

Customer Loyalty Drivers in the Fast-Food Industry: Evidence from Malaysia and India

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ABSTRACT

The fast-food sector is highly competitive, making it essential to understand the key determinants of customer loyalty for sustaining long-term business performance and customer retention. Therefore, this study investigates the factors influencing customer loyalty toward KFC by examining the relationship between convenience, price affordability, food quality, service quality, and physical environment with customer loyalty. A quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected by distributing questionnaires to 150 customers of KFC restaurants in Malaysia and India. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS Statistics. The results show that physical environment ($b = 0.342$, $p < 0.001$), price affordability ($b = 0.277$, $p < 0.001$), and service quality ($b = 0.173$, $p < 0.05$) have significant positive effects on customer loyalty, while convenience ($b = -0.029$, $p > 0.05$) and food quality ($b = 0.139$, $p > 0.05$) are not significant predictors. These findings suggest that physical environment is the strongest determinant of customer loyalty, followed by price affordability and service quality. The study provides useful insights for KFC to improve its marketing strategies and service performance in order to strengthen customer loyalty and maintain competitiveness in the fast-food industry.

Keywords: Convenience; Customer Loyalty; Fast-Food Industry; Food Quality; Physical Environment; Price Affordability; Service Quality

JEL Classification: M31; D12

INTRODUCTION

Fast-food restaurants are more widely available across the country compared to other industries (Ganatra et al., 2021). The fast-food business has grown rapidly due to rising living costs and the expansion of the global population (Pérez-Morón et al., 2022). Fast food chains such as KFC have transformed the consumption of food by providing quick service, standardized food quality, and reasonable prices. KFC has been among the most popular chains operating in the competitive fast-food industry as it offers diversity in flavor and satisfies the tastes of the diverse population (Ponnaiyan et al., 2021). In order for the industry to continue to expand, understanding the factors that influence customer loyalty is essential for businesses to help organizations enhance service quality and customer retention.

With the development of literature, research on customer loyalty within service industries remains relatively underexplored (Dandis et al., 2023). There remains a gap in knowledge regarding the interplay of numerous factors that could affect customer loyalty in the fast-food industry. Contemporary researchers tend to focus on specific variables only, such as technology usage in food delivery services or sensitivity to price. There is still a lack of comprehensive research that integrates multiple determinants, such as convenience, price affordability, food quality, service quality, and physical environment, that explain customer loyalty within the fast-food restaurant. This will create a gap in understanding how these determinants interact to influence customer loyalty in the context of well-established global brands like KFC. The lack of context-specific empirical evidence highlights a research gap that warrants further investigation.

Furthermore, it is equally important to take a holistic perspective in explaining the evolution of satisfaction into long-term behavioral loyalty. A single element may create one-time satisfaction. However, lasting customer loyalty is not built on just one factor. Instead, it comes from the combination of physical elements such as the food and the dining environment. It also depends on psychological factors, including the speed of service and the quality of personal interaction. This problem becomes extremely important for developing nations as the combination of the two aspects determines the survival of the fast-food chains. Apart from that, the success of a restaurant will largely depend upon the owner's skill to detect the influencing factors for customers' decision-making (Achmadi et al., 2023). As such, by focusing on all five determinants, this research moves beyond simply identifying outcomes to providing a clearer explanation of the underlying processes that drive them.

Therefore, this study aims to fill these gaps by examining the factors influencing customer loyalty at KFC by focusing on convenience, price affordability, food quality, service quality, and physical environment. Various important factors must be taken into account to create a customer-friendly environment (Nguyen et al., 2019). The primary objective of this study is to determine effective ways that would help increase service quality and ensure customer satisfaction in order to generate customer loyalty. By analyzing how each factor contributes to customer satisfaction and loyalty, fast-food operators such as KFC can make more informed managerial decisions that improve operational efficiency and overall customer experience. The results from this research will have practical applications for the management of fast-food outlets through better pricing, improved service, and physical environment, thereby boosting customer loyalty. This research will make theoretical contributions to the field of developing an overall model of customer loyalty in fast food outlets.

