

Driving Customer Satisfaction at KFC: The Influence of Product Quality, Service efficiency, and Restaurant Atmospherics on the Young Generation

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine how product quality, service efficiency and restaurant atmospherics influence customer satisfaction among the young generation at KFC, identifying key factors that enhance their overall dining experience and satisfaction levels. This study adopts a quantitative methodology to examine the relationship between product quality, service efficiency, and atmosphere on the customer satisfaction, restaurant atmospherics on the young particularly among the young generation. Data were collected through questionnaires from 200 KFC customers using purposive sampling and analyzed using SPSS software. For the younger generation, loyalty is "rented" rather than owned. While KFC relies on its signature recipe, Gen Z views a cold meal or a slow drive-thru as a reason to switch brands instantly. The challenges is balancing product quality with service efficiency and a modern atmosphere. We need to determine which of these factors actually keeps this techsavvy demographic from tapping their way to a competitor. By ensuring food is fresh and tasty, providing faster service, maintaining a clean and comfortable atmosphere, KFC can increase customer satisfaction that could attract more young customers in the future.

Keywords: Customer Satisfaction, Product Quality, Service Efficiency, Restaurant Atmospherics, Young Generation, KFC

INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-moving and competitive fast-food industry, customer satisfaction plays a very important role in the success of brands like KFC. Customers, especially the young generation, are not satisfied with just good food anymore. They expect a complete experience that includes quality food, quick service, and a comfortable place to dine. Young customers are more aware and have higher expectations, which makes it important for companies to understand what really makes them happy.

Customer satisfaction simply means how satisfied or happy a customer feels after their dining experience. It depends on whether their expectations are met or even exceeded. Research shows that different factors such as product quality, service efficiency, and the restaurant environment have a strong influence on customer satisfaction (Chien et al., 2025). In fast-food restaurants, these factors play a big role in deciding whether customers will come back again or recommend the place to others.

Among these factors, product quality is one of the most important. It includes things like the taste of the food, freshness, how it looks, and the variety available. When customers get good quality food consistently, they feel satisfied and start trusting the brand. Studies have also shown that satisfied customers are more likely to become loyal and visit again (Kee et al., 2024). For a brand like KFC, maintaining good food quality is very important to stay competitive. Service efficiency is another key factor that affects customer satisfaction. It mainly focuses on how fast and accurately the service is provided. Customers usually expect quick service, short waiting time, and correct orders. Staff behavior also matters, as polite and helpful employees can improve the overall experience. On the other hand, slow service or mistakes in orders can lead to dissatisfaction (Halid et al., 2024). Restaurant atmosphere also plays an important role in shaping the overall experience. Things like cleanliness, seating comfort, lighting, temperature, and background music create the environment of the restaurant. A clean and comfortable atmosphere makes customers feel relaxed and enjoy their time more. Studies suggest that such environmental factors influence customer feelings and their decision to revisit (Ng & Kee, 2025; Song et al., 2025). Even though many studies have looked at these factors individually, very few studies have examined them together, especially focusing on the young generation in fast-food chains like KFC. This study tries to understand how product quality, service efficiency, and restaurant atmosphere together affect customer satisfaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer satisfaction, products quality, service efficiency and atmosphere

Customer satisfaction, products quality, service efficiency and atmosphere
Customer satisfaction is a key factor in determining the success of businesses in the fast-food industry. It refers to the extent to which customers' expectations are met by a product or service. According to previous studies, customer satisfaction is defined as the overall evaluation of a customer's experience with a service or product. When customers are satisfied, they are more likely to revisit the restaurant and recommend it to others through positive word-of-mouth. In the context of fast-food restaurants such as KFC, customer satisfaction is influenced by multiple factors including service quality, food quality, and restaurant environment. Studies have shown that maintaining high customer satisfaction is essential for gaining competitive advantage and increasing profitability. (Abeykoon, H. N. 2024)

