SERVICE MANAGEMENT

UNVEILING THE LINK BETWEEN CUSTOMER ORIENTATION AND CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT: THE ROLE OF CUSTOMER EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The study examined the role of customer empowerment (CE) in the relationship between customer orientation (CO) and customer involvement (CI) within the context of local restaurants in Ghana.

Methodology: A qualitative approach was employed, and data were collected from 767 respondents using structured questionnaires. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analysis.

Findings: The results demonstrate that customer orientation significantly increases the likelihood of active customer involvement in local restaurants. Customer-centric strategies drive involvement both directly and indirectly through empowerment mechanisms, with customer empowerment playing a crucial role in amplifying the positive effects of customer orientation on active involvement.

Recommendations: The study recommends that small food outlets should invest in employee training to promote customer-centric approaches and implement empowerment programs that encourage customer involvement in decision-making and provide feedback channels. Businesses should also regularly measure customer satisfaction and foster a customer-focused, empowerment-driven culture to improve service quality and enhance customer satisfaction.

Keywords: *Customer orientation, Customer empowerment, Customer involvement, local restaurants, Ghana*

INTRODUCTION

Firms have long recognized the strategic importance of customer involvement in co-creation and service delivery. However, as markets evolve dynamically, interactive participation takes on entirely new meanings in business. Examples of customer involvement include co-production such as information exchange that promotes action and proposals for product or quality improvements which are major drivers of service quality (Dean et al., 2024; Morgan et al., 2024; Auh et al., 2019; Chan et al., 2010). Traditionally, customer involvement was viewed as downstream from service management practices; however, it is now acknowledged as a vital dimension of contemporary service management strategies, driven by changing customer expectations and emerging competitive forces (Mursid & Hu, 2022; Auh et al., 2019; Asokan et al., 2019; Dong & Sivakumar, 2017).

Although a substantial body of research examines the reasons why customers choose to act as active participants in decision-making, an articulated typology defining the scope of customer involvement is still developing. Consequently, related concepts such as co-production (Lee et a., 2024; Osborne et al., 2021), co-creation (Chen et al., 2021; Carbonell et al., 2009), customer involvement (Reppmann et al., 2025; Dean et al., 2024) are often subsumed under the broader term "customer participation" (Dong & Sivakumar, 2017; Nardi et al., 2020; Khalifa et al., 2025). However, the focus of co-production and co-creation extends beyond simply explaining how organizations deliver service experiences; these approaches emphasize that customers contribute significant value (Nejjari et al., 2025).

Furthermore, this insight highlights the need for companies to investigate the relationship between customer experiences and value co-creation (Chiadmi et al., 2025; Nejjari & Slaoui 2024). Several studies indicate that customer involvement in co-creation can lead to various benefits (Volkova 2025).), such as enhancing service quality and managing the nature of services (Ezechi et al., 2025). Even when there is no direct link between customers' service experience creation, participation serves as an effective means to boost satisfaction and loyalty. Collaborations often stimulate creativity and push organizations toward more personalized service models tailored to customers (Tariq 2025).

Building on these arguments, major international companies such as Cisco and DELL incorporate customer involvement into their business models as part of strategies to gain

sustainable competitive advantages and establish strong customer relationships (Yap 2025; Ertz, 2024; Bashir, 2023; Asokan et al., 2019; Ramaswamy & Gouillart, 2010). These companies suggest that multinationals may adopt collectivist innovation management practices typically advocated for domestic organizations. The focus on customer involvement reflects a broader trend of businesses adopting more consumer-centric tactics. Such involvement in innovation and decision-making enhances trust, improves forecasting, and differentiates companies from competitors (Miettinen, 2024; Roberts et al., 2022).

Involving customers in service production also yields valuable insights and feedback that can drive product development, service improvements, or new offerings (Ng et al., 2020). Although the importance of customer involvement in services is widely recognized, significant knowledge gaps remain regarding how organizations can effectively foster it. This dimension includes customer orientation aimed at encouraging customer involvement in service co-creation; however, it has been primarily explored concerning how organizational attitudes or expectations influence customer empowerment.

