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Sustainable service through product knowledge delivery in Mediterranea Restaurants, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the strategic role of product knowledge in improving the quality of employees in providing services in the restaurant industry. Using a qualitative case study approach at Mediterranea Restaurant Yogyakarta, Indonesia, this study collected data through in-depth interviews and observations through seven key informants. Then, Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, involving data reduction, display, and conclusion. The study's results indicate that product knowledge not only improves service competence but also helps employees deal with customer complaints, encourages purchasing decisions, and enables customers to make product purchases after conveying the meaning of the menu offered. This finding also confirms that systematic training based on on-job training and mentoring plays a key role in forming service competence. This study highlights the practical implications of providing customer products and services from an internal organizational perspective to see how restaurant management designs strategies and develops human resource learning factors based on knowledge-based service.

Keywords: Product Knowledge, Employee Training, Customer Service, Customer Complaints, Restaurant Industry.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi peran strategis pengetahuan produk dalam meningkatkan kualitas karyawan dalam penyediaan layanan di industri restoran. Menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif di Restoran Mediterranea Yogyakarta, Indonesia, penelitian ini mengumpulkan data melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi melalui tujuh informan kunci. Kemudian, data dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman, yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengetahuan produk tidak hanya meningkatkan kompetensi layanan tetapi juga membantu karyawan menangani keluhan pelanggan, mendorong keputusan pembelian, dan memungkinkan pelanggan melakukan pembelian produk setelah menyampaikan makna menu yang ditawarkan. Temuan ini juga menegaskan bahwa pelatihan sistematis berdasarkan pelatihan di tempat kerja dan mentoring memainkan peran kunci dalam membentuk kompetensi layanan. Penelitian ini menyoroti implikasi praktis dari penyediaan produk dan layanan pelanggan dari perspektif internal organisasi untuk melihat bagaimana manajemen restoran merancang strategi dan mengembangkan faktor pembelajaran sumber daya manusia berdasarkan layanan berbasis pengetahuan.

Kata kunci: Pengetahuan Produk, Pelatihan Karyawan, Customer Service, Pelayanan Komplain, Industri Restoran.

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1. Introduction

Company knowledge transfer contributes to innovation, especially in the context of MSMEs, showing the relationship between product knowledge, transformational leadership, and innovation (Lai et al., 2019; Irawan et al., 2023). Knowledge management is increasingly becoming an important focus in information systems because it can form a conceptual basis for managing, defining, and evaluating knowledge in an organization (Baskerville & Dulipovici, 2006). In the service sector, including hotels and restaurants, efficient, friendly service and high-quality food presentation are critical to customer satisfaction (Budiman & Hariani, 2024). However, this service practice is not free from various challenges, such as service delays, equipment damage, and communication problems between staff. Meanwhile, another study in high-end restaurant segments in Yogyakarta stated that satisfactory service to consumers and relationships with employees are one of the keys to the restaurant's survival, as well as the importance of maintaining the cultural concept in the restaurant environment, which can make consumers want to come back (Supriyadi et al., 2020).

To overcome this, an approach that integrates intensive training, effective management systems, and new learning technologies is essential (Kailer & Scheff, 1999). In this context, knowledge transfer, both explicit and tacit, becomes a key element in improving overall service quality (Watanuki & Kojima, 2007). Product knowledge and understanding of customer needs are very strategic in the sales world. Román et al. (2002) showed that sales training that focuses on customer orientation positively impacts the sales force's effectiveness. The quality of training, especially in terms of training hours and the relevance of its content to customer needs, has been shown to increase sales significantly. This training strategy is very much needed, especially in the service industry, such as hotels and restaurants, where service staff are required to serve food and create a practical service experience (Sawelo et al., 2024). The current generation tends to have a high interest, especially with knowledge with certain technological links that strengthen critical thinking and information processing skills through increased digital literacy (Junianta & Suratman, 2025). Therefore, training is a routine activity and part of a competency development strategy oriented toward long-term competitive advantage (Johannessen & Olsen, 2003).

In implementing knowledge management in organizations, integration into daily practices is crucial to the success of innovation. Sousa & González-Loureiro (2016) stress that knowledge-sharing routines, collaborative activities, and participation in quality improvement projects can strengthen knowledge transfer. On the other hand, Stanica and Peydro (2016) state that cross-functional training and a lean approach to product development contribute positively to the dissemination of knowledge between departments. Awareness of the organization's desires also encourages individuals to be more open to learning and knowledge development (Craig & Allen, 2013). It is reinforced by Joshi & Sharma (2004), who stated that organizations need concrete actions to develop customer knowledge to remain relevant and competitive. The knowledge developed as a reference for increasing more expressive productivity in the company, requires performance considerations as a fundamental assessment in the

company's organizational operating system Kurniawan et al. (2023). Ultimately, strategic management policies must support the practice and dissemination of knowledge within an organization. However, as Demir et al. (2023) noted, translating training into real performance improvements remains challenging, even in ISO-certified companies. Therefore, management practices such as regular courses, seminars, and information delivery systems are important in creating an organizational climate that supports continuous learning (Harun et al., 2015; Hsu, 2006). The effectiveness of this learning also depends heavily on factors such as information transparency and task efficacy, which act as mediators in employee innovative behavior (Che et al., 2018). Therefore, organizations need to consciously design training and knowledge management systems that collect information and implement strategies to generate real impacts on performance and innovation.