The distinctiveness of the current research is that it adopts an integrated analysis that takes into consideration various crucial elements like convenience, price affordability, food and service quality provided, and the physical environment, all at once. Unlike previous studies that focus on separate determinants, this research gives an insight into how all the above variables affect customer loyalty as a whole. Moreover, the research will provide a comparative insight into the impact that the culture and market environment of Malaysia and India have on customers' perception and loyalty with KFC. In addition, the study is able to make significant contributions to knowledge while offering important practical applications to improve customer loyalty programs.

The importance of this research lies in both its theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the research contributes to the existing literature through the development of a better customer loyalty model in the context of the fast-food industry. Practically, the findings can be applied by fast food firms in order to enhance their services and devise better retention policies. Instead of focusing on new clients, it is better to allocate resources towards retaining current ones (Ong et al., 2022). Understanding the combination of factors that impact is needed to sustain long-term business performance in an increasingly competitive market. It is because consumers always seek a complete dining experience that satisfies all their needs and preferences (Islam et al., 2021).

On the whole, this study has helped develop greater insights into the essential determinants of customer loyalty in the fast-food sector by highlighting how multiple factors collectively influence consumer behavior and long-term engagement. The findings further suggest that KFC, as a major global fast-food brand, can strengthen customer loyalty by continuously improving these aspects to enhance overall customer experience and relationship-building. This will allow the company to stay relevant and competitive in the ever-changing market environment. In other words, customer loyalty becomes a critical success factor as intense competition in the industry makes customer retention essential for survival (Al-Abdallah et al., 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer Loyalty

According to Maupa et al. (2023), loyalty can be defined as the willingness to repurchase and the dedication of customers who continually maintain their enthusiasm towards a particular product. Akgunduz et al. (2023) point out that customer loyalty involves making the first choice, a willingness to repurchase and choose the same product or service repeatedly. Purnami and Nurcaya (2025) stated that customer loyalty becomes a very important outcome in the restaurant industry due to heightened competition and low switching costs. Consumers have many options and can easily switch from one brand to another. According to Xu et al. (2022), brand image significantly influences restaurant loyalty among younger customers. In order to construct trust and loyalty in a restaurant, it can be built through positive customer experiences, consistent quality, and effective communication strategies. These together shape customers' perception and long-term commitment to a brand. When the customer is satisfied with certain products, he may choose to revisit the place as well as refer to other brands. In addition, satisfied customers often engage in positive word of mouth by recommending the restaurant to others, which helps to enhance brand reputation and attract new customers. Therefore, understanding customer loyalty becomes essential (Achmadi et al., 2023). In the fast-food industry, customer loyalty is a critical determinant of business sustainability because loyal customers contribute to stable revenue, higher visit frequency, and reduced market costs.

Hypotheses Development

Convenience and Customer Loyalty

Convenience refers to the ease and effortlessness with which customers can access and purchase products or services. Factors like operating hours, availability of parking facilities (Ali et al., 2021), and accessibility to public transportation are essential convenience determinants within the restaurant industry. The degree of convenience determines how easy it will be for customers to access these services, and individuals who have busy schedules and multiple daily activities perceive higher convenience in being able to save time, energy, and effort (Susanto et al., 2023). In addition, convenience not only reduces physical effort but also minimizes waiting time, which can improve overall service efficiency. Convenience plays a significant role in shaping customer loyalty since customers prefer returning to places that offer convenience and efficiency. Similarly, Zhong and Moon (2020) found that convenience-related service attributes positively affect customer loyalty in fast-food restaurants. Flexible operating hours, convenience of location, ease of transport, parking convenience, and drive-thru are various types of convenience attributes that impact customer loyalty (Masud et al., 2018). Apart from that, with the growth of digital services, convenience has extended from physical accessibility to online platforms. Londoño-Giraldo et al. (2024) found that convenience directly enhances customer loyalty in restaurant ordering apps. This will reinforce its importance in shaping modern consumer behavior. Therefore, convenience can be considered a key determinant that influences customer loyalty in KFC. Hence, the hypothesis is developed:

H1: Convenience has a positive effect on customer loyalty.

