

# Article

# Determinants of Customer Loyalty for Roadside Restaurants in Malaysia: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach

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#### **Abstract**

Customer loyalty has become a fundamental and crucial focus for any business in the retail food industry. Therefore, every organization concentrating on gaining customer loyalty to extend profits and maintain sustainability within the business arena. This study aims to identify the determinants and their effects on customer loyalty for roadside restaurants in Malaysia. Survey data has been administered using a convenience sample of 248 customers from roadside restaurants located at metropolitan area of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor states in Malaysia. SPSS and AMOS statistical packages were used to validate and test the hypotheses. The study found that customer loyalty is mostly related to the environment of the restaurant and quality of food towards roadside restaurant businesses. Moreover, customer satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between the determinants and customer loyalty. This study contributes to stream an enhanced understanding of the problems and benefits for the roadside restaurant owners to formulate good marketing practices and better customer relationship strategies. Future study can be directed by using other independent variables with a more comprehensive solution.

**Keywords:** Customer Loyalty, Customer Satisfaction, Roadside Restaurants, Malaysia

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#### Introduction

In today's economy, roadside companies are up against stiff competition. In Malaysia, fast food brands such as McDonald's, KFC, Burger King, Pizza Hut, Dominos, Subway, A&W, Nando's, and others are currently operating. In Kuala Lumpur, the market share of those roadside operators is now saturated, and competition is expected to intensify. Many studies have shown that when they are happy with a product or service, they are more likely to tell others about it and stay loval. Customer satisfaction and customer lovalty have a positive relationship. according to Shinde, Chavan, and Ali (2018). Customer loyalty may be ensured by a happy customer. The roadside retail food and beverage industry, like many other business markets around the world, including Malaysia, has been quickly evolving and becoming much simpler. Along with this positive development in the roadside market, people's eating habits and overall consumption patterns in every country on the planet have been evolving at a rapid pace (Shaed et al., 2017; De Rezende & de Avelar, 2012). Successful businesses should consistently fulfill and inspire their clients to understand their confidence and sustain positive relationships. It will convert frequent customers into loyal clients, ensuring the business's continued success. Customer loyalty is quickly tuning into the market currency of the twenty-first century, according to Gee, Coates, and Nicholson (2008). As a result, every company should think about winning customer loyalty in order to expand benefits and maintain long-term viability in the marketplace.

As a result, the aim of this study is to assess the influence of factors such as product quality and restaurant environment on customer loyalty. As a result, the primary goal of this research is to examine the impact of these two key factors on customer loyalty. This research will assist the roadside industry in surviving in existing markets and even establishing new markets in Malaysia. Furthermore, they would enlarge their markets and enter new markets with more earnings from current demands, as well as benefit from the knowledge obtained from this research for fulfilling and retaining clients.

#### Literature Review

## **Customer Loyalty for Roadside Restaurants**

Roadside restaurants must satisfy their clients, and they must have loyal customers if they are to survive in a competitive market. Roadside restaurants should recognize the most important factors that impact customer satisfaction and loyalty in order to achieve this goal. As a result, a study must be conducted to examine the key factors that influence customer loyalty. Generally, loyalty alludes to the perception of the customer to remain with specific products or services (Shaed et al., 2017; Kim and Yoon, 2004). A client who may be persistent, will usually recommend buying the same products or services to other customers. Customers' commitment can carry an authentic picture of the business and convey more income to the owner. Loyalty corresponds to shopper's guarantee in handling the products and services for purchasing again and again. Customer loyalty has traditionally been divided into two categories: customer attitude and customer behavior (Kumar and Shah, 2004). Customer loyalty may be a point of convergence for a variety of businesses (Vesel and Zabkar, 2009). Willingness to repurchase, endorsing the item to others, and budget prudence are all indicators of loyalty (Kim and Yoon, 2004).

