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DOES A SERVANT-LEADER AFFECT
RESTAURANT'S EXPERIENCE? A
MULTILEVEL MODEL OF SERVANT
LEADERSHIP, EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT,
AND CUSTOMER OUTCOMES

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Does a Servant-Leader Affect Restaurant's Experience? A
Multilevel Model of Servant Leadership, Employee
Engagement, and Customer Outcomes

Aouad Elias Maroun

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
August 2023

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

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Abstract

Leadership has been identified as a major element in the managerial roles of hospitality managers. New Leadership behaviors views are currently in high demand for more people (employee, customer)-centered and ethical practices management to motivate the 21st-century workforce specifically in hospitality firms seeking to distinguish themselves. As a result, organizations are struggling to stay competitive from both the demand (customers) and the supply (employees) side due to many challenges. The current focus on training for restaurant managers primarily targets employee management, while an overlooked aspect is that managers' presence and leadership style also significantly impact customer satisfaction, loyalty, and engagement. Against this background, academics and practitioners have been trying to discover the most effective leadership style to meet not only the service organizational goals efficiently and effectively but also to keep the followers motivated and to serve their needs and all other stakeholders' (i.e., employees, customers, communities). Among these leadership studies, specifically for the hospitality industry, servant leadership is regarded as an effective leadership style.

This uniqueness of servant leadership makes it one of the leadership models that would allow the relationship between the employees and customers to occur and be tested in one model and could be employee- and customer-centered. By attempting to understand to what extent servant-led followers' engagement and customer outcomes are influenced by servant leadership; this thesis explored further how servant leadership influence employee engagement, which in turn drive customer outcomes such as satisfaction and engagement, thus resulting in organizational success. Thesis results reveal the positive effect of servant leadership on customer satisfaction and customer engagement. As hypothesized, employee engagement is a

mediator between servant leadership and customer outcomes. Managerial recommendations and theoretical contributions were discussed.

Publications arising from the thesis

Book chapter:

Aouad, M. E. (2023). Servant Leadership to Increase Employee and Customer Satisfaction. In P. Berners & A. Martin (Eds.), *The Practical Guide to Achieving Customer Satisfaction in Events and Hotels* (pp. 146-164). Routledge.

Conferences:

- Aouad, M. E. & Putra, E. D. (2019). Servant Leadership in Hospitality: State-of-the-art and future research directions. *9th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management (AHTMM)*, July 9-12, 2019, Portsmouth, UK.
- Manosuthi, N. & Aouad, M. E. (2018). The customer engagement construct in the context of hospitality and tourism: A systematic literature review. *2018 Global Marketing Conference (GMC)*, July 26-29, 2018 Tokyo, Japan.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Background

One of the most important and rapidly transforming keys in a modern organization is effective leadership, especially in a complex industry like hospitality, which faces growing competitive pressures. While effective leadership leads to successful organizations (Hannah et al., 2014; Mayer et al., 2008), it is not simple yet very crucial to find the right effective leadership styles to fit every organization with globally focused issues. Northouse (2016) explained, leadership doesn't happen in a vacuum; It exists uniquely and differently in the organization's mission, vision, core values, people, communication, behavior, culture, environment, change, and success or failure. The need to identify the most effective leadership style increased the interest to study and practice many styles at the organization level (Parris & Peachey, 2012). In results, numerous leadership theories have emerged to possibly alleviate organizational deficiencies in this area (e.g., leader-member exchange, transformational, authentic, transactional, spiritual, followership, and servant leadership (Northouse, 2016)). In the same realm, studies related to hospitality revealed that effective leadership can also remedy the forthcomings of restaurant work including hard long working hours, high turnover rates, and the dissatisfaction and disengagement among frontline employees (Koyuncu et al., 2014; Kusluvan et al., 2010).

Against this background, academics and practitioners have been trying to discover the most effective leadership style to meet not only the service organizational goals efficiently and effectively but also to keep the followers motivated and to serve their needs and all other stakeholders' (i.e., employees, customers, communities)

(Brownell, 2010; Liden et al., 2008). Among these leadership studies, specifically for the hospitality industry, servant leadership is regarded as an effective leadership style (Brownell, 2010). Servant leaders commit to serving others first, ensuring the needs and growth of team members take priority over traditional power dynamics. The originator of this approach, Robert Greenleaf, theorized that the greatest leaders are those who serve first in order to create trust, empathy, and community (Coats, 2022; Yue, 2024). Servant leadership characteristics such as listening, empathy, healing, awareness and commitment to the growth of people, work together to improve both organizational culture and job satisfaction (Morris & Hurt, 2022).

Servant leadership is believed to improve collaboration and encourages followers to achieve service excellence, and also supports more morality-centered and inspirational self-reflection by leaders than other leadership styles (Brownell, 2010; Graham, 1991; Hunter et al., 2013; Maglione, 2022; Parris & Peachey, 2013b). In the practical world, adding to Bennett proposition that “Servant leaders practice leadership as hospitality” (Brownell, 2010, p. 368), the list of companies within the “100 Best Companies to Work For” that are practicing servant leadership and have it in its business core philosophy is increasing (e.g., Starbucks, Darden Restaurants, Chick-fil-A, Marriott International, Ritz Carlton, Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants) (Fortune, 2018) and therefore forcing more research in this area. As Starbucks included servant leadership in its organizational culture, Ritz Carlton and Marriott Hotels have implemented employee-oriented leadership and this is clear in their business mottos (i.e., Ritz motto: "We are Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen" and Marriott motto: “Take care of the associates, the associates will take care of the guests, and the guests will come back again and again”). Hence, offering hospitality to their employees first then to their guests, organizations will be providing

a fostering environment where such employees feel respected, rewarded, and encouraged to develop (King, 1995). The styles of leadership applied in such hospitality organization also have important implications on the service delivered.

Despite the promising progress of servant leadership study in the hospitality industry in the past years, empirical research linking servant leadership to employee and customer outcomes are still scant. Currently the servant leadership research is in a “third phase... model development phase” (Eva et al., 2019). The authors explained that in this phase more sophisticated research designs are being developed to go beyond the simple and dyadic leader-employee relationships with outcomes to understand not only the antecedents and the mediating effects, but also the boundary conditions relating all stakeholders of servant leadership (Eva et al., 2019).

The concept of servant leadership is now highly regarded in today’s professional world and of particular importance is its application, which aims towards satisfying the wants of its employees and creating an enabling environment. This type of leadership advances the idea of serving other people and this is demonstrated to result in several benefits for workers and for companies. The studies available on servant leadership suggest that it is effective at enhancing employee well-being, Job satisfaction and organizational performance in a wide range of industries such as health and care, education, and business.

Servant leadership has emerged as a significant paradigm in organizational behavior, particularly within service-oriented industries such as hospitality. This leadership style prioritizes the needs of employees and emphasizes the importance of

serving others, which in turn fosters a positive organizational culture and enhances employee engagement. The literature reveals a connection between servant leadership and various employee outcomes, including work engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. However, a direct connection between servant leadership and customers outcomes still very limited, which is very important to explore in a customer service oriented setting such as the hospitality industry. Therefore, this study further investigates how servant leadership affects employee engagement, which subsequently impacts customer outcomes like satisfaction and engagement, ultimately leading to organizational success..

1.2 Problem Statement

Leadership has been identified as a major element in the managerial roles of hospitality managers. New leadership behaviors views are currently in high demand for more people (employee, customer)-centered and ethical practices management (Van Dierendonck, 2011) to motivate the 21st-century workforce (Deloitte, 2015) specifically in hospitality firms seeking to distinguish themselves (Brownell, 2010). As a result, organizations are struggling to stay competitive (Luthans & Youssef, 2004) from both the demand and the supply side due to many challenges.

On the supply side, Goh and Lee (2018) explained that due to the increased number of businesses under different hospitality sectors such as airlines, hotels, restaurants, and others, the most essential problem is becoming not only the hiring of talented employees and leaders but also to retain them. Mainly, employees are losing trust in their leaders and have no appetite for ego-centric, self-centered leaders (Kellerman, 2013). At the same time, the ethical leader pool is shrinking, and many

employees have little to no commitment to organizations (Luthans et al., 2015). All this lead to dissatisfied and disengaged employees therefore to high employee turnover which is still the most common problem the hospitality industry is suffering (Jang & Kandampully, 2018).

Moreover, attracting, maintaining, and motivating frontline hospitality staffs is a key role of successful operation (Nadiri & Tanova, 2010) but remains a big issue for hospitality organizations (Goh & Lee, 2018; Kusluvan et al., 2010). Additionally, Yavas et al. (2013) stated that the centered management style is an important source of frontline employees dissatisfaction. Increasing satisfaction alone is not the only challenge, frontline employees' disengagement in the workplace could have high impact on hospitality firms too. While engaged employees reported positive impact on the quality of their organization's products, positive affect customer service (Seijts & Crim, 2006), "85% of employees worldwide are not engaged or are actively disengaged in their job" (Gallup, 2017, p. 4). This Gallup research also mentioned that \$370 BILLION is the cost in the US economy annually from the lost productivity of actively disengaged employees. Similarly, Watson (2012) stated that only 35% of the global workforce is highly engaged. This same study suggested that leadership which shows sincere interest in employees' well-being and earns employees' trust and confidence is an important driver of sustainable engagement. These characteristics overlap with servant leadership.

Lastly, in time when some researchers provide new hospitality leadership competencies at the business, person, and people level (e.g., Models hospitality and service excellence, Acts in an ethical manner, Displays emotional intelligence, Develops others) (Shum et al., 2018), others start to shed light upon the dark side of leadership in hospitality (e.g., abusive supervision) and its association with

subordinates' abusive behavior resulting in lower service quality and performance (Hon & Lu, 2016).

An important finding for the whole hospitality industry confirmed that servant leadership have a positive effect on satisfaction, commitment, engagement, and a negative effect on employee turnover intention (Ilkhanizadeh & Karatepe, 2018; Jang & Kandampully, 2018; Karatepe & Talebzadeh, 2016).

On the demand side, yet another problem, hospitality leaders must understand how their leadership would affect not only the attitudes their employees should have but also the outcomes on their customers in the workplace. According to Solnet et al. (2016), one of the key challenges in hospitality is the growing demand for customer experiences. As per the authors, more personalized and technology-oriented services are necessary with the rise of the customer expectations are raising.

Likewise, hospitality organizations with their leaders are competing among themselves to survive and reach their goal of keeping customers satisfied and engaged which leads to positive WOM and better organization's performance. Today more than ever, hospitality firms must strive to create a whole experience that lasts (Jani & Han, 2015) and connect with customers (Eisingerich et al., 2014) by engaging as representatives through employees (Palmatier et al., 2018). Keeping in mind that everyone in the organization is an actor and plays a role in creating the restaurant experience (Alexander et al., 2018). However the struggling of providing this experience in the restaurant business remains while Hackman and Wageman (2007, pp. 43-44) argue that the main questions for leadership research are as follow: "Under what conditions does leadership matter?" and "How do leaders' personal attributes interact with situational properties to shape outcomes?". In this regard, servant

leadership has shown to positively affect customer value co-creation and service delivery, therefore leading to better customer experiences (Hsiao et al., 2015).

This uniqueness of servant leadership style makes it one of the leadership models that would allow the relationship between the employees and customers to occur and be tested in one model and could be employee- and customer-centered. By attempting to understand to what extent servant-led followers' engagement and customer outcomes are influenced by servant leadership; this study's purpose addresses the leader's problem facing organizations and their disengaged employees and customers.

1.3 Rationale, Research Question and Objectives

Servant leaders make an impact beyond the organization or its members (Graham, 1991). This study aims to test a proposed multi-level model consisting of restaurant, employee, and customer-level of the servant leadership conceptual framework to identify the relationships among the employed research variables (i.e., Servant Leadership (SL), Employee Engagement (EE), Customer Satisfaction (CS), and Customer Engagement (CE) observed by Word-of-Mouth (WOM) and Willingness to Suggest (WTS)). The following is the rationale behind explaining the established relationships between the constructs at the three levels in the model (i.e., SL – CS – CE, SL – EE, SL – EE – CS, and SL – EE – CE):

At the employee level, more engaged employees impact customer satisfaction and drive financial and market performance (Barbera et al., 2009). More satisfied employees can maintain high service quality and increase customer loyalty (Arnett et al., 2002). Due to the known effect of EE on firm performance, tourism and

hospitality scholars have attempted to either identify their antecedents (Kusluvan et al., 2010; Slåtten & Mehmetoglu, 2011) or related them with other variables (e.g., Tourism involvement, Turnover intention) in one model (Lu et al., 2016; Yeh, 2013). This current study, however, explores a factor that is new to the hospitality literature (Brownell, 2010): servant leadership, and its relation to employee engagement. Servant leadership showed a positive relationship to both employee engagement and employee satisfaction in some studies (Chung et al., 2010; Martin et al., 2017) and no effect in others (González & Garazo, 2006). Through the care, the needs satisfaction, and the empowerment provided by the leader, servant leadership, unsuspectingly, increases the work engagement level in hotel employees (Ling et al., 2017), yet no influence on flight attendants engagement (Karatepe & Talebzadeh, 2016). Therefore, this study is motivated by the inadequacy of the previous results reported in the existing literature on servant leadership theory to further research the true, direct, positive, and significant effect of SL on EE in hospitality organizations. Moreover, there have been no studies conducted to research the mediating effect of employee engagement between SL and customer satisfaction and customer engagement in the hospitality industry, particularly in casual mid-scale restaurant businesses. Added to that, while most of the SL empirical research on EE were conducted at the individual or team-level (De Clercq et al., 2014), this study considers the importance of its effects on EE at the management restaurant-level.

At the customer level, satisfaction is considered as one of the most critical factors influencing customers' future behavior, and has undergone extensive research as an organizational goal, especially in the highly competitive hospitality and tourism industry. Being in today's connected world, customer engagement behaviors (van Doorn et al., 2010) are also becoming very important. The originality of the current

study, however, is to set CS and CE as direct servant leadership outcomes and indirectly through EE respectively. It is not known if a leader in restaurant context directly affect the customer outcomes, but it is clear that front-line employees have effect on customer satisfaction through the service orientation and quality they provide (Kim, 2011). This creates a gap in the hospitality leadership literature that this thesis will address. Few recent attempts started to link servant leadership *indirectly* to customer outcomes in hair salon (Chen et al., 2015) and in hospital (Neubert et al., 2016). For instance, Guchait's contribution to the field advocates for the role of ethical leadership in developing employee customer-oriented behaviours. According to Guchait's systematic review, servant leadership can enhance service quality and customer satisfaction by creating a supportive work environment that facilitates employee prosocial behaviors toward their customers. Given that hospitality is one industry in which service quality affects customer satisfaction and long term loyalty, this becomes especially relevant. (Guchait et al., 2023). Relying on the servant leadership theory, the mid-scale casual restaurant setting, and the above mentioned promising studies, and in line with the latest proposition of Chon and Zoltan (2019), I argue that manager servant leaders have a direct influence on customer satisfaction and customer engagement in forms of WOM and WTS. The author propose that SL has a positive effect on customer outcome variables (i.e., satisfaction, engagement) through the mediation of employee-related variable (i.e., engagement). This study draws on the generalized exchange theory, GET to explain this mediation effects. In this regard, for leaders to have direct contact with the customers and for them to notice his/her presence, the restaurants chosen should have few hierarchy layers in their organization: Top management (e.g., Restaurant Manager), Middle Management (e.g., team/shift-leader/supervisor/headwaiter, and

head chef), Front-line Employees (e.g., waiter/waitress, host/hostess, food runner, bartender, busser, cashier, expeditor, line/section chef, commis-chef). The findings will be the main substantial significance of this thesis. The scarce research in hospitality interacting SL, EE, CS, and CE reflects the importance of the definite reasons for this study to arise.

Based on the aforementioned rationale, this thesis focuses on the relationship between a well-established leadership trend started to be emphasized by service firms like hotels, restaurants, and very recently tourism (Tuan, 2018).

The main research questions that guides this Ph.D. thesis are:

RQ1: Does servant leadership affect customers' satisfaction and engagement in the restaurant?

RQ2: What is the role of employee engagement in boosting customer dining experience?

In order to answer the above research questions, the research objectives are established and have been developed to:

- 1) examine the direct effect of servant leadership at the restaurant level on customer outcomes in terms of satisfaction and engagement at the customer level.
- 2) assess the direct effect of servant leadership on employee engagement at the employee level in the restaurant.
- 3) investigate the indirect effect of servant leadership and the role of employee engagement in two directions:
 - a. The mediating effect of employee engagement between servant leadership and customer satisfaction.

- b. The mediating effect of employee engagement between servant leadership and customer engagement.

In summary, the current study attempts to examine the direct effect of servant leadership on customer outcomes and employee engagement and investigate the mediating effect of employees' engagement. Based on 1) theories (Servant Leadership Theory (SL), Generalized Exchange Theory (GET)), 2) conceptual and empirical studies from extensive literature review related to servant leadership, satisfaction, and engagement, and 3) data evidence collected from the hospitality field (restaurants in Lebanon), this research will respond to the above research objectives.

1.4 Research Significance

Research on the influence of servant leadership on both the employee attitudes and the customer outcomes in the hospitality industry addresses a gap in knowledge in the field of leadership. For, this study primarily aims to investigate the effect of servant leadership on employee engagement and on customer satisfaction and engagement in a restaurant service setting from the standpoint of employees and customers. The results associated with this study are believed to be relevant to both practitioners and scholars contributing theoretically and practically.

1.4.1 Theoretical

Theoretically, three important contributions will be drawn from this thesis as explained in the following.

This study will *advance* the servant leadership literature and increase its in-depth knowledge by drawing on the generalized exchange theory to understand the

effect of manager servant leader behaviors on the employee engagement and customers' satisfaction and engagement. In other terms, the aim is to extend theory development on the processes underlying relationships between servant leadership and outcomes at the employee and customer levels, as well to contribute to the scarce research on the multi-level effects that unit-level variables have on individual responses. Therefore, this research adds up to the current third phase of servant leadership research literature, which is, according to Eva et al. (2019, p. 112), "the model development phase where more sophisticated research designs are being utilized to go beyond simple relationships with outcomes to understand the antecedents, mediating mechanisms, and boundary conditions of servant leadership."

Finding an association of servant leadership with employee engagement and, in turn, customer satisfaction and engagement, is a notable result. Identifying a key *mediating* factor in this relationship will *extend and increase the theoretical precision* of developing servant leadership theory. Servant leadership, as hypothesized broadly in the literature (Van Dierendonck, 2011) and conceptualized as mindset (Eva et al., 2019), is associated with a concern for those outside of the organization. This research will extend recent research that links servant leadership within an organization to the satisfaction of patients in hospitals (Neubert et al., 2016) and customers in hair salons (Chen et al., 2015) by finding that manager servant leadership has an association through restaurant employee engagement on the satisfaction and engagement of customers during their dining experience while employing the logic of the generalized exchange theory. Understanding factors influencing customer satisfaction and engagement is increasingly important given the restaurant performance, financial implications, and marketing expectations associated with restaurant experience (Liden, Wayne, et al., 2014).

Results of this study will *expand and widen the knowledge base* of the servant leadership concept by introducing customer outcome construct (CE) and relying on the generalized exchange theory to explain its relation with servant-led manager behaviors and employee outcomes in restaurants. While marketing literature is introducing engagement over loyalty and satisfaction for employee and customer (Kumar & Pansari, 2014, 2016; Pansari & Kumar, 2017), it is also identifying the actors at different levels (organization, employee, and customer) (Alexander et al., 2018; Hollebeek & Andreassen, 2018; Vargo & Lusch, 2017) to cooperate and reciprocally exchange service and engage in creating value for the organization (Palmatier et al., 2018). Thus, indicating that the marketing activities in service organizations are no longer restricted to customers. Hospitality organizations such as restaurants must regard servant leaders and employees as internal customers, and customer as an “actor engagement” in an exchange that affect the experience.

1.4.2 Empirical

The findings offer an *empirical contribution* as well by *testing* the effect that servant leadership has not only on the employees of a restaurant but also on the customers patronizing this restaurant. Very limited research has investigated the influence of servant leadership in restaurants on employee attitudinal outcomes and customer outcomes simultaneously (Gutierrez-Broncano et al., 2024; Liden, Wayne, et al., 2014). This study bridges the gap, which is necessary because servant leadership is a strategy for many hospitality firms to maintain core competencies (i.e., keeping employees and customers satisfied and engaged), and where most of the majority of the work performed by employees in restaurants is related to customers (Brownell, 2010). Likewise, marketing scholars initiated research to link customer

engagement (CE) and employee engagement (EE) in one engagement framework (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Additionally, In line with recent publications (e.g., Mittal et al., 2018), the present study combines consumer and marketing, organizational behavior, and human resource concepts in the research multi-level model, bringing about a *multidisciplinary contribution* to the understanding of servant leadership. Another empirical contribution is by *determining the degree* to which the variable employee engagement mediates the relationship between the two constructs, SL and CS on one side, and SL and CE on the other side.

1.4.3 Methodological

Lastly, this thesis contributes to advance the hospitality literature in its *methodology design* through the data setting and the analytical approach.

1. Regarding the data setting, this thesis will be conducted in different population (Lebanon, Middle-East), treatment (Collection using multiple raters and organization of data), setting/context (mid-scale casual dining restaurants), and period of time strengthening the argument for examining the generalizability of servant leadership.

2. Then, according to the analytical approach, a multilevel method is used responding to the need of such hospitality research design to advance hospitality and tourism theories (Wong, 2017). Multilevel technique is not easy to apply concerning its requirements of constructing the conceptual model using multi-source data, the collection procedure at different levels, and the time and cost constraints. Yet, it is one of the methods which continues to advance the hospitality and tourism research through its application (Lee et al., 2017; Li et al., 2017). Similarly, hierarchical linear and multilevel modelling, received further attention in the leadership hospitality

literature (Ling et al., 2016; Tuan, 2018). Multilevel, a pragmatic method to innovate the hospitality research, is currently in high call for future hospitality and tourism publications (Olya et al., 2018). In line with the above, this thesis will use multilevel modeling to answer the research objectives and extensively investigate the complex phenomena at different levels (e.g., Level 1 = customer level; Level 2 = employee level; and Level 3 = restaurant level). While avoiding the ecological or atomic fallacies (i.e., treating components outside their real special context or analyzing aggregate data on the individual level) caused by single-level models (Snijders & Bosker, 2011), the cross-level perception presented in this thesis will describe how restaurant managers' servant leadership influences employee level and customer level.

1.4.4 Managerial

This research addresses a call for investigating servant leadership in the hospitality context (Carter & Baghurst, 2014) by exploring servant leadership in a restaurant organization with few management layers (Liden, Panaccio, et al., 2014). In this context, our findings will point to the benefits of servant leadership for restaurant employees and the customers they serve. Given the purpose of the restaurant industry is two-fold, maintaining satisfied and more engaged employees which lead to lower employee turnover, higher service quality, and better performance, and ensuring guest satisfaction and engagement leading to loyalty and profitability. The findings will be encouraging in providing evidence of how servant leadership from leaders/managers is associated with customers' attitudes and behaviors directly and through front-line employee-customer contact.

For these reasons, promoting servant leadership in restaurants has great potential for contributing to restaurants fulfilling their purpose and reaching their goals related to customer outcomes and employee attitudes. Practically, servant leadership may be improved through training for current and future restaurant managers. These trainings should be followed by the right way of evaluating the behaviors showing servant leadership. The results will also have relevant practical implications for companies particularly a service organization like a hotel or restaurant. First, promoting servant leadership as human resource practices is crucial to develop an empowering and employee-centered caring environment that satisfies the needs of the followers will foster their satisfaction and increase the level of their engagement and will enhance the customer experience thus the organization profitability. In addition, human resource development professionals should make sure to align the practices like recruitment, training, reward system, and others with the servant leadership style. Employees who interact with customers daily including the manager also contribute to the customers' experience, attitudes, and behaviors. Finally, effective management implementing servant leadership in its organization should always motivate to keep employees engaged to guarantee future service competitiveness and increase the level of satisfaction and engagement of their customers in the restaurant through word-of-mouth beyond the visit.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The thesis's core body contains five chapters. Chapter 1 presents the background of the research, states the problem leading to conduct this thesis, proposes the research question to be responded, provides the main objectives, and before

explaining the study significance and value, this chapter also introduces the research hypotheses and the conceptual multilevel model.

Chapter 2 offers a literature review of the relevant concepts, including servant leadership, employee attitudes (i.e., satisfaction and engagement), and customer outcomes (i.e., satisfaction and engagement); it also expounds the relationships among these pertinent concepts based on the existing literature. Likewise, chapter 2 reviews the theoretical foundations of the study (i.e., Servant Leadership Theory) to study the relationships among these related concepts from a wider perspective. Furthermore, the same chapter briefly summarizes the theoretical basis for the research (i.e., Generalized Exchange Theory and Service-Profit Chain Theory) and then derives the conceptual framework, which leads the research methods and data collection. Subsequently, the research hypotheses are proposed based on these theories and the reviewed literature.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology used in this research. To address the research question, the most applicable method is a quantitative multi-level approach. The scales of the all the constructs are adopted from previous research, which is expatiated in the same chapter 3. Likert scale is used to build the items and design the questionnaire to measure different variables. Chapter 3 also describes the process of data collection and data analysis, including the approaches to test the hypotheses.

Chapter 4 describes the pilot study which will be conducted in Lebanon to enhance the reliability, validity, and readability of the measurement scales then the data while testing the content validity and reliability of the main survey instrument. The multi-level analysis (i.e., Inter-rater agreement, ICC) and confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) are carried out to clarify the aggregation and to identify the best fit

models. It also provides the results of the final survey and discusses in detail the findings from the Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM).

Chapter 5 amplifies the overall discussions on the findings, along with the implications of the research for the human resource management and restaurant management and the theoretical contributions of this servant leadership study. This chapter also presents the limitations of the research and suggestions for future research.

1.6 Definition of Terms

Throughout the dissertation, the definitions of the following selected terms used for the purpose of this study are given below.

“Servant Leadership”:

Since its introduction in 1970, many scholars tried to provide a flexible description of how the servant leaders behave with the followers and what, why, and how servant leadership is defined (Greenleaf, 1970, 1977). This thesis will be using a recent new definition of servant leadership (Eva et al., 2019, p. 114):

“Servant leadership is an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community.”

“Employee Engagement”:

In this study, we adopt Schaufeli et al.’s (2002) definition of EE which has received increase attention in hospitality research in the recent years. The authors defined employee engagement as the status of the mind of the employees related

positively to their work and which comprises the three characteristics: vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

“Customer Satisfaction”:

Following the author literature, customer satisfaction for this thesis is based on the definition of satisfaction in his book (Oliver, 2014, p. 8):

“Satisfaction is the consumer’s fulfillment response. It is a judgment that a product/service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under- or over- fulfillment.”

“Customer Engagement”:

For the purpose of the research objectives, the following customer engagement definition by van Doorn et al. (2010, p. 254) is regarded in this study:

“Customers’ behavioral manifestation toward a brand or firm, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers such as word-of-mouth activity, recommendations, helping other customers, blogging, writing reviews.”

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

An overview of the main concepts of the study, including servant leadership, employee engagement, customer satisfaction and customer engagement, is provided in this chapter. The relationships among these pertinent concepts are also developed based on the existing literature. Fundamental theories, namely, servant leadership theory (SL) and generalized exchange theory (GET), are also discussed. The conceptual model for this study is derived, and hypotheses are proposed based on the literature reviewed and the two fundamental theories.

First, an overview on the history and different theories leadership is explained in Section 2.2 then the concept of servant leadership is reviewed in the leadership and the hospitality field in Section 2.3. Although the servant leadership concept was first introduced by Greenleaf in the 1970s, it is no earlier than 1991 that it has been given attention in the literature and was related with the issues such as leadership styles (Graham, 1991). Its origin and development are explained in Section 2.3.1 and 2.3.2. The characteristics of servant leadership which, after and based on the work of Greenleaf, were originally presented by Spears (1996) may include listening, healing, conceptualization, commitment to the growth of people (see Section 2.3.4). In the same section, additional behavioral researchers who provided other characteristics and measurement work of servant leadership are also revised. One of the most exciting parts of the servant leadership effort today is the new research on servant leadership, in hospitality or other industries, that is being conducted by many scholars. Section 2.3.5 provides highlights of the scientific research done in the leadership literature. Then the last Section 2.3.6 reviews what have been done in the hospitality

servant leadership research. Furthermore, Section 2.5 describes the restaurant industry in general and in Lebanon context.

Second, this chapter in its Sections 2.6.1 through 2.6.3 review the theoretical foundations of the study (i.e., Servant Leadership Theory and Generalized Exchange Theory) to understand the relationships among the related concepts from a wider perspective. Then the conceptual framework is derived, which leads the research methods and data collection.

At last, drawing on the explained concepts, theories, and the reviewed literature, strong argument and relationships are supported and the research hypotheses are proposed (see Section 2.7). Most of the literature was a review of scholarly from peer-reviewed articles, journals, dissertations, and books utilizing The Hong Kong Polytechnic University library databases and resources, EBSCO Host, ProQuest, and Google Scholar.

2.2 Leadership

2.2.1 History and Theories

Leadership is the ability to mobilize and influence others to do something (Cheung et al., 2018) and therefore it highly affects the performance of the group and the has an important role in organizations and their operations. Northouse (2016) gave a simple yet specific definition of leadership as a process whereby the group of individuals is influenced by the leader and together work to attain a mutual goal. He acknowledges also that leadership is a topic of interest and important area of study, formally started in the past century and still lacks understanding and agreement universally (Northouse, 2016). The study of leadership has evolved during the past

century with continuously increasing interest in the leadership research. The leading scholarly journal, *The Leadership Quarterly*, which is started in 1990 by Bernard Bass, has contributed over 800 manuscripts to the topic of leadership (Dionne et al., 2014). This topic has been one of the most taught subjects at business schools throughout the United States and the world during the last fifty years (Collinson & Tourish, 2015).