Price Affordability and Customer Loyalty

Generally, price serves as an indicator that consumers use to assess the quality of goods or services. Consumers typically evaluate and analyze price fairness from different angles (Ahmed et al., 2022). Price affordability refers to customers' perception of whether the product or service is appropriately priced and offers good value. In the fast-food industry, it is necessary to consider the relationship between the food price and its perceived value to attract customers (Ong et al., 2022). This indicates that customers are not solely focused on low prices but also on whether the price matches the quality and level of satisfaction they receive from the product or service. Jin et al. (2019) highlight that the growing acceptance of pricing justice also contributes to consumer loyalty. Affordable pricing can encourage repeat purchases and strengthen customer loyalty because customers are more likely to return to restaurants that offer satisfactory products at reasonable prices. Similarly, Severt et al. (2022) reveal that price fairness has a significant influence on loyalty in fast food restaurants. Additionally, Otterbach et al. (2021) also indicate that reasonable pricing strategies in the South African fast-food sector play a pivotal role in retaining cost-sensitive consumers. These studies support the importance of price affordability in competitive markets. As such, it is hypothesized:

H2: Price affordability has a positive effect on customer loyalty.

Food Quality and Customer Loyalty

Food quality has been widely recognized as a critical factor in influencing customer loyalty, especially in the fast-food industry. Recognizing the marketing value of customer loyalty, fast-food restaurants in contemporary times are looking for ways to ensure customer loyalty in the face of growing competitive pressures. One of these popular strategies is through ensuring the quality of food (Adediran & Adebisi, 2021). The food quality that has been verified at a higher level may offer guarantees on the food quality

established at a high level, which would provide assurances for customer expectations that are met, hence forming the basis for customer loyalty. Factors such as flavor, presentation, temperature, nutrition content, as well as menu diversification are among those that have been suggested to be considered while assessing the quality of a meal (Chowdhury et al., 2023). In the fast-food industry, customers are influenced by the quality of meals and drinks (Majid et al., 2021). High food quality increases the likelihood of repeat purchases because customers are more likely to return to restaurants that consistently provide delicious, fresh, and satisfying meals. In contrast, poor food quality would cause dissatisfaction, leading to customers changing their preference to other brands. According to Ling et al. (2024), food quality significantly affects customer satisfaction, resulting in increased customer loyalty for fast-food restaurants. Their findings show that customers are more likely to revisit restaurants when food is perceived as fresh, tasty, and consistent in quality. Similarly, Martinez-Ruiz et al. (2023) report that food-related values play a significant role in shaping customer loyalty across different types of restaurants. As such, the hypothesis was developed:

H3: Food quality has a positive effect on customer loyalty.

Service Quality and Customer Loyalty

Service quality can be defined as customers' overall evaluation of the service delivered by employees during the purchasing experience. There are five dimensions for measuring service quality, which are reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibles. (Yum & Yoo, 2023). These dimensions measure how effectively the restaurants have served the customer's needs beyond the provision of products themselves. Service quality is important because consumers evaluate both the quality of the product and the services they have received. Service quality plays a crucial role in making repeat purchases (Mulyawan et al., 2022). The reason behind this is that when customers receive efficient and friendly service, they are more likely to develop trust and emotional attachment towards KFC, which strengthens loyalty behavior. Ramadhan and Cindiyasari (2024) conclude that service quality has a positive impact on the loyalty of KFC customers. Their study explains that high service quality increases customers' relationships and makes customers return again and again. Moreover, Naini et al. (2022) report that service quality significantly influences customer loyalty through customer satisfaction. Tannady and Purnamaningsih (2023) also state that service quality has a positive relationship with customer loyalty. On the other hand, the service quality provided is strongly related to customer loyalty as well as emotional feedback (Dam & Dam, 2021). Thus, service quality is expected to positively influence customer loyalty at KFC. Therefore, the testable hypothesis has been developed as follows:

H4: Service quality has a positive effect on customer loyalty.

Physical Environment and Customer Loyalty

When it comes to dining experiences and influencing customer perceptions, the factors found, such as physical environment, become more important in this industry. The physical environment is made up of the physical aspects associated with designing the service settings and performing service cues, such as interior design, equipment, furnishing, cleanliness, and employee appearance (Sochenda, 2021). These factors contribute to creating an overall environment in the restaurants. A clean, comfortable, and visually appealing environment can improve customer satisfaction and encourage repeat visits. Customers are more likely to stay longer and revisit restaurants that provide a pleasant and comfortable atmosphere. According to a study conducted by Singh et al. (2022), the physical environment is very significant regarding dining experiences, ranking second after food quality. Makudza (2020) indicates that good management of

