

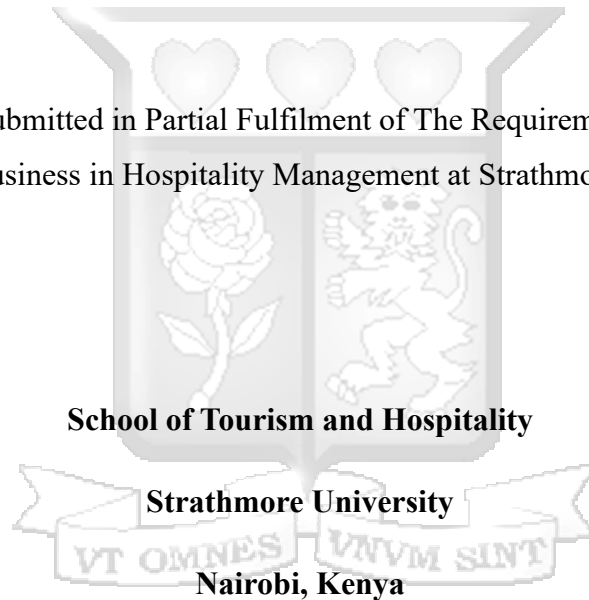
# **The Influence of Service Excellence Initiatives on Customer Experience in Casual Dining Restaurants – A Case Study of Nairobi County**

By

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ADM NO. 170415

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Master of Business in Hospitality Management at Strathmore University



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## Abstract

Service excellence is acknowledged as a way to satisfy clients, increase loyalty, and create enduring relationships. Service excellence is about delivering services beyond the expectations of the clientele. There is still a lack of understanding about how service excellence initiatives affect the customer experience in casual dining restaurants in Nairobi. The general objective of this study was to investigate the influence of service excellence initiatives on customer experience in casual dining restaurants in Nairobi. The study used a descriptive research design and convenience sampling to sample 384 customers. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on service excellence initiatives and their effects on the customer's experience. The questionnaires were distributed and collected from customers dining at the selected restaurants. To effectively investigate the influence of service excellence initiatives on customer experience in casual dining restaurants in Nairobi, the data collected from this study were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics were presented using tables and charts to summarize the responses and visually present the results of distribution patterns of service excellence initiatives, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. Correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships between service excellence initiatives and customer satisfaction. This study examined service excellence initiatives in casual dining restaurants in Nairobi and their effects on customer experience and satisfaction. Personalized service and digital integration were found to be highly valued by customers, highlighting their importance in enhancing service delivery. Staff professionalism and waiting time management significantly impacted customer satisfaction. The correlation between combined service excellence initiatives and customer experience was highly significant, emphasizing their collective influence on customer satisfaction. Customer loyalty was also found to have a strong positive correlation with service excellence initiatives. The study demonstrates that personalized service, digital integration, and staff professionalism are crucial to enhancing customer satisfaction, loyalty, and experience. The new knowledge gained highlights that integrated service excellence initiatives have a compounding impact on customer loyalty and satisfaction.

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## List of Abbreviations

|                 |                                  |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>e-WOM</b>    | Electronic Word-of-Mouth         |
| <b>CRM</b>      | Customer Relationship Management |
| <b>CX</b>       | Customer Experience              |
| <b>GCC</b>      | Guest Comment Cards              |
| <b>ORBI</b>     | Overall Restaurant Brand Image   |
| <b>SERVQUAL</b> | Service Quality                  |
| <b>TRA</b>      | Tourism Regulatory Authority     |
| <b>UK</b>       | United Kingdom                   |
| <b>USA</b>      | United States of America         |
| <b>WE</b>       | Work Engagement                  |



## Definition of Terms

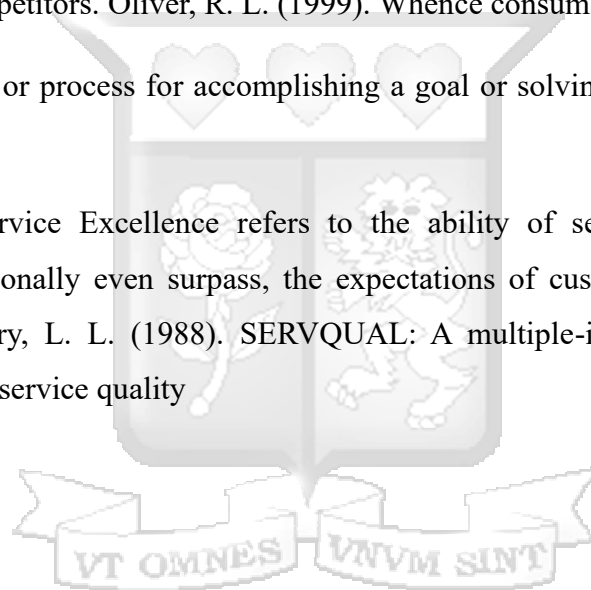
**Casual Dining Restaurants:** Described as full-service restaurants with laid-back, relaxing atmospheres and fairly priced meals. Kimes, S. E., & Robson, S. K. A. (2004). The impact of restaurant table characteristics on meal duration and spending

**Customer Experience:** How someone feels at all phases of business with a firm or an organization. Lemon, K. N., & Verhoef, P. C. (2016). Understanding customer experience throughout the customer journey

**Customer Loyalty:** The ability to retain customers and keep them purchasing what is on offer for a longer period than competitors. Oliver, R. L. (1999). Whence consumer loyalty?

**Initiatives:** A fresh plan or process for accomplishing a goal or solving a problem. Kotter, J. P. (2012). Accelerate!

**Service Excellence:** Service Excellence refers to the ability of service providers to meet continuously, and occasionally even surpass, the expectations of customers. Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1988). SERVQUAL: A multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality



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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to God Almighty for providing me with inspiration and perseverance throughout this journey. For showing me that nothing is impossible through Your grace and revealing that limitations only exist in my mind, not in Your power. Thank you for your constant presence, which has been a great source of strength.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the Study

Service excellence is acknowledged as a way to satisfy clients, increase loyalty, and create enduring relationships (Asif & Gouthier, 2014). Service excellence is about delivering services beyond the expectations of the clientele because it boosts consumer loyalty and profitability, this is essential to an organization's sustainability. Unquestionably, a sizable portion of the broader hospitality sector comprises restaurants. There have been difficulties in the restaurant industry's growth, particularly concerning customer service and fierce rivalry. Service companies have taken up several activities in their quest for excellence. These consist of a strategic focus, dedication from upper management, upholding strict standards, establishing profit divisions, keeping an eye on service delivery, and quickly responding to client concerns (Mandal, 2022).

The Casual dining restaurant sector plays a critical role in the hospitality industry, balancing quality food, ambiance, and affordability. Restaurant customers in recent times, want to experience a complete service excellence delivery, that takes into account; the physical atmosphere, employee performance, and food excellence (Garg & Amelia, 2016) In recent years, the competitive landscape in Nairobi has driven many casual dining restaurants to prioritize service excellence as a key differentiator. Service excellence encompasses a range of initiatives designed to improve customer experiences. Some of these initiatives include Customer feedback mechanisms, digital integration, and personalized service. Several emotions can be elicited from the customer during a single service interaction (Wu & Gao, 2019).

Service Excellence is the endeavour to exceed customers' expectations and fulfil their needs (Tieng (2022). Providing excellent services results in repeat business and positive word-of-mouth promotion for the business. (Thaher, 2017) upholds that service excellence results from organizations or businesses going above and beyond what is required, prioritizing accuracy, safety, comfort, quality, cost, procedure, and customer satisfaction. According to Umar et al. (2013) the delivery of service excellence is correlated with the result of the service encounter, and the quality of performance and the degree of customer satisfaction determine how well the service is measured. Johnston (2004) suggests that service excellence is both obvious and elusive, as we are

aware when we have received it and often, when we have not. Both good and bad customer service can leave us with strong emotions toward the establishment, its employees, and its offerings, which affect our loyalty toward them.

According to Jain et al. (2017), Customer experience is seen as a comprehensive, interactive process, helped by emotional and cognitive clues that lead to distinct, delightful memories. Srivastava and Kaul (2014) suggest that every social interaction impacts customer satisfaction and customer experience. According to Kolapkar et al. (2019) customer satisfaction may be transformed into a positive and gratifying customer. The servicescape and physical surroundings have been known to play a crucial role in determining satisfied and pleased customers. Khadka et al. (2017) argue that customers are important to every successful business, and an organization must emphasize serving many of them to achieve long-term goals by boosting customer satisfaction and loyalty.

There has been tremendous growth and diversity of restaurants worldwide, this is fuelled by quality service excellence encounters hence re-patronage. (Muhoro, 2018). Restaurants have been shown to substantially impact customer satisfaction, with other patrons and service excellence having a big impact on how the company is seen (Erkmen & Hancer, 2019). Since services are immersive and challenging to evaluate before purchase, several restaurants with modest promotion expenditures primarily rely on word-of-mouth (WOM) for service marketing (Jalilvand et al., 2017). Tsaur and Yen (2019) state that achieving customer delight through service excellence has also been acknowledged. To determine how good a restaurant is perceived, the effects of its physical environment and service have been investigated. Prioritizing the physical environment and service was found to encourage innovation and raise the standard of dining establishments as a whole (Liu et al., 2015).

Given that customers can be divided into groups depending on the behaviours they exhibit, casual dining restaurants can adjust their strategies to match the degree of engagement of their customers. But service excellence is another element that has a big impact on customer experience. This includes a range of physical environment elements, such as cleanliness, signs, ambient conditions, and spatial layout. These were found to be strongly correlated with customer satisfaction (Kamau,

2017). According to research conducted in the United States of America, perceived food quality has a favourable impact on contentment. According to Bae et al. (2018), this mediates the relationship between service quality and the likelihood of repeat business. Similarly, Josiam (2015) suggests that in the American Southwest, the two main reasons why people choose to eat at casual restaurants are utilitarian and hedonistic motives. It was also argued that restaurant characteristics and motivating factors could predict diner loyalty.

However, Hussein (2018) found that in Indonesia, brand experience has a beneficial impact on customer happiness and brand loyalty. Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty. Nonetheless, Nguyen et al. (2018) argue that in the UK fast-food sector, tangibles, certainty, and responsiveness have the biggest impact on consumer happiness, followed by dependability and empathy. It is argued that the physical aspects of service excellence are the most important factors influencing client loyalty. Tan et al. (2014) discovered that service quality variables have a positive impact on customer satisfaction, implying that fast-food firms in China should likewise improve their service quality. The effect of social media on customer experience was investigated in South Africa. Although social media grew steadily, it was discovered that restaurants should focus more on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to improve customer experiences (Mhlanga & Maloney Tichaawa, 2017).

Similarly, in Ghana, West Africa, it was stressed that for firms to succeed over the long run and remain competitive, social media marketing needed to be innovative and flexible (Malik, 2023). Around the world, the hotel sector is quickly changing from one that is primarily focused on physical assets and products to one that is more customer-centered and experience-centric. Hospitality companies are focusing more on creating creative and comprehensive experiential service offerings to create and maintain a competitive advantage (Bharwani & Mathews, 2016). Odunlami and Shonubi (2018) in their study on the impact on service delivery in Lagos, Metropolis, Nigeria suggested that fast-food restaurant workers pay closer attention to details and address customer complaints promptly to enhance customer satisfaction. A study in Arusha city's 3-star hotel was undertaken to find out the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction.

It was revealed that there is a negative gap between customer expectations and perceptions of assurance, responsiveness, and tangibility, with tangibility being the most important dimension (Mwacha, 2019). To foster loyalty, hoteliers in Rwanda were advised to prioritize customer satisfaction by implementing techniques like effective customer relationship management (Bizi Mubiri, 2016). Muhoro (2018) claims that positive customer experiences have fueled the expansion of restaurants across the globe. This entails how employees, clients, and the surrounding environment interact. Dimensions of the personal service interaction have a strong positive correlation with the experiential value of the customers. Customers have more options than ever before because of the proliferation of new eateries in the hotel industry. A crucial differentiation in the increasingly competitive restaurant industry is the provision of distinctive client experiences. A study conducted in Nairobi had the objective to investigate the drivers of the service excellence strategy of Nairobi star-rated hotels in the hospitality industry.

According to Owuor (2018), star-rated hotels use the six drivers of service excellence to encourage consumers to return and become loyal customers and brand ambassadors. These drivers include understanding client needs, maintaining consistent quality, providing individualized service, assuring timely responsiveness, practicing active listening, and empowering personnel. The report also suggests that businesses focus on remaining adaptable to emerging types of technology to keep up with the pace of technological innovation (Owuor, 2018). Research was conducted at five selected hotels in Thika town, focused on the influence of the dinner experience on customer satisfaction. This examined the relationship between the meal experience and hotel customer satisfaction. Findings revealed that most customers who revisit the hotel are loyal to it, refer customers as well, and spread positive comments about the hotel as a result of the following: quality of food offered, quality service, friendly staff, conducive environment, as well as the hotel's good atmosphere (Ngigi, 2021).

A study was conducted on 2 and 3-star hotels in Kisumu County, Kenya, to investigate restaurant patron tipping behaviour and its influence on food service empathy, with Prasuraman, Zeithaml, and Barry's empathy as key dimensions of quality under the SERVQUAL model. The findings revealed a significant relationship between rewards on service perception and food service

empathy. It failed to find a substantial link between incentives for better future services, social norms, and food service empathy (Were et al., 2021).

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

The global restaurant industry is highly competitive, with customer experience and loyalty serving as key differentiators for success (Opstad et al., 2022). While previous research examined the impact of service quality, food attributes, and pricing on customer satisfaction (Jung et al., 2015; Scozzafava et al., 2017), there remains a lack of understanding about how service excellence initiatives affect the customer experience in casual dining restaurants. Existing research emphasizes the importance of service quality in driving satisfaction and loyalty (Saleem & Raja, 2014; Liat et al., 2014), but the majority focuses on fast-food chains, hotels, or quick-service restaurants (Line & Hanks, 2020; Kizito, 2023), leaving a gap in research on full-service restaurants.

Nairobi's restaurant business is quickly expanding, with increased competition among casual dining outlets (Jamal Ali et al., 2021). However, many operators struggle to determine which service excellence strategies—such as personalized service, ambiance, staff training, or technological integration—are most effective in improving customer experience and fostering long-term loyalty (Hill et al., 2017; Padma & Wagenseil, 2018). While research like Watiki (2014) confirms the positive correlation between service quality and satisfaction in Kenya, there is inadequate empirical information on:

1. What service excellence initiatives have the greatest impact on customer experience in Nairobi's casual dining industry?
2. How do these initiatives promote customer loyalty in a diversified and competitive market?
3. What unique challenges do Nairobi's casual dining restaurants encounter when executing these strategies compared to global benchmarks?

