

# Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction in Medium-Sized Fast-Food Chains: A Literature Review

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**Abstract**—This literature review takes a closer look at how service quality influences customer satisfaction in medium-sized fast-food chains—a segment of the food industry that’s growing more competitive every day. As customers become more discerning and choices multiply, delivering excellent service has become essential not just for attracting customers, but for keeping them coming back. This review brings together key findings from past research to explore the main elements of service quality—such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and physical appearance—and how they shape the way customers experience fast-food services. By examining studies, models, and industry insights, this paper highlights how medium-sized chains often set themselves apart from large global brands. These businesses tend to focus more on personalized service, understanding local customer needs, and being flexible in their operations. It also looks at the growing importance of customer feedback, new ways of improving service, and how engaged employees can make a real difference in customer satisfaction. The review finds that while there’s a strong link between good service and happy customers, other things like food quality, prices, convenience, and brand image also matter. One clear takeaway is that more attention needs to be paid to medium-sized players, as they are often overlooked in existing research. This study not only deepens our understanding of what drives satisfaction but also offers practical insights for managers aiming to raise service standards and build lasting relationships with their customers.

**Keywords**— Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Medium-Sized Fast-Food Chains, Customer Experience, Service Innovation Food Service Industry.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Service quality is one of the major success factors in the fast-food industry since it affects customer satisfaction, customer retention, and customer loyalty. Today’s customer expectations and competition in the fast-food industry is bringing a new challenge. It is no longer enough for chains to only excel at speed and convenience.

As competition continues to grow, fast-food chains must not only focus on delivering fast service but also ensure that service quality is consistently maintained across various dimensions. These include tangibility, assurance, reliability,

empathy, and price—each of which plays a pivotal role in shaping customers' overall satisfaction. Tangibility, which includes the physical environment, facilities, and appearance of employees, directly impacts how professional and appealing a fast-food chain appears to customers. Assurance, reflecting the competence and trustworthiness of staff, builds customer confidence and enhances the overall experience. Trust and reliability depend on dependability, which is the capacity to always keep one's word. Empathy relates to the personalized service customers receive, which can make them feel valued and cared for, while price concerns the perceived value for money, ensuring that customers feel their experience is worth the cost.

The literature also examines how service quality influences long-term loyalty. Loyalty represents a more profound and lasting emotional bond with a brand, whereas client satisfaction is often a transient result. Loyal customers are more likely to continue patronizing a particular fast-food chain even when alternatives are available.

## II. DISCUSSIONS

### *Service Quality of Fast-Food Chains*

The first section examines customer satisfaction whether the food or product meets the customer’s needs. The literature review emphasizes the importance of customer satisfaction in medium-scale fast food chains in Bogo City. The following chapters discuss the company's customer retention rate and capacity to maintain customer loyalty. The review of related literature emphasizes the importance of the customer retention rate in fast food chain. The next sections determine the concept of service quality in the context of fast-food industries. It examines aspects of service quality, reviews on theoretical models used, which includes responsiveness, dependability, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. The literature review emphasizes the importance of service quality as a predictor of customer satisfaction and its function in meeting the customer expectations and needs.

Consequently, this presents a compilation of the most pertinent findings and insights derived from the literature review, providing a solid foundation for the subsequent discussions and analysis.

#### *Service quality*

Kandeepan et al. (2019) conveyed that service quality is the extent to which a given service meets the customer's expectations. Customers indeed have and should be one of the most important motivations or indicators, which serve as a business performer (Dugenio-Nadela C. et al, 2023). Willot reports (2020) mentions that service quality impacts customer loyalty to a brand and 96% branded service consumers across the globe agree with this service- branded loyalty correlation. Further explanation is provided by Marković et al (2015), that service quality has influence on customer satisfaction as well as to customer loyalty. This research studies and analyzes deeply the perception of fast-food service quality by customers and to what extent the SERVQUAL model is applicable with its five dimensions of tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy. From many reasons why customer satisfaction and loyalty are improved, service quality becomes pivotal by (Ismail & Yunan, 2016) argues the best motivational customer service measurement is the SERVQUAL model.

