

## MK7227 Postgraduate Dissertation Front Sheet

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**[Service Experience in Fine Dining Restaurant Context]**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Royal Docks School of Business and Law, University of East London for the degree of **[MSc International Business Management]**

**[August 2018]**

**[15,224]**

I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award

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**What attributes from Food Aesthetics, Service Quality Cues or the Roles, Consumption Rituals or The Norms and Boundaries of the Service Provider contributes to customer Service Experience in a Fine Dining restaurant context?**

## **Abstract**

This is a qualitative paper where the focus is to investigate consumer service experience in fine dining restaurant context. To identify the relevant attributes that contribute to consumer service experience, seven participants who have eaten at fine dining restaurants previously were interviewed. The semi-structured interview had pre-prepared questions, covering the following themes: Food Consumption and Fine Dining, Experience Marketing and Service Experience. Each theme covered questions, focused on the consumer perspective on fine dining restaurants, as well as what contributes to the service experience in fine dining restaurants.

From the research the following themes emerged as significant to the customer service experience: Conspicuous Consumption, Food Aesthetics, Service Quality Cues, Consumption Rituals and the Roles, Norms and Boundaries of the Service Provider. The main findings of the research implied that consumers enjoy the experience that fine dining restaurants have to offer. However, the food aesthetics are not always to customers' standards or expectations in comparison to what the customer must pay.

To conclude, the main arguments that emerged were that fine dining restaurant experience is more about people showing off, a display of status and self-validation of one's worth. The role that food plays isn't as significant to customers. However, what does matter to customers as significant to their service experience, are the service quality cues. The smaller intangible gestures, the role of the service provider is just as important. As there is a fine line, with the attention provided by the employee staff this can be overbearing to customers.

In terms of recommendations, for future studies the ritualistic approach to fine dining emerged as a way in which customers can enjoy fine dining experience. In the form of a treat or for special occasions. This can be adopted with a quantitative methodology approach. For restaurateurs, the findings suggest that customers require some boundaries. Therefore, to implement this, the manager can start by adding this information in their training programmes to the staff, and then incorporate it in their everyday business practice.

## Acknowledgements

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# 1. Introduction

The consumption of food has become more and more vital to consumer culture (Solier, 2013). The food service industry has attributes which distinguish it from other parts of the service sector, such as financial and professional services (John, 1999). It is thoroughly concerned with food choice and quality, as well as offering a form of experience (Campbell – Smith, 1967), this is more so evident in fine dining restaurants. The image of fine dining has changed over the past decade, on a global scale (Harrington, Cottenbacher and Kendall, 2011). Fine dining cuisine has become more international and significantly innovative with a strong focus on modern interior design and attracting younger consumers (Harrington, Cottenbacher and Kendall, 2011).

In terms of restaurant offerings, all restaurants provide experience to customers, either in tangible form – so the food itself or intangible – the environment and interactions with employee service. However, in fine dining restaurants, the dining experience includes not just the product, but the amazement and enjoyment from a precisely and creatively presented plate of food unique to the taste and desire of each customer (Arora and Singer, 2006). Pine and Gilmore (1999), delivered an example whereby the product is not just a product, suggesting a coffee in a five-star restaurant is different from coffee elsewhere. As the prior represents a heightened sense of theatre, tempting the customer to willingly pay more for a coffee.

On a personal note, understanding consumer interaction with fine dining restaurants is important to this research. In terms of, analysing what fine dining really offer to customers regarding the service experience, and more importantly what contributes to the customer service experience. Based on previous research fine dining restaurant aim to deliver exceptional service, consumer value and satisfying experience (Pine and John, 2002). When customers visit restaurants to have a meal, they often evaluate overall value of service they receive. Receiving a good service means they are likely to return to the restaurant, fine dining restaurants are no exception to this. Therefore, it is vital for fine dining restaurant managers to understand their customer needs to remain competitive.

The purpose of this research aims to explore the following objectives; to explore how the physical environment and human encounter influence service experience, to examine the role of food and service quality in fine dining restaurant, to understand the relationship between waiting staff and

customer at fine dining restaurants and to explore the role of the service provider and co – creation in terms of service experience. As for the research question this aim to investigate, what attributes from Food Aesthetic, Service Quality cues or The Roles, Consumption Rituals or The Norms and Boundaries of the Service Provider, contributes to customer service experience in a fine dining restaurant context? The reason for investigating this is because, the current literature on consumer service experience in fine dining restaurants, tend to focus on the importance of consumer choice (Nijite, Dunn and Kim, 2008), consumer attitudes towards restaurant brands (Hwang and Oh, 2013), customer satisfaction and value (Arora and Singer, 2006) and service quality (Hui, Kandampully and Juwaheer, 2009).

These restaurant literatures outlined what attributes influences consumer choices and the values that drive consumer satisfaction. From these studies there were limited findings that suggest the specifics consumer appreciate or expect as part of their service experience in fine dining restaurants. Whilst there were other studies that outlined specifics such as the physical environment (Walls and Berry, 2007), as an indicator of patrons' behaviour at fine dining restaurants. This paper aim to not only add to the current literature of fine dining consumption and service experience, but bring another perspective to the conversation, that challenges the norm.

The findingS of the research identified a current gap in the current literature regarding the roles, norms and boundaries of the service provider, whilst it is the norm for customer and restaurant managers to expect their waiting staff to deliver exception service on a personal level, this form of behaviour can feel unnatural to some customers and potentially ruin their experience. As well as that, a topic of importance to the current literature was also identified relating to a ritualistic element to fine dining service experience.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Firstly, the literature review will provide an overview on food consumption in fine dining restaurants. Second, we explore key concepts of experience marketing, covering the topics consumer experience and experiential consumption. Then the key concepts of service experience, covering the following topics service experience and co – creation, service encounters, consumer value and experiential value. Thirdly the research methodology, outlining the research paradigm that the study will adopt which is interpretivism. The methodological approach is qualitative long interviews. Then the data analysis section is discussing, where the findings of the research is identified and outline, whilst comparing and contrasting areas

that result support the current literature, and areas that the research doesn't support. Finally, the conclusion is discussed, the main findings and arguments that emerge for the research are identified and discussed. As well as that, the recommendations are discussed for theory, practice and future study, also possible recommendations that could be used by restaurateurs.

Furthermore, this project has provided literature that will not only compliment what currently exists but also challenge and add to the conversation. In terms of understanding that not all customers will appreciate all aspects of fine dining service experience the same. For restaurateurs, the project will add some significance as it identified that the smaller elements of the service experience go a long way for customer and that less is often more, in what customer appreciate and will remember.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The concept of consumer behaviour is about the way in which people act in their role as consumers (Schiffman and Kanuk, 1991). However, these behaviours tend to link to the process of searching, buying and using products and services (Pine and Johns, 2002). In addition, high quality experience has gained the attention from many scholars. The literature on fine dining food consumption, consumer experience and experiential consumption, service experience and co-creation, service encounter, consumer value and experiential value, is first reviewed, to develop a conceptual foundation. The review aims to, rationalise fine dining food consumption, and discussing theories of Service Experience.

### **2.1. FOOD CONSUMPTION AND FINE DINING**

The term consumption can be interpreted in two ways, one of “purchase” or “using up” (Solier, 2013). According to Miller (2001), the understanding of the word consumption in the form of “using up”, has influenced history negatively as an inherent evil, whilst throughout history, production is viewed as “creating something” and morally more acceptable.

In addition, the theory of consumption is viewed as a materialistic, meaning people in capitalist society live in a world that unnecessarily accumulate material goods, either for themselves or for others (Solier, 2013). This could potentially lead to, the consumption failing to satisfy the needs of the consumer. However, Miller (2001), argues against this, and claimed that it is mostly viewed by individuals from prosperous middle-class backgrounds who are worried about their own consumption levels. Also, other empirical studies have suggested otherwise, that the majority are less materialistic than we believe (Miller, 2001). Therefore, Miller’s argument encourages us not to look at material consumption as essentially bad.

Food consumption is different, as it enables individuals to participate in this form of consumption without feeling the guilt of accumulation (Solier, 2013). Food may have a materialistic element to it, but it also comes with a culturalist status. Food has now become of interest to scholars of consumption and material focus. These scholars use the term foodie, to describe an unprofessional fanatic who attempts to form a moral self through the consumption of food (Solier, 2013). Whilst it can be argued that food consumption is a necessity for consumers, it can become problematic, when

consumers develop a taste of luxury food. This is exemplified by the expensive haute cuisine, many consume in the practice of fine dining (Solier, 2013). In addition, high quality cuisine has long been an object of noticeable consumption', which can be argued that it portrays a display of wealth and competitive status. According to Veblen (1934), spending money this way is wasteful and morally suspect form of consumption. However, Miller (2001), argues against this perspective, claiming that some consumption of fine dining can be a treat. By viewing the consumption as a treat, this remove the notion of excessive spending and making it less of an everyday consumption practice. For some consumers, creating the restriction on consuming fine dining food on a regular basis, allows the consumer to appreciate the dining experience more.

Furthermore, in the restaurant sector, there are two types of restaurants, fast service restaurants and full-service restaurants. A fine dining restaurant comes under the category of full service restaurant. This is due to the decor of the restaurant and the table service (Amelia and Garg, 2015). Fine dining restaurants are an essential segment to the industry, due to their ability to set food and cultural trends. (Kwun and Oh, 2006). Even though, fine dining share in the market is small, the influence that this segment has on the food service industry is significant (Johnson, 1996).

Fine dining restaurants in today's market, has changed from what they used to be. The present fine dining market has been booming with success, the rigid and conservative image is now in the past and reduce significantly, making way for a modern, relevant and innovative image (Harrington et al 2011). The restaurant industry is increasingly competitive and highly populated; therefore, understanding customers' needs and wants is essential to succeed. Furthermore, in a fine dining restaurant, there are numerous factors that will influence customer impression such as food quality, service of the restaurant and the atmosphere (Amelia and Garg, 2015). Therefore, providing good food will enhance the customer's willingness to dine at a fine dining restaurant. Additionally, Susskind and Chan (2000), echo the perspective that, providing good service and pleasant setting is just as important.

In the restaurant sector, fine dining restaurants are known to be at the higher end with higher prices, high standards of operation and procedure, luxury ambiance and atmosphere. Fine dining restaurants take pride in food hygiene and cleanliness, which are qualities that are appreciated by customers. Due to their high standards, there is an expectation from customers that the experience they provide is exceptional to normal restaurants (Amelia and Garg, 2015). Their standards are also

reflected in quality of their staff members, as it is a requirement for their staff to be well trained and knowledgeable.

According to Amelia and Garg (2015), majority of customers decide to eat at full service restaurants tend to focus on the overall performances rather than the object, and eventually the small details of the service experience. On the other hand, the area that tends to get the most focus is quality. However, quality can be biased as everyone has different perspective on quality (Amelia and Garg, 2015) Therefore subconsciously, customer will sort through their experience clues positioning them into rational or emotional thoughts. In terms of experience clues, this relates to what the customer can see, hear, smell, taste, or hear (Amelia, and Garg, 2015). For instance, when a customer enters a fine dining restaurant, they will see the design of the restaurant, feel the atmosphere, taste the food and smell the aroma in the air as well as observe staff.

## **2.2. EXPERIENCE MARKETING**

Over the years, experience has materialised into a phenomenon of interest for service researchers and managers. More notably since it surfaced that consumer behaviour has experiential scope (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), this lead to academics and scholars being keen to develop an understanding, of the role of the customer's experience (Edvardsson et al, 2005; Tynan and Mckechnie, 2009).

Experience Marketing is a revolutionary approach to marketing and business. In comparison to traditional marketing, experience marketing is far more innovative and creative (Larimo and Same, 2012). Pine & Gilmore (1998), in the late 90s introduced experience economy following the service economy. In addition, experience can be interpreted in different ways and convey different meaning to different people. For instance, there is a clear difference between a mundane experience (dull or routine) and the pleasure of an extradinory experience (Caru and Cova, 2003). An extraordinary experience involves originality of insight and method (Privette 1983, pp.1366). This is generated from unusual, spontaneous and unrehearsed events (Abrahams, 1986) often linking to a significant amount of emotional intensity and experience (Arnould and Price, 1993). In comparison to peak experience and peak performance (Celsi, Rose and Leigh, 1993) extraordinary experience does not rely on greater levels of effort or an independent rational mode. Impulsiveness differentiates extraordinary events from day to day routines, which helps reinforce what is extraordinary about

the event. According to Lyng (1990, pp. 861 – 862), rock climbers and skydivers consider the experience as inexpressible. Also, Celsi, Rose and Leigh (1993, PP. 11), stated that skydivers view the act of skydiving as providing them with thrill and excitement, as well as a sense of involvement that transcends mundane experience.

The word experience is used to describe an everyday event in a person's life. There are several meanings and approaches to understand what an experience consists of (Caru and Cova, 2003). According to Caru and Cova (2003), there are numerous definitions of experience from social science and philosophy, which define experience as a personal event in the transformation of the individual with an importance on the emotions and senses. Another definition of experience comes from (Carbone and Haeckel, 1994), who view experience as a 'takeaway' made up of people's interactions with products and services. Based on the experience encounter, between the product and the service, this can generate a good or bad emotion, or lasting or fleeting (Carbone and Haeckel, 1994).

Furthermore, experience marketing is also linked to the understanding of consumer behaviour (Larimo and Same, 2012). From a consumer behaviour perspective, an experience is mostly personal with a great deal of emotions attached during the encounter with the products and services. Due to this, consumer behaviour researchers see experience as a vital aspect of consumers today (Caru and Cova, 2003). However, from a marketing and economy perspective, an experience is used to elevate products and services to promote an additional offering to consumers (Caru and Cova, 2003). Additionally, a good experience is required to be memorable (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) if not extraordinary (Lasalle and Britton, 2003) to develop consumer senses through various activities.

When thinking about experience marketing, the focus is on the experience itself. Another aspect is about the customer and experience co-creation (Larimo and Same, 2012). The aim of experience marketing is to create an entertaining atmosphere for customers, whilst providing the tools which enable customers to escape from their reality whilst educating them (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Customers can create meaning according to their perception, as the experience represents a meaningful relationship between the individual's perception activity and real life, which is essential to that individual (Larimo and Same, 2012).

### **2.2.1. CONSUMER EXPERIENCE & EXPERIENTIAL CONSUMPTION**

Walls et al (2011), identified consumer experience as multidimensional takeaway idea or outcomes, based on the consumer eagerness and ability to be influenced by physical and/or human encounters. Often consumers search and evaluate information on products and services, to compare existing options then make the best-informed purchase decisions (Harrington et al, 2011). For instance, when a customer has eaten in a fine dining restaurant previously, they will have broader information on the restaurant itself and menu meaning they will not need to seek further existing options.

However, if the customer has never eaten at the restaurant previously, they will not have the same pre- consumption experience and knowledge, thus they may seek information from either friends or family, external publications such as customer reviews or food guides (Harrington et al 2011). As some researchers have suggested, when a consumer intend on consuming products or services they tend to experience intense emotions such as, happiness, thrill or joy. Therefore, the pleasure of consumption can materialise before the consumption begins, meaning the idea of the consumption can be more exciting for the customer, more so than choosing and rationalising during the decision as this can remove the fun aspects for the customer (Kwortnik and Ross, 2007).

According to Caru and Cova (2003), based on the experiential perspective, the consumption experiences comes in various stages and include different activities, as to just focusing on pre-purchase action, which eventually leads to persuading consumers choices and potential behaviour. As well as that, Arnould et al (2002), stated that consumption experiences come in four significant stages. Firstly, the pre-consumption experience, this relates to the beginning process of identifying, planning and over contemplating about the experience. Secondly, the purchase experience, this is where the consumer makes their choice, purchase their items, the way in which they receive the item as well as the service experience. The next stage is, the core consumption experience, this focuses on understanding the satisfaction/dissatisfaction of the experience, and how they are feeling about the experience. Finally, the remembered consumption experience, this is about the customer relieving the experience identifying the good points or bad points. Because of these stages, it suggests that consumption experience cannot be reduced to one overall experience.



