

Mediating Effect of Customer Satisfaction on the Relationship between Service Quality and Restaurant Environment Towards Revisit Intention: A Conceptual Paper

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ABSTRACT— *The global fast-food industry continues to grow rapidly, driven by evolving consumer preferences and heightened competition. Ensuring customer satisfaction is essential for long-term success, as satisfied customers are more likely to remain loyal, recommend the restaurant, and revisit. This conceptual paper investigates how customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and restaurant environment in influencing revisit intentions at fast-food outlets in Malaysia's Klang Valley. Using the DINESERV framework, this study conceptually explains the interplay among these constructs and highlights their implications for enhancing customer loyalty and operational excellence in the fast-food industry.*

Keywords - Fast-food, DINESERV Model, Customer Satisfaction, Service Quality, Environment, Revisit Intention

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Malaysian Fast-Food Restaurant Market in Malaysia

In the current highly competitive business environment, customer loyalty has become a crucial and irreplaceable factor for success. Service providers must work towards cultivating strong customer loyalty to build and sustain lasting relationships with their clientele (Chun & Nyam-Ochir, 2020). The fast-food industry in Malaysia, in particular, has encountered notable difficulties in securing customer loyalty (Habib, Dardak & Zakaria, 2011). The rise of online delivery services and the widespread shift to takeaway and delivery during the pandemic have further emphasised the need to preserve customer loyalty during times of crisis (Dishman, 2020). Malaysian consumers have widely embraced international fast-food brands such as McDonald's, Burger King, Carl's Junior, Pizza Hut, and Kentucky Fried Chicken, boosting their prominence in the local market (Choong et al., 2013). As a quick service restaurant (QSR) channel, the fast-food segment has shown resilience, experiencing the smallest decline among all food service categories, largely due to its value-for-money appeal (Global Data, 2021). Moreover, Malaysia's fast-food sector is expanding rapidly, aligning with the global movement toward convenient dining solutions. In 2025, Malaysia's foodservice market was estimated at USD 14.75 billion with a projected CAGR of 13.3% through 2030 (Mordor Intelligence, 2025). Globally, fast-food enjoyed continued expansion with digital and off-premises sales growing significantly in which QSR digital sales comprised up to 25% of revenues in 2023 (QuBeyond, 2024).

1.2 Revisit Intention for Long-term Success

In the fast-food industry, revisit intention is a vital concept that reflects a customer's likelihood of returning to the same service provider or repurchasing its products in the future. It acts as an important measure of both customer satisfaction and loyalty, representing the perceived quality and value of the dining experience that shape customers' experience and self-identification, which in turn influence their behavioral intentions (Rather & Hollebeck, 2020). When

revisit intention is high, it suggests that customers are pleased with their previous experiences and hold a positive view of the restaurant, which in turn enhances the chances of repeat visits. Assessing these intentions offers valuable insights into customer behaviour and the process of creating value in the fast-food restaurant setting (Beling & Flink, 2017). Therefore, placing emphasis on customer satisfaction and consistently delivering outstanding dining experiences is essential for boosting revisit intention and ensuring long-term success in the fast-food sector.

1.3 Customer Satisfaction as a Mediator

This study positions customer satisfaction as a mediating factor, emphasising its essential role in attracting and retaining customers in today's fast-changing and competitive marketplace. Understanding customer behaviour supports effective communication, market opportunity identification, risk reduction, strategic planning, and staying ahead of trends (Villanueva et al., 2023). In the fast-food sector which marked by intense competition and evolving consumer demands, customers are increasingly value-conscious and quick to switch after a single negative experience. By examining the link between customer satisfaction and revisit intention, businesses can anticipate needs, tailor offerings, enhance loyalty, and maintain a competitive edge through ongoing evaluation and adaptation (Angelina et al., 2024).