Product Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Product quality at KFC is consistently described as a key driver of customer satisfaction, purchase decision and loyalty. Across all branches, quality is mainly judged based on tastes, freshness, consistency, portion size, presentation, hygiene and how well products meet customers expectations (Singh & Nanda, 2022). In the context of fast food, consistent taste and quality are essential in maintaining customer loyalty. High product quality is reflected in factors such as taste, crunchiness, spice level, which significantly influence consumer satisfaction and loyalty. (Khairunnisa et al., 2025). Research on sensory branding shows that taste and smell strongly influence consumer perception and satisfaction. For example, a study on KFC found that taste and smell are among the strongest factors in forming brand recognition and customer preference. This suggests that high-quality food not only satisfies hunger but also creates memorable experiences that encourage repeat visits. Moreover, KFC should follow strict food-handling procedures, including wearing proper attire such as clean uniforms, hairnets, gloves, and face masks when handling food, to ensure hygiene is properly maintained. (Ganatra et al., 2021). In the context of KFC in Malaysia, product quality is also closely linked to halal assurance, where compliance with halal standards increases consumer trust and willingness to purchase. (Mahendri et al., 2020). Additionally, young consumers are particularly sensitive to food quality due to increased awareness of health, hygiene, and value for money. If the perceived quality does not match expectations, dissatisfaction occurs quickly, leading to negative word-of-mouth. Overall, these factors shows that the product quality at KFC plays a crucial role in enhancing the customer satisfaction and loyalty

H1: Product quality positively influences customer satisfaction and loyalty in KFC.

Service Efficiency and Customer Satisfaction

Service efficiency, particularly in terms of speed and responsiveness, is widely recognized as a key determinant of customer satisfaction in the fast-food industry such as KFC. Service efficiency refers to how quickly and accurately customers are served, including order processing time, staff responsiveness, and error minimisation. In fast food settings, speed and convenience are major expectation, especially among younger customers who often prefer convenience. Studies have shown that efficient service significantly enhances customer satisfaction by reducing waiting time and improving the overall dining experience. Delays, incorrect orders, or unresponsive staff can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction. For younger consumers, who are accustomed to fast-paced digital services such as food delivery apps, expectations for speed and convenience are even higher (Hussain, S. 2014). In the context of service quality, responsiveness can be understood as the ability of staff to provide accurate and timely service while maintaining smooth communication with customers (Aryanto Mengi Dju Bire et al., 2021). Previous studies highlight several dimensions used to evaluate responsiveness. For instance, (Aryanto Mengi Dju Bire et al., 2021) identified factors such as satisfaction ready to help customers, satisfaction with the speed in service, and satisfaction with smooth communication as key indicators of responsiveness. Furthermore, a study by (Abeykoon., 2024) found that responsiveness as the most influential factor affecting both customer satisfaction and loyalty in KFC. According to Rumagit et al. (2022, as cited in Abeykoon, 2024), before getting classified as a restaurant that provides a standard service quality, it is necessary to build trust between the consumers and the employees. The employees should support the customers by delivering prompt service with a responsive attitude. Moreover, the study mentions that when the restaurant provides a premium good quality service while being fast and efficient, this can boost customer satisfaction as well as the popularity of the restaurant (Himasha Nethali Abeykoon., 2024). In addition, friendly and helpful staff interactions contribute to perceived service quality. Even in quick-service restaurants, human interaction still plays an important role in shaping customer perceptions even in quick-

service restaurants Overall, service efficiency is essential in enhancing customer satisfaction, building trust and encouraging customer loyalty at KFC.

H2: Service efficiency positively influences customer satisfaction and revisit intention in KFC.

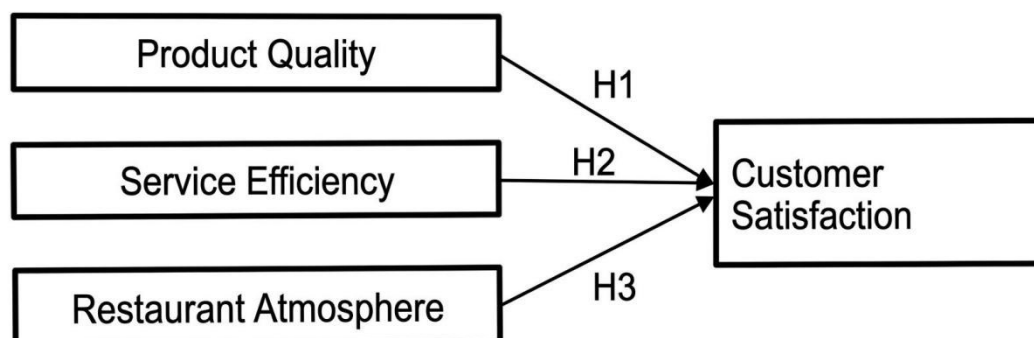
Restaurant Atmosphere and Customer Satisfaction