Customer orientation focused on understanding and prioritizing customer needs is a key factor in cultivating corporate cultures where genuine contribution can flourish (Juliana et al., 2024). Customer service-oriented companies build their customers' confidence, knowledge, and capabilities, enabling them to positively influence their service experiences (Simakova 2025; Giang et al., 2024). This suggests that customer empowerment plays an intermediary role, allowing customers to contribute to service delivery, which can subsequently benefit service performance and foster loyalty (Turkson et al., 2025; Nguyen, 2024). Understanding the complex relationships between customer orientation, empowerment, and involvement is crucial for designing strategies that promote continued engagement and relationship building among customers.

A study by Mende et al. (2015) indicates that features of customer involvement should be examined from a psychological perspective. This point is supported by Dong et al. (2017), who highlight the insufficient understanding of these processes and call for more systematic investigations into the interaction effects between customer involvement and organizational factors. In response to this academic call, the current study explores the chain linkage from customer orientation to empowerment and involvement. Its objectives are twofold: first, to

examine the impact of customer orientation on customer involvement; and second, to analyze how perceived empowerment mediates the relationship between customer orientation and involvement. By exploring these relationships, the study aims to address current knowledge gaps and provide practical insights into fostering an inclusive culture that supports and uncovers customer contributions. Theoretically, these findings could enhance understanding of customer-centric orientations as drivers of organizational success in highly competitive markets, where genuine and meaningful involvement is valued over transactional interactions.

CUSTOMER ORIENTATION

Customer involvement in business is a complex process. Its primary challenge lies in the difficulty for companies to understand and address customer needs with adequate attention and commitment (Sampson & Chase 2022). Zhang et al., (2024) argued that customer orientation is more than merely accepting customers reluctantly; it involves embedding a customer-oriented philosophy throughout the entire organizational system and integrating it with strategies, processes, and culture to deliver what customers want. This approach not only centers the customer as a key stakeholder but also emphasizes their active role in leveraging service co-production and decision-making (Sadighha et al., 2024).

To improve customer experience, organizations should strive to establish a work culture that encompasses behaviors such as personalized communication, customized services tailored to customer needs, and proactive feedback mechanisms (Shields, 2024; Banović-Ćurguz & Ilišević, 2018). These actions demonstrate to customers that their voices are valued, fostering trust and transparency (Sihombing & Dinus, 2024). According to the literature, a high level of customer-oriented culture correlates with increased customer involvement (Shields, 2024; Kao, 2020), and approaches that leverage direct customer involvement where managers create environments that empower customers tend to motivate active co-production (Yen et al., 2021).

However, the precise mechanisms through which customer orientation influences increased involvement remain somewhat unclear. While a customer-centric process orientation suggests higher participation, there is potential to deepen our understanding of the underlying mechanisms such as innovative culture, communication channels, and psychological triggers that mediate this relationship, along with the participation process itself. The third level involves integrating mental processes such as perceived control, self-efficacy, trust, and motivation into the transfer

of organizational initiatives into actual customer behavior. Given the nuanced ways these factors interact with participation incentives, the actual effect of involvement remains somewhat uncertain.

Fundamentally, this highlights the need for firms to adapt their behaviors to accommodate customers' unique desires and tastes, thereby enabling meaningful customer involvement (Racela & Thoumrungroje, 2020). It is not solely about a customer-focused orientation but also about embracing and integrating a customer-oriented mindset at every organizational level and aligning business policies, workflows, and workplace practices to meet customer requirements (Zhang et al., 2024). Such strategies can also motivate customers to take on more tangible roles in co-production and decision-making (Sadighha et al., 2024). Organizational practices that foster customer orientation include personalized communication, customized services, and proactive feedback actions that demonstrate to customers that their opinions matter and foster a culture of trust and transparency (Shields, 2024; Banović-Ćurguz & Ilišević, 2018). Empirical evidence shows that a customer-oriented culture is positively associated with higher levels of customer involvement (Turkson et al., 2025; Shields, 2024).

Resources invested in understanding market needs such as field surveys and customer relationship management systems can create environments that empower customers and encourage more active engagement in community-oriented practices (Arora et al., 2021). However, excessive customization without systemic awareness of how customer orientation drives involvement may lead to confusion. Although a customer-involving process indicates extensive participation, further research is needed on internal mediators such as innovative culture, communication channels, and psychological prompts that influence this relationship. More in-depth research into how these influences interact within a customer involvement setting is essential for converting soft commitments into genuine participation outcomes.