1.4 Service Quality and Restaurant Environment as Driving Factors

Service quality and the restaurant environment are strongly linked to customers' likelihood of revisit again, highlighting the greater profitability of retaining existing patrons compared to attracting new ones. Research consistently demonstrates that satisfied customers are more inclined to revisit and recommend a restaurant, thereby boosting long-term sales and profitability. A 2025 study using the Stimulus Organism Response (S-O-R) framework confirms that sanitation-related attributes including cleanliness has positively influence customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions, reinforcing how core environmental factors in dining spaces impact revisit behavior (Rathnasiri et al., 2025). Yet, despite the acknowledged role of service quality and ambience in fostering revisit intention, studies focusing on these factors within the fast-food sector remain limited. Gaining a deeper understanding of customer preferences and how the dining environment influences their experiences can offer valuable guidance for fast-food chains aiming to strengthen retention and loyalty.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

While prior study has extensively examined food quality, pricing, and service quality in fast-food restaurants, fewer studies have focused on the restaurant environment and customer satisfaction using the DINESERV model (Al-Alsaadi et al., 2025). This study addresses that gap by investigating how service quality and restaurant environment affect customer satisfaction, and how satisfaction mediates their relationship with revisit intention. It also examines the extent to which satisfaction influences customers' likelihood of returning and recommending the restaurant to others.

Focusing on Restaurant X in Malaysia's Klang Valley, a major player in the local fast-food market, the study explores the underexamined dynamics between service quality, environment, and revisit intention. Literature suggests that service quality enhances satisfaction, revisit intention, and purchasing decisions (Sumaedi & Yarmen, 2015), while mismatches between expectations and perceived service diminish satisfaction. The restaurant environment shapes customers' emotions, which in turn influence satisfaction levels (Liu & Jang, 2009). Elevating positive emotions and reducing negative ones can therefore improve satisfaction.

This study aims to provide Restaurant X's managers and policymakers with insights into the factors driving revisit intention, highlighting the mediating role of satisfaction. It also builds on earlier findings linking brand trust and loyalty to purchase intention, suggesting opportunities for further study. By identifying critical variables that shape consumer behaviour, the study offers practical strategies for enhancing loyalty. Ultimately, it contributes to the literature by analysing the interplay between service quality, environment, satisfaction, and revisit intention, supporting the development of targeted improvements that boost satisfaction, loyalty, and sustainable growth in the fast-food sector.

3. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This conceptual paper aims to examine the interrelationships between service quality, restaurant environment, customer satisfaction, and revisit intention within the context of Restaurant X in Malaysia's Klang Valley region. The

research questions that will be addressed in this research are:

- RQ1: Is there a significant relationship between service reliability and revisit intention among dine-in customers in fast-food restaurants?
- RQ2: Is there a significant relationship between service responsiveness and revisit intention among dine-in customers in fast-food restaurants?
- RQ3: Is there a significant relationship between cleanliness and revisit intention among dine-in customers in fast-food restaurants?
- RQ4: Does customer satisfaction mediate the relationship between service reliability and revisit intention among dine-in customers in fast-food restaurants?
- RQ5: Does customer satisfaction mediate the relationship between service responsiveness and revisit intention among dine-in customers in fast-food restaurants?
- RQ6: Does customer satisfaction mediate the relationship between cleanliness and revisit intention among dine-in customers in fast-food restaurants?

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RESEARCH

This study aims to assess the level of customer satisfaction in fast-food restaurants across the Klang Valley, a region well known for hosting some of Malaysia's most popular fast-food establishments. Its significance lies in evaluating the value customers perceive and the satisfaction they derive from the service quality provided. Customer satisfaction is expected to shape consumer behaviour and preferences, influencing their dining choices and overall experience. The study also seeks to promote awareness of the customer-driven and customer-influenced nature of the fast-food industry.

The findings are anticipated to benefit various stakeholders, including Malaysian consumers, government bodies such as the Ministry of Health (MOH), which oversees food quality and safety, and the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs (KPDN), responsible for operational and ethical oversight of food operators. Marketers and fast-food businesses can apply these insights to better understand customer needs, design effective marketing strategies, and create inviting dining experiences. Furthermore, the study intends to identify the key factors that significantly affect customer satisfaction and determine their actual impact. By deepening knowledge of target customers, the fast-food sector can gain a competitive advantage, enhancing both customer retention and market position.

5. DELIMITATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While this study delivers valuable insights into exploring the dynamics between service quality, environment, and revisit intention, several constraints and limitations must be acknowledged.

5.1 Delimitations

Geographic Focus: This study concentrates on Restaurant X users in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. Consequently, insights may not fully apply to other regions or countries where fast-food restaurant infrastructure, consumer behaviour, and environments may differ.

