



# **Influence of Fine-Dining Restaurant Service Quality and Legitimacy on Revisit Intentions in Tshwane City, South Africa**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of the study was to examine the influence of service quality dimensions and legitimacy on consumer revisit intentions in Tshwane city's fine-dining restaurants. The study was grounded in the DINESERV and Institutional theoretical frameworks. The study adopted a quantitative descriptive cross-sectional inquiry that surveyed participants once. Convenience sampling was employed via online platforms to distribute questionnaires to two hundred and twenty participants. Of these, one hundred and eighty four were suitable for analysis. The questionnaire required participants to choose their responses based on a non-comparative five-point Likert scale. Descriptive and inferential statistics were utilised as modes of statistical analyses. Structural equation modelling using SmartPLS4 was adopted. The results revealed that empathy, employee service quality, food quality, hygienic practices and safety assurance had insignificant positive influence on both pragmatic and social legitimacy. However, although physical environmental quality insignificantly influenced pragmatic legitimacy, its influence on social legitimacy was positively significant and more interestingly, responsiveness and reliability had significant positive influence on both forms of legitimacy. Therefore, managers and practitioners in the fine-dining restaurant sector should realise that unparalleled service quality does not warrant legitimacy and that other factors other than legitimacy are important drivers of consumer revisit intentions.

**Keywords:** Service Quality, Fine-Dining Restaurant, Legitimacy, Revisit Intentions

**JEL Classifications:** M31, L83, D12, L15

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Fine-dining restaurants (FDRs) are a category of the upmarket restaurants that provide classy and unique dining experiences. These upscale restaurants specialise in high-quality food, excellent service, and exceptional ambiance, which seek to create an indelible and exhilarating dining experience for guests. Rozekhi et al. (2016, p. 46) say that "fine-dining restaurants offer excellent food with emphasis on visual presentation, outstanding taste of food and the quality of ingredients used for preparation, also special culinary skills required during food preparation such as carving in front of consumer and table-side preparation such as flambé." These types of restaurants call for staff and diners to adhere to specific attire that align with the dining protocols and

service procedures. The services offered are seamless, exceptional, precise, and perfect. The decor is extremely elegant, unique, and well designed, with a tantalising atmosphere.

The South African restaurant sector is characterised with high competition and as such, fine-dining restaurateurs have to strive to achieve sustainable competitive advantage for them to remain in business (Petzer and Mackey, 2014). Generally, the changing business landscape has also seen fine-dining restaurants grappling with growing competitive pressure to remain profitable. Competition has driven these restaurants to make desperate attempts to know the needs of their customers better than their business rivals and to also provide service benefits beyond customers' expectations, an aspect which would guarantee

repatronage intention. It is, therefore, imperative for practitioners in the FDR industry to appreciate the usefulness of service quality dimensions as major determinants of organisational legitimacy, and ultimately of repatronage intention. As affirmed by Yang et al. (2020) service quality (SQ) strongly influences organisational legitimacy and repatronage intention. There is high competition, particularly among the fine-dining restaurants. Therefore, to harness customer loyalty and repeat business intentions, focus should be on aligning the organisation's institutional norms, and societal and market expectations (Du and Vieira, 2012; Yang et al., 2020). As provided by the institutional theory, actions of an organisation are regulated by institutional systems such that proper adherence to institutional norms is rewarded by gaining legitimacy (Berthod, 2018; Suchman, 1995) and positive repatronage intentions (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001).

Although numerous studies have been explored to probe the correlation between service quality elements, legitimacy and revisit intentions in the retail sectors (Blanco-Gonzalez et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2020; Handelman and Arnold, 1999), there is no evidence in extant literature of any study based on the expanded DINESERV model and how its dimensions impact organisational legitimacy and revisit intentions in FDRs in Tshwane City. This current study therefore intends to address this dearth in literature, using the modified DINESERV model together with the institutional theory. Grounding the study in the two theories will facilitate the collection of information that is relevant to appreciating the influence of service quality and legitimacy on revisit intentions in Tshwane city's fine-dining restaurants. The study endeavours to assess how the FDRs' service quality performances are perceived by consumers and how these organisations utilise these perceptions to gain legitimacy and promote revisit intentions, which are critical for organisational resilience and profitability. Tshwane being geographically the largest metropolitan city in the country and the third globally, pursuit of this study in that city is uniquely important as the findings will proffer invaluable insights about the relationships between service quality, legitimacy and revisit intentions that can be generalisable across national and global contexts.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Theoretical Framework

This study is rooted in two complementary theoretical foundations namely, the DINESERV model and the Institutional theory. Together, the theories produce a modified service quality model that can best describe the variables of this study in the context of the fine-dining restaurants (FDRs). Integrating the DINESERV model (with particular focus on dimensions like food, physical environment, employee quality and hygiene practices and Berry et al's. (1988) traditional service quality attributes) with the institutional theory framework proffers more insightful understanding regarding how these service elements influence customer satisfaction, which triggers perceived legitimacy (trust, favourable FDR image) and enhances positive behaviours like revisit intention, going beyond just consideration of quality to concerns of repeat patronage in specific settings like FDRs. It connects lower-level service facts (DINESERV) to broader-level

institutional perceptions (legitimacy), justifying the opportunities guaranteed for intended repeat patronage.

### 2.2. The DINESERV Model

The DINESERV is the equivalent of the SERVIQUAL model, commonly applicable to various service organisations. The DINESERV is a familiar concept to the restaurant sector. However, due to its inadequacies in measuring certain attributes unique to the restaurant sector, the DINESERV was improvised (Mtukushe et al., 2024). Kim et al. (2009) revisited the DINESERV and designed another that suited institutions like universities and included dimensions such as food, service quality, convenience, price and atmosphere. While Yang et al. (2020) and Slack et al. (2020) partly adopted the aspects of the extended DINESERV model, their studies did not embrace all the elements, thereby leaving a gap. This current study contextualises the extended DINESERV within the South African FDR market and goes beyond focusing on the traditional service quality elements (Berry et al., 1988) to the extended elements unique to the FDR industry.