The satisfaction of customers' needs would result in customer loyalty, which is the ultimate goal of any business relationship with its customers. Customer loyalty is determined by two key factors: attitude and behaviour (Kandampully and Shartanto, 2004). Consumer behaviour in terms of returning to a restaurant in a short period of time is referred to as the behaviour dimension (Bowen and Shoemaker, 1998). Also, a client who wants to repurchase and recommend the restaurant to others is most likely to stick with an equivalent restaurant for a short period. In contrast, the attitude measurement is concerned with a customer's desire to

make a repeat purchase and then recommend it to others, which is one of the easiest indicators that a person is a loyal customer (Getty and Thompson, 1994). Customer loyalty is normally demonstrated through repeat purchases (Wong and Sohal, 2003). Then Gremler and Gwinner (2000) discovered a link between customer satisfaction and the intention to become a loyal customer. When it comes to behavioural loyalty, users who have a stronger relationship with the maintenance staff (waiter or waitress) have a higher share of company (Berschler, 2006). Customers will return and need to be served by the waiter or waitress if the waiter or waitress maintains an honest relationship with them.

#### **Customer Satisfaction**

Restaurants that satisfy their foods and services to more customers would increase loyalty. Customer satisfaction has thus turned into the way to the achievement of business organizations. Muller (1991) mentioned that customer satisfaction could turn into the way to future performance since it is directly connected with dependability and repeat purchase. Furthermore, Anderson, Lehman and Fomell (1994) said consumer satisfaction is the experience that consumer has in general when acquiring and utilizing a specific product or services. According to past researches, the level of fulfilment would be distinctive in light of individual inclinations, desire, inspiration, and even observation. Customer satisfaction is essential for the success of restaurants (Manjunath and Reginald, 2016; Reichheld and Sasser, 1990). Moreover, the image of the restaurant will increase the customers' choice on which to be loyal (Wang, 1990). It is like a guide for the customer that helps them to decide if the restaurant could fulfil what they are looking for. Roadside restaurants must meet a wide variety of demand consistently. The representation of the restaurant plays a significant role in determining satisfaction in customers and also its overall position in the competitive market.

The relationship between loyalty and satisfaction has been investigated by a good number of researchers before. Satisfaction by customers is one of the critical outcomes of marketing activities conducted by restaurants (Shinde, Chavan and Ali, 2018; Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000). Developing a business can also influence customer satisfaction (Muller, 1991). Besides, it has been found that customer satisfaction can affect the intention to purchase in the service industry (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). Getty and Thompson (1994) also concluded that the motivation of customers to suggest a brand to others rely on the perception and satisfaction level. Bowen and Chen (2001) put their concern on the restaurant industry to investigate the linkage between these two dimensions. Their result implied that satisfaction could increase indeed improved loyalty in customers. With that, customer satisfaction was assumed to have an impact on reliability. Also, Tam (2004) has developed a framework that links loyalty with the quality of service and perceived values, which suggested that satisfaction level can significantly influence the future buying behaviour of customers, which was supported by Anderson and Sullivan (1993). Thus, it can be summed up that there is a direct relationship between customer loyalty and satisfaction (Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000).

#### **Quality of Food**

The restaurant industry, especially those operating on the roadside, is described as a fiercely competitive market. Food is a core product of the restaurant industry, and it plays an important role (Olise et al., 2015; Liu and Jang, 2009). A number of studies have suggested that food quality is one of the most important factors in achieving success (Soriano, 2002). Furthermore, in order to gain a competitive advantage and thrive in the market, restaurant managers must recognize which characteristics are important and reachable to customers, as well as understand which parameters influence the purchase decision (Bryhni et al., 2002). Consistent with Bowen and Morris (1995), the elemental evaluation of food quality is from the method of designing the menu because the food menu may be a handy tool, and which may be used as a marketing

tool for the various restaurants of the industry. Moreover, consistent with Pettijohn and Luke (1997), quality was the foremost crucial in creating satisfaction among the purchasers. This factor was more important than other factors. Therefore, it's essential to make sure that the standard of food is included during this study.

## **Restaurant Environment**

Individuals may have very distinct reasons for being loval. The environment is another factor that influences customer loyalty. The popularity of the restaurant's climate may be the beginning of customer loyalty for restaurant companies. A potential faithful client is aware of the restaurant's presence. According to Bitner (1992), the environment or atmosphere in which the service is offered may play a role in the customer's perception and level of satisfaction. According to some studies, the climate has a direct impact on customer satisfaction. As a result, it represents a roadblock in terms of increasing customer loyalty. Emotions and perceived value arbitrate the impact of a restaurant climate on satisfaction (Samah et al., 2015; Liu and Jang, 2009). According to Belman's study (1998), the most important factor is the design as well as the overall concept of atmosphere. Within the industry, the importance of having a healthier environment is increasing (Dulen, 1998). Restaurant owners should put more money into improving their physical appearance. According to Riley (2014), the physical environment has a positive impact on customer satisfaction, and customer satisfaction has a positive impact on customer loyalty. As a result, restaurant managers must raise their service quality and physical environment to maximize customer satisfaction in order to retain customers and remain competitive.