Scope of Variables: We examine only service quality and environment as drivers of revisit intention, mediated by customer satisfaction. Other potentially influential factors such as marketing efforts, brand image, or social influence are not included.

Theoretical Lenses: The study uses the DINESERV framework. While this offers strong foundations for understanding satisfaction and service quality, alternative theories (e.g., SERVQUAL, SERVPERF and Gronroos Service Quality Model) could yield complementary insights.

5.2 Limitations

Survey Data: Relying on self-reported questionnaires introduces risks of social-desirability bias and recall errors, which may affect the accuracy of the findings.

Cross-Sectional Design: Data was collected at a single point in time, given the service quality nature of Restaurant X's features and consumer expectations, the results may lose relevance as different fast-food restaurants have different benchmarks and market conditions change.

Absence of Qualitative Depth: The quantitative focus limits exploration of underlying motivations, cultural nuances, and strategic decision-making. Including interviews or focus groups could reveal richer, context-specific insights.

5.3 Future Research Design

To address these limitations, future research could propose:

- **Broader Sampling:** Extend the study to other Malaysian regions that Restaurant X operates in or international markets to test generalisability.
- **Mixed-Methods Approaches:** Incorporate qualitative methods, such as dine-in customer interviews or feedback analyses to capture deeper behavioural factors.
- **Additional Mediators and Moderators:** Investigate variables like, brand trust, or competitive dynamics to build a more holistic model.
- **Alternative Frameworks:** Apply models such as SERVQUAL or SERVPERF to explore different facets of service quality and sustain customer satisfaction.

6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the DINESERV model, an adaptation of the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988) specifically developed to measure service quality in the restaurant industry (Stevens, Knutson & Patton, 1995). The SERVQUAL model identifies five core dimensions of service quality which is tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, based on the gap between customers' expectations and perceptions. DINESERV retains these dimensions but tailors the measurement items to the unique characteristics of dining experiences, with particular emphasis on elements such as cleanliness, ambience, and comfort, which are critical in influencing customer perceptions in food service settings.

In the context of this study, three dimensions looks into service reliability, service responsiveness, and cleanliness, are selected as primary indicators of service quality. Service reliability refers to the ability of the restaurant to deliver promised services accurately and dependably. Service responsiveness captures the willingness and promptness of staff in assisting customers, while cleanliness encompasses the hygiene of the dining area, restrooms, and staff appearance. These dimensions are posited to directly influence customers' behavioural intentions, particularly their likelihood to revisit the establishment.

The model further incorporates restaurant environment as a determinant of customer perceptions, recognising that factors such as lighting, décor, seating arrangement, and overall ambience can evoke emotional responses that shape satisfaction levels (Liu & Jang, 2009). A well-maintained and pleasant environment can enhance positive emotions, reduce negative perceptions, and encourage repeat patronage.

Central to this framework is the role of customer satisfaction as a mediating variable. Drawing from relationship marketing theory, customer satisfaction is conceptualised as the cumulative evaluation of a dining experience, resulting from the interaction between service quality and environmental factors. Satisfied customers are more likely to form favourable attitudes toward the restaurant, leading to increased loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and higher revisit intentions. The mediation hypothesis reflects the proposition that while service quality and restaurant environment can directly affect revisit intention, their influence is significantly enhanced when filtered through the lens of customer satisfaction.

The framework posits both direct effects (e.g., service reliability → revisit intention) and indirect effects (e.g., service reliability → customer satisfaction → revisit intention). This dual-path approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which operational and environmental factors shape customer behaviour.

By integrating the DINESERV model with a mediational perspective, this study aims to address gaps in the literature concerning the fast-food sector in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. While prior research has examined service quality extensively, fewer studies have considered the combined effects of service quality dimensions and restaurant environment on revisit intention, particularly with customer satisfaction as a mediator. The proposed framework thus serves as a basis for empirically testing these relationships and generating insights that can inform managerial strategies to enhance service delivery, optimise environments, and foster sustainable customer loyalty in a competitive market.

7. DISCUSSION OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

A synthesis of literature on empirical studies examines revisit intention as the dependent variable, customer satisfaction as the mediating variable, and the independent variables of service quality and restaurant environment. The section concludes with an in-depth description of the research model adopted for this study.