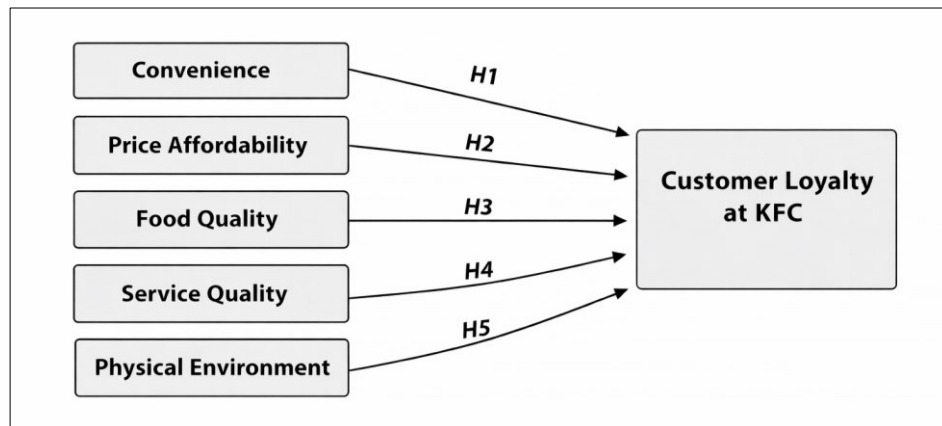
the physical environment leads to a good experience outcome, which will affect customer loyalty. Similarly, [Ing et al. \(2020\)](#) emphasize that customer loyalty depends on certain transaction-related factors, including the atmosphere. Therefore, the physical environment is expected to influence customer loyalty at KFC. Hence, the hypothesis states that:

H5: Physical environment has a positive effect on customer loyalty.

Research Framework

[Figure 1](#) presents the conceptual framework of the study, which positions convenience, price affordability, food quality, service quality, and physical environment as the main antecedents of customer loyalty at KFC. The model reflects the idea that customer loyalty in the fast-food industry is shaped by a combination of practical, economic, and experiential factors rather than by a single attribute alone. Each proposed relationship is tested empirically to identify which factor contributes most strongly to customer loyalty in the Malaysian and Indian KFC context.

Figure 1. Research Framework



RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional quantitative research design to examine the direct effects of convenience, price affordability, food quality, service quality, and physical environment on customer loyalty at KFC. A quantitative design was appropriate because the study aimed to test hypothesized relationships among measurable constructs using survey data collected from consumers with prior KFC experience. The design also allowed the researchers to compare the relative strength of each predictor and identify which factor contributes most strongly to customer loyalty in the fast-food context.

Sample Methods

A non-probability sampling technique, which is convenience sampling, was applied in this study. Individuals who were accessible and willing to participate in the research were selected as respondents. Individual consumers who have had previous experiences of making purchases at KFC restaurants in Malaysia or India have been identified as the target population. This approach was considered appropriate due to its practicality in reaching a large number of respondents within a limited time frame.

A total of 150 valid respondents were targeted for this study, which was considered adequate enough for carrying out any form of statistical analysis, including descriptive statistics and regression analysis ([Jannah et al., 2023](#)). While convenience sampling

limited the generalizability of the findings, it remained suitable for exploratory research focusing on consumer perceptions and behavioral intentions. The unit of analysis used in this study was individual consumers who had previously made purchases at KFC.

The respondents' demographic profile was also collected to provide a clearer understanding of the sample characteristics. This included variables such as gender, age, ethnicity group, marital status, occupation, education level, and income. These demographic factors allowed for further analysis of differences in customer loyalty across various groups.

Data Collection

This study used a quantitative research approach, where primary data were collected through a structured online questionnaire (Wolok, 2021). The survey was administered using an online platform (Google Forms) and distributed via digital channels such as social media and messaging applications to facilitate efficient and widespread participation.

Respondents were required to have prior experience with KFC to ensure the relevance of their responses. Participation was voluntary, and all data were collected anonymously to maintain confidentiality. The use of an online survey platform enabled efficient data collection and minimized data entry errors, as responses were automatically recorded. The collected data were subsequently prepared and analyzed using SPSS to examine the relationships between the independent variables and customer loyalty.