In recent years, several studies suggested that food, physical environment, and employee services should be at the forefront of components that are significant to restaurant experience, in shaping the insights of restaurant service quality in the restaurant industry (Chow et al, 2007; Jang and Namkung, 2009; Namkung and Jang, 2008; Ryu and Han, 2010)

### **2.3. SERVICE EXPERIENCE**

The complexity and intensity of today's market has led to the belief that the key in gaining advantage relies on producing premium service, that transcends into customer satisfaction (Han and Ryn, 2007). This is evident in the restaurant industry, as customer tends to use food, physical environment and employee services as essential components of restaurant experience to evaluate the restaurant service quality (Chow et al, 2007; Namkung and Jang, 2008; Ryu and Han, 2010).

In terms of service experience, this concept has been evaluated from several perspectives, as producing a customer experience that's deemed superior and is considered imperative in achieving satisfied and loyal customers (Grewal et al, 2009; Klaus and Maklan, 2012). According to Chow et al (2007), investigation of the relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction, and the return visit of patronage in the context of fine dining restaurants. The investigation captured three dimensions of service quality, interaction quality, physical quality and outcome quality. Additionally, Namkung and Jang (2008), too performed a study to recognize vital attributes that separate extremely satisfied diners for non-satisfied diners in upscale restaurant settings. The results suggested three quality factors, food, atmospherics and service that can be used to gauge customer's apparent quality regarding restaurant experience.

In addition, the service context of experience is more evident by direct contact between providers and customers, as well as other individuals involved in the service encounter (Tax et al, 2013). Therefore, the individual experiencing the service isn't just a customer with a user point of view, but the individual could also be the service provider, which means they experience the service from an employee's or manager's point of view (Arnould and Price, 1993; Berry and Carbone, 2007). Ostrowski et al. (1993), claimed that an individual positive experience eventually will lead to various good experiences, in turn creating a positive image. In the restaurant industry, consumer's insight of a restaurants image is likely to fully relate to customer's consumption service experiences.

Another argument comes from Booms and Bitner (1982) stating that the Servicescape of a hospitality firm to some degree impact customers intentions to revisit a restaurant brand image. Also, the physical appearance of restaurants could be used a tool to enhance brand image, change the perspective of the guest's mapping regarding competition, whilst improving customer satisfaction with the service encounters. In addition, Bitner (1992) stated that a firm's Servicescape has a correlation with cognitive responses, such as customer beliefs and perception. Relating to the restaurant context, the physical appearance such as, the ambiance, the decor and seating comfort, creates for first time customers cues that deliver the expected service offerings nature (Nguyen and Leblanc, 2002).

### **2.3.1. SERVICE EXPERIENCE AND CO-CREATION**

Furthermore, service experience and co-creation of service experience, has received a lot of attention from scholars and has become a topic of interest in marketing and service research (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Vargo and Lusch (2004), stated that service is an interactive process, of doing something for someone else that has value. Meaning, good also reduces service and have value – in use. Based on this, in the restaurant industry, the service is what unifies and encourages customers to return.

The traditional perspective is referred to as goods – dominant logic and is based on value in exchange. On the other hand, service dominant logic is linked to value in use, therefore the duties of the producer and the consumer are not dissimilar, implying that value is always co-created, together and mutually. The service dominant logic perspective suggests that, all exchange is focused on service and when goods are added they become tool of delivery and application of resources (Vargo, Maglio and Akaka, 2008).

According to marketing literature, co-creation is used to describe the joint creation of an offering (Hoyer et al, 2010) or value, which usually takes place during the exchange and integration of resources (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). The main understanding of co-creation is a range of individuals collaborating to create or being influences by other individuals. Therefore, consumers aim to put into effect their influence in all areas of the business operations. So being equipped with knowledge and the ability to voice dissatisfaction over choices, consumers now want to act and communicate more with firms which in turn, co-create value (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

In addition, the concept of co-creation has progressed from customer provider relationship (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2008) to incorporate co-creation between customers and customers collectives (Schau et al, 2009; Cova and Dalli, 2009) as well as groups of individuals of different types (Edvardsson et al, 2011; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Lusch et al, 2010). As well as the ability to create competitive advantage through co-creation, for this to happen, value needs to be jointly created by both the company and the consumer (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

According to Vargo and Lusch (2008), service logic co-creation needs value processes of the groups to join to enable all party to influence the other's processes (Gronroos and Voima, 2013). Additionally, co-creation of value essentially defies the traditional distinction between supply and demand. This is evident whereby, the firm still produce a tangible product, even though the experience and the value inbuilt in it is co-created (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

It can be argued that, the development of S-D Logic has expanded the extent to which the experience concept, solely relied on the customer perspective of the service encounter to now incorporating the past and future, along with lived and imaginary scopes (Helkkula et al, 2012). However, co-creation requires both managers and consumers to make the necessary commitments. As both must identify that the communication between the two, needs to be constructed on a strong foundation, that starts with transparency (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

### **2.3.2. SERVICE ENCOUNTER**

In terms of service encounters and service experiences, this relates to the customers observations of the service provider. The service encounter process looks at the ways in which consumer assess the level of service supplied by the organisations as well as, the interaction with other consumers (Bitner et al, 1997). According to Bitner and Brown (2000), service encounters can have a huge impact on loyalty; repurchase intentions as well as word of mouth recommendations. Service encounter literature covers several topic areas. Shieh & Cheng (2007), examined many studies of the connection between user experience and satisfaction; (Keng et al, 2007) analysed the connection amongst sales and interaction and (Mathwick et al, 2002) explored the cause of environmental design on experiential value.

The idea of service encounters studies, relates to the nature of personal connections, by creating a keen sense of desire of service encounters can "reduce the apparent risk linked with purchasing a service and improve the buying experience" (Julian and Ramaseshan, 1994) Thus, service encounters leads to backgrounds of experiential value.

Furthermore, businesses producing products and services this is no longer a major factor, the focus now surrounds the customer and being able to deliver superior customer perceived value. As the market becomes competitive, firms are actively seeking ways to deliver superior customer perceived value (Hu et al, 2009). Previous research has indicated that customer value, is a key factor to gain competitive advantage within service providing industries (Bolton and Drew, 1991; Parasuraman et al, 1991). This has become a major priority for managers, as the competition increases for customers in the customer-centred market today (Bolton and Drew, 1991; Gronroos, 1984). In addition, the way in which service employees attend to customers' needs is just as important, especially in fine dining restaurants, as this can affect the customers experience and satisfaction levels (Smith et al, 1999).

According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), customer service encounter relates to the final personal impression customers obtain from their initial encounter of a product, service or company which will hopefully have an impact on them, that they willingly communicate this to others. It has also been suggested that customer service encounters, can be used as a tool to provide information on customer preferences. This information can be useful to business to help improve their services. The study from Knutson's (1988), identified factors that influence customer satisfaction in restaurants, these are employee greetings, restaurant atmosphere, speed of service and convenience. Additionally, Kim et al (2006), study on luxury restaurants in Korea, indicated that as well as food quality, employee's customer orientation, communication and relationship benefits are essential factors to customers.

Additionally, the impact of the service encounters can be divided into two components: personal interactions which are between the service provider during a period and the physical environment of the restaurant (Bitner, 1990; Harris et al, 2003). As for the personal encounters with the service provider, the consumer assesses the quality of this based on the service provider capabilities, listening skills, and level of dedication (Chandon et al, 1997). These competencies and essentially relevant in a fine dining restaurant setting, as consumers tend to expect the service employees to

be knowledgeable about the food, where the ingredients are sourced and other things relating to the restaurant. This attention to service from the provider is appreciated by the customer, leading to a positive impact on their expectation towards the service offering (Coye, 2004).

In terms of the physical environment encounters, this relates to the interaction the consumer has with the restaurants physical facilities and other tangible elements in the environment (Bitner, 1990). Wakefield and Boldgett (1999), claimed that the tangible element in a physical environment leads to excitement. Such excitement plays an important role in determining customer patronage aims and eagerness to recommend.

Other scholars argued that, the influence of service encounters derives from three main elements such as; environmental, service employee and consumer factors. The environmental elements relate to consumer contact with intangible and tangible factors in the environment like, lighting, music and internal and external environmental design or the period when a consumer interacts with physical facilities and other tangible elements (Bitner 1990).

The service employee influence suggests that, the employee delivers service to the customers. Thus, the relationship between the consumer and the service employee is imperative to consumer service evaluation. Also, the behaviours of service employees are key in defining perceive service quality and consumer satisfaction (Andaleeb and Conway, 2006; Wu and Liang, 2005). A smile and greetings from employees play a vital role in customer's satisfaction. According to Ryu and Jang, (2008) restaurant service is provided by the staff within the service setting to consumers. This in term creates an exceptional experience to the consumers. When providing good service in fine dining restaurants, it is good keeping these aspects in mind as they matter: being prompt, friendly, available and exceptional (Morley, n.d).

Furthermore, businesses often put services together in a way that encourages customers to take part in service activities, creating an interaction with the service employees (Bitner, 1990). The third factor of influence is the consumer factor, suggesting if there is a possibility that the consumers are affected by the appearance, behaviour and perception of other customers (Bitner, 1992 and Baker et al, 2002).

In addition, Njite et al (2008), carried out a thorough interview, assessing the significance of non-food attributes related with fine dining selection preference. The results suggested that, customer interaction is considered the most important attribute in the fine dining segment. As well as that, Fiore and Kim (2007), created a conceptual framework which investigated the influences on the consumption experience in relation to environmental factors such as, the physical elements, individual elements as well as personal communication with others. The results implied that, environmental aspects like the relationship with service employees or other customers, can affect consumers perception and judgement on their service experience. Therefore, the value experience that the consumer receives enhance whilst the service encounter is perceived positively.

### **2.3.3. CONSUMER VALUE & EXPERIENTIAL VALUE**

Zeithaml (1988), defined value based on the customer's general evaluation of the usefulness of a product derived from the point of view of they received or gained. In other words, it is the value customers think they experience after or whilst using the service (Bettman et al, 1998). Therefore, value is shown or appreciated by the customers, when they are fulfilled with the overall experience. Based on the consumer-oriented management perspective, Woodruff (1997), viewed customer value based on consumer preferences depending on the product characteristics, the performance and the results that arises after using the product.

In addition, researchers Cronin et al (2000); Parasuraman and Grewal (2000), declared that service quality is an essential factor of customer value. Suggesting that, the makeup of value comes from an extremely personal point of view, therefore the understanding of value would vary widely from one customer to another (Holbrook, 1994). Therefore, customer value is control by the customer, and determined by the customer rather than coming from the seller.

According to Holbrook (1999), consumer value is an interactive relativistic preference experience, which showcases the movement between products and users from which value is derived. This suggests that consumers buy into products and services to gain value related goals or to obtain their benefits. In addition, market trend has suggested that function of customer experiential value has gained immense amount of attention from researchers, because, today's consumers are looking for more value, choices and great customer experience (Keng et al, 2007).

Furthermore Holbrook (1994), has expanded the conventional understanding of experiential value to include three fields: extrinsic/intrinsic value; active/reactive value and self/other-oriented value (Keng et al, 2007).

In the next section, the research methodology is evaluated to explain service experience in fine dining restaurant context

### **3. Research Methodology**

To evaluate the fine dining service experience of customers, the following research question will be investigated: “What attributes from Food Aesthetics, Service Quality Cues, Consumption Rituals or the Roles, Norms and Boundaries of the service provider, contributes to customers service experience in fine dining restaurant context?” To facilitate the investigation, the research will explore the following research objectives:

- To explore how the physical environment and human encounter influence service experience.
- To examine the role of food and service quality in fine dining restaurants
- To understand the relationship between waiting staff and customers at fine dining restaurants
- To explore the role of the service provider and co – creation in terms of service experience.

Previous studies on the theory of service experience explored the idea of physical environment, food and service on restaurant image (Rye et al, 2012) and Jaakkola and Helkkula (2015) on service co-creation. However, the interest of this research focusses the attributes of fine dining restaurants and which is significant to the customer service experience. Based on the literature presented in this dissertation, the research questions and objectives are created to add another point of view and interpretation of service experience theory.

#### **3.1. Research Paradigm**

To carry out the research methodology, firstly the philosophical perspectives that underpin research are examined. There are several ways of looking for knowledge on consumers, that knowledge can be acquired from different approaches. Therefore, identifying the best processes to gain the knowledge is essential.

There are two main research paradigms. A research paradigm is a philosophical framework, that outlines how scientific research should be done (Collis and Hussey, 2014). The first of the paradigms is Positivism, that comes from social sciences, and tends to form a realist stance and adopt the existence of a single objective reality, irrespective of what individuals perceive (Hudson and Ozanne, 1998). Positivism was established by theories such as: Comte (1798 – 1857), Mill (1806 – 1873) and Durkheim (1859 – 1971) (Collis and Hussey, 2014).



The other research paradigm is Interpretivism, which arose as an alternative perspective to Positivism. Interpretivism denies the claim that one real world exists, that reality is fundamentally mental and perceived. Individuals can create categories and theories, to help make sense of their worlds (Burrells and Morgan, 1979). Interpretivism comes from the values of idealism, which relates to Kant (1724 – 1804), and later developed by Dilthey (1833 – 1911), Rickert (1863 – 1936) and Weber (1864 – 1920) (Collis and Hussey, 2014).

Both philosophical assumptions relate to Ontological assumptions. In terms of Epistemological assumption, this focuses on what we agree to take as valid knowledge. This relates to the relationship between the researcher, and what is being researched. According to Positivist, valid knowledge comes from being observable and measurable, in other words being able to maintain an independent and objective stance. Whereas interpretivism aim to reduce the distance between the researcher, and what's being researched. (Collis and Hussey, 2014).

### **3.1.1. Interpretivism Research Philosophy**

Furthermore, based on the information above and the research objectives of this dissertation, the research paradigm that this dissertation will focus on is interpretivism.

Interpretivism is underlined by the principle that social reality is not objective, but rather subjective, as it created by our perception. Often, there is an interrelated relationship with the researcher and what is being researched, as it is difficult to separate what exists in the collective world, from what the researcher believes (Collis and Hussey, 2014). From an interpretivist point of view, the main aim of research is understanding behaviour, not forecasting it, as they view research as a process rather than one step (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

Additionally, interpretivist try to understand the complexity of the world, as they believe it is constantly changing and difficult to pinpoint a cause from an effect (Hudson and Ozanne, 1998). Therefore, rather than implementing quantitative methods used by Positivist, interpretivist focus on using a range of methods that look to describe, explain and understanding meaning of a phenomena in the collective world (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Therefore, data gathering from interpretive research requires some skill, as it is more than just having a conversation with people; it is systematic and usually theoretically informed (Hackley, 2003).

In addition, qualitative research method is often associated with an interpretivist philosophy, as the researcher need to make sense of what is being said, by those taking part in the phenomenon being studied (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). In terms of social constructionism, to some extent shared meaning and realities are dependent on people's interpretation of the events that occurs around them. Therefore, as meaning in qualitative research relies on social connections, it is more likely to be diverse, flexible and complex in comparison to quantitative data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). Also, sampling in qualitative research tends to be based on purposive or convenience. This means that sampling decisions are driven by pragmatic consideration of convenience or suitability for the issue being studied (Hackley, 2003).

### **3.1.2. Research Methodology**

To collect the qualitative data, the type of methodology that will be used is Long Interviews. Interviews are a way of gathering data with selected participants, known as interviewees, are asked questions to get their perceptive or feelings about an issue. Under an interpretivist paradigm, interviews are used to explore data on understanding, opinions, attitudes, explore people's memory, feelings and shared interests (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Interviews can either be unstructured or semi-structured, for this study; a semi- structured interview style will be used. This involves a set of prepared questions by the researcher, to allow the interviewee to talk about the main topics and develop other questions during the interview based on their response (Collis and Hussey, 2014).