### 2.3. Institutional Theory

Handelman and Arnold (1999, p. 34) state that: "the institutional theory focuses on the process by which societal expectations of "proper" behaviour influence the structuring and practices of organisations. As an organisation adopts institutionally defined and legitimated practices, orderly, stable, and socially integrated patterns of activity arise." Thus, organisations become established when they align with values beyond their operational requirements. FDRs, like other organisations, operate within complex environmental systems governed by socio-cultural norms, besides the economic nature of their activities (Yang et al., 2020). Based on institutional theory, "organisations operate as legitimate agents with collective purposes, which encompass technical rationality and social development to social integration and justice" (Meyer and Scott, 1992, p. 01). Legitimation entails the understanding that an organisation's actions agree with the norms values, values and belief systems as dictated by institutional environment (Yang et al., 2020; Suchman, 1995). Legitimacy assumes two forms, viz; pragmatic and social legitimacy. The former depends on individual self-interest and the capacity of the organisation to address the needs. The latter depends on social intrinsic behaviour that shows a positive normative assessment of the organisation and its operations (Suchman, 1995). Despite there being few studies that utilised the institutional theory in restaurant industry (Slack et al., 2020), the retail sector has found through the theory that consumer decisions are influenced by both economic and socio-cultural factors. Accordingly, just like retailers, FDRs need to embrace actions poised at achieving pragmatic and social legitimacy in order to influence revisit intention. Thus, by infusing the perspectives of the DINESERV and institutional theory, the researchers suggest an extended service quality model that can help in understanding how service quality (at a micro-level) influences customers' intentions to revisit fine-dining restaurants, while pragmatic and social legitimacy, expand this model by aligning it with a macro-level, institutional framework for comprehending FDRs' wider opportunities to operate and gain access to resources granted based on societal norms and values.

## 2.4. Service Quality

In the hospitality industry, studies on service quality have been predominant. As devised by Parasuraman et al. (1988), “Service quality is a form of attitude related but not equivalent to satisfaction, and results from the comparison of expectations with perceptions of performance.” Enterprises are believed to create competitive advantages through offering unmatched service quality (Nguyen et al., 2024). In this regard, it is imperative to appreciate customers’ expectations and how customers perceive and evaluate their level of satisfaction after receiving a service (Padlee et al., 2019). Service quality (SQ) explains the variance between what customers anticipate and what they perceive as having received from an organisation (Aftab et al., 2016). Similarly, Zibarzani et al. (2022) posit that service quality defines the disparities between customer expectations and what they obtain. Customers’ quality expectations are attached to a variety of service attributes.

### 2.4.1. Food quality (FQ)

Is the totality of attributes and properties associated with food and may include, but not limited to nutritional content, visual appeal, portion size, cost, variety, texture, consistency, taste, healthiness, freshness and adequate temperature (Norazha et al., 2022; Kamaruddin et al., 2024). Food quality has significant bearing on the consumer’s overall dining experience, and this impacts how individuals perceive quality associated with a particular restaurant (Ha and Jang, 2010). Being the major component of fine-dining restaurant business, the way food is prepared, handled and presented is paramount to consumers’ perceptions of value (Norazha et al., 2022).

### 2.4.2. Employee service quality (ESQ)

Is among the major drivers of FDR legitimacy and revisit intent. In other words, building strong employee-customer interactions produces high quality restaurant service outcomes which warrant repeat purchase intention. From fine-dining restaurant context, “employee service quality implies the level of service provided by restaurant employees, which in turn depends upon the interactions between customers and restaurant employees” (Petzer and Mackay, 2014, p. 4). Customers use these service encounters to appraise the value of the service offering, and to make judgments on the entire restaurant quality (Petzer and Mackay, 2014; Ryu et al., 2012). The actions by employees during service delivery influence customers’ perceptions of service quality positively (Rammile and Van Zyl, 2012; Brown and Lam, 2008).

### 2.4.3. Physical environment quality (PEQ)

Refers to the infrastructural set up in a restaurant meant to expedite provision of products and services. It encompasses artifacts, ambience, spatial layout and décor in a restaurant (Han and Ryu, 2009; Rajput and Gahfoor, 2020). Customers always expect a self-fulfilling dining experience and as such look for a pleasurable restaurant environment. PEQ satisfies and attracts new customers. Consumers use cleanliness, employee attire, décor, quirky and comfortable welcoming, among other factors to evaluate quality. The impact of PEQ on customer behaviours is easily noticeable in businesses like the fine-dining restaurants. Thus, fine-dining restaurateurs should strive to create distinct physical restaurant environments that conjure customer perceptions of legitimacy.

### 2.4.4. Hygiene practices (HP)

Are undoubtedly the most critical tools customers utilise to assess the overall state of sanitation of a restaurant. Norazha et al. (2022, p. 103) maintain that “employee hygiene, food handling, kitchen cleanliness, and restroom cleanliness are also included in measuring the overall restaurant cleanliness.” Hygienic practices not only bear considerable impact on restaurant quality and revisit intention, but they also affect customers’ perceptions of food and employees’ cleanliness (Norazha et al., 2022; Yoo, 2012). The cleanliness of the interior décor, rest rooms and employee appearance has been used to evaluate the hygiene of a restaurant. The FDR industry is intensely competitive and, therefore, calls for higher standards of hygiene. High standards of hygiene help improve customer positive behaviours such as loyalty, and repatronage intentions.

### 2.4.5. Responsiveness (RE)

Refers to “a restaurant’s ability to provide prompt service, meet customers’ needs quickly, and address any requests or concerns in a timely and efficient manner” (Riva, 2025: 80). Mena et al. (2020) state that responsiveness focuses on promptness of staff to customer requests, speed with which they process orders and short waiting and queuing time. Responsiveness defines the FDR employees’ desire or readiness to render services. It entails timeliness of service as well as the comprehension of customer needs (Mena et al., 2020).

### 2.4.6. Empathy (EMP)

In restaurant business describes how employees demonstrate care, concern, and offer personalised customer service. It calls for staff to understand and address individualised customer concerns and doing it beyond the normal protocols as a way of making customers feel gratified and valued. Rauch et al. (2015) state that with empathy staff recognise customer feelings, offer personalised attention and render special care that can be perceived by diners as unique. When customers feel content that their personal needs have been addressed, they become more satisfied and eager to repatronise the restaurant (Riva, 2025). For FDRs empathetic employees make customers feel welcome, appreciated, and honoured, making them more desirous to revisit the same FDR establishment in future.