Measures

The questionnaire consists of several sections, which are designed to measure both dependent variables and independent variables. All the measurement items were adopted and adapted from previous studies and modified to suit the context of KFC. Each construct was measured using multiple items to ensure reliability and validity. All the constructs in this study used the Five-point Likert scale, which ranges from 1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement on each statement based on their experiences at KFC. The appendix presents a detailed measurement item corresponding to each key variable in this study.

Customer Loyalty (Dependent Variable)

Customer loyalty was measured based on how consistent their preference and commitment towards KFC as their fast-food choice. This section consisted of 5 items adopted and adapted from Teoh et al. (2025) to capture respondents' loyalty on their preference, repurchase intention, and willingness to recommend the brand.

Independent Variable

First, convenience in this study refers to the ease with which customers can access and use KFC services. It reflects the accessibility and user-friendliness of KFC from the customers' perspective. The 4 measurement variables for convenience were adopted and adapted from Cheng et al. (2011), including operating hours, outlet accessibility, location, and the efficiency of the KFC mobile application.

Second, price affordability was measured using 4 items adopted and adapted from Kuek et al. (2025) and Zhao et al. (2021). Respondents' perceptions were measured based on affordability, value for money, and overall acceptability of KFC pricing. A higher mean score indicated a higher level of perceived price affordability.

Third, food quality was measured using 5 items adopted and adapted from Oh et al. (2021). This study measured the customers' evaluation of the food freshness, portion size, and visual appeal.

Fourth, service quality was measured using 7 items adopted and adapted from established literature authored by Taufik et al. (2022). These items focused on how employees perform and how customers received the service. In addition, this section also evaluated the adequacy of KFC's physical facilities and equipment.

Fifth, to focus on customers' evaluation of the physical environment on KFC, a 5-item scale designed to examine its cleanliness, comfort, and overall hygiene was adopted and adapted from Oh et al. (2021). Examples include: "The KFC dining area is clean and tidy" and "The rubbish area at KFC is clean and tidy". Overall, the items reflected how the customers perceive KFC's environmental quality and hygiene.

RESULTS

Respondents' Demographic Profile

Table 1. Summary of Respondent's Demographic Information (N = 150)

Item	Classification	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	78	52
	Male	72	48
Age	18 years and below	2	1.3
	18 - 24 years old	87	58
	25-34 years old	21	14
	35 - 44 years old	22	14.7
	45 years old and above	18	12
Ethnicity	Chinese	46	30.7
	Indian	52	34.7
	Malay	49	32.7
	Others	3	1.9
Marital Status	Married	51	34
	Single	99	66
Occupation	Government worker	10	6.7
	Housewife	12	8
	Private sector	36	24
	Self- employed	5	3.3
	Student	85	56.7
	Unemployed	2	1.3
Highest Education Level	Secondary School / SPM	16	10.7
	Foundation/ Pre-University / Diploma	24	16
	Degree	100	66.7
	Postgraduate (Master / PhD)	10	6.7
Monthly Income	Below RM1,500	93	62
	RM1,500 - RM3,000	39	26
	RM3,000 - RM5,000	10	6.7
	Above RM5,000	8	5.3

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. The results show that female respondents (52%) slightly outnumber male respondents (48%). Most respondents are aged between 18 and 24 years old (58%), followed by those aged 35

to 44 years old (14.7%) and 25 to 34 years old (14%), while the smallest group is respondents aged 18 years and below (1.3%). In terms of ethnicity, the sample consists of Indian respondents (34.7%), Malay respondents (32.7%), Chinese respondents (30.7%), and others (1.9%). The majority are single (66%) and students (56.7%). Most respondents hold a degree (66.7%) and earn below RM1,500 per month (62.0%). Overall, the sample mainly represents young and educated consumers with relatively low income levels.

Respondents' Experience with KFC

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on Experience with KFC (N = 150)

Item	Classification	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Familiarity with KFC	Yes	150	100
Frequency of Visiting KFC	Daily	2	1.3
	Weekly	35	23.3
	Monthly	64	42.7
	Rarely	49	32.7
Usual mode of KFC consumption	Counter	49	32.7
	Mobile application	50	33.3
	Self-service kiosk	51	34
Average spending per visit at KFC	Below RM10	3	2
	RM10 - RM20	40	26.7
	RM20 - RM30	70	46.7
	Above RM30	37	24.7
Companions when visiting KFC	Alone	25	16.7
	Colleagues	23	15.3
	Family	51	34
	Friends	51	34

Table 2 shows the respondents' experience. All respondents are familiar with the brand (100%), indicating that the data is collected from experienced individuals. Most respondents visit monthly (42.7%), followed by rarely (32.7%) and weekly (23.3%), while only a small percentage visit daily (1.3%). In terms of usage, respondents are fairly distributed across counter service (32.7%), mobile application (33.3%), and self-service kiosk (34%), showing balanced preferences.