CUSTOMER EMPOWERMENT

Similarly, customer empowerment is influenced by a lack of knowledge, which supports consumers in acting upon their service experiences (Ürgüplü & Yumurtacı Hüseyinoğlu, 2021; Auh et al., 2019). However, empowerment is not solely about providing information; it also involves creating psychological conditions that enable customers to see themselves as competent and motivated individuals capable of contributing to decision-making through interactions with

organizations (Schermuly et al., 2025; Ramani & Kumar, 2008). When customers perceive a sense of ownership and control over a matter, they are more likely to engage or participate intensively (Maier & Baccarella, 2025; Xie et al., 2020). If customers believe that firms can add value rather than simply extracting money through products and services, they tend to interact differently providing valuable feedback or critiques, co-creating solutions, and even recommending products or services based on what they can do.

Customer empowerment fosters trust and confidence (Giang et al., 2024), which are fundamental for maintaining long-lasting relationships. Customers perceive their engagement as mutually valuable (Badar et al., 2025; Barile et al., 2024). In this context, it is important to recognize that there is still much to learn about the mediating role of both customer-centric culture and customer goodwill in shaping power specifically, how one culture's "egg" hatches into a particular form of participation. Existing research has given limited attention to conceptualizing how empowerment relates to perceptions of control and self-efficacy among consumers, as well as the internal organizational practices that may foster this (Kamali et al., 2025; Xie et al., 2020).

Understanding this process is critical for developing tactics and strategies that effectively leverage empowerment as a driver of sustained customer commitment. It is also essential that customers experience psychological empowerment through interactions with service employees, which can only be fostered through mechanisms such as open communication (Hu & Li 2022 ; Morrongiello et al., 2017), self-service tools (Kim & Choi 2025; Orcajo et al., 2022), rewards and recognition programs (Martin-Howard 2023), and trust-building activities (Rejitha & Jayalakshmi 2025). However, these areas remain to be explored and elaborated upon by future research.

CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT

 Customer involvement refers to a customer's intentional involvement in service creation and delivery, where both parties recognize the importance of value co-production (Abdo et al., 2025; Mursid & Wu, 2022). These behaviors include providing recommendations, contributing feedback, and engaging in service innovation activities that directly influence operational processes and strengthen consumers' emotional bonds with a brand (Bouchriha et al., 2024). Empowerment involves giving customers the confidence, skills, and capability to participate;

empowered customers are active participants exercising their felt meaning in change (Auh et al., 2019).

Creating an open and transparent climate of dialogue and increasing accessibility to marketing channels can transform consumers from passive recipients into active contributors (Xie, Li & Keh, 2020). Because of this shared diversity, which fosters emotional bonds among coworkers over time, they develop loyalty to their team (Karim et al., 2023). However, despite its prominence, there is limited insight into what sustains customers' ongoing participation. Internal organizational drivers that help maintain continuous engagement include organizational culture, modes of communication, technological infrastructure, and motivational factors (Behl et al., 2023). These elements need to be better understood, and strategies should be developed that foster a consistent, meaningful second cycle of participation beyond initial engagement ensuring ongoing, sustained involvement.

ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH GAP

Customer involvement defined as customers' active involvement in firm-related activities, including their participation in product and service processes (Auh et al., 2019) is positively associated with a firm's customer orientation (Kao 2020). However, little attention has been paid to the mechanisms underpinning this relationship, particularly the mediating role of customer empowerment. This study draws on various theoretical frameworks, including Contingency Theory (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Garavan & O'Brien, 2024), Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) (Nariswari & Vargo, 2024; Vargo & Lusch, 2017), and Resource-Based View (RBV) (Paauwe, 2024; Barney et al., 2001). Numerous studies have explored customer participation, customer empowerment, customer orientation and performance in Ghana's local food sectors (Turkson et al., 2025; Turkson & Kwarteng 2025).

