

Quality of Service and Customer Loyalty as Pillars for Sustainable Development in the Restaurant Sector

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Abstract: The study was conducted at Restaurante Piscina-Ferrovário (a restaurant located in Nampula, Mozambique) in 2024. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques, including questionnaires administered to customers and interviews conducted with employees. The findings reveal that service quality dimensions such as cordiality, responsiveness, and service efficiency significantly influence customer satisfaction and intention to return. Additionally, challenges related to waiting time and lacks of service standardization were identified, which may affect service consistency. The study concludes that continuous improvement in service quality, combined with staff training and process organization, is a strategic factor for strengthening customer loyalty and ensuring the economic and social sustainability of organizations in the restaurant sector.

Keywords: Service Quality; Customer Satisfaction; Customer Loyalty; Restaurant Sector; Sustainability.

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I. INTRODUCTION

➤ Contextualization

Service quality has become a central element in contemporary literature as a key driver of customer satisfaction in the restaurant sector, acting as the main source of differentiation and competitive advantage. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), in saturated markets, the tangible product (food) becomes a commodity, shifting the responsibility of value creation and customer retention to the intangible component service.

In the specific context of the city of Nampula, Mozambique, Restaurante Piscina-Ferrovário positions itself as a strategic establishment by offering a hybrid value proposition that combines gastronomy and leisure, attracting a diverse and demanding clientele.

However, the sustainability of this business model faces structural challenges, particularly the lack of operational standardization and limited staff training. As argued by Ferreira and Gomes (2021), sustainability in the

restaurant sector goes beyond financial viability and includes the organization's ability to maintain standards of excellence that transform occasional customers into brand advocates. According to the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988), failures in critical dimensions such as responsiveness may compromise the company's image, regardless of the quality of its physical infrastructure.

In this context, this study focuses on understanding how service practices directly influence customer loyalty, using Restaurante Piscina-Ferrovário as a case study to identify the pillars of sustainable success in the local market.

➤ Problem Statement

In the context of the restaurant sector in Nampula, business sustainability depends not only on financial management but also on the ability to maintain a steady flow of customers through service excellence. Restaurante Piscina-Ferrovário faces the challenge of transforming its seasonal popularity into sustainable customer loyalty. The central problem lies in the fragility of service processes,

particularly delays in service delivery, which, according to Grönroos (2019), may lead to an erosion of the company's image and hinder long-term sustainability.

- *Research Question:*

To what extent can improvements in service quality serve as a foundation for customer loyalty and sustainable development at Restaurante Piscina-Ferrovário?

- *Justification*

The relevance of this study lies in the need for professionalization of the service sector in Nampula, where the restaurant industry represents a key pillar of local economic development. From an academic perspective, the study addresses a gap regarding the application of quality management models, such as SERVQUAL, in establishments that combine gastronomy and leisure in Mozambique. By drawing on authors such as Ferreira and Gomes (2021), the research contributes to the body of knowledge on how the intangibility of services shapes value perception in regional markets.

From a practical and social standpoint, the study is justified by the direct impact of service excellence on organizational sustainability. As argued by Porter and Kramer (2019), investment in employee training generates “shared value,” raising the standard of hospitality within the city. For the management of Restaurante Piscina-Ferrovário, this study provides a strategic roadmap for transitioning from an intuitive model to a process-based management approach, ensuring customer loyalty and long-term business viability.

- *Objectives*

- *General Objective*

To analyse the correlation between service quality and customer loyalty as determining factors for the sustainable development of Restaurante Piscina-Ferrovário.

- *Specific Objectives*

- ✓ To diagnose the current state of service quality using the SERVQUAL model from the perspective of customers in Nampula.
- ✓ To identify factors that promote or inhibit customer loyalty by comparing customer expectations with operational reality.
- ✓ To assess employees' perceptions regarding sustainability challenges, focusing on their level of training and professional behavior required to maintain service quality.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- *Service Quality in Customer Service*

Service quality in the restaurant sector is a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses both operational efficiency and human interaction. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), modern consumers seek complete experiences involving personalization and speed, making

service a strategic element for achieving competitive advantage. This perspective is reinforced by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985), who highlight the importance of evaluating both tangible dimensions (facilities) and intangible dimensions (reliability and empathy) in measuring perceived quality.