Within the service experience literature, majority of the studies use quantitative research methods. However, for this dissertation the choice of qualitative long interview methodology creates the opportunity to be positioned as an alternative perspective, within service experience literature along with a few other studies that have utilized this form of methodology to gather data, such as Gwinner, Gremler and Bitner (1998) and Nijite Dunn and Kim (2008)

### **3.1.3. Data Collection**

Furthermore, the data collection of the consumer interviews will be on a one-to-one, face-to-face interview process. This form of interview process is the traditional approach, the interviews will take place at essentially three different location, the participants place of work, their home or at the grounds of the university, preferably in areas where there is no distraction or noise. This method provides the advantage of collecting wide-ranging data, and potentially useful whilst asking complex or sensitive questions (Collis and Hussey, 2014). The sample size of this research will require between 6-8 participants, generally when adopting a qualitative research method, the pool of participants for data collection is smaller in comparison to quantitative research method. This is because, qualitative methods tend to focus on quality rather than quantity, and the idea is to use a process to collect the data over time.

In terms of recruiting the participants to take part in the interview, the process consists of firstly finding out if the individual has eaten at a fine dining restaurant before; the gender of the participants will be male or female between the ages of 26 – 70 who are working professionals.

Prior to the interview taking place, all participants will be equipped with details about the study and the purpose of the interviews and reassured about the confidentiality of the study. As well as, noting that this interview process is non-judgemental (Hackley, 2003). This is to allow the participants to feel safe and relax, which in turn will encourage the participants to be more forthcoming with their responses.

The interview will be audio-recorded, all participants will be asked if they are comfortable with this method of noting their data beforehand. The aim of the interview is to gain the participant perspective, from the pre-prepared question based on the information gathered from the literature review around service experience in fine dining restaurants. Therefore, the participants will be encouraged to talk more so than the interviewer, to enhance the quality of the data collected, as the interview is about the person, not the interviewer.

As mentioned above, a selection of question will be pre-prepared. However, once the interview gets going, there's a possibility of using some probing questions, as well as comments to bring the participant back to the research topic but taking care not to interrupt their flow. This form of flexibility is needed when collecting the data, as the participants may mention an essential or

interesting point that the researcher wishes the participant to elaborate on. Therefore, the interviewer could potentially ask an additional question to initiate the probe such as “could you please elaborate on that answer” (Hackley, 2003 p.78).

The interview questions will be prepared using a theme sheet. The themes are determined based on the information in the literature review; this is to allow the research to not only reflect what was discussed in the literature but to also bring forth new information to enhance the research analysis. As well as that, basing the theme sheet on the information for the literature review creates a structure to the research.

Furthermore, during the interview process, the participant may stray on to topics that are not relevant to the study. The interviewer could take advantage of this, if the topic provides additional insight that was not considered. However, if the topic proves to be irrelevant, it is essential not to make it apparent and maintain eye contact, then gently redirect the participant back to the topic of conversation.

#### **3.1.4. Collection Procedures**

In terms of data collection procedures, it is important in the first instance to create an atmosphere of face safety. To do this, according to McCracken (1998), the researcher designs a set of grand tour questions that will be simple and informative, allow for casual conversation between the participants and the interviewer, at this stage, to reinforce the participant feeling comfortable and at ease about the questions yet to come. It is essential to do this at this point, as participants are likely to have their guard up in the early stages (McCracken, 1988).

It is imperative that during the interview process the researcher pays attention and listen, especially to key terms. If the participants mention any key words during their speech, the interviewer should proceed to gently encourage the participant to follow through on that topic. However, if the key terms are not forthcoming, the interviewer will distribute in sequence rational potentials through probes already prepared.

Additionally, it may appear that the participant is trying to avoid answering a question. The procedure for this is, to try approach the question from a different angle, maybe less abrupt and less intimidating (McCracken, 1998). On the other hand, the interviewer must also pay close

attention to what the participant is not saying. For instance, answers that may not come to the surface of the conversation willingly. Therefore, the interviewer needs to know how to bring it to the forefront. As it is the interviewer's job to listen not only for what exists in the interview, but also what the data implies to be in the mind of the participant.

### **3.1.5. Data Analysis**

Regarding the data analysis and interpretation procedures, once the data has been collected; it will then be transcribed in word document format. The conversation between the researcher and the participant will be documented, therefore this will make it easier for the researcher to refer to relevant information, during the process of developing arguments at points in the research dissertation.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative data analysis involves three concurrent movement of activity such as; reducing the data, displaying the data, drawing conclusions and verifying the validity of those conclusion. For this research study, the analysis procedure that will be applied is data reduction.

During an interpretivist study, there's a huge amount of qualitative data collected, in the case of this research study, interview transcripts which requires looking over, analysing and interpreting. Data reduction is a process whereby the data is selected, focused, simplified and changed to use in the write up transcript (Collis and Hussey, 2014). This is the initial stage of the analysis process. Furthermore, data reduction requires removing unnecessary data and organising data where there is a common interest. To do so, the researcher needs to become familiar with the data. Therefore, the ability to reflect upon the data being collected is vital in interpretivist methodology.

Additionally, data reduction can be achieved by restructuring or breaking down the data (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Whilst analysing the data, the aim is not to prove that this interpretation of qualitative data is the only one that exist. However, it is important to provide a strong persuasive argument in favour of one interpretation over another (Hackley, 2003).

The qualitative analysis approach, that this research study will adopt is a deductive approach. The research question in this study will be used as a guide to group the data, this is a quick and easy approach to that is used to analyse qualitative data.

To analyse the data effectively, the following steps will be applied. Firstly, once the data is collected, it is best to make sense of the information; this can be done through transcription of the data. Once the data has been transcribed, the next step is organising the data. The research objectives and question will be used as a base to organise the research data. To achieve this, the research objectives or question will be placed in a table, and the collected data will be assigned to each objective.

After that, the data gets coded. Choosing to code the data will condense the information into easily clear concepts. Coding for this research data, will come from summarising the main themes used to structure the interview questions. Once the data is coded, the themes begin to provide a deeper insight into the meaning of the data.

Throughout the data analysis process, checking the validity is important to ensure the data is not flawed. Validity comes in two forms, validity regarding the accuracy of method and secondly reliability in terms of the procedures and whether the results are consistent and dependable

### **3.1.6. Data Reliability and Validity**

In addition, as with all research there is the question of credibility, meaning how trustworthy and reliable the research findings are. Both reliability and validity are essential obstacles in field work. Reliability is about the amount of consistency with which instances are allocated to the same group, by different observers or by the same observer on different events (Hammersley, 1992:67). As this research study is applying an interview-based research method, in terms of reliability it is vital, that an interview-based study reflects the standards of using lower inference descriptors. During the face-to-face interview, to allow for lower inference descriptors, the interview will be tape recorded, all interviews will be cautiously transcribed according to how the participants deliver their answers, for instance indicating when the participants was prompt to elaborate on an answer, and providing detailed quotations of the findings in the appendix of the dissertation – including probing questions.

As mentioned above, credibility of qualitative research doesn't rest only with reliability, but also trustworthy in the findings that's being presented. Validity refers to the extent to which an event is truly represented to the social phenomena it belongs to (Hammersley, 1990:57). In terms of qualitative research, one procedure in determining the validity is comparing different kinds of data for example, quantitative and qualitative and different methods, for example observation and interviews. This is to ensure the results verify each other, another name for this is triangulation, whereby different comportments give the same position of object. Another procedure that can be

applied is, relating the results of the research to initial question being asked in the study. The procedure is useful because, the researcher is verifying their research against what already exists, which in turn can strengthen the validity (Silverman, 2001).

## 4. Data Analysis

This study adopted a qualitative research method, the type of methodology used was Long Interviews, to explore consumer service experience in fine dining restaurants. To get a detailed analysis, on the research questions and shed some light upon the experience of fine dining, especially in terms of service delivery, the interview questions were prepared using a theme sheet, the themes were drawn from the findings in the literature review.

During the research, the following themes were identified regarding consumer service experience in fine dining restaurants: Conspicuous Consumption, Food Aesthetics, Service Quality Cues, Roles, Norms and boundaries of Service Provider and Consumption Rituals.

### 4.1. Results

#### 4.1.1. Key Themes – Conspicuous Consumption

What was evident from numerous of the participants is that, fine dining can be a unique experience but it is expensive to consume either on a regular basis or at all *“Fine dining restaurant offer a unique and rare experience and cuisine”, “I truly enjoy fine dining restaurant, but it is not something I engage with on a weekly basis, it’s usually on a special occasion”*. A few participants believe that fine dining cuisine is an obvious over consumption especially when the portion size of the food doesn’t reflect the price you as a customer is paying *“fine dining restaurants are very expensive, and normally I find the portion size of the food to be very small, in comparison to what I am paying for”*. As well as that, it is also expressed that fine dining restaurants; the food is the focus, and if that is the case, enjoying good food can be at any restaurant, not necessarily a fine dining restaurant.

It can also be argued that, fine dining restaurants focus more on just the food to create their experience. The location of the restaurant adds to the experience, which in turn justifies the consumption for some because it plays on the fact that is something they have never experienced before in a luxurious area *“If a restaurant is located in a luxurious part of London, they will charge high prices and people will still be willing to pay the prices, because it is unique”, “When a restaurant is located very central there is an expectation that, the food prices will be higher. I am paying for the food, but also the experience and for the chefs to cook the dishes”*.



What was also evident is that, fine dining consumption had an image of being pretentious, which leads to some diners often feeling uncomfortable eating at some fine dining restaurants, and in turn had an impact on their service experience *“Personally fine dining restaurant experience is not exciting, I find it very pretentious and it’s an experience purely for rich people to main their status”, “Sometimes the other diners can make me feel uncomfortable, restaurant can be a bit nerve racking because you’re constantly checking if you’re doing everything right and behaving in the appropriate way”*.

The pretentious image of fine dining consumption is not only evident in the type of customers they attract, but it seems to also exist in the type of food these restaurants offer. Often the consumption is encouraged due to the rarity and distinction of food you find in fine dining restaurants *“As a lover of fine dining, I enjoy that some food I can only find in fine dining restaurants, food I wouldn’t necessarily find in my local restaurant such as, a specific cut of beef steak and the starting price would be from £100 and above or a unique blend of wine from the south of France or Italy”*. As stated in the literature, fine dining restaurants are an essential segment to the industry due to their ability to set food and cultural trends. Even with a smaller share of the market, the influence on the food service industry is significant because food and service trends tends to start from there. However, this rarity can be misguided and have a damaging effect to consumer consumption. As some food is marketed as luxury food, but that is not necessarily the case *“Truffle oil most people in the finance, banking and high earning industries would have this oil on everything because it signifies luxury”*. From this example, the main ingredient of truffle oil is Mushroom, which is not a sort after ingredient as such. Nevertheless, because it is associated with fine dining cuisine, it became a trend and consumers buy into that. In addition, the existing literature highlights the theory of consumption, and the materialistic nature it possesses. Due to, people in capitalist society unnecessarily accumulating things for themselves or for others. This potentially leads to the consumption, failing to satisfy the customer needs.

Additionally, some customers are very much aware of the pretentious image that fine dining portrays and would argue that there is nothing wrong with such image or over consumption. As they know what they are getting and paying for, they know the type of people and atmosphere they will encounter. For these consumers, this is more than enough reasons to continue in the consumption of fine dining cuisine *“One reason why I would choose to eat at fine dining restaurants is because of the calibre of people I am likely to meet, these people tend to be different to those in your normal*

*every day type of restaurants*”, *“Usually when people go to fine dining restaurants it’s because of the atmosphere, different views and scenery”*. Miller (2001), claim support this point of view as he believed that people who viewed food consumption as an over consumption or pretentious, are those from middle class background who are worried about their own consumption levels. Also, other empirical studies suggest, less people view this form of consumption as materialistic.

Overall, in terms of the consumption of fine dining food, whilst there is an appreciation that the food is expensive, at times most people would have to budget to be able to enjoy this type of cuisine *“I consider myself a good cook, so when we eat at fine dining restaurant and I consider how much we paid, I often think to myself I can cook better than this and it would taste better. Hence, why the price is a major factor for me”*. The existing literature support this claim, as it was identified through the high volume of high cuisine consumption, that this portrays or display wealth and competitive status. Veblen (1934), argues that spending money this way is a wasteful and morally suspect of consumption. Nevertheless, there is still a noticeable need to consume this cuisine and be a part of the experience at least once *“I love the idea of consuming luxury food at fine dining restaurants even though it is costly, if I could I would eat at fine dining restaurants more often”*, *“Even though the portion size is smaller, I still enjoy the food and would recommend it to people to try at least once, because it is a nice experience to have”*. Additionally, the existing literature highlighted that, fine dining is known to be higher end with higher prices, higher standards of operation and procedures, luxury ambiance and atmosphere which are all aspects customer appreciate.

#### **4.1.2. Key Themes: Food Aesthetics**

It can be argued that in fine dining restaurants, food aesthetics is very important. In fact, fine dining restaurants are well known for their food presentation, which means it is often an expectation for customers when they go to fine dining restaurants that the food on the plate will either tell a story that is over the top or showcase something classic *“Some fine dining restaurant can be over the top, this is portrayed through their décor or even their food, whilst other fine dining restaurant may use a gentle touch”*. Either way the restaurant chooses to present it food, the aim is to capture the customers attention and provide an experience at the same time.

When you consider consumer behaviour, it is important to remember that consumers are individuals which means that they appreciate different things. This is also relevant in the fine dining restaurant industry. Therefore, the service provider needs to equip themselves with the knowledge of their customer's needs. During the research, the result suggested that not all customers appreciate, what most would consider as important in fine dining which is the food aesthetics. All the participant expressed several valid reasons as to why food aesthetics was important or not. In the existing literature, Amelia and Garg (2013), stated that in full service restaurants like fine dining, customers tend to focus on the overall performance rather than a singular object. Eventually, the smaller details make up the service experience.

In terms of consumer service experience, in fine dining the food aesthetics is a contributing factor to that experience *"When I am deciding to go to a fine dining restaurant, I look at the menus as some restaurant show images of what the food would look like, this would help make the decision for me", "It is mostly about the cuisine for me, if it is the first time I am going to a restaurant I would look at the food online, if I don't like how the food look I wouldn't go to that restaurant"*. As food aesthetics goes, this suggests that the influence on customer is very much apparent before the customer enters the restaurant. In other words, for these customers the way in which the food is presented on the restaurant website, on the menu or as an image of a complete dish on a plate, it is a significant deciding factor in whether they would go to that restaurant in the first instance. However, the study from Chow et al (2007), would disagree with this, as according to their investigation of customer satisfaction and return visit, this requires three dimensions such as interaction quality, physical quality and outcome quality. There was however a participant that contradict this point of view, *"The food appearance is very important, even though sometimes the restaurant show images of what the food will look like, when you go to the restaurant the presentation isn't the same and even what you thought it would taste like wasn't the same. Hence why I think it is important to also check the customer reviews"*.

However, the way in which food is presented in front of you, can create a good and lasting emotion that transcends in making the experience enjoyable, more so than anything else *"Food does play a significant role for me in fine dining restaurant, in terms of how it taste and presented especially how it is presented, even though I may not be satisfied with the portion size. How it looks on the plate make up for that for me, as I can see the effort that was put in putting this dish together", "When I think about my experience at a fine dining restaurant the food does it for me, because food*

*makes you happy. So, if you're having a nice plate of food that is appealing to the eye and taste good, then that's the best feeling".* As stated in the existing literature, according to researchers, when a customer consumes a product or service they tend to experience intense emotions of happiness, thrill or joy. In addition, Namkung and Jang (2008) study identified the following qualities that separate satisfied diners to non-satisfied diner, food being an attribute as well as atmosphere and service.