7.1 Determinants of Revisit Intention in Fast-Food Context

Revisit intention is a key concept in marketing and an essential element of customer loyalty. It goes beyond a single satisfactory experience, representing the cumulative outcome of all interactions a customer has with a brand, and is closely tied to word-of-mouth advocacy. It plays a significant role in fostering brand loyalty, as customers often base their likelihood of returning on the value derived from prior experiences (Hameed & Kanwal, 2018). This perspective is supported by findings that revisit intention is strongly shaped by past encounters and directly influences a customer's decision to continue engaging with the same products or services (Hassan, 2013). Achieving this requires understanding customer expectations, consistently delivering high-quality service, and addressing issues promptly.

Revisit intention is also defined as a consumer's disposition toward future purchasing behaviour and willingness to pay for a product or service (Zhang, Zhou & Liu, 2020). It serves as a critical indicator of whether offerings meet consumer needs and expectations, ultimately shaping their evaluations. When products and services meet or exceed expectations, satisfaction levels typically rise (Xiao, Yang & Iqbal, 2018). It is further described as a multifaceted process intertwined with consumer behaviour, perceptions, and attitudes, forming before the final purchase decision and influenced by internal and external factors (Mirabi, Akbariyeh & Tahmasebifard, 2015). Service quality and value are particularly influential in shaping purchase intentions (Dehghani & Tumer, 2015), while environmental attributes, such as an appealing setting, can further sway consumer choices.

Moreover, trust has also been identified as a vital determinant of revisit intention. In a study of 384 Lebanese consumers, found that trust positively influences purchasing decisions and strengthens the likelihood of return visits (Ali, Abbass & Farid, 2020). Collectively, these findings underscore that revisit intention is shaped by a combination of service quality, environmental conditions, perceived value, and trust, making it a complex yet critical construct in understanding consumer behaviour and loyalty.

7.2 Customer Satisfaction In Fast-food Restaurants

Customer satisfaction is widely recognised as a key determinant of business success, particularly in the highly competitive service sector. It is defined as a customer's evaluation of whether a product or service fulfils their needs and meets their expectations (Zeithaml et al., 2009). When these expectations are unmet, dissatisfaction is likely to occur. Customer satisfaction also has a psychological component, being a response shaped by past experiences, in which perceived performance is compared against prior expectations (Chang, Wang & Yang, 2009). Satisfaction may further be influenced not only by abstract, subjective judgments but also by comparisons with earlier experiences involving the same product or service (Suchanek & Kralova, 2018).

In the current global economic climate, service providers face increasing challenges. The slowdown has intensified competitive pressures, empowered consumers with stronger purchasing power, and contributed to more dynamic and unpredictable customer behaviours marked by rapidly shifting preferences (Razak et al., 2020). To remain competitive, businesses must deliver distinctive value propositions (Kok & Kim, 2021). These pressures are particularly evident in the food and beverage sector, which has been reshaped by global trends and technological integration (Singh, 2021).

Research indicates that personalising customer experiences can significantly enhance satisfaction (Mansoor, 2021). This is critical because customer satisfaction is closely linked to a company's competitive advantage, profitability, and market positioning (Kok & Kim, 2021). In the food industry, particularly in fast-food and delivery services, satisfaction serves as a key differentiator. Satisfied customers are more likely to return, recommend the service, and engage positively with the brand, whereas dissatisfaction can lead to customer attrition and reputational harm.

In today's digital landscape, customers frequently share their experiences through social media and online platforms (Mohd-Ramly & Omar, 2017). This amplifies the impact of customer satisfaction, as positive reviews can attract new customers, while negative feedback can quickly damage a brand's image (Eid et al., 2019). Consequently, managing satisfaction is not only about delivering quality service but also about fostering favourable customer perceptions and emotional connections.

Therefore, customer satisfaction emerges as a multifaceted construct shaped by psychological, experiential, and comparative factors. In the fast-evolving service environment, especially within the food sector, it plays a central role in driving loyalty, enhancing brand reputation, and sustaining long-term profitability.