Products are essential in marketing activities because they function as concrete results of business activities aimed at meeting consumer needs. Products in this context are not limited to goods but include services, experiences, ideas, people, places, organizations, and information valuable to consumers (Saragih et al., 2023). Along with the products' complexity, understanding the product, known as product knowledge becomes crucial. Product knowledge includes various information ranging from product types and brands and physical and functional characteristics to prices and consumer perceptions of the product's value Fatihuddin & Firmansyah, 2019). In a world such as restaurant and hotel services, employees' in-depth understanding of the details of their products will improve their ability to respond to customer needs appropriately and professionally. The importance of product knowledge in the service industry, especially the culinary and hospitality sectors, is focused on mastering technical information and its influence on service quality and customer perception. Zeithaml et al. (2018) revealed that services that enrich product knowledge improve overall service quality.

Furthermore, product knowledge not only acts as a tool in explaining products to consumers but also as a strategic element in creating a positive customer experience. Resmara (2017) stated that product knowledge reflects an individual's understanding of a product's features, benefits, and technical information, which helps consumers in the decision-making process. The dimensions of product knowledge grouped into three main categories: knowledge of product attributes, benefits, and how to use the product. This category is relevant to the employee's task in explaining product advantages and suggesting the best use to customers. Meanwhile, Peter & Olson (2010) added other important indicators, such as functional and psychological benefits and consumer value, which enrich the perspective on how users perceive and utilize products. In the context of restaurants, understanding these dimensions supports the delivery of complete information related to raw materials, serving processes, and consumption benefits.

In the restaurant industry, excellent service is a major differentiating factor influencing customer satisfaction. One factor contributing significantly to service quality is employee product knowledge outside menu innovation, cleanliness, maintenance,

and restaurant location (Handayani et al., 2023). The better the quality of the product and the quality of service provided, the greater the guest satisfaction in the restaurant (Saviera et al., 2023). So, product knowledge includes a comprehensive understanding of the menu, raw materials, serving methods, and the products' value (Peter & Olson, 2010). This also applies in hotel restaurants (Winarta & Kunto, 2013), explicitly stating that guest satisfaction is caused by the responsiveness variable, which is the most dominant variable, followed by assurance, empathy, reality, and reliability Sasongko & Subagio, 2013).

The role of skills and knowledge about the menu in the food and beverage service department is vital in providing food and beverage services in restaurants to provide customer satisfaction. However, servers must improve their skills to provide maximum service to restaurant customers (AS & Atalina, 2016). In the hospitality industry, it is common to face complaints from guests regarding the service provided by the hotel. Making product and service knowledge important as a source of responses will affect customer satisfaction and the level of guest arrivals, including how quickly they serve guest (Lawalu, 2019). When employees can provide accurate explanations and appropriate recommendations, the customer experience increases significantly (Zeithaml et al., 2018). Informative and empathetic service creates a more personal consumer experience, ultimately increasing customer satisfaction. It also added that the perception of value and service delivered by employees with good product knowledge impacts loyalty and repeat purchase intensity (Saragih et al., 2023).

Implementing product knowledge for new employees is the first strategic step in building superior service quality in the restaurant and hospitality industry. The product knowledge can be initiated by the presence of transformational leadership, which has a positive influence on knowledge sharing, self-efficacy, and trust in the leader. This also confirms the mediating role of self-efficacy and trust in the leader in the indirect relationship between transformational leadership and knowledge sharing Hananta & Suratman (2023). This process can be carried out through various approaches, such as formal training, senior employee mentoring, and direct field observation. Robbins and Coulter (2016) stated that effective training methods can accelerate employee understanding of the products and services offered and support adaptation to the company's organizational culture and operational standards. In customer service, understanding the product is very important to provide technical information and determine the employee's ability to respond to customer needs quickly and accurately (Zeithaml et al., 2018). Therefore, the adaptation process at the beginning of an employee's employment period is critical because it helps them understand and internalize product information to be optimally applied in service interactions. Ansani & Samsir (2022) explain that effective learning can occur through behavioral observation models and social interactions in the work environment. Interaction between new and senior employees, through direct observation and real work practices, is a valuable learning medium for strengthening product knowledge.