### 2.4.7. Safety assurance (SA)

Relates to staff competency, their expertise and friendliness, including their capacity to win customer trust and confidence (Riva, 2025). For FDRs it is imperative to have professional, well-trained employees capable of sharing knowledgeable information to customers and demonstrating expertise on menus, and instilling sense of security upon clients. Assurance can be examined by analysing how employees interact with customers, their skills in handling problematic situations, and how they strive to elicit trust from patrons (Awara and Anyadighibe, 2014). Assurance impacts positively on perceptions and positive behavioural consequences like the desire to revisit a restaurant when a customer has been assured of a consistently high-quality service.

### 2.4.8. Reliability (REL)

entails “the restaurant’s ability to consistently deliver accurate, dependable, and high quality service to customers” (Riva, 2025,

p. 79). Reliability measures how able and willing an employee is to execute a service based on the agreement (Braganza, 2024). Employees must be precise and be dependable in meeting their promises (Ngaliman and Suharto, 2019). When a fine-dining restaurant strives to surpass customer expectations, it will be perceived to be reliable and can have better chances of generating repeat patronage intention and positive WOM.

### 2.5. Pragmatic Legitimacy (PL)

PL is also known as exchange legitimacy, due to the tangible benefits the organisation gives to its public. Bitektine (2011) posits that this form of legitimacy embraces the overall benefits an organisation creates for its customers and depends on evaluators' self-interests. Sánchez-del-Río-Vázquez et al. (2025, p. 5) state that pragmatic legitimacy is built around three facets, namely, "direct benefits on the individual, social, and global welfare of the consumer; long-term or indirect benefits on the individual, social, and global welfare of the consumer; and the consumer's belief that the company puts the focus on the consumer's own self-interest." An organisation gains pragmatic legitimacy when it offers products and services that satisfy or delight customers (Anić et al., 2024). When FDRs carry out their operations in a manner that addresses stakeholder interests, stakeholders solidly grant them pragmatic legitimacy (Sánchez-del-Río-Vázquez et al., 2025).

### 2.6. Social Legitimacy (SL)

Based on the ethos of morality organisations are expected to "do the right thing" that promotes a social cause. Social legitimacy is apparent when an organisation and its actions have been appraised as normative and positive by the society. Stakeholders compare societal values and norms and see if the behaviours of the organisation align well and are consistent with societal welfare (Zhang and Borden, 2024). Social legitimacy is evaluated based on four aspects which are "organisational outputs and products, techniques and processes, organisational structures, and leaders' charisma and fit with moral values" (Sánchez-del-Río-Vázquez et al., 2025, p. 6). Thus, Handelman and Arnold (1999) contend that when organisations, even the FDR engage in behaviours that are humane motivated and seek to promote social welfare, they attract social legitimacy.

### 2.7. Revisit Intention (RI)

The fine-dining restaurants (FDRs) operate in business environments which are intensely competitive, with organisations offering undifferentiated products and services which results in customers having more options (Chun and Nyam-Ochir, 2020). Thus, it is crucial for organisations to provide greater value to existing customers and devise strategies aimed at promoting favourable post-purchase behaviours, as well as attracting new business. Revisit intention entails "visitors being willing to revisit the same place, for satisfactory experiences, and suggest the place to friends to develop the loyalty" (Rajput and Gahfoor, 2020, p. 3). Usually, customers develop attitudes towards service providers that emanate from their prior interaction with the service. Such attitudes may be negative or positive. Positive attitudes influence customer intentions to revisit the same service establishment and to recommend the organisation through WOM.

### 2.8. Service Quality and Legitimacy

Extant literature on institutional theory dwelt more on how retailer performance correlated with organisational legitimacy (Kim and Ha, 2020; Yang et al., 2020; Handelman and Arnold, 1999). The performance of an organisation is the yardstick used by constituents to appraise organisational legitimacy (Arnold et al., 1996). Previous research reveals that organisations focussed more on symbolic actions (e.g., good customer care, friendliness of staff) and performative actions (e.g., competitive prices, wider product choices) and these were then used to evaluate legitimacy, particularly in retail business. Similarly, Handelman and Arnold (1999) state that in the retail context customers grant retailers legitimacy after carefully examining their task-oriented and societal-driven actions. While evidence from prior studies indicates that organisations emphasised economic and socially driven goals, this study seeks to expand this theory by amalgamating it with the extended DINESERV model in order to establish how service quality attributes are perceived to influence the legitimacy of the fine-dining restaurants in Tshwane city. Previous literature attests that service quality elicits behavioural, cognitive and emotional responses. In their pivotal examination of service quality, Qin and Prybutok (2009) avow that provision of quality service results in satisfaction and auspicious behavioural intentions such as endorsements, loyalty, positive WOM and repatronage intention. Tuncer et al. (2021) established that in the FDR setting, service quality positively predicted customer satisfaction, with satisfaction and perceived value having predictive positive influence on revisit intentions. While there is apparently no empirical study on the association between service quality and legitimacy in FDR, Yang et al. (2020)'s study in retailing established that service quality variables (i.e., responsiveness hygiene practices, safety assurance, reliability and empathy) were positively correlated to both pragmatic and social legitimacy, with reliability having the greatest causal influence. Therefore, based on this landmark study, this research suggests that customers' appraisal of the FDR's service quality affects the FDR's pragmatic and social legitimacy.

- H<sub>1</sub>: FDR service quality (empathy (H<sub>1a</sub>), employee service quality (H<sub>1b</sub>), food quality (H<sub>1c</sub>) hygienic practices (H<sub>1d</sub>), physical environment quality (H<sub>1e</sub>), responsiveness (H<sub>1f</sub>), empathy, reliability (H<sub>1g</sub>), safety assurance (H<sub>1h</sub>), positively influences FDR's pragmatic legitimacy
- H<sub>2</sub>: FDR service quality (empathy (H<sub>2a</sub>), employee service quality (H<sub>2b</sub>), food quality (H<sub>2c</sub>) hygienic practices (H<sub>2d</sub>), physical environment quality (H<sub>2e</sub>), responsiveness (H<sub>2f</sub>), reliability (H<sub>2g</sub>) safety assurance (H<sub>2h</sub>), positively influences FDR's social legitimacy.

