

## Food safety practices among selected casual dining restaurants: A basis in achieving customer satisfaction

Sarmiento, Fhamela ✉

Lyceum of the Philippines University - Batangas, Philippines ([cheffham@gmail.com](mailto:cheffham@gmail.com))

Apritado, Jennie Margaret

Lyceum of the Philippines University - Batangas, Philippines ([jen\\_mar\\_143@yahoo.com.ph](mailto:jen_mar_143@yahoo.com.ph))



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### **Abstract**

This study aimed to determine the compliance of selected casual dining restaurants in Makati City on food safety and sanitation based on the Presidential Decree No. 856 also known as the Sanitation Code of the Philippines and Service Quality Standards shown in previous research. Specifically, to determine the casual dining restaurant's food safety practices in terms of personnel hygiene, food serving and food handling, and assess the sanitation practices in casual dining restaurants in terms of restrooms, establishment exteriors and dining room experiences in order to achieve customer satisfaction. Descriptive-Evaluative research was utilized to conduct this study. The respondents were 303 guests that has dined at least twice in 10 different casual dining restaurants that have been operational for 10 years in the municipality of Makati. Through personally administered questionnaires, the researcher tabulated the result of the data gathered using SPSS v. 21, frequency distribution and percentage, to describe the profile of the respondents. Weighted mean is utilized to determine personnel hygiene, food safety and sanitation practices of the casual dining restaurants. And Pearson's Product Correlation is used to attain the significant relationship of the variables. Results identified that based on the respondent's assessment, they strongly agreed that casual dining restaurants were able to apply and follow standard procedures in terms of food safety and sanitation. However, there are certain indicators that require additional attention or polishing to achieve a more positive dining experience for customers. An action plan for continuous restaurant operation enhancement was proposed.

**Keywords:** food safety, sanitation practices, casual dining restaurant, customer satisfaction

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### **1. Introduction**

Restaurants not only feed us, but they also shape our well-being. People say, “You are what you eat.”, making food safety and sanitation issues in casual dining restaurants of great importance. The way these establishments handle our food and drinks changes our mindset in how we think about food and how we choose to eat. They are influencers that impose a difference in lifestyle to its customers. They provide us with choices that meet our needs and wants. Restaurants are places where food and drinks are served to customers in return for money. (Briscoe & Tripp, 2015).

Restaurants have always played an essential role in the business, social, intellectual, and artistic life of a thriving society. They are mostly part of any major personal or professional events in our lives. According to Feldman (2015), they are considered shared kitchen and dining areas in densely populated urbanized cities. The question is, are they reliable in terms of providing its customers with quality and safe meals? Do they really follow the mandate of the local government in terms of sanitation? Since in the study of Borbon and Tolentino (2020) states that Keeping food clean is only one aspect of food sanitation. It includes all procedures used to safeguard food against contamination, poisons, foreign objects, harmful bacteria, and other contaminants. It also includes preventing bacteria from growing to a point where they could make consumers ill. Finally, it includes thoroughly cooking or processing food to kill any harmful bacteria present.

Casual dining restaurants are of no exemption to the preceded question. They are considered to bridge the gap between fine dining restaurants and fast-food restaurants, offering food and services to thousands of customers both local and foreign, daily. People come to casual dining restaurants when they dine out with family and friends. And to be able to accommodate this degree of turnover, they have applied reservation services especially during peak season. They offer huge spaces that groups of people may reserve and use for gatherings during special occasions. Menu that is served, differs according to the theme of the restaurant.

In the Philippines, Republic Act 10611 or Food Safety Act of 2013 initiated the campaign to strengthen the significance of Food Safety in the country with the leadership of President Benigno Aquino III and Vice President Jejomar C. Binay. It aimed to protect consumers by providing standards of food safety in various stages. It defined the role and responsibilities of food business and local government agencies involved in food business. In 2017, the Annual Survey of Philippine Business and Industry (ASPBI), listed a total of 28, 932 hotel and restaurant businesses in the Philippines. About 76.3 percent of these businesses belong to restaurants and mobile food service activities. Makati City, being the business hub of the Philippines, the local government promotes strict compliance and regulation to environmental, sanitary and health permits for both business and employees. There were issues of compliance and regulation in terms of food safety, this is because food establishments are usually discreet in terms of food safety issues or anything that can affect their name or brand.

This research intended to provide awareness to restaurant operators and the government of Makati, an updated setting in terms of food safety and sanitation practices in selected casual dining restaurants in the city of Makati. It also proposed an action plan that can help ensure customers a positive dining experience based on the result of this study.

#### *1.1 Objective of the Study*

This study aimed to assess the food safety and sanitation practices among casual dining restaurants in Makati City. Specifically, it aimed (1) to determine the food safety practices in terms of: personnel hygiene, food

serving and food handling; (2) assess the sanitation practices of casual dining restaurant such as: restroom, dining room experience and exterior; (3) test the significant difference when grouped according to the profile variables; and (4) propose an action plan based on the result of the study.

## 2. Methods

**Research Design** - The researcher used descriptive research method in presenting the data. During the conduct of study, the researcher used quantitative research method for the analyses of numerical data using statistical techniques or tools to carry out large scale assessment or baseline survey.

**Participants of the Study** - The respondents of this study were 303 customers who have dined at least twice in a casual dining restaurant, located in Makati with 10-year operation on-site.