Previously there are studies have not yet explored how on-the-job training specifically strengthens product knowledge and service quality in the restaurant

context of Indonesia. According to Fatihuddin and Firmansyah (2019), who emphasize the importance of understanding tasks and responsibilities based on mastery of product information. This ongoing training and learning process can create positive customer perceptions of the service, encouraging customer satisfaction and loyalty (Saragih et al., 2023). Structured and systematic training has an essential contribution to creating competitive service quality. Kasmir and Roharto (2017) stated that training aims to improve employee knowledge, skills, and work behavior. Mangkunegara (2016) added that training is a form of short-term education designed to equip employees with relevant technical skills at a higher level. In its implementation, three essential indicators measure the effectiveness of training: training participants, trainer quality, and program implementation itself. Suparyadi (2015) and Pratama (2018) emphasized that systematic training must be carried out to achieve optimal learning outcomes. Swasto (2010) also explained that the proper training method can improve performance, reduce absenteeism and turnover, and maintain employee competency so that it does not become obsolete. Therefore, human resource management strategies that integrate knowledge-based training are highly relevant to improving the competitiveness of service organizations, especially restaurants and hotels.

Mediterranea Restaurant is located in Yogyakarta and is known as one of the best culinary places that serve Mediterranean and European-style dishes. This restaurant was founded by a French chef, Chef Camille Massard, who has international experience in the culinary world. With a commitment to quality and taste authenticity, Mediterranea Restaurant has become a favorite destination for food lovers, both locals and tourists. The strategic location of the restaurant provides easy access for customers, while the warm and elegant interior design creates a comfortable and friendly atmosphere. Mediterranea Restaurant offers a variety of Mediterranean specialties, such as pasta, pizza, salads, and various types of steaks, which are prepared with fresh and quality ingredients. In addition, this restaurant is also known for having a selection of healthy and environmentally friendly menus. In its operations, Mediterranea Restaurant prioritizes excellent service and has a team of well-trained employees in terms of product knowledge. Each team member, from servers to baristas, has a deep understanding of each menu served so that they can provide the best recommendations according to the needs and tastes of customers. This restaurant is a place to eat and an impressive culinary experience, making it one of the leading culinary icons in Yogyakarta.

2. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data collection techniques were conducted through in-depth interviews with seven informants from various divisions (here the respondent initials: waiters EN, OL, AW, RS, barista- YO, chef- IA, and HRD- IR). The data analysis technique uses the Miles and Huberman model (data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion). Two objectives and results are to be achieved from qualitative research, namely analytical descriptive (thick description) and explanatory descriptive (Harahap, 2020). The purposive sampling

method was used to determine the research participants, with the following requirements: 1) have worked for at least 6 months, 2) are directly involved in service and realizing product information, and 3) are willing to be voluntary participants. These participants were selected based on their role and involvement in implementing restaurant product knowledge.

The important points explored during the interview are as follows: a) the level of importance of product knowledge for service and customer satisfaction as viewed by the waiter; b) stages and methods of product knowledge training for new employees; c) implementation of strategies and factors that help new employees understand product knowledge, d) the influence of product knowledge on customer satisfaction and customer complaints. This study's data analysis stages include data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Baba, 2017). This study also uses triangulation techniques to increase the validity and reliability of the data. Triangulation is carried out by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure that the data obtained is consistent and reliable. This triangulation is important to verify the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation of the application of product knowledge in various job positions in the restaurant.

3. Results and Discussion

This part discusses about the findings of depth-interview, started from how importance the product knowledge, the extend of product knowledge impact on product and services, the knowledges that needed for shaping the product and services, the strategies, factors delivering and measuring that the knowledge embedded. Also in the end of interviews about how the product knowledge and encourage buying decision and minimize the customer complaints.

A deep understanding of a restaurant's food, beverage, and ingredient menus is an essential element that directly affects service quality. Martini et al. (2022) emphasized that service is the main indicator in building customer satisfaction, ultimately leading to restaurant trust. Sulistyawati & Seminari (2015) stated that good service quality will increase customer satisfaction. Employees with good product knowledge can provide accurate recommendations, answer customer questions confidently, and explain products professionally. In addition, this understanding also supports effective communication between kitchen staff and the front-line service team, thereby reducing the potential for errors. Zeithaml et al. (2018) emphasized that product knowledge contributes directly to service quality, while Peter and Olson (2010) showed that product knowledge includes functional and psychological benefits that enhance customer experience. Saragih et al. (2023) also added that understanding the product helps shape customer perceptions of the value of the service provided.

