

# Challenges Facing Health Food Product Customers Among Restaurants in Nairobi City, Kenya

Carolyn Khasoa Wasike<sup>1</sup>, Barasa Remmy Shiundu<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Technical University of Kenya, Nairobi, Kenya

<sup>2</sup>Kaimosi Friends University, Kaimosi, Kenya

**Abstract**— Health food products have developed considerably through the ages due to the benefits they bring to consumers. However, not all outlets have leveraged on this market opportunity nor focused on meeting customer expectations. As a result of limited investment of outlets in health foods, customers face many challenges. The purpose of this paper is to investigate challenges facing health food product customers among restaurants in Nairobi city, Kenya. The study adopted a cross sectional analytical design which was conducted in 74 health food restaurants of Nairobi City, Kenya. While a total of 401 customers were approached, a response rate of 89% was achieved, accounting for 357 questionnaires. The results indicate that customers faced many challenges while sampling health food products in restaurants of Nairobi city. Challenges faced include: finding their favorite products out of stock (22.6%); doubts on raw materials used to prepare the health food products/finding their favorite product out of stock (22%) and highly priced products (19.4%). Other challenges were doubts on the raw materials used to prepare health food products (11.8%); poor quality products (11%), small portion/highly priced products (9.5%). This study concludes that prominent factors such as finding favorite product on offer out of stock, doubts on raw materials used to prepared health food products and highly priced products could be exploited by health food product outlets offering health food products to reduce challenges. Other challenges minor challenges such as poor quality products and small portion could also be resolved to improve customer eating experience.

**Index Terms**— health food products, health food challenges, food in restaurants, Nairobi city foods, healthy food product market.

## 1. Introduction

Various studies have been conducted on content of food and food choices for various groups of people (Zick, Wake, Reeves, 2013; Paul Gamble, Roger Gentry, Michael Kipps, (1980). There is, however. Limited data on health food choices for the general population. Indeed, O’Gorman (2009) agrees that the hospitality sector is historical plagued with limited investment in studies on food products and customer eating out habits. Legrand & Sloan (2015) on their part argues that the limited research versus the rapid changes in eating out habits among customers contribute to the many challenges that customers face while dining out. This change in customer expectations and needs among customers when eating made it more difficult for eating outlets and their employees to satisfy health food product

customers. The shift in customer eating out habits was accelerated by the benefits sought by customers from what they consume (Benalam, 2014). It however, emerged that catering outlets had limited capacity to meet the changing health food customer needs (Hwang & Lorenzen, 2012). This study set out to investigate, challenges faced by health food product customers among restaurants in Nairobi city, Kenya.

## 2. Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional analytical design whose sample study cites were drawn from 317 restaurants in Nairobi City, Kenya as listed by Trip Advisor.com. Out of the 317 listed restaurants in Nairobi city, 147 were flagged as health food outlets. A total of 74 restaurants were randomly sampled and included in the study, which is 50% of the total number of health food restaurants in Nairobi city. Respondents were 401 customers whereby 357 responded yielding a response rate of 89% from the researcher administered questionnaires. Findings were then analysed to identify health foods products consumed and the gender of health food product customers among restaurants of Nairobi city, Kenya.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

Challenges faced by customers when sampling healthy food product was an important factor in at the market. The study found that customers faced various challenges when dining as shown in table 1.

Findings in table 1 above show that among the challenges that customers faced when sampling health food products in restaurants were: finding their favorite products out of stock (22.6%); doubts on raw materials/found their favorite product out of stock (22%); and highly priced products (19.4%). Other challenges were doubts on the raw materials used to prepare healthy eating products (11.8%); poor quality products (11%); small portion/highly priced products (9.5%) as shown (table 1).

The first biggest challenge faced by customers when sampling health food products in restaurants of Nairobi city was finding their favourite product out of stock (22.6%). This was because the demand of selected products was higher than the volume that restaurants offered. This meant that the production levels of the health food products were not proportional market

\*Corresponding author: rshiundu@kafu.ac.ke

Table 1  
Challenges faced by health food product customers whenever they out in restaurants

Challenge faced by customers	N=385	%
Finding my favorite product out of stock	87	22.6%
Finding product out of stock/doubts on the raw materials	84	22 %
Highly priced products	75	19.4%
Doubts on the raw materials used	45	11.8%
Poor quality products	45	11%
Small portion/highly priced products	37	9.5%

*Key*

HEP: Healthy Eating Product Material

Challenges faced by health food customers was significant in market growth

demand. According to Future data statistics (2024), the market growth for unique products drives outlets to rethink their capacity and innovative approaches in meeting personalized customer eating perspectives. Customers finding their favorite products out of stock exposes the capacity weakness in health food product restaurants. This is an indicator of operation managers whose health food market demand dynamics understanding was wanting. Hwang & Lorenzen, (2012) agree that most catering outlets are unfamiliar with the health food product concept and lack the capacity to offer health food products that meet the needs of the health food product market.