Nevertheless, as mentioned before, the divide in terms of the importance of the food aesthetics. In fact, the research also suggested that the way in which the food is presented was not as significant to one's service experience. What was clear, was the understanding of the role that food plays in restaurants, as you do go to a restaurant to eat, but that's as far as the importance goes *"Fine dining to me is a presentation, because of the end of the day food is food. The fact that it looks pretty doesn't sell it for me, it's more about the quality of ingredient used which you experience through the taste", "I don't believe people eat with their eyes, because you can have a pie that is nicely decorated and place on the plate and well presented, but when you cut into it to eat it the taste is horrible. Not because it looks good, doesn't mean it will taste nice".*

What also came across was, what it meant for a customer to truly enjoy a fine dining service experience, it's not just reliant on the food or how it is presented *"I think going to any restaurant food is important, but when it comes to fine dining restaurant, as a customer I try to understand what makes you fine in comparison to normal restaurants. For me it can't just be about the food".* Furthermore, because fine dining restaurants are so prestigious. They tend to invest a lot of funding, in the sourcing of their ingredients, because of this there's this perception that the food speaks for itself, hence why it is significant. However, this perspective was not supported during the study *"fine dining experience is not just about the food, the name itself fine dining experience states this. The experience part creates an additional offering whereby you have to consider how I'm being treated as a customer".* Therefore, the food aesthetic is just one piece of the puzzle that makes fine dining experience what it is. This view was also identified in the literature, as the need for other attributes that a fine dining restaurant need to focus on, such as premium service, food, physical environment and employee staff to gain competitive advantage.

#### **4.1.3. Key Themes: Service Quality Cues**

In terms of service quality in fine dining restaurant experience, it can be argued that, this attribute is underplayed in terms of its significance to diners. However, what was discovered during the research, for a customer to have the full fine dining experience, there are some service quality cues that need to be met, such as the physical environment and the employee staff gestures. As, these service quality cues, can enhance distinguishing fine dining restaurants to normal restaurants *“The physical environment does contribute to your overall experience, because the way the restaurant is designed can sometimes make you feel special, especially when you’re paying high prices. The physical environment can make you feel that it was worth spending that amount”*. What was evident from the research, is in some respects the food can be overlooked, if the service quality provided match the customers standard expectations.

As for expectations, in fine dining restaurant this tends to be a lot higher than normal restaurants *“As it is fine dining I expect exemplary service”*. Customer tend to be a bit more unforgiven if an element of the service quality is not delivered effectively *“I am more critical on fine dining restaurants than normal restaurants. In normal restaurants, I allow certain things, and put it down to the level of training. But when it comes to fine dining restaurants, I have a higher standard and expectation”*. This is because, service quality is very important to customers, not just because it is what you are expecting, but because effectively you’re being charged a lot of money for it, so you expect the restaurant to provide the high service and because of the calibre of customers the restaurant is entertaining.

##### **4.1.3.1. Service Quality Cues: Physical Environment**

As for the physical environment, different areas of the restaurant environment were outlined as effective to customer’s service experience. For instance, the décor of the restaurant. Interestingly, the décor can create emotional cues for customers such as happiness, a sense of feeling valued and appreciated. Also, it can impact customers decision about returning to a specific fine dining restaurant *“The décor makes me happier, because some fine dining restaurant only focus on the food. But I think the décor plays a role and it just as important”, “It just makes you feel better and contribute more to your experience, because if there is a design theme that shows flow and continuity, as well as some thought this can be mind - blowing and appreciative from customers. Especially if it is a décor they haven’t seen before”, “The design helps a lot, being from a design*

*background, I would go to a restaurant because I heard the design is great. Even if the atmosphere isn't the best or the food, I can overlook those attributes and go back to eat at the restaurant just because the décor is cool".*

As well as the décor, the lighting, music and temperature are other attributes that were important service quality cues *"For me the ambiance such as the music, level of noise, lightening and the temperature is the most important, especially if it makes you feel good and create a memory. That memory would make you want to return to that restaurant", "I think in fine dining restaurant, you have a calmer and relaxing experience, meaning the music is not loud and it allows you to have a conversation, which is not always possible when you go to a normal restaurant".*

#### **4.1.3.2. Service Quality Cues: Employee Gestures**

In addition, gestures from the employees enhance the service quality cues. These gestures add to customers service experience in many ways. It creates a sense of importance and validation, which is only felt when dining at fine dining restaurant *"When you walk in the restaurant you're immediately greeted by someone who is usually friendly, after they greet you, your led to your table and asked if you're comfortable. Instantly you feel like you've arrived somewhere of superiority and you feel special", "At a fine dining restaurant you expect to be serviced very well, I expect to have a waiting staff at my table checking if everything is ok and to constantly be refilling my glass".* Based on these experiences, there is a clear expectation of what customers require to be a part of their service in fine dining restaurant. What may be considered as simple gestures, can be used to elevate service quality and in turn the customer experience, *"So when I go to fine dining restaurants, I expect all of these and more, and if one thing is missing or not done properly I'm left feeling disappointed and cheated out of my full fine dining experience".* As well as that, *"fine dining restaurants has a perception of greatness, so as a customer something small as placing the napkin on my lap as I set down is an expectation of mine, because I know this is part of the service. Therefore, if this is not delivered, I would start to question the standards of the restaurant, especially due to the charge I will incur which I believe is for the service as well".*

For most, service quality cues of fine dining restaurants are vital. As, any restaurant can use and source high quality ingredients, they can produce good tasting food and present it well on the plate. However, taking that on board and delivering high standard of service quality can be challenging.

Therefore, for fine dining restaurants mastering this attribute is significant to customers *“The point is when I go to a fine dining restaurant, I need to be treated well and feel like I am valued because the service experience counts the most”*. This interpretation is also evident in the existing literature from several scholars who suggested not only the food, but the physical environment and employee staff should be the forefront of components that are significant to restaurant experience in shaping the insight of restaurant service quality.

#### **4.1.4. Key Themes: Roles, Norms and boundaries of Service Provider**

Additionally, whilst service quality cues were outlined as a contributing attribute to customer service experience. So is the roles, norms and boundaries of the service provider. In fact, during the research the roles and norms of the service provider, can help or break the experience for customers. As well as that, the role that customers play in terms of how they interact with the service provider, can also impact their overall experience. The way in which customers interact with the service provider, at fine dining restaurants varies. However, what is consistent is how the customer expect the service provider to respond or treat them.

In terms of the norms and roles of the service provider from the customers perspective, there is an expectation for the service provider to be attentive, respectful, helpful and knowledgeable. Attentive in terms of customer’s needs, making sure they are happy with their meals without being interrupted or rushed, helpful in terms of making sure any special requirements are being seen to and executed properly. For instance, if the customer has any food allergies and knowledgeable in terms of knowing about the dishes on the menu and where the ingredients are sourced from. During the research, majority of the participants touch on these points as being essential at a fine dining restaurant *“What I look for as significant in my fine dining experience is for the service provider to treat me nicely, not feeling like I’m being rushed or ignored, in the sense that it is important that they listen to me if I request something specific”, “It is the service provider role to make me feel like I am being catered for and valued as a customer. Especially in fine dining restaurant, you expect this kind of treatment”, “At fine dining restaurants you tend to get more attention, because you usually have your own waiter, and that person looks after your needs for your duration at the table. However, in other restaurants you may have different people who come to your table and they may get your order wrong which can be frustrating”*.

The existing literature supports, this view regarding the relationship between the service employee and the customer. The behaviour of the service employees is key in defining perceived service quality and customer satisfaction.

In terms of the waiting staff providing attention to the customers, this is vital for fine dining restaurants. Meaning, customers often return to a restaurant because they developed a good relationship with the waiting staff, some even express that the waiting staff goes over and beyond for you *"I try to interact with the waiting staff, and normally I have a good conversation with them. I find in fine dining restaurants the waiters go out of their way to keep you entertained", "My interaction with the waiting staff is essential for me, because I am a people's person I tend to appreciate the relationship I built with the staff even more so than how the food taste. I would decide to go back to restaurant on the fact I know I will be entertained by the waiting staff"*. This suggests that the waiting staff have a key role in the customers service experience. Based on the literature, a smile and greeting from employee play a vital role in customer satisfaction. The restaurant service is provided by the staff within the service setting to consumers.

As for the staff being knowledgeable, the expectation varied. There was a split in the degree of knowledge that the customer expects the waiting staff to have, in terms of knowing about the dishes on the menu or where the ingredients are sourced from. There's an image to uphold of what fine dining represents, and that image is part of the experience for the customer. Therefore, not knowing about the food, could potentially ruin the customers experience *"Food knowledge is key, I want the waiter to be able to tell me what the special is for instance without stuttering, or what ingredient is in the dish. Not knowing isn't good enough, especially if they are supposed to be trained", "I expect the waiter to have knowledge, especially if it is a French restaurant and I ask what an ingredient is, I expect the waiting staff to know. If they didn't know, I wouldn't appreciate that", "I also don't like waiting, so when I placed my order I don't like setting there not knowing what is going on, I expect the staff to update me on how long my food would take, especially if there will be any delays"*. This view from the participants is supported by the existing literature, as stated the customer assesses the quality based on the service provider capabilities and level of dedication. These competencies are essentially relevant to fine dining restaurant settings.



Whilst half of the customers place such pressure and expectancy on the waiting staff to be knowledgeable, the study suggests not all customers think or feel the same *“There is an expectancy that the waiting staff to know everything and behave in a certain way, that is the norm for fine dining restaurants. However, I don’t place such pressure on them, because I see them as people who can make mistakes”, “I don’t see the big deal, I understand in fine dining restaurant you expect the waiter to know things especially about the food. But if one waiter doesn’t know, I will ask for someone else who does as I am sure there will be one”*. What the data indicates is whilst it is the norm in fine dining restaurants to have an image of excellency even with their staff, there is still some room of normalcy in terms of waiting staff not having such pressure to know everything, that is welcomed by some customers. This is another indication that not all customers have the same needs in meeting their service experience. However, this argument was not identified or supported by the existing literature service providers and their relationship with the customer.

This is also related to the boundaries required by the customer. Not all customers expect the service provider to behave in the manner that is created for them, for example being attentive. This can be suffocating and rejected by customers *“In terms of the service provider behaviour, I just want them to have a smile. I do not want them to talk that much, because I don’t really like it. If they friendly and less formal, that’s how I think it should be”*. This is also not indicated in the existing literature in terms of identifying boundaries that customers require from the service provider. The existing literature only focus on the fact that, the attentiveness of the service provider is viewed as being appreciated and leading to a positive impact on the customers expectations of the restaurant offerings.

However, all this expectation from the service provide, has a lot to do with how the customer collaborate with the service provider. Meaning that, the customer also has a role to play in how their fine dining experience materialise *“I do expect good service from the providers, but I think I am also pleasant as they are. Whenever I am going to a fine dining restaurant I also dress for the occasion, I would wear something that I wouldn’t normally wear. So, I think that’s me playing a role and making the effort”, “As I consider myself to be well mannered, I would be a bit more conscious of my attitude because of where I am”, “I think it is important for customers when they are at restaurants to interact with their surroundings. If the culture of the place is to use chop sticks, then I think it is important to at least try it because that makes the experience what it is” and “As a customer I think it’s important to engage, ask questions, ask the waiter what they recommend. I*

*think engaging with the service provider allows you to have a better experience because your taking part in shaping your experience”.*

Overall, customers found that engaging and working with the service provider in creating their service experience, enable them to have more control over their current experience and in the future. Also, it allows customer to not just be passive, but actively involved in making their experience more enjoyable. Vargo and Lusch (2008), supported this, as they stated that service is an interactive process of doing something for someone else that has value. Therefore, customers are now equipped with knowledge and ability to voice dissatisfaction over choices. Consumers now want to act and communicate with firms which in turn co – create value (Prahalad and Ramasamy, 2004).

#### **4.1.5. Key Themes: Consumption Ritual**

Moreover, what became apparent during the research is that fine dining has become a form of ritual for customers. As, some customers will only engage in fine dining experience as a treat either with friends, or family or on special occasions *“I think the company you have fine dining cuisine with is just as important. When you have good company, it adds to the experience. Especially when your treating yourself, it just makes the whole experience special”.*

Taking part in the fine dining experience in this way, it eliminates the factor that it is an over consumption, or the fact that it is expensive *“I think fine dining experience is best on special occasions, not if you’re just going out for a meal. So, either for a friend’s birthday or any celebration, a fine dining restaurant can offer a pleasant setting that will make the experience worthwhile”,* *“Normally fine dining isn’t something I would choose myself, when I do go it would be for a treat either for myself, or from some else”.* Therefore, this suggests that fine dining is more suited as an experience you have as a treat, whereby you will indulge in as ritual. As for these customers, when thinking of going to eat and have a good experience, fine dining restaurant isn’t the first restaurant of choice.

Additionally, viewing fine dining as a consumption ritual can make the experience more enjoyable. As, the customers appreciate the experience even more because you’re not indulging in the cuisine everyday *“If you have something every day, it reduces the value, it’s the same with fine dining*

*experience. because you have it often, it becomes normal and no longer an experience". In fact, a few of the participants, experienced this whereby they indulge in fine dining cuisine often and it became the norm for them "I believe because I've been to fine dining restaurant a lot the experience and the has been devalued for me", "Due to the people I was around, eating at fine dining restaurants was the standard. So, I would go all the time and it soon became the standard for me, it's not that I don't like fine dining restaurant experiences, I just don't get excited about doing it anymore".*

Overall, fine dining experience as a consumption ritual is something most of the participant believed is the best way to enjoy fine dining. It's an experience that tends to be overpriced for most average consumers, therefore having it as a treat enhance the excitement as it gives you something to look forward and make the experience more appreciative by the customer. Based on the existing literature, Miller (2001) supported consuming fine dining as part of a ritual, by having it as a treat. By viewing the consumption as a treat, this remove the notion of unnecessary spending and making it less of an everyday practice.

To conclude, the data analysis identified five key themes that are significant to consumer service experience in fine dining restaurants. Some of the themes identified, the existing literature correlated with the findings. However, new development emerged whereby the literature doesn't support or identified.

## 5. Conclusion

To conclude, the main findings from the research suggest that, there is no doubt that people enjoy the experience that fine dining restaurants have to offer. They revel in the luxuriousness of the experience, the rarity of the food and the ingredients. This also relates to (Solier, 2013) argument regarding the way in which high quality cuisine, shows a display of wealth, luxury and competitive status. This emerged as a quality that people identified but not necessarily enjoyed.

However, even with the food and the experience being luxury, in terms of the food aesthetics amongst the consumers this does not always live up to standards or expectation when you consider the amount customers must pay. There is a view that the presentation of the food is important because, it can be a deciding factor for customers choosing which restaurant to go to. However, this attribute doesn't seem as significant or justify the need to spend the amount you do in fine dining restaurants. This supports the view of (Veblen 1934) who suggests that this form of consumption is a wasteful way of spending money.

Another finding that emerged from the research was the consumption ritual of fine dining experience, having it as a treat allows customer to enjoy it more. As indulging in fine dining cuisine often, devalued what fine dining represents for some customers, which meant that the experience is no longer special. As Miller (2001) pointed out that, fine dining consumption as a treat removes the impression of excessive spending. As it becomes less of an everyday consumption practice.

The findings also highlighted the physical environment, employee gestures and the role of the service provider, as attributes that have significant impact on consumer service experience and has the potential to either deliver a good experience or a disappointing one. As Walls et al, (2011) identified consumer experiences are based on the ability to be influenced by physical or human encounter. The finding supports this view as the decor of the restaurant, the lightening and even the temperature can create a lasting positive mood and intense emotions such as happiness (Kwortnick and Ross, 2007) for customers then influence their decision to return to the restaurant, due to having a good experience.