Importance of product knowledge in restaurant services

> “It is essential because if he does not know, he cannot answer and provide the best service to customers, so customers feel that the service here is not the same. When dining in, eat here, especially this restaurant, which sells the name of a French restaurant and is already very popular. It would be a shame if you are not satisfied

with the service here; it can give a bad impression and experience, especially now that everything is digital, there are lots of social media, and everything is viral." (EN)

"We must also sell drinks here, and there are various drinks, so they must also understand the types of drinks available here." (AW)

"It is essential because product knowledge is the initial provision for new employees to understand the business process and their respective job descriptions, mainly as waiters because they deal directly with customers; there must be." (IR)

"It's important, especially for types of food, that they understand so that when guests ask them, they can answer later." (RS)

"It is very important in my opinion, the first thing that must be done here is to know the product knowledge starting from how it works, how the products are, starting from food and drinks so that later if he knows, he can provide a good experience to every customer who eats here. Usually, if there are new employees here, we don't immediately tell them to deal with customers. I direct him to seniors to handle customers, and he learns product knowledge." *(AW)*

Product Knowledge on Services' Impact

Professional and consistent service can increase customer loyalty to the restaurant. Ismail and Yusuf (2021) explained, that satisfactory service encourages customers to return to use the restaurant's services in the future. Employees who can provide relevant recommendations and answer questions quickly will create a warm and satisfying service atmosphere. Rasyid (2019) emphasized that service quality significantly influences customer satisfaction. Rahmawati & Susilowati (2021), also stated that quality service creates high satisfaction. Solomon (2017) added that product understanding helps employees respond to customer needs appropriately and avoid miscommunication, while Fatihuddin & Firmansyah (2019) stated that this knowledge strengthens work competence in service. Resmara (2017) also emphasized that interactions based on product knowledge create a more quality and memorable customer experience. Thus, product knowledge is not just a technical element but an integral part of a service strategy that builds trust and long-term relationships between customers and restaurants. A good understanding of product knowledge has increased employee professionalism and responsibility in customer service. EN emphasized that servers who understand the menu can avoid mistakes in recording orders and directly contribute to service quality. It also supported by other below:

"even though I work in the kitchen, the product knowledge of the front-of-house staff is critical to the smooth running of operations. If the servers know about the menu we serve, they can provide the correct information to customers and avoid mistakes in orders. This reduces the potential for complaints and ensures customers get the food they expect. This improves the overall quality of service." (RS)

"the relationship between knowledge products and service practices is significant because knowledge products are essential for providing exemplary service to customers, from questions that arise to taking orders. So, in the early stages, if there are new employees, we must learn the product and involve them in the work cooperation process." (YO)

> **“**from an HR perspective, product knowledge is important in providing satisfactory service. Employees who master the product tend to be more confident interacting with customers, which gives the impression of professionalism. Service supported by strong product knowledge helps build good customer relationships, reduces service errors, and provides a more enjoyable experience.” (IR)

Also, IA as a barista, that in-depth knowledge of the product allows for more targeted beverage serving, thereby enriching the customer experience. IA emphasized that product knowledge boosts employees' confidence, which is then manifested in the impression of professionalism when interacting with customers.

What types of product knowledge specifically?

It appears that there are several types of essential knowledge that restaurant employees must master to support service quality. One of the most critical aspects is product knowledge, namely a deep understanding of the menu, food ingredients, and the serving process, which is an essential basis for interacting with customers (Nugroho & Setyawan, 2015**)** . This knowledge helps employees convey product information accurately and convincingly to consumers. In addition, customer service skills are crucial, including service ethics, complaint handling, and understanding of food allergies that are directly related to customer safety and comfort. Situational knowledge is also considered necessary, namely the ability of employees to respond to unexpected situations appropriately and calmly.

> “.. many things must be understood because this server division is a waiter, delivering drinks from the barista to customers and then delivering food from the kitchen to customers. In addition, it is also necessary to understand how to work together tactically to understand the product to handle customers and take orders. But yeah, to be able to do all that gradually, it takes time to understand starting from the basics first; we, as those who have been here for a long time, we direct.” (YO)

> “We make drinks, and the knowledge that must be possessed includes knowledge about coffee, mixing drinks, and the right combination of flavors. Baristas must also know about equipment maintenance, such as espresso machines, to ensure everything works optimally and produces consistent drink quality.” (IA)

> “If our knowledge is working in the kitchen or cooking, the knowledge that employees must have includes basic cooking techniques to understand how to make food on the menu. In addition, they must also know about the correct storage of food ingredients to maintain quality and cleanliness. Knowledge of kitchen cleanliness and hygienic standards is also very important so that the kitchen is always safe and by Health regulations.” (RS)

> “Knowledge outside the business process should be about English; the customers here are foreigners. The menu is also in English, so we must understand what the menu means. Whether it will be asked by domestic or foreign guests, right?” (AW)

From an HRD perspective, emphasis on problem-solving skills and an understanding of work safety are essential because these aspects contribute to smooth operations while maintaining a positive image of the restaurant through efficient and safe service. Combining these three types of knowledge shows that

mastery of technical and non-technical competencies is essential for employee success in the restaurant industry.