In terms of spending, the majority spend between RM20–RM30 (46.7%), followed by RM10–RM20 (26.7%) and above RM30 (24.7%). Most respondents visit with family or friends (34%), while fewer visit alone or with colleagues. These findings suggest that respondents have moderate spending patterns and tend to visit in social settings.

Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Correlation Analysis

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients, and Zero-order Correlations for all Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Convenience	0.829					
2 Price Affordability	0.691**	0.877				
3 Food Quality	0.725**	0.587**	0.802			
4 Service Quality	0.618**	0.644**	0.754**	0.904		
5 Physical Environment	0.630**	0.608**	0.718**	0.666**	0.839	
6 Customer Loyalty	0.585**	0.657**	0.656**	0.666**	0.707**	0.885
Number of items	4	4	5	7	5	5
Mean	4.3700	4.2583	4.1373	4.0057	4.1000	4.0573

Standard Deviation	0.65457	0.70020	0.63463	0.66819	0.71297	0.78041
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Note: N = 150; *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. The diagonal entries represent Cronbach's coefficient alpha.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics, reliability, and correlation results. The Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.802 to 0.904, indicating a high level of internal consistency and reliability for all variables. The mean values are relatively high, suggesting that respondents generally have positive perceptions toward all constructs.

The correlation analysis shows that all variables are positively related and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that improvements in one variable are associated with improvements in others. The results confirm that all variables are suitable and reliable for further regression analysis.

Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Table 4. Regression Analysis

Variables		Customer Loyalty
1	Convenience	-0.029
2	Price Affordability	0.277***
3	Food Quality	0.139
4	Service Quality	0.173*
5	Physical Environment	0.342***
R ² Change		0.613
F Value		45.558
Durbin-Watson Statistic		1.698

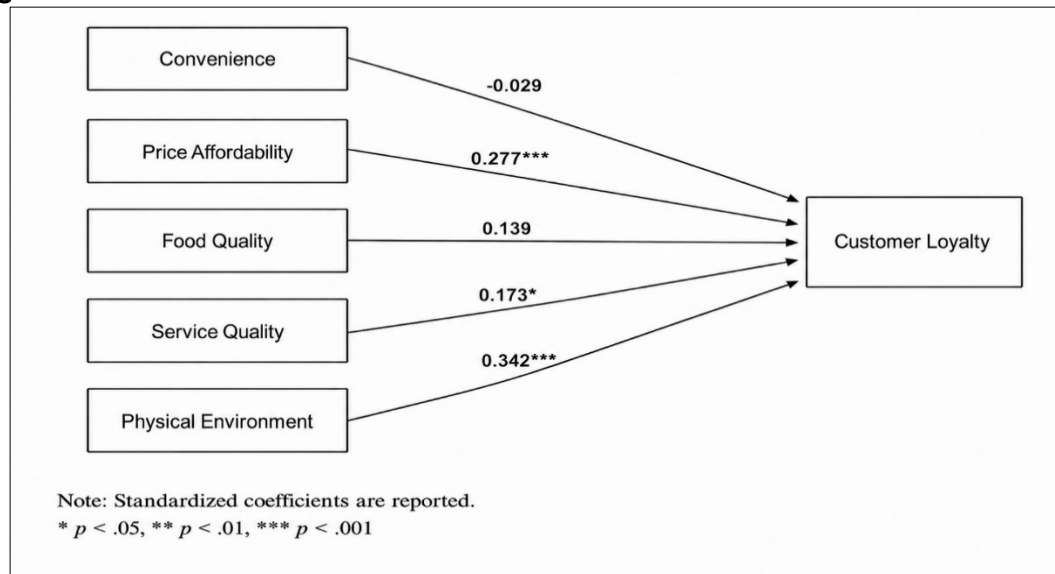
Note: N = 150; *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Table 4 presents the regression analysis results. The findings show that price affordability ($\beta = 0.277$, $p < 0.001$), service quality ($\beta = 0.173$, $p < 0.05$), and physical environment ($\beta = 0.342$, $p < 0.001$) have significant positive effects on customer loyalty. This indicates that customers are more likely to have better experiences when prices are affordable, services are satisfactory, and the environment is comfortable. However, convenience ($\beta = -0.029$) and food quality ($\beta = 0.139$) are not significant, indicating that these factors do not strongly affect customer loyalty in this study.