Leadership, even in its most basic form, existed and continued within civilizations since the first family unit, clan, village, and other controlled groups that came into existence. Early Phoenicians civilizations contributed to the world in several matters including navigational techniques, advanced glass making, and the phonetic alphabet (Allio, 2012). The Greeks and Romans for example introduced or thought of the democratic type of government, architecture, aqueducts, calendar, the arts, the census and countless other contributions (Gore & Clark, 2004). The entrepreneurial effort and accomplishments of many ancient societies are evidence of the existence of some form of organized leadership and the continual advancement of leadership throughout history.

During the last century, leadership has progressed from a practice, or something doable by people, to a defined process of research that has produced several leadership theories and types (Dionne et al., 2014; Northouse, 2016). The studies on leadership conducted by the University of Iowa in the 1930s focused on identifying what was assumed to be the best leadership practice (Bhatti et al., 2012). The research conducted by Kurt Lewin at that time led to identify that the three core leadership practices are *laissez-faire*, democratic, and autocratic. The *laissez-faire* leader is considered to be somebody who relinquishes control and responsibility to others, while the autocratic leader preserves a controlled environment, centered-oriented decision-making, dictatorial system of workplace that limits the followers'

participation (Bhatti et al., 2012). The democratic leadership style was related to effectively boost positive employee attitudes and morale, which was accomplished through cooperating with followers, delegation, and participation (Smothers, 2011).

Leadership research in the 1940s and 1950s by Ohio State Leadership Studies identified problems associated with organizations, groups, and the role of followers related to leadership. During this research observations were made about a movement developed shifting from the authoritarian leadership practices towards a transactional style approach (Omillion-Hodges & Wieland, 2016). Additionally, The Ohio State studies presented two main features of leadership namely: initiating of structure and consideration (Rowold, 2011). While both have impact on organizational goals and effective in performance and profitability, the former is related to the ability of the leader to initiate structure for followers within the organization and their responsibilities, the later impacted meeting follower's relationships and needs, encouraged positive aspects such as respect, open communication, and trust between the followers and leaders (Rowold, 2011).

Later in the 1960s, the University of Michigan conducted studies by Likert for the purpose to establish leadership effectiveness and this research produced production centered and employee-centered types of behavior-orientated leadership styles (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Gregoire & Arendt, 2014; Northouse, 2016). Production-centered leaders focused on technical aspects whereas employee-centered leaders focused on relationships. Leaders who focused on employees had higher rates of group performance and job satisfaction. Leaders who focused on production resulted in low satisfaction and production (Gregoire & Arendt, 2014; Yukl, 2013).

Each leadership theory has been built upon the other. The business environment has been changed globally same as the knowledge of leadership which

has expanded over time and evolved to meet these changes and will continue to generate valued research. In the same vein, a new phenomenon has emerged relying on the followers and their impact on the success of the organizational leadership (Allio, 2012). The follower is not the same, a modern one knows about recent technology who at the same time has increased power, knowledge, and given more empowerment to be involved in all aspect of their specialization within their organization (Allio, 2012; Carter, 2013). The whole organizational environment has been changed. In addition to the followers, leaders' role of leadership is no longer passive or the same; they are now required to guide and direct the followers to develop and maintain their skills to implement and sustain market performance and relationships with customers, colleagues, and suppliers and even society (Allio, 2012; Carter, 2013).

Today employees are at the cliff of a new place of work. Employees will not just follow blindly, obey orders, and operate with absolute loyalty. The majority of today's employees search meaning in their jobs, as well as many other aspects of their life. Spears (2010) described that we are moving away from the traditional autocratic leadership model to a more participatory model in which decision-making is shared. Continuing to move away from traditional hierarchical modes of leadership, a more caring, ethical, and participatory method of leadership emerges. While being not a new leadership theory (Northouse, 2016), servant leadership may be a theory of this present time.

Under this section seven of the known leadership approach are explained below and later servant leadership in the following section 2.3 of this chapter.

2.2.2 Trait Approach

The trait theory of leadership began with the great man theory of the early 20th century, in which researchers attempted to determine if historically renowned leaders shared a specific set of characteristics (Northouse, 2016). The central tenant of the trait approach was that an individual must be born with the correct qualities in order to be an effective leader. Stogdill (1948) reviewed the literature related to the traits of effective leaders and identified that intelligence, alertness, insight, responsibility, initiative, persistence, self-confidence, and sociability were some dominant traits and were varied by context. Mann (1959) on the other hand focused on the personality traits of successful leaders and added adjustment, extroversion, dominance, masculinity, and interpersonal sensitivity to the list. Another study conducted by Stogdill (1974) also added achievement, tolerance, and cooperativeness to the traits list. The social factors found to influence the effectiveness of the individual traits (Zaccaro, 2007). This trait theory didn't consider the leader-follower interactions (Northouse, 2016) opening the way to the behavioral leadership research.

2.2.3 Skills Approach

Skills are attributes that can be developed in order to improve leadership as opposed to traits which are innate and do not change. The three-skill approach proposed that the determinants for leadership were technical, human, and conceptual skills (Katz, 1955). Katz defined technical skills as relating to specific jobs, human skills involve working with people, and conceptual skills working with ideas. The level of every skill defer between management hierarchy (Northouse, 2016).

2.2.4 Behavioral Approach

During the late 1940s, there was a transition from trait theory toward behavior types of leadership. In the 1930s, the University of Iowa conducted a study of leadership that identified laissez-faire, democratic, and authoritarian as categories of leadership behavior (Bhatti et al., 2012).

Laissez-faire behavior was considered by many to be a negative approach to leadership utilizing a hands-off approach which intent to empower and delegate responsibility that would achieve an organizations' objectives. Democratic behavior was a method by which there was communication with followers who were included in the decision-making process. Authoritarian behavior was a method by which followers were given direct task by a leader and the expectation was for followers to do as instructed (Northouse, 2016).

2.2.5 Situational Approach

The situational leadership theory was developed in the 1960s by Blanchard based on a concept that different situations would require varying responses (Blanchard & Hersey, 1996). The theory suggested that leaders had to adapt their leadership approach based on the level of individual follower development. The theory further suggested that based on the maturity level of followers, the leader should match the appropriate decision-making style, either delegating, participating, telling, or selling, to the followers' particular skill level (Northouse, 2016). Furthermore, the study of Stogdill (1974) suggested that while leaders may have shared common traits, it was their ability to adapt to situations and apply appropriate

and different leadership styles in response to the situations, which in turn would produce desired results (Northouse, 2016).

2.2.6 Path-Goal Theory

In the path-goal model of leadership, the leader defines goals, clarifies the path, removes obstacles, and provides support as motivational factors for an employee toward a goal (House, 1996). In addition to meeting leader and follower goals, the use of path-goal leadership was intended to meet organizational goals (Yukl, 2013). Path-Goal is a behavioral or situational theory that blends elements of leader behaviors, characteristics of followers, and situations (Northouse, 2016). Path-Goal theory was developed to create an understanding of how to analyze, predict, and influence the behavior of followers (Northouse, 2016).

2.2.7 Leader-Member Exchange Theory

The leader-member exchange theory (LMX) moved from examining the traits or behaviors of the leader or the follower to focusing on the relationship between the leader and follower. Initially known as the vertical dyad linkage (VDL) the LMX theory separated a leader's relationship with followers into an in-group and an out-group (Dansereau Jr et al., 1975). The in-group is willing to provide additional effort for the leader but also receives additional rewards and communication while the out-group is transactional in that members produce standard results for standard compensation (Dansereau Jr et al., 1975). More recently LMX theory has focused on developing and increasing the effectiveness of leaders (Northouse, 2016).

Accordingly, a leader should offer in-group status to all subordinates through actions that advance the leadership-follower relationship to a partnership in which full communication has been reached (Northouse, 2016).

2.2.8 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is considered to be the most researched, studied, and possibly most practiced leadership theory of the past forty years (Dionne et al., 2014). Developed by James MacGregor in the 1970s Transformational leadership is defined as a method where leaders in a sense transformed themselves, and through changes in their behaviors and actions connected and interacted with their followers creating higher levels of motivation, morality and ultimately performance outcomes (Allio, 2012; Northouse, 2016).

Northouse (2016) stated that the principle theory of transformational leadership is the role that leadership is concerned with the transformation of organizations. Transformational leaders possess a distinguishing characteristic setting them apart from other leadership theories. Transformational leaders focus on traditional and hierarchical positions of power best suited for their operating environment and are engaged in self-focused concepts such as self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy (Schuh et al., 2013). Moreover, transformational leaders are individuals who enable an environment of continual learning while engaging in the recruitment and grooming of followers, and providing environments that promote a shared vision toward the organization's success (Northouse, 2016).

2.2.9 Servant Leadership for this Study

The leader under servant leadership approach is servant first, placing the emotional support and assisting the followers in their self-development and well-being who in turn see him/her a role model and display, freely not through power, appropriate behaviors (Greenleaf, 1970). Although other approaches to leadership, like transformational leadership, empowering leadership, and charismatic leadership, include supporting followers, servant leadership is unique as it has strong emphasis on leading by serving followers (Liden, Wayne, et al., 2014) and not only connecting to them. Added to that, due to its distinctive nature, motivation to serve first then lead by choice, servant leadership has exclusive relations with particular follower outcomes (i.e., employees and customers), even though it shares some similarities with other positive forms of leadership (Neubert et al., 2008; van Dierendonck et al., 2014). To elaborate on the differences between servant leadership and some other leadership styles as mentioned above that share some similar characteristics, it worth noting that some studies in the literature use them as control factor interchangeably.

While these leadership styles share some common characteristics, they also have distinct emphases and approaches. Servant leadership stands out by placing the primary focus on the well-being and growth of followers (Greenleaf, 1977), while transformational leadership emphasizes inspiring change and achieving high performance (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Empowering leadership centres on delegating authority and fostering employee autonomy, while charismatic leadership relies on the leader's personal charisma and vision to captivate and engage followers (Northouse, 2016). Furthermore, servant leadership focus on serving the needs of the followers and emphasising empathy and selflessness grounded in humility. Another

major difference between servant leadership and some other leadership styles mentioned earlier: transformational leadership, empowering leadership, and charismatic leadership is the conceptualization skills where the leader balance between the long-term goals and day-to-day operations (Spears, 2010). This characteristic reflects the leader's competency in solving work problems and understanding the organization's goals. Moreover, the suitability of each style depends on the organizational context, values, and goals. However, in term of organisational structure, servant leadership is well-suited for flat organizational structures, as the one chosen for this study, where collaboration and shared decision-making are emphasized.

Table 2.1 below provides a clear comparison of many specified aspects between each pair of leadership styles (i.e., servant leadership, transformational leadership, empowering leadership, and charismatic leadership).

Table 2-1 *Comparison between Servant Leadership and Other Styles.*

Aspect	Servant Leadership	Transformational Leadership
Focus	Emphasizes serving the needs of followers, fostering their growth and well-being.	Focuses on inspiring and motivating followers to achieve exceptional performance by appealing to their higher ideals.
Orientation	Primarily revolves around the well-being of followers and their development.	Revolves around creating a shared vision and inspiring change in followers.
Leadership Approach	Grounded in humility, empathy, and service to others.	Involves charisma, vision, and inspiration to drive change.
Outcome	Aims for followers' personal growth, development, and well-being.	Strives for enhanced performance and realization of a compelling vision.

Aspect	Servant Leadership	Empowering Leadership
Focus	Focuses on serving followers and their holistic development.	Focuses on delegating authority and fostering employee autonomy.
Approach to Authority	Involves using authority to support and enable followers' growth.	Involves delegating authority to encourage decision-making at various levels.
Influence Mechanism	Leverages support and guidance to help followers reach their potential.	Leverages trust and autonomy to encourage self-efficacy and initiative.

Aspect	Servant Leadership	Charismatic Leadership
Focus	Puts followers' needs and well-being at the forefront.	Relies on the leader's personal charm and vision.
Connection with Followers	Connects through empathy and active support.	Connects through personal charisma and emotional appeal.
Source of Influence	Influence stems from serving and supporting followers' growth.	Influence comes from the leader's compelling personality and vision.
Long-Term Relationship	Focuses on sustaining long-term, caring relationships with followers.	Often centers on short-term inspiration and emotional impact.

In summary, while these leadership styles share some common attributes, their focal points, approaches to influence, and intended outcomes vary significantly. Servant leadership uniquely centers on serving and developing followers, while transformational leadership focuses on inspiring change, empowering leadership emphasizes autonomy, and charismatic leadership relies on the leader's personal charisma and vision. As mentioned, the choice of leadership style should align with the organization's values, goals, and the type of relationship desired between leaders and followers.

Referring to the literature, servant leadership proved to explain variability above and beyond many other leadership types when they are controlled. Such as, after creating a newly measure for servant leadership, Liden et al. (2008) explained the impact of servant leadership on employee commitment, performance, and citizenship behavior in an organization. This influence remains significant even when we statistically account for the effects of transformational leadership and leader-member exchange (LMX). In another study, servant leadership was responsible for an additional 10% of the variation in team performance, surpassing the impact of transformational leadership (Schaubroeck et al., 2011). Furthermore, researchers demonstrated that servant leadership has positive effect on employees' self-efficacy and group identification, leading to their service performance even after controlling the positive influence of transformational leadership (Chen et al., 2015).

Last but not least, Ling et al. (2017) compared the effectiveness of servant versus authentic leadership in hotel sector by examining relationships with group-level trust climate and individual-level organizational commitment, work engagement, and work performance. Interestingly, servant leadership, in comparison with authentic leadership, shows a more significant effect on creating a trust climate and a more direct effect regarding increasing employees' positive work attitudes including organizational commitment and work engagement, ultimately influencing work performance. This explanation of important outcomes beyond the two dominant leadership approaches, namely transformational and LMX, in addition to authentic leadership pleads an explanation for *how* servant leadership influences employee attitudes and uniquely customer outcomes. Nonetheless, owing to the unpredictable and conceptual aspects of customer service along with the unique traits of the hospitality sector, the researcher conducting this research expects that servant

leadership might exert a more pronounced influence on employees' dispositions in contrast to alternative leadership approaches. This expectation primarily arises from the distinctive developmental, introspective, and benevolent aspects inherent in servant leadership, which are notably absent in other prevailing leadership theories. In line with the literature on understanding of how servant leader behaviors promote positive outcomes (Hsiao et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2016; Ilkhanizadeh & Karatepe, 2018; Liden, Wayne, et al., 2014; Ling et al., 2016; Tuan, 2018), the main purpose of this study is to continue the drive on servant leadership research.

2.3 Servant Leadership

The concept of a leader who places the needs of the follower before those of the organization seems counter-intuitive among businesses which survive to maximize their profit and increase the stock worth. Why would a corporation want a servant leader when the needs of the organization are not primarily? Although many scholars have claimed that the drive of a for-profit business is only profit, moving from short-term to long-term thought for the better and the good of the society has been a demand and an interest from academics (Friedman, 2007; Schlossberger, 1994). Corporate social responsibility and sustainability are practices in business looking for a long-term interest of all stakeholders. In this manner, the long-term growth and development of employees is a priority of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970). This section reviews both the historical and the modern origin of servant leadership then the development and definition for the basis of this thesis. Later on the characteristics and research highlights of servant leadership will be reviewed.

2.3.1 Origin

On one hand, historical roots of servant leadership predated the ideas of Greenleaf (1970). The concept he proposed in which the leader places the follower first was adopted long before his modern concepts related to SL. The principles of servant leadership have been examined in the Bible by theologians and other researchers (Blanchard & Hodges, 2005; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Several examples of leaders who believed to serve their followers and linked the same concepts deliberated by Greenleaf were found in the Bible (Barbuto Jr & Wheeler, 2006). Referring to his teachings to the disciples, who are considered the followers, which

includes: treating each other with love, being humble when communicating with the least privileged in society, and becoming elevated only by serving first, Jesus Christ, was the most notable of the servant leaders in the Bible (Blanchard & Hodges, 2005). In the study of Greenleaf's model of SL, scholars have developed SL models with a biblical basis by referencing biblical principles (Page & Wong, 2000; Sendjaya et al., 2008). In addition to Christianity as religion to espouse leaders who serve, a study by Wallace (2007) on servant leadership worldview provided examples of servant leadership features found in all five major religions: Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. The same author also showed some examples of disagreement between the five major religions and SL.

On the other hand, the modern servant leadership was originated by Robert K. Greenleaf (1970) himself in his essay "The Servant as Leader". From a worker as a crew of the construction line to management research head in American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T), Greenleaf served around 45 years before retirement. The essay written by Greenleaf was influenced by the reflection on those career years and was inspired by the Hesse's (1956) spiritual pilgrimage story, *Journey to the East*. The mentioned story is a short novel written Hermann Hesse, a German author. It was first published in German in 1932. In this story, the narrator called H.H. becomes himself a member of a group including fictional and real characters named "The League". In search of the ultimate truth, a branch of men of this group goes on a mythical pilgrimage journey to "the East". The storyteller tells of traveling across geography imaginary and real, through both time and space. Leo, described as a simple servant, happy, pleasant, handsome, and beloved by everyone, does the basic chores for them and tolerates them with his spirit and songs. When the journey faces a crisis in a deep mountain, as Leo, the servant, disappears, the group fall into anxiety

and argument. The journey seems out of control. They cannot pass it without Leo, the group disbands in disagreement and bickering after his disappearance and even blaming him for the ultimate collapse of the group and failure of the Journey. H.H. considers the League no longer exists and he has lost contact with the group but tries to locate Leo. Some years later, the narrator, one of the members of the group, finds Leo and to his surprise, Leo, first known as servant, turns out to be actually the Head of the League, spiritually guiding it, a noble and great leader. The structure of the essay “The Servant as Leader” became the conceptual foundation for the servant leadership model. Greenleaf (2009) suggested a paradigm shift in large organizations that would involve the commitment of workers to only serve following servant leaders and therefore reshape management and leadership methods from the employee upward. Additionally, he proposed that individual leaders should develop and nurture the trust of the followers and no longer rely on the coercive power deeply embedded in firms.

2.3.2 Development

Robert Greenleaf developed and introduced servant leadership in the 1970 in his essay “The Servant as Leader”. In his writing he identified the servant leaders who want to serve first and help others, and consciously choose to lead (Greenleaf, 1970). The followers are being served by the servant leader in a way that enables them to be freer, healthier, wiser, more independent, and eventually being servants themselves (Greenleaf, 1970). In addition, based on the original writings of Greenleaf, Spears (2010) defined ten characteristics that he viewed as the central in developing servant leaders. The characteristics are: commitment to the growth of

people, listening, foresight, awareness, conceptualization, empathy, healing, persuasion, building community, and stewardship (Spears, 2010).

In review of the servant leadership research, three phases can be recognized. The first phase of the servant leadership research concentrated on the conceptual development primarily based on the works of both Spears (1996) and Greenleaf (1977). The second is the measurement and testing phase where most of the research has been done on developing measures of servant leadership and testing the relationships between servant leadership and outcomes being in the same or in different studies via cross-sectional research (Barbuto Jr & Wheeler, 2006; Ehrhart, 2004; Laub, 2003; Liden et al., 2015; Liden et al., 2008; Lytle et al., 1998; Reed et al., 2011; Sendjaya et al., 2017; Sendjaya et al., 2008). The measures of servant leadership are currently 16 according to recent systematic literature review conducted by Eva et al. (2019). At present research of servant leadership is in third phase. It is the model development phase. At this stage, more sophisticated study designs are being employed to understand more the relationship between the outcomes, the antecedents, mediating and moderating mechanisms, and external boundaries of servant leadership (Liden, Wayne, et al., 2014; Tuan, 2018). In general, findings of most systematic literature reviews studies on servant leadership indicated that it has been researched internationally across many countries, measured by different instruments, and tested on the individual, team, and organizational levels (Coetzer et al., 2017; Eva et al., 2019). Eva and her colleagues for example found that among 39 countries the majority of the empirical research that has been conducted on servant leadership are coming from North America (44%) and China (Eva et al., 2019). Moreover, while many decades of research resulted in the advancement of the theory of servant leadership, there is still no consensus to date on the definition,

characteristics, and measurement of servant leadership (Coetzer et al., 2017). The field lacks clarity and coherence (Eva et al., 2019).

Changes continued in society and many businesses during the past century resulted in shift from the previously traditional attitudes concerning autocratic models and hierarchical styles of leadership towards Greenleaf's approach of servant leadership (Avolio et al., 2009; Spears, 2010).

During recent years, executives of many corporations are considered unethical, untrustworthy, and corrupt in the United States (Porter, 2012). Moreover many corporations struggling to gain people trust rating due to unethical scandals and therefore looking to leaders upholding morals and selfless (Porter, 2012; Van Dierendonck, 2011). While servant leadership could be the foundation of such leaders with high values, moral, and humble, executives of some successful companies like Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, Whole Foods, and Best Buy displayed characteristics of servant leadership (Hess, 2013). Similarly, in the hospitality industry the SL practices of executives positively influenced organizational performance and public opinion (Huang et al., 2016). Although the field of servant leadership has demonstrated progress in the last two decades, the research of this type of leadership will continue to move forward and offer more significant insights to this field in the coming years.

2.3.3 Definition

Even though servant leadership was introduced approximately four decades ago and empirical studies on the topic began over 15 years ago, (Laub, 1999, 2003; Lytle et al., 1998), there is still no unification or agreement on the definition of servant

leadership neither widely accepted (Neubert et al., 2016; Van Dierendonck, 2011). Servant Leadership would not be easy to apply and operationalize as Greenleaf (1977) predicted and left the readers to reflect and develop (Spears, 1996). In fact, Block put it right when he addressed Greenleaf at the 2005 International Servant Leadership conference: "...You've held on to the spirit of servant-leadership, you've kept it vague and undefinable. . . . People can come back every year to figure out what the hell it is..." (Block, 2005, p. 55). This takes us back to the introduction of the concept of servant leadership by Greenleaf, who did not provide us an empirically validated definition of it. Consequently, researchers and scholars began to come up with their own definitions of servant leadership and even models, to a lesser or greater degree inspired by the work of Greenleaf. This has brought in many interpretations of the concept of servant leadership, demonstrating a wide range of behaviors (e.g., Laub, 1999; Liden et al., 2008; Russell & Gregory, 2002; Sendjaya et al., 2008; Spears, 1996). Moreover, all researchers tried to provide a flexible description of how the servant leaders behave with the followers and what, why, and how servant leadership is defined. They are all based on the original definition which Robert Greenleaf first coined in the servant leadership essay as follows (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 6; 1977):

"The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?"

However, after claiming that the above mentioned Greenleaf's definition is somehow not sufficient for directing an empirical research, the authors of a recent study provided a new definition of servant leadership (Eva et al., 2019):

“Servant leadership is an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community.”

For this study the recent definition of servant leadership by Eva et al. (2019) will be used. With reference to the initial quote on servant leadership by Greenleaf as a vital foundation, Eva and her colleagues based the definition on three features: motive, mode, and mindset. Therefore, this conceptualization of servant leadership explains the essence of it and could be empirically applied to reach the research objectives of this study.

2.3.4 Characteristics

Robert Greenleaf, the behavioral, initiated the concept of servant leadership and supported it by combining a test and a sequences of leadership ideologies in order to provide the foundational elements of servant leadership. On one hand, Greenleaf first explained clearly the motivation of the servant leader as the desire to serve and it is innate while leadership is considered a choice (Greenleaf, 1970). A servant leader was described in what he stated to as the “best test” for servant leadership which is also served as the main emphasize of writing “The Servant as Leader”. Greenleaf specified that *“The best test, and difficult to administer, is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on*

the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?” (p. 6). Spears (2010) on the other hand, who worked as the president and CEO of the “Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership” from 1990-2007, clarified further the concepts of servant leadership provided in Robert Greenleaf’s essays. In this matter, he identified ten characteristics which he believed they were “as being of critical importance—central to the development of servant-leaders” (p. 27).

The following sections describe each characteristic: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community.

Listening

Listening was the first concept mentioned by Greenleaf (1970). The discipline to learn to listen is sufficient to respond to any problem to be solved by a true servant as a leader. Listening first before speaking is essential to become a servant leader who naturally has the ability to listen receptively to the verbal and non-verbal communication. According to Spears (2010), the servant leader communicates by deeply listening intently to the followers as well as to his/her inner voice. He added that this skill of listening is vital for the well-being and the growth of the servant leader if associated time to assess the value of words and periods of reflection.

Empathy

The servant leaders are likely to be trusted when they fully accept and empathize the followers regardless of their differences as persons. Through empathy a servant leader should never reject any person in case of performance appraisal or correcting behavior. Greenleaf added that a servant leader must be also willing to

accept imperfection and through his/her wise leadership anyone could achieve greatness (Greenleaf, 1970). Moreover, the most prosperous servant leaders are those capable to become empathetic listeners (Spears, 2010).

Healing

Following Greenleaf's understanding concept, Spears's comprised healing in his servant leadership characteristics. He referred to the healing characteristic as being for the leader's self and his/her relationship to others and as "one of the great strengths of servant leadership" (p. 27). The healing should address and understand the emotional hurts suffered by many individuals which result in "broken spirits" (p. 27).

Awareness

Greenleaf (1970) included that leaders must have the capacity to adapt to and process a wide range of information and this would permit the leader to tolerate stress and build confidence through an increased understanding of an uncertain internal and external environment. Spears (2010) described this characteristic as the servant leader's ability to understand issues relating to values, power, and ethics. Being generally- and self-aware will add strengths to this leader.

Persuasion

The concept of persuasion is illustrated by Greenleaf (1970) as the value of non-confrontational and gentle and clear methods of achieving goals. He described persuasion as an effective process, but is sometimes only achievable on an individual basis. Greenleaf also suggested patience in working through increasing progress

toward essential aims. As for Spears (2010), the servant leaders rely on persuasion, rather than using their status power, to enforce and making organizations decisions.

Conceptualizing

Greenleaf (1970) noted conceptualizing at the end of his essay as the final concept and the most important and prime element of servant leadership which includes having a purpose or vision. Servant leaders must have the ability to dream big and think about an organization or a problem from conceptualizing perspective. Similarly, Spears (2010) defined conceptualizing as the leader's ability to "think beyond day-to-day realities" (p. 28), but stressed on balancing between thinking in terms of long term purpose and day-to-day operations.

Foresight

Foresight stimulated the servant leaders to deviate their thinking of the instant moment only and be aware of the path in which they are leading to better guess the what and when is going to happen in the future (Greenleaf, 1970). To be achieved, as per Greenleaf, and similarly to how Spears (2010) described it, the servant leader has to work his/her intuitive mind in a way to learn from the past, to understand the present realities, and at the same time be aware and project the future. Interestingly, foresight remains mostly unexplored area in leadership studies which highly deserves attention.

Stewardship

Greenleaf noticed stewardship practices in CEO's, staffs, and trustees of all institutions while they were holding their institutions in trust for the greater good of community and society (Greenleaf, 2002). While stewardship could be defined as

holding something in trust for another (Block, 2005), servant leadership which assumes the commitment for the service of the needs of others, first and foremost, reflects stewardship. Servant leadership also emphasizes the practice of openness and persuasion, instead of control (Spears, 2010).

Commitment to the Growth of People

Greenleaf's (1970) test indicated that the servant leadership's aim is to develop the followers to a certain extent that servant leadership can be delivered from leader to followers and themselves become servants. Commitment to the growth of people, according to Spears (2010), is a characteristic in a servant leader which allows him/her to value the employee of the organization as an individual that should be offered with the right tools, training, and necessary experience in order to grow and excel. As such, the servant leader, believing in the intrinsic value of the workers rather than solely their tangible contributions, is deeply committed to the growth of each and every person within his or her organization. Thus, the servant leaders identify the tremendous obligation to do everything in their power to nurture the personal and professional growth of employees and coworkers (Spears, 2010). In practical terms, this could involve tangible steps like reserving funds for personal and career growth, demonstrating receptiveness to ideas and suggestions from all individuals, promoting employee participation in decision-making, and taking an active role in assisting laid-off staff members to secure alternative employment opportunities.

Building Community

Greenleaf's (1970) test went beyond the organization and included a reference to the larger range of improving society considering those with the least privileged in

the population and with the greatest need. Spears (2010) even added the stewardship characteristic as the servant leader's duty to continually strive to improve the society. The servant leader puts efforts to build a culture based on the group rather than the individual within the organization is part of the building community characteristic (Spears, 2010). According to Spears, servant leadership presents the hope of great future in "creating better, more caring, institutions" (p. 30). Therefore, the motive of a servant leader is not self or organization anymore, but rather the longer term and broader goals of a better society.

Greenleaf's thoughts and best test for the existence of servant leadership, along with Spears' servant leadership ten characteristics became the beginning point for academic models development and measurements which will be discussed in the methodology chapter.

2.3.5 Highlights on Scientific Research

Given that its origins trace back to Greenleaf's work in 1970, servant leadership has received comparatively more focus in academic literature, particularly when considering that it predates many of the widely recognized contemporary leadership theories (Hoang et al., 2023; Yukl, 2013). With a few notable exceptions, like Jill Graham's theoretical inquiry in 1991 which introduced servant leadership to the academic realm, scholarly investigation into servant leadership didn't gain significant traction until Mark Ehrhart's work in 2004. In that year, Ehrhart not only formulated a concise measurement scale but also published his empirical findings. Ehrhart's study revealed that servant leadership accounted for a greater amount of

variance in team organizational citizenship behaviors compared to transformational leadership and leader-member exchange. His research also highlighted the connection between servant leader behaviors and organizational justice, subsequently prompting employees to respond with engagement in organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) (Ehrhart, 2004).