The tangible dimension focuses on a range of equipment where fundamental needs are being catered to; a client would usually brand/product loyal and is hesitant to take risks trying new things (Grageda et al., 2022). Most likely the most important factor is reliability. This dimension is concerned with the proper maintenance of service issues, the proper execution of services, and the maintenance of logs of every action taken, as put forth by Parasuraman et al (1988) and Al-Ababneh (2016). This dimension refers to the completion of an order as guarantee servicing accuracy which includes quoting, recording, and invoicing.

Employees' readiness and willingness to deliver a service constitutes a part of responsiveness, and in this case can lead to exceeding customers' expectations (Parasuraman et al 1988; added by Al-Ababneh 2016). As captured by Parasuraman et al. (1988) and Al-Ababneh (2016), assurance involves degree of respect offered by an employee, his/her knowledge, and whether he/she is in a position to command confidence. Illustrations of assurance include a true comfortable interior, approachable and pleasant managers and staff, unobstructed access to account information, furnished guide on finances, as well as an evinced and adept management. What lacks in most organization is the specific attention and concern of the consumers which is termed as empathy (Parasuraman et al. 1988, Al-Ababneh 2016).

Furthermore, Parasuraman et al. (1988) gave more examples of customer empathy, such as paying close attention to them and maintaining convenient hours. Empathy is a quality that can enhance business effectiveness. According to Gunawan and Wahyuni (2018), service is an intangible activity that entails meeting a client's needs. It is an exceptional output standard that benefits and fulfills client expectations. This research aims to highlight the role of service quality in fast

food sectors. In addition, (Ansari & Jalees 2018) noted that enhancing service quality at restaurants would lead to customer satisfaction and will afford an edge over competitors by capturing a segment that is largely perceived as bounded. It tends to serve as a perception and subjective factors vary greatly among different people. Consumers tend to pay attention to how a certain product or service fares in relation to its competitors. As Setiawan put it so succinctly (2017), service quality represents the gap between a customer's perception and the actual experience of services rendered to them. Most certainly, services rendered to customers has a significant impacted the customer's behavior (Rita et al., 2019). Whether a particular product or service has satisfied the customer's expectations is the basis of their evaluation (Mansouri et al., 2022). Customers during this process tends to evaluate compare actual performance against set expectations, and in situation where the product or services meets exceeds expectations, satisfaction will be attained (Mansouri et al., 2022). This review looks at the available literature on performance within the industry in relation to customer's satisfaction.

*Tangibility.* "The appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials" is included under tangibles. Buildings are renovated, which alters their general look, and employees and machinery have a unique vibe. Tangibles include cleanliness of toilets, restaurant and other parts of the building, uniforms worn by employees, use of disposable gloves by employees, and so on (Abdulla et al., 2017). Out of the other five dimensions, the majority of clients view this one as the most crucial. It offers visual evidence of the images of services that clients, especially new clients, will use to evaluate the level of service provided. While these elements are meant to strengthen reputation, ensure uniformity, and signal quality, most companies tend to integrate them. In an attempt to establish a service quality framework for the company, they combine all elements including tangibles with others. (Anwar & Balcioglu, 2016).

In the competitive landscape of fast food, where customer expectations are high, maintaining a strong focus on tangibles can lead to improved customer perceptions, increased satisfaction, and ultimately, loyalty to the brand. By prioritizing the physical representation of their services, medium-scale fast-food chains can create a positive dining experience that resonates with consumers and fosters long-term relationships.