### 2.9. Legitimacy and Revisit Intention

Past research confirm that legitimacy has considerable effects on shaping consumer attitudes and behaviours towards evaluating organisations and products or services (Yang et al., 2020; Brown and Dacin, 1997). Several studies rooted in institutional theory affirm numerous kinds of support that organisations enjoy arising due to them having been accorded legitimacy (Yang et al., 2020; Suchman, 1995). Consumers who perceive an organisation as being compliant with institutional norms, grant it legitimacy and vow to rally behind its actions within the society (Blanco-Gonzalez et al., 2023; Valor et al., 2021). Loyal customers do not seek

substitutes, whenever their need arises; they simply turn to that organisation (Stangl et al., 2017). In this regard, the organisation enjoys a plethora of benefits such as intention to cement long-term bonds, Positive WOM and improved corporate reputation (Miotto et al., 2020). According to Blanco-Gonzalez et al. (2023: 06), (“legitimacy impacted revisit intention positively and resolved that when consumers perceive their organisations as legitimate, they are more attracted to returning to the establishment, thanks to the positive impact on society.” Similarly, Yang et al. (2020) confirm pragmatic and social legitimacy as key determinants of revisit intention. Thus, backed by previous literature, this study postulates that legitimacy has considerable influence on FDR revisit intentions.

- H<sub>3a</sub>: Pragmatic legitimacy of FDRs positively influences revisit intention
- H<sub>3b</sub>: Social legitimacy of FDRs positively influences revisit intention.

The interrelationships among the study’s variables are represented in the conceptual framework (Figure 1).

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research Design and Sample

A quantitative descriptive cross-sectional inquiry aimed at gathering data from the targeted population was applied (Kamaruddin et al., 2024). Single cross-sectional designs entail the use of a single sample of participants from a targeted population and obtaining information once from this representative group (Malhotra and Dash, 2016). The target population were all customers who had patronised the FDRs before and had patronage experience. Selection of participants was based on convenience, as the participants were contacted using an electronic link on online platforms including Facebook, LinkedIn and WhatsApp. Several factors were considered simultaneously to determine the appropriate sample size (Hair et al., 2020). These factors included, the budget, timescale, heterogeneity of the target

population, expected level of precision, and generalisability of the results (Ghauri et al., 2020). The appropriate size for sample were deduced from the sample sizes adopted in previous related studies, published tables, and calculations. Considering time and cost restraints, a sample size of 220 FDR customers in Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality was considered out of which 184 responses were valid for analysis. The survey targeted customers above the majority age, who had patronised the FDRs before. Online data collection was done from May to July 2025, after obtaining the ethical clearance certificate from Tshwane University of Technology’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), reference number REC Ref #: HREC2024=07=036 (MS).

#### 3.2. Instrumentation and Variable Measurement

The instrument used was a structured questionnaire with 45 question items. All study constructs, question items, and their corresponding measurements were based on previous research. The preliminary part of the instrument focused on participant demographics (5 items), and the second part contained questions on service quality variables, namely; FQ (6 items) (Anwar et al., 2023), ESQ (4 items) (Slack et al., 2020; Jang and Namkung, 2009), PEQ (3 items) (Ryu and Jang, 2008; Slack et al., 2020), HP (3 items) (Yang et al., 2020), RE (3 items) (Habib et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2020), EMP, (4 items) (Habib et al., 2025), SA, (3 items), (Habib et al., 2025), REL (3 items) (Yang et al., 2020), PL (3 items) (Handelman and Arnold, 1999; Yang et al., 2020), SL (4 items) (Yang et al., 2020), and RI (4 items) (Chen et al., 2017; Rajput and Gahfoor, 2020). A non-comparative 5- point Likert scale measured the items. Pretesting of the instrument was performed to assure the researchers of the appropriateness of the questionnaire for the intended research purpose. Cronbach’s alpha (>0.7) was utilised to validate and ascertain reliability (Hussey et al., 2025).

#### 3.3. Data Analysis

Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) based on SmartPLS 4 software was employed. Initially the measurement model was evaluated by testing the validity and consistency of all constructs. Convergent validity (CV) was assessed by checking factor loadings (>0.7), average variance extracted (AVE) (>0.5), as well as the Composite Reliability (CR) (>0.7) for all constructs. As for discriminant validity the stricter Fornell-Larcker criterion was employed. After declaring the measurement model as valid and dependable, testing of the structural model ensued. Relationships between variables measured by testing the path coefficients, levels of significance in the relationships, including coefficients of determination (R<sup>2</sup>-values) to establish the extent of variation in dependent variables attributed to the independent (service quality) and mediating variable (legitimacy). Tests for bootstrapping were done to find t-statistics and significance levels (P-values) for every path coefficient.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.1. Participants Profiling

Table 1 exhibits descriptive statistics for the participants’ personal profiles.

Figure 1: Research model

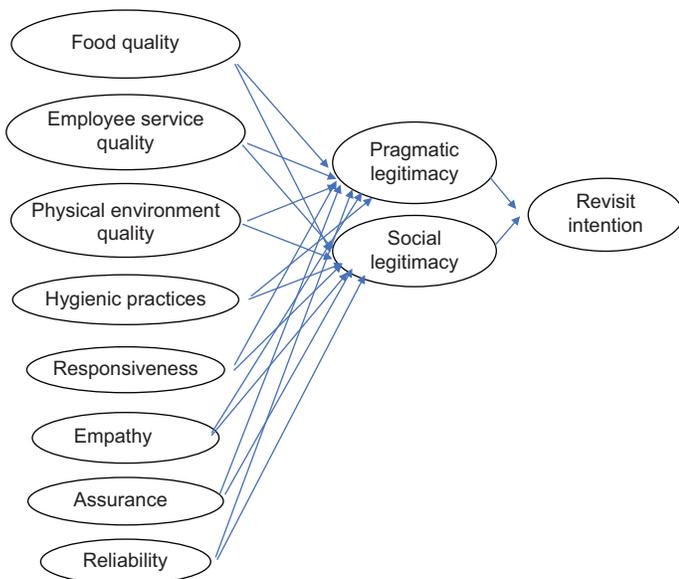


Table 1 shows the respondents' socio-demographic profile. Most were aged 18-30 (55%), followed by 31-45 (30%) years. Those aged 46-60 years accounted for 9%, and those aged above 60 years represented 5%. A paltry 1% did not disclose their age. The sample primarily consisted of younger adults who were active consumers of fine dining.