**Instrument** - The researcher adopted some questions from previous researches to completely and effectively obtain the necessary data needed. The first part of the questionnaire includes the profile of the customers. The second part is a modified checklist adopted from the Presidential Decree No. 856, basically known as the Sanitation Code of the Philippines to determine the food safety practices of casual dining restaurants. The third part of the questionnaire is adopted from previous research the factor loadings ranged from 0.57 to 0.84. Cronbach's alpha, ranging from 0.625 to 0.914, showed acceptable reliability of items Park et al. (2016), that is intended to assess sanitation practices of casual dining restaurants. A 4-point Likert scale measured the importance of attributes ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) for all the questions indicated.

**Data Gathering Procedure** - The researcher followed the steps in gathering data to answer the question in this study. This includes visiting the Makati Health Department as well as the city's Sanitation Office to gather information which became the basis for the construction of the questionnaire. After the questionnaire's approval, the researcher interviewed customers, with consent from the restaurant establishment. The respondents are informed of the purpose and importance of the study and the significance of their honesty in terms of answering the research questions to obtain a valid data.

**Data Analysis** - The researcher tabulated and evaluated the result of the data gathered using SPSS v. 21, Frequency distribution and percentage, to describe the profile of the respondents. Weighted mean of personnel hygiene knowledge and food safety and sanitation practices of casual dining restaurants. And Pearson's Product Correlation will be used to attain the significant relationship of the profile variables.

**Ethical Consideration** - For ethical considerations, a written permission to use and modify the survey questionnaire was obtained by the authors of the original questionnaire. Ethical approval to conduct the study and to contact staff, and customers was obtained from the casual dining restaurants. The researcher provided the respondents an informed consent which explains the nature and purpose of research as well as the guidelines in conducting the study for the respondents to be well-informed that their information and expressed opinions would be kept confidential and this study would not be harm to them. As indicated by CIRT (2013), the researchers need conform to ethical standards, so the community would support and believe the study. The public needs to be secured that the researchers will follow the correct rules and guidelines for matters such as compliance with the law, human rights, conflicts of interest, animal welfare, health standards, security, and so on.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of respondents. From a total of 303 respondents that has at least dined twice in a casual dining restaurant in Makati, 180 were male (59.4 percent), 123 were female (40.6 percent). Men are more likely to patronize casual dining restaurants to conduct their business meetings and personal engagements, mainly because of their big servings and availability of alcoholic beverages that is applicable to some establishments. Based on previous survey conducted by Captivate Office Pulse it is said that men are 25 percent more likely to take breaks than woman throughout the day for personal activities, meal

breaks.” (“Men vs. Women Eating Habits”, 2014).

**Table 1***Percentage Distribution of the Respondents' Profile*

Profile	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
20 years and below	75	24.8
21 - 30 years old	62	20.5
31 - 40 years old	79	26.1
41 years old and above	87	28.7
Sex		
Male	180	59.4
Female	123	40.6
Profession		
Student	75	24.8
Employed	132	43.6
Self Employed/ Entrepreneur	87	28.7
Retired	9	3
Civil Status		
Single	182	60.1
Married	111	36.6
Separated	10	3.3

Age group was structured as follows: less than 20 (24.8 percent), 21-30 years (20.5 percent), 31-40 years (26.1 percent), and 41+ (28.7 percent). Majority of the respondents were aged 41 years and above, normally this age group are the established or accomplished individuals meaning, they have ample time to go out and dine casually with friends or family. They don't worry about spending but is more critical about quality of food, service, and dining environment. More than half (60.1 percent) were single, one-third were married (36.6 percent), and 3.3 percent answered as separated. Single individuals tend to be more unconscious of their spending. They are driven and has a fast-paced lifestyle. Their deciding criteria is much easier to meet compared to married individuals, since married individuals must consider options for the entire members of the family. There were 24.8 percent or 75 students, 43.6 percent or 132 were employed, 28 percent or 87 were self-employed and 3 percent or 9 of them were retired. Employed individuals plan their spending on a day-to-day basis. Most of them have allotted budgets for weekend dinners and meet-ups. They are also considered to be the loyalist group since they have “brand cycles” where they visit their Top 5 restaurants in cycle, within their office area from Monday to Friday during lunch breaks.

Table 2 presents the food safety practices of casual dining restaurants in terms of personal hygiene. The composite mean of 3.59 indicates that the respondents strongly agreed on the indicators below. Based on the results, staff wears prescribed uniform got the highest mean score of 3.90. It was then followed by food handlers wears clean working garments with 3.84 and have trimmed nails got 3.64.

**Table 2***Food Safety Practices of Casual Dining Restaurants*

Indicators	WM	VI	Rank
Personnel Hygiene			
1. The food server looks healthy and not sick.	3.6	Strongly Agree	5
2. The staff wears the prescribed uniform	3.9	Strongly Agree	1
3. Female staff wears caps or hairnets	3.21	Agree	8
4. Food handlers wear clean working garments.	3.84	Strongly Agree	2
5. The staff wears close shoes.	3.46	Agree	7
6. The staff does not wear jewelry.	3.5	Strongly Agree	6
7. Food handlers have trimmed nails.	3.64	Strongly Agree	3
8. Food handlers do not have nail polish or wear artificial nails.	3.61	Strongly Agree	4
Composite Mean	3.59	Strongly Agree	
Food Serving			
1. The food was cooked at the right temperature.	3.83	Strongly Agree	3
2. The food has appropriate ingredients.	3.89	Strongly Agree	1