7.3 Service Quality and Restaurant Environment Factors

Service quality is defined as a subjective assessment made by customers, based on the comparison between their expected level of service and the actual service received (Gefan, 2002). Numerous scholars have examined this concept through various theoretical frameworks and empirical studies (Goceri & Goceri, 2017). Customers patronise fast-food restaurants for diverse reasons (Shafiq et al., 2019), and it is important for employees to adopt flexible service approaches (Shamsuddin et al., 2020). Rather than delivering service in a uniform manner, staff should tailor their interactions to meet the differing needs of individual customers, with empathy being a critical component of effective service delivery (Hussain et al., 2019).

In an increasingly saturated market where multiple providers offer similar products and services, customers have a wider range of choices (Farooqui & Alwi, 2019). This makes differentiation essential for fast-food businesses seeking a competitive edge. Like other sectors, the restaurant industry faces challenges in adapting to rapidly evolving consumer trends and demographic shifts (Fultz & Ramplodt, 2016). Rising customer expectations, intensified competition, technological advancements, and the increasing purchasing power of millennials are collectively reshaping the dining landscape and accelerating industry transformation.

The restaurant environment also plays a pivotal role in creating a sense of comfort and ease for customers (Gustafsson et al., 2006). A study of 384 fast-food diners in Taipei applying the SERVQUAL model found that aesthetic elements such as lighting, décor, and seating comfort significantly increase perceived satisfaction and revisit intention (Liu & Lee, 2021). This environment comprises two main components: fixed elements, including furniture, colors, and layout, and dynamic elements, such as staff interactions and the presence of other customers.

The environment is also identified as a key differentiator among restaurants, second only to food quality, variety, and pricing (Longart et al., 2018). Research further indicates that customer satisfaction strongly correlates with positive behavioural intentions (Daries-Ramon et al., 2018; Rashidin et al., 2020), and environmental factors significantly influence revisit intention (Safitri et al., 2020). As such, it is recommended that fast-food operators prioritise environmental quality to enhance customer experiences, especially given the growing dining-out trend (Shamsuddin et al., 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the hospitality sector adapted business models to sustain operations and support stakeholders (Norris et al., 2021). Measures included implementing stringent SOPs, capacity restrictions, modified service formats, enhanced health screenings, and shifting to takeout, drive-thru, or delivery services (Deloitte, 2021).

In summary, service quality is shaped by customer expectations, personalised interactions, and empathy, is critical for differentiating fast-food restaurants in a competitive and evolving market. Alongside service quality, the restaurant environment, encompassing both functional and aesthetic elements which plays a significant role in fostering comfort, satisfaction, and revisit intention, with its importance amplified during industry adaptations such as those prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

8. CONCEPTUAL MODEL DEVELOPMENT

This conceptual paper seeks to examine the determinants of revisit intention of Restaurant X in Klang Valley's fast-food industry. It employs the DINESERV framework as its theoretical foundation to build the conceptual model depicted in Figure 1.