Female respondents comprised 56% of the sample, with males at 44%, indicating a slight female majority. Most had post-secondary qualifications: 33% held degrees, 23% held post-degree qualifications, and 20% held diplomas or technical certificates. Fewer had lower levels of education: 16% had completed high school, 16% had no formal qualification, and 2% had completed primary education. These results indicate that fine-dining patrons in Tshwane are generally well educated, likely influencing their service expectations.

Regarding employment status, students represented the largest group at 33%, followed by full-time employed respondents at 30%. Part-time employed individuals made up 14%, while self-employed persons accounted for 12%. A smaller proportion of respondents were unemployed (9%) or retired (2%). This distribution indicates a diverse range of economic backgrounds among fine-dining patrons.

Finally, the monthly patronage frequency data shows that most respondents dined at FDRs between 2 and 4 times a month (38%). Approximately 24% reported visiting fewer than twice per month, whereas 16% reported visiting between 5 and 6 times/month. Remarkably, 22% of the respondents reported patronising fine-

dining restaurants more than 6 times/month, indicating a significant proportion of frequent patrons in the sample.

#### 4.2. Reliability and Validity

Cronbach's alpha (CA) and CR were computed to ascertain construct internal consistency (IC), and AVE was also computed to ascertain CV, as presented in Table 2. A reliability test assessed the consistency with which measurement items yielded stable results across administrations, using multiple scales for various constructs. Failure indicates potential confusion among respondents, which can affect measurement accuracy. Table 2 displays results of the measurement model, factor loadings, CA, CR, and AVE for all

**Table 2: Measurement model assessment**

Construct	Factor loadings	CA	CR	AVE
Empathy		0.78	0.86	0.60
EMP1	0.81			
EMP2	0.82			
EMP3	0.78			
EMP4	0.69			
Employee service quality		0.87	0.91	0.71
ESQ1	0.72			
ESQ2	0.87			
ESQ3	0.89			
ESQ4	0.89			
Food quality		0.85	0.90	0.63
FQ1	0.73			
FQ3	0.78			
FQ4	0.87			
FQ5	0.85			
FQ6	0.74			
Hygiene practice		0.83	0.90	0.74
HP1	0.83			
HP2	0.86			
HP3	0.90			
Physical environment quality		0.75	0.86	0.67
PEQ1	0.87			
PEQ2	0.81			
PEQ3	0.78			
Pragmatic legitimacy		0.76	0.86	0.68
PL1	0.82			
PL2	0.85			
PL3	0.80			
Responsiveness		0.87	0.92	0.80
RE1	0.87			
RE2	0.90			
RE3	0.90			
Reliability		0.76	0.86	0.67
REL1	0.87			
REL2	0.75			
REL3	0.84			
Revisit intention		0.92	0.94	0.80
RI1	0.85			
RI2	0.90			
RI3	0.93			
RI4	0.91			
Safety assurance		0.78	0.86	0.68
SA1	0.78			
SA2	0.78			
SA3	0.91			
Social legitimacy		0.77	0.86	0.61
SL1	0.85			
SL2	0.86			
SL3	0.81			
SL4	0.55			

**Table 1: Demographics of participants**

Category	Frequency	(%)
Age		
18-30 years	101	55
31-45 years	55	30
46-60 years	17	9
Above 60 years	9	5
Do not want to specify	2	1
Gender		
Male	81	44
Female	103	56
Education		
No formal qualification	5	3
Primary education Grades 1-7	4	2
High school education, Grades 8-12	29	16
Diploma/technical certificate	36	20
Degree	60	33
Post-degree qualification	43	23
Other	7	4
Employment Status		
Student	61	33
Part-time employed	25	14
Self employed	22	12
Full-time employed	56	30
Unemployed	16	9
Retired	4	2
Monthly patronage frequency		
<2 times	44	24
Between 2 and 4 times	70	38
Between 5 and 6 times	30	16
More than 6 times/month	40	22

constructs. Following Hair et al. (2018; 2022), a 0.50 factor loading threshold was used for indicator reliability.

All indicators have factor loadings of 0.50 or higher, confirming they contribute to their latent constructs. Indicators below 0.50 were eliminated to ensure reliability and validity, aligning with SEM guidelines (Hair et al., 2022). To assess internal consistency reliability CA and CR were used. The CA values ranged from 0.75 to 0.92, surpassing the prescribed minimum of 0.70 and demonstrating good internal consistency among the measurement items. Likewise, CR values ranged from 0.86 to 0.94, further affirming the reliability and stability of the measurement scales (Hair et al., 2018). CV was evaluated using the AVE. As advocated by Fornell and Larcker (1981), AVE values should go beyond 0.50, suggesting that a construct accounts for more than half of the variations of its indicators. The results indicate that all constructs garnered AVE values of between 0.60 and 0.80, thus meeting the criterion for CV.

Discriminant validity (DV) was subsequently measured using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, and the results are displayed in Table 3.

DV is established when each construct’s AVE square root surpasses its correlations with others, which is true for all constructs,

with diagonal values from 0.78 to 0.90, surpassing the highest correlations. For instance, empathy (0.78) is higher than its correlation with responsiveness (0.55), and revisit intention (0.90) has a high diagonal value and low correlations, indicating strong construct distinctiveness. These results confirm the measurement model’s adequate DV, ensuring the constructs are distinct and suitable for reliable analysis.