Among these variables, the physical environment has the strongest influence, highlighting the importance of ambiance and cleanliness, followed closely by price affordability. This supports H2, H4, and H5 while H1 and H3 are not supported.

The model explains 61.3% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.613$) and is statistically significant ($F = 45.558$), indicating good explanatory power. Overall, three out of five hypotheses were supported, while two were not supported. The results highlight the importance of price affordability, service quality, and physical environment in influencing customer loyalty at KFC. Convenience and food quality are not significant predictors of influencing customer loyalty. The structural model is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Structural Model



DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to look at what factors influence customer loyalty at KFC, focusing on convenience, price affordability, food quality, service quality, and physical environment. The regression results showed that some of the hypotheses were supported while others were not. This section discusses what these findings mean, why some factors mattered more than others, and how this compares to previous research.

The Influence of Physical Environment on Customer Loyalty

Based on the results regarding the 5 factors, the physical environment has the biggest impact on customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.342$, $p < 0.001$). It has a significant positive relationship with customer loyalty (H5). This is quite surprising since a lot of people would expect food quality or price to be affected the most. In the case of fast foods, when customers visit the restaurant, they judge the food as well as the entire environment of the restaurant. When there is a good and comfortable environment for diners, customers are more likely to enjoy their stay at the restaurant and may return in the future.

This study finding is aligned with findings by Jeong et al. (2022), who found that the physical environment plays an important role in shaping dining experiences. It's also supported by Cankül et al. (2024), who showed that a well-managed physical environment can improve customer experience and customer loyalty. What is interesting is that in this study, the physical environment actually matters more than food quality. This might be because KFC's food quality is already quite good and consistent, so customers have come to expect it. The physical environment, on the other hand, can vary in cleanliness, seating comfort, smell, and hygiene from one outlet to another, so it becomes the most important factor that customers notice and use to decide whether to come back.

The Influence of Price Affordability on Customer Loyalty

Price affordability is the second strongest predictor of customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.277$, $p < 0.001$). It has a significant positive relationship with customer loyalty (H2). From here, it means that customers are more likely to remain loyal to KFC when they feel the prices are reasonable and provide good value for money. This is not too surprising because

more than half of them (62%) earned below RM1,500 per month, and most were students (56.7%). For this group, money is often tight, so they often care about spending at KFC outlets. As a result, price may play an important role in their decision to revisit KFC. Customers may not necessarily expect the lowest price, but they are likely to expect a fair balance between price and portion size. This finding is in line with [Batarliené and Slavinskaitė \(2023\)](#), who reported that price fairness significantly influences loyalty in fast food restaurants. This finding was also supported by [Yulihapsari et al. \(2025\)](#), who stated that appropriate pricing is crucial for attracting price-sensitive consumers. Therefore, continuing to offer value meals, student discounts, and affordable combo deals is probably a smart strategy that can help KFC strengthen customer loyalty.

The Influence of Service Quality on Customer Loyalty

Service quality is also significantly influencing customer loyalty (H4) ($\beta = 0.173$, $p < 0.05$). Its effect is weaker than physical environment and price affordability. This shows that the better an employee performs, behaves in a polite manner, and treats their customers personally, the more likely the customers are to remain loyal. Good services may also increase positive perceptions towards the brand and lead to repurchase intentions. This supports H4, and also confirms earlier findings from similar studies by [Akil & Ungan \(2021\)](#) and [Juwaini et al. \(2022\)](#). However, the coefficient is smaller than for the physical environment and price affordability. One reason for this may be due to the increasing use of self-service kiosks and mobile applications. In this study, usage is fairly evenly split between counter service (32.7%), mobile apps (33.3%), and self-service kiosks (34.0%). When customers order through a screen, they have less direct interaction with employees. Employee service may become slightly less influential compared to the physical environment and price affordability.