Food safety practices among selected casual dining restaurants: A basis in achieving customer satisfaction

3. The food is well-cooked.	3.84	Strongly Agree	2
4. The service area has no flies, cockroaches and other vermin.	3.08	Agree	8
5. Flatware, cutleries and glass are washed and cleaned with no visible smudges (no grease).	3.47	Agree	5
6. The food are served promptly.	3.71	Strongly Agree	4
7. Tables and chairs in the service area are clean and sanitized.	3.33	Agree	6
8. Service areas are clean and uncluttered.	3.12	Agree	7
Composite Mean	3.53	Strongly Agree	
Food Handling			
1. The server is not using bare hands in serving the dishes.	3.5	Strongly Agree	7
2. Food are handled using tongs, spatulas or other utensils instead of hands.	3.79	Strongly Agree	2
3. Food is served and handled only by the serving staff.	3.78	Strongly Agree	3
4. Smoking is not allowed inside the establishment	4	Strongly Agree	1
5. All food and supplies are handled properly and appropriately.	3.54	Strongly Agree	6
6. The food handlers with wounds or cuts are properly covered with bandage.	3.7	Strongly Agree	4
7. Foods are served promptly.	3.67	Strongly Agree	5
8. Service trays are clean and sanitized.	3.4	Agree	8
Composite Mean	3.67	Strongly Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

The respondents observed that the food handlers are in their proper uniform. This shows that majority of the casual dining restaurants give importance not just in food safety, but also the image it projects to their customers. And in wearing standard clothing emulates uniformity and professionalism, to create a more conducive working environment for food handlers. Most food establishment require crew to wear a nominated uniform or other protective clothing when working (Hickman 2020). Customers communicate with servers and observe servers' appearance and behaviors. Servers' personal hygiene can also be regarded, and this includes the server's uniform, nails, and accessories (Park et al., 2016).

On the other hand, staff wears close shoes and female staff wears caps or hairnets, obtaining the lowest mean values of 3.46 and 3.21 respectively and is assessed as "agree" only. This shows that some casual dining restaurants are inconsistent with the standards in food safety in terms of foot ware and hairnets because of their branding or concept. In the case of Restaurant, A, their concept is Singaporean-Malaysian. Their standard uniform is Sarong for the male staff and Batik for the female staff. Both require wearing sandals or slippers with their garments and a simple hair tie for the female is enough to give emphasis and authenticity to their brand image. Food safety regulations include using hairnets in food service establishments.

Common causes of food returns in a restaurant, are often because of hair present in the foods served. Hair can create both physical and biological hazard. If a customer finds a hair in their food, they are less likely to return to the establishment. Wearing a hair covering such as hairnet, visor, or cap, will help keep hairs from falling into the food that is being prepared. If a server is tasked to serve the food, he/she may no longer be required to wear a hair restraint. However, if the server has a long hair, it is a good idea to pull it back to keep hair from falling or dangling into the food (Hutchings 2017). This statement is also supported by the U.S. Food Code (2017), reiterating food employees should wear clean and effective hair restraints, such as hairnets or beard nets, if appropriate, and clothing that covers body hair. They may use hats, caps, scarves, or any other head covers that are acceptable, to ensure the hair is contained to prevent contamination on food. Hair sprays and tying back of the hair in a ponytail are not effective hair restraints (Judkis, 2016).

Table 2 also presents the food safety practices of casual dining restaurants in terms of food serving. The composite mean of 3.53 indicates that the respondents strongly agreed on the indicators. Based on the result, the food has appropriate ingredients with the highest score of 3.89. It is followed by the food is well-cooked and the food is cooked at the right temperature with 3.84 and 3.83 respectively. The respondents observed that the food has appropriate ingredients that lead to their satisfaction and continuous patronage of the restaurant. The taste is usually believed to influence restaurant customer satisfaction and future behavior intention (Rozekhi et al., 2016). Many customers have become food savvy, so the taste of food in restaurant has become increasingly important.

To achieve that, food must have appropriate ingredients and is cooked well at the right temperature. Temperature is also a sensory element of food quality (Rozekhi et al., 2016; Kivela et al., 1999). Moreover, temperature is used to extract the flavor from food which will then interact with other sensory properties such as taste, smell and sight and eventually lead to customer satisfaction. According to Serhan and Serhan (2019), the overall quality of the food and beverage, the taste, the freshness, the nutritious aspect, and the portion size are categorized under food quality measurement. As a core product of a food service operation, food and beverage quality has been given a great importance and has been checked for many aspects such as temperature, texture, flavour, and aroma (Serhan & Serhan 2019).

On the other hand, service areas are clean and uncluttered, obtaining 3.12 and the service area has no flies, cockroaches, and other vermin, got 3.08 which is the lowest mean values and is assessed as agree only. The respondents observed that the management of service areas are inconstant. It shows that managers, supervisors and employees need to pay more attention to areas where the customers are able to see once they dine, also have appropriate pest control management that can help them maintain a good physical surrounding. Likewise, in the study of Black et al. (2018), they concluded that “it is very important for food handling facilities to partner with reputable pest management partners that are knowledgeable about how to inspect for fruit fly breeding sites, perform chemical and non-chemical approaches to eliminate fruit flies, and maintain good communication with facility management and staff about maintaining structural integrity.”