*Assurance.* "The competence and politeness of the workers, as well as their capacity to inspire trust and confidence, suggests certainty." Customers must trust and establish trust since regretting purchases is not an option (the money and time spent). A consumer needs to feel safeguarded when utilizing different services, alongside secure accommodation during their stay (Anwar & Louis, 2017). Based on the research done by (Cronin & Taylor, 1992), consumers need to have a sense of safety in every monetary exchange; therefore, employees need to be trustworthy. This dimension is important for high risk and uncertainty services that consumers will use (Anwar & Abdullah, 2021). The seven dimensions initially created for communication, security, credibility, competence,

understanding/knowing customers, courtesy, and access (Anwar & Abdullah, 2021) are made up of empathy and assurance. The ways that consumers classify and arrange data related to their perception of service quality are shown by the aforementioned dimensions. At times, clients will recognize service quality using all five dimensions, but at other times, they might only utilize a few of them (Anwar & Shukur, 2015). The dimensions allow customers to assess service quality, and therefore, assist in measuring the customer's overall satisfaction. In the context of fast food, which entails quick interactions, staff assurance conveyed through warm and prompt services improves customer perception immensely.

Ultimately, while customers may utilize all five dimensions of service quality to form their opinions, the assurance dimension often stands out as particularly influential in the fast-food industry. By prioritizing employee training and fostering a culture of trust and confidence, medium-scale fast-food chains can enhance their service quality, leading to improved customer satisfaction and loyalty (Tirol, 2023).

**Reliability.** Reliability illustrates a service provider's following actions in relation to promised services and trustworthiness towards actions. Fulfilling the customer's request is of utmost importance (Hameed & Anwar, 2018). "Verifying the service provider's capacity to deliver services consistently and effectively is what reliability entails." It entails "doing it right the first time and as for the customer it is one of the most significant dimension Berry and Parasuraman, (1991) as cited in (Anwar & Ghafoor, 2017). More specifically, reliability means that the organization delivers on its promises: promises about delivery, service provision, issue resolution, and pricing policies. Customers like dealing with companies that keep their word about the outcomes of their services" (Anwar & Climis, 2017).

Responsible "being willing to help" is used to mean the organization's reaction to request and promptness of service provided after the issue has already taken place (Tirol et al., 2022). All steps as put forth in service demand the response, if there is no response, the purpose can switch. Besides Reliability, this concept plays an important role in customer satisfaction. Responsiveness means the ability of the organization to assist properly customers and resolve problems which may occur efficiently (Tinapay & Tirol, 2021).

With regard to fast-food restaurants, being responsive means providing additional customer support, including quick service and resolving customer issues effectively. Not responding to customer issues may lead to dissatisfaction, which can tarnish the brand's image. As a result, if medium-sized fast-food restaurants emphasize dependability and responsiveness, they will improve the dining experience and boost customer satisfaction thereby increasing brand loyalty.

**Empathy.** Was empathy is individually caring for the customer as per their requirements. To make the customer feel important and appreciated, the service providers interact with them on a personal level and go out of their way to assist them (Bahadur et al., 2018). As explained by Murray et al. (2019), empathy's core essence is projecting oneself into the customer's shoes and understanding what they may require. As listed by Murray et al. (2019), the enabling factors of empathy include courtesy

and friendliness of the staff, comprehension of the client's needs, provision of special attention to the customer, and describing in detail the steps involved in the service to be provided.

In addition, According to Tellez and Gonzalez-Tobon (2019), empathy is the 'ability to feel and understand other's emotions and circumstances and is a fundamental skill for designers to acquire an in-depth understanding of people (i.e., end-users and other stakeholders) so that products, services, environments, systems, and experiences meet human needs, expectations, and aspirations and it is closely tied to customer attention and serves to reassure customers that a particular market or business entity is best suited to satisfy their needs and foster strong customer loyalty through trust (Ali et al., 2021).

Empathy fosters customer loyalty and forgiveness for service firms which, in turn, enhances customer satisfaction (Marandi and Harris, 2010; Wieseke et al., 2012; Bahadur et al., 2020). Empathy enhances focus on customers by employees and their productivity (Wieseke et al., 2012; Nguyen et al., 2019; Ngo et al., 2020). In turn, this cultivates empathy among customers towards the service and the people providing it (Wieseke et al., 2012).