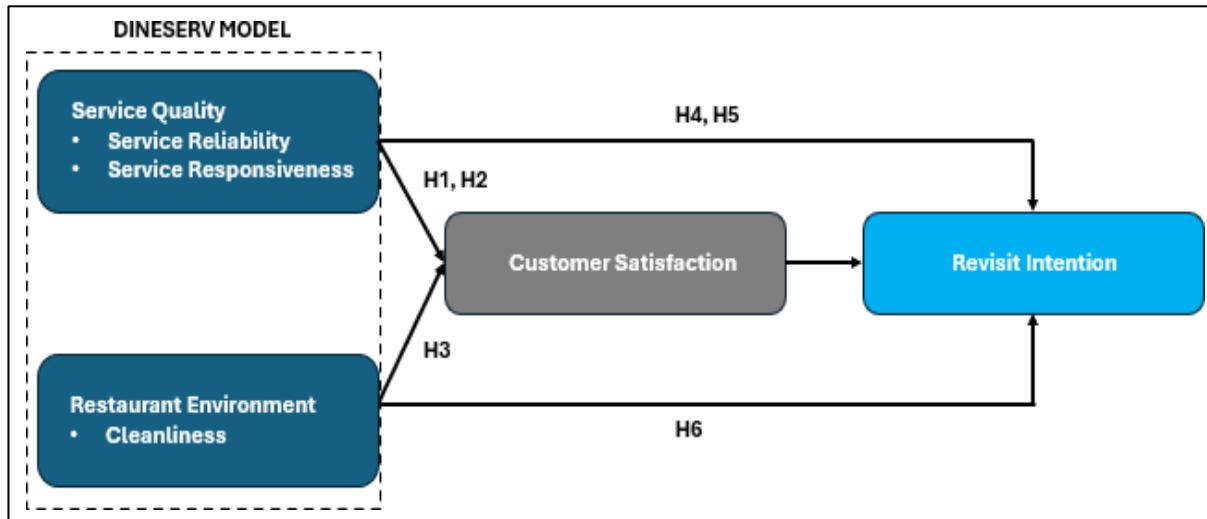


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Model for This Study

9. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative methodology to investigate the determinants of fast-food in Klang Valley's for Restaurant X. It draws on the DINESERV framework, with customer satisfaction introduced as a mediating variable.

9.1 Research Design

A structured, web-based survey is employed to gather data from customers of Restaurant X in the Klang Valley. The questionnaire captures the core DINESERV constructs of service quality and environment of Restaurant X. It also measures customer satisfaction and revisit intention as outcome variables, as well as collecting demographic and information of the consumers who visited Restaurant X.

9.2 Data Collection

The Google Form questionnaire is administered online via social media channels to maximise response rates and capture a diverse sample. Respondents are active consumers of Restaurant X's branches in Klang Valley.

9.3 Pilot Testing

Preliminary pilot study is carried out to refine the questionnaire and reliability testing for Cronbach's alpha coefficients above 0.80 for every scale, will demonstrate strong internal consistency.

9.4 Statistical Analysis

Survey data is processed in statistical software, with two main stages of analysis:

- Descriptive Statistics: Summarise respondents' demographics and Restaurant X visitation patterns.
- Inferential Statistics: Employ multiple regression and structural equation modelling (SEM) to evaluate how service quality and environment influence revisit intention, and to assess satisfaction's mediating role in these relationships.

9.5 Ethical Considerations

This study follows strict ethical guidelines by safeguarding participants' anonymity and keeping their information Asian Online Journals (www.ajouronline.com)

confidential. All respondents provide informed consent, and the research fully complies with relevant data protection laws.

10. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The fast-food restaurant sector in the Klang Valley continues to demonstrate resilience and growth, yet sustaining customer loyalty remains a persistent challenge due to evolving consumer expectations, heightened competition, and the rising influence of service quality and environmental factors. This study examined the interrelationships between service reliability, service responsiveness, cleanliness, and revisit intention, with customer satisfaction serving as a mediating variable, using the DINESERV framework.

Findings from the conceptual framework affirm that service quality dimensions and restaurant environment factors significantly influence customer satisfaction, which in turn drives revisit intention. Even when fast-food outlets maintain competitive pricing and strong brand recognition, they risk losing customers if operational quality and ambience fail to meet evolving preferences. This highlights the need for a balanced strategy that integrates operational efficiency, service excellence, and environmental enhancement.

Key recommendations emerging from the study include:

- **Strengthen Core Service Quality:** Invest in consistent service reliability and responsiveness, ensuring timely order fulfilment, attentive staff interactions, and prompt issue resolution.
- **Enhance Environmental Appeal:** Maintain high standards of cleanliness, comfortable seating, and an inviting ambience that fosters positive emotional responses.
- **Leverage Customer Feedback:** Implement continuous satisfaction monitoring to detect service gaps and adapt offerings in real time.
- **Build Loyalty Through Experience:** Move beyond transactional interactions by building experiences that foster emotional attachment and repeat patronage.
- **Managerial and Practical Implications:** Fast-food operators can utilise this study's insights to enhance service quality and environment. Prioritising staff training, maintaining cleanliness and improving ambience while actively monitoring customer feedback can boost satisfaction, revisit intention and long-term competitiveness.

By addressing these strategic priorities, fast-food operator of Restaurant X in Klang Valley can not only raise satisfaction levels but also secure a sustainable competitive advantage in a market where customers are increasingly discerning. Future research should expand the scope to include brand trust, digital engagement, and cultural factors, offering a more holistic understanding of loyalty formation in Malaysia's dynamic quick-service restaurant landscape.

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