Physical atmosphere or servicescape is a key determinant of customer behaviour in the fast food industry such as KFC, referring to the man made physical surroundings of a service setting that include ambient conditions, spatial layout, and signs or symbols (Han et al., 2022). According to Kotler (1973), atmosphere can create emotional effects that increase the likelihood of purchase. This environment influences customer experience and satisfaction, which can lead to positive behavioural intentions such as revisit intention in food service settings (Han et al., 2022). The concept of sensory marketing highlights how engaging multiple senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch) can enhance customer experience. Research on KFC indicates that sensory elements such as visual design, aroma, and background music contribute significantly to customer perception and brand identity. In addition, research by Soma Nath and Agarwal (2023) found that servicescape has a strong influence on customer perception, emotional response, and satisfaction in restaurant settings. These physical cues shape trust and purchase intentions, especially among younger customers at KFC. Moreover, younger generations expect more than basic seating, as they value cleanliness and modern design to ensure satisfaction (Shanika W. G. C, 2025). Previous studies also show that factors such as perceived crowding and restaurant environment influence customer evaluation and perception of popularity (Ali et al., 2021). Overall, physical atmosphere plays an important role in enhancing brand image and encouraging repeat visits by creating a comfortable environment that makes customers stay longer, with elements such as hygiene, lighting, layout, and equipment contributing to service quality and customer loyalty (Shanika W. G. C, 2025)

Conceptual Framework

The study framework model is depicted in Figure 1. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the study, illustrating the influence of product quality, service efficiency, and restaurant atmospherics on customer satisfaction among the young generation at KFC. The framework proposes that customers who perceive higher products quality, experience efficient service, and enjoy a comfortable restaurant atmosphere are more likely to report higher levels of customer satisfaction.

Figure 1. Research Framework



RESEARCH METHOD

Sample and procedure

This study adopted a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between product quality, service efficiency and restaurant atmospheric on the customer satisfaction among the young generation at KFC. A quantitative approach is suitable as it allows for the systematic measurement of variables and statistical analysis. The target populations of this study consists of young Malaysian consumers who have visited or dined at KFC. A non probability purposive sampling techniques was applied to ensure that the respondent met the criteria of being young customer who has dining experience at KFC. Data also been collected through distribution of structured online survey via Google Forms. The survey link shared across social media platforms such as Whatsapp, Instagram, Tiktoks and Threads to reach a diverse demographics. A total of 160 valid responses were collected and subsequently analysed using SPSS software which was used to perform the descriptive statistic and regression analysis where to test the hypotheses.

Measures

This study employed a structured questionnaire which included the 23 items on five point Likert scale. This survey was also divided into multiple sections in order to assess the respondent profile product quality, service efficiency, restaurant atmospheric and customer satisfaction. All the measurement items were adopted from established studies in the fast food and service industry literature (Bulochova et al., 2024) This study clarifies the validation of the contents. A structured questionnaire which included the 23 items on five point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) which is to capture the respondents perceptions. Product quality was measured using six items (item 4-9) which assess the freshness, preparations, taste, variety. presentation and consistency of KFC food (mean = 3.83). Service efficiency was assessed through five items (items 10-14) which captures the orders speed, staff responsiveness. order accuracy, waiting time, complaint handling (mean = 3.85). Restaurant Atmospherics was measured using five items too (items 15-19) reflects the cleanliness, seating comfort, ambiance, suitability for socializing and the overall enhancement of the dining experience (mean = 3.98). The last one is Customer Satisfaction served as a dependent variable and was assessed through four items (items 20-23), which examined the overall. satisfaction, expectation fulfillment, revisit intention, and likelihood to recommend KFC to others (mean = 3.99). All items were developed based on instruments from fast food satisfaction and the data analysed using the SPSS software to assess the descriptive statistics.