Table also shows the food safety practices of casual dining restaurants in terms of food handling. The composite mean is 3.67 indicating that the respondents strongly agreed on the above indicators. Based on the result, smoking is not allowed inside the establishment got the highest mean score of 4.0. It was followed by food being handled using tongs, spatulas or other utensils instead of hands with a mean score of 3.79 and food being served and handled only by the serving staff with a mean score of 3.78. The respondents observed that all casual dining restaurants in Makati have strictly followed the mandate of the national government by prohibiting smoking in public places.

The Republic Act No. 9211, also known as the Tobacco Regulation Act of 2003, an omnibus law regulating smoking in public places, tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, and sales restrictions, among other requirements. Further, Executive Order No. 26 of 2017 imposes strict standards for designated smoking areas (DSAs), imposes duties on persons in charge of public places, prohibits advertising outside point-of-sale retail establishments, and addresses some other sales and advertising restrictions. In Makati City there is a fine for both violator and any establishment if caught violating this city ordinance.

On the other hand, items such as the server not using bare hands in serving the dishes, got the lowest mean value of 3.5 and is assessed as strongly agree; service trays are clean and sanitized with a mean value of 3.4 and is agreed only by the respondents. The respondents observed that the food servers were able to handle the food with great caution and following standard procedure. They showed high regard as to who and how the food was brought to their table. Casual dining restaurants rarely apply these least indicators because of ergonomics. In other words, ergonomic focuses on the way to fit a particular work (equipment, tools, methods, as well as working environment and organization) according to the capability, ability, and limitation of human. The goal of ergonomic is to create jobs, systems, or products safe, effective, efficient, healthy, satisfying, convenience, and even enjoyable for human being (Palit et al., 2019; Kroemer, 2017). Casual dining is a unique sector of the foodservice industry. These restaurants “serve moderately priced food, averaging \$10 to \$40 for dinner per diner, in an informal and relaxed atmosphere with a full-service wait staff” (Peng et al., 2015).

For casual dining restaurants, to be able to sell a plate worth 500-2000 pesos here in the Philippines, it should be visually adequate. Filipinos are known to be “price conscious”, meaning they are concerned in getting the best value for their money. Expensive price equals to big servings, making it impossible for wait staff to utilize service trays or food trays, therefore, serving food by hand. Nevertheless, food tray or bar trays should always be clean and sanitized with the use of proper cleaning agents, since same trays are used in serving dishes

and bussing out of plates, left over scraps of food left in the tray can be a breathing ground for bacteria. Similarly, cleaning and sanitizing of equipment is an important component in the food safety program for food meets equipment and utensils. To avoid this from occurring, equipment must be properly cleaned and sanitized. It is a must to make sure that workplace is as safe for employees and customers. (Barlan-Espino, 2017).

Table also presents the summary table of food safety practices of casual dining restaurants. The composite mean of 3.60 indicates that the respondents strongly agreed to the above indicators. Based on the result, food handling got the highest mean score of 3.67. It is followed by personal hygiene, with a composite mean of 3.59. The respondents observed how casual dining restaurants showed high regard as to how the restaurant employees handle goods from raw to finished products. The results of the study may help managers and restaurateurs understand the importance of emphasizing to employees the value of visibly demonstrating their expertise in sanitary handling of food. The respondents showed significant thought to food handler's personal hygiene in terms of garments, shoes, nails and hair accessories.

Also, food serving got the lowest mean score of 3.53 among the three sub-variables of food safety practices in casual dining restaurants. The respondents observed that some casual dining restaurants pay inconsistent attention to food serving in terms of food quality, service area and equipment condition and pest control management. It is discussed in previous researches that although training in all areas of food sanitation is important, sanitary food handling is extremely important to consumers (Park et.al. 2016). In the study of Abubakari et al. (2019) about 97.6 percent of the customers perceive employee hygiene is an important factor that can influence their return intention. Return intention of customers can then result to the success and longevity of any food business. The study of Al-Tit (2015) stated that food quality has a great influence on customer satisfaction. It is one of the most important factors resulting in higher levels of customer satisfaction. Therefore, for customers to come back and patronize your restaurant, food serving should have equal importance compared to food handling and personal hygiene of employees.

**Table 3**

*Sanitation Practices of Casual Dining Restaurants*

Indicators	WM	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
<b>Restroom</b>			
1. Toilets and urinals are well maintained and clean	3.19	Agree	5
2. Trash bins are available and not full	2.91	Agree	7
3. The floor is clean and free from any obstacles	3.39	Agree	2
4. Adequate supply of water, towels and soap are available	3.29	Agree	3
5. Walls are well maintained and clean	3.16	Agree	6
6. Toilet paper is available	3.64	Strongly Agree	1
7. There is no evidence of insects and rodents.	3.22	Agree	4
Composite Mean	3.26	Agree	
<b>Dining room experience</b>			
1. Dining room has a pleasant ambiance.	3.72	Strongly Agree	1
2. The dining room is well ventilated.	3.38	Agree	6
3. Furniture and fixture are arranged properly.	3.67	Strongly Agree	2
4. The place smells clean.	3.47	Agree	4
5. The place is cozy and relaxing.	3.54	Strongly Agree	3
6. The table and chairs are well maintained.	3.42	Agree	5
Composite Mean	3.53	Strongly Agree	
<b>Exterior</b>			
1. The overall appearance of the building exterior is well maintained.	3.51	Strongly Agree	3
2. The parking lot is spacious and clean.	3.57	Strongly Agree	2
3. The signage is noticeable.	3.84	Strongly Agree	1
Composite Mean	3.64	Strongly Agree	

*Legend:* 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 3 indicates the sanitation practices of casual dining restaurants in restroom. The composite mean of 3.26 indicates that the respondents agree on the above indicators. Based on the result, toilet paper is available with the highest mean score of 3.64. It is followed by the floor, being clean and free from any obstacles with a

mean score of 3.39 and adequate supply of water, towel and soap being available with a mean score of 3.29.