This study is motivated by Turkson et al., (2025), who investigated various dimensions of customer involvement as an umbrella term, comprising customer participation and engagement in service co-creation, orientation, and performance in unorganized food sectors in Ghana. While their study provided valuable insights, it also highlighted areas requiring further investigation. The authors reported that, psychological orientation of customers may enhance their active participation, but the internal mechanisms linking customer orientation to participation, the contingency effects of cultural and industry contexts, and the long-term sustainability

implications remain underexplored. This study aims to fill these gaps through a comprehensive, contextually nuanced approach.

In their study, the authors reported that there is limited information about how customer orientation influences customer involvement. Although a positive correlation was acknowledged, the potential "dark side" of participation has been overlooked (Blut et al., 2020). Specifically, there is little understanding of what drives internal mechanisms such as customer motivation, control behaviors, trust, and self-efficacy. To address this, customer empowerment is examined as a mediating variable, with the goal of empirically exploring how organizational efforts to understand and respond to consumer expectations foster employees' psychological sense of control, encouraging voice behavior.

By focusing on internal organizational operations rather than simple correlations, this study seeks to advance understanding of the psychological effects of organizational culture and internal procedures. While the authors recognized the importance of psychological and motivational factors, they also acknowledge that these areas are insufficiently explored in the context of Ghana's informal food sector. This study draws on Self-Determination Theory (Nariswari & Vargo, 2024; Vargo & Lusch, 2017), emphasizing relatedness, competence, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation to deepen understanding of customers' motivational mechanisms in engagement. It aims to demonstrate that empowerment practices such as providing relevant knowledge, encouraging participation in decision-making, and fostering trust drive intrinsic motivation by satisfying psychological needs, enhancing self-efficacy, and reinforcing motivation.

Methodologically, this approach addresses the typical limitations of cross-sectional studies, which do not adequately explain sustained participation. While a longitudinal design would offerstronger causal insights, this study employs mediation analysis in a high-tech crowd funding context to provide valuable initial data on the psychological and internal determinants of long-term participation in Ghana's informal food sector. Furthermore, the study explores how cultural and industry-specific moderators influence customer behavior. To date, there is limited empirical evidence on how these factors operate within specific contextual realities. The study examines the intersecting characteristics of customer orientation, empowerment, and participation,

considering local community interactions, gender roles, and cultural norms, with the aim of producing contextualized insights and tailored strategies that align with Ghanaian social realities.

Ultimately, this research seeks to ensure the success and cultural appropriateness of customer involvement initiatives, emphasizing the importance of internal psychological processes guided by Self-Determination Theory (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2020) to foster long-term customer engagement. It aims to identify sustainable organizational practices that support enduring participation, recognizing the significance of industry and cultural contexts. The findings and recommendations will be valuable for organizations operating in resource-constrained settings, helping to develop culturally grounded, effective strategies for increasing authentic and sustainable customer involvement in Ghana's local restaurant sector.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING OF THE STUDY

Self-Determination Theory

Ryan and Deci (2024) posit that Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers a comprehensive view of the psychological motivations of customers. It effectively describes the relationships between customer orientation, customer empowerment, and customer involvement. SDT discusses the conditions necessary for generating intrinsic motivation, where individuals find themselves in a situational context that meets these needs in an autonomy-supportive manner (Deci & Ryan, 2024). People with high support needs require fundamentals, substitution, and addressing related gaps (Yang & Gao 2025). Once these are in place, they are more likely to have positive initial experiences with new services such as receiving information tailored to their life situations, feeling respected in previous communication, and having genuine opportunities to participate meaningfully (Widelska & Krot, 2021). Such support has the power to generate motivation independently; when it does, customers are more likely to interact authentically with organizations.

Customer empowerment is particularly relevant within this framework, as it addresses these psychological needs (Guo & Cheng, 2021). Empowerment can be defined as providing customers with information, resources, and decision-making authority that enhances their sense of self-reliance and autonomy (Al-Omari et al., 2020). The level of empowerment customers have to influence organizational outcomes and make informed choices supported by third-party

information tools can significantly boost their intrinsic motivation to participate (Kataria et al., 2023). This empowerment shifts the concept of customers from passive and reactive to active participants (Hu, 2023), who are eager to engage in virtual and real-world interactions, leading to greater psychological satisfaction (Rachmad, 2024). Consequently, empowerment acts as a mediator that transforms a customer-oriented organizational culture into genuine customer involvement (Turkson et al., 2025).