Empathy plays a crucial role in shaping service quality and customer satisfaction within medium-scale fast food chains in Bogota City. By fostering an environment where individualized attention and understanding of customer needs are prioritized, businesses can significantly enhance the customer experience. Implementing training programs, personalized service strategies, and robust feedback mechanisms can empower employees to connect with customers on a deeper level, ultimately leading to increased loyalty and satisfaction.

Furthermore, recognizing the importance of community engagement, employee well-being, and cultural sensitivity can create a more holistic approach to service delivery (Tirol, 2023). As the fast-food industry continues to evolve, embracing empathy as a core value will not only differentiate brands in a competitive market but also build lasting relationships with customers, ensuring long-term success and sustainability.

**Price.** Pricing a product or service is important since it determines their adoption and distribution in the market. Kotler and Keller (2016) state that pricing a new product is highly challenging. Customers value price in exchange (Sari and Siregar, 2019). Price has also been viewed as a very valuable facet in establishing the client's satisfaction level. Gerson (2014) notes, customer satisfaction is defined as the perception customers have about the fulfillment of their expectations. In case of appropriate service delivery, client happiness and satisfaction are assured. Furthermore, Larson et al (2017) noted, customer satisfaction is regarded as a central mediating factor in shaping and modifying consumers' purchasing attitude. Architectural assumptions indicate a considerable relationship exists between consumer purchasing behavior and pricing strategies employed by businesses, as it relates to the fact that high price leads to low sale volume and low-price increases sales volume (Sadiq M. W. et al., 2020). There has been growing literature suggesting pricing attracts

more attention and consideration regarding consumer purchasing behavior (Huo et al., 2021).

Furthermore, prices can be perceived as a form of evaluation and reaction from consumers if the selling price is deemed reasonable and acceptable. Kotler and Keller (2016) states that price is user's perception when disparity that is deemed and difference which is required to be paid, especially when the difference accepted is price is considered worthy. The Price, as defined by Taghizadeh et al. (2019), is a measure of the outcomes and procedures necessary to achieve good and acceptable outcomes at fair rates. Their ability to effectively promote a location or restaurant might be influenced by client happiness. This is also investigated by research (Juliana et al. 2020) which shows that Price impacts customer satisfaction.

Kotler and Keller (2016) describe satisfaction as a mental construct that includes the beliefs, ideas, and responses an individual possesses concerning satisfaction. Thus, the user's attitudes and behaviors towards satisfaction are shaped fundamentally by satisfaction itself. Furthermore, Kotler et al. (2012) explains that consumer happiness is contingent upon how well the product meets the buyer's expectations. Customers are dissatisfied if the performance does not meet expectations. Customers are satisfied if expectations are met. When expectations are surpassed, customers are quite pleased.

In the context of medium-scale fast-food chains, effective pricing strategies can enhance customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. As demonstrated by Juliana et al. 2020, price directly impacts customer perceptions and satisfaction levels. As stated by Kotler et al. 2012, customer satisfaction ultimately depends on how well a product's performance matches the expectations of the buyer. When fast-food chains manage to meet or exceed these expectations through appropriate pricing and quality service, they foster a positive customer experience that can lead to increased loyalty and repeat business.

#### *Customer satisfaction*

As per Fourie (2015), satisfaction refers to the customer's evaluation of a product or service based on how well it supposedly meets the customer's needs and expectations. Customer satisfaction rests as an evaluation, an aspect of attitude, as (Feng et al, 2019; O'Dwyer & Gilmore, 2018) emphasize, where the organization has to pay greater attention to the mental constructs. Moreover, (Grigoroudis and Siskos 2010, supported by Fourie 2015) provided the justification for why companies are to measure their customer satisfaction. They are: "to ensure an understanding of the market and its competitive landscape; to be aware of customer dissatisfaction as some customers refrain from airing grievances; to uncover possible new opportunities in the market; to design a customer satisfaction measurement process custom fit to the business; and to highlight management versus customers' discrepancies in perception of offered services quality." These reasons bolster why an organization should strive to keep customers happy every step of the way (Li Sa et al., 2019).