Product knowledge strategy through employee trainings

Training in the context of restaurants is a short-term educational process that aims to improve technical skills and understanding of work (Mangkunegara, 2016; Kasmir & Roharto, 2017**)**. IR that has responsible as HRD mention that the work handed over to new employees regarding product knowledge is usually done in stages.

> "…first, we provide formal training where new employees learn each item on the menu, including ingredients and how to serve them. In addition, they are also placed with senior employees to do on-the-job training, where they can practice directly what they have learned while getting guidance from more experienced colleagues. Routine evaluations are also carried out to ensure they have mastered product knowledge before releasing them to serve customers independently." (IR)

> **"**When I hand it over to new servers, I introduce them to the menu and main products. In addition, I also teach them about the standard operational. I usually ask them to click on some menus so they can understand the taste and provide more detailed descriptions to customers. Next, I will learn how to answer common customer questions like food recommendations or drink pairings. I also often hold service simulations to help them learn in a more realistic situation." (EN)

> "For the kitchen, I teach new employees by starting from the basics, such as cooking techniques and the correct use of ingredients. I also emphasize the importance of consistency in taste and presentation, which requires a deep understanding of the product. I make sure they train under the supervision of more senior colleagues here so that they can be corrected immediately if there are mistakes in the cooking process or preparation of ingredients. This handover takes time because product knowledge in the kitchen also involves complex technical aspects." (RS)

> "I usually accompany new employees to ensure they understand our products in detail. We start by providing a menu guide that contains a complete explanation of the product, and I also explain how to communicate with customers when there are questions about the product. In addition, I teach tips on serving customers and handling complaints so they can apply product knowledge correctly when dealing directly with customers." (OL)

Based on interviews, the transfer of product knowledge to new employees is carried out gradually through a combination of formal training and on-the-job training, which has proven effective in forming work competencies directly in the workplace (Kurniasari et al., 2018**)**. Training starts from introducing SOPs and menus to fieldwork practices, which are reinforced through mentoring by senior employees and periodic evaluations, so that employees can master product knowledge thoroughly (Pratama, 2018**)**.

> "The method of implementing product knowledge that teaches new employees is done gradually. New employees start learning the menu and products in theory. Then, he is invited to practice directly serving customers under supervision. We also often simulate real situations so that they can prepare themselves to face various scenarios in the restaurant, such as customers asking about allergies or special requests upon request." (YO)

> “If there are new employees, we usually introduce them first to our company's various parts, such as dinner napkins, cutlery sets, service soup, etc. All are done during on-the-job training so that we can provide examples that can be practiced directly. In addition, we invite them to subscribe to the menu/testing to describe the taste and texture to customers better. In addition, we also usually use role-playing, where new employees are trained to face various questions or situations that may occur when serving customers. This method is considered effective in increasing their confidence in applying product knowledge.” (RS)

> “If there are new employees, we usually direct them to use on-the-job training. So new employees are directly involved in our working hours, serving guests, delivering food and drinks, etc. The initial introduction is like introducing the products in the menu book, the SOP for providing food and beverages, and how to serve and solve problems in serving customers. Gradually, new employees will understand how we work and get to know our products here.” (OL)

> “New baristas are usually introduced to the basics of barista duties. What we do here is make drinks. There are many types of beverages, such as coffee drinks, types of coffee, healthy drinks, and wine. Everything is done gradually. Here, we also provide the opportunity to test products/beverages to help them understand the taste profile of each drink offered. We involve them in daily service, where they apply this knowledge directly to customers accompanied by seniors here.” (IA)

> “From the HRD side, implementing knowledge products for new employees combines periodic written knowledge product testing or direct practice on-the-job training accompanied by other more experienced employees. We recommend reading the book menu often, following senior directions in on-the-job training. Usually, we hold a written test to find out how far the understanding of new employees is in understanding the product here.” (IR)

Training is a strategic effort to improve employee knowledge and skills in specific tasks (Kurniasari et al., 2018**)**. Based on the results of interviews with six informants, the on-the-job training method is the main approach in transferring product knowledge to new employees in restaurants because it is considered adequate, structured, and directly applied in the work environment. In addition, mentoring by senior employees is an important factor in ensuring correct understanding. Kasmir and Roharto (2017**)** stated that this training improves attitudes, discipline, loyalty, and new knowledge for employees and companies.