Moreover, there is evidence indicating a positive correlation between servant leadership and the followers' affective commitment (Liden et al., 2008) and also job satisfaction (Mayer et al., 2008). Furthermore, van Dierendonck and colleagues worked out both a laboratory experiment and a field study to provide evidence that by satisfying followers' needs, servant leadership positively affects organizational commitment and work engagement (van Dierendonck et al., 2014).

In addition, needs of autonomy, relatedness and competency of followers are predicted by servant leadership, leading to employees' in-role and extra-role performance at the workplace (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). Additionally, Liden et al. (2008) and Sousa and van Dierendonck (2017) studied servant leadership dimensions independently. The former study was a scale development justifying all dimensions positively but the latter reported humility and empowerment in the servant leader maximized follower engagement.

Finally, under the same sequence, two meta-analyses including servant leadership are being published recently. The first study used the global measure of servant leadership dimensions to support the incremental validity of servant leadership over precedent leadership approaches (e.g., transformational, authentic, and ethical leadership) (Hoch et al., 2018). In the second, Banks et al. (2018) argue that the leadership theories proliferation including servant leadership was lacking

evidence to be considered parsimonious and hard to differentiate them from each other.

Servant leadership was investigated also at the team level (i.e., aggregating the followers' perceptions of the servant leader's behavior to the team level) as in Ehrhart's (2004) early study. In this regard, servant leadership when aggregating to the team level explained more variance (10%) above the transformational leadership in a positive relation to team performance (Schaubroeck et al., 2011). In the same study Schaubroeck and his colleagues showed that affect-based trust mediated the relation of servant leadership and team performance in addition to psychological safety to the followers instilled by this leader. Another research done at the team level found that team potency (maximum ability to perform well) and team effectiveness (i.e., team performance and team organizational citizenship behavior OCB) were positively affected to be higher in presence of servant leadership (Hu & Liden, 2011). Moreover, Hunter et al. (2013) found that service climate of the team is more enhanced by servant leadership and mediate its effects employees' sales behaviors, OCB, and turnover intentions. Lastly, Peterson et al. (2012) conducted a distinctive study that delved into servant leadership on an organizational level. This is in line with Greenleaf's argument that leaders should, before giving for themselves, help others first thus showing negative relationship between leader narcissism and servant leadership.

The majority of progresses have appeared not only in top-tier management journals (e.g. Chen et al., 2015; Liden, Wayne, et al., 2014), but also research on servant leadership has appeared in many disciplines, including nursing (Neubert et al., 2016), hospitality and tourism (Ling et al., 2016), and education (Williams et al., 2018). Further, research on servant leadership has also been conducted in the non-

for-profit (Parris & Peachey, 2012), public (Schwarz et al., 2016), and youth sectors (Eva & Sendjaya, 2013). Additionally, the majority of the research studies available depend on samples coming from Canada and the United States (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Hunter et al., 2013; Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2018; Liden, Wayne, et al., 2014; Liden et al., 2008; Peterson et al., 2012), China (Chen et al., 2015; Schaubroeck et al., 2011), and Europe (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017; van Dierendonck et al., 2014), leaving windows for research to test servant leadership across other parts of the world like Africa, Middle East, and South America, to enhance generalizability.

Most of the research available on servant leadership has been highly supportive. As proposed by numerous scholars and recent literature reviews, there is a substantial need for further research to gain a more comprehensive knowledge of the antecedents and outcomes of servant leadership. Additionally, exploring the relative factors that could influence how servant leadership aligns with individual, team, and organizational outcomes requires additional investigation (Eva et al., 2019; Liden, Panaccio, et al., 2014; Van Dierendonck, 2011).

One of the extensive research ideas concerning nuances of servant leadership in organizations is its effect on employee burnouts in contexts preferable to healthcare. Ma et al. assume that servant leadership contributes to the reduction of burnouts among the COVID-19 nurse volunteers by ensuring a sense of psychological safety and providing adequate job resources, like organizational support or job clarity Ma et al, 2021. This is consistent with the conservation of resources COR theory. The theory states that employees balance the acquisition and retention of resources by searching for a good fit in a particular environment. The research indicates that servant leaders can influence mediation of burnout through extant resource configurations by fostering an environment of communication and sharing.

Further, aiding the concept of stopping the burnouts, servant leadership has been associated with initiatives that have been linked to improved job performance and career growth. The research from Agusta indicates that servant leadership correlates with performance when employees are encouraged to actively work towards self-development and self-growth at the workplace (Agusta & Azmy, 2023). This holds particularly well in an organizational setup where the leaders are engaged in the management and the coaching of the subordinates. The work stresses the transformative elements of leadership as moderators for this association claiming that direct and/or indirect practicing of servant leadership qualities will make a difference.

Other researchers pay attention to the servant leader's influence on the team as well as to the effectiveness of the organization. According to Lu's systematic review of literatures, servant leadership influences positive results at team and organizational levels which supports this leadership style in creating a collaborative workplace (Lu et al., 2024). It is suggested in the review that organizations adhering to servant leadership may witness increased employee engagement, adherence to the organization's goals, and overall performance.

Servant leadership approach especially in the education sector has witnessed to have great impact on the teacher performance and students performance. Thai'Atun et al. (2024) study suggests a strong link between a servant leader and the supervisory role of the school principals which implies that anyone serving in a position of leadership and applies the philosophy of servant leadership is able to improve the performance of their staff. Such insight is especially important in educational leadership where the service provided directly determines the level of students achievement and the atmosphere in which the school operates.

Also, in different contexts the influence of servant leadership on job satisfaction has been analysed. Yang (2023), in a study in law enforcement agencies found that there is a rise in officer's job satisfaction when servant leadership is practiced. In such a case, it is obvious that servant leadership will usually promote a good atmosphere and culture within the organization which translates to high employee morale and low turnover intention.

Servant leadership extends beyond the confines of individual and team effects as it impacts the organization as a whole. In their systematic review, Canavesi and Minelli underscored the link between servant leadership style and employee satisfaction as well as patient satisfaction in health care settings, thus showing that this leadership approach is associated with better service delivery and more effective organizations (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). This also highlights the importance of using servant leadership style in promoting the culture of care and quality in the organizations.

To conclude, the existing literature on servant leadership demonstrates its effect on the followers welfare, the state of the organization, and the performance presenting a holistic view. Since the servant leader puts their followers first and enhances the surroundings, they would increase job satisfaction, lower expected turnover rate and foster creativity. The results of the analysis highlight that effectiveness of servant leadership, including in healthcare and education, should take into account personality of employees and contextual factors. This thesis extends the above literature to understand the direct link between servant leadership and customers outcomes.

2.3.6 Research in Hospitality

Notwithstanding the proliferation of servant leadership (SL) studies in the leadership literature since 1991, research in the hospitality field only started recently. As being the ideal effective leadership for the hospitality industry, scholars in hospitality and tourism have perceived the importance of SL starting 2010 (Brownell, 2010). However, there is no consensus and clarity around the SL construct (Eva et al., 2019) and it is relatively new in the hospitality leadership literature (Wu et al., 2013). Hence, a review of the existing works in hospitality and tourism literature of servant leadership is indispensable to reduce research fragmentation and address the importance of this thesis. Using content analysis, an integrative and comprehensive systematic review is provided to show the current state on the research progress and to offer critical insights. In methodology, specific keywords and conditions were employed in four databases including Scopus, EBSCOHost, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar to retrieve all SL hospitality-related articles published since the concept first appeared in 1970. This search used a combination of keywords including “servant leadership,” “servant leader,” and “hospitality,” “restaurant,” “event,” “tourism” or “hotel” appearing in the “titles, keywords, or abstracts” to identify articles in the databases. Only relevant (i.e., focus on SL as a key variable or subject area), full-length, and English papers were retrieved leaving the remaining documents for analysis (see Table 2-2). Book chapters and conference papers were excluded. After that, a detailed analysis based on types of research, journals, countries, sectors, theories and methods used, dimensions, and operationalization scales is presented. This review in this section shows the current state of servant leadership literature in hospitality which gives a clear link to this study and its conceptual model.

Servant leadership has gained considerable ground as a key leadership type in the hospitality industry. This form of leadership focuses on serving others and meeting the needs of employees, which helps improve the culture of the organization and employees' willingness to engage. The studies establish that there is a relationship between servant leadership and a number of professional outcomes related to employees, such as work engagement, job satisfaction, and commitment to an organization. It has been documented that servant leadership works very well in the hospitality industry where the quality of service is of utmost importance. For example, Rabiul states that this type of leadership is consistent with the culture of hotel management which includes employee engagement and customer service improvement efforts (Rabiul & Yean, 2021). This was also supported by Guchait, who showed that servant leadership encourages employees' customer behavior and willingness to help other employees through LMX processes with care (Guchait et al., 2023). Such findings emphasize the importance of servant leadership and its impact on employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction in the context of hospitality. Additionally, the role of a servant leader is not just limited to achieving results as an individual but is also beneficial for the organization as a whole. According to Ozturk's research, physicians engaged in a servant leadership style reported feeling more engaged at work and were more inclined to report satisfaction with their jobs, which indicates that this style of leadership could work in two directions (Ozturk et al., 2021). This is also supported by Gui's study, where he noted that there was a significant correlation between servant leadership styles and employee satisfaction as well as other employee outcomes (Gui et al., 2021). Such approaches not only place a priority on the interests of the employees, but in particular enable demonstrating the typical characteristic of a servant leader to empower their followers to become more

dedicated and ensured. Servant leadership is complex and works through various mechanisms. For example, researchers like Decuypere suggest that promotion focus, which is a moderator at the individual level, may strengthen the link between servant leadership and employee engagement (Decuypere & Schaufeli, 2021). This means that whether servant leadership is more effective than other forms may depend on some of the characteristics of the employees and the organization. In the same meta-analysis, also noted is the role of ethical leadership as a complement, noting that both servant leaders and ethical leaders have a strong desire to manage their work morally and have positive exchanges with their employees. This overlap highlights an increasing interest in leadership research in which ethical and moral aspects and behaviors of leaders are increasingly considered relevant in their practice. Besides, the cultural context is significant for the effectiveness of the servant leadership. It has been noted in Zhang's meta-analysis that the effect of servant leadership is more pronounced in collectivistic societies where group cohesiveness and support for others in an organisation is held in high esteem (Zhang et al., 2021). This implies that institutions within different cultures may need to modify their styles of leadership to suit the perspectives of their employees. Given the impact of globalization on organisational structures, understanding such cultural differences will be more crucial for hospitality leaders. Servant leadership, which is associated with employee engagement and satisfaction has also been established to promote work-family enrichment. This seems to be especially important in the hospitality industry which is regarded as a high-stress domain. Servant leadership, according to Ozturk's results, can aid the processes, which enhance interaction between work and family roles, thus making it easier for employees to use resources in both areas (Ozturk & Karatepe, 2021). This enrichment, not only has positive implications for the employees to an

extent, but also issues related to the internal outcomes to the organization by way of minimizing the employees burnout and turnover intentions, as Guchait has emphasized (Guchait et al., 2023). The role of the servant leader encompasses the need for their employees to take on active roles in balancing both work obligations and family obligations which is instrumental in maintaining a conducive work atmosphere.

All in all, the reports revolving around servant leadership strongly advocate for its importance in enhancing employee engagement in various organizations, especially those belonging to service industries. The leadership approach calls for a blend of serving others and having a high level of ethical standards while also ensuring a deep understanding different cultures due to the diverse nature of this leadership strategy. This thesis will respond to the calls and supplements to the servant leadership hospitality literature.

Table 2-2 *Publications of Servant Leadership in Hospitality*

#	TITLE	AUTHORS / YEAR
	Leadership in the service of hospitality.	(Brownell, 2010)
	Servant Leadership and Procedural Justice in the U.S. National Park Service: The Antecedents of Job Satisfaction	(Chung et al., 2010)
	Building a legacy of volunteers through servant leadership: A cause-related sporting event.	(Parris & Peachey, 2012)
	Encouraging servant leadership: A qualitative study of how a cause-related sporting event inspires participants to serve.	(Parris & Peachey, 2013a)
	The impact of servant leadership on hotel employees' "servant behavior".	(Wu et al., 2013)
	The influence of servant leadership on restaurant employee engagement.	(Carter & Baghurst, 2014)
	Servant leadership and perceptions of service quality provided by front-line service workers in hotels in Turkey: achieving competitive advantage.	(Koyuncu et al., 2014)
	Servant leadership and serving culture: Influence on individual and unit performance.	(Liden, Wayne, et al., 2014)
	The effect of servant leadership on customer value co-creation: A cross-level analysis of key mediating roles.	(Hsiao et al., 2015)
	Servant leadership and customer service quality at Korean hotels: Multilevel organizational citizenship behavior as a mediator.	(Kwak & Kim, 2015)
	The central role of leadership in rural tourism development: A theoretical framework and case studies.	(McGehee et al., 2015)

Servant leadership, social exchange relationships, and follower's helping behavior: Positive reciprocity belief matters.	(Zou et al., 2015)
The impact of CEO servant leadership on firm performance in the hospitality industry.	(Huang et al., 2016)
An empirical investigation of psychological capital among flight attendants.	(Karatepe & Talebzadeh, 2016)
The trickle-down effect of servant leadership on frontline employee service behaviors and performance: A multilevel study of Chinese hotels.	(Ling et al., 2016)
Servant leadership, empowerment climate, and group creativity: A case study in the hospitality industry.	(Linuesa - Langreo, 2016)
Antecedents and consequences of psychological contract breach.	(Peng et al., 2016)
An identification perspective of servant leadership's effects.	(Zhao et al., 2016)
Servant Leadership, Employee Job Crafting, and Citizenship Behaviors: A Cross-Level Investigation.	(Bavik et al., 2017)
Test of a mediation model of psychological capital among hotel salespeople.	(Bouzari & Karatepe, 2017)
Does servant leadership work in hospitality sector: A representative study in the hotel organizations.	(Ghosh & Khatri, 2017)
Antecedents to Job Satisfaction in the Airline Industry.	(Kurian & Muzumdar, 2017)
Servant Versus Authentic Leadership: Assessing Effectiveness in China's Hospitality Industry.	(Ling et al., 2017)
New Strategies in the New Millennium: Servant Leadership As Enhancer of Service Climate and Customer Service Performance.	(Linuesa-Langreo et al., 2017)
Does trust in organization mediate the influence of servant leadership on satisfaction outcomes among flight attendants?	(Ilkhanizadeh & Karatepe, 2018)
Reducing Employee Turnover Intention Through Servant Leadership in the Restaurant Context: A Mediation Study of Affective Organizational Commitment.	(Jang & Kandampully, 2018)
Integrating Servant Leadership into Managerial Strategy to Build Group Social Capital: The Mediating Role of Group Citizenship Behavior	(Linuesa-Langreo et al., 2018)
Activating tourists' citizenship behavior for the environment: the roles of CSR and frontline employees' citizenship behavior for the environment	(Tuan, 2018)
Hospitality Faculty Mentoring Program for Assistant Professors.	(Williams et al., 2018)
The effects of empowering leadership on employee adaptiveness in luxury hotel services: Evidence from a mixed-methods research	(Peng et al., 2022)
Negative role modeling in hospitality organizations: A social learning perspective on supervisor and subordinate customer-targeted incivility	(Xiao & Mao, 2022)
Examining the effect of entrepreneurial leadership on employees' innovative behavior in SME hotels: A mediated moderation model	(Hoang et al., 2022)
Occupational stigma and career commitment: Testing mediation and moderation effects of occupational self-esteem	(Kusluvan et al., 2022)
Ethical leadership, trust in organization and their impacts on critical hotel employee outcomes	(Eluwole et al., 2022)
Effects of empowering leadership under boundary conditions in the hospitality industry	(Rescalvo-Martin et al., 2022)

Green inclusive leadership and employee green behaviors in the hotel industry: Does perceived green organizational support matter?	(Aboramadan et al., 2022)
Can group diversity translate adhocracy culture into service innovative behavior among hospitality employees? A multilevel study	(Yang et al., 2022)
How needs for belongingness and justice influence social identity and performances: Evidence from the hospitality industry	(Li et al., 2022)
Tourism employee ambidexterity: The roles of servant leadership, job crafting, and perspective taking	(Tuan, 2022)
Anthropomorphism in hospitality and tourism: A systematic review and agenda for future research	(Ding et al., 2022)
What motivates employees to work in the hotel industry?: Quarantine hotel employees' perspectives	(Choi et al., 2022)
Does organizational empowerment promote self-leadership in hotel management? An analysis based on employees' cultural value orientation	(Su et al., 2022)
Formation of hotel employees' service innovation performance: Mechanism of thriving at work and change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior	(Wu et al., 2023)
From responsible leadership to hospitality employee's support for external CSR: Need satisfaction as a mediator and moral reflectiveness as a moderator	(Zhou & Zheng, 2023)
A systematic review of employee voice literature in hospitality	(Huang et al., 2023)
Mapping progress in hospitality CSR research: A bibliometric review from 2006 to 2023	(Peng et al., 2023)
The impact of green human resource management on hospitality employees' quitting intention: A dual perspective study	(Cao et al., 2023)
Service improvisation as a double-edged sword	(Oh & Jang, 2023)
Servant leadership, ideology-based culture and job outcomes: A multi-level investigation among hospitality workers	(Fatima et al., 2023)
"Are your employees mentally prepared for the pandemic?" Wellbeing-oriented human resource management practices in a developing country	(Ngo et al., 2023)
Job embeddedness in hospitality and tourism scholarship: Past, present, and future research agenda	(Arici et al., 2023)
Test of a serial mediation model of Machiavellian leadership among hospitality and tourism employees	(Karatepe et al., 2023)
The antecedents of employees' innovative behavior in hospitality and tourism contexts: A meta-regression approach	(Zhu et al., 2023)
An investigation of the interrelationships of leadership styles, psychological safety, thriving at work, and work engagement in the hotel industry: A sequential mediation model	(Rabiul et al., 2023)
Special privileges or busywork? The impact of qualitative job insecurity on idiosyncratic deals and illegitimate tasks among hospitality workers	(Currie et al., 2023)
Can ethical climate and ethical self-efficacy channel ethical leadership into service performance? A multilevel investigation	(Yang et al., 2023)
Ethical leadership in tourism and hospitality management: A systematic literature review and research agenda	(Hoang et al., 2023)
How mentors inspire affective commitment in newcomers: The roles of servant leadership, psychological capital, and feedback-seeking behavior	(Zhou et al., 2024)

General manager servant leadership and firm adaptive capacity: The heterogeneous effect of social capital in family versus non-family firms	(Gutierrez-Broncano et al., 2024)
How can promote hotel employees' performances? Relative importance of high-performance HR practices and the moderating role of empowering leadership	(Hai & Park, 2024)
The road to eco-excellence: How does environmentally specific empowering leadership foster hospitality employees' green creativity through green creative self-efficacy and green learning orientation	(Meirun et al., 2024)
The effects of recovery experiences on hotel employees' subjective well-being, organizational citizenship behavior, and task performance	(Huang & Tsai, 2024)
Give it 110 percent: The sequential nexus between green supervisor support, green descriptive norm, green self-efficacy, and green behavior	(Olorunsola et al., 2024)
Exploring the impact of abusive supervision on employee approaches to managing service errors and failures: Examining the effects of hope and optimism, and service tenure	(Gip et al., 2024)
When can empowering leadership foster intrinsic motivation and proactive performance in the tourism and hospitality industry? A moderated mediation model	(Abuelhassan et al., 2024)
How and when job passion promotes customer-oriented organizational citizenship behavior: A moderated mediation model	(Teng et al., 2024)
Differential leadership and hospitality employees' in-role performance: The role of constructive deviance and competitive climate	(Liu et al., 2024)
The effect of resilient leadership on employee resilience during a crisis in tourism & camp	(Zhang et al., 2024)
How does authentic leadership drive hotel employees to innovate? A cross-level influencing process	(Lin, 2024)
Green inclusive leadership and hospitality employees' green service innovative behavior in the Chinese hospitality context: The roles of basic psychological needs and employee traditionality	(Zhao et al., 2024)
How does despotic leadership thwart frontline employees' role-related service behaviors? A psychological empowerment perspective	(Sun et al., 2024)
Embracing artificial intelligence (AI) with job crafting: Exploring trickle-down effect and employees' outcomes	(Li et al., 2024)
How AI awareness can prompt service performance adaptivity and technologically-environmental mastery	(Mo et al., 2024)
A meta-analytic review of hospitality and tourism employees' creativity and innovative behavior	(Lim et al., 2024)

Foundational Theories and methods

Various theoretical perspectives, concepts, or frameworks have been extensively employed to investigate the servant leadership in the context of hospitality and tourism. Based on the articles collected, ten different theories have been used to

be the foundation for the models of servant leadership investigated. It is obviously to note that twenty of these articles used social theories as a background to support examining the servant leadership including Social Exchange, Social Learning, Social Identity, and Social Information Processing. It is evident that previous literature has employed theoretical perspectives separately to study the servant leadership construct. Given that servant leadership is a complex construct relating to all level of stakeholders, combining information from different but interrelated level such as individual-level, team-level, and the firm-level is indispensable for researchers to better understand and disentangle this complicated construct. Most of the methods used in the studies are related into multilevel, specifically seven used the Hierarchical Linear Model, HLM. Consequently, future research should pay attention on the multilevel study. This thesis will be also using HLM to explore the relation of servant leadership between three levels.

2.4 Related Concepts

Employee Engagement

Despite the disagreement about the accurate definition of the relatively new construct employee engagement, there is common agreement about the important characteristics of engagement. Therefore many definitions by a number of scholars have been provided in the academic literature (Saks, 2006). Kahn (1990, p. 694), states personal engagement as “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.” Whereas, Schaufeli et al. (2002) further identified and tested three dimensions (vigor, dedication, and

absorption) as the structure of the engagement. Later the authors defined employee engagement as the status of the mind of the employees related positively to their work and which comprises the three mentioned characteristics (Schaufeli et al., 2002). In this study, we adopt Schaufeli et al.'s (2002) definition of EE which has received increase attention in hospitality research in the recent years (Babakus et al., 2017; Ling et al., 2017; Putra et al., 2017; Yeh, 2013). Employee engagement is a critical factor in organizational success, influencing various outcomes such as productivity, job satisfaction, and retention rates. The concept of work engagement refers to the level of enthusiasm and dedication employees exhibit toward their work, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in their tasks (McQuade et al., 2021). Research has consistently shown that engaged employees are more likely to contribute positively to their organizations, demonstrating higher levels of performance and lower turnover intentions (Cai et al., 2024). Servant leadership, a leadership style that prioritizes serving others, has been identified as a significant predictor of work engagement. This leadership approach fosters a supportive environment where employees feel valued and empowered, which in turn enhances their engagement levels (Ozturk & Karatepe, 2021). For instance, the hospitality industry has been a focal point for examining the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement. Research in this sector has demonstrated that servant leadership not only enhances employee engagement but also contributes to improved customer service and organizational performance (Gui et al., 2021; Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2022). For example, Guchait's systematic review highlights that servant leadership is associated with positive employee attitudes, including reduced stress and burnout, which are critical for maintaining high levels of engagement (Guchait et al., 2023). This is particularly relevant in high-pressure environments,

such as the hospitality, where employee well-being is essential for sustaining service quality and operational effectiveness. In contrast, Lythreath et al. (2021) et al. found that servant leadership explains additional variance in employee performance behaviors beyond what transformational leadership can achieve. This indicates that while servant leadership positively influences engagement, it may not be the sole contributor to enhancing employee performance, suggesting a more complex relationship to shape employee behaviors. Additionally, the findings of Jin highlight that the relationship between servant leadership and workplace engagement may vary across different organizational contexts (Jin & Ikeda, 2023). This indicates that while servant leadership can enhance engagement, its effectiveness may be contingent upon the specific dynamics of the workplace such as different hospitality premises. Specifically, employee engagement is a more proximal construct to performance outcomes (Karatepe et al., 2018; Kašpárková et al., 2018). Restaurant employees high on engagement complete their daily tasks successfully and display extra-role customer service behaviors (Grobelna, 2019; Orłowski et al., 2021). As shown, research over the past years illustrates a complex interplay between servant leadership, employee engagement, and various contextual factors. While servant leadership is consistently linked to positive employee outcomes, research is needed to explore these dynamics to better understand how to foster employee engagement in diverse settings.

In summary, the interplay between servant leadership and employee engagement is well-documented, with evidence suggesting that servant leadership practices significantly enhance engagement levels. This relationship is vital for fostering a productive and committed workforce, ultimately contributing to organizational success. However, evidence is needed whether employee engagement

still boosts both customer satisfaction and engagement when servant leadership is considered as a predictor.

Customer Satisfaction

In 1980, Oliver explained the expectation/disconfirmation paradigm and clarified that consumers grow their expectations about a product or service before purchase and then they compare actual performance to those expectations after purchase to define their satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with the purchase (Oliver, 1980). Later, Oliver and Swan (1989) explored the equity model. The model elucidated that when consumers receive more value in terms of price, time, and effort than they actually spent, satisfaction would exist. Following the author literature, customer satisfaction definition of this thesis is based on his definition of satisfaction in his book (Oliver, 2014, p. 8):

“Satisfaction is the consumer’s fulfillment response. It is a judgment that a product/service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under- or over- fulfillment.”

Customer Engagement

The customer engagement construct has been increasingly gaining importance and investigated in the marketing literature since 2005 (Brodie et al., 2011). Nevertheless, it took about a decade (2013) for the concept of customer engagement to be gradually recognized in the context of hospitality and tourism as the main driver for business success (N. Torres & Kline, 2013; Wei et al., 2013). Since then the definitions of customer engagement range from unidimensional (van Doorn et al.,

2010) to multidimensional (i.e., cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral) (Hollebeek, 2011). However, despite the prominence of the multidimensional perspective, the majority of the definitions in the academic and business practice literature conveyed engagement as a unidimensional concept and the behavioral dimension specifically appears dominant and perhaps received the most attention (Choi & Kandampully, 2019). Regardless of the context, at least one of the following three dimensions — cognitive, emotional (affective), and physical (behavioral) should reflect the customer engagement construct (Brodie et al., 2011).

For the purpose of the research objectives, the following customer engagement definition by van Doorn et al. (2010, p. 254) is regarded in this study:

“Customers’ behavioral manifestation toward a brand or firm, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers such as word-of-mouth activity, recommendations, helping other customers, blogging, writing reviews.”

Servant Leadership

This thesis will be using a recent definition of servant leadership (Eva et al., 2019, p. 114):

“Servant leadership is an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community.”

In the aforementioned definition, Eva and her colleagues relied on three features: motive, mode, and mindset. The definition of servant leadership provided emphasizes a leadership style that prioritizes the needs and interests of others, both within the organization and in the larger community. This approach would be feasible

and beneficial for a restaurant manager as the leader, particularly in terms of employee engagement and customer satisfaction and engagement:

1. Motive: Other-Oriented Approach

A restaurant manager who adopts a servant leadership style is primarily motivated by the desire to serve their employees and customers. This means they focus on creating a supportive and nurturing environment for their staff, which can lead to higher levels of employee satisfaction and engagement. When employees feel valued and supported, they are more likely to be motivated, committed, and productive, which directly impacts the quality of service they provide to customers.

2. Mode: Prioritizing Individual Needs

By prioritizing the individual needs and interests of their employees, a servant leader in a restaurant setting can tailor their management approach to suit each team member. This could involve providing personalized training, recognizing individual contributions, or offering flexible work arrangements. Such attention to individual needs can lead to a more harmonious and motivated workforce, reducing turnover and fostering a positive work culture. Engaged employees are more likely to provide excellent customer service, enhancing the overall dining experience for patrons.

3. Mindset: Reorienting Concern for Others

A servant leader shifts their focus from self-interest to the well-being of others. For a restaurant manager, this means fostering a team-oriented environment where collaboration and mutual support are encouraged. This mindset can create a strong sense of community and belonging among employees, which can translate into a more cohesive and efficient team. When employees work well together and feel supported, they are more likely to deliver consistent and high-quality service, leading to increased customer satisfaction and engagement.

In summary, a restaurant manager who embodies servant leadership can create a positive and engaging work environment by focusing on the needs of their employees and fostering a culture of service. This approach not only enhances employee engagement but also improves customer satisfaction and engagement, as happy and motivated employees are more likely to provide exceptional service.

2.5 Restaurant Industry in Lebanon

Taking a closer look at Lebanon, it has been named by a number of international media as the number one tourist destination for its unique landscapes, beaches and resorts, and Beirut's vibrant nightlife (El Maalouf et al., 2015). Lebanon is a well-known destination in the Mediterranean region, with a small surface area (10,452 km²) ("Lebanon country profile," 2018). The country is endowed with a special landscape and heritage, and a mild climate that distinguish it from all the neighboring countries (Ghadban et al., 2017). The country is developing into an F&B haven, as more establishments step out of the box with their culinary concepts. Meanwhile, Lebanon exports nightlife trends and restaurant concepts to the region and other part of the world (Rahhal, 2018). Local restaurants are expanding geographically through franchising operations or operating their own chains. Despite this, those who work in the industry still have to cope with the challenges of an increasingly competitive and unregulated market, and with consumers' decreasing purchasing power.

Food and Beverage are deeply rooted in the Lebanese culture. In addition to the high reputation of Lebanon serving international cuisine, Lebanese cuisine still the main component of the industry even with some twist on the menu. Restaurants are

distributed in every city and village in Lebanon which is divided into four districts as shown in figure 2-1 below. The figure points out that most of the establishments are located in Beirut and Mount Lebanon district where the data of this study will be collected. In Beirut, capital city including Bliss, Hamra, Verdun, Down Town, The Park Zone, Zaituna Bay, Monnot Sodeco, Gemmayze, Badaro, Sassine, Mar Mikhael, new restaurants proliferated and the market witnessed a 3.47% growth in the number of restaurants in 2015 (Daou, 2015).