Without this understanding, restaurant managers run the danger of using generic or poor service tactics, perhaps losing customers to competitors that understand experiential dining preferences better. This study aims to close this gap by investigating the direct impact of service excellence initiatives on customer experience in Nairobi's casual dining scene, with practical implications for industry practitioners.

### **1.3 General Objective**

To investigate the influence of service excellence initiatives on customer experience in casual dining restaurants in Nairobi.

### **1.4 Specific Objectives**

- i. To identify and analyse service excellence initiatives implemented in Nairobi's casual dining restaurants.
- ii. To evaluate how service excellence initiatives influence customer satisfaction.
- iii. To determine the impact of service excellence initiatives on customer loyalty.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

- i. What types of service excellence initiatives are currently being implemented in Nairobi's casual dining restaurants?
- ii. How do different service excellence initiatives affect customer satisfaction levels?
- iii. To what extent do service excellence initiatives influence customer loyalty?

### **1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This study investigates the impact of service excellence initiatives on customer experience in casual dining restaurants, using Nairobi as a case study. The study focuses on core service excellence strategies, such as staff training, service customization, atmosphere, and technological integration, and their direct influence on customer satisfaction and loyalty.

While the study focuses on Nairobi's casual dining sector, its results are intended to contribute to larger hospitality industry conversations by establishing global service excellence concepts that could be used across markets.

The study will collect primary data from customers at selected casual dining restaurants in Nairobi, as well as analyse service excellence models from global hospitality literature to determine their relevance in emerging economies.

### **1.6.1 Limitations of the study**

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations:

1. Sample Specificity – The study focuses on mid-range, full-service casual dining restaurants, excluding fast-food, fine dining, and street food establishments, which may operate under different service dynamics.
2. Temporal Constraints – Customer preferences and industry trends evolve rapidly; thus, the study's conclusions reflect the market conditions at the time of research.

### **1.7 Significance of the Study**

This research holds significant value for various stakeholders within the Nairobi hospitality industry.

#### **1.7.1 Restaurant Owners**

The valuable insight gained from this study could provide restaurant owners with a clear understanding of how specific service excellence initiatives influence customer experience. This knowledge is expected to grant empowerment to build targeted service improvement strategies, leading to increased customer satisfaction, loyalty, and profitability.

#### **1.7.2 Restaurant Managers**

The study could help restaurant service managers in their capacity to ensure all the business needs are being met. Service excellence initiatives could help them maintain customer relations by providing efficient problem-solving solutions, and assist with the essential role of customer relations, through excellent communication skills and exceptional interpersonal skills, geared towards service excellence

### **1.7.3 Policymakers**

A clear understanding of the factors that contribute to a positive customer experience could inform sound policy decisions related to hospitality training programs and industry regulations. This is expected to create an avenue for a more customer-centric dining environment in Nairobi.

### **1.7.4 Customers**

This study could benefit customers, both returning and new. The restaurant owners and Managers are expected to have a better understanding of what they desire from the restaurants in terms of service excellence and what inspires loyalty in them. They could also understand the interaction of the initiatives that provide memorable customer experiences. This feedback could go a long way to help the casual dining restaurants improve on their products and service delivery.

### **1.7.5 The Academicians and Future Researchers**

Students studying hospitality management could benefit from this research by understanding customer experience management and high-quality restaurant service through its integration into their curriculum. This research offers empirical data and an understanding of the specific context of casual dining establishments in Nairobi. This is expected to add to the body of knowledge on customer experience, hospitality management, and service excellence, especially when it comes to contexts that are local or cultural and may not have been thoroughly examined previously.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Overview**

This chapter will review various literature to shed more light on service excellence initiatives that would improve customer experience and ultimately satisfaction and loyalty within the casual dining restaurants sector of the hospitality industry in Nairobi.

### **2.2 Theoretical Review**

This section critically explores three key theoretical frameworks that shape our understanding of service quality and customer experience in Nairobi's casual dining industry. The Customer Satisfaction Theory, SERVQUAL, and KANO models will be used to expand knowledge on this topic. The SERVQUAL model is useful in determining the quality criteria that must be improved, while the KANO model categorizes service attributes that satisfy customer needs. At the same time, the Customer Satisfaction Theory examines how customer expectations, perceptions, and experiences influence their overall satisfaction with a service.

#### **2.2.1 SERVQUAL Model**

The service quality theory (SERVQUAL) model was proposed by Parasuraman et al., (1988). This hypothesis is essential for service management and customer satisfaction studies. SERVQUAL measures service quality using a gap analysis methodology, highlighting gaps between customer expectations and perceptions of service. This method defines service quality as the extent to which it fulfils or exceeds clients' expectations in five areas: tangibles, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, and empathy. Reliability is the ability to perform the promised service exactly and consistently, whereas tangibles are the physical structures and gear. Responsiveness refers to the ability to assist clients quickly, whereas assurance is focused on staff members' experience, civility, and ability to engender confidence and trust. Finally, empathy is concerned with giving clients compassionate, tailored attention.

The SERVQUAL model was a popular research topic among academics and had a considerable impact on service quality research (WANG et al., 2015). According to Gabrow (2021), the SERVQUAL approach is used to assess performance and customer loyalty. Results from the study carried out show that the quality aspects of the sample restaurants can be arranged from assurance

to empathy (empathy), in ascending order: concrete, reliability, response, and assurance. However, Ali et al. (2021) argue that, apart from reliability, which has a negative association with customer pleasure, four components of service quality - empathy, responsiveness, assurance, and tangible - have positive relationships with customer satisfaction. Nonetheless, Hsieh et al. (2015) argue that the chain restaurant industry should avoid offering "care-free quality" items and instead use extremely appealing quality traits to raise the emphasis on development, since these qualities can bolster the benefits of chain restaurants. They also indicate that the two most important areas for service quality development are crucial quality attributes and high value-added quality attributes. However, Puri and Singh (2018) state that the relationship between customer pleasure and service loyalty in the tourism sector remains unresolved.

The service quality (SERVQUAL) model is a technique for evaluating customer satisfaction and service quality. Patients in China evaluated healthcare services as being of lesser quality than expected. Hospitals were asked to make changes based on the scenario to improve the quality of medical care (Fan et al., 2017). SERVQUAL was created to measure the difference between customer satisfaction and needs. This complicated strategy helps to bridge the gaps between the wants and expectations of customers. Ten criteria were initially used to quantify it, Courtesy, Access, Competence, Reliability, Responsiveness, Security, Credibility, Communication, tangibles, and understanding the customers. The SERVQUAL approach now addresses five components, responsiveness, tangibles, empathy, reliability, and assurance. These components were eventually combined into what is also referred to as the RATER model. The Rater model simplifies the SERVQUAL model, focusing on five parameters for customer evaluation. These dimensions measure perceived service quality on a multiple-item scale, making them crucial for service marketing.

### **2.2.2 KANO Model**

Kano, a quality management professor at Tokyo University of Science, invented the KANO model in 1984. It was said that Dr. Noriaki created this framework while researching the factors that contribute to consumer loyalty and happiness. The KANO model focuses on product features that may help customers meet their needs and increase their pleasure. The model's strategy can be utilized by product managers or teams to help them decide which features to include in a product or service. The sole criterion for determining whether a feature should be included or excluded is

its influence on customer satisfaction. The features are divided into five categories: must-have, performance, attractive, indifferent, and reverse features. The KANO model classifies a product's or service's traits into three categories: basic, performance, and interesting attributes.

This system offers a sophisticated understanding of customer preferences and satisfaction. Basic attributes are necessary features that are considered a minimal necessity. Unexpected elements known as excitement traits make clients happy when they are there, but don't always make them unhappy when they are not. Initiatives can be prioritized using the Kano model, which takes into account how each one might affect consumer satisfaction. It facilitates the distinction between characteristics that are essential for fulfilling the bare minimum expectations (basic), those that, when enhanced, have a major impact on satisfaction (performance), and those that can produce exceptional experiences and go above and beyond expectations (excitement). Nairobi's casual dining restaurants must contend with intense competition, but the Kano model offers a framework for tactical differences.

Restaurants can differentiate themselves from competitors and generate positive word-of-mouth and repeat business by discovering and adapting exciting features that thrill customers. This knowledge enables companies to efficiently prioritize their investments in the creation of new products or services. Through systematic consumer feedback and analysis, firms may discern which features fit into each category and strategically deploy resources to boost customer satisfaction, surpass expectations, and sustain a competitive edge in the market. Zavira et al. (2023) suggest that by grouping customer demands into categories such as appealing, necessary, one-dimensional, indifferent, reversible, or dubious, the Kano model was used to analyse customer satisfaction. It was discovered that four out of seven marketing mix elements needed by Korean restaurant customers were low-dimensional.

According to Sun (2020), participants in the study reported over-service in attractive, one-dimensional, indifferent, and 'reversed quality' qualities. However, Rotar and Kozar (2017) argue that the outcome results of price, user experience, design, and technological aspects were utilized to build the Kano model, which employed two approaches, the declared and deduced importance approach. Zobnina and Rozhkov (2018) suggest that hotel managers now have access to a sophisticated yet user-friendly customer satisfaction evaluation tool in the hospitality and tourism

sectors. The significant variation in key factors for consumer satisfaction in different groups can be utilized to plan future product developments.

### **2.2.3 Customer Satisfaction Theory**

The Customer Satisfaction Theory is a conceptual framework that describes how customers assess and react to products or services based on their expectations and perceived experiences. It is based on the premise that consumer pleasure stems from a contrast between pre-consumption expectations and actual performance. If the perceived experience matches or surpasses expectations, the consumer is satisfied; otherwise, discontent ensues (Oliver, 1980). This theory is critical for understanding consumer behaviour and informing company tactics aimed at boosting service quality, customer retention, and brand loyalty.

Several scholars have contributed to the development of this theory. Oliver (1980) introduced the Expectation-Disconfirmation Model, which argues that satisfaction is determined by the gap between expectations and actual service delivery. Westbrook and Reilly (1983) further expanded the theory by emphasizing the psychological and emotional aspects of satisfaction, linking it to customer loyalty and repeat business. Later, Anderson, Fornell, and Lehmann (1994) highlighted the financial implications of customer satisfaction, demonstrating its impact on market share and long-term profitability. Additionally, the SERVQUAL model Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, (1988) was developed to measure customer perceptions of service quality, aligning closely with satisfaction theory.

In the context of this study, the Customer Satisfaction Theory provides a relevant framework for evaluating how service quality, through factors such as responsiveness, reliability, and assurance, affects customer experience. The theory helps explain how restaurant customers form judgments about their dining experiences based on service encounters, ultimately influencing their likelihood of returning or recommending the restaurant. The Customer Satisfaction Theory promotes a focus on the overall experience, allowing restaurants to look beyond individual service encounters and consider how service excellence across various dimensions contributes to the overall customer experience.

It teaches restaurant owners and managers that customer satisfaction is more than just meeting expectations in one area (such as food quality), but also about consistently delivering excellence

in multiple service aspects (such as speed, friendliness, and atmosphere). The Customer Satisfaction Theory and SERVQUAL model offer a solid foundation for evaluating the customer experience in Nairobi's casual dining restaurants. SERVQUAL's dimensions can provide valuable insights for casual dining restaurants to enhance service excellence, ultimately leading to improved customer satisfaction and a more positive brand perception.

## **2.4 Empirical Literature Review**

In casual dining restaurants, service excellence initiatives require efficient feedback methods to improve service delivery and identify areas of improvement. Bilgihan et al. (2018) argue that there are three different kinds of clues that can be used to explain why a customer may be satisfied or dissatisfied with their overall dining experience, thus functional, mechanical, and humanistic clues. Restaurants adopt a proactive approach by swiftly resolving customer queries and implementing essential modifications based on feedback. According to Aureliano-Silva et al. (2021) however, more positive and emotionally appealing internet evaluations were associated with higher intentions to visit restaurants. Review appeal considerably reduced the impact of internet reviews on the intention to visit a restaurant. Likewise, Nasr et al. (2014) imply that positive customer feedback offers the potential for improving the well-being of service entities.

## **2.5 Service Excellence in Casual Dining Restaurants**

Service excellence is defined as consistently meeting and occasionally exceeding customer expectations through excellent service delivery (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Casual dining involves: Personalized interactions (Othman et al., 2024), effective operating processes (Nilsson et al., 2021), and effective customer feedback management (Bilgihan et al., 2018). While global studies emphasize digital integration (e.g., AI-driven reservations, self-service kiosks), Nairobi's market has particular hurdles, including low technology adoption, a reliance on human connection, and price sensitivity (Miricho & Bitok, 2020). This shows that hybrid methods (which combine digital tools with high-touch service) might be more effective in Nairobi than pure automation.

### **2.5.1 Digital Integration**

The advent of technology has revolutionized the casual dining industry, making Digital Integration a cornerstone of service excellence. This approach involves the adoption of advanced technologies to enhance operational efficiency and enrich customer experiences. One significant aspect of

digital integration is the implementation of self-service technologies (SSTs). These include digital kiosks and mobile applications that allow customers to place orders and make payments independently. A study by Nilsson et al. (2021) highlights that SSTs improve service efficiency and empower customers, leading to increased satisfaction. However, the study also notes that the absence of personal interaction may negatively impact perceptions among certain customer segments. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is another technological advancement transforming restaurant operations.

In Kenya, the adoption of digital integration inside casual dining establishments has taken a dramatically different path than in more technologically advanced nations. For example, Gachuru (2017) notes that, while online ordering systems are more popular among Nairobi's fast-food restaurants, they still face challenges such as unreliable internet access, consumer trust in payment security, and a general lack of understanding among older customers. These difficulties create a distinct degree of complexity that is not addressed in the wider Western or Asian-focused literature. The findings of Ivy Omwanicha (2020) support the notion that transactional convenience in Nairobi's chain restaurants, such as KFC, has a significant impact on customer satisfaction. Her research, however, highlights limitations in decision and search convenience, with customers frequently unable to use digital menus and receiving a lack of targeted recommendations. This implies that, while the Kenyan casual dining sector embraces digital solutions, usability and inclusion difficulties persist, limiting the full potential of digital integration.