This indicates that most casual dining restaurants provide adequate toilet paper to their customers. It shows that the respondents keenly observed sanitation practices of casual dining restaurants in the restroom and can find inconsistencies as to how they manage it. Previous studies shown that the sanitation practices of casual dining restaurants in the restroom play a vital role in achieving customer satisfaction. Having toilet paper available for customers to use is essential. It is identified as one of the key factors that a customer would look for when using the restroom, especially for the female. Since they are more likely to use compared to male.

It is said that cleanliness of the restroom has been determined to be a central factor that drives overall perception of cleanliness (Liu, 2017). Over 80 percent of consumers reflect a dirty restroom as an indication of overall level of cleanliness in a restaurant (Kim & Bachman, 2019). Consumers will eat up to 25 percent more in a restaurant where they are comfortable using the restroom (Kim & Bachman, 2019). Creating a well devised schedule can maximize the need for regular cleaning, restocking of essentials, maintenance, and sanitation, to avoid restroom complaints (Barlan-Espino, 2017).

Some studies have shown that the female demographic have higher expectations compared with male in terms of cleanliness in restaurant facilities including restroom (Du Plessis, 2016). It suggests that they are more likely not revisit a restaurant who has hygiene issues, like lacking soaps and toilet paper (Krummert, 2016). Kim and Bachman (2019) also stated that restroom one of the key areas that the customers meet, therefore the restaurant's management should be able to closely monitor the availability of soaps, toilet paper, hand towel and most importantly water. If these demands are not met, it is highly unlikely that customer will no longer come back, resulting to bad business.

On the other hand, items such as walls are well maintained and clean and trash bins are available and not full, obtained the lowest mean value of 3.16 and 2.91 respectively and is assessed as agree only. The results show that the respondents have observed that these two indicators are the least managed areas in a restaurant specifically the trash bins. Research shows that more than 80 percent of customers would avoid eating at a restaurant with a dirty restroom again. Any food establishment needs to project a well sanitized restaurant facility, to attract loyal customers, managers should come up with a concrete plan and monitoring so as not to overlook cleanliness in the restrooms. If trash bins overflow with waste or a clogged toilet causes unpleasant odors, customers will take notice and it could negatively impact their experience (Vitali, 2017). Restroom cleanliness is very crucial to achieve customer satisfaction. In the study of Kim and Bachman (2019), they concluded that in relation to the five senses, customers evaluate restroom cleanliness first, by sight and smell such as restroom odor, trash bins, and cleanliness of restroom floors, walls, toilet bowl and seat.

Table also presents the sanitation practices of casual dining restaurants as to dining room experience. The composite mean of 3.53 indicates that the respondents strongly agreed on the above indicators. Based on the results, dining room has a pleasant ambiance which got the highest mean score of 3.72. It was followed by furniture and fixture are arranged properly with 3.67 and the place is cozy and relaxing. The respondents observed that the casual dining restaurants has provided them a pleasant ambiance in terms of aesthetics, music, and lighting. Ambiance plays a vital role in achieving customer satisfaction. Providing them with a clean place to dine, will encourage your customers to come back. Add catchy or Instagram friendly decors, appropriate music and conducive lighting will amplify the message or theme you want to impart. Customer nowadays are always looking for new experiences, and a fresh and quirky restaurant interior design catches their eye. When customers walk through your door, they should immediately be able to sense what type of operation you want to be. Whether it's a fun and casual sports bar, or a homey, comforting place that serves your grandmother's recipes, or a fancy, high-end restaurant, the décor, furnishings, music, lighting, and artwork all contribute to the ambiance of your place (Chiasson, 2015). While the ambience is made up of a set of elements such as lighting, music, scent, and color. Research in environmental psychology has suggested that ambience have a powerful impact on customer's attitudes, emotions, and behavior (Omar et al., 2015).



On the other hand, items such as table and chairs are well-maintained, and the dining room is well ventilated obtaining the lowest mean values of 3.42 and 3.38 respectively and is assessed as agree only. This shows that the respondents observed that some casual dining restaurants pay less attention in maintaining their tables and chairs and that the dining room ventilation is not sufficient to support the crowd. Interior design is one of the physical attributes that attracts customers in deciding which establishment to patronize. Customers should be able to move freely in casual dining restaurants, given that they have high foot traffic, management must be able to schedule a maintenance check of their dining room area. Check whether they have wobbly tables and chairs, if couches need reupholsters, if their air conditioning unit needs cleaning or if they need to set up an air filtering system. All these play a vital role in making the customers comfortable and satisfied. Environmental ergonomic affects human's health, convenience, ability, and willingness to perform (Kroemer, 2017). Environmental Ergonomic is an ergonomic study investigating the relation between humans and their limitations within a physical working environment, covering illumination (lighting), sound, climate, air circulation, and vibration (Palit et al., 2019). The restaurant's ventilation system does not only provide comfort to the customers but should also provide a positive working environment and climate to its employees as well. Palit et al. (2019) investigated physical working environment comprising of air circulation, climate, illumination, and sound. Kroemer (2017) distinguishes air circulation into two: natural and mechanical. Climate is the combination of air temperature, humidity, air movement, and radiation. However, air temperature and humidity play the most important role of climate.