To maintain customer satisfaction, the organization needs to constantly adapt based on s customers, as pointed out by Alteren & Tudoran (2019; supported by Limbu, Jayachandran, Babin, & Peterson, 2016; Rippé, Weisfeld-Spolder, Yurova,

Hale, & Sussan, 2016)), not what they presume customers expect (Román & Martín, 2014). Companies also need to manage customer perceptions and expectations while understanding that satisfaction hinges on competitive offerings, market activities, and economic conditions (Tinapay et al., 2021).

Customers' expectations, for example, may differ depending on their previous experiences with competitors or industry standards (Tirol, 2021). If a competitor launches an innovative product or service that significantly improves the customer experience, it may shift customer expectations and perceptions of value, regardless of an organization's efforts to maintain satisfaction at touch points. External factors such as economic downturns or shifts in consumer behavior can also have an impact on customer attitudes and satisfaction levels, often in ways that organizations have no control over. Past studies have also demonstrated that consumer trust may be impacted by customer satisfaction (Hanaysha & Hilman, 2015).

Customer satisfaction reflects the sense of pleasure and well-being that customers experience. It arises from meeting or exceeding their expectations regarding a service. This concept is widely explored within consumer behavior and social psychology. Essentially, according to (Pizam A., Shapoval V. Ellias T. 2016) customer satisfaction is defined as the customer's personal evaluation of their experience, based on how their perceptions align with the actual attributes of the product. Customer satisfaction gauges how favorable an experience is for the consumer. It is defined as the difference between the perceived performance of a good or service and the expectation or benchmark set by the consumer. In simple terms, customer satisfaction is something that is evaluated after an exercise or experience and in this case, it is bounded by the customer's perception of whether the service suffices or not. Increased customer satisfaction tends to drive more growth in repeat purchases and greater unsolicited referrals to other people. Prayag G, Hosany S, Muskat B, Del Chiappa G (2017).

#### *The Relationship Between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction*

In the current research, we'll explore how service quality affects the level of customer satisfaction. Literature focuses on (Ali & Raza, 2015) the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. More recent studies, such as Ali and Raza (2015), have further established this relationship noting that aspects of SERVQUAL have a strong and positive influence on customer satisfaction. From the perspective of consumers, service quality often encompasses product/service features, staff and employee attitude and behavior, business's responsiveness, and willingness to adapt (Sundbo, 2015).

Several previous researchers found stronger relations between service quality and customer satisfaction leading to the conclusion that greater degree of service quality will result in greater degree of customer satisfaction (Pooya et al., 2020; Kant & Jaiswal, 2017; Vazifehdost et al., 2014; Islam et al., 2020). These particular authors conducted a multitude of

studies showing that service quality leads to high levels of customer satisfaction.

A report by (2018) outlined a case study analyzing five different service sectors in Pakistan: hospitality, healthcare, education, and banking. The study demonstrated that service quality has a considerable impact on customer satisfaction.

#### *Customer Service*

Responding to customers are all the efforts needed by an organization, which occurs before, during and after a transaction in the context of customer service. To Kotler and Keller (2016), customer service encompasses all organizational actions that support and interact with customers before, during, and after a transaction which includes the phases of awareness, acquisition, onboarding, usage, and retention. For Smith (2020), customer service is better defined as the total experience a customer goes through, as it is created by policies, processes, technologies, and employee interactions that encourage meaningful interactions that fulfill or exceed customer expectations.

The agritourism business sees customer service as the organization's meeting the requirements and wants of its clientele. Excellent customer service for an agritourism business really contributes a lot in terms of marketing. Customer service is increasingly recognized as a crucial contributor to business success and sustainability in today's highly competitive marketplace (Smith, 2020). It goes beyond the basic needs of customers such that an organization is recognized as consistently exceeding the expectations of its clientele" (University of Vermont, nd). "The emergence of an orientation towards servicing customers places customer service as a major indicator of performance and a strong determinant of overall corporate activity and profitability in almost all sectors" (Lee & Johnson, 2022).