It is vital to note that many Nairobi-based businesses, particularly those in the mid-tier casual dining sector, continue to rely primarily on manual procedures. While some restaurants have used digital reservation systems or payment interfaces with M-Pesa, these practices are not industry-wide. The mismatch in digital adoption between foreign franchises and locally owned restaurants exposes a gap in digital capacity-building and customer digital literacy. This study, therefore, positions digital integration not merely as a technological upgrade but as a context-sensitive strategic initiative that requires alignment with local infrastructural capabilities, consumer behaviour patterns, and managerial readiness. Unlike previous studies that often generalize digital integration as uniformly beneficial, this research acknowledges the nuances inherent in the Kenyan context—an approach that strengthens the applicability and realism of service excellence frameworks in Nairobi's casual dining sector.

### **2.5.2 Personalized Service**

Personalized Service remains a critical component of service excellence in casual dining. This approach involves tailoring dining experiences to individual customer preferences, thereby fostering loyalty and enhancing satisfaction. Personalization can be achieved through various strategies, including the use of customer data to inform service delivery and menu offerings. For instance, tracking previous orders and preferences allows restaurants to make personalized recommendations, creating a more engaging dining experience. Othman et al. (2024) found that such customization significantly influences customer loyalty in full-service restaurant settings. Training staff to recognize and anticipate customer needs is also vital.

Personalized service is still a generally recognized determinant of customer satisfaction in the casual dining industry. Global studies highlight its significance in tailoring dining experiences through the utilization of customer information, employee empowerment, and proactive service delivery (Othman et al., 2024). The basic concept is that personalization promotes emotional ties, which lead to customer loyalty and repeat purchases. Nonetheless, the premise that personalized service always improves customer satisfaction deserves additional examination in the Kenyan context. Nairobi's informal dining restaurants represent a distinct convergence of customer expectations, technical preparedness, and cultural elements that shape how personalization is perceived and delivered.

According to Wanjiku (2013), employee-related factors—such as morale, role clarity, and remuneration—are critical to the quality of service provided in Nairobi's hotels and restaurants. These elements have a direct impact on the staff's ability to provide individualized service. While employee training is often provided, it is frequently uneven and not well matched with customization efforts, particularly in locally owned casual eating establishments. These characteristics of personalization, while simple, are effective in this situation. However, they are sometimes disregarded in favour of more technologically driven personalization methods, which may not completely connect with the local customer base. According to Ivy Omwancha (2020), decision convenience, which involves customers' capacity to make decisions based on prior visits or preferences, remains undeveloped.

This suggests a gap in the integration of customer history into service delivery, which reduces the ability of personalized service models to improve satisfaction. As a result, this study contributes to the conversation by stating that personalization in Nairobi's casual eating industry has to be reconsidered in light of socio-cultural realities, labour circumstances, and varied degrees of technology access. Personalized service cannot be considered just as the result of CRM systems or algorithmic recommendations; it must also be based on human-centric relational dynamics and supported by ongoing staff development. The Kenyan context highlights that low-tech and high-touch techniques can, in some situations, provide more meaningful personalization than advanced but impersonal digital solutions.

### **2.5.3 Restaurant Staff Training**

A New Zealand study found a link between employee training benefits, perceived organizational support, and service quality (Waqanimaravu & Arasanmi, 2020). There is a need to emphasize the role of training as a core HR function in improving a company's quality of delivery and performance. According to Kurdi et al.'s (2020) study in Jordan, employee happiness is important when defining organizational performance, particularly in the service sector. Improving employee satisfaction is critical for improved business operations since it increases long-term staff productivity and retains valuable customers. According to Memon et al. (2016). It has been believed for quite some time, from their study in Malaysia, that training is crucial in helping employees develop positive attitudes and behaviours. he also emphasizes how important training satisfaction is to increasing work engagement (WE) and lowering voluntary turnover.

In Pomona USA, Villanueva (2016) argues that the four most prevalent training themes were on-the-job training, “employee feedback before and after training, trainer influence in training, and describing the job in the training plan. On-the-job training was frequently seen and used in the casual dining restaurant under study. Although Martin et al. (2014) note that different trainers may use different terminology to refer to the same approaches. in Toronto, Canada, thirteen core training methods were defined, which they feel comprehensively cover all the current methods available in the training industry. These thirteen techniques were analysed and contrasted using seven criteria, some of which include internship, job rotation, job shadowing, team training, mentoring, and apprenticeship.

Grobelna (2015), in his study conducted in Poland, says that the rising worldwide operations of hospitality organizations provide considerable obstacles for management and personnel in terms of efficiently working and dealing with people from other cultures. Intercultural communication can lead to a variety of challenges. Nonetheless, he emphasizes that hospitality organizations must recognize that visitor interactions must be expertly tailored to accommodate the distinct needs of persons from various cultural backgrounds. However, according to Dhar (2015), in India, there is a significant association between staff training and the quality of services offered by tourist hotel workers. These findings were borne out of the fact that organizational commitment acts as a mediator between training, perceived benefits from training, perceived support from training, and the effects of training on service quality.

Halawi et al. (2018), in their studies in Lebanon, argued that human resource managers still create training and development programs to help staff members learn and gain abilities, knowledge, and skills related to their roles, even when they are hiring individuals with previous experience, recognizing that workers are an organization's most important asset. King and So (2015) nevertheless proposed that multinational corporations need to establish a competitive edge, to effectively compete in the current Chinese hotel industry, which they accomplish by developing their brands. Implementing a training and development plan in a Ghanaian hospitality facility could help alleviate issues like inventory management and employee morale, as internal brand operations significantly influence worker understanding. It was determined that investing in staff training and development led to lower business expenses and more employee motivation (Majdoub, 2018). Adesola (2017) has suggested in Lagos, Nigeria that organizations' training quality and quantity vary significantly based on external change, workforce adaptability, and internal career development value.

Some organizations define training needs before organizing activities. According to Miricho and Bitok (2020), a structured mechanism was implemented to assess competency and training plans among Nairobi restaurants, aiming to enhance performance, policies, and practices in training actions and staff training needs. Regarding service delivery, Wangechi et al. (2020), suggest that organizations prioritize learning and development to address performance difficulties, improve service quality and stability, and gain a competitive advantage. In India, Dhar (2015) suggests that

upper management in the hospitality sector should concentrate on raising employee engagement levels by offering various training-related opportunities. Different methods, including peer and customer surveys, supervisor evaluations, and questionnaires, should be used to assess the results of training initiatives. Joao et al. (2019) stated from South Africa that training is crucial for employee retention and staff development, improving service quality, and promoting economic and social sustainability. It boosts productivity and service quality, and measuring success in the service industry involves assessing customer satisfaction and enhancing the quality provided.

Wanjiku (2013) highlights the significant impact of employee factors on customer service quality in Nairobi, Kenya. Wanjiku suggested that hotels should prioritize employee satisfaction, as well as good remuneration, clear job descriptions, and competitive compensation can enhance employee performance. Staff training in Vietnam enhances customer satisfaction, reputation, revenues, and long-term success for restaurants. All employees need to contribute to the customer experience. Without proper training, communication between employees and customers may diverge from the restaurant's standards (Minh & Dao, 2021). However, according to Namasivayam et al. (2014), leader-empowering behaviours affect psychological empowerment and employee satisfaction, influencing customer satisfaction. This leads to increased organizational commitment levels and customer satisfaction. Tefera and Kistan Govender (2017), argue that creating a service environment in Ethiopia that fosters client loyalty is crucial for organizations that rely on recurring revenue. This includes hotel management. Effective customer service is critical for hotel operations and retention. It is advised that all hotel personnel receive frequent training in this area.

#### **2.5.4 Customer Feedback Mechanisms**

Management of feedback is essential for casual dining restaurants to improve employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and overall operational efficiency. It helps identify the organization's strengths and weaknesses, drives strategic decision-making, and promotes progress throughout the system. In the USA, Zhang et al. (2018) suggest that customers increasingly rely on online reviews when making local business decisions. Bilgihan et al. (2018b) also argue that data mining on user-generated websites can offer valuable insights into service performance, helping predict restaurant service satisfaction and dissatisfaction levels. The complexity of customer experience and technology advancements is giving rise to unstructured textual data, making it difficult for managers to analyse and interpret. Text mining, a popular method for

extracting information from this data, has performed below expectations in this study done in the UK (Ordenes et al., 2014).

Stamolampros et al. (2019) suggest that online employee reviews provide valuable information for management to act upon. According to Puranen and Reismaa (2019), businesses require customer feedback to understand the needs of their customers in Morocco. Customer communication is crucial for businesses to function effectively, as customers make judgments based on more than just goods and services. Similarly, in China, Yan et al. (2015) argue that one of the most widely accepted marketing tenets is that of being more profitable to keep current customers than to attract new ones. For practitioners to make money, it is crucial to think about how to keep current customers and increase their likelihood of making more purchases. Schuckert et al. (2015) suggest in a study carried out in Hong Kong, that opinion mining, motivation to post reviews, and the role of reviews were evenly distributed. Additionally, in Jordan, Dinçer and Alrawadieh (2017) stated that only recently have hotel managers been able to obtain guest feedback using traditional techniques like GCCs (Guest Comment Cards).

Advancements in internet technology enable hotel customers to provide feedback to hotel managers and other visitors, who are increasingly making online purchases and seeking travel-related information. In Nairobi, Maroko (2022) argues that strategic management aids management teams in selecting effective and realistic strategies, enhancing understanding of a business's strengths, weaknesses, risks, and opportunities, and evaluating its competitive edge, including goals and approaches to meet rivals. According to Ukpabi et al. (2018), African visitors place a premium on hotel service quality and security, and online travel reviews are essential for holiday planning since they help purchasers imagine destinations. Typical elements of a feedback management system consist of: Feedback collection techniques, Analysis of Feedback, Dashboard and reporting, developing action plans, and Closed-loop feedback.

Customer knowledge positively affects service quality, and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a partial mediating factor between the two. According to Habon et al. (2019), respondents in a quick service restaurant found that they were better equipped to perform their roles and demonstrate high productivity, with no significant differences across their profiles after they underwent training development programs. Customer feedback management systems are

important in requesting, processing, and utilizing client input to improve service quality. According to Nasr et al. (2014), the UK study reveals that positive customer feedback can enhance service company performance, suggesting various strategies for delivering and influencing such feedback.

According to Radojevic et al. (2015), clients in the European hospitality industry frequently rate hotels on online booking portals based on service quality, resulting in a rating score as a comprehensive metric for customer satisfaction. This strategy delivers useful feedback to hotel management while improving the overall customer experience. However, Ordenes et al. (2014), in another European study, imply that the complexity of customer experience and technology improvements generate unstructured textual data, making it difficult for managers to assess and interpret. Despite its popularity, text mining has fallen short of expectations in terms of the depth and quality of client input. Napolitano (2018), argues that user-generated content can significantly impact a company's popularity and financial performance.

TripAdvisor allows business owners to respond to unfavourable comments, which are typically difficult to remove. Patil and Rane (2023) additionally, in India, it implies that customer ratings have a significant role in restaurant selection. These portals provide customers with information about other restaurants, such as menus and customer reviews. Kim and Kim (2022), states from Korea, that as the internet becomes more prevalent, users may share their experiences and information through online reviews. Online reviews are a valuable source of information for customers, often influencing their purchasing decisions. Customer experience in online reviews is critical for maintaining customer satisfaction and re-purchase intentions, leading to sustainable business success. Park et al. (2016), argue that Twitter users' mixed perceptions of Asian restaurants were significantly lower for Chinese restaurants than the other three.

According to Mhlanga (2018), electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) heavily influences client decisions in the hotel industry. It enables them to lessen the risk of purchasing services as intangible products. In South Africa, Beneke et al. (2016) noted that negative online word-of-mouth has a major negative impact on brand equity and purchase intention. Negative online customer reviews have a greater impact on the brand equity of high-participation products compared to low-involvement products. However, according to Itorobong et al. (2024), Positive

recommendations and fewer complaints improve Akwa Ibom Hospitality's perceived service excellence in West Africa, however, higher online review ratings may have a negative influence, highlighting development opportunities.

### **2.5.5 Influence of Service Excellence Initiatives on Customer Experience**

Service excellence initiatives significantly shape customer experience by enhancing service quality, employee engagement, and operational efficiency (Habon et al., 2019). Training programs contribute to service quality by equipping restaurant staff with the skills necessary to improve interactions with customers and maintain high service standards (Joao et al., 2019). The restaurant's physical environment influences customer satisfaction through ambiance, aesthetics, and layout, creating an atmosphere that encourages repeat patronage. Additionally, waiting time plays a critical role in shaping customer perceptions, as prolonged wait times may lead to dissatisfaction (Lahap et al., 2018). While effective queue management and environmental factors, such as background music, can mitigate negative experiences. Collectively, these elements highlight the interconnectedness of service initiatives in fostering customer loyalty, enhancing satisfaction, and driving business success.

### **2.5.6 The Effect of a Restaurant's Physical Environment on Customer Experience**

A restaurant's physical environment has a significant impact on the overall customer experience. Bujisic et al. (2014) found that the restaurant type moderates the association between service quality, ambiance quality, and customer behavioural intentions in the United States. According to Liu and Tse (2018), the ambiance, including the physical and service settings, has a major impact on consumer satisfaction with the dining experience. According to Hanaysha (2016), customer satisfaction is a key aspect in Malaysian corporate success. Food quality, pricing justice, and physical surroundings all have an impact on customer happiness. the connection between overall restaurant quality and client happiness. In Korea, Han and Hyun (2017) imply that increasing client repeat patronage and visitation to other hotel restaurants is crucial for hotel firms as it directly impacts earnings and success. According to Almohaimmed (2017), previous studies in Saudi Arabia have examined the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction in various restaurant types, with little attention given to the relationship between total restaurant quality and customer satisfaction.

According to Tuzunkan and Albayrak (2016), service staff, facility aesthetics, layout, atmosphere, table setup, and lighting are the most influential factors for Turkish customers in Istanbul's restaurant environment. Customer demographics influence physical environmental elements. Additionally, Petzer and Mackay (2014) argue in South Africa, that customer satisfaction is influenced by product and service quality, as well as the atmosphere in the servicescape, contributing to positive word-of-mouth, returns, and profitability. Similarly, in Kenya, Githiri (2016) maintains that customer satisfaction with the physical environment significantly influences their return intention, particularly in rated restaurants. Muigai (2019), suggests that the management of Thika's fine-dining hotels prioritize maintaining a pleasant atmosphere to differentiate themselves from their competition.