As for the employee gestures, what was discovered was the impact these gestures had to customer service experience, in terms of making them feel important and valued. Being greeted, walked to your seat, placing the napkin on their laps and having waiting staff at their table refilling their drinks when needed, are small gestures to the customer that helps elevate their service experience, and create a positive feeling of being valued, which in turn enhance their willingness to return to the restaurant.

Although these specific gestures did not appear in the existing literature, what was present in the literature is the understanding that direct contact between the customer and service provider was an essential attribute in terms of how customer assesses their service quality. As stated by Ostrowski et al (1993), that an individual positive experience eventually will lead to various good experience and create a positive image that is likely to reflect onto the customer's consumption service experience.

As mentioned, the role of the service provider varied in many ways in terms of what is expected of them and the way in which they deliver it. The finding suggests that, both the service provider and the customer play a role in determining the outcome of the customer's experience. This was evident in the service dominant logic theory, that states that the duties of the producer and the consumer are not dissimilar, implying that value is also co-created together (Vargo, Maglio and Akaka, 2008).

Furthermore, the main arguments that emerged from the research are that fine dining experience is more about showing off and a display of status and self-validation of one's worth. The reality of it, the need to indulge in an experience like this on a regular basis is not necessary. To truly enjoy a fine dining restaurant experience, this is much better appreciated as form of consumption ritual, as a treat that you gift yourself occasionally either for an achievement or birthday. The point is, the occasion needs to be special to justify the expenditure on fine dining experience.

Another argument that emerged was the role that food plays from the taste, to the ingredients and aesthetics. As it is fine dining, there's a perception that the food served is vital to customers service experience, and it's an attribute that all customers would consider significant in fine dining restaurants. However more often it is the opposite, as it is a belief that you can enjoy good food, with good ingredient quality that taste just as good at a normal regular restaurant without it being

fine dining. Where the portion size will be bigger, so you feel you've eaten and the cost is lower, so you wouldn't feel you've broken the bank to enjoy the food.

The final argument that came through is regarding the service quality and the service provider role and boundaries. The small gestures and intangible aspects, they provide the most impact to the customer service experience. The decor is viewed as such as valued attribute, due to the emotional attachment developed by the customer to the exterior of the restaurant. The intangible elements make the customer feel happy and special; this often encourages customer's willingness to visit the restaurant again. As well as that, the lightening, noise and temperature also has an impact on the mood of the customer, which helps create a memory that customer will try to recreate by going back to the restaurant.

As mentioned above the roles and boundaries of the service provider, the argument that emerged was rather interesting, as there is a fine line with regards to the service provider being attentive and this can be viewed as suffocating for the customer. Whilst it is the norm for the service provider to be attentive, respectful, helpful and knowledgeable, there are also boundaries that also need to consider as this could potentially ruin the customer service experience.

The overall findings of the research suggest that, intangible aspects of the restaurant as well as role of the service provider have a more significant impact to the customer service experience. Additionally, fine dining experience requires more than one attribute of the restaurant offering to deliver a standard of service experience that will satisfy customers and meet their expectations.

In terms of this research, in comparison to previous research in some respects there are correlations with the findings. Regarding, understanding the attributes in fine dining restaurant experience that contribute to the customer service experience. However, a gap has also been identified whereby, not all attributes customers appreciate equally, such as the food aesthetics. There's another way to indulge in fine dining experience, and that's through consumption rituals which is just as effective. As well as that, identifying the boundaries needs required by the customer from the service provider. Therefore, this research provides the opportunity to explore other aspect of service experience no mentioned in the previous research

## 6. Recommendations

In terms of study recommendation, the findings from the research developed an extension to the service experience theory. In terms of the service providers role, norms and boundaries in fine dining restaurants. The study identified, that there is a level of boundaries that needs to be maintained between the service provider and the customers. The existing literature suggests that, the connection and interaction between the customer and the service provider is key and have a massive impact on loyalty and revisit intentions. However, the finding from the study suggests something new, whereby the customer also appreciate and expect some boundaries. Implying that, there isn't a constant need for the waiting staff to be attentive towards the customer feelings about the food, or the service in general as well as being knowledgeable about the dishes and where the ingredients are being sourced.

This need for boundaries, arise from the fact that customer find that the encounter with the service provider can be somewhat awkward and unnatural if not managed effectively. Even though the service standard is important, there is a fine line that need to be considered as it can become overpowering for the customer, and effectively ruin the customer experience. In most cases, the customer is satisfied with the customer taking their order with a smile, and leaving them to enjoy their meal in peace, as the customer has the view if something is wrong and they need assistance they will ask for it.

Due to the development of this information, this has provided some implication for the theory of service experience and service encounter. For instance, Julian and Ramaseshan (1994), states that service encounter studies relate to the nature of personal connections by creating a keen sense of desire which reduce the apparent risk linked with purchasing a service and improve buying experience. However, from the findings of the study service provider boundaries, implies that there's a potential hinderance in delivering this connection between the customer and service provider. According to Hu et al (2009), the service market industries its becoming very competitive whereby businesses are seeking ways to deliver customer value and gaining competitive advantage. One way of doing that is, through service employees' attention to customer needs, especially in fine dining restaurants as this can affect customer experience and satisfaction levels (Smith et al, 1992).

Where this may be the case, the finding of the study shows that not in all cases that this is apparent as sometime the service employees' presence can ruin the customer experience if not carefully managed.

In relation to recommendation to restaurateurs about their service experience. One aspect that the restaurant manager may consider is the, atmosphere and mood that the restaurant presents to customers. Based on the research findings, customer tend to find the interaction with other customer can create discomfort, or the interaction with the service provider can be overpowering. Therefore, what could possibly benefit this situation, regarding the service provider delivery of service to the customer, is for the manager to implement in the training programme for the waiting staff a set of guidance notes, that will become part of their working practice. These notes will be generated from customer feedback about things the restaurant can do better to improve their service.

The restaurant manager will then use these feedbacks, as part of the service employees training to provide them with the knowledge on how best their customer liked to be served. This in turn will show the customer how dedicated the service provider is to make their experience special, but it also provides the managers with information about their customers habits, and how to best target those habits. Getting the customer to take part in a survey, may be a nuisance for some customers. However, the restaurant can offer a 10 or 20% discount on their next meal for taking part in the survey to enhance customers willingness to take part.

Another recommendation for restaurateurs, the finding of this study identified the impact that the intangible aspects of the restaurant have on customer service experience. So, if the restaurant has an interesting décor, this could be used as an opportunity to get the customer more involved in their restaurant experience, by incorporating the décor in the experience. In terms of taking the customer on a culinary journey, which relates to the significance of the décor. For example, if the décor is very cultural this could also be showcase in the food and wine. As the food is being delivered to the table there's also a message that tells a story about an aspect of the décor.

Regarding future research to explore based on this study, during the research the ritualistic approach to fine dining emerged as a way in which customers can enjoy fine dining experience. The idea that fine dining experience is much more enjoyable when you indulge in it occasional, which to



some degree makes sense. Since, fine dining experience is not a necessity form of consumption, it has an image of over consumption and somewhat materialistic. Also, the expense attached to enjoying this form of experience is costly hence the over consumption aspect. Therefore, for future research prospects researching service experience in relation to consumption rituals in the context of fine dining restaurant, could potential add another perspective on fine dining experience consumption and challenge the norm by getting people to look at fine dining differently. This research could also adopt a quantitative research methodology, structured using hypothesis.

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## Appendices 1 – Transcript

### **Interviewee 1:**

The first set of questions is going to be about Food Consumptions and Fine Dining Restaurants and getting your opinion and experience.

### ***Theme: - Food Consumption and Fine Dining***

#### **q.1 Tell me what you think about Fine dining Restaurants?**

**Interviewee:** - In terms of fine dining this is something I truly enjoy doing personally, but it is not something I engage with on a weekly basis, its usually on a special occasion. I am a fan of fine dining and I think it is good to experience something new and that's the way I like to do it. So, whenever I do it, I am expecting something completely new that I am not used to and it is suppose to be something out of the ordinary that's my personal view on it.

**Interviewer Probe:** - *You mentioned that it is something you do from time to time, why not all the time?*

**Interviewee:** - Because it tends to be out of budget. So fine dining is usually not affordable to everyone all the time. So due to money why I don't go to fine dining restaurants all the time.

#### **q.2 What do you think about the consumption of luxury food at fine dining restaurants?**

**Interviewee:** - I personal enjoy some of the food you can only find at fine dining restaurants. But I also think some of the food that are there, are specifically marketed as luxury food but its not. So, for example Truffle Oil most people in finance, banking and high earning industries would have it on everything because it was equated as luxury to them. But, it comes from mushrooms and it grows a lot, and it's not particularly luxurious but it was associated with fine dining and it became a trend, because it came from fine dining and tricked down into everything else.

But nonetheless I am a fan, I like a lot of things that I wouldn't necessarily find in my local restaurant, but I will in a fine dining restaurant. So, for example rare meat or beef done in a certain way, or a rare wine that wouldn't find anywhere else but in a fine dining restaurant. But again, it's a matter of when and how you can afford it.

#### **Q.3 Why would choose to eat at a fine dine restaurant instead of a normal restaurant?**

**Interviewee:** - it's the food and the overall experience. Fine dining restaurant tend to provide a full experience, you go in and your treated in a certain way from the second you walk in if the service is good. You step in and it is supposed to provide an overall vibe, experience, mood and make you feel

like you are enjoying something unique and special its not supposed to be like an everyday experience.

*Q.4/ Interviewer probe: - would you say that the food and the experience is essential in you choosing to go to a fine dining restaurant, is there anything else that encourages your choice?*

It is the cuisine, when I firstly choice a restaurant that I haven't been to before I would first look at the food. Because if I don't like a food I wouldn't go there, I would then look at the design because I am in the industry and I would look at the design of the restaurant online. I would also look at the reviews about other people's experience and service, and whether they thought it was good value for money. So other external factors are involved when I am making my choice.

*Q.5 Fine dining restaurants are known to have high standards, with that comes high prices. Your potentially paying high prices for food – how does that make you feel do you encourage that argument or you disagree with it?*

I encourage that argument because like I said it is not something you have every day, well most people wouldn't but when they do have it, it is something special. So yes, the prices are high, but of course they are paying higher rents, because a fine dining restaurant will not be in a cheap area, so the rent is high. They are paying salaries for top people in that industry to cook and serve customers, they are paying services themselves and for high quality ingredients so all that fits in a final price. And they also need to make a profit because it is a business at the end of the day. So, I do agree that the prices should be higher.

### ***Theme: - Experience Marketing***

*So, we are now moving on to the experience side of things*

*Q.1 How would you describe your overall experience at a fine dining restaurant?*

***Interviewee:*** - Should I choose a specific one?

***Interviewer:*** - Yes.

***Interviewee:*** - so experience from the moment I walked in?

***Interviewer:*** Yes, your interaction with the service provider, the other customer, the ambiance.

***Interviewee:*** - so for example I will pick one that I worked on as a design project – M restaurant, you walk in and your greeted by someone who is usually friendly, and nice music cool design. You instantly feel like you have arrived somewhere so that already feeds into the overall mood and expectations. Then after your greeted and led to your table, again your asked if you're comfortable and if you like a glass of water and you just feel like they care, and they want to make you feel good.

Another thing I like is when they provide the service whereby the chef comes over to your table and explain certain food if you don't know and they could possibly change something for you which I think is a nice touch, because it doesn't feel standardise as a customer you feel you have room for you to adapt it for you. It's the constant attention you get through out your meal, to check if your happy with your meal, the temperature of your food. They are happy to change it if you're not happy for no extra cost. You feel like they take care of you and they value as a customer.

**Q.2/ Interviewer probe: - So the environment and interaction with the service provider, for you that makes you feel valued and they are interested in more than just your money.**

***Interviewee:*** - Yes, it does.

**Q.3 Once you dined at this fine dining restaurant and had a good experience, does that encourage you to continue dining at that restaurant?**

***Interviewee:*** Yes.

***Interviewer:*** - so you wouldn't look for another restaurant?

***Interviewee:*** Yes, I would, but for example if I have a specific event coming up and a good friend of mine is visiting for just one evening I want to provide a good experience for them, I would go back to the one I know for sure that will provide me with a good experience I wouldn't necessarily try a new fine dining restaurant. However, if it is just for myself and I want to treat myself to a nice meal, I would try somewhere new.

**Q.4/Interviewer probe: Previously you mentioned you look at customer reviews in choosing fine dining restaurants. Are there any other avenues that you use?**

***Interviewee:*** - Yes, my friends recommendations, family, colleagues from work, people who are into food like me I would trust there recommendations even more than online.

***Interview probe:*** Would you say by hearing their experience, in your mind would you then have a preconceived idea of what your experience should be?

***Interviewee:*** - Yes it does influence you, even if you try not to. Obviously, your expectations are higher if your friends say it was perfect and the best.

***Interviewer probe:*** - What if they experience doesn't match to what you experience, where does that put you, how does make you feel?

***Interviewee:*** - So after that I would have conversation with them. For example, they had a better experience than me, I would either leave a bad review or speak to my friend and say that I wouldn't go there again.

***Interviewer probe:*** - but would you argue because you already know what to experience before you go, you're already setting yourself up for disappointment?

**Interviewee:** - It could be the case, but I must say, more often when my friends recommend restaurants for me to try I tend to have a good experience and I am not disappointed.

Q.5/ Interview probe: - Previously so far you mention the food is important, the environment, the service and the service providers are important. What attributes out of those, if others are significant to a fine dining restaurant experience?

**Interviewee:** - The most important for me of course the food, but mostly the service. For me if the food is great and I am not treated nicely, or I'm being rushed, or ignored and I am asking for something and you don't listen – i.e. if I am allergic to something and you still put that ingredient in there. I think that lack of service has more of a potential to ruin my experience than anything else. if the design isn't how it is online, that's fine I can forgive that because maybe my experience with the staff is great, they make me smile and make me feel good. Say the food wasn't at the level as I would like it, but the staff was helpful that could turn it around me, but if the service is bad from the beginning it doesn't matter how good the food and environment is I wouldn't go back.

**Interviewer & Interviewee:** - so you would say the service and service staff come first, then second is food quality and third is design.

### ***Theme: Service Experience***

Q.1 & Interviewer: I guess you can say you've already touched on this, but tell me how important is the standard of service is to your experience in a fine dining restaurant, and how does it benefit your experience?

Interviewee: standard of service is one of the most important it really shaped your experience. I had this experience once, whereby I arrived everything was going well, but then I was being rushed and they forgot some dietary requirements I had, and the manager and the staff attitude ruin my entire experience. So, for me the standard of the service is really very important.

Q.2 How does the physical environment of the restaurant influence your service experience – so that's the lighting, music, décor etc..

**Interviewee:** - it does help a lot, because I come from a design background it helps a lot. So, I would go to a restaurant just because I heard that the design is great, and I just want to see it and experience it and I would try it and I would go back. Even if the atmosphere wasn't good or the food good but just because the design is cool I would go back, but that's just me maybe others wouldn't do that. So, it does feed into it for me a lot, if the ambiance is good and the service is good it just makes you want to go back.

**Interviewee probe:** - so for example you have an anniversary and you go to a restaurant whereby the physical environment doesn't match what your trying to celebrate would that ruin your experience?

**Interviewee:** - it could potentially as you said its an anniversary and I'm with my significant other and we want an intimate experience and we can't get a booth at this restaurant then yes it could ruin it. Or if I'm celebrating my birthday with my friends and we are loud, and the restaurant is quiet, and people are talking very low off course you would feel uncomfortable. But I wouldn't say I wouldn't go back if the experience was good, I would just go back for a different occasion.

**Q.3 What role do you play as a consumer in creating your own experience with the service provider?**

**Interviewee:** - I think as a consumer you do have a influence on your own experience. Firstly, you can check in advance, for e.g if I am doing an anniversary dinner for my partner I would check what the restaurant atmosphere is like during the evening, what do you recommend and if they have a private booth or not. So that is a way of shaping your experience in advance. Secondly you can leave a review afterwards, you can get in touch with them if something is not right you can do it during your dinner. If one of the waiter/waitress is being rude to you, you can ask for the manager. I think all of that providing constant feedback contribute and shape the experience you have. Its about being active and not just passive and accepting what you are given.