The relationship between customer orientation and participation is also clarified through SDT, which emphasizes intrinsic motivation (Luarn et al., 2023). More energy and focus are directed toward fostering internal motivation rather than relying solely on external incentives (Shulga & Busser, 2021). Customers feel entitled to contribute and desire ownership in the product innovation process participating in co-creating new products and features (Nyadzayo et al., 2023). The intrinsic reward derived from fulfilling psychological needs encourages continued participation, benefiting both consumers and businesses by fostering loyalty, trust, and intimacy (Shafia'i et al., 2025).

Finally, SDT highlights how these relationships confer lasting benefits. As customers' psychological needs are persistently fulfilled through empowerment and participation, their intrinsic motivation deepens, leading to ongoing engagement and willingness to endorse the brand (Xie et al., 2020). This sustained participation accelerates immediate organizational results and cultivates loyal consumers who maintain strong connections with the brand (Mursid & Wu, 2022). In summary, Self-Determination Theory provides an excellent framework for understanding how a customer-focused environment facilitated through empowerment can lead to significant and long-term customer involvement, ultimately generating value for both the customer and the organization.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The survey was conducted at local restaurants in six cosmopolitan regional capitals in Ghana that serve local cuisine. In Ghana, such enterprises are predominantly female-owned and are mainly located in urban and rural areas near markets, transport stations, stops, and along highways. These outlets typically offer a variety of delicious, affordable local African dishes that are

popular among Ghanaians (Turkson & Kwaateng, 2025). The study employed a quantitative research design, utilizing structured and objective data collection and analysis methods (Slater & Hasson, 2025).

Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were adopted to select study participants, ensuring the representativeness of the sample (Turkson et al., 2025; Rahman et al., 2022; Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020). Owners of local restaurants and their customers were selected through simple random sampling. Additionally, customers were classified into active service co-creators and non-co-creators during the purchase occasion using stratified sampling. This approach enabled the researcher to distinguish between customers who co-produced the service and those who did not, thereby providing insights into varying levels of customer involvement in local food service environments (Sturgis, 2020). This stratified sampling method enriched the understanding of three distinct levels of customer involvement across the subsector. The use of a quantitative methodology, combined with appropriate sample selection and data analysis, ensured comprehensive and structured coverage of the research.

Respondents and study Area

The study was limited to local restaurants and customers within six key cosmopolitan regions in Ghana. These local retaurants were selected because they are among the largest consumers of local food and experience high customer traffic. Since the selected premises represent a diverse range of customer types including students, drivers, vendors, shop owners, and workers from various occupations they offer a broad spectrum of perspectives on customer involvement. Furthermore, selecting these sites facilitated data collection related to customer orientation, empowerment, and participation, which are central themes of the study. Customers are considered active participants in service co-creation, making these settings particularly relevant for examining customer influence on local food businesses. Data were collected from a total of 767 outlets, chosen based on their alignment with the research objectives, accessibility, representativeness of local food varieties, and the potential for resource-efficient data collection.

Data Collection Methods

A cross-sectional survey was conducted using well-structured questionnaires administered to respondents at selected local restaurants across six cosmopolitan regional capitals in Ghana. The

target respondents included customers and food owners involved in the co-management of services, with the aim of understanding how customer involvement influences local restaurants. Customer co-creation intensity was the central focus of data collection. This study sought to fill an underexplored area regarding customer involvement in local fast-food chains by investigating the degree of customer involvement in service co-creation.**Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using multiple methods. Initially, descriptive statistics provided an overview of the dataset. Correlation analysis was performed to explore associations between variables. A multivariate regression model based on Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) was employed to analyze the interaction dynamics among the variables. Additionally, the SPSS process macro was used to examine whether certain variables mediated these relationships. The data were summarized using causal statistics to better understand the underlying relationships and effects within the dataset.