However, these global generalizations may not always translate well into specific restaurant contexts, especially in Nairobi's casual dining industry. Kenyan clients, although becoming more global in their dining habits, nonetheless have place-based expectations that reflect specific social, cultural, and economic trends. For example, Kamau (2017) discovered that in Nairobi's categorized hotels, customer satisfaction is highly responsive to ambient circumstances, notably illumination, cleanliness, and spatial arrangement. This research found that these servicescape features provide a feeling of perceived order and professionalism, which are frequently absent in mid-tier casual dining establishments. Githiri (2016)'s findings support this view by demonstrating that the quality of the physical environment has a substantial impact on the willingness of customers to return to rated Nairobi restaurants.

According to Githiri, layout coherence and mood were viewed as reflections of management attention and operational standards, hence indirectly impacting customer confidence in the organization. Notably, Nairobi customers chose environmental hygiene and noise control over high-tech ambiance enhancers, which are frequently favoured in overseas research. Muigai (2019) adds another layer by investigating fine-dining places in Thika, a peri-urban neighbourhood inside Nairobi's hospitality belt. His research found that a well-curated physical environment may frequently serve as a differentiator between competitors, even when menu options and price structures are similar. These findings are especially pertinent for Nairobi's casual dining operators,

who want to cater to an increasing middle class that values experiences and is extremely aware of environmental aesthetics.

As a result, whereas international research relates restaurant atmosphere to customer satisfaction, this study contends that in the Kenyan setting, environmental signals such as cleanliness, spatial order, and culturally resonant design are especially important. These are more than simply decorative design components; they are strategic instruments that impact emotional comfort, perceived value, and behavioural loyalty.

### **2.5.7 The Influence of Waiting Time on Customer Experience**

According to Statistician et al. (2023), many well-known restaurants suffer from client loss due to high wait times in line. Kim et al. (2016) contend that waiting for service is frequently a negative part of a customer's experience. Kim et al. (2016) reported that in the United States, service consumption frequently entails waiting at various phases of delivery, with a strong interaction impact between the consumption stage and emotional responses. According to De Vries et al. (2018), several service sectors in Europe need clients to wait for service. Waiting can have an impact on customers' service experience, travel time, spending, and return behaviour; however, in Germany, Kremer and Debo (2016) state that longer wait periods may raise the perceived quality of a product, leading misinformed buyers to purchase it despite the wait. Short wait times can negatively impact consumer perception of quality, leading to the "empty restaurant syndrome." Regardless, in Taiwan, Liang (2016) suggests that implementing good queue management and promotional activities can dramatically minimize the amount of time a customer spends waiting.

In Malaysia, Lahap et al. (2018) implied customers are willing to sacrifice time for quality meals. One factor contributing to this is the impact of electronic word-of-mouth. Longer queues often result in longer waiting times. Curiosity among the customers may lead to restaurant patronage. Psychologically, the phenomenon is also known as the bandwagon effect. According to Emerald (2016), after classifying the attitudes and behaviours linked with important incidents in waiting situations, these four themes emerged: social justice, servicescapes, affective responses, and service results. In Bangladesh, Ahsan and Alam (2014) suggest that queuing theory is the study

of queues and waiting lines. Queuing theory can provide some analysis on waiting time, average system time, queue length, number of customers served at once, customer balking probability, and system states (e.g., empty or full). In China, Fang (2015) concludes that long wait times can lead to consumer dissatisfaction and negatively impact restaurant operations. Research suggests that background music is a controlled environmental aspect in restaurants that can affect customer wait times. This has implications for management in the service industry.

In addition, a rising amount of Kenyan research provides critical context-specific insights that are usually lacking in global literature. For example, in her study of e-services at fast food restaurants in Nairobi, Gachuru (2017) found that customer dissatisfaction is frequently caused by delayed service and a lack of communication regarding order progress. Her findings highlight that, while digital ordering channels exist, their usefulness is diminished when not accompanied by quick service delivery. This demonstrates a mismatch between technology ease and real fulfilment speed in Nairobi's casual dining industry. Kamau (2017) builds on this problem in her research of servicescapes in Nairobi's categorized restaurants. She discovered that service delays had a detrimental impact on customer satisfaction, even in well-designed dining locations.

This study supports the concept that waiting is not just about time elapsed, but also about perceived attentiveness and hospitality, a feature that is typically overlooked in international queue models. Waiting time at Nairobi's casual dining restaurants necessitates a dual approach: operational efficiency and effective engagement. Restaurants must optimize kitchen and floor procedures to eliminate objective delays and also teach employees to communicate with empathy and honesty during inevitable wait times. As a result, the impression of wait time may be shifted from a cause of dissatisfaction to a controlled interaction that improves the customer relationship.

Ivy Omwancha (2020) found that convenience-based service components, including ease of access and transactional simplicity, had a direct and quantitative influence on customer satisfaction at chain restaurants in Nairobi. Her research reveals that customer satisfaction in Nairobi is influenced not only by product quality or ambiance, but also by how easily services are accessed and experienced, an often-overlooked aspect of excellence campaigns. These studies reveal that customer satisfaction is inextricably linked to a variety of relational, operational, and experiential aspects, many of which are context dependent.

### **2.5.8 Effect of Service Excellence Initiatives on Customer Satisfaction**

Customer experience (CX) is now a key factor in determining how successful a restaurant is. The goal of service excellence initiatives is to improve customer experience through memorable dining experiences, individual interactions, and higher-quality service. Pine (2020) implies that the internal generation of service value is focused on customer satisfaction and loyalty, and outward consumption of that value. For casual dining restaurants, customer experience is a complex idea that includes all the touchpoints a customer may have, from arriving to being seated, to getting service, to enjoying their meal, and finally departing happy. It involves several elements, ranging from overall satisfaction, meal quality, and ambiance to service quality. According to Petzer and Mackay (2014), product and service quality, as well as the service environment, all influence customer happiness.

Satisfied customers spread positive word of mouth, improve returns, and raise profitability. Pizam et al. (2016) in the United States emphasized the relevance of using customer satisfaction as a proxy for service excellence. They defined and researched the concept in hospitality and tourism, concluding that satisfaction with a hospitality experience is determined by the individual components or features of all products and services that make up the encounter. In Europe, Morkunas and Rudiene (2020) proposed a link between consumer happiness and repurchase intentions. In Malaysia, Dastane et al. (2017) argue that customer satisfaction is a key aspect of retaining customers. They maintain that it is a well-known fact that retaining customers is significantly less expensive than obtaining new ones. In Pakistan, however, Shahzadi et al. (2018) argue that customer satisfaction helps bridge the gap between essential restaurant qualities and behavioural objectives.

In the Middle East, Almohaimmed (2017) found a considerable difference between customers' opinions of the relevance and performance of key restaurant qualities. His study found that customer satisfaction is positively influenced by all 11 restaurant quality dimensions, including halal, food, hygiene, menu, and atmospheric quality, as well as assurance, accuracy, responsiveness, interior design, external environment, and pricing. Notwithstanding, Mmutle and Shonhe (2017) suggest in South Africa that effective customer satisfaction and expectation management are crucial for organizational longevity. Mbango (2019) demonstrates a varying

opinion in South Africa, stating that customer satisfaction affects customer value. Predictors of customer satisfaction include trust, commitment, and communication.

To ensure customer satisfaction, businesses must focus on producing sustained customer value. Organizations can gain a competitive advantage and fulfil their goals by doing this. (Chinomona & Dubihlela, 2014) reveal a significant positive relationship between customer satisfaction, trust, loyalty, and repurchase intention. Tseng and Wu (2014) suggest that most organizations understand that their most valuable resource is their clientele, and that improving service quality is the only way to attain high levels of customer satisfaction. Moreover, according to Alhelalat et al. (2017), with the implementation of reinforcement programs to enhance the personal and functional aspects of staff, customer satisfaction could be realized by improving employee service behaviour. Additionally, Dhar (2015) argues that there is a substantial correlation between staff training and the caliber of services provided by employees in tourist hotels.

According to Al-Tit (2015), both food and service quality have a beneficial impact on customer satisfaction, and customer satisfaction serves as a mediator between service quality and customer retention. Furthermore, according to Kristiawan et al. (2021), service quality has an impact on customer satisfaction. Happy customers will return to the establishment, and for the establishment to continue operations, its owners and managers must continue to provide high-quality services and products. Kanyan et al. (2016) argue that in the food market, organizations must capitalize on customer happiness. This can be accomplished by offering excellent customer service. Similarly, Gay Barlan-Espino (2017) says that the fundamental purpose of restaurants is to ensure that customers are comfortable and satisfied while not jeopardizing the business's capacity to run efficiently.

### **2.5.9 Customer Experience**

Customer experience in casual dining establishments encompasses the cumulative perceptions and interactions that customers have with a restaurant. This experience is pivotal in determining customer satisfaction, retention, and loyalty. Key components influencing customer experience include service quality, food quality, ambiance, and price fairness. Understanding and optimizing these factors are essential for restaurants aiming to enhance customer satisfaction and encourage repeat patronage.

### **2.5.10 Customers' Willingness to Recommend and Return**

While exploring factors that affect customers' restaurant choices in the USA, Liu and Tse (2018), state that dimensions such as food, service, price, value, and atmosphere have a more direct impact on revisit intentions than indirect effects. Satisfaction plays a role in influencing revisit intentions. Thus, excellent performance may not dramatically increase revisit intentions. Excellent performance can boost client satisfaction, leading to an increased likelihood of repeat visits. According to Worsfold et al. (2016) in Europe, to ascertain the guests' intention to return to hotels, a higher assessment of service quality and value resulted in higher guest satisfaction and intention to return. Meanwhile, in Malaysia, customers evaluate casual dining restaurants by taking into account various restaurant qualities. These include the impact of cuisine, service, restaurant, and price factors on the restaurant experience (Ponnam & Balaji, 2014).

In South Africa, Mhlanga et al. (2016) indicate that some of the current elements promoting customer return are convenience, relaxation, past visits, celebrations, business needs, social occasions, quality cuisines, service, ambiance, quietness, and referrals. It was also mentioned that formal full-service restaurants are typically selected based on good service, meal quality, suggestion, and ambiance. According to Uddin (2019), brand loyalty is strongly dependent on customer perceptions of product and service value. According to Espinosa et al. (2018), overall restaurant brand image (ORBI) predicts recurring customer loyalty and satisfaction. Loyalty bridges the gap between ORBI and the intention to return to a casual dining establishment. Some determinants of customer satisfaction on return intention according to Mansa (2021), include hygiene, perceived restaurant image, menu pricing, well-cooked food, and professionalism.

Some impediments to customer satisfaction were identified as high-priced meals, unfriendly waiting staff, bad seating arrangement and ambiance, slow service response, and low social standing. Customer satisfaction significantly impacts on the customer's intention to return to the restaurant. Customers who were more satisfied with the physical environment of rated restaurants in Kenya, were more inclined to return (Githiri, 2016). Customers were more influenced to return by the physical environment, he argued. A study of restaurant recommendations in the USA by Bakhshi et al. (2014), suggests that online recommendation services provide significant information for restaurant selection. Endogenous restaurant attributes like meal, price, and service

influence recommendations, and exogenous factors like demographics (e.g. neighbourhood, diversity, and education) and weather (temperature, rain, snow, and season) affect reviews.

In evaluating key determinants of customer loyalty in Finland, Biriukova and Greene (2020), analysed factors such as meal quality, service quality, staff friendliness, price, and trust. They argued further that referrals from family and friends and social media advertising are the most used information channels in the restaurant environment. They also added that the most critical aspect in choosing a restaurant to dine at is the sort of food offered there. However, for Vietnamese diners, meal quality, service quality, and narcissistic personality traits significantly affect customer satisfaction and their desire to repurchase Ho et al. (2020). They maintained that customer satisfaction serves as a link between predictors and repurchase intentions. Concerning customer revisit intentions in China, Yan et al. (2015) argue that to improve service quality, food service operators should focus on word of mouth, employee training, and maintaining a consistent atmosphere to retain customers.

To maintain a good customer relationship, they suggest focusing on food quality, including taste, variety, visual appeal, and nutrition, and maintaining a reasonable price. In understanding key determinants of brand loyalty Otengei et al. (2014), suggest a strong correlation exists between dining experience, guest delight, restaurant image, and brand loyalty in Ugandan full-service restaurants. Githiri (2018) implies that perceived price fairness significantly impacts customer relationships, quality, trust, satisfaction, and loyalty while visiting restaurants. She added that customers were more likely to return when prices were reasonable. In Ghana, Adongo et al. (2015) imply that memorable local dining experiences can impact travellers' willingness to recommend.

### **2.5.11 Customer Retention**

Customer retention refers to a restaurant's ability to encourage repeat visits from its patrons. In the casual dining sector, retaining customers is crucial, as repeat patrons often contribute significantly to a restaurant's revenue and profitability. Several factors have been identified as influential in promoting customer retention. Service Quality stands out as a primary determinant. High-quality service, characterized by attentive, prompt, and courteous interactions, fosters a positive dining experience, making customers more inclined to return. A study focusing on the restaurant industry highlighted that superior service quality positively correlates with increased customer retention

rates (Nainggolan et al., 2022). Price Fairness is another critical factor. Customers' perceptions of receiving value for their money significantly influence their decision to revisit an establishment.

Research indicates that when patrons perceive pricing as fair and reflective of the quality offered, their likelihood of returning increases (Gad, 2024). The Physical Environment of a restaurant, encompassing aspects like cleanliness, ambiance, and overall atmosphere, also plays a vital role in retention. An inviting and comfortable environment enhances the dining experience, encouraging repeat visits. Studies have shown that a well-maintained physical setting positively impacts customers' intentions to return (Githiri, 2016). Trust serves as a mediating factor between customer satisfaction and loyalty. When customers trust that a restaurant consistently delivers quality food and service, their loyalty strengthens, leading to higher retention rates. Empirical evidence supports the notion that trust significantly mediates the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty in the fast-casual dining context (Nainggolan et al., 2022).

### **2.5.12 Customer Satisfaction**

Customer satisfaction in casual eating refers to how well a restaurant's offerings match or surpass customer expectations. It is an important indication of a restaurant's performance and predicts customer loyalty and favourable word-of-mouth. Several factors contribute to client satisfaction in this industry. Food quality is crucial. The taste, appearance, and freshness of food have a tremendous impact on clients' eating experiences. Research of factors influencing customer satisfaction in casual dining found that better meal quality is directly related to higher satisfaction levels (Gad, 2024). Service quality is also very important. Attentive, courteous, and fast service improves the whole dining experience, resulting in more satisfaction. Research indicates that the quality of service provided is a significant determinant of customer satisfaction in the restaurant industry (Nainggolan et al., 2022).

