation and ordering systems to post-visit CRM systems, three rocks has the in-house skills and team capacity to develop best-in-breed solutions, starting with its new flagship product, **three rocks XMS**.

three rocks XMS is a totally modular experience management system which enables businesses to create a tailored CX tech stack to match their individual business needs. XMS offers businesses a pick and mix of cutting-edge technology including digital booking systems, self-service kiosks, restaurant order management solutions, and CRM and data analysis processes. Businesses benefit from a tailored suite of products that match their needs and budgets, and transform customer service, experience, and company growth. XMS is also flexible and can be tailored to suit any industry.

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