Table 3.3 highlights the sanitation practices of casual dining restaurants as to exterior. The composite means of 3.64 indicates that the respondents strongly agreed on the above indicators. Based on the result, the signage is noticeable with the highest mean score of 3.84. It was followed by the parking is spacious and clean with 3.57. The respondents observed that all casual dining restaurants paid significant importance to signage. It is well lit and is visible from afar; they can use attractive color schemes that catch the eye of passerby. Signage design and content is extremely important for any type of restaurant. It has two (2) major purposes: to identify the firm and attract attention. Ideally, signs should indicate to consumers the who, what, when, where and when of the service offering. For casual dining restaurants, since their primary target market are families or big groups, it should project a wholesome and professional branding. It should be able to impart the brand's identity to all potential customers in the vicinity. Signs, symbols, and artifacts consist of signage, personal artifacts, decoration, and other physical features that work as signals that connect with users (Abdul-Jalil et al., 2016). The sign's size, shape, coloring, and lighting all contribute to the firm's projected image (Hoffman & Bateson, 2017).

On the other hand, item such as the overall appearance of the building exterior being well maintained got the lowest mean score of 3.51 and is assessed as strongly agree. The respondents observed that these indicators pertaining to the exterior are well managed not just by the restaurants but the property or building managers as well. It implies that before a restaurant owner chooses a space for his business, the location should coincide with his/her restaurant theme and market intention, to be able to utilize its strengths and opportunities and eventually will lead to attracting and satisfying customers. Hoffman and Bateman (2017) said, the architecture of the firm's physical facility is often a three-way trade off between a design that will attract the firm's intended target market, a design that maximizes the efficiency of service operation and a design that is affordable.

Table also presents the summary of sanitation practices of casual dining restaurants. The composite mean of 3.48 indicates that the respondents agree on the above indicators. Based on the result, exterior got the highest mean score of 3.64. It is then followed by dining room experience with 3.53. The respondents observed that the exterior of the casual dining restaurants in terms of building exterior, parking lot and signage are well maintained and is effective in providing satisfaction to its existing and potential customers. At a glance, customers should be attracted to the exterior of your restaurant. It should be able to inform them without really having a direct contact or conversation. Store's exterior or façade should maintain its integrity for the longest time possible. This is achieved through joint efforts between the building management and store owners. Studies have shown that there is good opportunity that a customer will choose your restaurant if you have ample parking for all the guest. Casual dining restaurants target diverse groups of diners. They should be able to attend to their parking needs

any time of the day and of the week to maximize sales. The firm's architecture conveys several impressions as well as communicating information to its customers, such as nature of the firm's business, the firm's strength and stability and the price of its service (Hoffman & Bateson, 2017). Likewise, a great restaurant will ideally have its very own parking lot. Customers will simply drive on to another restaurant once they have nowhere to park their car (Barlan-Espino, 2017). Also, Chen (2010), as cited in Barlan-Espino (2017), suggested to increase, and improve the size of the parking lot by having partnership to the parking lots in the vicinity that will increase the expediency of customers who drive their cars.

On the other hand, restroom obtained the lowest mean score of 3.26 and is assessed as agree only. The respondents were able to observe that compared to restaurant exterior and dining experience, the restroom is one area that needs more attention and monitoring. According to Liu (2017), cleanliness is highly valued in society and has a direct influence on a positive attitude toward public spaces such as restaurants. Kim and Bachman (2019) found that customers felt that the cleanliness of a restroom was a good indicator for the condition of the kitchen in a restaurant and food safety. This substantiates the notion that one does not only eat with their eyes first, but also uses them to determine patronage based on the physical conditions of an establishment, including the restroom.

**Table 4**

*Difference of Responses on Food Safety Practices when Grouped According to Profile Variables*

Profile Variables	F-value	p-value	Interpretation
Personnel Hygiene			
Age	1.429	0.234	Not Significant
Gender	1.156	0.249	Not Significant
Profession	1.852	0.138	Not Significant
Civil Status	0.793	0.453	Not Significant
Food Serving			
Age	1.213	0.305	Not Significant
Gender	0.987	0.325	Not Significant
Profession	0.752	0.522	Not Significant
Civil Status	1.328	0.267	Not Significant
Food Handling			
Age	3.334	0.02	Significant
Gender	1.627	0.105	Not Significant
Profession	1.687	0.17	Not Significant
Civil Status	0.465	0.628	Not Significant

*Legend:* Significant at p-value < 0.05

Table 4 presents the comparison of responses on food safety practices of casual dining restaurants in terms of personal hygiene when grouped according to profile. It was observed that all computed p-values were greater than 0.05 alpha level, thus, the researchers fail to reject the null hypothesis and implies that the responses do not vary significantly across the respondents' profile.

This shows that the respondents have no difference in perception about personal hygiene practices of casual dining employees, regardless of age, gender, profession, and civil status. Good personal hygiene is said to be the basic requirement of good manufacturing practices. The more the customers are able to see consistent hygienic and food safety practices done, the higher chances of achieving customer satisfaction and return intentions. Employees are said to be the front-liners who have direct contact with the guests thus, management must ensure that their employees are following hygienic ways by providing complete uniform with safety caps or hat and apron in dining and kitchen staff, that is an advantage in portraying hygienic culture. Maintaining and sustaining good personal hygiene includes taking a bath every day, washing your hands before and after service, brushing your teeth at least twice a day and wearing neatly pressed and clean clothing. Barlan-Espino (2017) was able to suggest sticking to standard policy on staff using a seize and pressed uniforms, nails cut and maintained, wearing light make-up and perfume.