The ambiance of a restaurant, which includes its interior design, lighting, music, and general environment, enhances the dining experience. An appealing ambiance can boost mood and enjoyment, leading to increased satisfaction. According to studies, a restaurant's physical atmosphere has a considerable impact on customer satisfaction (Gad, 2024). Price fairness is another significant consideration. Customers choose whether the quality of the meal and service is worth the price spent. Perceptions of fair pricing positively influence satisfaction and the

likelihood of repeat patronage. Empirical research supports the notion that perceived price fairness is a critical component of customer satisfaction in the dining industry (Nainggolan et al., 2022). Achieving high customer satisfaction in casual dining requires a holistic approach that addresses multiple facets of the dining experience. By focusing on delivering exceptional food and service quality, creating a pleasant ambiance, and ensuring fair pricing, restaurants can enhance customer satisfaction, leading to increased loyalty and positive recommendations.

## **2.6 Gaps in Literature**

While many firms provide adequate customer service, customers favour those who go above and beyond to achieve service excellence. Tieng (2022) defines service excellence as meeting or slightly exceeding the customer's expectations. This study by Hussein (2018), however, develops a model to understand the relationship between experience quality, restaurant image, customer satisfaction, brand engagement, and customer loyalty in Indonesian casual dining restaurants. Restaurant operators need to prioritize customer satisfaction and comprehend loyalty from the angle of business viability. Ahmed et al. (2023) similarly, suggest that service excellence and price fairness impact restaurant consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Singh et al. (2022), argue that balancing service excellence and brand image can improve price perception, customer satisfaction, and retention.

While existing research establishes the importance of service excellence in hospitality, critical gaps remain in understanding its application within Nairobi's unique casual dining context; the SERVQUAL and Kano models are well-established (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Kano et al., 1984), but their direct application to Nairobi's casual dining sector is unproven. Preliminary findings indicate that 'empathy' dimensions may bear varying weight in Kenya's community dining culture. Ahmed et al. (2023) and Singh et al. (2022) look at service excellence initiatives in isolation, ignoring how Nairobi's mix of tech adoption (e.g., M-Pesa payments) and human-centric hospitality creates unique operational tensions. Also, QR code menus may streamline orders but risk depersonalizing (welcome) rituals.

With so many dining options, retaining customers has never been more challenging. The study reveals how specialized service excellence initiatives, from staff training approaches to wait time

strategies, drive repeat business in Nairobi's distinct market, moving beyond general 'good service' recommendations to concrete, locally relevant findings. This study transforms academic principles into practical changes to diners' daily lives. At the same time, it provides restaurant owners with something unique: Nairobi-specific data on what service excellence looks like for their real customers, rather than assumptions based on other markets.



## 2.7 Conceptual Framework

The study's conceptual framework depicts service excellence initiatives and their impact on customer experience in casual dining establishments in Nairobi. The independent variables are service excellence initiatives, service excellence experience, and customer loyalty, with customer experience as the dependent variable (Figure 2.1).

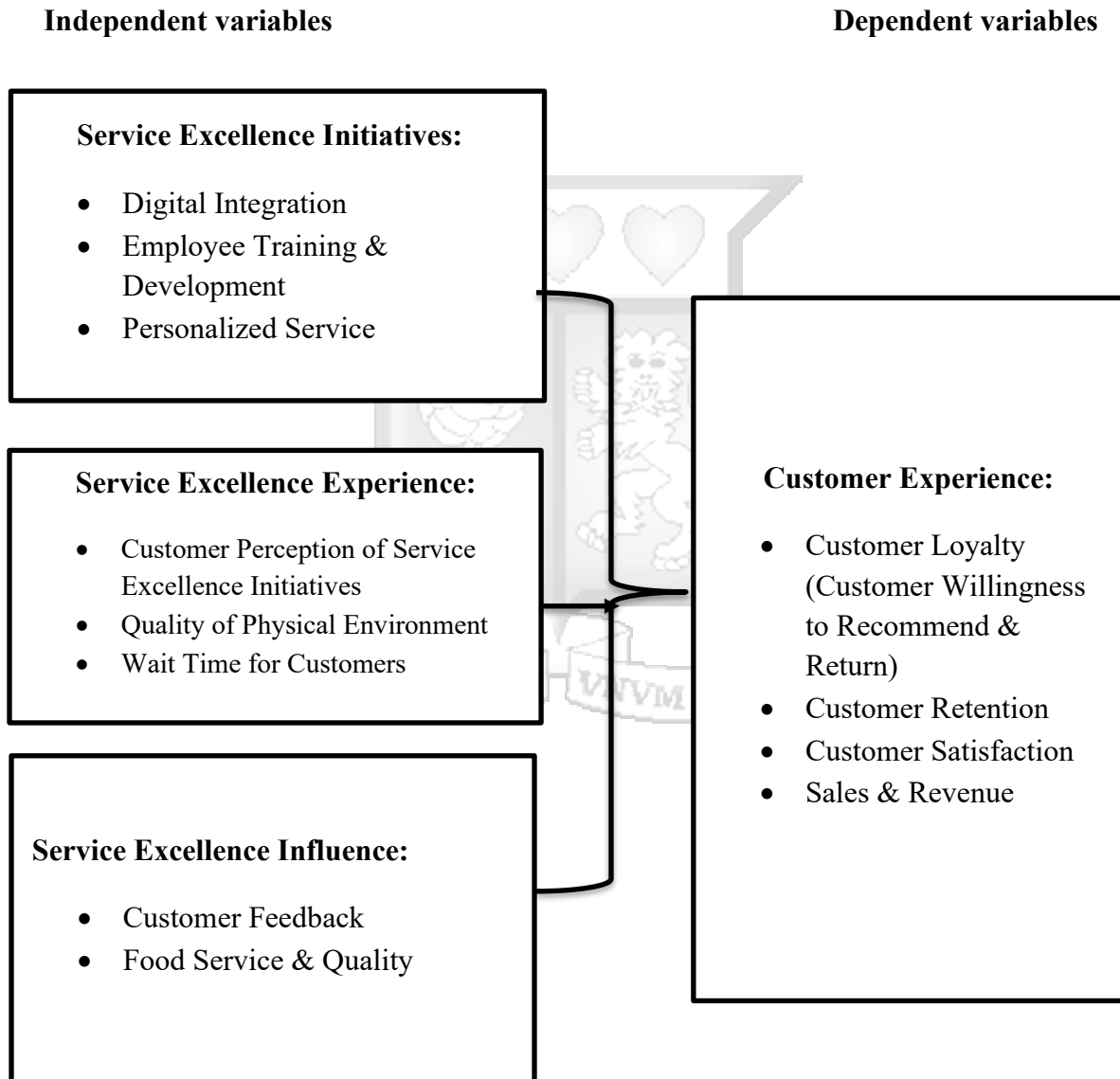


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

### 2.7.1 Operationalization of Variables

This study investigates how service excellence initiatives affect customer experience in Nairobi's casual dining restaurants. To quantify these abstract ideas empirically, each variable has been carefully operationalized into observable indicators. This approach provides systematic data collection and analysis, as well as a thorough assessment of how specific service excellence initiatives affect customer experiences in Nairobi's casual dining industry. See Table 2.1 below



Table 2.1: Operationalization of Variables

| Variables                             | Definition  | Indicators  | Measurement Scale   | Type of Data                                    | Data Analysis Method   |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Service Excellence Initiatives</b> | Initiatives undertaken by the business to enhance service excellence      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital Integration</li> <li>• Employee Training &amp; Development</li> <li>• Personalized Service</li> </ul>  | Ordinal / Interval (Likert Scale 1-5)                                     | Quantitative (Ordinal/Interval)                 | Descriptive Statistics, Correlation Analysis, Regression Analysis        |
| <b>Service Excellence Experience</b>  | How customers perceive their service experience                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer Perception of Service Excellence Initiatives</li> <li>• Quality of Physical Environment</li> <li>• Wait Time for Customers</li> <li>• Food Service &amp; Quality</li> </ul> | Ordinal / Interval (Likert Scale 1-5)                                     | Quantitative and Qualitative (Ordinal/Interval) | Descriptive Statistics, Correlation Analysis, Regression Analysis        |
| <b>Service Excellence Influence</b>   | The impact of service excellence on customer evaluation                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer Feedback</li> </ul>   | Ordinal / Interval (Likert Scale 1-5)                                     | Quantitative (Ordinal/Interval)                 | Descriptive Statistics, Correlation Analysis, Regression Analysis        |
| <b>Customer Experience</b>            | The overall experience customers have, including satisfaction and loyalty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer Loyalty (Customer Willingness to Recommend &amp; Return)</li> <li>• Customer Retention</li> <li>• Customer Satisfaction</li> <li>• Sales &amp; Revenue</li> </ul>           | Ordinal / Interval (Likert Scale 1-5) (Sales & Revenue can also be Ratio) | Quantitative (Ordinal/Interval/Ratio)           | Descriptive Statistics, Correlation Analysis, Regression Analysis, ANOVA |

## **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes the methodology used in this study, including the research design, study area, target population, sampling methodology, research tools, pilot study, data collection, and analysis to investigate service excellence initiatives implemented by casual dining restaurants in Nairobi to improve customer experience.

### **3.2 Research Philosophy**

Positivism was the applied research philosophy. Positivism is founded on the belief that reality can be objectively measured and characterized using factual data. It focuses largely on structured, quantitative procedures to test ideas and reach broad conclusions. Customers' quantitative data was collected using structured questionnaires with closed-ended questions. This approach aligns nicely with positivism since it allows for the collection of numerical data that can be statistically assessed. This research ethic emphasizes objective measurement and statistical analysis, which aligns well with organized surveys and quantitative data. The purpose is to generate objective, generalizable results concerning the impact of service excellence programs on customer experience using empirical data collected via questionnaires.

### **3.3 Research Design**

The study used a descriptive research approach, which is well-known for its capacity to capture and depict real-world occurrences as they occur, without the manipulation of factors (Siedlecki, 2020). This methodology was particularly ideal for the hospitality and service sector research, as the purpose is frequently to investigate the customer attitudes, operational practices, and service delivery mechanisms in their natural setting (Kothari, 2004; Saunders et al., 2016). Descriptive research enabled researchers to investigate links between constructs, in this example, service excellence programs and customer experience, while also allowing for statistical analysis and generalization based on observable patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This is consistent with the present study's goal of determining how various service excellence initiatives impact customer experience in Nairobi's casual dining restaurants. Using this

approach, the research was able to collect data from a cross-section of the target demographic over a set period, providing a snapshot of current service standards and consumer views. The research approach also allowed for the quantification of replies using structured questionnaires, allowing descriptive and inferential statistical analysis to be performed. This strategy improved the study's empirical validity while keeping it anchored in the daily reality of restaurant operations.

### **3.4 Target Population and Sampling**

#### **3.4.1 Target Population**

The target population comprised customers of casual dining restaurants registered with the Tourism Regulatory Authority (TRA) under Class B, which includes restaurants and other food service providers (TRA, 2013). According to TRA records, there are approximately 95 such restaurants in Nairobi County. For this study, a subset of 35 casual dining establishments was selected from five major dining zones—Westlands (15), CBD (4), Karen (4), Lavington (6), and Kilimani (6)—to ensure geographical representation and variation in restaurant types and customer profiles.

#### **3.4.2 Sampling**

This sampling frame was constructed to capture a diversity of culinary styles, restaurant capacities, and service models. As suggested by Patton (2002), diversity sampling improves external validity by reflecting a broader range of customer experiences. To select participating restaurants, convenience sampling was used, a non-probabilistic method deemed appropriate for exploratory research where the population is accessible but undefined (Etikan et al., 2016). This method also aligned with time and resource constraints, enabling the researcher to approach restaurants willing to participate within the designated areas. The customer base of these restaurants was treated as an infinite population, due to the transient nature of patronage in the casual dining context. Customers vary daily, and their frequency of visits is unpredictable.

This aligns with the definition of an infinite population in social research, where the total number of units cannot be enumerated at any fixed point (Taherdoost, 2016). To determine the appropriate sample size for data collection from this infinite population, Cochran's formula was applied, which is widely used for estimating sample sizes where the population size is unknown or indefinite

(Oribhabor, 2019). The proportion (P) was set at 0.5, a conservative value used when variability in the population is unknown, thereby ensuring maximum sample size and statistical reliability.

$$n_0 = \frac{z^2 P(1 - P)}{e^2}$$

Where:

Z is the Z-value corresponding to the confidence level

P is the estimated population proportion (0.5 if unknown) and

E is the margin of error (0.05)

n = 384.16

Approximate sample size = 384 respondents

Customers within the selected casual dining restaurants were sampled during peak business hours over two weeks. Data collectors approached restaurant customers following their meal experience to ensure that their responses reflected immediate and authentic reactions to the dining service. Although convenience sampling does not offer the statistical rigor of random sampling, it is methodologically justified in this context due to the absence of a stable, pre-defined customer list and the need to capture real-time service encounters. It also provided practical feasibility for engaging participants across multiple sites within a defined data collection window.

### **3.5 Data Collection Instruments**

A systematic questionnaire was utilized to collect information about service excellence initiatives and their impact on the customer experience (Chandra, 2018). The questionnaire contained closed-ended and open-ended questions to collect quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. The qualitative data is designed to provide insight into the consumer experience.

### **3.6 Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection for this study involved multiple tools, including structured questionnaires, qualitative observations, and brief field notes. The primary data collection method consisted of self-administered questionnaires distributed to customers at selected casual dining restaurants in Nairobi. Customers were selected through convenience sampling and were approached after dining to ensure that responses captured immediate and reflective insights about their service experience. Each participant was informed of the study's purpose and assured of confidentiality before participation.

A total of 384 responses were targeted based on the sample size calculation using Cochran's formula for an infinite population. Participants were drawn from 35 casual dining restaurants situated in Westlands, CBD, Karen, Lavington, and Kilimani—locations selected for their diverse customer profiles and high casual dining density.