**Q.4 Tell me about the difference it makes to your experience as a customer, to have the power to collaborate with the service provider in creating your own experience in a fine dining restaurant?**

**Interviewee:** - it does empower you, off course it is limited. As the service provide has a vision and how you feel as you should be treated may not fit into it, in that case you don't go back. I've had a bad experience at a restaurant, I left a bad review about it and after that I was contacted by the service provider, and I was offered apologies and offered another dinner free due to my bad experience. So that gave me power and I felt like I had a voice.

**Interview probe:** - did that encourage you to go back to that place after they respond to your bad experience with an offering?

**Interviewee:** - No it didn't because I felt like I was just going back because the second dinner they were offering me was free and usually when they do that, I would have to remove my bad review. And I would care more about the other consumer choosing to go to this place and have the same bad experience like me. I wouldn't want other people to go through the same thing, so I wouldn't remove my review for that reason for a free dinner, because my money has already been taken and my experience has already been bad. The service provide should fix what's wrong by looking at their

management not by getting me to remove my review because that's not fixing the problem that's covering it up.

**Interviewer probe:** - so you feel by you what they are offer that's you encouraging their behaviour and not encouraging them to change?

**Interviewee:** - Yes, I do because after I left my review I was contacted by other people that wanted to celebrate their birthday at this restaurant said after seeing my review they won't go there because of my review. So, the service provider seeing that my review has caused another customer not to go their restaurant I think that is more valuable and important than me going back and deleting me review.

**Interviewer probe:** so, you would rather co-create with other consumers rather than the service provider?

**Interviewee:-** Yes.

**Interviewer probe:** because you feel it is more beneficial to you and you have more power?

**Interviewee:** I think it would be a better lesson to the service provider because if they are losing customers they would realise ok I need to fix my management.

Q.5 As a customer how does your interaction with the waiter/waitress influence your service experience?

**Interviewee:** it does influence it a lot, if they have a good attitude, smile and listen to you especially if you have any allergies. They must pay attention, may me feel good because I am spending a lot of money, so I am expecting to get the best service I can get.

Q.6 Tell me about your expectations from the waiters/waitress, in terms of their behaviour, interaction with the customer and food knowledge at the fine dining restaurants?

**Interviewee:** There must be a bit more training they do need to know a lot more about food and wine and different combination. For e.g. at McDonalds yes, your expected to smile, give me a good service and not be grumpy. But in fine dining restaurants often your dealing with people who are more educated in what they want. And when they ask you the difference between certain dishes or what an ingredient is they need to know you can't look ignorant. I would expect in another type of restaurant where I pay a lot less for the waiters/waitress not to know.

**Interviewer probe:** - for you if you feel the waiters/waitress are not as knowledge would that ruin your whole experience?

**Interviewee:** no that wouldn't ruin my whole experience I think what would ruin for me is bad attitude. If they do not know they can say they haven't been trained in this and bring someone else who does. I wouldn't mind that.

Q.7 Explain to me how your value expectation is being fulfilled when you dine at fine dining restaurants? value in terms of Monterey or time

**Interviewee:** - when I go to fine dining restaurant I expect to take my time to eat my food and enjoy every ingredient. I do feel like what I pay for I usually get and its worth it for me, so I don't mind spending more for something I wouldn't have all the time and something that would provide me with a new experience. So, for me it's all about new experience.

**Interviewer probe:** - you find that when you go to a fine dining restuarant if the experience is not the same your value expectation is met?

**Interviewee:** - if I experience something new and learnt something new and I've had a good time and the ambiance is good then I do feel like my value experience is met. The only time I would feel like my value is not met is if the food is not great, the attitude from the staff is bad and if I leave the place with bad memories is general. Is important that I have good quality ingredients and good ambiance.

#### **Interviewee 4**

#### **Theme: Food Consumption & Fine Dining**

Q.1 Tell me what you think about fine dining restaurants?

**Interviewee:** They are very expensive, and normally I find the portion size of the food to be very small in comparison to what you're paying for. I know for a lot of people eating at a fine dining restaurant is unique, but for me its not anymore because of the circle of people I mix with it's a place I was used to going on a regular basis. So, for me the fine dining experience is not that exciting anymore it's just a pretentious thing now. I guess because I've been there a lot its almost devalued the excitement for me.

**Interviewer probe:** You mentioned the circle you've been with.

**Interviewee:** Yes, for those people eating at fine dining restaurant is the norm, so I would go all the time and its become the norm. so, it's not to say I don't like fine dining restaurants and the experience I'm just not so excited about it.

Another thing is, I consider myself to be a good cook, so lots of time when we are paying a lot of money, I think I can cook better than this and it would taste better. Hence why the pricing of their food is a major thing to me.

**Interviewer probe:** so generally, you don't think the experience contribute to what you're paying for?

**Interviewee:** No, normally when I go to find dining restaurant, my expectations are a lot higher than what I get when I go there. In terms of portion size, service. In some fine dining restaurant, I don't think the service is equates to what I am paying for.

**Q.2 what do you think about the consumption of luxury food at fine dining restaurants? do you think it is a waste of time, and people shouldn't indulge in it?**

**Interviewee:** I think it is ok for special occasions not if you're going out for just a meal.

**Q.3 Why do you choose to eat at fine dining restaurant instead of a normal restaurant?**

**Interviewee:** normally it is not something I choose for myself when I do go it would be that it is a treat from someone else. So, if I am thinking of going out to eat, I wouldn't choose a fine dining restaurant in the first instance, due to the fact that it is overpriced for what your actually getting.

**Interviewer probe: You don't think fine dining restaurant offer an experience that you wouldn't necessarily get anywhere else?**

**Interviewee:** No, because you can get the experience of a beautiful surrounding at other places and not necessarily eat there. Like a beautiful hotel for example.

**Q.4 Tell how important is the food itself in your choice of dining at a fine dining restaurant?**

**Interviewee:** The food does a play a major part for me, in terms of how it tastes and how it is presented.

**Interviewer probe: earlier you mentioned about the portion size, does that mean your usually not satisfied?**

**Interviewee:** yes, often I am not satisfied at all with the portion size. And I suppose because when I go I am not choosing to go there, I would think that this is not worth it for the money in comparison to what I am getting because I always feel hungry afterwards.

**Interviewer probe: Often fine dining restaurants are known to have smaller portions, so naturally would you not just set your expectations for what it is going to be?**

**Interviewee:** Yes, I do, but even still I am left not feeling satisfied.

**Q.5 Fine dining restaurants are known to have high standards, with that come high prices. Your potentially paying high prices for food – how do that make you feel?**

**Interviewee:** when your choosing fine dining restaurant you know that you're just paying these high prices for the food, there is nothing else for me that what fine dining offer, food.

**Interviewer probe: In that case how do you feel as a consumer that your paying such high prices just for food?**



**Interviewee:** if I had a choice, I wouldn't choose fine dining. I would choose a nice restaurant that serve nice food because I like nice food. But I wouldn't choose a restaurant, with a a la carte menu because I do think it is a waste of money.

**Interviewer probe:** you mentioned nice food, so you don't believe that fine dining restaurant offer nice food?

**Interviewee:** Not all the time no they don't. you can go to a restaurant that is not fine dining that offers nice food and the portion sizes are different and bigger. Don't get me wrong the food is normally nice, but just not for the price. The price is the major issue for me

### **Theme: Experience Marketing**

**Q.1** How would you describe your overall experience at a fine dining restaurant?

**Interviewee:** always very nice, I've never had a bad service. However, whilst I am leaving the restaurant I am always thinking wow, we've paid all that for so little.

**Interviewer probe:** so even though your experience was never bad, you've always left a fine dining restaurant think that you've overpaid?

**Interviewee:** Yes, I do because I've had good experience and nice service at normal restaurants with just as a nice food but obviously they are classed as so – called fine dining.

**Interviewer probe:** so, in that case, what do you think the relevance is of fine dining then, if your saying you get just the same experience and service at a normal restaurant?

**Interviewee:** I think it is for posh people, and it is status thing and nothing else.

**Q.2** How does the environment and other customers in the restaurant contribute to your overall experience?

**Interviewee:** I can't say I've ever taken any notice of other customers really when I am in the restaurant. I go in and think about the experience for myself, not the other customers.

**Interviewer probe:** ok so what about the environment, how the décor is, the detail in how everything is placed?

**Interviewee:** for me it is just the same as it is in another normal restaurant. I really don't see the difference in a fine dining restaurant and a normal restaurant.

**Q.3** Once you've dined at a fine dining restaurant and had a good experience, does that encourage you to continue dining at that restaurant – or will you be opened to trying others?

**Interviewee:** No, it doesn't

**Interviewer probe:** Bear in mind you say you don't usually choose these fine dining restaurants you go to, but say your celebrating a special occasion you wouldn't think to choose a fine dining restaurant you've been to?

**Interviewee:** No, for me nice dining comes to mind.

**Interviewer probe:** and what is the difference?

**Interviewee:** well the difference is it is not Al la Carte, it's bigger portions and it is not as portentous. Fine dining to me is portentous.

**Interviewer probe:** And even when you are dining at the restaurant you feel that way?

**Interviewee:** Yes, I do even if I am having a good time, it is a portentous way of eating food.

**Q.4** In your case, you don't choose the fine dining restaurants, but if you had to, what avenues do you research?

**Interviewee:** I would always check reviews online, if someone said that they are taking me out to dinner to a restaurant, I would check online for reviews about the food the taste and the service. Not so much about the décor, for me it's about the taste of the food and the service.

**Interviewer probe:** what about word of mouth recommendations?

**Interviewee:** Yes, I take on broad word of mouth recommendations.

**Interviewer probe:** so, considering the online reviews and word of mouth recommendations from friends or colleagues about their experience, what if your one is not the same?

**Interviewee:** of all the time I've gone out to fine dining, the food has always been nice and some better than others, the service is also nice not all of them. But for me it is not always as good as people say it should be. I go there with an expectation for it to be brilliant and its not always the case and I do feel a little bit let down at times.

**Interview probe:** ok would you not say, that by listening to recommendations and reviews and creating this high expectation for yourself that you're in fact setting yourself up for disappoint me?

**Interviewee:** I suppose so but isn't that the norm to take on another persons recommendation and go by what people say in general.

**Interviewer probe:** but because we are not passive people, don't you think while your there it's good to find something out of the experience and make it your own?

**Interviewee:** yes, I suppose you do, because anything you do when you there with someone else you make it your own, and I always try to do that. And I would come back to the person and say that you thought this was good, but I didn't I though this was better etc. so it's an automatic think I would try and make It my own.

Q.5 you mentioned food, portion size and service. what other attributes do you think is significant to a fine dining restaurant experience?

**Interviewee:** the taste so food related.

**Interviewer probe:** so nothing else, the décor, the music etc.?

**Interviewee:** No, just the taste of the food.

**Interviewer probe:** how would you rank the attributes?

**Interviewee:** taste of the food, service, price and experience. for me experience you can have everywhere, and fine dining experience is not that special.

### **Theme: Service Experience**

Q.1 How important is the standard of service to your experience in a fine dining restaurant, and how does it benefit your experience?

**Interviewee:** Very important to me, not just in fine dining but in all restaurants.

**Interviewer probe:** but because of the image of fine dining standard of service is key right?

**Interviewee:** Yes exactly, but because it is fine dining I expect exemplary service

**Interviewer probe:** how does the exemplary standard of service benefit your experience?

**Interviewee:** It makes me feel that it was worth going and enhanced my experience, it doesn't let me think it's any less expensive.

**Interviewer probe:** ok do you not think in anyway that the expense is justified due to the location or ingredients? I know you believe that you can get good experience in normal restaurants, but fine dining restaurants are not just normal.

**Interviewee:** I know what your saying, there is this beef that I said I will taste it's called Colby. The cow is massaged from the day its born and fed on special meals all its life and for one steak it cost £100. So, I said I want to taste it because I want to taste the difference. And I can only taste this in a fine dining restaurant.

**Interviewer probe:** and do you believe because of how you view fine dining restaurants, that you would allow yourself to taste the difference?

**Interviewee:** Yes, I will allow myself to taste the difference because I know it will be £100 steak. So, I know this cow has been rare from the day it was born, so I am expecting it to be expensive and in my head that is justified.

**Interviewer probe:** ok but most fine dining restaurant do have a justified reason why their prices are so high.

**Interviewee:** No, I don't agree

**Interviewer probe:** how about where the restaurant is located, or where the ingredients had to come from or how the waiting staff had to be trained to deliver the appropriate service or the machinery they must use in the kitchen?

**Interviewee:** where the restaurant is located yes, because their rates may be higher. I don't think any else would contribute to the price being expensive.

**Q.2** How does the physical environment of the restaurant influence your service experience?

**Interviewee:** A mean for me I would walk into the restaurant and look at the surroundings, and think this is nice, but I don't dwell on it. For me the focus is the food, because I know where I am, and I expect it to be like that.

**Q.3** What role do you play as a customer in creating your own experience with the service provider?

**Interviewee:** I do expect a good service from them, but I think I am also as pleasant as they are. Whenever I am going to a fine dining restaurant I also dress for the occasion, I would wear something that I would normally wear. So, I think that's me playing a role and making the effort. Also, where I am already well mannered, I would be a bit more well mannered because I know where I am. I also express if I am not happy with the food to the service providers, as I know where I am coming to eat and there is a certain standard and if that's not met then I would let them know. I think that is also me contributing to my experience.

**Q.4** Tell me about the difference it makes to your experience as a customer, to have the power to collaborate with the service provider in creating your own experience in fine dining? – especially because before people wouldn't choose to voice their own opinion on the service or anything else.

**Interviewee:** I think that is more surrounding the British culture, because in America and other parts of the world, people would always voice their opinion if they are not happy about something. But I think it has changed now in the British culture and more people are doing it.

**Interviewer probe:** and how does it make you feel that you can now collaborate your thoughts with the service provider?

**Interviewee:** I've always done so, and I've never found hard to call back the waiting staff and express my dislike to something maybe being the food or the service. I probably won't eat the food they replace, just because I've seen how customer are treated when they've voiced their opinion on something. I believe it could also happen in fine dining restaurants that it doesn't really matter because we are all human beings.

**Q.5** As a customer how does your interaction with the waiting staff influence your service experience?

**Interviewee:** I try to interact with them very well, I will also make a effort to know the waiting staff names especially if they have a name badge and I will always address them by their names. And normally I have good conversation with them, I find in fine dining restaurants the waiting staff go out of their way to keep you entertained.

**Interviewer probe:** *And would you say that add to your experience?*

**Interviewee:** Yes, it would in some way, but it would change my approach to a criticism if I had any. I would be a bit nicer in my delivery due to how the waiting staff behaved towards me.

**Q.6 Tell me about your expectation from the waiting staff, in terms of their behaviour, interaction with the other customers and food knowledge at fine dining restaurants?**

**Interviewee:** Yes, I would expect them to have knowledge. Especially if it is a French restaurant and I ask what an ingredient is, I expect the waiting staff to know. If they didn't know I wouldn't like that. I also don't like waiting, so when I placed my order I don't like setting there not knowing what is going on, I expect good service that way for the waiting staff to up date me on how long my food would take especially if there will be any delays.

**Interviewer probe:** *how about food knowledge, do you expect them to know the ingredients on the menu.*

**Interviewee:** if I ask the question, can you tell me what this is, or have you tasted it before, what does it taste like. So, I've asked questions like that many times, and I would expect them to know.

**Interviewer probe:** *and what if they don't, what impact that would have?*

**Interviewee:** I would be disappointed, but it wouldn't put me off going back to that place, I just wouldn't think too much of that waiter because I know for a fact that in the same place another waiter would know.