In the specific context of Nampula, the application of these theories requires consideration of local particularities. Ferreira and Gomes (2021) emphasize that customer experience is strongly influenced by attention to detail and staff cordiality. Thus, at Restaurante Piscina-Ferrovário, quality should not be viewed merely as task execution but as the ability to build trust and anticipate customer needs in a growing urban market.

- *Customer Loyalty and Experience*

Customer loyalty results from a positive experience that strengthens commitment and intention to return. Babin and Harris (2017) argue that satisfaction arises from both objective dimensions, such as order accuracy, and subjective dimensions, such as sensory experiences within the establishment. When expectations are exceeded, what Malhotra (2019) describes as a comprehensive understanding of customer perceptions is achieved, which is essential for increasing organizational competitiveness.

From this perspective, customer experience extends beyond the moment of consumption to the entire journey within the restaurant. Dinis and Matavele (2022) highlight that establishments that promote a strong service culture can transform occasional customers into brand advocates. For Restaurante Piscina-Ferrovário, managing this experience in a humanized manner is crucial to prevent customer migration to competitors offering faster and more efficient services.

- *Customer Satisfaction*

Customer satisfaction is defined as the result of the comparison between prior expectations and the actual perception of the service received. Oliveira and Santos (2021) state that the way customers are received and treated directly influences their decision to return, with poor service posing a risk to profitability. In line with this, Gil (2019) emphasizes that measuring satisfaction through quantifiable data ensures objectivity and scientific rigor in business management.

Recent literature indicates that satisfaction in the restaurant sector is particularly sensitive to emotional aspects. Creswell and Creswell (2018) highlight that a mixed-methods approach is most suitable for capturing these nuances, as it allows both measurement of satisfaction levels and understanding of the meanings attributed to service experiences. In the case of the restaurant under study, maintaining high satisfaction levels requires a constant balance between food quality and service agility.

- *Quality Management in Restaurant Services*

Quality management in contemporary restaurant services requires a systemic approach that integrates

operational efficiency with excellence in interaction. According to Grönroos (2019), management should focus on “co-creation of value,” where service is not merely delivered but experienced through a relationship of trust between frontline staff and customers. Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2020) note that this management is challenged by the perishable nature of services, requiring the adoption of strict operational standards to prevent variability in service delivery from affecting customer perception, particularly during peak demand periods.

The effectiveness of this management depends on the organization’s ability to monitor performance and respond quickly to deviations. Slack, Brandon-Jones, and Johnston (2021) argue that total quality in restaurant services is only achievable when a culture of “zero defects” is supported by appropriate infrastructure. In the present case, quality management must evolve from an individual effort-based model to a system of standardized processes, ensuring that employee friendliness is complemented by operational efficiency, reducing waiting times and increasing competitiveness in the Nampula market.

➤ *Sustainability in the Restaurant Sector*

Sustainability in modern restaurant services extends beyond financial viability to include social responsibility and talent retention. According to Savitz and Weber (2018), business sustainability lies at the intersection where shareholder interests align with those of the community and employees. In the context of Restaurante Piscina-Ferroviário, this is reflected in the need to create a work environment that promotes continuous training, ensuring that human capital is valued as the main asset for maintaining long-term service quality.

Porter and Kramer (2019) argue that sustainability is linked to the creation of “shared value,” where the restaurant’s success generates social benefits through the professional development of local youth in Nampula. Similarly, Bansal and DesJardine (2021) emphasize that sustainability requires a long-term vision in which customer loyalty and employee motivation are prioritized over short-term profits achieved at the expense of quality. Therefore, the restaurant will only achieve sustainability if it can transform its current popularity into a solid organizational structure capable of withstanding market fluctuations through consistent service excellence.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted at Restaurante Piscina-Ferroviário, a well-known establishment located in the city of Nampula, Mozambique. The selection of this location is strategic, as the restaurant operates under a hybrid model combining gastronomy and leisure, requiring quality management that encompasses multiple service touchpoints.

This study is characterized as descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory, aiming to analyze service quality and its influence on customer satisfaction and loyalty at Restaurante Piscina-Ferroviário in Nampula. A mixed-methods approach

was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. The quantitative component was based on structured questionnaires administered to customers, allowing the measurement of indicators such as responsiveness, cordiality, and service efficiency. The qualitative component involved semi-structured interviews with employees, enabling a deeper understanding of perceptions and experiences related to service delivery.

Regarding procedures, field research was conducted, complemented by bibliographic and documentary research. Data collection methods included direct observation, questionnaires, and interviews, allowing for data triangulation.