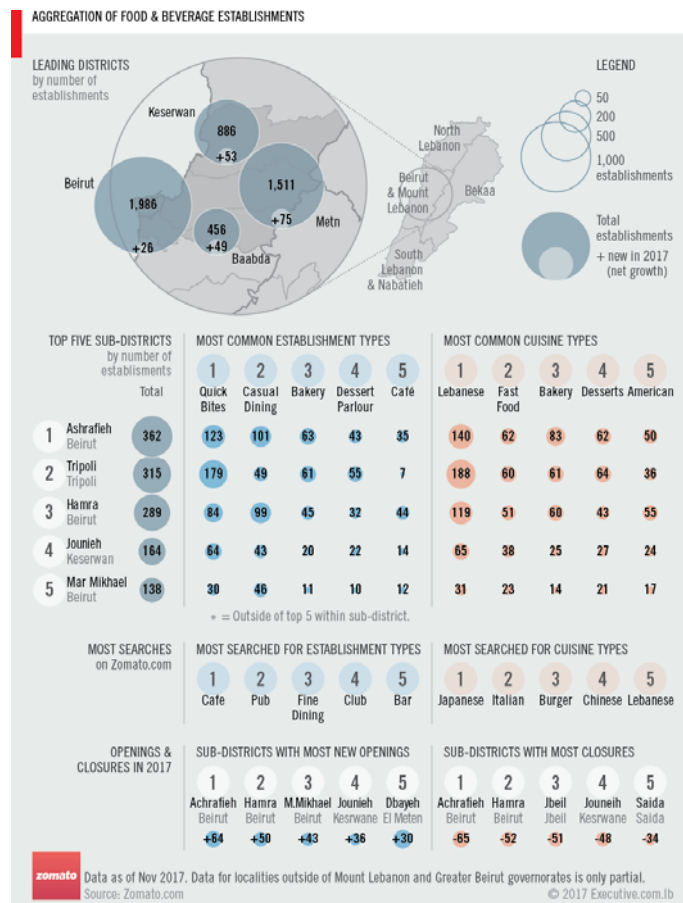


Figure 2-1. Distribution of establishments in districts and sub-districts

According to the Central Administration of Statistics (www.cas.gov.lb), the value of both the hotel and restaurant industries totaled \$1.25B in 2016 or 3% of GDP.

The sector of Hotels and Restaurants employs around 100,000 persons representing 4% of total employment in the country in 2016 increasing to 140,000 in 2018 (www.economy.gov.lb).

2.6 Theoretical Foundation and Conceptual Model

2.6.1 Servant Leadership Theory

Servant leadership was initiated by (Greenleaf, 1970) who believed that the roles of servant and leader, although paradoxical concept (Graham, 1991), could occur within one person. Having said that, influence, which is the key part of leadership, is altered with servant leadership by focusing on the ideal of service in the leader-follower relationship which makes it a “leadership theory” with high potential (Van Dierendonck, 2011, p. 1229). Nearly after two decades since (Graham, 1991) set the foundation for the development of “servant leadership theory”, a lack of coherence and clarity has delayed its theory development (Eva et al., 2019, p. 112). In that matter, a conceptual paper by Chon and Zoltan (2019) on the “Role of servant leadership in contemporary hospitality” provides a guide with many aspects of future research directions which advances the “theory of servant leadership.”

To start with, according to Greenleaf, leader’s greatness which comes from being a servant to others, altruistically, that having empathy and full acceptance of others are what form great leadership. Greenleaf explained that putting others needs first was a considered choice. Greenleaf quoted, “it begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (p. 6). Greenleaf explained that servant leaders first make sure that others’ needs are being met. Serving others and not expecting from the followers to serve as leaders. This, as the core personal motivation for someone to lead, clearly differentiate servant leadership from other perceptions on leadership. Moving away from self-orientation, being an altruist, moral person, all fit a servant leader, and require a strong character,

self, emotional and psychological maturity (Eva et al., 2019). The leader has first the *motivation to serve* others, doing so along with an other-oriented approach to lead.

Then, having such motive in a leader, leads to the follower growing as a person, becoming “healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous” and likely themselves to become servants (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 6; 1977). The servant leader *mode* recognizes and prioritizes others’ needs, interests, goals, individually and above those of his or her (Eva et al., 2019). Eva and her colleagues explained that the mode of servant leadership focuses on empowering followers, involving them in decision-making, and constantly supporting their development. This kind of leader, with a humanistic and relationship approach to followers (Liden, Wayne, et al., 2014), can then affect positive change in them by focusing on their growth on the psychological well-being, ethical wisdom, emotional maturity, and many other aspects. In return the followers trust the servant leader.

At last, Greenleaf talked about the trustees who are everyone in the organization practicing stewardship including CEO’s, subordinates, employees, and customers and all are holding in trust for the better of the community and the society (Greenleaf, 1970, 2002). The leader’s duty is to assume moral responsibility for his/her subordinates, customers, and stakeholders. In other words, with this *mindset*, servant leaders take care of all their entrusted followers, empower them, and commit to their well-being development while at the same time ensuring the concern towards others within the organization and the larger community (Eva et al., 2019).

Larry Spears (2004) confirmed and explained what Greenleaf called the desire to serve others, formed a true servant leadership; a theory developed out of his working experience in large organizations. He clearly stated that “True leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a deep desire to help others (p. 8)”

and later described servant leadership as a “quiet revolution” (Spears, 2010, p. 26). Finally, Spears categorized Greenleaf’s 10 central characteristics of servant leadership as: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (see Section 2.3.4).

2.6.2 Generalized Exchange Theory

Provoked by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss’s (1969) seminal conceptions of social exchange processes in explaining the kinship behaviors in his anthropological writings, Ekeh (1974) in his book argued social exchange theory as an essential and basic part of social theory. Somehow ignored in the literature (Linda D. Molm et al., 2007; Takahashi, 2000), the collectivistic social exchange theory including the Generalized Exchange Theory (GET) elaborated by Ekeh, primarily was presented by the exchange theorist Lévi-Strauss first in the original French version of *Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté* (Lévi-Strauss, 1967). While Ekeh (1974, p. 50) described two types of social exchange which he called “*restricted exchange*” and “*generalized exchange*”, Bagozzi (1975, p. 33) added another type called “*complex exchange*”. The types, restricted exchange and generalized exchange, will be explained below and this study will be using the generalized exchange theory.

Restricted Exchange

Restricted exchange is based on the mutual reciprocity principle between strictly two parties in social exchange transaction (Ekeh, 1974). Under this reciprocations, the transaction is limited to two individuals, units, or actors expecting

to benefit directly each other without receiving or giving to any other party of the social exchange situation (Ekeh, 1974). That is, restricted exchange operates in pairs where “ \longleftrightarrow ” represents “gives to and receives from” considering two social actors like A \longleftrightarrow B (p. 50). This type of exchange, a “*quid pro quo* mentality”, has “short time intervals for mutual reciprocity” and had spread implicitly in the marketing literature dealing with “customer-salesman, wholesaler-retailer”, or other actors in a dyadic exchanges (Bagozzi, 1975, p. 33). The dyadic reciprocity relation of mutual reinforcement by two parties, as presented by Blau (1964), has been extensively used in the modern sociological theory.

Generalized Exchange

Generalized exchange is defined on the basis of the univocal principle of reciprocity (Ekeh, 1974). According to Ekeh, the univocal reciprocity is the foundation of generalized exchange involves “at least three actors in a social exchange situation” (p. 50) and “the actors do not benefit each other directly but only indirectly” (p. 48). It also involves self-interest indirectly and can only exist in a moral and trustful system. In the conclusion of his book, Ekeh (1974, p. 205) makes it clear: “Univocal reciprocity means first and foremost that an actor does benefit to another actor for which he does not expect immediate or direct reciprocation. This implies, above all, that there is enough trust that the giver will be reciprocated from someone and somewhere else in the future. This means that univocal reciprocity can only operate in an atmosphere of generalized morality and trust that the system will work.” Thus, considering four persons, the theory operates following a unitary system where “ \rightarrow ” signifies “gives to”: A \rightarrow B C D \rightarrow A (Ekeh, 1974).

Marshall (1998) summarized the elements of generalized exchange:

1. Three or more actors are in a system of social exchange situation;
2. In this exchange, the individual gives to someone but receives from someone else. Thus, indirect univocal reciprocity occurs, for example, given actor A (furniture store chain) gives benches with its label name to actor B (bus company) which places them at bus stops for actor C (riders). Then, after many actors C (riders) notice the advertising label of the actor A (furniture store chain), they start, at any time in the future, to visit the stores. The sequence of the exchange is: $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow A$ (Bagozzi, 1975).
3. The system works in an environment of trust and morality providing a broad equality of reciprocity between the actors (Ekeh, 1974). The system may breakdown if violated in the future;
4. When univocal reciprocity occurs, the actor expects the benefit after a certain time interval and not immediately; and
5. “Indirect self-interest” is the benefit that an actor desires to him/herself and expected to receive from another actor but not the direct actor in the exchange (Marshall, 1998, p. 275).

Ekeh (1974, p. 53) also identified two types of generalized exchange and called them “*chain generalized exchange*” and “*net generalized exchange*”, both operating on the principle of “*univocal reciprocity*.” The former was already explained and known as the main generalized exchange theory (see Figure 2-3). The latter which he introduced to the literature, oppose the chain as the individual is put against the group. Either the whole group benefits each party or the party gives to the group (see Figure 2-2). The net form of the generalized (indirect) social exchange and the chain form generalized (indirect) social exchange differ qualitatively (Bearman, 1997) (see Figure 2-2 and 2-3). Whereas, as claimed by Bearman (1997),

net generalized exchange can become direct dyadic exchanges “person-to-group” like in Blau (1964), chain generalized exchange cannot.

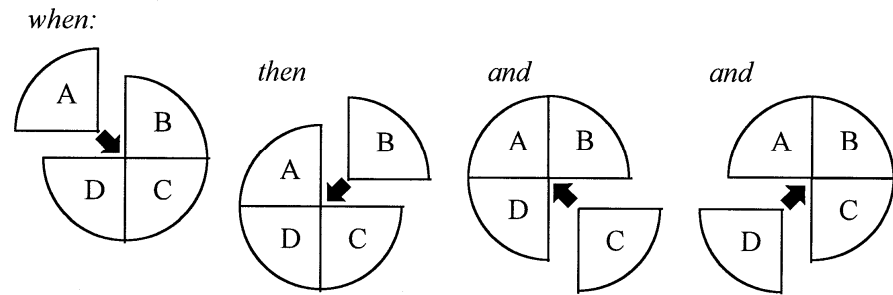


Figure 2-2. Net Generalized Exchange (adopted from Bearman (1997))

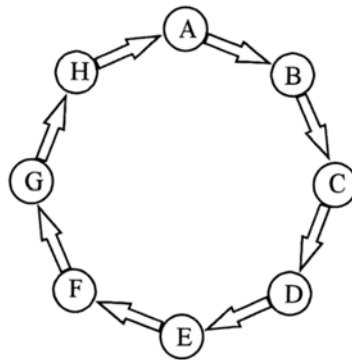


Figure 2-3. Chain Generalized Exchange (adopted from Bearman (1997))

Practically, Evanschitzky et al. (2011) used GET to explain the univocal or directional reciprocity involving three actors in terms of levels of satisfaction. The three actors namely customer, frontline employee, and employer/manager chosen for the study were from DIY retail stores. The authors showed that the frontline employee satisfaction fully mediated the association between employer satisfaction and customer satisfaction. Results of the same study also indicated that frontline employee satisfaction had a moderating effect between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. That is, higher frontline employee satisfaction led to a stronger relation between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Generalized exchange theory as explained above distinguishes the multilateral over the bilateral or dyadic exchanges as between a customer and an employee. Moreover, the generalized exchange can be particularly important when a portion of the targeted parties is indirectly receiving the goods or services (Marshall, 1998). Similarly, Palmatier et al. (2018, p. 188) suggested that generalized exchange theory can provide a “framework for better understanding the association between customer engagement and employee engagement.” Therefore, GET is used as another foundation theory in the model presented in this thesis (see Figure 2-3) that explains the engagement of three actors (leader, employee, customer) when put together into play in a chain of univocal reciprocity indirectly transferring benefits among each other.

2.6.3 Conceptual Model

Figure 2-3 below presents the framework around which this study is designed. This multi-level research conceptual frame below is built using three levels upon the constructs of Servant Leadership (SL) at the Restaurant-level, Employee Engagement (EE) at the Employee-level, and Customer Satisfaction (CS) and Customer Engagement (CE) at the Customer-level. The model conceptualizes the aforementioned variables as global constructs as I am interested in the overall effect of SL, EE, and CS. As for the CE construct, the customer behavioral is used and expanded with its dimensions of Willingness to Suggest (WTS) and Word of Mouth (WOM).

The arrows represent the possible relationships between the constructs as the elements of the conceptual model that are in question. The cross-level relationships conceptualized in this model are not causal relationships, but rather explanatory and predictive relationships. The multiple propositions between the variables in the frame predict a possible positive relationship between SL and all other constructs.

The main research questions that guides the below multilevel research model in Figure 2-4 are:

RQ1: *Does servant leadership affect customers' satisfaction and engagement in the restaurant?*

RQ2: *What is the role of employee engagement in boosting customer dining experience?*

In order to answer the above research questions, the research objectives are established and have been developed to:

- 1) examine the direct effect of servant leadership at the restaurant level on customer outcomes in terms of satisfaction and engagement at the customer level. More research sheds light on the effect of servant leadership not only on followers like employees but also on other organizational stockholders as customers and even on the community (Chen et al., 2015). Nevertheless, how servant leaders increase the level of satisfaction and engagement in customer attitudes and behaviors in service industries remains an undiscussed issue, and this issue is the main focus of the current study. This research objective, which will be tested by hypotheses H1 and H2, address the demand side related to the customers of the restaurants. As explained previously, restaurants are facing a challenge to find the right manager characteristics to keep the organization competitive by increasing the level satisfaction and engagement of their customers.
- 2) assess the direct effect of servant leadership on employee engagement at the employee level in the restaurant. Servant-led managers focus on the follower needs (Graham, 1991), to help them to grow and develop exceeding their expectations which leads to increasing their job satisfaction (Mayer et al., 2008) and empowering them which leads to high level of engagement (De Clercq et al., 2014) in the workplace. While this research objective is responding to the problem of the supply side in the restaurant explained in the problem statement section, this study hypothesized (H3) a positive relationship between servant leadership employee engagement. Thus, knowing the driver and the type of leadership which will increase the engagement of employees with the restaurant and therefore decrease the turnover.

3) investigate the indirect effect of servant leadership and the role of employee engagement in two directions:

- a. The mediating effect of employee engagement between servant leadership and customer satisfaction. By meeting the basic needs of the followers, namely relatedness, competence, and autonomy in the workplace, servant leader engenders their engagement reflecting in higher customer satisfaction (Neubert et al., 2016).
- b. The mediating effect of employee engagement between servant leadership and customer engagement. Total engagement occurs in the presence of a special follower-centered style of leadership, in our case servant leadership, that make the employees more engaged in their work and spread to increase the level of engagement in the customers through the same followers (Roberts & Alpert, 2010).

Testing the mediating effect of employees' attitudes further clarifies the third objective. To answer this objective and while this study proposing (H4 and H5) that if employees are more engaged and satisfied, customers satisfaction and engagement will follow. However, the problem in the restaurant operations remains with not only relying on first-line employees to deliver the services, but also on the manager, who holds specific leadership traits, to keep those employees committed and motivated (H3) and to affect the customer experience as well.

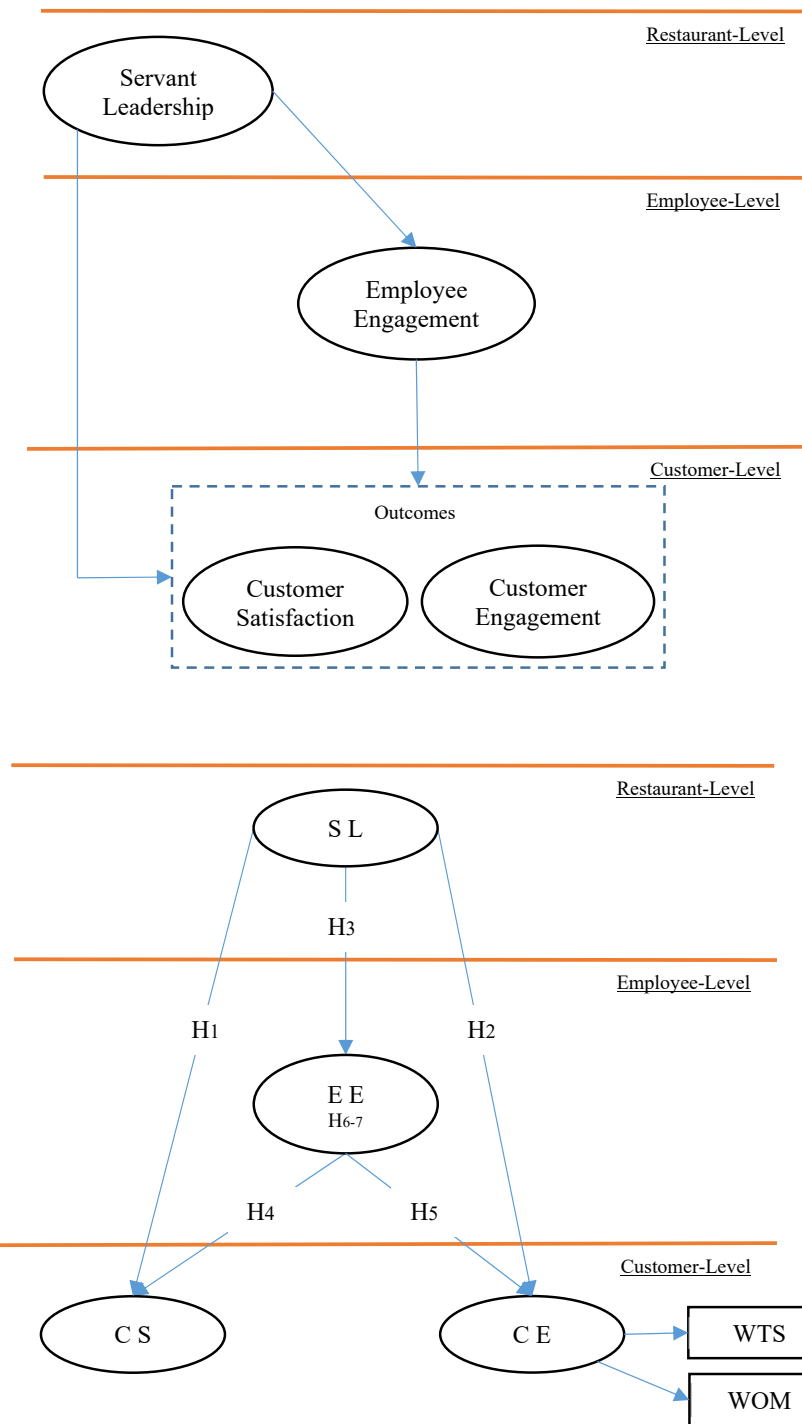


Figure 2-4. Multilevel Research Model

Notes: Level 1 = customer level; Level 2 = employee level; and Level 3 = restaurant level.

SL = Servant Leadership; EE = Employee Engagement; CS = Customer Satisfaction; CE = Customer Engagement; WTS = Willingness to Suggest; WOM = Word-of-Mouth.

Given the significant research objectives of this study, the research hypotheses represented in the model which are explained in Section 2.6 were developed as follows:

Servant Leadership is positively related to Customer Outcomes and Employee Engagement:

- H1. Servant Leadership is positively related to Customer Satisfaction.
- H2. Servant Leadership is positively related to Customer Engagement.
- H3. Servant Leadership is positively related to Employee Engagement.

Employee Engagement is positively related to Customer Outcomes:

- H4. Employee Engagement is positively related to Customer Satisfaction.
- H5. Employee Engagement is positively related to Customer Engagement.

The mediation effect of Employee Engagement:

- H6. Employee Engagement mediates the relationship between Servant Leadership and Customer Satisfaction.
- H7. Employee Engagement mediates the relationship between Servant Leadership and Customer Engagement.

2.7 Research Hypotheses Development

This study investigates the effect of servant leadership on customer outcomes and employee engagement as well as the mediating effect of employee engagement (Figure 2-3). Meanwhile, as servant leadership is a promising style for the hospitality industry (Brownell, 2010), its presence should be investigated in a restaurant context seeking to keep their employees satisfied and engaged leading to satisfied and more engaged customers. Thus, the engagement of these employees is also examined. The latent constructs of customer engagement are willingness to suggest and word-of-mouth, which are explained in separate sections. The relationships among the four concepts (servant leadership, customer satisfaction, customer engagement, employee engagement) are explained and seven hypotheses are proposed in the following sections.

2.7.1 Servant Leadership and Customer Outcomes

At the customer level, satisfaction is considered as one of the most critical factors influencing customers' future behavior, and has undergone extensive research as an organizational goal, especially in the highly competitive hospitality and tourism industry. In 1980, Oliver explained the expectation/disconfirmation paradigm and clarified that consumers grow their expectations about a product or service before purchase and then they compare actual performance to those expectations after purchase to define their satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with the purchase (Oliver, 1980). Later, Oliver and Swan (1989) explored the equity model. The model elucidated that when consumers receive more value in terms of price, time, and effort that they actually spent, satisfaction would exist. Referring to his book, Oliver (2014,

p. 8) defined customer satisfaction (CS) as follow: “Satisfaction is the consumer’s fulfillment response. It is a judgment that a product/service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under- or over- fulfillment.” In the restaurant industry customer are more satisfied when perceived high quality and value in terms of service, food, and price, in addition to the overall experience that would likely affect their intention to come back or recommend the place to others.

Being in today’s connected world, customer engagement behaviors (van Doorn et al., 2010) are very important. The customer engagement construct has been increasingly gaining importance and investigated in the marketing literature since 2005 (Brodie et al., 2011). Nevertheless, it took about a decade (2013) for the concept of customer engagement to be gradually recognized in the context of hospitality and tourism as the main driver for business success (N. Torres & Kline, 2013; Wei et al., 2013). Since then, the definitions of customer engagement range from unidimensional (van Doorn et al., 2010) to multidimensional (i.e., cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral) (Hollebeek, 2011). However, despite the prominence of the multidimensional perspective, the majority of the definitions in the academic and business practice literature conveyed engagement as a unidimensional concept and the behavioral dimension specifically appears dominant and perhaps received the most attention (Choi & Kandampully, 2019). Regardless of the context, at least one of the following three dimensions —cognitive, emotional (affective), and physical (behavioral) should reflect the customer engagement construct (Brodie et al., 2011). Thus, this study will be looking into the behavioral dimension of the customer engagement (CE) defined by van Doorn et al. (2010, p. 254) as: “Customers’ behavioral manifestation toward a brand or firm, beyond purchase, resulting from

motivational drivers such as word-of-mouth activity, recommendations, helping other customers, blogging, writing reviews.”

In fact, customer engagement is relatively a novel concept compared to the traditional key drivers such as customer satisfaction, perceived service quality, perceived value, or trust and its effect size is ascertained to be greater than that of the traditional measurements (So et al., 2016). Therefore, this construct has gained popularity and received much more attention for scholars in the marketing literature. Nevertheless, the concept of customer engagement has been gradually recognized in the context of hospitality and tourism as the main driver for business success since 2013 (N. Torres & Kline, 2013; Wei et al., 2013). On one hand, in most of the past studies, consequences of CS and CE are most of the time attitudinal (e.g., Loyalty) or behavioral (e.g., Word-of-Mouth) with many contextually-specific attributes being in hotel, restaurant, theme park, resort, or destination (Ahn & Back, 2018; Canny, 2014; Howat & Assaker, 2013; Qiu et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018). On the other hand, new studies attribute conceptually and empirically the effect of customer satisfaction on customer engagement (Choi & Kandampully, 2019; Youssef et al., 2018). The originality of the current study, however, is to set servant leadership as an antecedent of both CS and CE.

Pointing on the essence of the servant leadership theory, presented by Greenleaf (2002), expanded by Graham (1991), and redefined by Eva et al. (2019), both the followers and other resources within the organization such as the customers of the restaurant will cultivate the behaviors of servant-led manager. Servant leaders have focus on the interest that goes beyond the employees to reach other stockholders in the organization including customers and eventually society outside the organization (Graham, 1991; Yang et al., 2018). A servant leader will be listening

attentively as important part of the verbal and non-verbal communication (Spears, 2010). When the manager in the restaurant listens with empathy to every request or complaints by any customer as well as practicing the same skills with his/her team members, he/she is more likely to be trusted. Customers will feel more comfortable in such surrounding where they can ask for any service knowing that they will be delivered to their needs. At the same time, the servant leader, the manager in this case, is the one who is taking care of the day-to-day operations while keeping the balance in thinking about the long-term effect and objectives of the restaurant reflecting the conceptualizing characteristic of a servant leadership (Spears, 2010). He or she makes sure that all the needs of the customers will be met, and that they are satisfied with the food, the service, and having an enjoyable experience by always being around and directly in contact with them. This leader knows very well that this kind of care and behavior will lead to having more satisfied guests and these guests will come back and tell other people about their experience. Keeping this in mind, by practicing stewardship, a characteristic of servant leadership (Spears, 2010), the manager in this restaurant will be committed to serve the needs of others including the customers and will be holding trust for their and the community's best. The concept of servant leadership also is distinct from any other leadership types as it emphasizes on the interests of others inside and outside of the organization (Neubert et al., 2016). By definition, the servant leader, the restaurant manager in this study, has a *mindset* of caring for all the entrusted followers including employees (Greenleaf, 1970) and at the same time showing concern towards others including customers (Eva et al., 2019). In return, these customers will always feel this trust and belonging to the community and that they will be willing to share their suggestions for

improvement with the staff and the leader. Lastly, they will reflect positive words and stories about their experience to relatives, friends, and other customers.

Empirically, despite the aim of servant leaders to make an impact beyond the organization or its members, there is limited research supporting this assertion opening a vast window for many new research needed in this matter including this thesis. For instance, in a compatible work to our proposal, Chen et al. (2015) demonstrate that servant leadership is *directly* related to service performance in terms of service quality, customer-focused citizenship behavior, and customer-oriented prosocial behavior in hair salon. In a different context, hospital setting, servant leadership is *indirectly* associated to patient's satisfaction through nurse job satisfaction as a mediator (Neubert et al., 2016). Specifically, the authors tested servant leadership at the unit-level which showed association with job satisfaction of the nurses; Job satisfaction also showed a positive relation with patient's satisfaction indicators including satisfaction with nursing, satisfaction with pain management, and willingness to recommend. Although promising results for SL effects on the customer-level, the study considered SL from the individual perception. In this thesis, servant leadership will be tested at the restaurant-level to explain the variability between different restaurant leaders. Interestingly, Liden and colleagues found *no direct link* between servant leadership and store performance using secondary internal data composite of carry-out accuracy, delivery accuracy, customer satisfaction, facility audit, and sanitation audit (Liden, Wayne, et al., 2014). Last but not least, in the hotel industry, Hsiao et al. (2015) investigated the key mediating roles of employee positive psychological capital and employee service-oriented organizational citizenship behavior between servant leadership which stimulates customer value co-creation (CVC). Although the authors adopted three-level model

(organization, employee, customer) using HLM, they didn't run it simultaneously and treat it as two-level model, therefore no test was used to reveal if servant leadership facilitates CVC directly. To strengthen the rationale to test and reveal a direct association between SL and CE, I refer to (Pansari & Kumar, 2017); it is believed that customer engagement is positive for value creation. Moreover, the current research extends recent research that relate servant leadership within an organization by proposing that servant leadership has a direct association on the satisfaction of restaurant patron which differ from the patient in hospital (Neubert et al., 2016) and the customer in hair salon (Chen et al., 2015). I also propose a restaurant setting with few management layers (i.e., flat organization) where the customer can notice the presence of the leader helping the employees. The manager in this restaurant will always be visible to all customers and interacting and caring for both the employees and the customers served by them. Therefore, in this customer service position, he/she has to greet the customers when arriving and leaving, direct them to the right table, and visit them during the meal time. The customers also could always refer to him/her for any complaint or recommendation. In line with the servant leadership theory, restaurant organization setting, and the above promising yet inconsistent literature studies; I argue that servant leadership has direct influence on customer satisfaction and customer engagement in forms of WOM and WTS and propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Servant Leadership is positively related to Customer Satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2. Servant Leadership is positively related to Customer Engagement.

2.7.2 Servant Leadership and Employee Engagement

At the employee level, one of the main challenges facing the hospitality firms has always been and still is to retain their employees, keeping them satisfied with the work and make them more committed and engaged.

Despite the disagreement about the accurate definition of the relatively new construct employee engagement, there is common agreement about the important characteristics of engagement. Therefore many definitions by a number of scholars have been provided in the academic literature (Saks, 2006). Kahn (1990, p. 694), states personal engagement as “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.” Whereas, Schaufeli et al. (2002) further identified and tested three dimensions (vigor, dedication, and absorption) as the structure of the engagement. Later the authors defined employee engagement (EE) as the status of the mind of the employees related positively to their work and which comprises the three mentioned characteristics (Schaufeli et al., 2002). In this study, I adopt Schaufeli et al.’s (2002) definition of employee engagement which has received increase attention in hospitality research in the recent years (Babakus et al., 2017; Ling et al., 2017; Putra et al., 2017; Yeh, 2013).