To enhance flexibility and improve response rates, a QR code link to the digital version of the questionnaire was provided for customers who preferred to complete the survey later at their convenience. However, the majority of responses were collected on-site, immediately after customers had completed their meals, allowing for timely and context-rich data. Pretesting (pilot testing) of the questionnaire was conducted before the main data collection phase. A small-scale test involving 20 customers from two non-sampled casual dining restaurants in Nairobi was carried out to assess the clarity, relevance, and timing of the questionnaire items. This was carried out in February 2025, immediately after the Strathmore Ethical approval was received. Based on participant feedback and researcher observations, minor adjustments were made to the wording of a few items to eliminate ambiguity and improve response consistency. The pilot also confirmed the estimated completion time of approximately 10–12 minutes per questionnaire, which was considered acceptable in the dining context.

Data collection was conducted from February 2025, after the NACOSTI approval was received, with research assistants visiting restaurants during peak hours and weekends to maximize customer accessibility. All data were recorded and reviewed daily to ensure completeness and accuracy. Quantitative responses were coded for statistical analysis using SPSS, while open-ended items and

field notes were thematically grouped for interpretation. Analysis of the data collected was largely done in March 2025.

### 3.7 Research Quality

This study used validity and reliability tests to ensure high research quality.

#### 3.7.1 Validity

The validity of the research was carefully maintained using several critical measures. First, using approved measuring techniques like structured questionnaires and interview guides guarantees accurate information about the customers' perceptions, expectations, and experiences. Second, a carefully planned sampling strategy ensured representation across various types of casual dining restaurants in Nairobi, increasing the external validity of the findings. Furthermore, conducting pilot testing and training data collectors reduced biases and errors, strengthening the internal validity of the study. Finally, by following ethical guidelines and remaining transparent throughout the study process, the validity of the overall project findings would be increased.

#### 3.7.2 Reliability

A small sample was used to pre-test the questionnaire to polish the questions and ensure their clarity. To validate the findings, questionnaires were examined. Cronbach's Alpha values of at least 0.7 were utilized to assess the survey instruments' internal consistency and reliability (Warrens, 2014). Cronbach's Alpha was used in the reliability test to determine construct internal consistency. The overall reliability score was 0.828, showing high internal consistency. Individual constructs showed acceptable reliability levels, with service excellence efforts at 0.768 and customer experience at 0.800. Table 3.1 shows the results of the reliability test.

Table 3.1 Reliability Test

| Construct                      | Number of Items | Cronbach's Alpha Index |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| Overall                        | 15              | 0.828                  |
| Service Excellence Initiatives | 4               | 0.768                  |
| Customer Experience            | 11              | 0.800                  |

### **3.8 Data Analysis and Presentation**

This study used descriptive and inferential statistics to successfully assess the impact of service excellence efforts on customer experience in Nairobi's casual dining establishments. The collected data was provided in the form of tables and charts to summarize the responses. Graphs and bar charts were utilized to illustrate the distribution of answers to service excellence initiatives, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. A correlation analysis was performed to investigate the relationship between service excellence initiatives and customer satisfaction. Correlation analysis was also utilized to investigate the relationship between the type of service excellence program and the level of customer satisfaction.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

The selected casual dining restaurant respondents and restaurant managers were explained to the study's scope. All participants were informed about the study's goal, and their consent was requested before participation to ensure informed consent from all responses by confirmation. Participants were informed that participation in the study is entirely voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time during the research process. Participants were told that their replies would be kept anonymous and used solely for this research. The obtained data was entered into a spreadsheet, examined, and cleaned to detect and correct any problems, ensuring data integrity and correctness. The research design, data protection, and ethical standards were upheld by subjecting the proposal for review by the Strathmore University Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee (SU-ISERC).

## Chapter 4: Presentation of Research Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings on the influence of service excellence initiatives on customer experience in casual dining restaurants in Nairobi County. The analysis includes the response rate, demographic characteristics of respondents, customer satisfaction levels, the importance of service excellence initiatives, and customer loyalty. Additionally, reliability and validity tests, frequency distributions, and correlation analyses are provided to establish relationships among the study variables.

### 4.2 Response Rate of the Research

The response rate for the study was 98.95%, with 380 out of 384 distributed questionnaires returned. The high response rate could be attributed to the strategic data collection method applied, where questionnaires were administered in person and during peak dining hours in most of the restaurants visited. This allowed for immediate clarification of any grey areas and completion of forms for those so disposed to fill them. This approach also took advantage of customers' post-meal engagement levels, when their dining experiences were still fresh in their memories. The face-to-face interaction and personal interaction also increased some customers' willingness to participate. The high response rate ensured the reliability and representativeness of the collected data. Table 4.1 presents the response rate distribution.

Table 4.1: Response Rate.

| <b>Description</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|--------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Distributed        | 384              | 100                   |
| Returned           | 380              | 98.95                 |

### 4.3 Demographics Analysis of Participants

Understanding the demographic characteristics of customers in casual dining restaurants is essential for evaluating service excellence initiatives and their impact on customer experience. Demographic data help identify consumer trends, service expectations, and opportunities for enhancing personalized service. A well-balanced demographic profile ensures that the study findings represent the general population of casual dining patrons, allowing for more accurate conclusions regarding service excellence and customer satisfaction. The gender distribution of respondents shows near-equal representation, with 51.1% female and 48.9% male participants. This balance supports diverse perspectives on customer experience and strengthens the study's credibility.

Age distribution indicates that the largest group of respondents falls within the 46-55 age range (36.3%), followed by those aged 26-35 (33.4%). The 36-45 age group accounts for 17.6%, while younger customers aged 18-25 represent 8.7%. Customers above 55 years constitute the smallest group at 3.9%. This suggests that middle-aged adults are the primary patrons of casual dining restaurants in Nairobi. Regarding frequency of visits, 48.7% of respondents dine monthly, 29.5% rarely visit, 13.2% visit daily, and 8.6% visit weekly. The high proportion of monthly visitors indicates regular engagement with casual dining establishments, though less frequent daily and weekly visits suggest varied dining habits among customers.

Table 4.2: Demographic Characteristics of Customers.

| Demographic Characteristic |         | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------|---------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender                     | Female  | 194       | 51.1           |
|                            | Male    | 186       | 48.9           |
| Age                        | 18 - 25 | 41        | 8.7%           |
|                            | 26 - 35 | 143       | 33.4%          |
|                            | 36 - 45 | 85        | 17.6%          |
|                            | 46 - 55 | 59        | 36.3%          |

|                    |          |      |      |
|--------------------|----------|------|------|
|                    | Above 55 | 21   | 3.9% |
| Frequency of Visit | Daily    | 33   | 13.2 |
|                    | Monthly  | 159  | 48.7 |
|                    | Rarely   | 38   | 29.5 |
|                    | Weekly   | 39.5 | 8.6  |
|                    | Total    | 349  | 100% |

---

#### 4.4 Descriptive Statistics of Customer Responses Regarding Their Dining Experiences

Descriptive statistics provide a method to summarize and organize collected data, allowing researchers to present the main features of a dataset clearly and understandably. This process typically involves calculating measures such as means, minimums, maximums, and standard deviations to describe central tendencies and variability within the data. Descriptive analysis is an essential first step in research because it offers a snapshot of participants' responses and highlights overall patterns and trends. In this study, descriptive statistics were used to analyse customer responses concerning various aspects of their dining experiences, including satisfaction levels, the perceived importance of service initiatives, and customer loyalty indicators. These statistics help to quantify customer perceptions and identify areas of strength or concern within casual dining restaurants. Interpreting descriptive results involves understanding what the averages and variations indicate about customer opinions. Higher mean scores generally suggest greater satisfaction or importance attributed to specific factors, while larger standard deviations indicate more varied experiences among respondents. This initial interpretation sets the groundwork for deeper analysis and helps contextualize subsequent findings related to service excellence and customer experience.

##### 4.4.1 Satisfaction with Dining Experience

Table 4.3 presents descriptive statistics on customer satisfaction with specific aspects of their dining experience. Cleanliness received the highest mean rating of 4.90, reflecting strong approval among respondents. Food quality (mean = 4.10) and staff politeness (mean = 3.92) also received

favourable ratings, indicating positive experiences in these areas. Speed of service recorded a mean of 3.89, showing moderate satisfaction. Ambiance had the lowest mean score of 2.87, suggesting it is an area that requires attention to improve customer experience.

Table 4.3: Distribution of Customer Satisfaction with Dining Experience

|                    | N   | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------|-----|---------|---------|------|----------------|
| Food Quality       | 380 | 1       | 5       | 4.10 | 1.071          |
| Speed of Service   | 380 | 1       | 5       | 3.89 | 1.211          |
| Cleanliness        | 380 | 1       | 5       | 4.90 | 1.143          |
| Staff Politeness   | 380 | 1       | 5       | 3.92 | 1.127          |
| Ambiance           | 380 | 1       | 5       | 2.87 | 1.415          |
| Valid N (listwise) | 380 |         |         |      |                |

#### 4.4.2 Overall Satisfaction

Table 4.4 summarizes overall satisfaction with the dining experience. The mean score of 3.04 indicates a moderate level of customer contentment. The relatively high standard deviation of 1.414 reflects a wide range of opinions, signifying that while some customers were satisfied, others expressed fewer positive experiences, pointing to variability in service quality or expectations.

Table 4.4: Overall Satisfaction.

|                      | N   | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|----------------------|-----|---------|---------|------|----------------|
| Overall Satisfaction | 380 | 1       | 5       | 3.04 | 1.414          |
| Valid N (listwise)   | 380 |         |         |      |                |

### .4.3 Importance of Service Excellence Initiatives to Dining Experience

Table 4.5 shows customer ratings on the importance of different service excellence initiatives. Waiting time management was rated as the most important initiative, with a mean score of 4.13. Staff professionalism followed closely at 3.95, indicating that customers value courteous and skilled employees. Personalized service and digital integration received lower mean scores of 3.07 and 2.89, respectively, suggesting these initiatives were seen as less critical to the overall dining experience by respondents.

Table 4.5: Importance of Service Excellence Initiatives to Dining Experience

|                                    | N   | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------------------------------------|-----|---------|---------|------|----------------|
| Importance Personalized Service    | 380 | 1       | 5       | 3.07 | 1.395          |
| Importance Digital Integration     | 380 | 1       | 5       | 2.89 | 1.390          |
| Importance Staff Professionalism   | 380 | 1       | 5       | 3.95 | 1.357          |
| Importance Waiting Time Management | 380 | 1       | 5       | 4.13 | 1.342          |
| Valid N (listwise)                 | 380 |         |         |      |                |

#### 4.4.4 Customer Loyalty (Likelihood to return & recommend)

Customer loyalty was assessed through respondents' likelihood to return to and recommend the restaurants, as shown in Table 4.6. The mean score for likelihood to return was 3.50, indicating a moderate tendency for repeat visits. Similarly, the likelihood to recommend received a mean score of 3.29, reflecting a comparable level of willingness among customers to endorse the dining establishments to others.

Table 4.6: Customer Likelihood to Return and Recommend

|                      | N   | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|----------------------|-----|---------|---------|------|----------------|
| Likelihood Return    | 380 | 1       | 5       | 3.50 | 1.408          |
| Likelihood Recommend | 380 | 1       | 5       | 3.29 | 1.416          |
| Valid N (listwise)   | 380 |         |         |      |                |

#### 4.5 Service Excellence Initiatives Implemented at Casual Dining Restaurants

The study revealed several key service excellence initiatives implemented by casual dining restaurants in Nairobi that aim to enhance customer experience. Among these, waiting time management was the most experienced initiative, with 43.5% of respondents indicating that restaurants actively manage and reduce customer wait times. This focus reflects the importance placed on efficient service delivery and ensuring customers do not experience unnecessary delays during their dining visits. Digital integration is another prominent initiative, reported by 33% of respondents. This includes technologies such as online reservation systems, digital menus, mobile ordering, and payment options. Such tools help streamline operations, provide convenience, and improve the overall dining experience by reducing manual errors and speeding up transactions.

Personalized service was noted by 23.5% of respondents, indicating efforts by restaurants to tailor services to individual customer preferences. This initiative includes recognizing returning customers, customizing orders, and attentive staff interactions designed to create a more engaging

and unique dining experience. Personalized service is valued by customers as it makes them feel acknowledged and appreciated. Employee training and development was also highlighted as an important initiative, although experienced by a smaller percentage of respondents. Training focuses on improving staff professionalism, service skills, and product knowledge. Well-trained employees are better equipped to handle customer requests and deliver consistent, high-quality service.

#### **4.6 Correlation Analysis**

Correlation analysis is a statistical method used to measure the strength and direction of relationships between variables. It helps determine how one variable changes in relation to another, with coefficients ranging from -1 to +1. Positive values indicate variables increase together, while negative values show an inverse relationship. This analysis is important for identifying associations among factors, offering insights into how different variables relate without proving causation.

In this research, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to assess the relationships between service excellence initiatives and customer experience and satisfaction. The strength of these correlations indicates how closely improvements in service initiatives align with better customer outcomes. Strong positive correlations suggest that enhancing service initiatives is linked to higher satisfaction and improved customer experience. Understanding these relationships assists restaurant managers in prioritizing service improvements that matter most to customers. The subsequent sections detail the specific correlation findings observed in the study.

##### **4.6.1 Correlation Analysis Between Individual Service Excellence Initiatives and Customer Experience**

The correlation analysis reveals significant relationships between customer experience and various factors. Digital Integration shows a strong positive correlation with customer experience ( $r = 0.673$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ), indicating that digital services enhance customer satisfaction. Personalized Service also has a strong correlation ( $r = 0.767$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ), emphasizing its importance in improving customer experiences. Employee Training & Development is positively correlated with customer experience ( $r = 0.561$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ), suggesting that well-trained employees contribute to better customer interactions. All correlations are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), highlighting the importance of these factors in enhancing customer experience (Table 4.7).

Table 4.7: Correlation Analysis Between Individual Service Excellence Initiatives and Customer Experience

| Variable                        | Customer Experience | R Value | P Value |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------|---------|
| Digital Integration             | 0.673               | 0.673   | 0.022   |
| Personalized Service            | 0.767               | 0.767   | 0.015   |
| Employee Training & Development | 0.561               | 0.561   | 0.030   |
| Customer Experience             | 1                   | -       | -       |
| N Value                         | 380                 | 380     | 380     |

#### 4.6.2 Correlation Analysis Between Service Excellence Initiatives and Customer Satisfaction

A strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.851$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) between service excellence initiatives and customer satisfaction was observed. Key factors such as digital integration, employee training, personalized service, and waiting time management significantly enhance customer experiences

Table 4.8: Correlation Analysis Between Individual Service Excellence Initiative and Customer Experience

|                                | Service Excellence Initiatives | Customer Satisfaction |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Service Excellence Initiatives | Pearson Correlation            | 1                     |
|                                | Sig. (2-tailed)                | .010                  |
|                                | N                              | 380                   |
| Customer Satisfaction          | Pearson Correlation            | .851                  |
|                                | Sig. (2-tailed)                | .010                  |
|                                | N                              | 380                   |

### 4.6.3 Correlation Analysis Between Combined Service Excellence Initiatives and Customer Experience

Combined Service excellence initiatives had the strongest positive correlation ( $r = 0.874$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ), demonstrating their overarching influence on customer satisfaction.