RESULTS

Reliability Test Results

A questionnaire was developed to measure three major constructs, each comprising several sub-constructs, totaling 16 items. The specific items for each construct were as follows: customer orientation (6 items), customer empowerment (5 items), and customer involvement (5 items). A reliability analysis was conducted to evaluate the consistency of the survey instrument in measuring these constructs. Cronbach's alpha was used to verify the internal reliability of the items within each section of the questionnaire. The results are summarized in Table 1. All alpha values were above 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability. Specifically, the key driver customer orientation with its five items, yielded an alpha coefficient of 0.876. Customer empowerment demonstrated an alpha of 0.812, and customer involvement had an alpha of 0.836. Overall, these values suggest that the items are reliable measures of their respective constructs.

Table 1: Reliability Test Results

Variable constructs	Number of items	Cronbach Alpha Value
Customer orientation	5	.876
Customer empowerment	6	.812
Customer involvement	5	.836

Mediating role of customer empowerment in the relationship between customer orientation and customer involvement

This section presents the analysis of the mediating role of customer empowerment in the relationship between customer orientation and customer involvement. The regression statistics, which display the results for both the direct and indirect effects of the variables, are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Indirect effect of customer orientation on customer involvement through customer empowerment

Variable	B	SE	t-Stat.	Prob.
Direct Effect: DV = Customer involvement				
Constant	1.507	.474	3.179	.002
Age	.011	.039	.279	.780
Gender	.148	.106	1.398	.163
Education	-.024	.035	-.689	.491
Experience	-.003	.024	-.135	.892
Customer orientation	.152	.080	1.892	.059*
Customer empowerment	.673	.059	11.459	.000***
Direct Effect: DV = Customer Empowerment				
Constant	2.975	.388	7.669	.000
Age	.130	.036	3.620	.000***
Gender	.199	.093	2.143	.032**
Education	-.012	.033	-.360	.718
Experience	-.007	.023	-.315	.752
Customer orientation	.551	.034	16.369	.000***
Indirect Effect				
CO → CE → CI	.199	.067	2.959	.007***

DV= Dependent variable; CO = Customer orientation; CE = Customer empowerment; CI = Customer involvement

The upper section of Table 2 presents the results for the direct effect of customer orientation on effective customer involvement, with customer empowerment included as an additional independent variable. The middle section displays the results for the direct effect of customer orientation on customer empowerment, while the lower section shows the results for the indirect effect of customer orientation on effective customer involvement mediated by customer empowerment. The findings related to the first direct effect linking customer orientation to customer involvement indicate that customer orientation has a significant positive impact at the

10% level (β = .152, p < .1). This suggests that, after controlling for demographic variables within the model, any enhancement in the customer-oriented services provided by local food joint operators significantly increases customer involvement in the co-production of services. This implies that implementing appropriate and comprehensive customer orientation programs is highly beneficial for encouraging customer involvement in service delivery.

The effect of customer empowerment on customer involvement is also positive and statistically significant at the 1% level (β = .673, p < .01), indicating that when local food joint owners empower their customers, these customers are better positioned to participate effectively in the service co-creation process. Facilitating customer decision-making regarding their preferences for meals and tastes encourages active participation, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of service delivery. The second direct effect examines how customer orientation influences customer empowerment. The results demonstrate a positive relationship, significant at the 1% level (β = .551, p < .01), suggesting that customer orientation is a vital strategy for empowering customers within service delivery.

Furthermore, the results for the indirect effect of customer orientation on customer involvement via customer empowerment, presented in the lower part of Table 2, reveal a significant positive influence at the 1% level (β = .199, p < .01). This finding is consistent with earlier results, which showed that customer orientation positively affects both customer empowerment and customer involvement, with customer empowerment subsequently enhancing participation. The technical interpretation of this outcome is that customer empowerment plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between customer orientation and the effectiveness of customer involvement in local food joint services. In other words, customer empowerment reinforces the positive impact of customer orientation on customer involvement. According to these results, the primary source of customers' active involvement in service co-creation within local food businesses stems from the implementation of adequate customer orientation programs.