More engaged employees impact customer satisfaction and drive financial and market performance (Barbera et al., 2009). More satisfied employees can maintain high service quality and increase customer loyalty (Arnett et al., 2002). Due to the known effect of EE on firm performance, tourism and hospitality scholars have attempted to either identify its antecedents (Kusluvan et al., 2010; Slåtten & Mehmetoglu, 2011) or related it with other variables (e.g., Tourism involvement, Turnover intention) in one model (Lu et al., 2016; Yeh, 2013). This current study,

however, explores a factor that is relatively new to the hospitality literature: servant leadership.

That is, a core characteristic of servant leadership, selflessness or looking beyond the interest of one's self, as Greenleaf puts it (2002), could be the answer to employees when they are concerned about how their managers treat them showing non-abusive supervisory behaviors which make them respected followers and more committed to the organization. It is also clear in Graham's servant leadership definition as an "inspirational and moral" model leadership (1991, p. 105). Moreover, developing and helping others to grow, understanding emotional needs of others, caring about their well-being, being authentic and acting ethically are some of the characteristics of a servant leader (Van Dierendonck, 2011). In addition, applying servant leadership creates empowerment conditions and provides stewardship and/or direction (Spears & Lawrence, 2002) in the followers. The second feature of servant leadership defined by Eva et al. (2019) is the *mode* by which the manager involve the employees in the decision-making while focusing on empowering them and therefore alleviating their level of engagement in the work. In this regard, servant leadership activated employee engagement among flight attendants (Karatepe & Talebzadeh, 2016). Hunter et al. (2013) also showed that servant leadership is negatively associated with disengagement and turnover intentions when tested in U.S. retail organizations.

Not surprisingly, employees who recognize that their leaders show servant leadership behaviors such as forming long-term relationships with them, understand, empathize and putting their interests first, work with them to grow and develop, empower them, and display ethical behaviors feel more satisfied and more engaged (i.e., vigorous, dedicated, and absorbed) in their job. Relatively, in a step to validate

the development of servant leadership survey, Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) tested the extent that servant leadership and its dimensions are related to engagement in different studies. Servant leadership showed positive relationship to both employee engagement and employee satisfaction. Interestingly, empowerment, accountability, and humility were among the servant leadership dimensions with the strongest relations, common to the dimensions used by (Liden et al., 2015; Liden et al., 2008) which also will be some of the dimensions used in this thesis. Additionally, servant leadership influences positively employee engagement in police leadership in Wales (Martin et al., 2017). However, no empirical support for the direct relationship between SL and EE when examined between flight attendants and their purser (Karatepe & Talebzadeh, 2016). Therefore, the inadequacy of the previous results reported in the extant literature on servant leadership theory motivated me to further research the true, direct, positive, and significant effect of SL on EE in relation to hospitality organizations such as restaurants. Moreover, no studies have been conducted to research impacts of servant leadership on employees' employees' engagement in the hospitality industry particularly in mid-scale restaurant businesses. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3. Servant Leadership is positively related to Employee Engagement.

2.7.3 Servant Leadership, Employee Engagement, and Customer Outcomes

Some of the most powerful indicators of the success in hospitality service-provided organizations like restaurants are internally satisfaction and engagement of their employees and externally the satisfaction and engagement of their customers. Worthy to note that employees' satisfaction (Spector, 1997) and customer satisfaction

(Oliver, 2014) constructs have been both extensively and widely-researched in the human resources and marketing literature (Homburg & Stock, 2004).

To start with, satisfaction at the customer level has always been the defining element for a successful business and studied across many areas in the service marketing literature (Delcourt et al., 2013). Customer satisfaction is the most common goal between the hospitality firms. In many previous work, researchers used customer satisfaction as a mediator influenced by the attributes (e.g., Service quality, food quality, physical environment) and affecting behavioral intentions of the customers in the restaurant (Canny, 2014; Cronin Jr et al., 2000; Heung & Gu, 2012), and in the café (Zhang et al., 2018). Moreover, in the tourism context, Qiu et al. (2018) affirmed that tourist satisfaction in the destination rests to be one of the most important reasons for the visitors to stay loyal, return, and recommend through word-of-mouth. Yet, this study will treat the customer satisfaction as servant leadership outcome.

Recently one notable research validated that the relationship between nurse managers' servant leadership behavior and patient satisfaction is fully mediated with nurse satisfaction in hospitals (Neubert et al., 2016). Customers in restaurants differ from patients in hospital as stakeholders who have different needs to satisfy and dissimilar purposes to visit, revisit, or recommend the organization. No patient wants to leave a hospital with an intention to come back whereas a satisfied restaurant patron would be most likely to revisit again and most of the time share the experience with others. Furthermore, leadership can only be understood in relation to the context and its characteristics in which it occurs (Yukl, 2013). Although leadership has a power explanatory factor beyond the context's characteristics, Yukl (2013) emphasizes that leadership is bounded in particular context and specific conditions which are vital

elements to understand its influence. Restaurant business has its own characteristics. Hence, this thesis will use employees and customers in the restaurant sector being more relevant and which will be the first to test such relation in this context and in Lebanon, a developing country.

Some employees are more engaged than others in their work. The level of engagement might be due to different leadership style (Hoon Song et al., 2012; Tims et al., 2011). In a multi-level analysis, Tims et al. (2011) concluded that daily transformational leadership related positively to employees' daily engagement. As employee engagement have been studied in other leadership types, investigating the link between servant leadership and work engagement started only in recent years. The first attempt showed a positive influence of servant leadership on employee engagement with data collected from four IT companies (De Clercq et al., 2014). In the same year, another paper was published exploring the difference linking servant leadership (SL) and transformational leadership (TFL) to employee engagement (van Dierendonck et al., 2014). The authors concluded that both SL and TFL were related to work engagement; however, SL worked primarily through follower need satisfaction. Once again in a later study, servant leadership was confirmed to impact positively employee engagement (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017). Although it contributes to a better understanding of servant leadership, it is inconclusive as only three dimensions of the servant leader behaviors were used and on a sample of anonymous range of participants from different sectors indicating very little about the context. Moreover, employee engagement was tested as mediator. In their research to validate a Short Form of the Servant Leadership Behavior Scale Sendjaya et al. (2017) determined that servant leadership behaviors reduce workplace deviant behaviors through the mediation of employee engagement. This thesis will consider

unidimensional global servant leadership that include all the dimensions and test it exclusively in the restaurant industry.

Regarding the servant leadership hospitality stream, Carter and Baghurst (2014) introduced the construct, employee engagement, by conducting a qualitative study at a single restaurant in U.S. that provided evidence of a positive relationship between servant leadership and employee engagement. The authors recommended a quantitative study using a larger sample to validate the results. The current study is responding to this recommendation. Only one more study carried out in the same hospitality literature to date in hotels in China and resulted in servant leadership having a more significant and direct effect than authentic leadership regarding increasing employees' work engagement (Ling et al., 2017). Lately, Huertas-Valdivia et al. (2018) proposed and the data analysis in their study revealed that in the hospitality industry, empowering leadership style has a powerful positive impact on employees' intrinsic motivation leading to higher level of employee engagement (Putra et al., 2017). Therefore, the same study suggested to explore the role of other emerging leadership styles as servant leadership in enhancing employee engagement in the hospitality industry. In view of this suggestion, a clear gap exists in the servant leadership literature which this thesis will fill by using a sample from the restaurant industry located in Lebanon to elaborate more not only on the relationship between the servant leadership and employee engagement but also on the customer satisfaction and engagement. Many researchers expressed out conceptually the effect of employee engagement on customer engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Mittal et al., 2018) and theoretically the generalized exchange theory (GET) could explain the interplay between servant leadership, employee engagement, and customer engagement.

Generalized exchange theory goes beyond the traditional dyadic exchanges and examines three or more actors who engage in a chain of indirect and reciprocal transfers among each other (Bearman, 1997; Ekeh, 1974; Linda D. Molm et al., 2007; Marshall, 1998). Different from the bilateral exchanges, such as those between a customer and an employee, network-GET recognizes the importance of multilateral exchanges, such as those among the servant leader manager (A) of the restaurant employees, the restaurant employees (B), and even potentially the main customers (C), and other customers. The servant leadership concept has a morality point of view that is concerned with the welfare of others and the best interest of followers in mind (Gregoire & Arendt, 2014). This mindset and stewardship spreads over the community which aids exchange system under the generalized exchange theory to work (Ekeh, 1974). In other words, a restaurant implementing servant leadership satisfy the needs of the employees and empower them, the employees become more engaged and exchange the higher level of engagement with the customers who in turn become more satisfied and engaged and exchange their engagement with the restaurant in form of WTS and WOM.

Based on the above review, it is clear how important the three constructs (i.e., Employee engagement, Customer satisfaction, and Customer engagement) are to the service industry particularly to the restaurants and hotels businesses. However, no systematic study linked them to the servant leader behavior in one model creating a gap in the existing hospitality servant leadership literature. Relying on the GET theory and primary data, and to address the above deficiencies in the hospitality servant leadership literature, this thesis will explore the associations of servant leadership with the level of engagement of followers, the employees, and those who are served by followers, the customers, in for-profit organization context, the restaurant, in a

middle-eastern developing country, Lebanon. In regards to all the above observations the study suggests the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4. Employee Engagement is positively related to Customer Satisfaction.

Hypothesis 5. Employee Engagement is positively related to Customer Engagement.

Hypothesis 6. Employee Engagement mediates the relationship between Servant Leadership and Customer Satisfaction.

Hypothesis 7. Employee Engagement mediates the relationship between Servant Leadership and Customer Engagement.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the main research method employed for this study. Section 3.2 in this chapter discusses the research design developed to response the research question as well as specify the research process followed. The main survey details including the survey setting, survey population, and sample size are explained in section 3.3. In line with the research objective and the applied circumstances, the methods for sampling and the sample size are decided accordingly. Section 3.4 introduces the data analysis methods used in this study, including the analytical approaches, the methods used to test the reliability and the validity of the measurements and the methods to test the multi-level structural model hypotheses. Section 3.5 expatiates the measurement scales of the constructs for the main survey, including servant leadership, employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and customer engagement, which all are adopted from previous research in the literature.

3.2 Research Design

This study was designed to investigate the influence of servant leadership in services on restaurant experience in a multi-level conceptual model. Drawing on the generalized exchange theory, the research model exhibits how servant leadership relates and boosts employee engagement and customer experience and engagement. This approach is considered typical explanatory research that seeks theoretical

reasoning. As every research has its own unique design (Sarantakos, 2017), this study adopted a multilevel model descriptive analysis. Such design in cause-and-effect is obligatory to determine the causal relationship of unit and individual levels predictors of servant leadership and employee engagement. Thus, helping in investigating the effects of servant leadership at the employee level and customer level in restaurants which answers the research questions. Additionally, according to the principles proposed by Saunders et al. (2009), and to answer the research question and reach the research objectives, a quantitative survey is necessary for the present study to confirm the model derived from the reviewed literature and fundamental theories. All of the issues associated with servant leader behaviors and employee engagement were explored from the perspective of employees and the customer outcomes from the perspective of the restaurant patrons.

Based on the logic guiding the research question and objectives, this study follows a positivist approach and employs a quantitative methodology to explore potential cause-and-effect connections among variables. Utilizing a correlational design, the study seeks to forecast associations between constructs by quantifying coefficient magnitudes and determining statistical significance.

A questionnaire was designed to examine the relationships among the relevant constructs in this study. The four related constructs, namely, servant leadership, employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and customer engagement, were examined by groups of items, which were designed based on previous studies and the characteristics of the services in the hospitality industry (Section 3.3). All the measurement scales for the aforementioned variables were adopted from previous studies.

The concept of servant leadership behavior refers more to the behavior of the leader while operating and managing the restaurant ordinary employees' team. Thus, the target respondents for the questionnaire were frontline employees and team leaders or entry-level managers in mid-scale restaurants. Those are the people who deliver services directly to customers and have frequent interactions with the customers. However, for level 1, the target respondents were the customers of the same restaurants. The reliability of the measurements was tested after the pilot study, then the main survey was collected. A pilot study was conducted in Lebanon to test the content validity and reliability of the survey instrument as well as to evaluate the readability and effectiveness of the Arabic version of the questionnaire. After collecting the data from the survey of this study, the reliability and the validity of the measurements were also tested. Based on the data collected from the survey, relationships among the variables were analyzed with HLM using multilevel modeling. This analysis was followed by the discussion and conclusion of the research, along with the implications for future research.

To sum up, the research involves seven steps (Figure 3-1). The study began with a literature review, followed by the proposal of a research framework, including the research hypotheses. Chapter 2 discusses both the literature review and conceptual multi-level model. Previous related studies and the conceptual multi-level model established a foundation for the instrument development, in which the questionnaire design was based. The research design from the third step (instrument development) is reported in succession in the following sections.

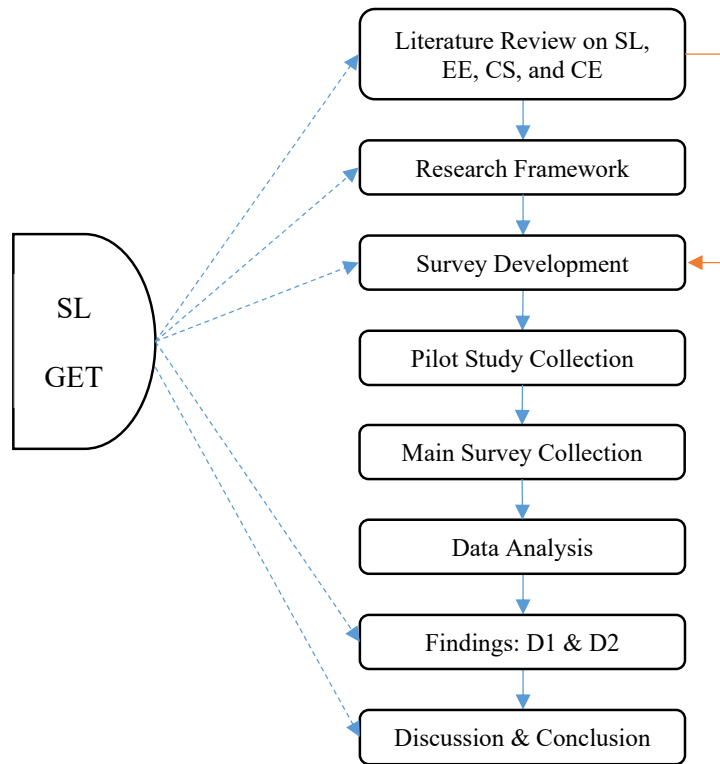


Figure 3-1. Overview of the research design

Notes: SL = Servant Leadership; EE = Employee Engagement; CS = Customer Satisfaction; CE = Customer Engagement; GET = Generalized Exchange Theory; D1 = Description; D2 = Discussion.

3.3 Survey Setting, Sample, and Data Procedures

3.3.1 Survey Setting and Population

The survey setting for this study will include restaurants being a chain or freestanding restaurants of any type of cuisine (e.g., Italian restaurants, American restaurants or specialty restaurants, and other types of restaurants). The restaurants in this way are considered mid-scale or casual.

The restaurant industry environment is getting more and more competitive and an effective leadership is much needed for service firms to be successful (Gupta et al., 2005; Jang & Kandampully, 2018). And as this thesis emphasizes on the importance of servant leadership, hence, selecting a restaurant context may be most appropriate.

In addition, a restaurant provides various services (e.g., ordering, table services) to customers where employees need to constantly interact with them (Chathoth et al., 2013). As a sector of the hospitality industry, restaurants also focus on serving customers well and encourage employees to maintain good relationships with customers. In such restaurant organization the leader is in direct contact with the followers (i.e., employees) who are serving the customers. Following the recommendation of Liden, Panaccio, et al. (2014), the service industry, restaurant context in particular, is considered the ideal place to test the presented model of this study where there are few layers of management such that managers/leaders interact often with followers, who directly serve customers. Additionally, customer contact is requirement of the restaurant service (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996). Moreover, in this type of restaurant as in figure 3-2, the manager/leader will have the ability and has given full responsibility to act as direct formal leader over the followers while being present in the organization. Therefore, he or she may deploy servant leader behaviors

through the empowerment position in the restaurant. In addition, a flat restaurant organizational structure is important (see Figure 3-2), especially for this study and within the hospitality industry as it has many benefits. To name few, flat organizations have better communication, better decision making, employees are given more autonomy and there is a higher degree of work delegation. As there is less of a hierarchy within an organization, employees feel more at ease to talk to their leaders and colleagues and are overall more satisfied in the workplace. Employees at the same time feel more empowered and therefore they will be likely to be more engaged. Team work is also best when employees are given a considerable amount of autonomy and decision-making ability.

Another three essential reasons to choose a restaurant for the setting of this study. First, the restaurant and due to its service element could result in a relatively high performance ambiguity (Sitkin & Roth, 1993) related to the management or the employees. Second, a customer dining experience (e.g., satisfaction) could lead to a significant consequence (Oh, 2002), that is, a negative customer behavior (e.g., engagement or not). Third, restaurant depend on people to serve people, this nature includes high interdependence between the three exchange actors considering the servant leader/manager, the employee, and the customer who is participating in the exchange process. Hence, and according to Northouse (2016), restaurant context is totally different than other organizational context including health care and nonprofit or other settings. The norms and the ways servant leadership are performed may vary. Thus, this study is best and interesting to be tested in this restaurant setting.

This current research specifically focuses on restaurant employees and their manager as the servant leader as well as the customers who are being served by them

during their working hours in the restaurants in Lebanon. Choosing restaurants in Lebanon has many reasons:

1. While the majority of the studies on servant leadership have been conducted in either China or US, research is needed in other countries such as Lebanon to add to generalization of servant leadership across borders (Eva et al., 2019).
2. Lebanon is a developing country rich in multicultural people as it is considered the link between the east and the west in Asia and which is well known by its hospitality caring culture and service (Fakih et al., 2016). Such culture would allow the servant leader characteristics to be displayed. Lebanon is the most culturally diverse country in the Middle East and is considered as a unique cosmopolitan Arab state. Added to that, the Lebanese society is very modern and share similarities with certain culture of southern Europe as the country is linked, due to the French colonialization, in ideology and culture to Europe. This unique diverse rare Arab and European environment country in the Middle East is considered Europe's gateway to Western Asia as well as Asia's gateway to the Western World (Davis, 2011), and grants it an important mediator role and makes it commercial, banking, and cultural hub ("Lebanon country profile," 2018). As a touristic summer and winter destination, Beirut, the capital city of Lebanon, was named Travel and Leisure Magazine's Best International City for Food in 2017 (Rahhal, 2018), and the country has recently been recommended in many global publications for its food, wine, and nightlife. In 2013, The Lonely Planet ranked Lebanon among the top 10 food destinations in the world and the country was also judged by CNN to be the world's best breakfast destination (Ekstein, 2013). Lebanon is not comparable to any Arab country in its uniqueness in diversity of culture,

politics, and religion (Naoufal, 2018). Such unique setting characteristics would allow replication and generalization of the study in similar multicultural cosmopolitan city like Hong Kong and Singapore.

3. Leadership is same all over the world but leading is not. How to lead differ by region and culture to match local market (Weir, 2010). Specifically that leadership differs in the characteristics of the context of place and people which influence leader's behavior (Yukl, 2013). Likewise, Megheirkouni (2016) claims applicability of leadership theories could be specific in the Arab Middle-East countries like Lebanon. Dorfman and House (2004) also argue that leadership studies in the Middle-East are almost nonexistent due to the inherent difficulty of conducting organizational research there. Hence, findings from Lebanon could add significance on the Arab Middle-East region organizational hospitality leadership research.
4. A recent study investigated the effect of servant leadership on employee satisfaction in different types of events (Megheirkouni, 2018). The author analyzed data collected from three different Middle Eastern countries including a birthday party in Lebanon and showed the applicability of servant leadership in personal events on employee satisfaction. However, with this promising finding, all the data for this thesis will be collected from Lebanon to study servant leadership applicability in the restaurant sector on employee engagement and customer outcomes.
5. Accessibility to data. The researcher has connection with many restaurants in the category chosen for the study in Lebanon.

3.3.2 Sampling

The main survey was conducted in restaurants all over Lebanon. The restaurant market in Lebanon can be segmented according to numerous criteria, of which the most common is the average check (Daou, 2015). This private report defined the segments as follows:

- High-end: the average check can surpass the \$90 for a full lunch or dinner experience.
- Medium to high: the average check varies between \$60 to \$90.
- Medium: the average check range is \$30 to \$60 in restaurants such as Leila, Kabab-ji, Margherita, Olio, Duo and Mandaloun.
- Medium-low: the average check is below \$30 in restaurants such as Roadster Diner and Crepaway.

According to Daou (2015), the same private investment bank report, restaurants in the medium and medium-low segments manage to have the highest turnovers and the highest number of outlets across the country since they capture the largest portion of the Lebanese population. In addition, the medium and medium-low restaurants are considered in the mid-scale segment/casual dining restaurants with an organizational structure of few management layers as shown in figure 3-2. Therefore, consistent with Fakhri et al. (2016), this study defines the type of restaurant in Lebanon in terms of the price paid per person on a typical meal into high-scale, mid-scale, and low-scale restaurant and considered the MSR as sampling. Typically, low-scale restaurants (LSR) were defined as having average check less than USD \$20, mid-scale (MSR) between USD \$20 and \$60, and high-scale (HSR) above USD \$60. According to Fakhri et al. (2016), “these brackets are based in the Michelin guide, which uses similar criteria to classify European restaurants into different price and segment

categories, and which, in this case, was also slightly adapted to local economic standards based on the ministry of tourism classification and information from Lebanese restaurants review blogs (e.g., www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurants-g294004-Lebanon.html). For example, the LSR in Europe is below 35 Euros, which, in the Lebanese context, correspond to \$34 (p. 75).”

As I am very familiar with these restaurants mentioned in the report, I guarantee that most of them have the same organizational chart as follow: Top management (e.g., Restaurant Manager / Executive chef), Middle Management (e.g., team/shift leader/supervisor/headwaiter, and head chef), Front-line Employees (e.g., waiter/waitress, host/hostess, food runner, bartender, busser, cashier, expeditor, line/section chef, commis-chef). Moreover, to make sure the restaurant chosen for the study functions in this way, the restaurant chart of the operation was provided in advance from the administration. The restaurant was selected using convenience sampling from all the restaurants available in the same category. This practice of choosing the restaurants has been used by previous study (Jang & Kandampully, 2018).

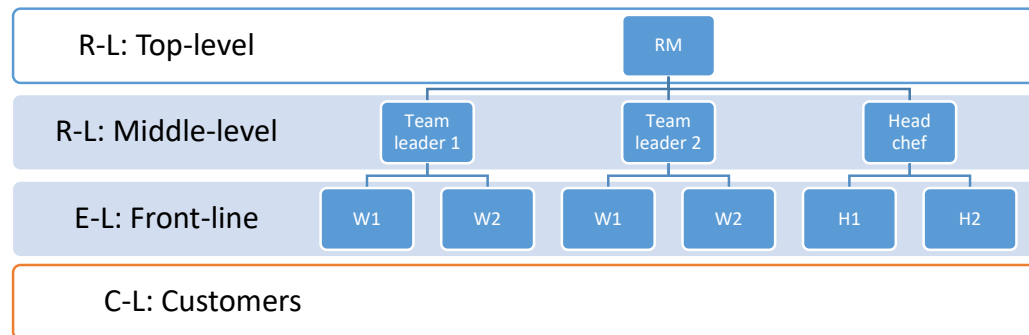


Figure 3-2. Restaurant Organization

To clarify the “employee” and the “leader” for this study are not limited to individual customer-contact employees who engage in services but also who work in productions in a restaurant context; they are primarily the front (dining area) and back (kitchen area) of the house frontline employees and entry-level team leader supervising directly those frontline employees working during their shifts. Frontline employees in restaurants involve several positions such as waiter/waitress, host/hostess, food runner, bartender, busser, cashier, expeditor, line/section chef, commis-chef, and other restaurant-related positions. The positions of entry-level are at the level following the restaurant managers, such as team leader/head waiter, and head chef.

Furthermore, responding to the call of many research (Eva et al., 2018; Van Dierendonck, 2011), this study used multiple stakeholder perspectives (e.g., Leader/manager, the followers employees, and the customers) as a multi-source collection of data to better assess the variables on servant leadership and the ratings (Eva et al., 2019).

3.3.3 Sample Size

The size of the sample dictates the amount of information we have and therefore, in part, determines our precision or level of confidence that we have in our sample estimates. An estimate always has an associated level of uncertainty, which depends upon the underlying variability of the data as well as the sample size. The more variable the population, the greater the uncertainty in our estimate. Similarly, the larger the sample size the more information we have and so our uncertainty reduces. As our sample size increases, the confidence in our estimate increases, our uncertainty decreases, and we have greater precision. When considering simple

random sampling, sampling error SE are larger than in other probabilistic sampling technique. Same population but different conclusions depending on the size and type of the sample. This proves the crucial importance of sample size and sampling techniques when it comes to statistical inference. Therefore, sample size should be considered and decided carefully. The sample size of a study theoretically depends on four elements, namely, population size, desired precision (i.e., sampling error, margin of error, or confidence interval), variability, and confidence level. Differences on these four elements imply a variation on the desirable size of the sample. Therefore, the sample size depends on the requirements imposed by the analyst (i.e., desired precision and confidence level), which are decided before sampling, and the observed aspects (i.e., population and variability). Where some researchers depend on the rule of thumb of 10 to 1 meaning that the minimum sample size for a study is equal to the number of items multiply by 10 (Hair et al., 2010).

While sample size of 30 is the minimum necessary requirement for normality, multilevel requires large sample of clusters. As multilevel are usually estimated with maximum likelihood methods which they perform much better when sample sizes are very large and worse when the number of clusters is small (McNeish & Stapleton, 2016). Guidelines by many researchers have been suggested such as 30 clusters (level-2) with a cluster size of 30 (level-1), a minimum of 20 clusters, or 50 clusters with a cluster size of 20 for cross-level interactions or 100 clusters with 10 units each if the main interest is in the variance components (Hox et al., 2017; Snijders & Bosker, 2011). Moreover, the mean group size should be not less than 5 members. In referring to similar sample and mean group size used in the application of multilevel three-levels hierarchical studies, few solid work can be mentioned such as Chen et al. (2015)

and Tuan (2018). The former study conducted in hair salon, used a multilevel model of servant leadership including Level 1 as the customer-level ($N = 470$); Level 2 as the employee-level ($n = 238$); and Level 3 as the store-level ($n = 30$). The latter tested in tourism organizations, had $N = 502$ for customer-level, $n = 197$ for employee-level, and $n = 37$ for organizational-level. Another notable study in hotels had $N = 303$ (customer level); $n = 190$ (employee level); $n = 30$ (organizational level) (Hsiao et al., 2015). This thesis followed the same rule by considering at least 30 clusters for restaurant level 3 with average group size of 5 and above.

3.3.4 Data Collection Procedure: Pilot test and main questionnaire

Ideally, data was collected from restaurants in Lebanon. Restaurant operators/managers might be reluctant to participate in the study; thus, it was very useful to use the Lebanese American University, LAU connections to gain access to restaurants and encourage establishment owners to participate in the study. Alternatively, having worked as a restaurant consultant for several years in Lebanon, the author acquainted with this sector and have developed a viable network in the industry, which facilitated the access of the data. Added to that, early preliminary approval to conduct the survey was initiated by contacting with some restaurant owners. One of the owners, who operates three restaurants suggested that the researcher need to collect data from the employees themselves, and the manager of the restaurants will organize the collection of the data from the customers. The study also adopted a multi-source data collection method that made it possible for data to be collected from employees and customers in restaurants. In this regard, employees rated the restaurant manager servant leader and their work engagement. Then the

customers rated their satisfaction and engagement towards the restaurant dining experience. Moreover, a discreet numerical & letter coding was used to match employees rating on managers' servant leadership and customers' responses. To provide a broad spectrum for academic analysis and mitigate bias (Carifio & Perla, 2007), the survey, as previously mentioned, was rated on 7-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree).

As a start, following the back-translation method (Brislin, 1970), the questionnaire was first developed in English, translated into Arabic, and then back-translated into English to confirm its accuracy and ensure respondent's language convenience. Noting that the researcher's native language is Arabic. This was done using two independent, bilingual legal experts to ensure translation quality.

Following Hinkin et al. (1997's) guidelines, the main questionnaire's content validity was also evaluated by three expert groups before collecting the data:

1. two professors whose primary research focus was the restaurant industry;
2. hospitality graduate students with relevant field industry experience; and
3. restaurant managers who were currently working.

The three expert groups carefully examined the wording, clarity, readability, and meaning of the initial questionnaire. After that many suggestions were given to be more convenient for the first-line employees and restaurant customers in Lebanon. For instance, one group of the experts suggested to specify on the questionnaire who is considered the leader for the employees or change it to restaurant manager. Based on the comments also received from the two professors, the initial questionnaire was re-worded and reformulated to reflect more closely the restaurant industry and the study's context. It was then clarified within the questionnaire that "Leader = Restaurant Manager".

Then, a pilot test was conducted with 40 actual restaurant employees and 70 restaurant patrons. The result of data analysis indicated that the value of Cronbach's alpha for all the constructs was greater than 0.70, suggesting that all the constructs' reliability was acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). Finally, the survey questionnaire was finalised and distributed to mid-scale-service restaurant employees and customers in Lebanon in the summer of 2020.