Service as a phenomenon provides an area of concern and in my understanding, quality means leadership and excellence in doing things. In the context of business, Cook (2017) defines leadership as responding to customer needs and requirements. Excellence is defined in terms of craftsmanship like precision, accuracy, and perfection (Tinapay & Tirol, 2022).

#### *Customer Retention Rate*

Customer retention is determined by the degree of two-way communication a company uses to maintain its relationship with its clients (Kaguri, 2016). In addition to maintaining a constant connection with them, Alhassan (2016) claimed that a company's regular interactions with its customers and willingness to solicit feedback from them also serve as a key instrument in boosting the rate of retention. Customer retention is an essential business strategy in today's economy as it improves profits and minimizes costs. The percentage of consumers who continue to maintain a business relationship over a specific period of time is referred to as the customer retention rate (Tinapay & Tirol, 2022).

Customer retention rate is also referred to as the churn rate, an extremely important metric to be tracked in any restaurant service. With lower churn rate customers remain loyal to the

business and, over time, more customers are attracted. For any business the customer retention rate or, in other words, the churn rate, is the most accurate measure of customer satisfaction. The rate defines how well a business is retaining customers and loyal users, which is critical for short- and long-term success of a business. It matters significantly because, as studies show, retaining customers is more cost-effective than servicing them. (Brown, M. 2020.) Customer retention strategy is deeper than meeting the consumers' needs, it goes as far as raising the standards so consumers are more than willing to promote the brand. It is important to note that new customers are significantly more expensive to acquire than the costs associated with trying to keep existing customers (Osarenkhoe et al., 2017).

According to Komunda et al. (2015) he asserts that retained customers are individuals who persistently remain loyal to the company. Loyal customers are in frequent visit and this repetition is really of worth for the particular business. Retention of customers can lead to loyalty and members who will increase in valuing the business over time (Tinapay & Tirol, 2021). The monetary value is much higher as it will guarantee a certain amount of daily sales from regular customers. Words of positive feedback also have a huge impact on drawing attention to new clients. Good feedback from existing customers is always good in drawing the attention of new customers. The formula for calculating CRR is:  $CRR = ((E-N)/S) \times 100$ . Where S is the starting number of customers, E marks the ending number, and N represents customers gained during the assessing period (Atwell, E. 2023).

#### *Customer Loyalty*

This paper contributes to the discourse on measuring the level of customer loyalty by suggesting an approach which combines multiple metrics of customer loyalty into a single integrated measure. As described by Venkatakrisnan et al. (2022), customer loyalty is understood as a willingness, or a propensity, by customers to manipulate purchase paths in a way that companies benefit from repeat purchases long after the initial transaction. Additionally, Kalia et al. (2021) explained customer loyalty as the willingness or intent of a customer to continue engaging with a business's offerings based on favorable past experiences with them. More specifically, loyalty is defined as a consumer's action of purchasing a brand and repeatedly buying it over a certain duration (Widodo & Jauhari, 2023).

As noted by Lestari et al (2023) An analysis of a customer's likelihood of repurchasing reveals it is tied to their perception of an entity (service provider). Recognition of customer loyalty as a key driver to profitability reveals the opportunities associated with it in contexts of long-term value and understanding sustainable competitive edges (Mansouri et al, 2022). Utami and Oetomo (2015) discussed other studies supporting a customer's satisfaction, brand loyalty, and service engagement are significantly influenced by the product's quality, its price, and the service offered. To put it succinctly, providing firms diversified dimensions of services which resulted in customer satisfaction which in turn enhances

customer loyalty (Heskett et al., 1997; Kashif et al., 2015; Kaur & Soch, 2018).

### III. CONCLUSION

The fast-food industry is fiercely competitive, and keeping customers happy is key to staying ahead. For medium-sized fast-food chains, focusing on service quality and delivering good value is essential to meet what customers expect and boost their business results. This study looks at existing research to understand how service quality influences customer satisfaction and loyalty in this market. By learning from past studies, it hopes to offer useful ideas for improving service and helping these businesses grow and thrive over time.

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