Table 4.9: Correlation Analysis Between Service Excellence Initiatives and Customer Experience

|                                |                     | Customer Experience | Service Excellence Initiatives |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| Customer Experience            | Pearson Correlation | 1                   | .874                           |
|                                | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                     | .008**                         |
|                                | N                   | 380                 | 380                            |
| Service Excellence Initiatives | Pearson Correlation | .874                | 1                              |
|                                | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .008**              |                                |
|                                | N                   | 380                 | 380                            |

### 4.7 Summary of Findings

The study reveals a statistically significant relationship between service excellence initiatives and customer experience in Nairobi's casual dining industry, emphasizing the importance of intentional service initiatives in moulding diners' perceptions and loyalty. Demographic data show a balanced gender distribution, with the 46-55 age group appearing as the leading cohort, indicating that middle-aged professionals are an important market sector. The frequency of visits (often weekly or monthly) stresses the need for constant service excellence in encouraging repeat customers. An assessment of customer satisfaction across five crucial dimensions—food quality, speed of service, cleanliness, staff politeness, and ambiance—provided nuanced findings. While meal quality and cleanliness received moderate satisfaction, problems in speed of service and staff politeness were identified as essential.

Pain points indicate operational and training shortcomings. Ambiance generated a wide range of impressions, showing that atmospheric refinement might be a competitive differentiator. Personalized service and digital integration were identified as the most impactful service excellence initiatives, indicating changing customer expectations for specialized encounters and seamless technology involvement. Staff professionalism and waiting time management were also regarded as important elements, with respondents emphasizing the role of well-trained individuals and operational efficiency in building pleasant experiences.

Customer loyalty measurements confirmed these findings, with a significant majority indicating both intent to return and willingness to promote the restaurant, a testament to the clear link between service excellence and long-term customer loyalty. Finally, the study confirms that service excellence is not only an add-on but also a basic component of the casual dining customer experience. Strategic investments in personalization, digital technologies, and staff training, along with targeted improvements in service speed and ambiance, have the potential to boost satisfaction and strengthen a competitive edge in Nairobi's changing dining marketplace.

The best restaurants strike a balance, using digital technologies to augment and not replace the human interactions that build long-term loyalty. Most deeply, the study challenges operators to imagine service excellence as a living ecosystem in which technology frees staff to provide genuinely caring service, training goes beyond skill-acquisition to foster emotional intelligence, and every element - from the first online booking to the final goodbye - is calibrated to function in concert to create experiences that feel both efficient and genuinely human. In the competitive Nairobi food scene, this integrated experience does more than please customers; it converts them into loyal enthusiasts who return not only for the cuisine but for the sense of recognition and appreciation.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter summarizes the study's primary results, exploring how service excellence initiatives influence customer experience in Nairobi's casual dining restaurants. It explores the implications of the findings, compares them to current literature, and addresses the research objectives. Based on the findings, practical recommendations are made to restaurant management. Finally, the chapter suggests topics for further research in service excellence and customer experience.

### **5.2 Discussion**

#### **5.2.1 Effect of Digital Integration on Customer Experience**

The study's findings highlight the increasing importance of digital integration in defining customer experiences in Nairobi's casual dining industry. Digital technologies had a significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.673$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) with customer satisfaction, indicating their potential to improve service excellence, especially in addressing pain areas like wait times, which respondents prioritized (mean importance = 4.13). Online booking systems, mobile ordering, electronic payment systems, and self-service kiosks are tools that help streamline operations, thereby reducing waiting times and improving customer satisfaction levels. Results indicated that customers appreciate the convenience, speed, and efficiency provided by the use of such technologies. Nonetheless, system failures, complicated interfaces, and the absence of human interactions may harm customer experiences. Available literature resonates with these views, calling for greater digital integration in the restaurant industry.

Nairobi's casual dining restaurants are at a crossroads, torn between the efficiency of digital solutions and the warmth of personal interaction. According to research, digital solutions such as self-service kiosks and AI-driven reservations can improve operations and increase customer satisfaction by making service faster and more predictable (Bilgihan et al., 2018; Nilsson et al., 2021). But there is a catch. While technology shines at transaction processing, it fails to reproduce the human touch that defines Kenyan hospitality. Consider Java House's hybrid model as an example. They've implemented tablet ordering but maintain people available for consultation and difficulties. This method recognizes an important truth: in Nairobi, eating is about more than simply the food - it's about experience.

The familiarity of a waiter who recalls your regular order, and the cheerful ‘karibu’ that makes customers feel valued (Aureliano-Silva et al., 2021). The difficulty is to strike the correct balance between using technology to improve productivity and retaining the human qualities that promote loyalty. The most successful Nairobi eateries will see digital tools as additions rather than alternatives for humans. A QR code menu may speed up ordering, but how about a well-trained server who can recommend the best wine pairing? This is what converts first-time visitors into regulars. The future of service excellence in Nairobi's casual dining scene is not about choosing between technology and tradition; it is about combining the two in a way that is distinctively Kenyan.

### **5.2.2 Effect of Employee Training and Development on Customer Experience**

The study found a moderate positive connection ( $r = 0.561$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between employee training and customer experience in Nairobi's casual dining industry, emphasizing its importance in moulding service excellence perceptions. Staff professionalism (mean importance = 3.95) and civility (mean satisfaction = 3.92) were identified as high-priority traits, which are closely connected to successful training programs that provide staff with communication, problem-solving, and product knowledge skills. These abilities allow employees to manage interactions effortlessly, handle issues proactively, and maintain consistent service standards—key drivers of customer satisfaction and loyalty in a competitive market. Adequate training enables employees to obtain the skills necessary for managing customer interactions, solving problems, and coping with service delays.

Variability in speed of service (mean satisfaction = 3.89) shows unequal training implementation or ad hoc procedures, resulting in service delivery discrepancies. This is a gap that must be addressed. Training is generally episodic (e.g., during onboarding) rather than continuous, which hinders skill retention and adaptation to changing client expectations. Evidence from existing literature confirms that training in the service industry is necessary. Waqanimaravu and Arasanmi (2020) argue that worker training enhances the quality of services by enhancing workers' competence and motivation.

Entering any of the casual dining restaurants in Nairobi—from the bustling Java House to the serene About Thyme—has one common characteristic: staff who display intentionality in movement, welcome customers with a smile, and handle problems with finesse. No coincidence:

this is the direct outcome of structured training programs aimed at optimizing service delivery. Research indicates that professionally designed training programs build positive staff attitudes, enhance the level of motivation, and lower turnover rates in Nairobi's dynamic restaurant sector. All these factors combined improve the standard of service, turning typical meals into special encounters. The impact of training, however, is not acquired overnight but by planning and executing it.

Restaurants that measure training efficiency using customer feedback and operational indicators have better levels of loyalty, proving that investing in employee development directly drives business resilience. Finally, the key to Nairobi's dining scene is that employee training is not a cost of doing business, but rather the secret ingredient behind every five-star rating. Patrons don't simply return; they evangelize when waiters know menu highlights, managers de-escalate conflicts with empathy, and bartenders remember regulars' beverages. In a city where casual dining rises and falls on word-of-mouth, it is the strongest competitive advantage.

### **5.2.3 Effect of Personalized Service on Customer Experience**

The study found a high positive association between personalized service and customer experience in casual dining establishments, emphasizing the importance of one-on-one engagement. Customers like it when restaurant personnel understand their tastes, offer unique menu recommendations, and create personalized dining experiences. Personalized service at this level develops emotional ties with customers, fostering an appreciation factor that increases the likelihood of repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth communication. Othman et al. (2024) found that personalized dining experiences had a significant effect on customer loyalty in full-service restaurants. On a similar point, Schuckert et al. (2015) stated that user-generated information, such as social media reviews, typically emphasizes the value of personalized service in influencing customer perceptions.

Nairobi's casual dining industry depends on connections - a waiter remembering a regular's order or a manager welcoming with a warm smile may elevate a meal into an experience. Research demonstrates that personalized service, when implemented carefully, improves client retention more than acquisition. Nairobi diners like subtle personalization, such as a server remembering a favourite table or recommending a meal based on previous orders. For example, restaurants such as Java House employ CRM systems to discreetly track preferences, increasing repeat visits

without overstepping boundaries. However, the boundary becomes blurred when personalization becomes intrusive.

Customers in Nairobi may distrust restaurants that abuse personal data for recommendations due to privacy concerns. Staff training is paramount. Staff have to maintain a balance between being discreet and alert while offering personalized service. The Nairobi market is a prime example of how personalized services, when mapped onto cultural expectations and distinguished by openness, go beyond being simply strategic and capture the essence of Kenyan hospitality. Casual dining restaurants that successfully balance this harmony, utilizing technology as an enabler instead of a constraint, are likely to dominate an age where consumers increasingly value authenticity and integrity.

#### **5.2.4 Effect of Service Excellence Initiatives on Customer Experience**

The study's findings emphasize the transformational power of personalized service in altering customer experiences in Nairobi's casual dining industry. Personalization has a substantial positive link ( $r^* = 0.767$ ,  $p^* < 0.05$ ) with customer satisfaction, indicating its importance in building emotional ties and brand loyalty. However, the modest relevance rating (mean = 3.07) indicates that personalization remains an underutilized distinction, sometimes overshadowed by operational concerns such as waiting time management and staff professionalism. When these are used successfully, customers express high satisfaction, a strong desire to return, and a stronger willingness to recommend the restaurant to others. To sustain service excellence, casual dining restaurants must implement formal feedback systems to identify areas for improvement. Nasr et al. (2014) argue that positive customer feedback enhances service company performance and brand reputation.

In Nairobi's thriving casual dining scene, service excellence is more than simply great food; it is a business need that affects customer attitudes and determines company success since internet evaluations and word-of-mouth opinions have a huge impact on dining choices. Proactive handling of customer feedback enables restaurants to identify and correct service deficiencies, converting casual diners into regular customers. Personalized service, as seen by custom orders, attentive interactions, and acknowledgment of returning customers, fosters a sense of exclusivity and belonging, in line with global trends that show emotional connection boosts customer retention.

However, Nairobi's casual dining industry demonstrates a paradox: although customers respond positively to personalization, poor execution shows institutional weaknesses.

For example, employees frequently lack organized training to genuinely offer tailored experiences, resulting in wasted chances to leverage consumer data for meaningful interactions. When effectively applied, these service excellence metrics generate a virtuous cycle: enhanced customer experience develops loyalty, positive word-of-mouth attracts new customers, and continuing excellence establishes a competitive edge in Nairobi's busy dining scene. The most successful businesses recognize that service excellence is a continuous journey in which every interaction, whether with employees or through digital channels, becomes a chance to deepen customer connections and achieve long-term success.

#### **5.2.5 Effect of Service Excellence Initiatives on Customer Satisfaction**

The study found a strong correlation ( $r = 0.874$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ), indicating that service excellence initiatives significantly affect customer satisfaction. Digital integration, personnel training, individualized service, and operational efficiency are some of the components that make up service excellence. When these factors are properly executed, consumers report better levels of satisfaction, which leads to repeat business, brand loyalty, and favourable word-of-mouth referrals. The findings imply that casual dining establishments that prioritize service excellence programs are better positioned to provide exceptional client experiences. Businesses may create memorable dining experiences by constantly reviewing and refining service tactics, fostering customer loyalty, and building a strong brand reputation.

Service excellence initiatives in Nairobi's casual dining restaurants result in a powerful trifecta of customer satisfaction: digital integration streamlines operations with online bookings and cashless payments, reducing frustrating waiting times, while trained staff provide warm, personalized service that makes diners feel genuinely valued. This mix of technical efficiency and human connection works especially well in Nairobi's hospitality culture. However, true service excellence requires more than isolated improvement; it requires a holistic approach where digital tools complement rather than replace the human elements of hospitality.

Where staff training focuses equally on technical skills and emotional intelligence, and where personalized service feels natural rather than intrusive. When these factors come together, as they

do in Nairobi's casual dining restaurants, they create dining experiences that meet immediate needs while also instilling the type of emotional attachment that keeps customers coming. The issue for operators is not to choose between technology and human touch, but to artistically combine the two to fulfil Nairobi diners' changing expectations for convenience, care, and connection.

### **5.2.6 Future Work**

Prospective future study areas to expand understanding of the customer experience in casual dining restaurants, based on current market gaps and upcoming trends:

- i). Assessing how customer expectations vary across different cultural and economic settings, providing insights for global restaurant chains.
- ii). Mixed service models: How balancing technology, like QR code menus, with human interactions (e.g., culturally competent personnel) influences emotional connection and loyalty.
- iii). Cultural tolerance for waiting: How Nairobi restaurant guests' expectations differ from Western standards, and if ambient features (e.g., live music, community tables) reduce impatience.

### **5.4 Conclusion**

The findings demonstrate that service excellence is more than just an operational approach in Nairobi's casual dining sector. When digital integration is deliberately balanced with human warmth, staff training based on cultural knowledge, personalized yet unobtrusive service, and clever wait time management, dining experiences that are genuinely meaningful for customers are created. These programs do more than simply satisfy; they foster long-term loyalty, turning casual visits into repeat patronage. In Nairobi's highly competitive marketplace, where guests increasingly expect both efficiency and genuine connection, casual dining restaurants must regard service excellence as a dynamic, ever-changing commitment rather than a static checklist. The future belongs to casual dining restaurants that understand that consistency and care are the most important differentiators in the art of hospitality.

## 5.5 Recommendations for Nairobi's Casual Dining Restaurants

Based on the research findings, here are practical recommendations to improve the customer experience through service excellence in casual dining restaurants.

- i). Increase adoption of user-friendly digital tools such as online reservations and mobile ordering to reduce waiting times and enhance customer convenience.
- ii). Implement regular and structured employee training programs to improve service consistency and staff professionalism.
- iii). Establish systematic customer feedback mechanisms to effectively identify service gaps and promote continuous improvement.