**Q.7 Explain to me how you consider your value expectation is being fulfilled when you dine at fine dining restaurants?**

**Interviewee:** I've never gone to a fine dining restaurant and not feel overall satisfied, even though I may think that monetary wise it's valuable. I've never thought I wasted my time, because I look at it as an experience, even though it cost a lot, but I enjoyed. I enjoy the food even though the portion size is small, and I would recommend it to someone to try at least once, because It is a nice experience as part of life especially as your getting older. It would be something I indulge in all the time, I would always put it down to if it is a special occasion, the reason for that is not a lot of ordinary people can afford to go all the time

## Interview 5

### Theme: Food Consumption & Fine Dining

#### Q.1 Tell me what you think about fine dining restaurants?

**Interviewee:** my thought on fine dining restaurant is you go there presuming you're going to get nice food, nice service and nice ambiance.

#### Interviewer probe: do you often think when you go there that you get all that?

**Interviewee:** not all the time, sometimes it's a perception that you expect that, but you don't get it.

#### Interviewer probe: what do you think is the cause for it not to live up to the perception?

**Interviewee:** Most of the time I think its about how your treated by the waiting staffs, their behaviour and their attitude. A mean don't get me wrong some of them are very nice and helpful but some of the times some of them see it as just another job and their attitude reflect that, and as a consumer you can see that. I guess the important thing here, for me is that even though it is fine dining, when things happen like this you see that there is some normalcy there that it's not just all sophisticated

#### Q.2 What do you think about the consumption of luxury food at fine dining restaurant?

**Interviewee:** personally, fine dining to me it's a presentation, because at the end of the day food is food, its how it is put in front of you. Because you can good a nice pie but when you cut it and decorate the plate and you think that looks nice, but when you taste it it's horrible. Not because it looks nice, doesn't mean it will taste nice

#### Q.3 In that case, why would you choose to eat at a fine dining restaurant, instead of a normal restaurant?

**Interviewee:** I would choose to go to a fine dining restaurant because I've been told its nice there, but I wouldn't just decide to go to a fine dining restaurant for the sake of it. If I am told that the food is nice, the ambiance is good, the service is good, and I must try it, then yes, I would I would go. So, it would be because of word of mouth, why I would choose to go to a fine dining restaurant not because its fine dining. If there was another restaurant down the road that also had nice food and good service and wasn't fine dining, I would rather go there instead.

#### Q.3 Tell me how important is the food itself in your choice of dining at a fine dining restaurant?

**Interviewee:** the quality of the food is important, the fact that it look pretty doesn't sell it for me. It is about the taste and the quality, so I don't believe that people eat with their eyes, the food need to taste good. so even if I am eating and I am full because it tastes nice, I must finish it.

Q.4 Fine dining restaurant are known to have high standards, with that come high prices. Your potentially paying high prices for food – how do that makes you feel?

**Interviewee:** I don't think I am just paying just for the food. Because the food at a fine dining restaurant, may not be as nice as the food from the restaurant down the road. But the prices maybe higher. So, what I am really paying for is the ambiance, the bigger premises and its nicer and how they decorate the plate.

**Interviewer probe:** so, do you think the prices are justified?

**Interviewee:** I don't think the prices are justified, but they have made an investment and they need to make their money back. So, for me is just business at the end of the day.

### **Theme: Experience Marketing**

Q.1 How would you describe your overall experience at a fine dining restaurant?

**Interviewee:** the feeling mostly when I go, they tend to make you feel special from the moment you enter, they take your coat, they pull out your seat. So yes, usually when I go they treat me in a way that I feel special and important.

Q.2 How does the environment and other customers in the restaurant contribute to your overall experience?

**Interviewee:** Generally I don't pay attention to other customer and how they are being treated and if I feel that other customers are getting treated better than me and I am made to feel that I am not as important that would ruin my experience in a way, but If that happens I can becoming vocal and I would express that I am not happy. In saying that, on one occasion that has happened, and I actually got up and walked out of the restaurant, because I felt like I was being ignored, because I arrived before another table and they were getting seen to before me and I didn't understand why, they took long to come to my table and I just got frustrated and walked out. As I was walking out, they tried to apologies but for me the damage had already been done.

**Interviewer probe:** how about the environment, have you been to a fine dining restaurant and the environment hasn't been up to standards?

**Interviewee:** yes, on one occasion that did happen to me, and that did affect how I showed my appreciation because I didn't leave any tips, and usually I show my appreciation through that, but not on this occasion.

Q.3 Once you've dined at a fine dining restaurant and had a good experience, does that encourage you to continue dining at that restaurant?

**Interviewee:** I like to try different ones, especially if I am treating myself I would think ok I've been to this one, lets try something new. After trying it and I don't like it, at least I know then for next to not go back there.

**Interviewer probe:** In terms of special occasions, would you stick to the ones you know or try something new?

**Interviewee:** oh no if I am organising something like a celebration, I would stick to the one I know to be good. but if it is just for myself and I am thinking of treating myself then yes, I would try something different.

**Q.4** How do you go about choosing a fine dining restaurant, what avenues do you research? If any.

**Interviewee:** I go more by word of mouth, that's because of my family connections, they tend to go to a lot of these high places. They may say I've been to this place and its really nice and then I would try it, and if I found somewhere that I may want to go and they may say we went there last week and its not very good then I won't bother trying it.

**Interviewer probe:** so, taking that, what if someone said to you this place we went to was nice and you went, and you didn't have that similar experience. How would that make you feel?

**Interviewee:** I don't think I have experience that as such, but once someone took me to a restaurant and she said previously it wasn't very good, but we were in the area, so we went. And it turned out it was good on that day, so I guess it depends on who was on duty then on that day, your first impression always counts as well. So even though we went and had a good time second time round, the first impression of it still weighted a lot.

**Q.5** What other attributes do you think is significant to a fine dining restaurant experience?

**Interviewee:** for me its about how your treated. If you treat me well and make me feel welcome, then I am happy. Its not about the décor for me, also having space and being able to move around well. So, for me the food plays a role, but its mostly about how I've been treated and having space.

### **Theme: Service Experience**

**Q.1** Tell me how important is the standard of service to your experience in a fine dining restaurant, and how does it benefit your experience?

**Interviewee:** I think in general the service is very good.

**Interviewer probe:** and how does having a good service benefit your experience?

**Interviewee:** I think its about how I have been treated as a person, it not about the food – because food is food. I am not a lover of food, I eat because I am supposed to it.



Q.2 How does the physical environment of the restaurant influence your service experience?

**Interviewee:** there is one restaurant that we go to in Covent Garden, its owned by one of those big chefs. There is nothing grand about it, but it is always nice to go in there. The music they play, its very relaxed its not over the top. I hate when I go into restaurants and the atmosphere is over the top. I am more attracted to those places, fine dining yes but done in a settle way.

Q.3 What role do you play as a consumer in creating your own experience with the service provider?

**Interviewee:** for me if I've gone somewhere and the food is good, I would send compliment to the chef. If it is a positive I would say it, but if it was a negative I wouldn't say anything. I find it comfortable commenting on the food but not the service.

Q.4 Tell me about the difference it makes to your experience as a customer, to have the power to collaborate with the service provider in creating your own experience in a fine dining restaurant?

**Interviewee:** I think it is a good thing, especially when you have the online reviews option. I have a friend she would go online and do the research before we go there, and she is also good at writing reviews after she's being there. She tends to put the good stuff rather than the bad stuff, for me I think people are more interested in reading the bad stuff.

Q.5 As a customer how does your interaction with the waiting staff influence your service experience?

**Interviewee:** its big for me, because I am a people's person. If the waiter is very friendly and we can have a conversation I like that. I don't like the ones who are very serious, I like to have a laugh with the waiting staff, I like to feel like I am not just a paying customer I am still a person. And I tend to go for that more even if the food isn't all that good, but because the service was nice, so I can go back there because of the service.

Q.6 Tell me about your expectation from the waiting staff, in terms of their behaviour, interaction with the customer and food knowledge at fine dining restaurants?

**Interviewee:** when I go to fine dining restaurant, I like when they talk to you as a person instead of a customer. So, they may pass a comment about what your wearing, I like that. Even if I ask a question and they may not know the answer, and they take their time to go a find out I like. Or if I ask about a dish on the menu and if they haven't tried it and they are honest about it any suggest something else that they think I may like, I also appreciate that.

**Interviewer probe:** do you expect them to have a lot of food knowledge, especially what wines goes with what, where the ingredients come from etc..?

**Interviewee:** No, I don't, because I know what I want and what I like. So, if I am going to have red meat, I'll have it with white wine, because that's what I like because I am not a red wine person. I don't want to be told what I should be having.

*Q.7 Explain to me how you consider your value expectation is being fulfilled when you dine at fine dining restaurant?*

**Interviewee:** I would say it's about how I felt about the place, sometimes if for example I was taken out and I know how much was spent and it's a lot. I would think it's good, but it wasn't worth that much and I wouldn't go back there. So, for me it's about value for money, the ambiance and the way you've been treated, the food may not necessarily be good. but the service is good, and the ambiance is good, and I've been treated well so I am happy.

## Interviewee 7

### Theme: Food Consumption & Fining Dining

#### Q.1 Tell me what you think about fine dining restaurants?

**Interviewee:** I think that fining restaurants have unique cuisine, usually come with smaller portions in food and sometimes they are very rare. I also think that the calibre of people that attend make it fine dining.

#### Interviewer probe: what do you mean by rare?

**Interviewee:** I mean in terms of the type of food, certain restaurants can't sell certain food due to certain laws, for example raw fish in sushi bar have the right to sell this. Where as a fast food restaurant like McDonalds can't sell raw fish.

#### Q.2 What do you think about the consumption of luxury food at fine dining restaurants?

**Interviewee:** I love the idea of consuming luxury food at fine dining restaurants, now it not something I can consume due to affordability, as I would imagine going to fine dining restaurant would cost me £300 which I can't budget for. But in future I can see myself eating at fine dining restaurants every day, especially if I don't want to cook in my house. Because I don't think there is anything wrong with consuming this kind of food, it's totally ethical, you could meet different kind of people and if you have the money then why not.

#### Q.3 Why would you choose to eat at a fine dining restaurant instead of a normal restaurant?

**Interviewee:** one reason why I would choose to eat at a fine dining restaurant is due to the calibre of people you tend to meet there. For example, if you were to go to McDonalds or other normal restaurants on the high street, the people you meet there wouldn't be the same. Another reason is personal space, I think in fine dining restaurants you have more privacy and there is a certain ethicist that goes with it. Also, it's a lot to do with the lifestyle that goes with being able to afford eating at a fine dining restaurant. The service also plays a huge factor, I know when I go to a fine dining restaurant the standards of service would be exceptional, in comparison to that of a normal restaurant.

#### Q.4 How important is the food itself in your choice of dining at a fine dining restaurant?

**Interviewee:** Personally, at this age I am, I wouldn't say the food plays that major of a role. For me its more about the ambiance, the environment and the atmosphere and the service – so the overall experience, just as a long as the food taste good then I am happy.

Q.5 Fine dining restaurants are known to have high standards, with that comes high prices. Your potentially paying high prices for food – how do that makes you feel?

Interviewee: I wouldn't agree that your purely paying high prices just for food. I think with some fining dining restaurant, they may have a chef that is a specialist for that type of food, so I would imagine it would be difficult to find a chef who is a specialist for a certain type of meat, so you must pay for that service and it would be expensive. Knowing this would make me feel great and enjoy the experience more because I know I am getting top service and food from a specialist. And because you know it is from a specialist it would taste and look as it is supposed to be, therefore I think it is worth. Think about it in normal working environment when you have a regular person doing a job they can do a good enough job, but when you get a specialist in you know the quality of work would be better because they are coming with more knowledge on how to get the job done.

Interviewer probe: do you think the location and ingredients have any influence on prices being charged?

Interviewee: yes, I think you need to take the location into consideration, if you go to Mayfair there's a lot of fancy restaurants there already, so you know that prices will be high and the type of people in that area influence the prices too. On the other hand, you can have a restaurant located in a not so luxurious part of London, but they will still charge high prices and people will still be willing to pay it because it is unique.

As for the ingredients I think it varies because you can get any ingredient for your local supermarket, unless it is a rare fruit you can only get in a forest. As for the meat, yes, I understand why you would pay more, because of how it is being prepared and how it's being breed because you can tell difference of the quality of the meat.

### **Theme: Experience Marketing**

Q.1 How would you describe your overall experience at a fine dining restaurant?

Interviewee: my first visit at a fine dining restaurant, I was uncomfortable, but I guess it was because I wasn't used to being in a place like that. The food was great, but in terms of my overall experience I think it could have been better.

Q.2 How does the environment and other customers in the restaurant contribute to your overall experience?

Interviewee: sometimes the other customers can cause the feeling of being uncomfortable, especially I think if you're of a colour some customers may find it odd that your there. Also, if the

person is not dress appropriately for the occasion other diners may stare at them and make them feel like you don't belong

**Interviewer probe: so do you think to go to a fine dining restaurant that you have to be of a certain status/calibre**

**Interviewee:** No not necessarily because you can't tell someone's wealth based on their appearance. However, you do have to look a certain way i.e. your appearance because the service provider wouldn't want to have someone dressed like a homeless person in their fine dining restaurant, I don't think it would be good for business.

**Q.3 Once you've dined at a fine dining restaurant and had a good experience, does that encourage you to continue dining at that restaurant?**

**Interviewee:** If I am being honest no not at this stage, because I can't afford to do so as often. However, when I get the chance and I can, it would be a regular thing for me and I would try different ones, and I wouldn't go back to the last one I went to, as I felt the overall experience could be better

**Q.4 How do you go about choosing a fine dining restaurant, what avenues do you research? If any.**

**Interviewee:** I would use the Michelin book and the apps, the often post information of 5-star restaurants. I would also use word of mouth, more so than reviews because everyone taste is different. When I go by word of mouth it is from someone I know, and we most likely have similar taste. If though we may have the similar taste, I would still go there expecting to create my own experience.

**Q.5 What attributes do you think is significant to a fine dining restaurant experience?**

**Interviewee:** for me the ambiance such as the music, level of noise, lightening and the right temperature is the most important think, especially if it makes you feel good and great a memory. That memory would make you want to go back again. A lot of fine dining restaurant can be a bit over the top with the décor, and far too modern. I think it's nice when you go to a fine dining place that has something that is very unique to them, and I think décor usually stays in peoples mind.

**Interviewer probe: what about the food, service and waiting staff, do you think either of these are significant?**

**Interviewee:** I would say ambiance is first, then the food, quality of service, and waiting staff

### **Theme: Service Experience**

**Q.1 Tell me how important is the standard of service to your experience in a fine dining restaurant, and how does it benefit your experience?**

**Interviewee:** it was great when you go to a fine dining restaurant and all your utensils and glasses are clean. When I went I had to send my glass back to get a clean one, and it did dampen my experience, because your paying really high prices so you expect good service.

*Q.2 How does the physical environment of the restaurant influence your service experience?*

**Interviewee:** well like I said before, the décor, music and lightening are all very important to my experience, it adds to my memory and would make me want to go back their and recreate the memory or create better memory. So for me the physical environment plays more of a Hugh role for me rather than anything else, especially the food, because the food comes in and it goes out, but when I think about the restaurant what comes to mind Is how you felt when you was there and the environment, not the food.

*Q.3 What role do you play as a consumer in creating your own experience with the service provider?*

**Interviewee:** personally, when I go to a restaurant I don't tend to interact much with the service provider unless I am asked a direct question. So, for example, if something was wrong with my food or the service, I wouldn't disclose that information unless I am asked. I am happy to give my feedback to service provider, but how I look at it is, this feedback or us working together is costing me a lot of money, so I'm giving you all this information and I don't get nothing in return. Next time when I come back things may have changed; the prices may have increased. So, you've benefit of my suggestions, now I must pay more.