### 4.3. Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesised structural model was confirmed using PLS-SEM with a bootstrapping procedure of 5,000 resamples. This variance-based SEM approach enables estimation of complex models with multiple constructs and indicators without assuming normality in the data (Hair et al., 2012; Hair et al., 2019). Path coefficient significance was determined using T-statistics and bias-corrected percentile bootstrap confidence intervals. The level of significance based on a lesser P-value (i.e.,  $P < 0.05$ ) indicating considerable proof against the null hypothesis. Results are presented in Table 4.

According to Table 4, empathy (EMP) did not significantly influence pragmatic legitimacy (PL) ( $\beta = 0.047, P > 0.05$ ), indicating that customers’ perception of the FDR’s empathy does not strongly affect their practical evaluation of its services. This suggests that other service quality dimensions may play a more

**Table 3: Discriminant validity**

	EMP	ESQ	FQ	HP	PEQ	PL	RE	REL	RI	SA	SL
EMP	<b>0.78</b>										
ESQ	0.45	<b>0.85</b>									
FQ	0.30	0.37	<b>0.80</b>								
HP	0.28	0.34	0.42	<b>0.86</b>							
PEQ	0.37	0.47	0.41	0.43	<b>0.82</b>						
PL	0.46	0.47	0.30	0.33	0.43	<b>0.82</b>					
RE	0.55	0.57	0.43	0.40	0.44	0.56	<b>0.89</b>				
REL	0.53	0.50	0.26	0.32	0.42	0.61	0.56	<b>0.82</b>			
RI	0.10	0.09	0.06	0.00	0.12	0.13	0.10	0.06	<b>0.90</b>		
SA	0.51	0.39	0.38	0.43	0.40	0.43	0.52	0.44	0.08	<b>0.82</b>	
SL	0.43	0.39	0.25	0.33	0.42	0.62	0.49	0.62	0.19	0.36	<b>0.78</b>

AVE square root estimates are diagonally presented, with correlations below the diagonals

**Table 4: PLS-SEM path coefficients**

Hypothesis	Relationship	Standardized beta	Standard error	T	P-values	Decision
H <sub>1a</sub>	EMP→PL	0.047	0.084	0.555	0.579	Not supported
H <sub>2a</sub>	EMP→SL	0.061	0.083	0.735	0.463	Not supported
H <sub>1b</sub>	ESQ→PL	0.064	0.088	0.730	0.465	Not supported
H <sub>2b</sub>	ESQ→SL	-0.027	0.068	0.399	0.690	Not supported
H <sub>1c</sub>	FQ→PL	-0.004	0.060	0.067	0.946	Not supported
H <sub>2c</sub>	FQ→SL	-0.023	0.077	0.300	0.764	Not supported
H <sub>1d</sub>	HP→PL	0.039	0.065	0.598	0.550	Not supported
H <sub>2d</sub>	HP→SL	0.075	0.082	0.922	0.356	Not supported
H <sub>1e</sub>	PEQ→PL	0.104	0.078	1.341	0.180	Not supported
H <sub>2e</sub>	PEQ→SL	0.134	0.066	2.027	0.043	Supported
H <sub>3a</sub>	PL→RI	0.027	0.122	0.218	0.828	Not supported
H <sub>1f</sub>	RE→PL	0.214	0.095	2.257	0.024	Supported
H <sub>2f</sub>	RE→SL	0.157	0.075	2.085	0.037	Supported
H <sub>1g</sub>	REL→PL	0.355	0.099	3.593	0.000	Supported
H <sub>2g</sub>	REL→SL	0.445	0.080	5.555	0.000	Supported
H <sub>1h</sub>	SA→PL	0.049	0.071	0.690	0.490	Not supported
H <sub>2h</sub>	SA→SL	-0.015	0.067	0.227	0.821	Not supported
H <sub>3b</sub>	SL→RI	0.171	0.117	1.460	0.144	Not supported

decisive role in shaping pragmatic judgments. The non-significant result implies that while empathy is valued, it alone is insufficient to enhance customers' practical perceptions. EMP also had a non-significant influence on social legitimacy (SL) ( $\beta = 0.061$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). Customers' social evaluation of the restaurant is not significantly shaped by empathy alone, suggesting that social legitimacy depends on broader factors such as reliability or responsiveness. The result indicates that empathy may contribute indirectly but does not have a direct impact.

Employee service quality (ESQ) did not significantly influence pragmatic legitimacy (PL) ( $\beta = 0.064$ ,  $P = 0.465$ ). This implies that functional aspects of service such as accuracy or promptness are insufficient to alter customers' practical judgments about FDR. Other factors such as reliability and responsiveness may have a greater influence on pragmatic legitimacy. Equally, ESQ wielded insignificant influence on social legitimacy (SL) ( $\beta = -0.027$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). Customers' social perception of the FDRs is not strongly driven by ESQ alone. This finding suggests that social legitimacy is more influenced by factors related to social trust or broader organisational behaviours.

Food quality (FQ) also had insignificant positive influence on pragmatic legitimacy (PL) ( $\beta = -0.004$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ), showing that the quality or presentation of food alone does not influence practical customer evaluations to grant FDRs pragmatic legitimacy. Customers may consider other service aspects more keenly when forming pragmatic judgments. The result highlights that food quality is necessary but not sufficient to drive perceived pragmatic legitimacy. Food quality's (FQ) influence on social legitimacy was insignificant (SL) ( $\beta = -0.023$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). Customers' social perceptions are likely shaped by more holistic organisational behaviours rather than food quality alone. This finding indicates that social legitimacy requires consistent service reliability and ethical practices.

Hygiene practice (HP) showed no significant positive influence on PL ( $\beta = 0.039$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). While cleanliness is important, it does not alone determine customers' practical evaluation of FDR services. The result suggests that hygiene may be a standard expectation rather than a distinguishing factor for awarding pragmatic legitimacy to an FDR. Similarly, HP did not substantially bear positive influence social legitimacy (SL) ( $\beta = 0.075$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). Customers may perceive hygiene as essential but not sufficient for forming positive social evaluations about an FDR's legitimacy. Social legitimacy appears to depend more on factors that signal reliability and ethical behaviour.