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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Similarity Report

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Maureen Uchendu | RESEARCH PROPOSAL - MAUREEN UCHENDU - 26TH MARCH SIMILARITY INDEX - Update 6 P...

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## Appendix B: Ethical Approval



4<sup>th</sup> February 2025

Mrs Uchendu Maureen,

maureen.uchendu@strathmore.edu

Dear Mrs Uchendu,

**RE: The Influence of Service Excellence Initiatives on Customer Experience in Casual Dining Restaurants – A Case Study of Nairobi County**

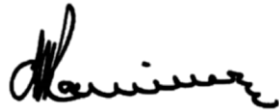
This is to inform you that SU-ISERC has reviewed and **approved** your above **SU-masters** proposal. Your application reference number is **SU-ISERC2595/25**. The approval period is from **4<sup>th</sup> February 2025 to 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2026**.

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements:

- i. Only approved documents including (informed consents, study instruments, MTA) will be used.
- ii. All changes including (amendments, deviations, and violations) are submitted for review and approval by SU-ISERC.
- iii. Death and life-threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to SU-ISERC within 72 hours of notification.
- iv. Any changes anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affected safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to SU- ISERC within 72 hours.
- v. Clearance for the export of biological specimens must be obtained from relevant institutions.
- vi. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to the expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal.
- vii. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days of completion of the study to SUI SERC.

Before commencing your study, you will be expected to obtain a research license from National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) <https://researchportal.nacosti.go.ke/> and obtain other clearances needed.

Yours sincerely,



Mr Ambrose Rachier, Chairperson; SU-ISERC

Ole Sangale Rd, Madaraka Estate. PO Box 59857-00200, Nairobi, Kenya. Tel +254 (0)703 034000

Email [admissions@strathmore.edu](mailto:admissions@strathmore.edu) [www.strathmore.edu](http://www.strathmore.edu)



## **Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet And Consent Form**

### **Study Title:**

**The Influence of Service Excellence Initiatives In Casual Dining Restaurants – A Case Study Of Nairobi County**

### **SECTION 1: Information Sheet**

Investigator: Maureen Ogechukwu Uchendu, Student, School of Tourism & Hospitality, Strathmore University

Supervisor: Dr. David Chiawo, Dean, School of Tourism & Hospitality, Strathmore University

Institutional Affiliation: Strathmore University, Nairobi, Kenya.

### **SECTION 2:**

#### **2.1: Purpose of the Research**

This project is a research study by Maureen Ogechukwu Uchendu, a Strathmore University student in the School of Tourism & Hospitality. It aims to explore how service excellence initiatives influence customer experiences in casual dining restaurants in Nairobi County. The data collected will be used solely for academic purposes and will contribute to understanding customer satisfaction and loyalty in the restaurant industry.

#### **2.2: Description of Participants**

The study will include customers from casual dining restaurants in Nairobi County. Participants will be chosen based on their dining experience at these restaurants. The estimated total number of participants is 384.

#### **2.3: Expected Duration of Participation**

Your involvement will require filling out a simple questionnaire, which will take approximately 15-20 minutes. This is a one-time participation, with no follow-up necessary unless you want to submit more feedback.

#### **2.4: Procedures to be Followed**

As a participant, you will be asked a series of questions about your experiences and opinions on service excellence initiatives in casual dining restaurants. These questions will be about food quality, service delivery, restaurant ambiance, and customer service.

#### **2.5: Experimental Procedures**

This study does not include any experimental techniques. Your responses will be used exclusively for research purposes.

#### **2.6 Expected risks or discomforts**

Participating in this study is unlikely to cause any substantial risks or discomfort. However, if any question makes you uncomfortable, you are free to skip it. All information submitted by you will be kept strictly confidential and will not be used without your express permission.

#### **2.7: Benefits of Participation**

Participating in this research will help to improve customer service in Nairobi's casual dining restaurants. The information acquired will be utilized to improve the dining experience for customers like you and to guide service excellence initiatives in the hospitality industry.

#### **2.8: Alternative Procedures**

This study does not include any alternative methods because participation is confined to answering questions on a questionnaire. You can choose not to participate without penalty.

#### **2.9: Confidentiality**

Every response will be kept strictly confidential. Your information will not be shared or published. The data will be anonymous, and any information that could identify you will be kept confidential. All survey responses will be held securely, with access restricted to the research team only.

#### **3.0: Compensation**

There is no monetary reward or compensation for your participation in this study.

#### **3.1: Contact for Questions or Concerns**

For any questions regarding this study, please contact the principal investigator: Maureen Ogechukwu Uchendu at Strathmore University, School of Tourism & Hospitality or send an email to [maureen.uchendu@strathmore.edu](mailto:maureen.uchendu@strathmore.edu) or call 0716901527. You can also contact my supervisor for further information or inquiries: Dr. David Chiawo, Strathmore University, School of Tourism & Hospitality or email [dchiawo@strathmore.edu](mailto:dchiawo@strathmore.edu) or call 0726254971.

For ethical concerns related to this study, please contact The Secretary - Strathmore University Institutional Ethics Review Board: P.O. Box 59857 - 00200 Nairobi, email [ethicreview@strathmore.edu](mailto:ethicreview@strathmore.edu)

### 3.2: Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate without any penalty. You may also choose to withdraw from the study at any time with no consequences.

#### Consent Form

By signing below, you agree to voluntarily participate in the research study titled ‘The Influence of Service Excellence Initiatives on Customer Experience in Casual Dining Restaurants – A Case Study of Nairobi County.’

You agree that you have read and understand the information provided in the Participant Information Sheet, and that you have had the opportunity to ask any questions about your participation. You are aware that you may withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

#### Consent:

I consent to participate in the research study outlined above.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can skip any questions or withdraw at any time without consequence.

I understand that my personal information will be kept confidential.

Participant's Name:

---

Participant's Signature:

---

Date:

---

Researcher's Name:

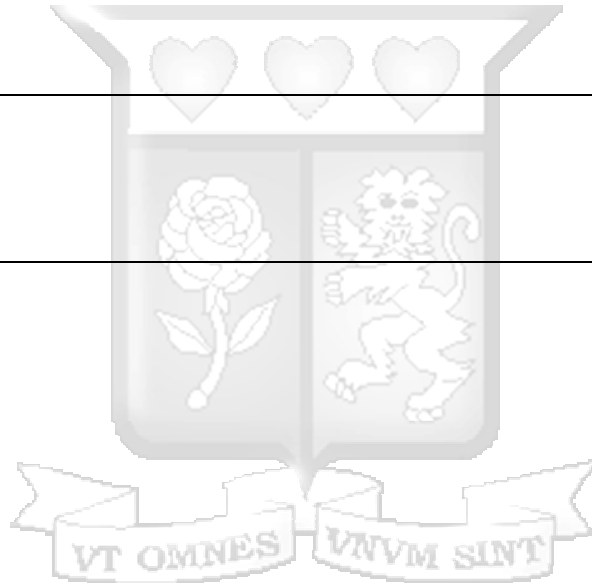
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Researcher's Signature:

---

Date:

---



## Appendix D: Gate Keeper's Approval Letter

Maureen Ogechukwu Uchendu

School of Tourism & Hospitality, Strathmore University

Ole Sangale Rd, Madaraka Estate

P.O. Box 59857-00200, Nairobi, Kenya

0716901527

Maureen.uchendu@strathmore.edu

(Date)

(Restaurant Manager's Name)

(Casual Dining Restaurant Name)

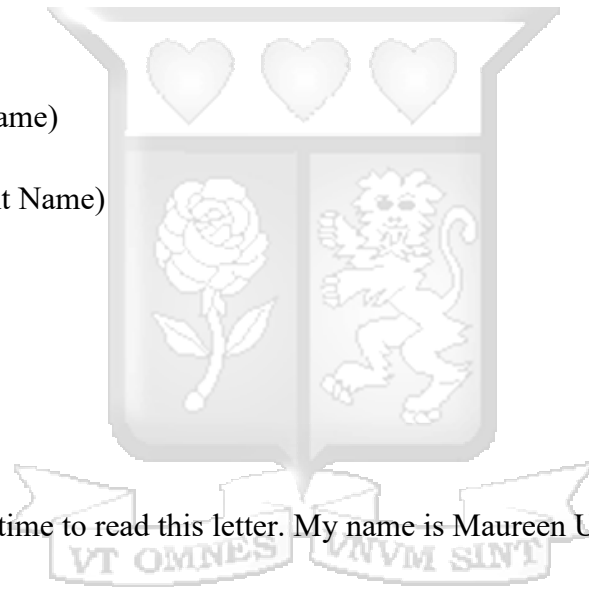
(Restaurant Address)

(City, Postal Code)

Dear (Manager's Name),

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. My name is Maureen Uchendu, and I am a Master's student at Strathmore University. I am currently undertaking a research study titled "The Influence of Service Excellence Initiatives on Customer Experience in Casual Dining Restaurants: A Case Study of Nairobi County." As part of this research, I am requesting your permission to distribute a brief customer questionnaire to your patrons, to collect data for the study.

The study will look into how service excellence initiatives adopted in casual dining settings affect customers' dining experiences, satisfaction levels, and loyalty. By assessing customer



input, the research intends to provide significant insights that might contribute to improving service quality and customer experience in casual dining restaurants in Nairobi. County.

How is your restaurant involved?

- Customers will be asked to fill out a short questionnaire while dining. The survey is completely voluntary and anonymous.
- Questionnaire Content: The questionnaire is intended to collect information about service quality, customer satisfaction, and what customers think of service excellence initiatives.
- Duration: The questionnaire takes approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.
- Confidentiality: All responses will be treated with strict confidence, and no personally identifying information will be gathered.

What benefits does it provide for your restaurant?

- Insightful Data: Analyze your restaurant's service quality and its impact on your customers' experience.
- Improve service excellence and retention strategy with actionable information from customer satisfaction comments.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in allowing me to deliver questionnaires to your valued customers. If you agree, I can work with you to make the process as smooth as possible, including supplying copies of the questionnaire and instructions for your staff to distribute them.

If you have any queries or need additional information, please call 0716901527 or email [Maureen.uchendu@strathmore.edu](mailto:Maureen.uchendu@strathmore.edu). I hope for your positive response and look forward to

working with you on this interesting project.

Thank you for considering my request. I truly appreciate your time and assistance in this.

Kind regards,

Maureen O. Uchendu

Researcher, School of Tourism & Hospitality

Strathmore University



## Appendix E: Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in our survey on the influence of service excellence initiatives on customer experience in casual dining restaurants in Nairobi. Your feedback is invaluable in understanding and enhancing casual dining experiences in Nairobi. Kindly answer the following questions honestly by ticking the appropriate boxes; your responses will remain confidential.

Thank you for your time.

### SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

#### 1. Gender

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

#### 2. Age Group

- 18 - 25
- 26 – 35
- 36 - 45
- 46 - 55
- 56 and above



#### 3. How frequently do you visit casual dining restaurants?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Rarely

## SECTION B: CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND SATISFACTION

### 4. How would you rate the overall quality of service in this restaurant?

*(Likert Scale: 1 = Very Poor, 5 = Excellent)*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

### 5. Rate your satisfaction with the following aspects of your dining experience today:

*(Likert Scale: 1 = Very Dissatisfied, 5 = Very Satisfied)*

Food quality:  1  2  3  4  5

Speed of service:  1  2  3  4  5

Cleanliness of the restaurant:  1  2  3  4  5

Staff politeness:  1  2  3  4  5

Atmosphere/ambiance:  1  2  3  4  5

### 6. How would you rate your overall level of satisfaction with the service received?

*(Likert Scale: 1 = Very Dissatisfied, 5 = Very Satisfied)*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

**7. Was your waiting time acceptable?**

Yes

No

(If No, please specify the approximate waiting time in minutes):

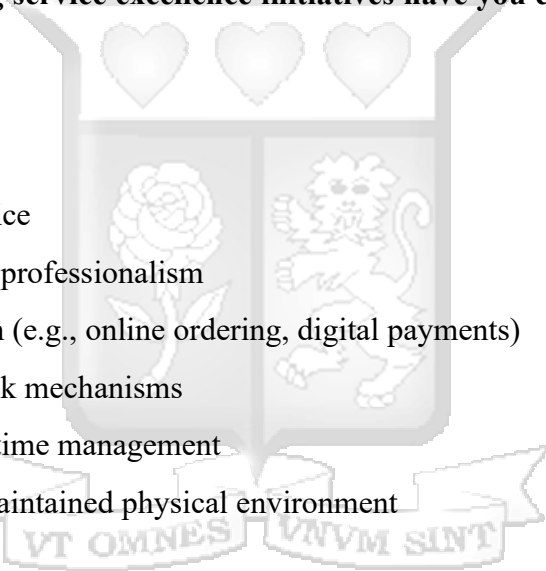
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**SECTION C: SERVICE EXCELLENCE INITIATIVES**

**8. Which of the following service excellence initiatives have you experienced during your visit?**

*(Select all that apply)*

- 
- Personalized service
  - Staff training and professionalism
  - Digital integration (e.g., online ordering, digital payments)
  - Customer feedback mechanisms
  - Efficient waiting time management
  - Clean and well-maintained physical environment

**9. How important are the following aspects to your dining experience?**

*(Likert Scale: 1 = Not Important, 5 = Very Important)*

- Personalized service:  1  2  3  4  5
- Digital integration (online services):  1  2  3  4  5
- Staff professionalism:  1  2  3  4  5
- Waiting time management:  1  2  3  4  5

**10. Rate how well this restaurant performs in each of these service areas:**

*(Likert Scale: 1 = Very Poor, 5 = Excellent)*

- Personalized service:  1  2  3  4  5
  - Staff professionalism:  1  2  3  4  5
  - Digital integration (online services):  1  2  3  4  5
  - Waiting time management:  1  2  3  4  5
  - Physical environment:  1  2  3  4  5
- 

#### **SECTION D: CUSTOMER LOYALTY AND RECOMMENDATION**

**11. How likely are you to return to this restaurant in the future?**

*(Likert Scale: 1 = Not Likely, 5 = Very Likely)*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

**12. How likely are you to recommend this restaurant to others?**

*(Likert Scale: 1 = Not Likely, 5 = Very Likely)*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

**13. How many times have you dined at this restaurant in the past 6 months?**

- 0

- 1–3
  - 4–6
  - 7 or more
- 

**SECTION E: OPEN-ENDED QUESTION**

**14. What specific aspects of service excellence would you like to see improved in this restaurant?**

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