RESULTS

Table 1. Summary of Respondents' Demographic Information (N=161)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
Below 18	6	3.7
18-20 years old	19	11.8
21-22 years old	55	34.2
23-26 years old	52	32.3
Above 26	29	18.0
Gender		
Female	113	70.2
Male	28	17.2
Prefer not to say	20	12.4
How often do you visit		
KFC		
Frequently (once a week)	36	22.4
Occasionally (1-2 times a month)	49	30.4
Rarely (less than once a month)	59	36.6
Very frequently (more than once a week)	17	10.6

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of 161 respondents in total. The sample shows a clear concentration in the younger age groups, with respondents aged 21–22 years old representing the highest proportion (N=55, 34.2%), followed by those aged 23–26 years old (N=52, 32.3%), above 26 years old (N=29, 18.0%), 18–20 years old (N=19, 11.8%), and below 18 years old (N=6, 3.7%). In terms of gender, the sample shows a significantly higher proportion of female respondents (N=113, 70.2%), while male respondents account for (N=28, 17.4%) and those who preferred not to say represent (N=20, 12.4%). Most respondents reported visiting KFC rarely, which refers to less than once a month (N=59, 36.6%). This is followed by respondents who visit KFC occasionally, about 1–2 times a month (N=49, 30.4%), frequently, once a week (N=36, 22.4%), and very frequently, more than once a week (N=17, 10.6%).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistic, Cronbach's Coefficients Alpha, and Zero-order

Variables	1	2	3	4
Product Quality	0.740			
Service Efficiency	0.463**	0.779		
Restaurant Atmospherics	0.494**	0.587**	0.793	
Customer Satisfaction	0.398**	0.535**	0.449**	0.496
Number of items	6	5	5	4
Mean	3.5747	3.8513	3.9758	3.6566
Standard Deviation	0.48418	0.60359	0.62444	0.41940

Correlations for All Study Variables

*Note: N=161; *p <.05, **p <.01, ***p <.001. The diagonal entries represent Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha.*

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha, and zero-order correlations for all study variables. Overall constructs reveal an acceptable internal reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.496 to 0.793, as shown above. The correlation results demonstrate positive and statistically significant relationships among the variables. Service Efficiency indicates a moderate and positive correlation with Customer Satisfaction ($r = 0.535$, $p < 0.01$), which suggests that better service efficiency is associated with higher customer satisfaction. In addition, Restaurant Atmospherics also shows a moderate correlation with Customer Satisfaction ($r = 0.449$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, Product Quality indicates a positive correlation with Customer Satisfaction ($r = 0.398$, $p < 0.01$). It shows that customers who perceive better product quality are more likely to feel satisfied with KFC. Besides that, Service Efficiency indicates a moderate positive correlation with Restaurant Atmospherics ($r = 0.587$, $p < 0.01$), while Product Quality also shows positive correlations with Service Efficiency ($r = 0.463$, $p < 0.01$) and Restaurant Atmospherics ($r = 0.494$, $p < 0.01$). To conclude, through the regression analysis, it shows that the correlation matrix supports the expected relation among the constructs and also provides justification for further hypothesis testing.

Table 3. Regression Analysis

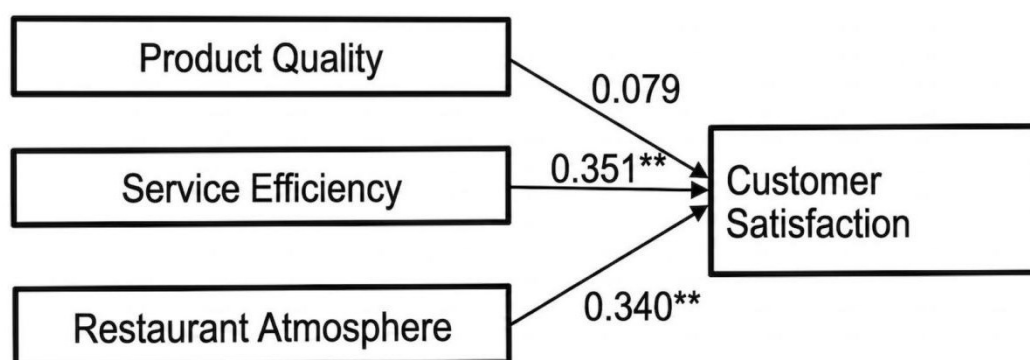
Customer Satisfaction towards KFC (R² Change = 0.398)	Beta
Product Quality	0.079
Service Efficiency	0.351**
Restaurant Atmospherics	0.340**
Model Summary	
F-Value	13.205
Durbin-Watson	2.492