Physical environment quality (PEQ) caused insignificant positive influence on PL ( $\beta = 0.104$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). While a pleasing interior may enhance experience, it does not directly affect practical judgments about service performance. Customers likely prioritise reliability and responsiveness over aesthetics for pragmatic evaluation. On the contrary, PEQ bore a significantly positive influence on SL ( $\beta = 0.134$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). This indicates that ambience and aesthetic appeal shape customers' perceptions of the FDR's social standing and reputation. A well-maintained and attractive environment enhances the outlet's social legitimacy.

Responsiveness (RE) positively and significantly affected PL ( $\beta = 0.214$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Prompt and attentive service enhances practical customer evaluations. This emphasises the importance of quick response and problem-solving in shaping pragmatic judgments. RE also significantly influenced SL ( $\beta = 0.157$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Timely service contributes to influencing customers' perceptions of the restaurant's social reputation and trustworthiness. This suggests that responsiveness is key for both functional and social evaluations.

Reliability (REL) had a strong positive effect on PL ( $\beta = 0.355$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). Consistently delivering services accurately and on time strengthens customers' practical evaluation. REL emerges as one of the most important determinants of pragmatic legitimacy in the model. REL also strongly influenced SL ( $\beta = 0.445$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Consistent performance enhances the restaurant's reputation and social credibility. Customers perceive reliable FDR as trustworthy and socially responsible.

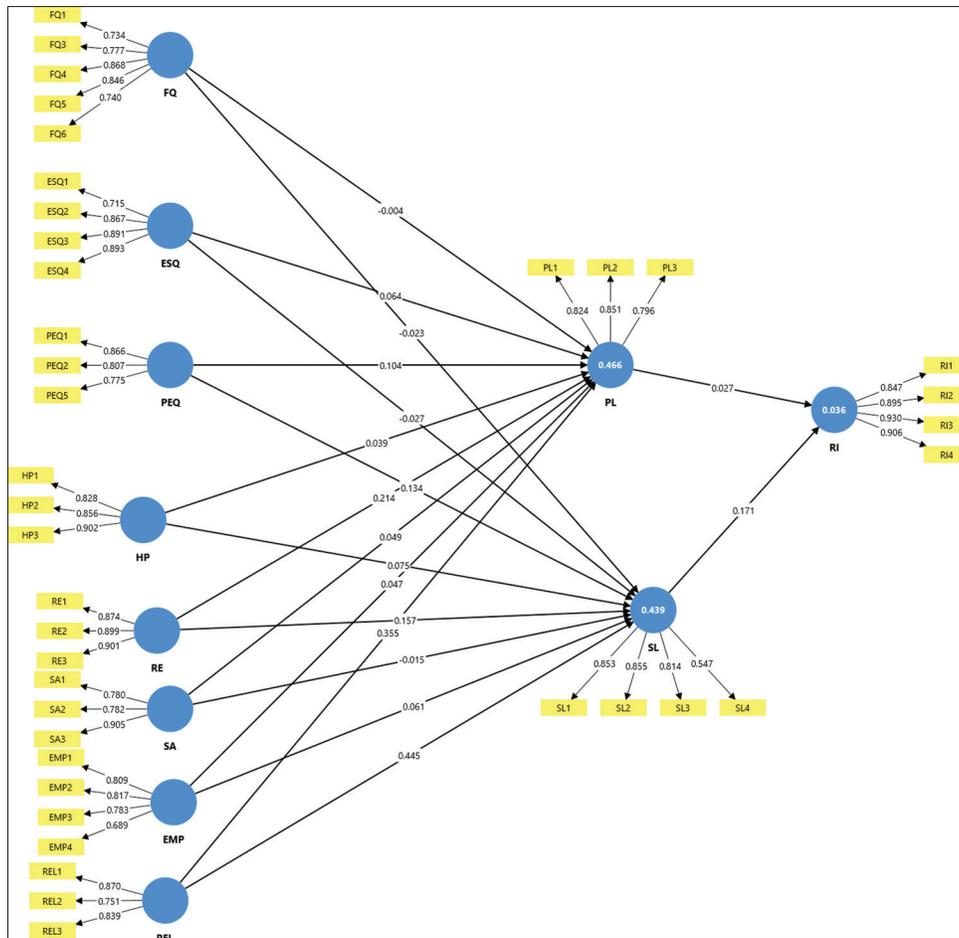
Safety assurance (SA) had no significant effect on PL ( $\beta = 0.049$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). While safety is valued, it does not directly shape customers' practical evaluations. Other service quality elements may overshadow safety in determining pragmatic judgments. SA also insignificant positive influence on SL ( $\beta = -0.015$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). Customers' social perception is not directly influenced by safety measures alone but customers' propensity to grant SL is more affected by factors that signal FDR reliability and responsiveness.

Pragmatic legitimacy (PL) did not meaningfully influence RI ( $\beta = 0.027$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). Customers' repeated visits are not driven solely by practical evaluation, suggesting that social and emotional factors may play a larger role. This highlights the need for holistic strategies beyond service functionality. Social legitimacy (SL) did not significantly influence RI ( $\beta = 0.171$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). Although social perception is important, it alone does not drive repeated patronage. This highlights that multiple factors, including practical experience, are needed to encourage revisit intention.

To illustrate these noteworthy results, Figure 2 below showcases the entire model, its respective coefficients, and associated factor loadings.

The  $R^2$  values for the endogenous constructs indicate the proportionality of variance in the constructs explained by the predictors in the model. PL and SL have  $R^2$  values of 0.466 and 0.439, respectively, indicating that approximately 46.6% and 43.9% of the variance in PL and SL, respectively, is explained by the service quality constructs. RI has a much lower  $R^2$  of 0.036, indicating that only 3.6% of its variance is described by PL and SL, suggesting that other factors outside this model may influence customers' revisit intentions. Furthermore, all factor loadings for the observed indicators exceed the benchmark of 0.5, indicating that the observed items reliably represent their respective latent constructs. This indicates strong reliability and instils confidence in the CV of the measurement model, signifying that the observed variables effectively capture the constructs and that the model's results can be interpreted credibly.