The second largest proportion of customers faced challenges in either challenged by either finding find their favorite product out of stock or by doubts on the source of raw materials used to prepare the healthy eating products (22%). Vinicious, Campos, Rochar, Emmendoerfor, Vidigal, Soue da rocha, Dela Lucia, Cabral, carlvarho and perrone (2021) argue that, healthiness of food products on offer had an impact on customer food choices and eating out trends. These scholars (Vinicuous et al., 2021) further confirm that indeed, perceptions on healthiness of food have an influence on attitudes that customers develop towards food products on offer in eating outlets.

This means the customers cast their doubts on the nutritional value of the products as well as the general quality of healthy eating products on offer in eating outlets. Indeed, Ditlevsen, Sandøe & Lassen (2019) agree that based on the doubts that health food customers cast of the healthiness of ingredients used in food preparation, most prefer organic foods. Ditlevsen et al., (2019) report that the preference of organic foods by restaurant was based on the fact that organic foods were free of toxins and drug residues. Since food content perceptions by customers, affect the demand and supply aspects, demystifying ingredient quality by food operators would be vital in building customer confidence and growing the health food market.

Last but not least, was highly priced products (19.4%). This challenge could be attributed to the fact that most restaurants sourced materials for their products from the outskirts of the city, which increased the cost of the final product. Highly priced products could also be attributed to the fact that health food products require to be prepared by employees trained in this area. For outlets to equip their employees with these specialized skills, more resources would be required increasing expenses on staffing which are eventually reflected at the point-of-sale prices. Zick, Wake, Reeves (2013) effects of calorie labelling of foods at the point of purchase found that implementation of calorie labelling increased the costs per menu. According to the trio, this increased operational expenses that are reflected in the

point-of-sale prices. Indeed, Outlets which invest in health food product capacity building require resource allocation whose cost is passed to customers. This means that products such as health foods that need specialized staff would be more costly than other conventional foods.

Lastly were poor quality products (11%). Poor quality of products was attributed to customers' doubts on the source of raw materials used to prepare the products as well as the features of the final products on offer. Hwang and Lorenzen (2008) agree that lack of capacity, in technical skills and knowledge among restaurant staff in health food products is one of the reasons behind the challenges they faced in meeting the needs of the health food product market.

#### 4. Summary of Findings

Challenges that customers faced when sampling healthy eating products was finding their favorite products out of stock (22.6%); doubts on raw materials/found their favorite product out of stock (22%); and highly priced products (19.4%). Other challenges were doubts on the raw materials used to prepare healthy eating products (11.8%); poor quality products (11%); small portion/highly priced products (9.5%) as shown (table 4.16).

#### 5. Conclusion

Finding favorite product out of stock, doubts on raw materials used to prepare health food products and highly priced products were the major challenges that impeded on customers sampling healthy food products in restaurants. Resolving the challenges would thus be vital in growing the health food product market.

#### References

- [1] Benelam, B. (2014). Calories on the menu, *Nutrition Bulletin*, vol. 34, no. 3, pp. 289-90.
- [2] Ditlevsen K., P. Sandøe, P. & Lassen J., (2019) Healthy food is nutritious, but organic food is healthy because it is pure: the negotiation of healthy food choices by Danish consumers of organic food, *Journal of food quality and preference*, Volume 71, pp. 46-53
- [3] Future data statistisa report (2024). Catering Market Size, Share, Trends and competitive analysis by type: On premise catering and off premise catering by application Regions and industry Forecasts. Accessed at <https://www.futuredatastats.com/catering-services-market>
- [4] Hwang, J., & Lorenzen, C.L. (2012). Effective nutrition labelling of restaurant menu and pricing of health menu. *Journal of Food Service*, Vol. 19, No. 5, pp. 270-276.
- [5] Pinto A. R. V., Rafael Faria de Abreu Campos A. D. R., Rocha F., Emmendoerfer L. M., Vidigal, R. T., C. M., Samuel José Silva Soares da Rocha, S. S. J. S., Della L. M. S., Cabral, M. F. L., Carvalho. D.F.A., Perrone, T.I., (2021) Perceived healthiness of foods: A systematic review of qualitative studies: Future foods.