The sample consisted of 22 customers and 3 employees, selected through a non-probabilistic convenience sampling method, ensuring diversity of profiles and experiences. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the STATA software, while qualitative data were treated through content analysis based on Bardin (2016). Ethical principles were respected, ensuring informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality of participants.

IV. RESULTS PRESENTATION

The qualitative analysis, based on employee interviews and processed using Bardin’s (2016) content analysis technique, allowed the identification of three central categories that explain the dynamics of service at Restaurante Piscina-Ferroviário:

➤ *Category 1: Level of Training and Technical Capacity*

The data reveal a critical gap in professional training. Interviewees’ narratives indicate that knowledge is acquired empirically:

“My professional posture is the result of experience gained over the years... I have never had in-depth professional training.”

This lack of formal training, discussed in light of Kotler and Keller (2016), explains the difficulty in standardizing service, resulting in performance that depends on individual goodwill rather than technical hospitality standards.

➤ *Category 2: Professional Attitude and Empathy*

Despite the lack of technical training, employees demonstrate a strong awareness of the importance of courtesy. The interpretation of responses indicates that the team values “humanized service,” which justifies the positive evaluation in the “assurance” dimension of the SERVQUAL model. According to Ferreira and Gomes (2021), this empirical posture sustains customers’ emotional satisfaction, compensating for logistical shortcomings through respectful and welcoming treatment, a highly valued factor in the sociocultural context of Nampula.

➤ *Category 3: Operational Challenges and Flow Management*

This category highlights the main barrier to service quality: the lack of synchronization between the dining area, bar, and kitchen. One interviewee stated:

“We try to be as fast as possible, but when the restaurant is full, the flow does not always keep up.”

This narrative confirms the results related to waiting time, indicating that customer dissatisfaction is not due to lack of effort, but rather weaknesses in quality management processes. The absence of efficient workflows prevents good intentions from translating into operational speed, putting sustainability and full customer loyalty at risk.

➤ *Quantitative Analysis*

The analysis of quantitative data collected at Restaurante Piscina-Ferroviário provides insight into the relationship between customer profiles and their perception of service quality. According to Malhotra (2019), characterizing the sample is a fundamental step in validating research findings, as it helps determine whether services align with the actual target audience.

The tables below present the sociodemographic variables of the 22 surveyed customers in Nampula. As emphasized by Gil (2019), distributions by gender and age group provide a stratified view that supports the identification of consumption patterns and differentiated expectations regarding service quality.

Table 1 Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	12	55%
Female	10	45%
Total	22	100%

Source: Author (2024)

Among the 22 respondents, diversity was observed in terms of gender, age, and frequency of visits. The majority of customers fall within the 18–34 age group, indicating familiarity with the service provided.

This configuration suggests that the restaurant is not targeted at a specific gender, demonstrating its ability to attract diverse customer profiles. From a managerial perspective, this is advantageous as it expands the potential market and reduces dependence on a single segment.

Table 2 Age Group

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–24	8	36%
25–34	7	32%
35–44	5	23%
45+	2	9%
Total	22	100%

Source: Author (2024)

Regarding age distribution, the data indicate that 68% of customers are between 18 and 34 years old. Specifically, 36% are aged 18–24, while 32% are between 25–34. In contrast, 23% are between 35–44, and only 9% are aged 45 or above.

These results suggest that the restaurant is particularly attractive to a younger audience, who tend to value aspects such as service speed, environment, and social interaction. However, the low participation of older customers indicates the need for strategies aimed at attracting and retaining this segment.

Table 3 Customer Visit Frequency

Visit Frequency	Frequency	Percentage (%)
First-time visit	6	27%
Occasional (1–2 times/month)	8	36%
Regular (weekly)	5	23%
Very frequente	3	14%
Total	22	100%

Source: Author (2024)

Table 3 shows a mix of occasional (36%) and regular customers (23%), along with 14% very frequent visitors, indicating an existing base of customer loyalty. At the same

time, the presence of first-time customers (27%) highlights the need for continuous retention strategies and service improvement.

Table 4 Initial Reception Evaluation

Evaluation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Good	11	50%
Good	7	32%
Fair	3	14%
Poor	1	4%
Total	22	100%

Source: Author (2024)

Table 4 shows that the customer’s first impression is highly positive, with 50% rating the reception as “Very Good” and 32% as “Good.” This indicates that initial hospitality is a key strength of the organization, playing a crucial role in shaping customer perceptions and setting the

tone for the overall service experience. A strong reception not only enhances immediate satisfaction but also contributes to building trust and increasing the likelihood of repeat visits.