To collect data from the mid-scale / casual dining restaurants in Lebanon, the researcher contacted several restaurants owners and or human resources to seek their voluntary approval to participate in the study. Where most of the restaurants were located in the main capital, Beirut, restaurants in other populated and touristic areas were also included after approval. Out of 55 restaurants owners or administrator contacted, 37 initially approved to conduct the study. At a later stage three restaurants withdrew and another two were omitted due to short period of leader-organizational tenure (i.e., less than 6 months) leaving 32 restaurants as the final list which was included for analysis. The initial contact was done either by phone, emails, or personal meetings at the restaurant to explain the context of the study. For this thesis, the main data collection was conducted among restaurant employees to rate their manager leader's behaviors and to self-rate their engagement in the work. Customers of the same restaurant will be rating their satisfaction and engagement. Accordingly, the research instrument was distributed. To ensure the validity of the data, questionnaires collection included restaurant employees, customers who were served by the same employees who were managed by the same leader / restaurant manager. Therefore, the working schedule of the employees and the manager shifts were given to the researcher. Usually, for most of the chosen restaurants, there were two shifts: morning shift (AM) including

lunch and night shift (PM) including dinner. For lunch or dinner shift the schedule would be as follow: one restaurant manager, two or more frontline employees, serving two or more customers. As the study is interested in global satisfaction and engagement in the restaurant, on average 2 customers were at least nested in 1 employee. The questionnaire was coded by (L) if distributed for the morning shift participants and by (D) for the night shift. The same code was used for customers at lunch (L) and dinner (D). These questionnaires were code-lettered to each shift and code-numbered to match responses from employees with those from customers. Another part of the questionnaire was filled by the customers who at one time were served by the same employees of the same restaurant manager. The schedule and the coding were set according to the schedule provided by the human resources management or restaurant manager. The questionnaire was administered on site to ensure access to different groups (i.e., the customers patronizing the restaurants, the restaurant employees, and owners/operators/manager). With the assistance of another two graduate students from the Lebanese American University, where the researcher teaches, the data were collected in three waves to alleviate the potential common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In the first-wave survey (T1), employees provided their demographic data as well as rating their manager's servant leadership characteristics. In the second-wave survey (T2), conducted one month after T1, employees were asked to report on their work engagement with the restaurant. One month following T2, the third-wave survey (T3) was implemented to collect data from customers served by these employees in terms of customer satisfaction and customer engagement and their demographic. In the same vein, while food and service quality are the most attributes to affect customer satisfaction in restaurants (Canny, 2014) and as satisfaction construct exists at a transaction-specific and a cumulative level (Oliver,

2014), timing of the collection is crucial to control other outcomes. Accordingly, the questionnaire was administered at the end of the mealtime (i.e., after paying the bill) being at the table or at the exit door. Therefore, this study could capture the whole dining experience of the customers and reflect their entire satisfaction/experience at an aggregate level which is the objective of this research. Prior to the survey distribution, as mentioned earlier, the questionnaires were code-numbered to match responses from employees (T1 and T2) with those from their customers (T3). The questionnaire delivered to an employee (T1 and T2) and that to his/her customers (T3) were coded with the same letter code and number. Noting that despite this code numbering, the respondents remained unidentified since all questionnaires were answered anonymously.

On one hand, when given the approval to be on site, the employees were approached just before the opening of the restaurant and during changing shifts (AM/PM), so they have the time to answer the survey. In this case the researcher was present to administer the survey which likely leads to a high response rate. High response rates are particularly important in this investigation because of the aggregation of SL measures to the restaurant-level which will be meaningful only when a substantial percentage of employees complete surveys (Timmerman, 2005). And to mitigate social desirability issues and to ensure full confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents' profile, the researcher left the data collection sites until respondents completed the survey. Each employee has to fill one survey and keep it separately to avoid the bias of social desirability (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Later, the researcher collected the sealed envelopes including the questionnaires.

On the other hand, an envelope package including number of questionnaires needed with the full instructions was provided at each restaurant to survey their

customers. The clear descriptions and the restaurant name were marked on the cover of the envelope. Most importantly, the envelope should be given to the restaurant manager to administer the process as he or she will be responsible for the employees and the customers of every shift. The researcher collected the sealed envelopes one to three weeks after distribution.

A total of 550 and 300 questionnaires were distributed to customers and employees respectively in 32 restaurants. Two hundred and fifty-two employees (84%) participated in the T1 survey. In the T2 survey, questionnaires were distributed to employees who took part in the T1 survey, and 229 responses were returned (76%). In the T3 survey, 404 customers of these employees returned their responses (74%), giving rise to the final sample of 229 employees and their 404 customers. After the matching process and retaining responses of those without missing relevant data, incomplete surveys and outliers which were treated at the screening stage, the study's final sample size used for analysis is as follow:

N = 404 customers (Level 1: customer-level); n = 229 employees (Level 2: employee-level); in 32 restaurants (Level 3: restaurant-level).

And each restaurant's employee and customer data were grouped into one team, with a total of 32 teams. Each team consisted of a group average size of 7 employees (ranging from 5 to 11) to one leader and 10 customer samples (ranging from 6 to 20).

3.3.5 Data Handling and Storage

The researcher handles the data from the participants in two protected steps. First the data was collected through a secure environment storage provided by Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com) and protected by a password known only by the researcher. Qualtrics is one of the well-known and leading online survey software with access permission through the School of Hotel and Tourism Management (SHTM) at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. In their security statement on the website, Qualtrics assures their dedication to protect data for all customers using best industry standards and high level of security (Qualtrics, 2018). Then the data was remained on the mentioned secure online server until the end of the collection period. The second step involves an exportation of the data from Qualtrics to a Microsoft Excel file which is saved on a password protected personal computer. At last, the data retrieved by Qualtrics will be deleted from the online server.

3.3.6 Human Participants Ethics

Human subjects' protections will be applied at all level of the research. To start with, prior review of the study proposal, consent form, information, and survey was processed through an online application on the Human Subjects Ethics Application Review System. Then, approval by the Departmental Research Committee (DRC) was pursued through the Human Subjects Ethics Sub-committee at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Furthermore, before filling the survey, every participant was asked to read, agree, and complete a consent form. In this

regard, all the information about the purpose of the research, the limited risk, their voluntary participation, and the withdrawal ability from the study at any time will be given upfront. According to privacy, the anonymity of the participants was taken care off by using coding numbers/letters and not any personal information that could reveal their identity. In terms of confidentiality, no ethical concern would occur as the organization does not own the specific participants' data, and only overall results in a report form will be shared. In addition to the participants' confidentiality, the restaurant subject name of the research will stay confidential. This research will be done with no collaboration with the organization under study and is solely at the discretion of the researcher.

3.4 Method for Data Analysis

3.4.1 Analytical Approaches

Given that each participant will be providing data at the restaurant level (e.g., servant leadership), at the employee level (e.g., employee engagement), and at the customer level (e.g., customer satisfaction and customer engagement), the hypothesis testing will necessitate hierarchical or cross-level techniques to be used. According to Raudenbush and Bryk (2002), data of this nature has a nested structure (e.g., two or more employees will be paired with the same supervisor) of three-level models, with customers (Level 1) nested in employees (level 2) nested in restaurants (level 3) in Lebanon. Therefore, conventional statistical techniques such as traditional regression methods to analyze the data may violate the independence assumption of observations and lead to an overestimation of the parameters (Zhang et al., 2009). Because hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) can resolve non-independence problems and estimate the impacts of factors at different levels simultaneously (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002), HLM is used in this study as an analytic tool to test the hypotheses. In addition to the ability to model cross-level effects, HLM offers the advantage of providing the explained variance for each level rather than estimating the total variance explained (Cullen et al., 2004). Finally, HLM has been used in many leadership studies and the hospitality literature as well (e.g., Chen et al., 2015; Hsiao et al., 2015; Tuan, 2018).

Multilevel conceptual models require very established and strong theoretical support about the relationships between the variables. Fundamental theories, such as GET along with the main core SL theory, are used to guide the investigation in this thesis. In addition, most relationships among the constructs between the three levels

have theoretical foundations and literature support. For example, although the mediating role of employee engagement in hypothesis 6 has not been previously examined, the impact of servant leadership on employee engagement as well as the relationship between employee engagement and customer satisfaction were supported by many previous studies (Kim, 2014; Zhang et al., 2016).

In a first step for the analysis to deal with the multilevel data is to ensure the appropriateness of aggregation. In this regard, the inter-rater agreement will be tested (James et al., 1984, 1993) and individual scores of servant leadership to the restaurant level (level 3 in the model) will be estimated through between-group differences and within-group agreement. Therefore, two intra-class correlations (i.e., agreement among ratings in the same group ICC1 and reliability of group means ICC2) for assessing agreement among group members will be employed (MUTHÉN, 1994). Using the aggregation, a percentage of variability may be lost and this is due to individual differences (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). As a result, misrepresentations of the relationships between variables can be dramatic. HLM effectively disentangles individual and group effects on the outcome variable and therefore is generally recommended over aggregation for dealing with nested data.

In the HLM analyses, a fully unconditional, intercept-only null model, with no predictors at either employee or restaurant level, will be first estimated to examine within-group and between-group variability, and if variance is significant, to demonstrate the data's nested nature by those variances, and to justify the use of multi-level analyses. Then the variables will be introduced in different models for analysis.

Many used programs to solve multilevel models are available such as R and Mplus. These are coding programs while HLM version 7 (<http://www.ssicentral.com>),

which is most widely and commonly used for hierarchical data modeling, will be used for the data analysis for this study. HLM7 has new statistical features such as cross-classified random effects for linear models for three-level data, and linear and nonlinear models for four-level data.

3.4.2 Testing for Reliability, Validity, and Measurement Models

While the objective to have an assessment and evaluation more accurate, reliable and valid tests and questionnaire must be used. Reliability refers to the consistency of the measurements and the ability to produce the same results for the same latent construct if measured over time across different situations (Mazzocchi, 2008; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Cronbach's alpha (α), a widely used measure the internal reliability of the multi-item scales, is applied in this study. This internal consistency is done by examining the correlations between several items of the scale across the respondents (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The maximum value of the alpha reliability coefficient is 1, but each scale's value should be near or exceeding 0.70 for an acceptable level of reliability for each construct (Mazzocchi, 2008). The scales for this thesis will comply with this criterion otherwise an explanation will be provided. Using SPSS, *correlation* and *reliability* will be tested to validate the measurement scales for the various latent concepts used in this study (e.g., SL, EE, CS, CE).

Validity reflects whether a measurement scale can actually measure what it supposes to measure and whether it can be used to predict the latent concept (Field, 2013). The average variance extracted (AVE) is usually adopted to measure the convergent validity of measurements. AVE, which estimates the overall amount of variance explained by a construct in relation to the variance resulting from the

measurement error, should exceed 0.5 for each construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In addition, the criterion for discriminant validity will be checked and met if the AVE for each construct was greater than the squared correlation coefficients for the corresponding inter-constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Using AMOS, to examine the *convergent* and *discriminant validity* of each variable, a measurement models will be estimated by the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

3.4.3 Testing for Mediating Effects

Multilevel models have many benefits regarding answering interesting research questions. One of these benefit is to hypothesize and empirically test multilevel mediation processes that are not easily answered using conventional statistical procedures (Mathieu et al., 2008). However, there are analytical challenges for testing the mediation in a multilevel setting, but addressing them has been explained and will be followed in this study (Mathieu et al., 2008; Mathieu & Taylor, 2007; Zhang et al., 2009). It is also important to note that a multilevel research design and mediation testing with a strong foundation should rely on strong multilevel theory. As Mathieu and Taylor (2007) presented, the inference of multilevel mediation depends on the tripod of strong role of theory, design research features and measurement, and the appropriate statistical techniques and analysis. Having said that, in this thesis, the mediation models (e.g., SL – EE – CS and SL – EE – CE) are based on solid multilevel theory and used valid multilevel research design (three-level model) and measurements with well-established scales to assess the multilevel phenomenon of servant leadership.

Generally, in testing the mediation, the question will be whether relationships between exogenous predictors, X , and outcomes, Y , are mediated by a third set of variables, Z (Raudenbush & Sampson, 1999).

The following are the general steps to test mediation in multilevel model (Mathieu et al., 2008; Mathieu & Taylor, 2007, p. 172):

1. Consider the influence of any methodological controls and covariates, from whatever levels, on substantive variables using the appropriate analyses.
2. Evaluate the relative magnitude and significance of variance that resides within and between Level 2 units, for each potential Level 1 mediator and criterion. Significant between unit variance is required for modeling cross-level effects.
3. Conduct within level mediational tests following the single level rules of evidence.

Then:

1. Evaluate the significance of all applicable univariate within- and cross-level $X \rightarrow Y$ relations. The relationships should be significant for inference.
2. Test the influence of X (from whatever level) on M .
3. Test the $M \rightarrow Y$ relationship.
4. Add X into the equation containing $M \rightarrow Y$. It must not add significantly for full mediation to be supported.

3.5 Measurement Scales

This research is designed to investigate the influence of servant leadership behaviors of restaurant leader on employee attitudes and customer outcomes. This approach is a typical explanatory study that pursues theoretical reasoning. Therefore, a quantitative survey is necessary to confirm the multi-level model derived from the reviewed literature and necessary theories. The questionnaire was designed to examine the relationships among the four related constructs, namely, SL, EE, CS, and CE using Likert-type scale to choose through specific items presented. All the measurement scales were adopted from previous studies, they are used in different research, and validated with satisfactory level of reliability.

3.5.1 Servant Leadership

Following Ehrhart (2004) seminal empirical work, Liden et al. (2008) developed a more comprehensive and psychometrically sound measure of servant leadership (Van Dierendonck, 2011) (see Table 3-1). For this scale, the authors identified seven dimensions of servant leadership to be measured: behaving ethically, emotional healing, putting subordinates first, helping subordinates grow and succeed, empowering them, creating value for the community, and conceptual skills. Based on the 28 items of servant leadership measure in the scale, Liden et al. (2015) introduced a shorter version SL-7, to measure global servant leadership. The corresponding short version showed high consistent reliability and validity with the original full measure (Liden et al., 2015). This study will be using this 7-item scale as the objective is to measure the global servant leadership. The items will be the same as the original scale.

Table 3-1 *Most used dimensions for servant leadership*

Scale	# Items	Likert	Dimensions
Ehrhart (2004)	14	1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree	(1) Having conceptual skills. (2) Empowering subordinates. (3) Helping subordinates grow and succeed. (4) Putting subordinates first. (5) Behaving ethically. (6) Forming relationships with subordinates. (7) Creating value for those outside of the organization.
Liden et al. (2015)	7	1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree	(1) Conceptual skills. (2) Empowering. (3) Helping subordinates grow and succeed. (4) Putting subordinates first. (5) Behaving ethically. (6) Emotional healing. (7) Creating value for the community.

In general, the scales created to measure servant leadership are all based on the characteristics of the servant leadership, the unidimensional or multidimensional construct, and their reliability.

Liden et al. (2015) created a scale based on seven characteristics of servant leadership inspired by the work of Spears (2010). The servant leadership characteristics defined by Spears were explained previously in the thesis. For the measurement of servant leadership presented in the conceptual model, this study considered the dimensions uncovered by Liden and colleagues (p. 255):

- “1) Emotional healing, which involves the degree to which the leader cares about followers' personal problems and well-being;
- 2) Creating value for the community, which captures the leader's involvement in helping the community surrounding the organization as well as encouraging followers to be active in the community;
- 3) Conceptual skills, reflecting the leader's competency in solving work problems and understanding the organization's goals;

- 4) Empowering, assessing the degree to which the leader entrusts followers with responsibility, autonomy, and decision-making influence;
- 5) Helping subordinates grow and succeed, capturing the extent to which the leader helps followers reach their full potential and succeed in their careers;
- 6) Putting subordinates first, assessing the degree to which the leader prioritizes meeting the needs of followers before tending to his or her own needs; and
- 7) Behaving ethically, which includes being honest, trustworthy, and serving as a model of integrity.”

While six of the dimensions overlap somehow with other servant leadership measurement scales available, conceptual skills, is a unique dimension of the above SL-7. The inclusion of this competency-based dimension in addition to the other character-based dimensions, makes it the appropriate fit to use this measure with customers and organizational outcome variables (Eva et al., 2019) as in the current study (i.e., customer satisfaction and customer engagement).

Another reason to consider the SL-7 in this study is the unidimensional structure of the scale. Consistent with the agreement of Liden et al. (2015) that servant leadership is not a higher-level construct that causes its dimensions, servant leadership also does not fit the typology for a multidimensional construct profile. As the authors explained the servant leadership dimensions are not representing “the same construct with different degrees of accuracy but instead are capturing different aspects of leader behavior (p. 255).” As the aim of the study is to focus on measuring global servant leadership, this scale is a good fit.

Finally, the scale is valid and reliable. The scale originally was developed by Liden et al. (2015) using many samples in many studies to validate it. The reliability Cronbach's alpha for the scale ranged between .80 and .90. Moreover, in the

multilevel servant leadership hospitality research, the SL-28 scale of Liden et al. (2008) with its multidimensional was the most used while the shortest unidimensional SL-7 version scale was similarly popular. Both scales were among the most recommended due to their psychometric validity (Eva et al., 2019). The Cronbach's alpha for this scale in this research is 0.82.

Servant Leadership original Scale:

- SL1. My leader can tell if something work-related is going wrong.
- SL2. My leader makes my career development a priority.
- SL3. I would seek help from my leader if I had a personal problem.
- SL4. My leader emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community.
- SL5. My leader puts my best interests ahead of his/her own.
- SL6. My leader gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that I feel is best.
- SL7. My leader would NOT compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success.

3.5.2 Employee Engagement

Employee Engagement for this study will be measured using the 9-item shortest version scale of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli et al., 2006) which originally was created with 17-items (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The scale measures the three dimensions of EE namely vigor, dedication, and absorption with 3 items for each. The UWES was adopted because it has not only been tested among many countries but also has been commonly used in hospitality literature with high reliability Cronbach's alpha of .88 (Putra et al., 2017). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha for this scale shows 0.87.

Employee Engagement Scale:

- EEv1. At my work, I feel bursting with energy.
- EEv2. At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.
- EEv3. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.
- EEd1. I am enthusiastic about my job.
- EEd2. My job inspires me.

EEd3. I am proud of the work that I do.
EEa1. I feel happy when I am working intensely.
EEa2. I am immersed in my work.
EEa3. I get carried away when I am working.

3.5.3 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction for this study will be measured using the 3-item scale adopted from Choi and Kandampully (2019) who used it in the hotel context while the main overall satisfaction attributes was brought from Cronin Jr et al. (2000). The word “hotel” was replaced by “restaurant” to fit the context of this thesis. Additionally, the self-rating of the construct well reflects the overall experience as the scale chosen asks about the entire visit and not a specific transaction within the process which is the main interest of this study. The scale is well-validated and has high reliability with Cronbach’s alpha equals to 0.94.

Customer Satisfaction Scale:

CS1. Overall, I was satisfied with my experience dining at this restaurant.
CS2. I think I did the right thing in visiting this restaurant.
CS3. My choice to visit this restaurant was a wise one.

3.5.4 Customer Engagement

Customer engagement is reflected by both willingness to suggest, WTS and word of mouth, WOM. The scale was adopted from Choi and Kandampully (2019) who developed WTS based on the work and definition of van Doorn et al. (2010) that is used also in this study and brought WOM from Hightower Jr et al. (2002) study. Choi and colleagues applied the CE scale (WTS, WOM) to capture the behavior dimension of CE in hotels which makes it suitable to be used in this study.

The scale is valid and reliable with Cronbach's alpha of 0.915 and 0.897 for WTS and WOM respectively. To adapt the above customer engagement scale to this study, “hotel” was changed to “restaurant” to match the investigated context.

Customer Engagement Scale:

Willingness to suggest WTS:

WTS1. If given a chance, I am willing to suggest improvements in the quality of service provided by restaurant employees.

WTS2. If given a chance, I am willing to suggest improvements in the quality of food provided by the restaurant.

WTS3. If given a chance, I am willing to suggest additional services.

WTS4. If given a chance, I am willing to suggest improvements in ambience.

WTS5. If given a chance, I am willing to suggest improvements in design.

WTS6. If given a chance, I am willing to suggest improvements in facilities.

Word of mouth WOM:

WOM1. I will say positive things about this restaurant.

WOM2. I will encourage family and friends to visit this restaurant.

WOM3. I will recommend this restaurant to someone who seeks my advice.

3.5.5 Summary of Study Measures

All the scales used for this thesis have been chosen from previous studies where they have been psychometrically tested, validated, and showed high reliability. All the scales had a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient above the cutoff point of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, all the measurements of the variables in this study were evaluated using seven-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

After reviewing all the scales that were used in the study, the following Table 3-2 is a summary of study measures as well as showing the respondents and the referent status and level:

Table 3-2 *Summary of study measures*

Construct	Measure	Respondent	Referent	Level
SL	SL-7 scale (Liden et al., 2015)	Employees	Leader	Aggregated to restaurant-level
EE	WE-9 scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006)	Employees	Employees	Employee-level
CS	CS-3 scale (Choi & Kandampully, 2019)	Customers	Customers	Customer-level
CE	WTS-6 / WOM-3 (Choi & Kandampully, 2019; Hightower Jr et al., 2002)	Customers	Customers	Customer-level

3.5.6 Control Variables

Previous research on leadership has identified that demographic variables such as age and gender may be related to employee engagement and work-related outcomes (e.g., Liu et al., 2017; Riordan et al., 2003). Additionally, researchers have suggested that tenure with the organization may influence employees' attitudes in leadership studies (Putra et al., 2017). Tenure may also reflect employees' knowledge and experience accumulated over their work time. Consequently, this study chose to control for age, gender, tenure with supervisor, and tenure with organization within the analysis. Participants provided their gender directly and chose their age within the groups given. For tenure with the organization, they directly wrote the period in year and month. Then for tenure with the manager, only dyads for which both the employee and leader had a work relationship with each other not less than two months were included (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). Another individual control variables include employee education (1. Less than secondary/high school, 2. Completed secondary/high school, 3. Some college or university, 4. Completed college/university diploma/degree, 5. Completed postgraduate degree). Education builds employees' knowledge necessary to leadership characteristics (Tuan, 2018).

Chapter 4: Data Analysis, Results, and Discussions

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data results and analysis of the current study. The chapter starts by reviewing the administration and cleaning data of the survey followed by presenting the demographic representation of the respondents. Correlations and descriptive statistics results are then presented. Testing the appropriateness of the proposed model in terms of validity and reliability including measurement models are then analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis along with factor loadings and model fit indices. Later, the aggregation to the group level is discussed and the multi-level model analysis using HLM presents the findings of the hypothesized relationship among the independent variable (i.e., Servant leadership) at the restaurant level 3, the mediating variable (i.e., Employee Engagement) at level 2 and the dependent outcome variables (i.e., Customer Satisfaction and Customer Engagement) at level 1 of the model.

4.2 Survey Administration and Respondents' Profile

The sample for this study included data collected from restaurant leader-employee dyads and customers from the same restaurant in Lebanon. Two sets of questionnaires were used: One for customers and another for their immediate restaurant employees who were serving them under one leader/manager who represented each restaurant. The data collected was screened visually and manually at the first step to remove insincere or incomplete responses. Some other questionnaires were also excluded if a mid-shift employee filled out two surveys over Lunch and

Dinner schedule. Finally, the results of Mahalanobis' distance showed that 12 multivariate outliers were detected and removed. Consequently, 229 and 404 useable employees and customers responses respectively remained from 32 restaurants for analysis. Table 4 presents the data of the participated restaurants. They are 32 restaurants with number of employees ranging between 7 and 20. Note that the data in the table represents the final number of employees and customers who filled a useable survey. The mean group size employees nested in a restaurant is 7 (5 – 11). The average number of customers nested in each employee is around 2.

Table 4 *Restaurant' profile (n=32)*

Restaurants	Employees	Customers
1	7	14
2	5	12
3	8	12
4	6	14
5	5	16
6	7	15
7	6	10
8	8	12
9	9	15
10	9	10
11	8	12
12	8	12
13	7	14
14	8	13
15	7	12
16	9	16
17	6	12
18	7	12
19	5	14
20	7	14
21	5	10
22	5	7
23	6	10
24	5	8
25	8	12
26	10	15
27	8	12
28	10	16
29	6	10
30	11	20
31	8	15
32	5	8

The profile of the respondents was executed on SPSS version 27. Table 4.2 and Table 4.3 present the profile of employees (n = 229) and the profile of the customers (N = 404) respectively. Employees demographic characteristics include information such as age, gender, education status, and restaurant tenure. As for the customers demographic information also include age, gender, education status, as well as nationalities and if they are first-timer or revisiting to the restaurant.

Table 4-1 *Employees' profile (n=229)*

Variables		Frequency	Percent (%)
<i>Gender</i>	Male	134	58.5
	Female	95	41.5
<i>Age (years)</i>	Under 20	49	21.4
	21-30	140	61.1
	31-40	30	13.1
	41-50	10	4.4
<i>Education</i>	Below secondary/high school	19	8.3
	Completed secondary/high school	49	21.4
	Some college or university	105	45.9
	Completed college/university diploma/degree	52	22.7
	Completed postgraduate degree	4	1.7
<i>Restaurant tenure</i>	2 month – 1 year	114	49.8
	> 1 - 2 years	50	21.8
	> 2 - 3 years	59	25.8
	> 3 - 4 years	9	3.9
	> 4 - 5 years	14	6.1
	> 5 - 10 years	17	7.4
	> 10 years	5	2.2

Table 4-2 *Customers' profile (N=404)*

Variables		Frequency	Percent (%)
<i>Gender</i>	Male	185	45.8
	Female	209	51.7
	Other	10	2.5

<i>Age (years)</i>	Under 18	19	4.7
	18-25	152	37.6
	26-35	101	25.0
	36-45	88	21.8
	46-55	29	7.2
	56-65	11	2.7
	66 or above	4	1.0
<i>Education</i>	Below secondary/high school	15	3.7
	Completed secondary/high school	47	11.6
	Some college or university	110	27.2
	Completed college/university diploma/degree	167	41.3
	Completed postgraduate degree	65	16.1
<i>First-time visit</i>	YES	179	44.3
	NO	225	55.7
<i>Nationality</i>	Lebanese	308	76.2
	Other	96	23.8

Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 show the demographic profile of 229 valid responses for restaurants' employees and 404 valid responses for restaurants' customers respectively. On one hand, as presented in Table 4.1, employees were distributed between 58.5% male and 41.5% female. The ratio of male recorded high values since they have been more engaged in front-line positions in restaurants which also reflect the Lebanese hospitality sector distribution. Regarding the respondents' age, more than half of the employees surveyed were aged between 21 to 30 with 61.1% whereas only 4.4% were between 41 and 50. Employees aged between 31 and 40 accounts 13.1 % of the total respondents, and the remaining 21.4% of employees' age is under 20. Concerning the education level of the employees' sample, the survey result showed that most of the respondents had attained Some College or University education (45.9%) with another 22.7% who completed a college or university diploma or degree. Only 1.7% or 4 respondents have completed postgraduate degree.

Additionally, employees who completed secondary or high school accounted for 21.4% of the data whereas the rest had some education (8.3%). Furthermore, as mentioned in the “Control Variable” section, information regarding the employee-leader/restaurant manager relationship length and restaurant tenure were considered to examine employees’ behaviour. Thus, employees experience in a particular restaurant as well as knowing the manager tenure in the restaurant were surveyed. On this basis, most of the employees (114, 49.8%) have been working in the restaurant from 2 months to 1 year. The remaining employees had restaurant tenure work experience of 1-2 years (50, 21.8%), 2-3 years (59, 25.8%), 3-5 years (23, 10%), between 5 and 10 years (17, 7.4%), and more than 10 years (5, 2.2%).

On the other hand, by reviewing the data collected regarding the customers profile characteristics which is presented in Table 4.2, most of the restaurants’ customers were domestic from Lebanon (76.2%) and the remaining from other countries (23.8%). About 56 per cent of all respondents indicated that they visited the restaurant before therefore were considered repeaters. But the remaining of the customers were considered first-timer as about 44 per cent indicated on the survey. Among the customers, 51.7% were female, 45.8% were male, and 2.5% did not disclose their gender and recorded their responses as others. As can be seen, most of the respondents are aged between 18 and 35 (more than 67%); the other share of the respondents ranged from 36 to 55 accounts for less than 30%; and approximately 3.7 per cent of respondents’ ages ranged between 56 and above. The customers’ ages profile fit within the restaurant type of mid-scale / casual which was chosen as the context for this study. Moreover, almost 85% (84.6 per cent) of customers who visited the restaurants had some college/university or were college/university graduates or

even hold postgraduate degree. The rest of the customers surveyed had either completed secondary/high school (11.6%) or hadn't finish (3.7%).

4.3 Measurement Model Analysis

To start with, before testing the hypotheses, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to measure the convergent and discriminant validity of each variable in the model (i.e., Servant Leadership (SL), Employee Engagement (EE), Customer Satisfaction (CS), and Customer Engagement (CE)). CFA has its strength in confirming the correctness of the measurement model in dealing with multiple relationships simultaneously and guiding the re-specification of the model using the underlying dimensions and items extracted (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Hair et al., 2010).

In this regard, many indices from the CFA results were reviewed to ensure the robustness of the measurement model and to check the goodness-of-fit. Some of the main absolute indices to examine the model fit are chi-square statistic, Goodness-of-fit index (GFI), root mean square error approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) (Hooper et al., 2008; Kline, 2015). In terms of interpretation, Chi-square divided by Degree of Freedom (χ^2/df statistic) is considered acceptable between 1 and 5 (Marsh & Hocevar, 1985). Additionally, fit indices including GFI, TLI, and CFI if above 0.9 then indicate that the observed model show very good fit to the actual population (< 0.8 indicates acceptable fit) (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996; Hu & Bentler, 1998; Kline, 2015; Tanaka, 1993). As for the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) where values less or equal 0.05 are considered excellent, values between 0.05 to 0.08 are considered

acceptable, and values between 0.08 and 0.1 are considered mediocre and poor fit (Hair et al., 2010; MacCallum et al., 1996). Having presented this information, this study conducted Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) by using AMOS 28.0 to measure sample data from customers at level 1 ($N = 404$) which includes two constructs such as customer satisfaction and customer engagement, and from employees at level 2 ($n = 229$) which includes employee engagement and servant leadership constructs.