DISCUSSION

The research results provide valuable insights into the relationship between customer orientation, customer empowerment, and customer involvement in local food service businesses, and they are consistent with existing theories and earlier empirical analyses. Specifically, the marginally significant direct effect of customer orientation in driving customer involvement supports the

contention that a customer-oriented organization does influence an increase in behaviors related to co-creation with consumers. Customer orientation results in making service encounters more centered on customer needs, which aligns with the work of Racela and Thoumrungroje (2020). It is also a source of participation regulation. Although this is a small effect, it signals that customer involvement initiatives should not be viewed solely as internal firm activities; instead, customer input has diversified and advocates for much more than just passive presence at a premises (Neacsu, 2020).

Moreover, customer empowerment has a positive and highly significant influence on customer involvement, supporting the theory that creating a sense of empowerment in customers increases their desire and capacity to co-produce services (Badar et al., 2025; Xie et al., 2020). Participation and satisfaction tend to increase when empowerment strategies involve customers in decision-making (Xie et al., 2020). This finding is also consistent with Shin et al. (2020), who suggested that co-creation and empowerment are fundamental for creating value in service relationships. The strong positive correlation between customer orientation and customer empowerment (particularly the latter) indicates that organizations that are more focused on understanding and responding to their customers are better positioned to enable their empowerment (Anning-Dorson et al., 2020). This aligns with service marketing literature, which states that being customer-oriented builds trust and encourages participation, thereby supporting empowerment (Windarti et al., 2020).

Finally, the mediating effect of customer empowerment between customer orientation and participation supports previous findings by scholars such as Shen and Chen (2025) and Turkson et al. (2025), who identified empowerment as a critical enabler for transforming customer-oriented strategies into participatory behaviors. This underscores the importance of combining empowerment strategies with customer orientation programs to optimize customer engagement and co-creation (Moussafir & Qmichchou, 2021). Overall, these results reinforce the notion that a holistic, customer-oriented, and empowerment-based approach is essential for effectively sustaining customer involvement. These findings are consistent with previous literature, which contends that customer empowerment increases customer involvement, thereby enhancing service performance and organizational success (Mohammad, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The results of this study demonstrate the significant influence that customer orientation can have in increasing the likelihood of active customer involvement when visiting a local restaurants. The findings suggest that customer-centric strategies drive customer involvement both directly and indirectly through various enabling mechanisms that empower customers, thereby enhancing their involvement in co-creation activities. Moreover, customer empowerment appears to play a crucial role in amplifying the positive effects of customer orientation on active involvement. Overall, the study confirms that customer orientation programs should be adopted by local restaurants, with a focus on empowerment, as this approach has important implications for service delivery efficiency by increasing customer involvement. In conclusion, fostering a customer-centric environment is essential for boosting meaningful customer involvement, which, in turn, leads to improved service quality and higher customer satisfaction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, small food outlets can better capitalize on this potential by investing in employee training to promote a more customer-centric approach and by fostering themes of customized service and active participation. Businesses should also implement empowerment programs, such as encouraging customer involvement in decision-making and providing feedback channels, to help customers feel a sense of control and involvement. Regularly measuring customer satisfaction can also identify areas for improvement and guide service enhancements. Ultimately, promoting a customer-focused and empowerment-driven culture will not only encourage customer involvement but also improve service quality, contributing to greater customer satisfaction.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

If local business owners want to inspire customer involvement in their food establishments, they should adopt a broader customer-centric approach that understands and encourages the engagement of their patrons. This involves training staff to deliver attentive, personalized service and creating spaces where customers can tailor their experiences, provide feedback, and become involved in service design. Such empowerment motivates customers to act more actively and loyally, as they feel a sense of control over their interactions. Also, staff training programs focused on customer involvement, feedback mechanisms like comment cards or digital surveys,

and customization options such as menus offering dishes crafted based on customer preferences are essential. Establishing channels of communication with customers, along with participatory initiatives such as workshops, tasting events, and loyalty programs, are also important. Constantly listening to customer feedback and recognizing their input can strengthen relationships and encourage customers to take an active role in the service process, fostering a positive experience associated with feeling valued. Businesses could organize regular focus groups or engage with customers on social media to demonstrate how their feedback has led to new changes. In conclusion, local executive chefs, beverage managers, and every member of the food and beverage team must reinforce a customer-centric culture to ensure their service is of superior quality and exceeds diners' expectations across the board

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

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