Table 4 also displays the comparison of responses on food safety practices of casual dining restaurants in

terms of food serving when grouped according to profile. It was observed that all computed p-values were greater than 0.05 alpha level, thus the researchers fail to reject the null hypothesis and implies that the responses do not vary significantly across the respondents' profile. This shows that the respondents got no varying in perception about the food serving of casual dining employees, regardless of age, gender, profession, and civil status. To come up with standard procedures and food safety practices in terms of food serving that is consistently followed, management should be able to hire skilled employees who has a good understanding of the importance of food safety, likewise hiring good managers and supervisors that will ensure that all practices are followed religiously. To be able to achieve customer satisfaction, a casual dining restaurant should always make sure to provide a well-cooked food with good quality ingredients, provide a clean and sanitized facility where diners can be comfortable and safe at the same time, making sure all tools and equipment used are clean and considered as non-contaminants. Training is relevant in providing services to guests. Service is considered the top on the expectation of customers; thus, companies must offer exceptional service. (Barlan-Espino, 2017). According to the study of Gizaw et al. (2014), the supervision given by the managers or owners of the establishment nobly contributes to the knowledge, improved food hygiene and safety level of the servers. Good and strong supervision affects the output of work and creates positive organizational environment. More so, some studies conducted to investigate restaurant service quality have used three main dimensions of service quality: food quality, physical environment (ambience) and employee service (Cetinsoz, 2019).

The table shows the comparison of responses on food safety practices of casual dining restaurants in terms of food handling when grouped according to profile. It was observed that there was a significant difference on age since the obtained p-value of 0.020 was less than 0.05 alpha level. This means that the responses differ significantly and based on the post hoc test conducted, it was found out that those who are 20 years old and below has greater assessment on food handling. This shows that the younger generation had a positive view on a casual dining restaurant's food handling standards particularly on the establishment being a non-smoking area. Being a generation that is dependent on technology, their mindset can easily be persuaded. Whatever they see in television or in social media, they would believe it to be correct and true. Before they visit an establishment or make any purchase, they would "google it" or check for reviews online about the food, the service, and the ambience. Once they find the place to be interesting, they already have a positive perception of the restaurant even before they visited. Once these so called "young professionals" dine in casual dining restaurants, the first instinct that they do is to take pictures of themselves, the people they're with or the food that they ordered. This scenario can also turn sour on the part of the establishment if their expectations and demands are not met. For example, if one of the staff forgot to provide tongs or utensils at the table, that little detail can pose a threat to the restaurants social media standing. Results in previous studies has shown that their perception of food handling safety practices in casual dining restaurants is subjective and can easily change based on the perception of the society. According to Manala-O (2018), Generation Z or the younger segment that was born 1995 through 2015, share the largest market value here in the Philippines. This size reveals a significant potential and power to market opportunities. They are known to be price and health conscious and prefer technology and WI-FI accessible establishments. Paquette, Moore, Claveria (2014), described them to be living a fast-paced, multi-tasked, social lifestyle. If they experience what they expected in a restaurant, based on what they see in digital media or hear through word-of mouth (WOM), everything for them is at par. Based on previous studies, any negative experience they have encountered, will reflect instantly in social media sites, which can then be bad for business. However, according to Champman (2016), these so-called young generation cover 42 percent of fast-casual and 30 percent of all restaurant consumers, they take full advantage of technology and often, pay little attention to product quality (Chapman, 2016; Kim & Bachman, 2019).

Table 4 also displays the comparison of responses on sanitation practices of casual dining restaurants as to restroom when grouped according to profile. It was observed that all computed p-values were greater than 0.05 alpha level, thus, the researcher fails to reject the null hypothesis and implies that the responses do not vary significantly across the respondents' profile. This shows that age, gender, profession, and civil status is immaterial in terms of sanitation practices in the restroom. Casual dining restaurant should always maintain

cleanliness in restrooms no matter what time of the day. There should be no excuse for dirty washrooms. Barlan-Espino (2017) stated that managers and owners must prepare a back-up plan when they experience exceeding number of guests especially on peak season and special occasions. Creating a well devised schedule can maximize the need for regular cleaning, maintenance, and sanitation, to avoid restroom complaints.

Furthermore, the table shows the comparison of responses on sanitation practices of casual dining restaurants as to dining room experience when grouped according to profile. It was observed that all computed p-values were greater than 0.05 alpha level, thus, the researcher fails to reject the null hypothesis and implies that the responses do not vary significantly across the respondents' profile. This shows that there is no significant difference on sanitation practices of casual dining restaurants as to dining room experiences in terms of age, gender, profession, and civil status. Ambiance, climate, and ventilation, these are physical and environmental ergonomics that a casual dining restaurant must consider and really give importance to, to achieve customer satisfaction. A warm dining area or broken chair can affect the experience of a customer, hence, could result to accident or injury, therefore resulting to non-revisit intention.