*Note: N=151; *p <.05, **p <.01, ***p <.001*

Table 3 presents the result of the multiple regression analysis conducted to examine the influence of Product Quality, Service Efficiency, and Restaurant Atmospherics on Customer Satisfaction towards KFC. Overall, the regression model shows a significant statistic with an R² Change value of 0.398, indicating that 39.8% of the variance in Customer Satisfaction is explained by the three predictors. Hypothesis H1 proposed that

Product Quality positively influences Customer Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.079$), which is supported by the regression results. This shows that better product quality can increase customer satisfaction towards KFC. Hypothesis H2 examined the impact of Service Efficiency on Customer Satisfaction. The findings reveal that Service Efficiency has a positive effect on Customer Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.351$). Thus, H2 is supported, suggesting that efficient service delivery contributes to higher customer satisfaction. Hypothesis H3 proposed that Restaurant Atmospherics positively influences Customer Satisfaction. The results indicate that Restaurant Atmospherics also shows a positive effect on Customer Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.340$). Therefore, H3 is supported, suggesting that a comfortable restaurant atmosphere can improve customer satisfaction towards KFC.

Figure 2. Overview Result



DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to better understand what actually makes young customers feel satisfied when dining at KFC. The research focused on three main factors: product quality, service efficiency, and restaurant atmosphere. Based on the results, all three variables were found to positively influence customer satisfaction. However, service efficiency and restaurant atmosphere had a stronger impact compared to product quality. These findings clearly show that customer satisfaction today is no longer based only on food quality. Young consumers now expect fast service, convenience, comfort, and an enjoyable overall experience whenever they visit a restaurant.

The findings reflect how customer expectations have changed over the years, especially among younger generations. In the past, fast-food restaurants were mainly chosen for quick and affordable meals. Today, however, restaurants have become more than just places to eat. Young customers often look for places where they can relax, spend time with friends, study, or even create social media content. Because of this shift in lifestyle and behaviour, companies like KFC must focus not only on providing good food but also on delivering a memorable dining experience.

Another important point highlighted by this study is the growing competitiveness in the fast-food industry. Customers now have many choices, and switching from one brand to another is quite easy. If customers feel dissatisfied with the food, service, or environment, they may quickly move to competing brands. Therefore, understanding what truly influences customer satisfaction has become extremely important for businesses that want to remain competitive and retain loyal customers.

Influence of Product Quality on Customer Satisfaction

The findings of this study showed that product quality positively influences customer satisfaction at KFC. Although the impact was weaker compared to service efficiency and restaurant atmosphere, product quality still remains an essential factor in shaping customer experiences. Customers generally expect food that tastes good, looks fresh, is hygienically prepared, and remains consistent every time they visit the restaurant.

This finding makes sense because food is still the main reason customers visit KFC. Regardless of how attractive the restaurant environment is or how friendly the employees are, customers may still leave dissatisfied if the food quality does not meet their expectations. For example, if the chicken is oily, cold, overcooked, or inconsistent in taste, customers are likely to feel disappointed. Consistency is especially important because customers expect the same quality across all KFC outlets.

The importance of product quality is also linked to changing consumer awareness. Young consumers today are more conscious about hygiene, health, freshness, and value for money. They carefully observe food presentation and cleanliness before deciding whether the dining experience was satisfying. In addition, social media has made customers more expressive about their experiences. Customers frequently upload food photos, reviews, and opinions online, meaning that both positive and negative experiences can spread quickly.

This situation places additional pressure on fast-food companies to maintain high standards of food quality. A single poor experience can affect customer trust and damage brand image. On the other hand, consistent quality can strengthen customer loyalty and encourage repeat purchases.

From a managerial perspective, KFC should continue emphasizing food quality control across all branches. The company should ensure that ingredients are fresh, preparation methods are standardized, and hygiene practices are strictly followed. Employees handling food should also receive proper training to maintain consistency and safety standards. These efforts are important because customer satisfaction begins with meeting customers' basic expectations regarding the food itself.