> “In practice, we teach new employees directly when we work or what is usually called on-the-job training. We use a buddy system strategy, where experienced senior employees accompany new employees. This mentoring allows them to learn directly while getting immediate feedback from colleagues/seniors. We also encourage new employees to be quick and responsive to situations both internal teams and customers. We also actively communicate to assess new employees to what extent they understand the role of a waiter before we allow them for the next task." (ID)

> "The strategy in the kitchen usually involves a hands-on approach. I always encourage new employees to learn while working, directly involved in preparing ingredients and cooking. We also use rotation positions in the kitchen so they can

understand the role of each section in serving dishes. In this way, product knowledge can be applied in all aspects of their work in the kitchen" (RS)

"For new baristas, the main strategy is hands-on experience. They are involved in every stage of coffee making, from selecting beans to brewing techniques. We also often do exercises in front of the class so that they understand the taste characteristics of each type of coffee. This strategy strengthens their understanding of the product and makes them more confident when explaining coffee to customers" (IA)

"As for the strategy, we return it to the seniors to teach because they are also the ones on show in the field, but from the management itself, we have something like a training period, and then there will be a product knowledge test before later entering a 3-month contract period to learn to understand the working knowledge. I think 3 months is enough time for a new employee to learn the product and how to work." (IR)

Training plays an important role in shaping behavior and equipping employees with skills, knowledge, and work attitudes that fit the company's culture and needs Kasmir & Roharto, 2017**)**. The application of product knowledge for new restaurant employees is carried out through a practical and contextual gradual learning strategy. Handoko (2010**)** distinguishes two training methods: on-the-job training, which is carried out directly in the workplace, and off-the-job training, which takes place outside the workplace (Endayani et al., 2015**)**. Mentoring by seniors (buddy system), as well as simulation services and position rotations, helps strengthen real product understanding.

How Ensuring Product Knowledge Embedded for Employees?

YO as senior waiter said that the way to measure the level of product knowledge of new employees can also be seen from the familiarity of the names of food or drinks that they memorize later there will usually be a written test of product knowledge with HRD to find out how far the product knowledge they have is also one of the parameters of their development to be allowed to handle customers or not. Below supported statements:

"The way to measure the level of product knowledge of new employees is step by step, starting from new employees who are still laymen until they are allowed to receive orders. Usually, they are only allowed to receive orders if they already understand the products here; then, later, they will also be given access to input orders into a system. But to do that, it is the same as minimizing customer complaints" (EN)

"From the management side, sir, we usually have a 6-day trial period before we contract them to work here so they can get to know the work environment and understand the business process, after which there is also a written product knowledge test. If it is written, we can also see how far they have developed in understanding our products here." (IR)

"At the bar, we usually measure the product knowledge of new employees by practicing directly. New employees are asked to make drinks or explain various types of drinks to guests. In addition, I also often do role plays to see if they can explain the differences between various types of drinks and recommend the right pairing." (IA)

Informants mentioned direct observation and simulation as the most effective methods to measure new employees' product knowledge comprehension. Employees assessed their ability to explain products while serving customers confidently. In addition, role-play conveys readiness in various work situations, which also helps build teamwork capabilities Pratama (2018). This approach allows for a holistic assessment of new employees' competence and service readiness.

Factors that accelerate understanding of product knowledge?

> "There are many factors, in my opinion, such as being involved in the business process, such as delivering food and drinks to customers, it can help new employees memorize our products here, then it's like allowing them to test it so they know what it tastes like so when it's time to take an order, they're ready to answer customer questions." (YO)

> "The main factor, in my opinion, is direct guidance from senior employees. When new employees are always accompanied, they can learn faster through observation and practice. In addition, direct experience, such as serving customers directly, also accelerates their understanding. Practice in real situations is always the best way to learn" (EN)

> "Another important factor is the gradual assignment of tasks. New employees are not immediately released to handle customers alone but are given small tasks first. This allows them to focus on understanding the products one by one without pressure. In addition, direct training in the field is also important because they can learn from direct experience and see how their colleagues interact with customers" (OL)

> "One crucial factor is structured intensive training. Well-designed training, which includes theory and practice, gradual evaluations in writing such as written tests, or communicating with senior servers to find out how far the new employee has progressed. This will accelerate employee understanding. In addition, employee motivation itself is fundamental. Employees who are enthusiastic and eager to learn tend to understand product knowledge faster" (IR)

One important factor that accelerates the understanding of product knowledge for new employees is direct mentoring by senior employees through on-the-job training. This method allows employees to learn practically in real work situations with proper supervision. This type of training effectively instills the basic skills needed to carry out the job (Andayani & Makian, 2016) while building confidence and professionalism when interacting with customers.

Product knowledge encourgage buying decision

Lack of product knowledge affects upselling ability and reduces customer interest in trying new menus, as YO and EN explained related with Sudaryono (2014) and Nurfauzi et al. (2023), which state that the quality of service and information influences purchasing decisions. Sulistyawati and Seminari (2015), also Peter and Olson (2010) emphasize the importance of product knowledge in increasing customer satisfaction and retention.