Relatively, table 4 also underscores the comparison of responses on sanitation practices of casual dining restaurants as to exterior when grouped according to profile. It was observed that there was a significant difference on age since the obtained p-value of 0.040 was less than 0.05 alpha level. This means that the responses differ significantly and based on the post hoc test conducted, it was found out that those who are 31 to 40 have greater assessment on exterior. This shows that middle aged people, born any time from 1980 through 1996 are particular about sanitation practices specifically to its exterior. Generation Y or so-called Millennials are known to be health conscious and tech-savvy. They see food as an adventure. They don't observe traditional meal periods, so foods that were once exclusively for breakfast are now in demand late at night. Fresh foods must be available on demand, anytime. Like Generation Z, millennials are born into an era where technology plays a huge part of their everyday lives. In addition, they live a very dynamic life where time is of the essence. They are easily attracted to technological applications as well, like in finely designed restaurant signage that catches their attention would bring them to visit the establishment out of curiosity. Of course, the restaurant should be able to deliver to their expectation, otherwise it will be a one-time deal. Saulo (2016), explained that their generation is the first to be excessively immersed in technology where every bit of information they know is based on the information over the internet. They post all their insights, discussions, and thoughts through social media to be shared with their own network of family and friends. Likewise, parking space is important to people who value time. Suffice to say, by simply keeping up with the standards you are trying to sell, these types of people will not stop from coming.

**Table 5**

*Proposed action plan based on the results of the study*

Key Result Areas (KRA)	Strategies/ Programs/Implementation	Outcomes
1. Female staff wears caps or hairnets.	Themed hair dress uniform in replacement to hairnet	Lessen incidents of hair being found in customer's food and employees would still look professional and authentic.
2. The service area has no flies, cockroaches and other vermin.	The Makati Sanitation Department may strictly impose on restaurants the usage of biodegradable food grade mist that automatically sprays in time interval. Fines may be applicable for non-compliance.	The biodegradable food grade mist will visibly reduce infestation, without human intervention Fines might ensure compliance from the food establishments.
3. Service trays are clean and sanitized.	Food trays should be submerged in a basin with cleaning solution, and a dry cloth should be available beside the basin for instant drying during operation.	Food trays are well sanitized and odor free.
4. Trash bins are available and not full.	Restaurant owners can partner with scientific researchers and develop a biodegradable dissolving agent that can be placed inside the toilet tank that would instantly dissolve any used toilet paper. A sensor installation for trash bins can signal steward to check and manage trash in restroom.	Toilet paper reduction and clog pipe solution. Trash bins in the restroom will be monitored.

5. The dining room is well ventilated	Makati City hall may impose standards and regulation on ventilation system (intake and outtake) based on its area or store capacity	Reduce the risk of hazardous smoke emission for both employee and customers. Dining environment will be cool, odorless and smokeless.
6. The overall appearance of the building exterior is well maintained	A daily checklist for store façade; (checking wall cracks busted lights etc.) Semi-annual audit for the building can be done by building administration.	Management can contact accredited contractors right away.

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#### 4. Conclusions

Majority of the respondents were male, more likely to patronize casual dining restaurants mainly because they are attracted to big servings of food and the availability of alcoholic beverage; ages 41 and above are those who have stable professions and can afford a somewhat expensive dining experience; single, given that casual dining restaurants are open for all meal period, it can easily attract customers who are not price conscious and are only thinking about satisfying themselves; and employed, these type of customers have a restaurant cycle, that they patronize if its within their office area. They are the loyalist, since they will visit your restaurant for at least twice a week, simply because the restaurant is nearest to their workplace. Based on the results of this study, the respondents confirmed that casual dining restaurants follow food safety practices: Employees are asked to wear standard uniforms, the food having the appropriate ingredients and the prohibition of smoking inside the establishments favored all the respondents. In terms of sanitation practices, the casual dining restaurants consistently provided toilet paper for customers to use. The customers experienced a dining room with a pleasant ambiance and observed a noticeable signage. There is no significant difference in responses in terms of personnel hygiene, food serving, restroom management and dining room experience based on the existing profile variables. (age, gender, profession and civil status). However, there were significant differences in responses: respondent's age from 20 years and below about food handling, and aged 31 to 40 years old in terms of establishment exterior. The researcher was able to propose an action plan based on the results of the study.

##### 4.1 Recommendations

The management can strictly enforce daily a comment/feedback form using tablets, to customers in order to monitor the consistency of the restaurant's performance in terms of food safety and sanitation. This can be done through an online survey that a guest answers upon checkout. It is an automated system generated and directly linked to the top management or owners to avoid employee intervention. This way all data gathered is constructive and genuine. The casual dining management may conduct a series of food safety and sanitation trainings and seminars every month to all employees. For instance, a seminar about the "Current Situation and Trends on Food Safety in the Hospitality Industry" or "My Life in Your Hands, A Food Handler Awareness Program". In this manner, employees are empowered and at the same time intrigued, which motivates them and keeps them knowledgeable in their field. In the end, it's a win-win solution for both customers and the restaurant business.

The government of Makati may partner with FoodSHAP, an independent food safety training provider, to strictly regulate and enforce food safety trainings with examination for all employees in restaurants, prior to giving them a work permit that would allow them to take a job in the city of Makati. The Makati government may also impose, ISO 22000 accreditation to restaurant establishments who has been providing service for at least three (3) years. This accreditation provides a layer of reassurance within the global food chain, helping food products cross borders and bring people food that they can trust. For non-compliance, the local government make revoke their business license or non-renewal of business permit.

The future researcher may expand more by using different variables such as return intentions of customers, product quality assurance and its relation to brand sustainability. Likewise, food safety training materials and its approaches to achieve a more compliant food handler behavior.

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