Influence of Service Efficiency on Customer Satisfaction

Among all the variables examined in this study, service efficiency was found to have the strongest influence on customer satisfaction. This finding suggests that speed and convenience play a very important role in shaping customer experiences at KFC. Young customers today prefer services that are quick, smooth, and hassle-free.

This result reflects the lifestyle of modern consumers, especially younger generations who are used to fast technology, instant communication, and quick online services. Many customers visit fast-food restaurants because they expect to receive their food quickly without wasting time. As a result, long waiting times, slow staff response, or inaccurate orders can easily create dissatisfaction.

The findings also indicate that customer interactions with employees contribute significantly to customer satisfaction. Even though the interaction between staff and customers in fast-food restaurants is usually brief, the quality of these interactions still matters. Friendly greetings, polite communication, and employees who respond quickly to customer requests can create a positive impression. On the other hand, rude behaviour or poor responsiveness can negatively affect the entire dining experience.

Another reason service efficiency has become more important is the rapid growth of digital technology and food delivery platforms. Customers are now familiar with mobile ordering systems, online payment methods, and delivery applications that prioritize convenience and speed. Because of this, customer expectations toward restaurant service have become much higher than before. They expect orders to be processed accurately and efficiently whether they dine in, order takeaway, or use delivery services.

This finding highlights the importance of operational efficiency in the fast-food industry. KFC should therefore continue improving its service processes by investing in staff training, better communication systems, and digital technologies such as self-service kiosks and mobile applications. These technologies can help reduce waiting times, minimize order errors, and improve the overall customer experience.

In addition, management should regularly monitor customer feedback regarding service quality because customer expectations continue to evolve over time. Fast and efficient service not only increases satisfaction but can also encourage repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

Influence of Restaurant Atmosphere on Customer Satisfaction

The findings of this study also showed that restaurant atmosphere positively influences customer satisfaction. This indicates that customers pay attention not only to the food and service but also to the physical environment of the restaurant itself. Elements such as cleanliness, lighting, seating comfort, music, temperature, and interior design all contribute to how customers feel during their visit.

This finding is particularly relevant for younger consumers because many of them view restaurants as social spaces rather than simply places to eat. Customers today often choose restaurants where they can relax comfortably, spend time with friends, or enjoy a pleasant atmosphere. A clean and visually attractive environment can therefore improve mood, increase comfort, and create a more satisfying dining experience.

The strong influence of restaurant atmosphere also reflects the growing impact of social media culture. Younger generations are often attracted to restaurants that have modern and aesthetically pleasing interiors because such places are considered more enjoyable and “Instagram-worthy.” Customers may even choose a restaurant based on its environment and ambiance rather than solely on the food itself.

This suggests that restaurant atmosphere has become an important part of branding and customer experience in the fast-food industry. A comfortable environment can encourage customers to stay longer, revisit the restaurant, and recommend the place to others.

Because of this, KFC should continue improving the physical appearance and comfort of its outlets. Maintaining cleanliness should always be a top priority because cleanliness strongly influences customer perceptions regarding food safety and professionalism. In addition, comfortable seating arrangements, proper lighting, attractive interior designs, air conditioning, and free Wi-Fi can further enhance customer satisfaction.

Management should also regularly update restaurant designs to match current customer preferences and lifestyle trends. Creating a welcoming and comfortable environment can help KFC build stronger emotional connections with younger customers.

Managerial Implications

The findings of this study provide several important implications for KFC management. First, service efficiency should receive greater attention because it was identified as the strongest factor influencing customer satisfaction. Customers today expect fast and convenient service, and failing to meet these expectations may result in dissatisfaction and customer loss. Therefore, KFC should continue improving operational systems, employee performance, and digital ordering technologies.

Second, product quality should remain a core priority because food quality directly shapes customer perceptions and trust. Customers expect meals that are fresh, tasty, hygienic, and consistent. Maintaining these standards is important for ensuring long-term customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Third, restaurant atmosphere should not be overlooked because modern consumers value comfort and experience when dining out. A clean, comfortable, and visually appealing environment can improve customer mood and create positive experiences that encourage repeat visits.