So, what I think would work best, is if they took surveys from people and for the ones that took part in return they get discounted rate for a year.

So, in terms of myself and the service provider working together, I think it is 80/20, 80 to the service provider and 20 to the consumer. Purely because as a consumer I know why I am coming to your restaurant, it could be for a meeting etc... so how I present myself shouldn't affect how I am being treated.

*Q.4 Tell me about the difference it makes to your experience as a customer, to have the power to collaborate with the service provider in creating your own experience in a fine dining restaurant?*

**Interviewee:** I think it would be a disaster because you have a vast a mount of customer base to go through and you can't please everyone. So, what if the information I provide to you suits one demographic, what about the others the restaurant will lose out. So, I don't think it would work, what I think that would work is the restaurant investing in the service

*Q.5 As a customer how does your interaction with the waiting staff influence your service experience?*

**Interviewee:** If they smile, that makes a big difference. However, if they are a bit over attentive meaning they are always coming over and asking questions and repeating the same thing. That ruins my experience

*Q.6 Tell me about your expectation from the waiting staff, in terms of their behaviour, interaction with the customer and food knowledge at fine dining restaurant?*

**Interviewee:** From the last time I went to a fine dining restaurant, I didn't have much of a conversation with the waiting staff around my food, because like I said I felt uncomfortable. So, I went with what I knew visually, me and the waiting staff didn't have any kind of interaction about the food, he didn't suggest any recommendations which I think was fair on his part because a good waiter should be able to judge from the customer body language whether they are opening and willing to be chatty.

In terms of my waiting staff behaviour, I just want them to have a smile. I am not looking for them to talk that much because I don't really like that. But just as long as they smile, and they are friendly and less formal, that's it I think that how it should be.

In terms of food knowledge, I expect to know about how the food is cooked, where the wines from, where the ingredients are from if asked. If they don't know that's fine, we get someone else that does.

*Q.7 Explain to me how you determined that your value expectation is being fulfilled when you dined at a fine dining restaurant?*

**Interviewee:** so, for me it goes back to it being the ambiance, the quality of food and service, and the waiting staff.

## Appendix 2 – Research Ethics Application

### School Research Ethics Committee Application Front Sheet

Field Name	Details to complete
Student Number(s)	1541564
Programme	MSc International Business Management
Module Code	MK7227
Project Title	Service Experience in the context of Fine Dining Restaurant
Project Supervisor/Tutor	Aidan Kelly
Please confirm if your supervisor or tutor has signed your SREC application form either digitally or electronically (Yes or No, please note that unsigned forms will be rejected)	
What form of primary data collection will your project involve?	Long Interviews
SREC Reviewer Decision ( <b>Not completed by the student</b> )	
SREC Reviewer Comments and Amendments Required for Resubmission (If “Minor” or “Major”, <b>Not completed by the student</b> )	



## **ROYAL DOCKS SCHOOL OF BUSINESS & LAW**

### **Ethical Application for Undergraduate Projects and Postgraduate Dissertations**

- **Submission process:**

- All applications should be submitted online through the Moodle site – **School Research Ethics Committee** (if you find that you do not have access to this site immediately contact either Dr Aidan Kelly (Business Chair) at: [a.j.kelly@uel.ac.uk](mailto:a.j.kelly@uel.ac.uk) or Dr Aaron Winter (Law & Criminology Chair) at: [a.winter@uel.ac.uk](mailto:a.winter@uel.ac.uk))
- All applications should be uploaded to the SREC Moodle Site whether they have been given prior approval by your supervisor or need further approval by SREC.
- All applications for ethical approval must include the following:
  - A completed **Application Form**. This form includes five sections (A-E). Please ensure that you answer all relevant questions and include the relevant paperwork as requested.
  - **Participant Information Letter** (Appendix 1)
  - Relevant **Consent/Assent Forms** where appropriate (Appendix 2)
  - Where relevant, a **Letter of Permission** from the **Host Organisation/Business** (this must be signed and/or in an email with a verifiable email address). In the case of research in the NHS you must first have clearance for the NHS research and development office: <https://www.healthandcarereseach.gov.wales/nhs-research-and-development-offices/>
  - If your project involves overseas travel it is also subject to ‘**Overseas Travel Approval**’ and must be approved by the **Head of Department or Head of School**. The student “Request to Travel” form is available on Moodle.
- Further details on UEL Research Ethics procedures can be found at: <http://www.uel.ac.uk/qa/research/>

**NB:** Please ensure that you have read the **School Research Ethics Guidelines 2017-18** notes before completing the form.

## Application for School Research Ethics Approval

Before completing this form, applicants should read the School Research Ethics Committee Guidance Notes 2017-18. Sections A to F of this form should not exceed 3 pages using 11pt font size.

### 1. Applicant Details

**Student Name: Shantal Wilson**

**Student ID No: 1541564**

**Title of Course: MSc International Business Management**

**Dissertation/Project Module Code:**

**Supervisor: Aidan Kelly**

**UEL Email address: u1541564@uel.ac.uk**

### 2. Project Details

**Dissertation/Project Title: Service Experience in the context of Fine Dining Restaurants**

**Duration of Dissertation/Project:**

**From: January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2018**

**to: August 29<sup>th</sup> 2018**

**Project Rationale:** (Please provide a brief description of the project, including aims and objectives, rationale, and potential contribution to knowledge) **(Max. 200 words)**

The initial objective of the project is to first understand consumer behaviour towards food consumption in Fine Dining restaurants, and to explore the service experience they encounter when dining at Fine Dining restaurants. From my research into fine dining, the restaurant literature tend to focus on consumer choice, consumer attitude towards restaurant brands or customer satisfaction and service quality, but in terms of the customer perception of the overall service experience the results provided were limited, as well as the determined factors that would encourage customers to revisit the same fine dining restaurant. However, there have been some attempts, to assist restaurant marketers in understanding customer service experience which included variables such as physical environment and atmospherics. From my understanding of the current literature, this provided the rationale, to research in depth into the subject area of service experience of customers who dines at fine dining restaurant. To facilitate the research the following objectives are explored: To study the impact of how a customer's first-time experience influence a repeat visit, and how the first time experience differs from the returning customer's experience, To examine the extent to which service encounters influence word-of-mouth recommendations and To explore the extent to which customer's can co-create of their service experience. The potential contribution of this project is to add to the service experience and fine dining literature, by understanding what aspect of the service experience influence consumer perception and encourages repeat customer. This understanding could be beneficial to restaurant managers seeking to understand their customers more and provide a better service.

**Methodology:** (Please provide a brief outline of the methodology and research methods to be used, attaching any interview schedules or questionnaires that are to be used. This must include a description of the expected sample/main participants and how this sample will be identified/participants will be selected. Also, you should include information about the precise location where the work will be carried out.) **(Max 150 words)**

The chosen methodology that will be used for this project is long interviews. The sample size will be 8 participants. The selection process of the participants are, individuals who are working professionals between the age of 26 – 45, who have dined at fine dining restaurants in past and are regular diners at fine dining restaurants. The precise location where the interviews will be carried out will be in a quiet room either at the participants place of work, university grounds, or at the participant's home.

**3. Ethical Considerations:** *(Please ensure you complete sections 3.1 to 3.8 and respond to each section, incomplete applications will be rejected)*

**3.1 Informed Consent and Anonymity** (Please provide details of how informed consent is to be obtained and anonymity of participants is to be protected). The consent process will be documented in writing with the consent form. A copy of the consent form will be provided to the participant before the interview takes place. Once the participant reads and sign the consent form, the participant will also receive a signed copy. To protect the participant anonymity during the recording of the interview, the participant's names will not be disclosed on the recording. Instead numbers will be used to for the researcher to identify the participants. If a participant

**3.2 Participant Confidentiality** (In order to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998, please provide details of how you will ensure the confidentiality of participants' data, particularly where audio and/or visual data is to be collected)

By using the participant letter and informed consent process to brief the participants about the measures in place in the study to ensure confidentiality about their data: such as who will have access to the data, how the results will be reported and how the results will be used. All the participants data that is stored on the audio recording device, only the researcher will have access to and when not in use, the device will be stored in a secured and locked place.

**3.3 Will the dissertation involve minors (participants under 18 years old) or other ethically-sensitive methods/issues.**

**NO**

If carrying out research with minors (although it is strongly advised that you do not) you must obtain parental consent and, where necessary, attach a DRB certificate (previously CRB). For further guidance please see: <https://www.gov.uk/disclosure-barring-service-check/arranging-checks-as-an-employer>).

**3.4 Participant Withdrawal/De-Briefing protocol.** Please describe briefly the protocol for participant withdrawal from the research and de-briefing of participants once the research is completed. (will participants/participant organisations be given an opportunity to ask questions at the end of the interview and/or request a copy of the final report?)

Participants will be provided with an inform consent detailing what the project entails and have the opportunity to be withdrawn from the project at anytime during the interview process. Once the interview is completed, the participants will be able to ask questions off the record and provide a copy of the final report

**3.5 Researcher/Participant Welfare.** Will either the researcher or participants themselves be exposed to any risks or distress as a consequence of this research?

**NO**

If YES please provide details and complete a risk assessment form (see Appendices) (<http://www.uel.ac.uk/hrservices/hs/generalriskassessments/>)

**3.6 Will any inducement (eg. monetary or ‘in kind’) be offered to participants?**

**NO**

If YES please provide details.

**3.7 Will the research involve access to ‘commercially-sensitive’ or ‘restricted’ databases? NO**

(You must ensure that you have the consent of any business/organisation, to access and publish excerpts from any records or information that is not normally available to the public)

If YES please provide details.

**3.8 Will the research involve travel away from UEL/overseas travel**

**NO**

If YES you will need to ensure that you have completed the Student “Permission to Travel” form available on Moodle. This form must be approved signed by the Head of School or Head of Department at the Royal Docks School of Business and Law. You may also be required to complete a separate risk assessment form, which is available here: <https://uelac.sharepoint.com/staff/pages/risk-assessment.aspx>

**4. Data security and disposal (Please ensure you tick all relevant boxes, incomplete applications will be rejected)**

In order that the research is conducted in an ethical manner and that all information remain confidential in line with the 1998 Data Protection Act, It is vital that participant confidentiality is respected and ensured. Assurances must be given to participants that personal details will securely stored and remain anonymous.

Please confirm by ticking the relevant boxes:-

✓☐ Research data, codes and all identifying information to be kept in separate locked filing cabinets.

✓☐ Access to computer files to be restricted to the research team (normally researcher and supervisor) and accessible by password only.

✓☐ There will be no transfer of data to or via a third party.

✓☐ All electronic data will undergo secure disposal.

✓☐ All hardcopy data will undergo secure disposal.

✓☐ In line with the Data Protection Act (1998), **personal data** shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes for which it was collected. In the case of UG and PG dissertations this is usually **1-2 years**, unless otherwise specified.

Please state how long **personal data** will be retained for: 6 months.

##### **5. Other Documentation check-list:**

**Please include the following documents with your application** – please tick ☐.

Participant invitation/information letter ✓☐

Relevant Consent form(s) ✓☐

Assent Forms ☐

Where applicable:

Permission letter from host business/organisation ☐

Overseas Travel/Fieldwork Risk Assessment ☐

Interview schedule/Copy of questionnaire(s) ☐

Is ethical clearance required from any other ethics committee? **YES / NO**

If YES, please state the name of the relevant committee(s)/organisation.

##### *Declaration:*

- I have read the School guidance notes about application for ethical approval. I am aware of my responsibilities and agree to abide by them.
- I agree to inform my project supervisor and the School Research Ethics Committee of any changes to the proposed programme.
- I undertake to abide by accepted ethical principles and appropriate code(s) of practice in carrying out this research.

**Student Name and ID**  
**No: Shantal Wilson 1541564**

**Student Signature:** *S. Wilson*

**Date:** 04/06/18

**Supervisor/Tutor**  
**Name:** .....

**Signature:** .....

**Date:** .....

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

**Please complete/delete forms as necessary. Please submit as one document with the application.**

**Appendix I**      Participant(s) Information Letter

**Appendix II**      Consent Forms

- Consent form
- Parental Consent form (please delete unless participants are under the age of 18)
- Assent Form (please delete unless participants are under the age of 18)

## **APPENDIX I**



**(This is a Template Only – You must complete the participant information form based on your own research study)**

### **Participant Information Letter**

**Programme of Study: MSc International Business Management**

**Dissertation Title: Consumer Service Experience in Fine Dining Restaurant Context**

Dear Participant,

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

- Investigate consumer service experience in fine dining restaurants
- The study aims to understand customer perception of fine dining restaurants and what creates the service experience
- The characteristics of the participants are working professionals, male & female, between the age of 26 - 45

#### **What will I have to do if I take part?**

- All participants will have answer a series of questions based on the purpose of the study
- The long interview will be audio recorded and take place with myself, and one participant at a time
- Each interview will approximately 30-40 mins (depending on the participants response to the question)
- The interview will either take place at the participants place of work, the university grounds or at the participants home.

#### **What are the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?**

- In terms of disadvantages, participants maybe become nervous at first undergoing a interview as this may not be something they are used to doing. However due to the choices of location being familiar to the participants, this should reduce any discomfort they may feel.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. If you do decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If you do not take part or withdraw from the study later, it will not disadvantage you.

#### **What will happen to the information?**

Your participation in this study and all information collected will be kept strictly confidential in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). Unless otherwise indicated, all personal information and data collected will be coded and anonymised so that you cannot be recognised from it. The collected data will be securely stored on a password protected computer and safely disposed of once the dissertation has been completed.



The results of this study will be reported as part of my degree programme and may be further disseminated for scientific benefit. The results will be available to you on request.

**Who should I contact for further information or if I have any problems/concerns?**

For further information, you can contact myself - Shantal Wilson via my e-mail: [u1541564@uel.ac.uk](mailto:u1541564@uel.ac.uk) or my Supervisor, Aidan Kelly on [a.j.kelly@uel.ac.uk](mailto:a.j.kelly@uel.ac.uk)

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the programme in which you are being asked to participate, please contact:

**Catherine Fieulleateau**, Ethics Integrity Manager, Graduate School, EB 1.43  
University of East London, Docklands Campus, London E16 2RD  
(Telephone: 020 8223 6683, Email: [researchethics@uel.ac.uk](mailto:researchethics@uel.ac.uk))

## APPENDIX II

### CONSENT FORM

(To be used if participants are 18 or over)



**Programme of Study: MSc International Business Management**

**Dissertation Title: Consumer Service Experience in Fine Dining Restaurant Context**

**Supervisor: Aidan Kelly**

- i. I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be treated in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998'. *(Please tick in the case of questionnaires/interviews involving the collection of data falling under the Data Protection Act 1998 definition of 'sensitive personal data')*
- ii. *(Please tick where **anonymous questionnaires** are used)* By taking part in this study I fully understand that 'Submission of a partially completed or fully completed questionnaire implies consent to participate in the study and that I will be unable to withdraw my data'. ☐
- iii. I confirm that I have read the participant information sheet for the above study and I have been given a copy to keep. ☐
- iv. I understand what the study is about and I have had the opportunity to discuss with the researcher and ask questions about the study. ☐
- v. The procedures involved have been explained to me. I know what my part will be in the study and how the study may affect me. ☐
- vi. I understand that my involvement in this study and particular data from this research will remain strictly confidential. Only researchers involved in the study will have access to the data. ☐
- vii. It has been explained to me what will happen to the data once the study has been completed. ☐
- viii. I understand that I have the right to stop taking part in the study at any time without reason or prejudice to myself. ☐
- ix. I know who to contact if I have any questions/concerns about my participation and I have their contact details. ☐
- x. I fully and freely consent to participate in the study. ☐

**Participant's name: Shantal Wilson**

**Participant's signature: .....**

**Please tick to agree**

**Date: .....**

**Researcher's Name: .....**

**Researcher's Signature: .....**

**Date: .....**