Table 5 Waiting Time Perception

Waiting Time Evaluation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Satisfactory	5	23%
Satisfactory	8	36%
Less Satisfactory	6	27%
Unsatisfactory	3	14%
Total	22	100%

Source: Author (2024)

However, time efficiency emerges as the main point of friction. As shown in Table 5, although the majority of respondents report a positive perception, approximately 40% express dissatisfaction with waiting time. This result is particularly critical, as service speed is a key determinant of

customer satisfaction in the restaurant sector. Persistent delays may undermine the overall experience, offset positive impressions, and weaken customer loyalty over time if not properly addressed.

Table 6 Customer Satisfaction Level

Satisfaction Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Satisfied	10	45%
Satisfied	8	36%
Less Satisfied	3	14%
Unsatisfied	1	5%
Total	22	100%

Source: Author (2024)

The level of satisfaction (Table 6) remains high, with 82% of customers reporting that they are “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied.” This positive perception is reflected in the intention to return (Table 7), where 82% indicate that they would revisit the restaurant, confirming the effectiveness of

the current leisure and gastronomic strategies. These results suggest that, despite operational challenges, the overall customer experience is strong enough to sustain customer loyalty.

Table 7 Intention to Return

Intention to Return	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	18	82%
No	4	18%
Total	22	100%

Source: Author (2024)

Table 8 Identified Service Problems

Service Problems Experienced	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	10	45%
No	12	55%
Total	22	100%

Source: Author (2024)

The results presented in Tables 7 and 8 (Identification of Problems) reveal that 45% of customers have encountered

service irregularities, reinforcing the existence of standardization challenges identified in the introduction.

Table 9 Overall Service Quality Assessment

Overall Evaluation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Excellent	8	36%
Good	9	41%
Fair	4	18%
Poor	1	5%
Total	22	100%

Source: Author (2024)

The Overall Evaluation of Service (Table 9) presents a favorable assessment of the establishment’s performance, with the combined proportion of ‘Excellent’ (35%) and ‘Good’ (40%) ratings reaching 75%. This result suggests that the team’s strengths, particularly cordiality and operational efficiency, are sufficient to offset occasional shortcomings related to waiting time and process inefficiencies.

V. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The interpretation of the data collected at Restaurante Piscina-Ferroviário, when compared with the theoretical framework, reveals a scenario of “empirical hospitality” that sustains the organization but poses risks to its long-term sustainability.

The predominantly young demographic profile (68% under 35 years old) indicates a segment with high expectations regarding speed and efficiency, reinforcing pressure on the responsiveness dimension of the SERVQUAL model. While the presence of both regular and occasional customers suggests a certain level of established service quality, the main point of friction lies in operational efficiency, particularly waiting time.

Despite high levels of satisfaction and intention to return (above 80%), this may reflect a “halo effect,” where the leisure experience compensates for service inefficiencies. However, this type of satisfaction is fragile and may be disrupted by more efficient competitors.

Employee narratives confirm that the lack of structured training is a key limitation, reinforcing the idea that service delivery is intuitive rather than standardized. Operational bottlenecks during peak periods further explain customer dissatisfaction related to waiting time.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that service quality at Restaurante Piscina-Ferroviário is the central element of customer experience, although its effectiveness as a pillar of sustainable development is still limited by operational challenges.

The findings reveal a solid foundation of customer satisfaction, driven mainly by employee cordiality and initial reception. However, this “empirical hospitality” is fragile, as

it depends more on individual effort than on standardized processes.

The main limitation identified relates to responsiveness, particularly waiting time, which generated dissatisfaction among 40% of respondents.

Therefore, for the restaurant to strengthen its competitiveness in the Nampula market, it is essential to invest in continuous staff training and process professionalization. Only through the adoption of a total quality management approach will it be possible to transform current satisfaction into sustainable customer loyalty.

➤ *Recommendations*

- Standardize service procedures to ensure consistency
- Invest in continuous technical training
- Improve operational flow between service areas
- Develop strategies to attract and retain diverse customer segments

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is limited by the relatively small sample size and the use of convenience sampling, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the focus on a single restaurant limits broader sectoral conclusions.

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