At the employee level, as shown in Table 4-3, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the two measures (SL and EE) which were estimated at this level ($n = 229$), indicated that a two-factor model fit the data best. There is statistical evidence for the fit indices used for this sample ($\chi^2 = 190.64$, $p = 0.000$). Meanwhile, normed chi-square (chi-square fit index divided by degrees of freedom, $\chi^2/df = 1.89$) is 1.8, indicating that there is less discrepancy between the hypothetical model and the sample data and is within the acceptable threshold. In addition, the proposed model exhibited a good fit as Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = .909, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = .915, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .929, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .06, all are within the acceptable limits and reveal a generally good model fit for the measurement model.

Moreover, employees rated their engagement to the work using nine-item scale of originally three dimensions developed by Schaufeli et al. (2006). The three dimensions measured by the employee engagement scale were *vigor*, *dedication*, and *absorption* with 3 items for each. Therefore, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the fit indices of this construct was assessed and the result is shown in Table 4-3. A single second-order factor model fell within the acceptable range ($\chi^2 = 60.794$, $p < .01$; Goodness of Fit Index [GFI] = .944; Tucker-Lewis Index [TLI] = .932; Comparative fit index [CFI] = .953; Root mean square error of approximation

[RMSEA] = .07), suggesting that the dimensions reflected the overall construct. An average of the nine items was used to yield a single composite measure, with a high score indicating a higher work engagement.

At the customer level, as presented in Table 4-4, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was computed and also indicated that a two-factor model fit the data best estimating the two measures (CS and CE) at this level (N = 404). The goodness-of-fit indices from the CFA, the measurement model ($\chi^2 = 82.560$, $p < .01$, GFI=.968, TLI=.990, CFI=.994, RMSEA=.045). The proposed measurement models were found to fit the data well because all the indices are acceptable as RMSEA is between 0.05 – 0.08 so acceptable and CFI and TLI are above the threshold .90, also relative chi-square $\chi^2 / df = 1.685$ is in the acceptable range of 1 – 5.

Furthermore, the original scale of the construct customer engagement (CE) included two higher order dimensions such as Word-of-Mouth (WOM) and Willingness-to-Suggest (WTS). Ratings on the two dimensions were averaged as a single CE score. Therefore, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) at the customer level using the average scores on the two constructs as indicators of customer engagement supported a single-factor model as presented in Table 4-4. A single second-order factor model fell within the acceptable range ($\chi^2 = 50.954$, $p < .01$; Goodness of Fit Index [GFI] = .974; Tucker–Lewis Index [TLI] = .987; Comparative fit index [CFI] = .992; Root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .05), suggesting that the dimensions reflected the overall CE construct. An average of the two dimensions with nine items was used leading to a single composite measure, with a high score indicating a higher engagement with the restaurant.

Table 4-3 *Measures Assessed at the Employee Level*

Factor	χ^2	<i>df</i>	χ^2/df	GFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
2-factor baseline model ^a	190.64	101	1.89	.909	.915	.929	.06
single second-order model ^b	60.794	25	2.432	.944	.932	.953	.07

^athis model has two separate factors, including Servant Leadership (SL) and Employee Engagement (EE).

^bthis model is used to assess a single composite measure construct: Employee Engagement (EE).

Table 4-4 *Measures Assessed at the Customer Level*

Factor	χ^2	<i>df</i>	χ^2/df	GFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
2-factor baseline model ^c	82.560	49	1.685	.968	.990	.993	.045
single second-order model ^d	50.954	24	2.123	.974	.987	.992	.053

^cthis model has two separate factors, including Customer Satisfaction (CS) and Customer Engagement (CE).

^dthis model is used to assess a single composite measure construct: Customer Engagement (CE).

$p < .01$

4.4 Validity

To test the validity of the model, this thesis conducted Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) by using AMOS 26 to measure the sample data (For level 1 measures,

N = 404; For level 2 measures, n = 229) which includes four constructs such as servant leadership, employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and customer engagement.

On one hand and through the confirmatory factor analysis, convergent validity and discriminant validity were assessed. For instance, convergent validity is supported when all calculated average variance extracted (AVE) exceed .5 threshold (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In some cases, AVE values up to .40 are considered acceptable given their centrality to the model and having a higher composite readability (Chin et al., 2003; Hatcher & O'Rourke, 2013). In this study, convergent validity was supported by the fact that all average variance extracted (AVE) equal to or exceeded .50 and ranged from .52 to .83. Further, composite reliability values ranged from 0.89 to 0.96 exceeding the recommended .60 threshold by Hair Jr et al. (2017). Thus, discriminant validity was satisfied using the above criteria. Additionally, the discriminant validity was supported as all the values of the square root of AVE were found larger than the inter-construct correlations or the squared multiple correlation coefficient as shown in Table 4-6 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

On another hand, as indicated by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), confirmatory factor analysis CFA results in convergence validity when the factor loadings for indicators are significant. In this case, the results indicate that factor loading for all constructs of the presented model, including higher-order factors of 'customer engagement CE' namely 'willingness-to-suggest WTS' and 'word-of-mouth WOM', were higher than the cut-off point value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). As shown in the "Standardized Regression Weights" reported in Table 4-5, the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results further supported the convergent validity of the measures

because the estimated standardized factor loadings ranged from 0.614 to 0.959 for all indicators and were significant at $p < .001$.

The above results indicated that all items effectively portrayed their intended constructs, thereby offering substantiation for the validity of the proposed research framework.

Table 4-5 *Confirmatory Factor Analysis Result for Convergent and Discriminant Analysis.*

Construct	Items	Standardized Factor Loading (λ)***	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Level one				
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	CS1	0,893	.94	.83
	CS2	0,959		
	CS3	0,88		
	WTS1	0,825		
	WTS2	0,806		
Customer Engagement (CE)	WTS3	0,922	.96	.75
	WTS4	0,843		
	WTS5	0,83		
	WTS6	0,832		
	WOM1	0,865		
Level Two	WOM2	0,954	.91	.52
	WOM3	0,911		
	EEv1	0,761		
	EEv2	0,841		
	EEv3	0,675		
Employee Engagement (EE)	EEd1	0,794	.89	.53
	EEd2	0,668		
	EEd3	0,748		
	EEa1	0,762		
	EEa2	0,642		
Level Three	EEa3	0,614	.89	.53
	SL1	0,758		
	SL2	0,684		
	SL3	0,626		
	SL4	0,853		
Servant Leadership (SL)	SL5	0,789	.89	.53
	SL6	0,647		
	SL7	0,727		

Note: *** $p < 0.000$ (two-tailed).

4.5 Reliability and Correlations

As shown below, Table 4-6 presents the reliability of the multi-item scales using the Cronbach's alpha: Servant leadership (.82), employee engagement (.87), customer satisfaction (.94), and customer engagement (.89). All the alpha coefficients were above the cut-off point of .7 indicating an acceptable level of internal reliability for each construct.

Table 4-6 also shows the correlations among the variables. It presents that servant leadership, the independent variable at the restaurant-level, was positively related to the outcome variables at the customer-level, customer satisfaction ($r = .40, p < .05$) and customer engagement ($r = .45, p < .05$). According to the same correlation table, there is a positive association between the level-three independent variable servant leadership and the first dependent variable at level-two employee engagement ($r = .41, p < .01$). Moreover, employee engagement at the employee-level is positively correlated with customer satisfaction ($r = -.21, p < .05$) and customer engagement ($r = -.30, p < .05$) at level-one which is the customer-level of the same restaurant.

Table 4-6 *Reliability, AVE, Mean Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between the Variables.*

	CS	CE	EE	SL
Level one				
CS	.91			
CE	.38**	.87		
EE	.21*	.30*		
SL	.40*	.45*		
Level Two				
EE			.75	
SL			.41**	
Level Three				
SL				.70
Internal Reliability (α)	.94	.89	.87	.82
Mean	6.02	5.4	5.6	5.5
SD	.85	.90	.77	.92

Note: a. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

b. SL = Servant Leadership; EE = Employee Engagement; CS = Customer Satisfaction; CE = Customer Engagement.

c. Boldfaced values represent the square root of AVE.

d. For level 1 measures, N = 404; For level 2 measures, n = 229; For level 3 measures, n = 32.

In conclusion, as anticipated, variables at the customer level represented by customer satisfaction and customer engagement were correlated positively with servant leadership variable. Employee engagement variable was also significantly correlated with servant leadership. It appears that the servant leadership variable have stronger relationships with the customer variables than the mediating employee variable; analysis and testing these relationships will be described shortly.

4.6 Common Method Bias

To examine common method variance, many procedural treatments as well as statistical were applied.

Procedurally, this survey was conducted using several restaurants across many famous regions in the country. Additionally, the data were collected from two sources: restaurant employees and their customers. Employees rated their managers leadership characteristics and their own work engagement in different timing (T1 & T2) while customers rated other constructs in a third wave (T3). Moreover, the titles of the variables and dimensions were excluded from the survey and the respondents were anonymous and were assured that there was no right or wrong answer to the survey questions. Finally, the respondents were asked to place the completed survey in a separately provided envelope, which then had to be sealed (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Statistically, to test the common method variance, Harman (1976) one-factor test was used. The resulted factor is 27.85% which is less than 50%. Therefore, the common method bias was not a major concern in the present study.

4.7 Data Aggregation

As a multilevel model was constructed for this study, investigating the appropriateness of the data aggregation to the team/restaurant level is necessary. This is to aggregate the employee scores of servant leadership items to the team or restaurant level and testing the between-group variance and within-group agreement. It is also required to assess team-level by examining their inter-rater agreement and testing the inter-rater agreement by computing the Rwg values of servant leadership

(James et al., 1984), between-group agreement, within-group agreement (Hofmann et al., 2000), intraclass correlations (ICC1), and the reliability of the mean (ICC2). The two intra-class correlation coefficients, ICC (1) and ICC (2), were calculated to test the variability between group mean. ICC (1) is defined as the degree of proportional consistency of the total variance that group membership can account for (Harrison & Klein, 2007; Klein et al., 2000). ICC (2) assesses the level of the group means' reliability.

In this study, the aggregation of ratings to the restaurant level was supported as the results showed that the large values for servant leadership was $Rwg = 0.89$ which exceeded the acceptable level of 0.7. The value of ICC (1) for servant leadership was 0.15. The findings of the one-way ANOVA also showed that the covariances among employees of a restaurant group were significant for servant leadership ($F = 41.385, p < 0.001$). Moreover, ICC (2) for servant leadership was 0.79 which were greater than the cut-off value of 0.7 (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Therefore, the reliability of the servant leadership (SL) measurement was confirmed at the restaurant level and aggregation is justified. Noting that the employees at every restaurant were asked to rate their manager for servant leadership on a 7-item scale.

4.8 HLM Results and Hypotheses Analysis

This study research problem consists of data on customers nested within employees who are serving them and employees nested within restaurants, the level-1 model will represent the relationships among the customer-level variables, the level-2 model will capture the influence of employee-level factors, and the level-3 model will incorporate restaurant-level effects. Formally there are $i = 1, \dots, n_{jk}$ level 1 units

(e.g., customers), which are nested within each of $j = 1, \dots, J_k$ level 2 units (e.g., employees), which in turn are nested within each of $k = 1, \dots, K$ level 3 units (e.g., restaurants).

HLM8 was used to conduct multilevel analyses and examine the multilevel conceptual model and hypotheses. The study used HLM 3 to test the effects of variables at level 3 (Servant Leadership) and level 2 (Employee Engagement) on variables at level 1 (Customer Satisfaction and Customer Engagement) and used HLM 2 to examine the influences of variables at level 3 (SL) on variables at level 2 (EE). Below is the summary of the model specified having two dependent outcome variables, customer satisfaction (CS) and customer engagement (CE):

The outcome variable is customer engagement CE:

Level-1 Model

$$CE_{ijk} = \pi_{0jk} + e_{ijk}$$

Level-2 Model

$$\pi_{0jk} = \beta_{00k} + \beta_{01k}(EE_{jk}) + r_{0jk}$$

Level-3 Model

$$\beta_{00k} = \gamma_{000} + \gamma_{001}(SL_k) + u_{00k}$$

$$\beta_{01k} = \gamma_{010} + u_{01k}$$

Mixed Model

$$CE_{ijk} = \gamma_{000} + \gamma_{001} * SL_k + \gamma_{010} * EE_{jk} + r_{0jk} + u_{00k} + u_{01k} * EE_{jk} + e_{ijk}$$

The outcome variable is customer engagement CS:

Level-1 Model

$$CS_{ijk} = \pi_{0jk} + e_{ijk}$$

Level-2 Model

$$\pi_{0jk} = \beta_{00k} + \beta_{01k}(EE_{jk}) + r_{0jk}$$

Level-3 Model

$$\beta_{00k} = \gamma_{000} + \gamma_{001}(SL_k) + u_{00k}$$

$$\beta_{01k} = \gamma_{010} + u_{01k}$$

Mixed Model

$$CS_{ijk} = \gamma_{000} + \gamma_{001} * SL_k + \gamma_{010} * EE_{jk} + r_{0jk} + u_{00k} + u_{01k} * EE_{jk} + e_{ijk}$$

where

π_{0jk} ($p = 0, 1, \dots, P$) are level-1 coefficients,

a_{pjk} is a level-1 predictor p for case i in level-2 unit j and level-3 unit k ,

e_{ijk} is the level-1 random effect, (deviation from the group mean)

$\beta_{00k}; \beta_{01k}$ ($q = 0, 1, \dots, Q_p$) are level-2 coefficients,

EE_{jk} is a level-2 predictor,

r_{0jk} is the level-2 random effect,

γ_{000} (grand mean); γ_{001} are level-3 coefficients,

SL_k is a level-3 predictor, and

u_{00k} is the level-3 random effect (deviation of restaurant k 's mean from the grand mean).

Noting that for starting values, data from 404 level-1 and 229 level-2 records were used and EE has been centered around the group mean. Whereas grand-mean-centering was used for level-1, the influence of customer individual attributes on satisfaction and engagement was assumed not to vary across restaurants (constant), and thus the coefficients of these covariates at were set to have no effect on level-2 model and same to employees on level-3 model. On another note, the researcher reported the pseudo R^2 as an indicator of goodness-of-fit measure where it is more applicable to this type of multi-level research model (Kreft & De Leeuw, 1998). As R^2 is used as a standard measure of goodness-of-fit for linear regression models, it might not be applicable in multi-level models due to the hierarchical nature of the data and the presence of clustered data. This study followed the formula proposed by Kreft and De Leeuw (1998) which is simply known as “KDL Pseudo R^2 ” and calculated as follow:

$$\text{KDL Pseudo } R^2 = 1 - [\text{Var}(\text{Residuals}) / \text{Var}(Y_{\text{observed}})]$$

To start with, following Raudenbush and Bryk (2002), the fully unconditional model allows estimation of variability linked to the three levels, i.e. customers, employees, and restaurants. This simple three-level model partitions the total variability in the outcome Y_{ijk} (CS, CE) into its three components: level-1 among customers within employees, σ^2 ; level-2 among employees within restaurants, τ_π ; and level-3 among restaurants, τ_β . It also allows us to estimate the proportion of variation that is within employees, among employees within restaurants, and among restaurants. This fully unconditional three-level model with no predictor variables specified represents how variation in an outcome construct is distributed across the three different levels of customer, employee, and restaurant.

Null model analysis:

According to Hofmann (1997) the first step involves the assessment of a significant between-group variance in customer-employee-restaurant levels. Thus, a null model was executed in which neither level 1 nor level 2 predictors were specified for the two dependent variables CS and CE. Analysis of these customer rated variables using a three-level null-model, intercept-only model, in the hierarchical linear modelling software HLM 8 (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) to partition the variance into the three levels simultaneously showed that 21% of the variance in customer satisfaction (CS) resided at the restaurant level, 41% resided at the employee level, and 38% resided at the customer level. For customer engagement (CE), 18% of variance resided at the restaurant level, 37% resided at the employee level, and 45% resided at the customer level. These results support the importance of investigating

the impact of level 3 on employee engagement and customer behaviour at the restaurant.

After the null model which was constructed to test whether there is grouping-level clustering effect, the testing of the hypotheses using different models were run using HLM3, Intercept-as-Outcome Model, level 2 variable, namely employee engagement was added into level 2 model to test the effect on dependent variables, i.e. customer satisfaction. Then HLM2 was used to test the relationship between servant leadership and employee engagement at level 2. Finally, the mediating effect was tested in HLM and using the estimation bias-corrected confidence intervals CI to test the indirect effects predictions with a bootstrapping procedure ($k = 1,000$) by Preacher and Hayes (2008).

Hypotheses Testing:

To start with, Tables 4-7, 4-8, and 4-9 show respectively the HLM3, HLM2, and Sample Bootstrapping results. Using HLM3 model, Table 4-7 presents the results of testing the relationship between servant leadership at level 3 and customer variables at level 1 and the cross-level interaction with employee engagement at level 2. In this study, Hypothesis 1 and 2 were set to predict that servant leadership is positively related respectively to customer satisfaction and to customer engagement. As shown in Model 1 for both dependent variables at level 1 of Table 4-6, servant leadership was positively related to customer satisfaction ($\gamma = .65, p < .05$), and positively related to customer engagement ($\gamma = .74, p < .05$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 were supported.

For Hypothesis 3 which posits that servant leadership is positively related to employee engagement, it was tested using HLM2 model and the results are shown in

Table 4-7. As it shows, servant leadership has significant main effects on employee engagement ($\gamma = .52, p < .05$) and therefore supporting Hypothesis 3.

In support of Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 5, Model 2 under both customer level variables of Table 4-7 shows the statistical results after including the effects of servant leadership in the model. On one side, employee engagement significantly predicts customer satisfaction ($\gamma = .19, p < .05$), lending support for Hypothesis 4 showing that employee engagement is positively related to customer satisfaction. On another side, Model 2 also shows significant effects of employee engagement on customer engagement ($\gamma = .25, p < .05$). Thus, the result shows that employee engagement is positively related to customer engagement and supports Hypothesis 5.

Table 4-7 *Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM3) Results: Relationship Between Servant Leadership, Employee Engagement, and Customer Outcomes*

Dependent variables at Level 1	Customer Satisfaction		Customer Engagement	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	3.36** (.14)	3.89** (.18)	3.53** (.17)	3.72** (.22)
Level 3				
Servant leadership	.65* (.27)	.64* (.25)	.74* (.11)	.61* (.16)
Level 2				
Employee Engagement		.19* (.08)		.25* (.07)
$\sim R^2$ (Employee level)		.10		.12
$\sim R^2$ (Restaurant level)	.13		.12	

Note: a. For Level 1 = customer level, N = 404; For Level 2 = employee level, n = 229; For Level 3 = restaurant level, n = 32

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed tests).

b. All parameters estimate to the predicting variables are unstandardized estimations of the fixed effects, γ_{000s} , with robust standard errors. Values in parentheses are standard errors.

Table 4-8 *Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM2) Results: Relationship Between Servant Leadership and Employee Engagement*

Variable at Level 2	Employee Engagement
Intercept	3.86*** (.16)
Level 3	
Servant leadership	.52* (.23)
$\sim R^2$ (Restaurant level)	.12

Note: For Level 2 = employee level, n = 229; For Level 3 = restaurant level, n = 32. The value in parentheses is the standard error.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed tests).

Finally, to test the mediating effect of employee engagement in the model, sample bootstrapping tests of indirect effects was used and the results are shown in Table 4-9 below. Following Preacher and Hayes (2008) to support Hypotheses 6 and 7 and show that employee engagement mediates (fully or partially) the positive relationship between servant leadership and customer satisfaction (H6) and customer engagement (H7), three steps were analyzed. First the mediation analysis with employee engagement as a mediator, second testing the direct relation on the dependent variable with controlling for employee engagement, and third testing the mediation effect of employee engagement. As shown in Table 4-9, in line with the HLM3 results, there is a significant positive relationship between the servant leadership SL and each dependent variables i.e., customer satisfaction CS and customer engagement CE in the presence of mediator employee engagement EE. However, the focus in this test is in understanding whether EE mediates (fully or partially) the tested relationship SL to CS and CE. Furthermore, the second step of the test and when controlling for the mediator EE shows that there is still a statistical significance of a positive relationship between the predictor SL and either CS or CE. Therefore, the mediator EE partially mediates the relationship between SL and the dependent variable being tested. Lastly, in conclusion, the sample bootstrapping tests of indirect effects indicate that servant leadership was related significantly and

indirectly through employee engagement to customer satisfaction, 95% confidence interval (CI) [.05, .17], $p < .05$ and to customer engagement, 95% CI [.07, .22], $p < .05$. Noting that the 95% confidence intervals did not include zero, indicating that the indirect effect was significant for both mediation.

Table 4-9 *Sample Bootstrapping Result: Cross-level Indirect Effects of Servant Leadership on Customer Satisfaction and Customer Engagement*

Dependent variables (DV) at Level 1	Customer Satisfaction	Customer Engagement
EE as mediator		
SL \rightarrow DV	.64*	.75*
SL \rightarrow DV, controlling for EE	.47*	.54*
SL \rightarrow EE \rightarrow DV	.17* (.05, .17)	.21* (.07, .22)

Note: Bias-corrected confidence intervals (for the indirect effects) are in parentheses. SL = Servant Leadership, EE = Employee Engagement.

* $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed tests).

In summary, Table 4-10 below presents the results of hypotheses testing using hierarchical linear modeling reported above. Given the significant research objectives of this study, the research hypotheses predicting the relationship of servant leadership with customer satisfaction and engagement and partially mediated by employee engagement were all supported from H1 – H7.

Table 4-10 *Results of Hypotheses*

<i>Servant Leadership is positively related to Customer Outcomes and Employee Engagement:</i>	
H1. Servant Leadership is positively related to Customer Satisfaction.	Supported
H2. Servant Leadership is positively related to Customer Engagement.	Supported
H3. Servant Leadership is positively related to Employee Engagement.	Supported
<i>Employee Engagement is positively related to Customer Outcomes:</i>	
H4. Employee Engagement is positively related to Customer Satisfaction.	Supported
H5. Employee Engagement is positively related to Customer Engagement.	Supported
<i>The mediation effect of Employee Engagement:</i>	
H6. Employee Engagement mediates the relationship between Servant Leadership and Customer Satisfaction.	Supported (Partially)
H7. Employee Engagement mediates the relationship between Servant Leadership and Customer Engagement.	Supported (Partially)

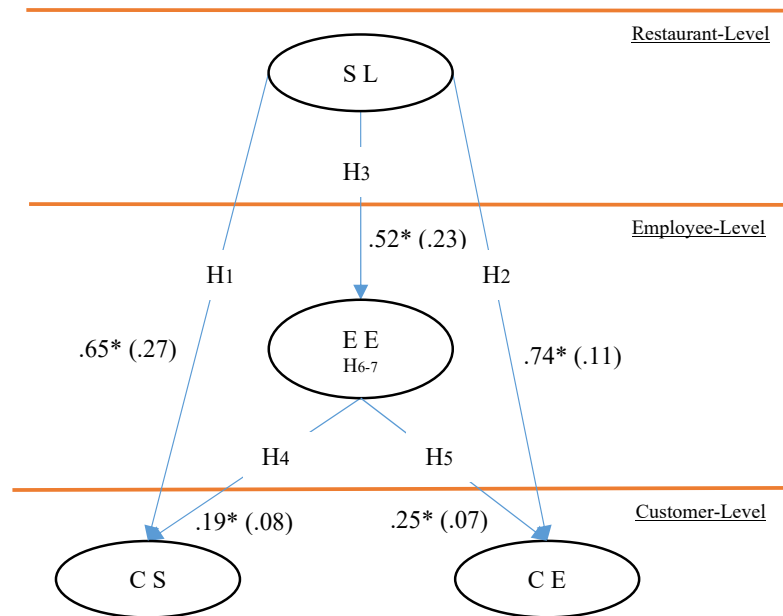


Figure 4-1. Multilevel Research Model Results

Notes: Level 1 = customer level; Level 2 = employee level; and Level 3 = restaurant level.

SL = Servant Leadership; EE = Employee Engagement; CS = Customer Satisfaction; CE = Customer Engagement.

4.9 Discussions

Almost all prior research of servant leadership in the hospitality context have focused on investigated its effects on employees and organizational variables (Ilkhanizadeh & Karatepe, 2018; Jang & Kandampully, 2018; Karatepe, 2013). Some other studies also explained the mediating role of the work engagement in the direct influence of servant leadership on job-related variables such as career satisfaction (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020) but not yet to the customer level. Additionally, in the service literature, the focus of research was on the influence of transformational leadership on service performance (Liao & Chuang, 2007). However, due to the unpredictable and abstract nature of customer service and the characteristics of the hospitality industry, the researcher of this study anticipated that servant leadership could have a more significant impact on employees attitudes compared to other leadership. This is primarily attributed to the developmental, self-reflective, and altruistic nature of servant leadership, which is lacking in transformational leadership and other leadership theories. Moreover, analyzed articles of the servant leadership studies were mainly founded in the mainstream management and leadership literature and recently in the hospitality literature (Brownell, 2010). Only few of these studies reached the customer level while explaining the effects of servant leadership in many context (Neubert et al., 2016). As such evidences are from outside the hospitality industry, this study argues that including customer views and data to test leadership concepts in hospitality research is a fundamental difference from mainstream research. The hospitality industry is customer and service oriented where servant leadership will have high impact on the organization, its employees, and customers as well. Analysis of variables related to customer experience in the hospitality context is novel in servant leadership research and goes beyond the structure proposed by prior

systematic reviews (Eva et al., 2019; Van Dierendonck, 2011). Added to that, this effect was assumed in the literature but has been rarely tested. To explain this trickle-down effect (restaurant-employees-customers) in the hospitality context, this study put forth a three-level multilevel conceptual model guided by the generalized exchange theory GET and the development theory of servant leadership. Based on a comprehensive literature review and to fill the research gaps related to servant leadership effect on the followers, this study proposed a conceptual model to test the significance of servant leadership on the customer satisfaction and engagement in mid-scale restaurants. Examining servant leadership in this context, mid-scale restaurant, is an important contextual factor that could influence the frontline service employees' work engagement, and thus be leveraged to explain the effect on the customer experience. All measurement items were adopted from previous studies ensuring the validity and the reliability assumptions as well as the adaptability of scale in multicultural contexts.

Extending prior research, this study found that servant leadership has direct positive influence on customer satisfaction and customer engagement. It also found that employees' attitude indicated by their level of work engagement mediated the relationships between servant leadership and customer satisfaction and between servant leadership and customer engagement. These results thus highlight the predictive validity of servant leadership in a hospitality service setting. As the first attempt in the hospitality literature, this study evoked the reciprocity processes specified in generalized exchange theory to explain the trickle-down influence of servant leadership. In particular, the explanation relied on the univocal reciprocity occurring under either the net form where the leader gives to the employees as team or under the chain form where the leader/manager gives to the team and expects the

reciprocity from the customers who have willingness to suggest improvements and positively recommend and sometimes comeback to the restaurant. The proven trickle-down effect of servant leadership on customers, through the mediation of follower outcomes, increases the importance of the phenomenon that was explained due to the nature of the hospitality industry which is highly devoted to customer service. The proposed multilevel process model and the findings are noteworthy because they combined three different field of study or distinct concepts of leadership, human resource, and marketing. While they are related and often interconnected in business settings, each of these areas focuses on different aspects of organizational functioning. In this context, servant leadership influences employee engagement which in turn leading to customer satisfaction and engagement in the restaurant.

Lastly, before getting to the theoretical contributions and managerial implications of this study in the coming chapter 5, a review of the research objectives is presented and explained in this discussion part below.

4.9.1 Research Objective One

The first aim of this study is to test whether servant leadership has direct and positive relationship with customer outcomes in terms of customer satisfaction and customer engagement. As hypothesized, the results of this study supported the influence of servant leadership on customer variables i.e., customer satisfaction and customer engagement observed through willingness to suggest and word of mouth. Prior studies tested many employee-related variables that showed positive effect on customer satisfaction (Kim, 2011) but still unclear if the leader directly influence the attitude and the behavior of the customers in restaurants which is also a challenge in

the restaurant business. Most of the leadership literature researched different types of leadership and their relationship with the followers, servant leadership on the other hand, as introduced by Greenleaf (1970) has the potential to affect the followers and all stakeholders including customers and even communities. In the development of the servant leadership theory, limited number of reviews papers came out proposing different frameworks to be used in future research to understand and advance the knowledge of this type of leadership (Eva et al., 2019). In line with one of the problem statement explained in this thesis, Solnet et al. (2016) determined that customers experiences as growing demand is one of the key challenges in the hospitality industry. As mentioned, restaurants have to keep their customers satisfied to stay competitive in the market. While customers search for empathetic and authentic experiences, this objective has been reached to assure that servant leaders can provide the foundation of delivering this customer oriented service. Additionally, in a recent conceptual academic paper, Chon and Zoltan (2019) urged further research by proposing that servant leadership has a positive effect on initiatives for the community and customers toward service experience. In response, the finding confirmed Hypothesis H1 that servant leadership is positively associated with customer satisfaction in the mid-scale restaurant. Customers are more likely to have better dining experience and feel they did the right thing in choosing a specific restaurant where the manager demonstrates characteristics of a servant leader. Moreover, Hypothesis H2 was also confirmed by the finding showing that the customers of a mid-scale restaurant, while the manager is present, are willing to engage more by suggesting improvements to the quality of food and service and by saying positive things about the restaurant and recommending others to visit it. Thus, adding to the solution to keep the restaurant competitive and increase the positive word-of-mouth.