Figure 2: SEM with coefficients



#### 4.4. Discussions

Grounded in the DINESERV model and the institutional theory, this study advances our understanding of how FDRs’ extended service quality dimensions affect legitimacy, which in turn triggers revisit intentions among customers. While the study by Yang et al. (2020) discovered that all the five service quality dimensions influenced PL and SL, results in this context revealed that empathy, employee service quality, safety assurance, food quality, and hygienic practice had no substantial positive influence on pragmatic and social legitimacy. Physical environmental quality’s influence on pragmatic legitimacy was insignificant, while its impact on social legitimacy was considerably significant. Just like in Berry et al.’s (1988) findings HP has been found to be an insignificant determinant of FDR legitimacy and yet on the contrary, Lee et al. (2016) resolved that hygiene and safety assurance were fundamental drivers of pragmatic legitimacy in retailing. Both reliability and responsiveness had considerable positive influence on both forms of legitimacy. This finding is diametrically incongruent to Yang et al. (2020) who concluded that responsiveness was an ineffective determinant of legitimacy and such variations in the findings may be attributed to the distinctions in the contexts in which the studies were done. Results also revealed that legitimacy (pragmatic and social) did not have significant positive influence on RI in FDRs of Tshwane City. FDRs also need to provide food that meets consumers’ necessities and execute strategies aimed at providing the products and the

overall service more efficiently. Findings involving legitimacy and revisit intention are in line with results from preceding studies. Pragmatic legitimacy’s positive influence on consumer revisit intentions was insignificant and this result disagrees with results of Ailawadi et al. (2013) and Sen and Bhattacharya (2001). More so, Guo et al.’s (2017) results which showed social legitimacy as the determinant of revisit intention is inconsistent to this study’s finding which reported that social legitimacy insignificantly influences revisit intentions in Tshwane city’s FDR market. Deriving from these findings, it becomes imperative to note that consumers’ perceptions regarding the FDRs’ legitimacy are not positive predictors of revisit intention and yet in retailing a myriad of studies have resolved that legitimacy positively correlated to revisit intentions (Sánchez-del-Río-Vázquez et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2020; Blanco-González et al., 2023). This distinction could be attributable to sectoral variations in these service oriented organisations. The R<sup>2</sup>-values (i.e., 46.6% and 43.9% for PL and SL respectively) signify that FDR service quality dimensions jointly cause <50% of positive influence on legitimacy, while more than 50% may be attributed to other causes such as price, location and availability of alternatives. A paltry R-squared (R<sup>2</sup> = 3.6%) of causality on RI is attributed to the direct influence of the two forms of legitimacy, proving that legitimacy is a weak determinant of RI, while 96.4% of variation in RI is explained by other factor which have not been considered for this study.

## 5. MANAGERIAL AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

It is worth conceding that the results have critical implications for corporate decision making by managers in the hospitality sector of South Africa, particularly in the FDR industry. While most elements of the DINESERV (i.e., FQ, ESQ, PEQ, SA and HP) depicted insignificant positive influence on legitimacy it is imperative for FDR managers to realise that service reliability and responsiveness are key for promoting sustainable fine-dining restaurant legitimacy (pragmatic and social). More so, the quality of the FDR environment is the basis for obtaining social legitimacy. Besides, legitimacy plays no substantial catalytic role on customers' revisit intentions as it does not directly and positively influence customers' revisit intentions. Findings from this study should be a springboard for a positive paradigm shift in thinking by practitioners. Thus, while providing unparalleled service quality (based on the DINESERV model) is crucial, its impact on organisational legitimacy is less meaningful and more insightfully legitimacy's influence on revisit intention is equally trivial thereby calling for practitioners to consider a plethora of factors which can jointly and severally influence RI for enhancing sustainable FDR competitiveness.

Theoretically, this study expands the understanding of the popularized DINESERV model by Berry et al. (1988) which focused on only five traditional service quality dimensions (i.e., empathy, reliability, physical evidence (tangibility), assurance, and responsiveness,) to a broader version of the model which includes food quality and hygiene practices, which are peculiar to the FDR industry. More so, coupling the DINESERV model and the institutional framework brings out a hybrid model with a more profound dimensional scope that researchers can explore to further interrogate service quality and organisational legitimacy, not from a retailing perspective (Kim and Ha, 2020; Yang et al., 2020; Blanco-Gonzalez et al., 2023; Handelman and Arnold, 1999) but also from an FDR business point of view. The theoretical grounding of this study could be a springboard for future studies that could embrace the combinations of these frameworks in exploring the connections between service quality, organisational legitimacy and revisit intentions beyond the FDR sector. Furthermore, while past studies that applied institutional theory (i.e., Yang et al., 2020; Handelman and Arnold, 1999) focussed on performative and socio-norm based actions that influenced legitimacy in the retail sector, this study adds the expanded service quality dimensions (DINESERV) and examines how these influence FDRs' social and performative actions as the bases for obtaining legitimacy which was deemed critical for encouraging revisit intentions.

## 6. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This study explored the influence of service quality on legitimacy and revisit intention. Generally, most service quality attributes proved to have insignificant predictive influence on legitimacy as exhibited by more prevalent significance values of  $P > 0.05$

for most relationships and  $R^2$  values of 46.6% and 43.9% for PL and SL, reflecting lesser causal influence of service quality on legitimacy. However, reliability and responsiveness depicted highly positive significant influence on legitimacy with values  $P < 0.05$ . Both forms of legitimacy wielded insignificant positive influence on revisit intention in Tshwane City's FDR sector as evidenced by significance levels of  $P > 0.05$ . Consequently, it was established that service quality is a weak predictor of FDR legitimacy and more so, legitimacy wields insignificant positive influence on consumer RI.

Despite opening new frontiers in the understanding of service quality and its association with legitimacy and RI in the FDR context, the scope of this research has been limited to a narrow and specific geographic locale. Therefore, narrowing the delimitation has naturally limited the generalisability of the study findings. Moreover, the sample size adopted for the study was relatively small, which could also have compromised the representativeness of the results. Consequently, a study with broader a broader scope could be commissioned by other researchers in the same industry. Alternatively, replication could be done in other service-related fields such as transport and banking, using larger sample sizes to obtain generalisable results.

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