The Influence of Convenience on Customer Loyalty

Convenience ($\beta = -0.029$, $p > 0.05$) does not significantly affect customer loyalty (H1). This means that convenience may not be the main reason customers remain loyal to KFC. One possible explanation is that KFC has already become a well-known and accessible fast-food brand. All 150 respondents are familiar with KFC, and in both Malaysia and India, KFC outlets are fairly common. Since all respondents are familiar with KFC, convenience has become a basic expectation rather than a factor that creates strong loyalty. When customers can easily find a KFC nearby, the app works well, and the operating hours are reasonable, convenience becomes something they take for granted. This finding differs from [Zhong and Moon \(2020\)](#), who found that convenience positively affected customer loyalty in KFC. The difference may be due to differences in research context, customer profile, or level of convenience provided by KFC.

The Influence of Food Quality on Customer Loyalty

Food Quality also did not have a significant effect on customer loyalty, even though it had a positive effect (H3). The mean score was high ($M = 4.14$ out of 5), and the standard deviation was relatively small ($SD = 0.63$). This means that most respondents already thought KFC's food quality is good. If the majority believes something to be good, then that particular variable is likely to become a normative expectation and thus not a unique determinant of customer loyalty. This finding matches that of [Akmal et al. \(2023\)](#), who found that food quality does not significantly affect customer loyalty in fast food restaurants. This happens because respondents consider the price to be affordable and able to meet consumers' needs. Therefore, quality does not become a barrier to customer loyalty.

Managerial Implications

For KFC managers, the findings provide several important practical implications. First, the KFC should prioritize the cleanliness of the restaurant environment, as the physical environment was found to be the strongest predictor of customer loyalty. The cleanliness of KFC should be consistently monitored and improved. Second, KFC should keep prices affordable and prepare value-for-money meals in order to target younger and lower-income customers. Third, although many customers now use self-service kiosks and mobile applications, KFC should continue to train employees to provide efficient service while also improving its digital service platform. Fourth, food quality and convenience should be maintained as basic service standards, although they are not significant factors in this study. Therefore, KFC should focus on strengthening these experiential and economic factors to remain competitive in the fast-food industry.

Although this study provides useful insights, its findings should be interpreted with caution due to the use of convenience sampling, self-reported questionnaire data, and the focus on KFC customers in Malaysia and India only. Future research could address these limitations. The research should use a more representative sampling method that includes different age groups, income levels, and family types. This would allow future studies to produce findings that are more global with a wider population of KFC customers. In addition, future research could conduct a comparative study across several countries to see whether the importance of physical environment and price affordability remains consistent in other cultural contexts. In addition, qualitative research such as interviewing and focus group discussions can be employed in order to understand more deeply the way in which consumers perceive both the physical environment and price considerations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study was able to explore the factors that affect customer loyalty in KFC by focusing on convenience, price affordability, food quality, service quality, and physical environment. Based on the quantitative analysis of 150 respondents by using SPSS software, the findings showed that physical environment was the strongest factor of customer loyalty, followed by price affordability and service quality. This indicates that customers are more likely to remain loyal to KFC when they experience a clean and comfortable restaurant environment, perceive the prices as affordable, and receive good service. However, convenience and food quality were not found to have significant effects on customer loyalty as these factors function as basic expectations rather than strong loyalty drivers in this study.

Practical implications of the findings would prove to be highly beneficial in terms of guiding KFC management and broader fast-food operations in working on how to stay competitive in such a volatile market environment. Management must concentrate on optimizing its existing retention strategies by providing excellent hygiene, reasonable pricing policies, and effective digital service interfaces. Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of customer loyalty in the fast-food industry by showing that loyalty is influenced not only by product-related factors, but also by customers' overall dining experience and perceived value. Future researchers are encouraged to use larger and more representative samples, include different customer groups, and compare KFC with other fast-food brands or countries to provide broader insights into customer loyalty.

LIMITATION

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the use of convenience sampling may limit the external validity of the findings, as the sample may

not fully represent all KFC customers. Most respondents were young, single, and had relatively low incomes. The results might look different if the sample included more working adults or families with higher incomes. Second, the data was collected through online questionnaires and was based on self-reported responses. This may affect internal validity because respondents may not always answer surveys honestly or in a socially desirable way. Third, the study only focuses on Malaysia and India. The future studies should use more representative samples and include respondents from different countries.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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