From the perspective of servant leadership concept, the manager of the restaurant hold conceptual skills which makes this leader competent in solving work issues or complaints while behaving ethically including being honest, trustworthy, and understanding to the organization's goals. By practicing these characteristics, the customer may notice and therefore feel more satisfied with their dining experience and more likely to increase their level of engagement as described in the research model.

4.9.2 Research Objective Two

Another objective of this study is to understand the direct relationship between employee engagement and servant leadership from one side and customer satisfaction and customer engagement from another side. The findings disclosed a positive relationship for the three paths and respond to the main problem statement of the hospitality industry, i.e., keep low employees disengagement rate and increase their satisfaction and loyalty to decrease turnover intention.

At first, Hypothesis H3 confirmed that servant leadership has positive effect on employee engagement. The results suggest that management of restaurant that possesses servant leadership qualities empower their employees and fosters their engagement. That is, when the servant-led managers in the mid-scale restaurants send powerful signals to their employees about the presence of servant leadership characteristics and practices in form of showing ethical behavior and giving empowerment and trying to help them to enhance their performance, their employees experience higher levels of psychological empowerment leading to higher levels of work engagement. In line with previous research that discussed the positive influence

of servant leadership and its positive effect on work engagement in the hotel and airlines service (Karatepe & Talebzadeh, 2016; Ling et al., 2017), the findings of this thesis are in agreement with the mentioned studies.

Then, Hypothesis H4 was tested and supported the positive association between employee engagement and customer satisfaction. To keep their competitiveness, companies' effort lies in increasing their customers satisfaction and this is done by keeping their employees highly engaged. Employee Engagement, relatively new studied variable that goes beyond employee satisfaction, has shown positive findings in early research stage related to customer satisfaction. Previous studies focused on the conceptualization, though many definitions were presented, antecedents, on organization performance, and on other employee attitudinal variables (Babakus et al., 2017; Bakker et al., 2008; Putra et al., 2017). Other studies are considered as beginning attempts to link employee engagement to customers satisfaction. Zameer et al. (2018) demonstrated that employee engagement has a significant direct impact on customer satisfaction in the context of banking sector. Bilal et al. (2020) on the hand, found that teachers' work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption) and students' satisfaction are positively related. The role of the frontline employees has always been a vital in the business environment and specifically in the service industry for better service quality, organization performance, and therefore more satisfied customers. This study can be added to support, within its findings, the association of employee engagement and customer satisfaction.

Finally, the finding of Hypothesis H5 show a positive correlation between employee engagement and customer engagement. In this vein, more research reviews conceptually propose that employee engagement would result in effect on customer engagement if tested (Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Mittal et al., 2018). The current study

is first to empirically support conceptual proposals in a multilevel model to understand the effect of engaged employees on increasing restaurants' customer engagement.

Relying on the generalized exchange theory GET, the chain unilateral form, employees of the mid-scale restaurant, being energetic and enthusiastic about their work, showing high level of dedication, and feeling happy and immersed at work, reciprocate their level of engagement to their customers who will feel more comfortable and motivated to reciprocate their level of engagement in their willingness to suggest new ideas to the restaurant as well in their word-of-mouth to others encouraging them to dine at this restaurant. Thus, in the findings presented here, the study confirm the significant positive effect of the employees' engagement vigor, dedication, and absorption attitudes on the customers' engagement toward willingness to suggest improvements and positive word-of-mouth in the restaurant business.

4.9.3 Research Objective Three

The third objective of this study is to examine the mediating effect of employee engagement between servant leadership and customer outcomes i.e., customer satisfaction and customer engagement. Indeed, testing the mediating effect hypothesized by H6 and H7 respectively statistically showed that employee engagement partially mediates the relationship between servant leadership and customer satisfaction and between servant leadership and customer engagement in the context of restaurant industry. In a first notable recent review conceptual paper on servant leadership in hospitality, Chon and Zoltan (2019) stress on the important role and benefits of servant-led manager by providing synthesis of servant leadership

literature and originating many future research propositions. The authors proposed that “SL has a positive effect on customer outcome variables (e.g., guest loyalty, customization) through the mediation of employee-related variables (p. 3385)”, urging the need for future research in this direction. In this same vein, Neubert et al. (2016) used the hospital context to validate the fully mediation effect of nurse satisfaction between nurse servant-led managers and patient satisfaction. Due to the specific characteristics of the hospitality restaurant business and its customers, hospitality research on servant leadership is in demand.

In response to the above proposition and the gap in the literature, this study confirmed that an employee-related variable i.e., employee engagement partially mediates the positive relationship between servant leadership and customer outcome variables i.e., customer satisfaction and customer engagement. Moreover, explaining and justifying the mediation in a multilevel model as the one tested in this thesis needs to be based on a strong foundation theory to understand the cross-level variations and the relationship between the variables at the restaurant-level 3, employee-level 2, and customer-level 1. For that, this current research relied on the generalized exchange theory, GET, as the foundation of building the research conceptual multilevel model and to explain the mentioned mediation effect. GET includes, differing to the bilateral dyadic exchanges, three or more agents (i.e., customers, employee, restaurant managers) who will engage in a chain of multilateral exchanges and on the basis of the univocal principle of indirect reciprocity (Ekeh, 1974). In application, the manager who is present at the restaurant when the customers are served by their employees, demonstrate servant leadership characteristics (e.g., skills in solving work problems, caring about employees well-being and putting their needs first, empowering the employees of the restaurant and entrusts them with responsibility, autonomy, and

decision-making influence). This manager expects that practicing servant leadership will lead the restaurant employees to become more engaged at their work and exchange their high level of engagement with their customers. The customers, in turn, will feel more satisfied by the dining experience and show increase in level of engagement leading to an exchange behavior with the restaurant. They might suggest improvements in the quality of service and food, in the ambiance, design, and facilities, or any additional services that benefit the restaurant. Additionally, the servant-led restaurant manager assumes indirect reciprocity when the customers provide such suggestions and recommend this restaurant to friends and others. Suggestions for improvements to the restaurant and increase number of customers visiting to dine will reflect positively on the restaurant, represented by the manager practicing servant leadership. Lastly, it is worth noting that, as employee engagement *partially* mediates the relationship between servant leadership and customer outcomes, the manager and the employees have to be present at the restaurant to enhance the dining experience and increase satisfaction and engagement of their customers.

To conclude this part of the study, the analysis of the multi-level data found that servant leadership positively influences directly customer satisfaction and customer engagement and indirectly through employee engagement in the restaurant business. This empirical evidence provides support for the argument that the hospitality industries require servant leadership (Brownell, 2010), and that servant leaders employ efficient and effective direct values in the hospitality restaurant industry. The theoretical and managerial implications and contributions of the findings are discussed in the coming last chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Contributions

5.1 Introduction

Building on empirical findings and utilization of the generalized exchange theory GET and the newly developed servant leadership theory, the multilevel research model and tested hypotheses offer a number of theoretical contributions and practical implications. The thesis improves knowledge and practice of servant leadership in hospitality. It also add to the knowledge on the current employees and customers attitudes in the restaurant business. Moreover, the findings of this study provide a range of practical contributions for human resources, managers, marketers, and restaurant practitioners. This chapter discusses the main research contributions, limitations and suggests future research.

5.2 Research Contributions

5.2.1 Theoretical Contributions

The research focusing on the impact of servant leadership on employee attitudes and customer outcomes in the hospitality industry fills a gap in the field of leadership knowledge. This study aims to primarily explore how servant leadership influences employee engagement and customer satisfaction and engagement within a restaurant service environment, taking into account the perspectives of both employees and customers. The results associated with this study provided many theoretical, and empirical and methodological contributions and are presented in the following.

First, this thesis expand the knowledge of servant leadership by responding to the calls for more empirical research regarding the role of servant leadership with the followers and customers in the hospitality industry. As servant leadership is still underdeveloped theory (Eva et al., 2019), and while leadership differ by region and culture and in the characteristics of the context of the place and people, there is a need to explore and research in the literature. Furthermore, servant leadership is proven to have positive effect on many employees attitudes (e.g., satisfaction), showed negative effect on other variables such as turnover intention. Thus, solving some of the industry problems. In the same vein, the hospitality industry is in high demand for more leaders with ethical practices with care to the employees and customers to keep them motivated and engaged leading to profitability. This study proves that servant leadership could be one of the solution in the restaurant business to solve the work engagement issues. Hence, the results further added to the development of the servant leadership theory showing positive effect on employee engagement and customer satisfaction and engagement in the restaurant setting in a developing country.

Second, the current study incorporated a multi-level conceptual model by integrating the generalized exchange theory, GET, via employee engagement at level 2, to explain the relationships between servant leadership at the restaurant level 3 and customer outcomes variables of satisfaction and engagement at level 1. Most of the previous study of leadership relied on the social exchange theory in form of dyadic exchanges, the framework of this thesis brought a rarely used theory into the hospitality and leadership literature to explain and support the development of the servant leadership research. Generalized exchange theory identifies the actors at

different levels (organization, employee, and customer) in a social exchange situation where the first (manager/leader) exchange with another actor (employee) but expect reciprocity from the third actor (customer).

The findings anticipated a mutual advantage to hospitality and leadership / HR fields of study by associating a conceptual model framework of servant leadership and GET theories to employees' attitudes and customers behaviors issues in restaurant setting. Thus, this study contributes to the development theory of servant leadership (Eva et al., 2019) by providing a new understanding into the hospitality service literature and the generalized exchange theory. This thesis confirmed the applicability of the GET theory in the hospitality context.

The study also offers insights into servant leadership in different hospitality setting and cultural context unexplored in the literature as third theoretical contribution. Most of the previous studies in hospitality servant leadership focused on the lodging sector and very few on foodservice as contexts, with the majority of the samples from China and USA (Chon & Zoltan, 2019). With concentration of results from developed countries and similar culture, the same paper review revealed that there is a considerable research gap that would limit the representation and generalization of the research extant on servant leadership. Additionally, using the generalized exchange theory in fresh context and cultural across borders and specifically in the hospitality literature advance its generalization. Within the above calls, the findings of this thesis shed light on the relationship between servant leadership and customer satisfaction and behavior through employee engagement using data collected from a developing multicultural country. By exploring servant leadership practices in the casual mid-scale restaurant in less-developed countries, this

study provides new dimensions and broaden the scope of the generalized exchange theory.

The fourth contribution of this study lies in the methodology approach based on testing the theories (servant leadership and GET) using primary data to measure variables in a three-level research model. This current study brought theories, concept, and variables from leadership, psychology, and marketing into the model, enabling further understanding and inference towards measuring the practice of servant leadership in the context of hospitality and restaurant business. In addition, unlike the majority of previous hospitality research using two-level dyadic models, this thesis offers empirical evidences through cross-level perception to investigate the complex phenomena of servant leadership at three different levels (i.e., how restaurant managers' servant leadership influences employee level and customer level). Generally, this thesis contributes to the literature by developing a conceptual multilevel model that considers servant leadership effects on first-line employees attitude and customers' dining experience in the restaurant business. With its estimations of the mediating effects of employee engagement on the relationship between servant leadership and customer satisfaction and engagement, the present study adds empirical evidence to the leadership and hospitality literature. Thus responding to many hospitality servant leadership research calls (Chon & Zoltan, 2019).

Lastly, the cultural aspects of servant leadership have important, multilayered repercussions regarding customer outcomes. Because servant leadership focuses on serving the needs of others, it does not always operate well in every cultural context. This variability is, however, important in clarifying how this leadership style can be

adjusted in order to improve service and customer satisfaction in all contexts. Cultural values have been confirmed to contribute greatly to how leaders would act and the results of their actions. For example, Zhang's meta-analytic review shows that the relationship between servant leadership and employees' outcomes is moderated by culture, in this case being individual versus collectivist nature (Zhang et al., 2021). In those cultures described as collectivists, and where the focus is on the maintenance of group members on more relational constructs, there may be a stronger appeal to servant leadership, resulting in higher commitment and motivation among employees and better customer service. However, in cultures that emphasize individualism, the emphasis may be more in self-oriented goals and this may lessen the positive effects of servant leadership on customer outcomes. Lebanon is generally considered a collectivist society. This means that the needs and goals of the group (such as family, extended family, or community) are prioritized over the needs and desires of each individual. Therefore, this could explain the findings of this thesis that showed the positive impact of servant leadership on the employees and customers outcomes.

5.2.2 Managerial Implications

The findings of the current study also provide many practical implications for restaurant managers, human resources and training departments, marketers, and restaurant practitioners.

The results explained the relationship between servant leadership, employee engagement, and customer behavior in the restaurant business. It was found that servant leadership, as a management practice, fuel and increase the satisfaction of the

restaurant customers and let be more engaged. Additionally, the level of satisfaction and engagement of the customers is also elevated through employees who have high level of engagement with their work. Clark and Matze (1999) argued that the leadership trend in the new economy focuses on relationship-building between employees and their organizations. However, the findings of this study expanded the leadership knowledge beyond the dyadic relationship between the restaurants management and their employees. Servant leadership has effect and relationship with the customers visiting and dining at the restaurants. Therefore, the managerial implications of the results of this study are elaborated mainly for hospitality managers to revise their leadership practices as well for human resources and marketing departments.

To start with, for *human resources department*, while recruiting external or promoting internal managers who are the leader who will represent the restaurant, can benefit from the study findings. In the hiring process or in the promoting selection procedure, the HR department can evaluate whether applicants have the necessary servant leadership skills by using different tools including leadership types test. Additionally, restaurants can use the servant leadership scale in form of interview for the potential managers applying for the job or in form of survey for the current employees to rate their team member leader for promotion. In practice, behavioral interview questions can help identify a person's capacity to demonstrate specific leadership attitudes or behaviors by eliciting past examples of these qualities. Moreover, personality assessments, which consider traits like agreeableness and self-absorption, have been associated with servant leaders and can further inform selection or promotion decisions. Hiring or promoting more managers who embrace servant

leadership characteristics will create positive impact on the restaurants keeping employees loyalty and engagement high and leading to more satisfied customers.

Another initiative that the HR of the hospitality organizations can take is to design manager training programs for transforming managers into outstanding servant leaders. They can even integrate the dimensions of servant leaders, such as caring for subordinates, valuing individual needs, and emphasizing the quality of leader-follower relationships, into performance valuation to determine the efficiency of the leader. Thus, hospitality organizations can systematically produce servant leaders and create positive impacts on the organizations. Promoting servant leadership in restaurants has great potential for contributing to restaurants fulfilling their purpose and reaching their goals related to customer outcomes (e.g., guest loyalty, customer satisfaction, customer engagement) and employee attitudes (e.g., employee satisfaction and engagement).

Practically, servant leadership may be improved through training for current and future restaurant managers. These trainings should be followed by the right way of evaluating the behaviors showing servant leadership. First, promoting servant leadership as human resource practices is crucial to develop an empowering and employee-centered caring environment that satisfies the needs of the followers will foster their satisfaction and increase the level of their engagement and will enhance the customer experience thus the organization profitability. In addition, human resource development professionals should make sure to align the practices like recruitment, training, reward system, and others with the servant leadership style. Drawing of the results of this study, employees who interact with customers daily including the manager also contribute to the customers' experience, attitudes, and behaviors. Finally, effective management implementing servant leadership in its

organization should always motivate to keep employees engaged to guarantee future service competitiveness and increase the level of satisfaction and engagement of their customers in the restaurant through word-of-mouth beyond the visit.

In summary, hospitality organizations can promote servant leaders by implementing formal policies and human resources practices. This includes selecting or promoting managers with traits like optimism, integrity, and service orientation. Training programs help managers understand and adopt servant leadership principles, enhancing skills such as empathy and empowerment. Performance evaluations and rewards should recognize core attributes of servant leadership, encouraging managers to incorporate these principles into their daily work.

Then, *restaurant managers/servant leaders* have to know, based on the findings of the current research, that if practiced servant leadership with their presence in the restaurant, have direct effect and positively increase not only employees engagement but also their customers satisfaction and engagement.

On one hand, restaurant managers of casual mid-scale restaurant structure with few management layers (i.e., restaurant manager, supervisory level, front-line employees), enhances the relationship of servant leadership with customer satisfaction and customer engagement through employee engagement also points to a practical implication. While the finding of this study discloses that servant leadership is a key driver of restaurant frontline employees' work engagement, these restaurants' manager, scoring high on servant leadership characteristics, must enhance the positive attitudes of their employees by treating them with consideration, demonstrating a commitment to their needs, growth and development, and including them in decisions to let them think proactively, and most importantly empowering them by delegating

responsibility, autonomy, and decision-making influence. As the drivers of engagement are in the hand and controllable by the servant-led restaurant managers, it is highly recommended from them to assign jobs to their followers employees that utilize skills and abilities, to encourage them to innovate, to let them feel that they are being treated with trust and respect and working for a credible manager. Those employees will score high on the level of work engagement and therefore increase the level of satisfaction and engagement of their guests in the restaurants.

On the other hand, the study also pointed out that, practically, the manager acting as servant leader has a significant direct positive relationship with the restaurants guests' level of satisfaction from the dining experience and their engagement in terms of willingness to suggest and word-of-mouth. In this context, practices such as showing social acceptance, remaining authentic and humble in the presence of the employees and guests, offering support and care to the followers employees while at work, listening actively and using conceptual skills to address any problem at work or guests complaints, and expressing ethical behaviors, honesty and trust reflect a true servant leader/manager. Building on the findings of this study, it is recommended that restaurant managers implement these practices in their daily work while they are present in the restaurant. Thus, customers dining at the restaurant will notice most of these servant leadership practices adept by the manager and therefore, they feel they did the right choice visiting such restaurant and their dining experience was elevated leading to higher level of satisfaction. Additionally, the customers of the restaurant trustworthy and heard and taking care of, if they engage. At this point, it is highly recommended that managers pass by these satisfied customers to ask for their feedback and listen to their suggestions as they are willing to present some improvements on different aspects of the restaurant and dining experience (e.g.,

quality of food and service provided by the restaurant, any additional services, ambience, design, and facilities). In this case, more training for those leaders on problem-solving and complaint response techniques in addition to communication-with-customers skills workshops may be especially necessary in hospitality and restaurant business.

Restaurant customers themselves can benefit from having an employee who acts as a servant leader, turning their experience inside the restaurant into something even better. Chameleonic, humble, attentive managers make people feel important which wins their respect and later on builds their loyalty. It is very helpful when managers ask guests for feedback and suggestions and spend time talking to them. It's not only how customers feel served but it also helps them feel part of the answer to the restaurant's requirements. Also, feedback is crucial when the client has some complaints, it is great for them to receive feedback solved with understanding and proper solutions to the problems. This interaction not only makes customers feel heard but also empowers them to contribute to the restaurant's success. Moreover, when managers address complaints with empathy and effective problem-solving skills, it reassures customers that their satisfaction is a top priority. As a result, customers are more likely to recommend the restaurant to others, sharing their positive experiences through word-of-mouth. To further enhance this dynamic, restaurants could benefit from training programs that equip managers with advanced communication and customer engagement skills, ensuring that every guest leaves with a memorable and satisfying experience.

Finally, the findings of this study also disclose that the customers of restaurants managed by servant leaders are not only willing to suggest any improvements to the restaurant, but also they are willing to spread the word about

their dining experience. Therefore, collecting feedback using the specific willingness to suggest (WTS-scale) including the improvements aspects mentioned in this study is highly recommended to the *marketing* department. Thus increasing the customers' engagement with the restaurant.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

Despite its theoretical and practical contributions, this study is not without limitations which are explained here and recommendation for future research are mentioned.

First, examining attitudes and behaviors is a wide concept. This current study included only one mediator acting as an outcome variable for servant leadership and a predictor for customer satisfaction and engagement. Thus, it didn't include all possible response variables for servant leadership. Added to that, employee engagement partially mediates the relationship between servant leadership and customer outcomes; This finding suggests that there are other mediators that transmit the favorable impact of servant leadership on customer satisfaction and engagement. Future research may look into other variables that could be tested at the employee level and add comprehensive results and extend the findings of this study.

Second, comparing with other styles of leadership, some characteristics overlaps as explained in the literature, this study explored only servant leadership. Other studies have shown positive results of servant leadership when still adding transformational leadership into the model (Chen et al., 2015). This is mainly because servant leadership has a developmental, self-reflective, and altruistic orientation, whereas transformational leadership does not. It is highly recommended to control another type of leadership such as transformational leadership,

empowerment leadership, or charismatic leadership while testing the model to explain servant leadership above and beyond them.

Third, organization size and context play an important role in leadership studies. The testing of the current model in flat type restaurants was a strength to this study. The mid-scale restaurant context showed positive relationship between servant leadership and customer outcomes as the manager is most of the time presents and communicates with the customers. However this study did not check the organization size in terms of small or big operations, number of seats or customers flow, or even sales. To generalize the current model and results to other industries or even hotels should be treated with caution. Future research should examine the effects of servant leadership on customer outcomes in another service industries such as banks, healthcare to extend the external validity of the current findings and mainly control for organization size. It is expected that the positive relationships between servant leadership and many follower and customer outcomes may persist in diverse samples but the influence of organizational structure if treated as moderator will change based on the context.

Forth, another weakness of this study lies in the design of the research. Although this study tested an advance modeling approach, three-level multilevel model, to examine the relationship between variables at different levels, the cross-sectional design might preclude the research ability to make causal inferences. For example, it is possible that individual employee attitudes (i.e., employee engagement) influenced by customer experience, reinforce and encourage servant leader behaviour with continued engagement. Future studies on this topic could collect time-series data to employ a longitudinal research design. This, not only to address the causality issue, but also to reduce potential common method variance CMV related overestimation of correlation coefficients. However, this current thesis reduced the influence of CMV by separating the collection in time and collecting from multiple sources. Future studies would also consider to report quantitative or qualitative data from the perspective of the

leader/manager, an ideal to extend the current findings. By applying longitudinal designs or even experimental research, servant leadership studies would be more beneficial to test particularly the effectiveness of leadership training programs as suggested previously in the practical contributions.

Last but not least, another possible limitation related to the data analysis, is using the Pseudo R^2 to explain the goodness-of-fit measure and the amount of variance explained by the model. However, this current study justified carefully the interpretation of the Pseudo R^2 supported and based on the model's context, theory, and the research objectives. As with any goodness-of-fit measure, it's essential to interpret the Pseudo R^2 in the context of the research problem and consider the practical implications of the results. A model with a relatively low Pseudo R^2 might still be useful and provide valuable insights if it aligns with the theoretical expectations or contributes to a better understanding of the data. Therefore, future multilevel model research should not only interpret Pseudo R^2 with caution but also consider to assess the model in conjunction with other model diagnostic and statistical assessments and visualizations to ensure the validity and reliability of the model.

Further to the above, although only few research have studied antecedents of servant leadership behaviors focusing on the leader's personality and gender with positive relationship (Eva et al., 2019) and on emotional intelligence but no significant relationship (Barbuto Jr et al., 2014), all were outside the hospitality context. Therefore, the researcher of this thesis highly recommend future research on antecedent variables (e.g., agreeableness, likeability personality, and emotional intelligence) of servant leadership in the hospitality or hotel contexts as they still lack in the hospitality literature.

5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis extended the leadership and hospitality literature and studies of employee engagement and customer outcomes with strong support for the proposed hypothesized model. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between servant leadership and customer outcomes and the role of employee engagement through the context of Lebanese restaurants. All research objectives were accomplished. Building upon the underdeveloped servant leadership theory and generalized exchange theory, this study predicted and found that a restaurant manager leader's servant leadership promoted restaurant dining experience in boosting customer satisfaction and engagement through its prominent influence on employees' work engagement. Specifically, the findings of the first objective revealed that the restaurant manager with servant leadership characteristics has direct effect and increase customers satisfaction during dining. The same leader positively influence their engagement as well. In the presence of servant leaders, customers are more likely to engage in the restaurant and suggest improvements and positively promote and recommend it through word-of-mouth. Another objective of this study was to understand the effect of such leader on employees attitude. The findings suggest that servant leadership boosts employee engagement in restaurants. Added to that, the results also showed a mediating role for the employee engagement between servant leadership and customer satisfaction and engagement. Together, these rationales and findings constitute a significant contribution to the understanding of servant leadership, employee engagement, and customer attitude and behaviors in restaurant settings. Finally, this thesis would stimulate future research in the same area of servant leadership in different settings and cultural contexts.

Appendices

Appendix I. Questionnaire for Employee

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am pursuing my PhD study on the topic of servant leadership, employee attitudes, and customer outcomes restaurants. For the following questions, there is no right or wrong answer. Your participation in the survey is very important to the completion of the study and much appreciated. Your responses will remain anonymous and strictly confidential, as only aggregate results will be reported in any publications and will be only used for academic research purposes. If you would like to have more information regarding this research, please feel free to contact me.

It should take about **5 minutes** to complete the questionnaire.

Sincerely,

Maroun E. Aouad, PhD candidate

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Tel: + (852) 9256

Email: maroun.aouad@polyu.edu.hk

Part one:

1. Please choose the most suitable number for your truthful opinion. Mark your answer with “✓” beneath the number you choose. Please rate your level of agreement on the following statements with:

Leader = Restaurant Manager (RM)	strongly disagree 1	disagree 2	slightly disagree 3	neutral 4	slightly agree 5	agree 6	strongly agree 7
SL1. My leader can tell if something work-related is going wrong.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SL2. My leader makes my career development a priority.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SL3. I would seek help from my leader if I had a personal problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SL4. My leader emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SL5. My leader puts my best interests ahead of his/her own.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SL6. My leader gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that I feel is best.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SL7. My leader would NOT compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. Please choose the most suitable number for your truthful opinion. Mark your answer with “✓” beneath the number you choose. Please rate your level of satisfaction on the following statements with:

	Strongly disagree 1	disagree 2	Slightly disagree 3	neutral 4	Slightly agree 5	agree 6	strongly agree 7
EEv1. At my work, I feel bursting with energy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
EEv2. At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
EEv3. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
EEd1. I am enthusiastic about my job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
EEd2. My job inspires me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
EEd3. I am proud of the work that I do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
EEa1. I feel happy when I am working intensely.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
EEa2. I am immersed in my work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
EEa3. I get carried away when I am working.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Part two: Background Information

Please mark your answer with “✓” for each question based on your truthful opinion.

3. Gender:

☐ 1. Male

☐ 2. Female

4. What is your age? Years.

5. What is the highest level of education you have attained?

☐ 1. Less than secondary/high school

☐ 2. Completed secondary/high school

☐ 3. Some college or university

☐ 4. Completed college/university diploma/degree

☐ 5. Completed postgraduate degree

6. How long have you been working in the industry (hotel or restaurant)?

Months

Years

7. How long have you been working in the restaurant?

Months

Years

8. Please specify your current position in this restaurant: _____.

Please check again to ensure you have finished all the questions. Then return the questionnaire in the enclosed envelop and submit it to the researcher.

I highly appreciated your participation!

THANK YOU SO MUCH

Appendix II. Questionnaire for Customer

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am pursuing my PhD study on the topic of servant leadership, employee attitudes, and customer outcomes restaurants. For the following questions, there is no right or wrong answer. Your participation in the survey is very important to the completion of the study and much appreciated. Your responses will remain anonymous and strictly confidential, as only aggregate results will be reported in any publications and will be only used for academic research purposes. If you would like to have more information regarding this research, please feel free to contact me.

It should take about 4 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Sincerely,

Maroun E. Aouad, PhD candidate

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Part one:

1. Please choose the most suitable number for your truthful opinion. Mark your answer with “✓” beneath the number you choose. Please rate your level of agreement on the following statements with:

	Strongly disagree 1	disagree 2	Slightly disagree 3	neutral 4	Slightly agree 5	agree 6	strongly agree 7
CS1. Overall, I was satisfied with my experience dining at this restaurant.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
CS2. I think I did the right thing in visiting this restaurant.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
CS3. My choice to visit this restaurant was a wise one.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Strongly disagree 1	disagree 2	Slightly disagree 3	neutral 4	Slightly agree 5	agree 6	strongly agree 7
WTS1. If given a chance, I am willing to suggest improvements in the quality of service provided by restaurant employees.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
WTS2. If given a chance, I am willing to suggest improvements in the quality of food provided by the restaurant.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
WTS3. If given a chance, I am willing to suggest additional services.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
WTS4. If given a chance, I am willing to suggest improvements in ambience.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
WTS5. If given a chance, I am willing to suggest improvements in design.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
WTS6. If given a chance, I am willing to suggest improvements in facilities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
WOM1. I will say positive things about this restaurant.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
WOM2. I will encourage family and friends to visit this restaurant.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
WOM3. I will recommend this restaurant to someone who seeks my advice.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Part two: Background Information

Please mark your answer with “✓” for each question based on your truthful opinion.

2. Gender:

☐ 1. Male

☐ 2. Female

3. In which of the following age groups do you belong?

☐ Under 181

☐ 46-555

☐ 18-252

☐ 56-656

☐ 26-353

☐ 66 or above7

☐ 36-454

4. What is the highest level of education you have attained?

☐ 1. Less than secondary/high school

☐ 2. Completed secondary/high school

☐ 3. Some college or university

☐ 4. Completed college/university diploma/degree

☐ 5. Completed postgraduate degree

5. What is your nationality?

☐ 1. Lebanon

☐ 2. Others, please specify _____.

6. Is this your first visit to this restaurant?

☐ 1. YES

☐ 2. NO

Please check again to ensure you have finished all the questions. Then return the questionnaire in the enclosed envelop and submit it to the researcher.

I highly appreciated your participation!

THANK YOU SO MUCH

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