Overall, the findings suggest that customer satisfaction in fast-food restaurants depends on a combination of factors rather than a single element. Businesses that successfully provide quality food, efficient service, and a pleasant atmosphere are more likely to satisfy customers and remain competitive in the market.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study provides useful insights into customer satisfaction at KFC, several limitations should still be acknowledged. First, the study focused only on young consumers in Malaysia, which means the findings may not fully represent customers from different age groups, cultures, or countries. Future studies could include more diverse respondents to provide broader perspectives.

Second, the study relied mainly on online questionnaires to collect data. While this method allowed information to be gathered efficiently, it may not fully capture customers' deeper feelings and personal experiences. Future researchers could use interviews or focus group discussions to gain richer and more detailed insights.

Third, this study examined only three independent variables. Other factors such as price fairness, promotional activities, brand reputation, digital service quality, and customer loyalty programs may also influence customer satisfaction and should be explored in future research.

Finally, future studies could compare KFC with other fast-food brands to better understand differences in customer expectations and competitive strengths within the industry. Such comparisons could provide more valuable insights for improving customer satisfaction strategies in the fast-food market.

CONCLUSION

This study was carried out to better understand what genuinely influences customer satisfaction among young diners at KFC, and the results reveal a very clear picture. Young customers are mainly influenced by three important factors: the quality of the food they receive, the efficiency and speed of the service, and the overall atmosphere and experience inside the restaurant. When these three elements work together effectively, they account for nearly 40% of the factors shaping customer satisfaction among younger consumers. This is a meaningful insight for any fast-food brand operating in a highly competitive market where young people are constantly exposed to countless food choices and alternatives every single day.

Among these factors, service efficiency emerged as the strongest contributor to customer satisfaction. Today's younger generation values convenience and speed more than ever before. In a time where meals can be ordered within seconds through mobile apps and delivery platforms, long waiting times, delayed service, or incorrect orders can quickly frustrate customers and push them toward competing brands. Young consumers expect their experience to be smooth, quick, and reliable from the moment they place an order until they receive their food. Even a small inconvenience can influence whether they decide to return again in the future.

The atmosphere of the restaurant was found to be the second strongest factor influencing satisfaction. For young customers, dining out is no longer only about eating food; it is also about enjoying the environment and overall experience. A restaurant that feels clean, comfortable, modern, and welcoming creates a positive emotional connection with customers. Many young people prefer places where they can relax, spend time with friends, take pictures, socialize, or simply enjoy a pleasant dining environment. This shows that ambiance plays a much larger role in customer satisfaction than many businesses may assume.

Product quality also had an important influence on customer satisfaction, even though its direct impact was slightly lower compared to service efficiency and restaurant atmosphere. However, this should not be misunderstood as food quality being less important. Taste, freshness, consistency, portion quality, and hygiene remain essential expectations for customers visiting a fast-food restaurant. No matter how attractive the restaurant looks or how quickly food is served, customers are unlikely to return if the food itself fails to meet their expectations. Quality food remains the foundation of customer trust and brand reputation.

The findings of this study clearly suggest that KFC and similar fast-food brands cannot afford to focus on only one aspect of the customer experience. A tasty meal served slowly in an uncomfortable or poorly maintained environment will not fully satisfy customers. In the same way, a visually appealing restaurant with fast service will still disappoint customers if the food quality is inconsistent or orders are inaccurate. Young consumers expect all aspects of their dining experience to work together smoothly and consistently every time they visit.

Therefore, if KFC wants to create long-term loyalty among younger customers rather than attracting only occasional visits, the company must continue improving all three areas together. Maintaining high food quality standards, improving service speed while ensuring order accuracy, and creating an enjoyable restaurant atmosphere are all equally important. Achieving the right balance between these elements is not simply about offering good customer service — it is about creating memorable experiences that encourage young customers to return regularly and build a lasting connection with the brand.

LIMITATION

This study has several limitations. First, the study sample is limited to young Malaysian consumers who have visited KFC, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other age groups and countries. Second, this study focuses only on product quality, service efficiency, and restaurant atmospherics as factors influencing customer satisfaction, while other potential variables were not included. Future research should consider additional variables and broader samples to provide a deeper understanding of customer satisfaction in the fast-food industry.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors have declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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