> "…When guests are hesitant about their choices and ask for menu recommendations, employees who understand the menu can provide

recommendations according to guest preferences, making it more likely that guests will choose that menu." (you)

"There may be many guests who do not know or may be unfamiliar with the menu here. If we provide informative recommendations, they tend to follow our advice, and that influences their decision to buy." (ID)

".. When employees can answer customer questions, customers will feel more comfortable and often make purchasing decisions based on the information we provide." (OL)

"We only cook based on requests written by the waiter who takes the order, so we cook according to the provisions, food hygiene, and presentation to taste. This will also provide customers a good experience so they can return." (RS)

"Employees who have strong product knowledge can increase sales. They can recommend pairing food and drinks or explain the special menu here. When guests understand the value or specialty of our recommended dishes, they are more likely to order the food/drink." (IR)

"Product Knowledge is also critical when guests choose drinks. For example, if a guest comes here and asks for recommendations for drinks, I can provide the information the guest asked for or explain the various types of cocktails or wines, and guests will be more confident in choosing. The right explanation can make them try new drinks they might have previously cared about." (IA).

Product knowledge greatly influences customer purchasing decisions. Employees' in-depth understanding of the product allows them to provide promising arguments and relevant recommendations, accelerating purchasing decisions (Sudaryono, 2014; Nurfauzi et al., 2023**)**. This shows that service quality significantly affects customer satisfaction (Sulistyawati & Seminari, 2015).

"Frontline employees/waiters must be able to explain the details of the dishes well. If they do not know about our ingredients or cooking methods, customers will not be interested in trying special items or chef recommendations. Lack of product knowledge will reduce customer interest, which hurts sales, especially for special or premium menus." (RS)

"If, for example, my colleagues or I cannot explain the difference between various types of wine or cocktails, guests may hesitate and have a less than pleasant experience because they do not get the information they expect. When they come to look for an experience, they ask about the type of drink but don't get it." (IA)

"Lack of product knowledge hurts sales. Employees who do not master the product often cannot answer customer questions well, so guests feel less confident in ordering. This makes upselling opportunities or special menu recommendations missed. And ultimately reduces sales potential." (ID)

"Lack of product knowledge from the service team can degrade the guest experience and directly impact sales. Guests who don't feel helped when making menu choices may feel disappointed or dissatisfied. This affects sales at the moment and reduces the likelihood of them returning or leaving a positive review, which impacts long-term performance." (IR)

"If employees don't understand the product, they can't make good and accurate recommendations. Guests often rely on the server to make suggestions, but if the

server can't explain the menu or pairings well, guests are left confused or often end up just ordering dishes they already know." (OL)

Performance is a series of activities that produce work by established standards (Endayani et al., 2015**)**. Based on the answers of the six informants, a lack of product knowledge hurts restaurant sales performance, reducing customer interest and inhibiting upselling. Customer satisfaction, directly related to service quality, is the key to customer loyalty (Sulistyawati & Seminari, 2015; Aini, 2008**)**. Employees can improve their performance, provide positive experiences, and strengthen customer trust with proper training.

Product knowledge anticipates customer complain

Employees who master product knowledge are important in reducing customer complaints because they can provide accurate information and appropriate solutions from the start. Understanding the product also allows employees such as baristas to recommend drinks according to customer tastes, thereby increasing satisfaction and encouraging purchasing decisions.

> "… if the Waiter can provide a complete and detailed explanation before the customer orders, such as the ingredients or how the food is prepared, the customer will understand more about what they are ordering. This automatically reduces the chance of complaints. When customers are still dissatisfied, a Waiter with good product Knowledge can offer solutions, such as recommendations for more suitable alternatives." (OL)

> "as a chef who cooks food, I often see that customer complaints about food are often caused by misunderstandings about ingredients or cooking methods, or maybe misunderstandings between waiters who take orders, and then after we finish cooking and serve them to customers, it turns out to be wrong. Well, things like this: When the server knows how the dish is prepared, they can explain to guests before problems arise, and if there are complaints, they can immediately convey the information correctly." (RS)

> "when employees understand the details of the product, they can provide recommendations that are by customer preferences, so complaints due to mismatched expectations can be avoided." (IA)

> "it is important to understand customers and the contents of the menu. If employees can explain product details, such as ingredients, serving methods, or even potential allergies, customers feel more satisfied and have fewer complaints" (YO)

Good product understanding is important in reducing customer complaints and increasing satisfaction, which aligns with the company's goal of meeting consumer needs (Fatihuddin & Firmansyah, 2019). Employees who understand the product well can avoid misunderstandings, handle complaints, and provide quick solutions and appropriate alternatives. This will encourage customer satisfaction and loyalty, (Sulistyawati & Seminari (2015); Solomon (2017); Zeithaml et al., (2018).

4. Conclusion

Product knowledge is key in supporting professional service, reducing customer complaints, driving purchasing decisions, and increasing customer satisfaction.

Experience-based training and mentoring strategies have proven effective in building knowledge-based service competencies. Therefore, restaurant management needs to make product knowledge development an integral part of its human resource strategy. Product knowledge requires sufficient training time and effort for employees to provide excellent service. Without adequate product knowledge, employees will struggle to answer customer questions, provide relevant recommendations, or accurately explain menu details. This can impact overall service quality. Good service quality not only affects customer satisfaction but also has a long-term impact on customer loyalty and the company's reputation. Satisfied customers are more likely to use a company's services again, recommend it to others, and build a positive image of the company in the community. Conversely, poor service quality can quickly damage a company's reputation, especially in today's digital age, where negative reviews can easily spread through social media and other platforms.

In the context of this study, it is essential to understand how employee product knowledge affects their performance, service quality, and customer satisfaction. This study aims to explore this relationship in the restaurant industry, given the high level of direct interaction between employees and customers. Restaurants are an ideal place to analyze these dynamics as one of the sectors highly dependent on customer service. By understanding the relationship between these variables, companies can design more effective strategies to improve service quality and customer satisfaction. Product knowledge is an essential component that an employee in a restaurant must possess. In-depth knowledge of the menu can give customers in-depth information for determining purchases. Also, mastery of the menu book or product knowledge can minimize customer complaints. That will create customer satisfaction when making product purchases/eating at the restaurant. Employee mastery of product knowledge has a significant impact on service quality. Employees who are confident and able to explain products professionally increase customer satisfaction and strengthen the restaurant's image as a quality place to eat. With good product knowledge, employees can provide proactive, efficient, and customer satisfaction-oriented services while opening up opportunities to increase sales.

Employee training plays a vital role in training employees quickly or slowly to understand the job description and master the product. This study proves that involving new employees in the implementation process will accelerate employees' understanding of the job description and product. The new employee training process at Mediterranea Restaurant is carried out in stages, from the introduction of SOPs and products to direct practice under the supervision of seniors. Evaluation methods such as written tests and field observations help management assess the ability of new employees to understand products and provide services. This approach ensures that employees not only master product knowledge but can also convey it well to customers. Practical training for employees includes two training sessions: on-the-job and off-the-job. Applying on-the-job training in training employees by giving tasks and responsibilities while practicing directly can help employees quickly understand their tasks and duties. Off-job training can also help employees learn what has been

practiced and deepen their knowledge through a theory, such as a book learning menu, SOP learning, product knowledge tests, and foreign language learning.

Somehow, there are limitation of this study. First, The study focuses exclusively on the restaurant industry, which is characterized by high customer interaction and rapid service cycles. As a result, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other service sectors such as hospitality, retail, healthcare, or banking, where the nature of product knowledge and customer interaction may differ. Second, The data and observations are based on a single restaurant, so the results may reflect the specific culture, training style, or management approach unique to that setting. This may limit the ability to generalize the findings to other restaurants with different operational models or management systems. The other limitation is although product knowledge plays a central role in service performance, other variables such as employee motivation, leadership style, organizational support, working conditions, or customer personality were not deeply analyzed. These factors might interact with product knowledge in shaping service quality. The last, the training evaluation in this study focuses primarily on immediate or short-term employee performance, without assessing long-term retention of product knowledge, continuous improvement, or potential changes over time factors that may greatly influence the sustainability of training effectiveness. In addition, the measurement of customer satisfaction remains limited, as the study only discusses the concept at a general level and does not incorporate diverse evaluation metrics such as online reviews, repeat visit frequency, or customer loyalty indicators. This limitation may narrow the interpretation of service quality outcomes and restrict a more comprehensive understanding of how product knowledge truly impacts customer satisfaction.

Future research should expand the scope beyond a single restaurant by examining multiple establishments or comparing different service industries to enhance generalizability. Studies are also encouraged to incorporate additional variables such as employee engagement, leadership support, emotional intelligence, and work environment to understand better how these factors interact with product knowledge in shaping service quality. Longitudinal research is necessary to evaluate the long-term retention of product knowledge and the sustained impact of training over time. More exploration by digital training tools—such as e-learning modules- can provide insight into scalable training methods effectively. Researchers also compare diverse customer satisfaction metrics, including online reviews, repeat visits, and loyalty indicators, to obtain a more accurate assessment of service outcomes. Additionally, examining demographic moderators such as age, experience, or educational background could deepen the understanding of training effectiveness. Benefit analyses may help organizations evaluate the financial impact of investing in product knowledge development.

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