## **Research Framework and Hypotheses**

In 1994, the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) was created. The Index used data from customer interviews to feed into a multi-correlation econometric model developed at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006). The ACSI model produced factors on the left (customer anticipation, perceived quality, and perceived value), customer satisfaction in the middle, and happiness outcomes on the right (customer grievances and customer loyalty, including customer retention and value tolerance). The conceptual framework for this study has been constructed using the ACSI model. The conceptual framework serves as the bedrock upon which all scientific research is built. It's a logically constructed, explained, and elaborated network of relationships between the factors considered important to the study (Sekaran, 2003). According to the literature review, there is a strong link between these variables in roadside restaurants, such as food quality, restaurant climate, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. In addition, consumer satisfaction and customer loyalty in roadside restaurants have a strong relationship, according to the literature review. As a result, the independent variables, mediating variable, and hence the dependent variable are depicted in Figure 1. The relationships between the variables are built into the theories so that they can be visualized rapidly, and the dynamics of the condition can be understood.

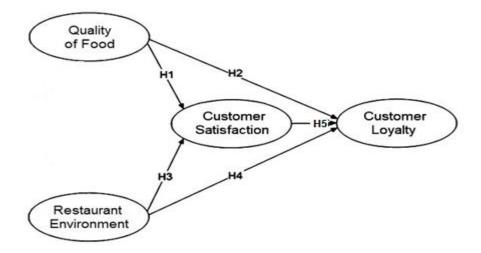


Figure 1. The proposed research model

The following hypotheses are developed that will be tested in this study:

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant positive relationship exists between quality of food and customer satisfaction.
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant positive relationship exists between quality of food and customer lovalty.
- H<sub>3</sub>: There is a significant positive relationship exists between restaurant environment and customer satisfaction.
- H<sub>4</sub>: There is a significant positive relationship exists between restaurant environment and customer loyalty.
- H<sub>5</sub>: There is a significant positive relationship exists between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

#### Methods

Research design helps to execute the plan for researchers to satisfy their objectives. To realize answers for the research problem, the approach and foundation of the research design are crucial (Aaker et al., 2001). A set of close-ended structured questionnaires were adapted from previous similar researches to test the research hypotheses. The questionnaires denoted by statements were designed using five-point Likert type response scale. Data was collected via survey method distributed among target customers. A complete set of answers from 248 roadside restaurant customers were received who were selected conveniently from the metropolitan area of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor states in Malaysia. These are the two major states in Malaysia. The data collected from the survey was transferred into a SPSS file to hold out the whole test, starting with the problems of reliability and validity of scale using the Cronbach's Alpha. Then exploratory correlational analysis has been done to ascertain factor loadings and extracting factor supported Eigenvalues. Finally, confirmatory correlational analysis has been done by testing the trail diagrams proposed within the model employing a structured equation modelling technique.

#### **Findings**

## Demographic Information

The descriptive demographic statistics including the frequencies and percentages were inclined to describe and explore the demographic variables of the respondents' gender, age, race, legal status, occupation and monthly income. Table 1 below summarizes the findings of the frequency and percentage distribution of demographic variables.

Table 1. Demographic Statistics

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	121	48.79
Female	127	51.21
Age		
Less than 21	26	10.48
22 - 30	115	46.37
31 - 40	51	20.56
More than 40	56	22.58
Race		
Chinese	64	25.81
Indian	43	17.34
Malay	109	43.95
Others	32	12.90
Marital Status		
Single	77	31.05
Married	145	58.47
Others	26	10.48
Occupation		
Student	45	18.15
Government employee	35	14.11
Private job	61	24.60
Self-employed	56	22.58
Housewife	24	9.68
Retired	15	6.05
Others	12	4.84
Monthly Income (RM)		
Below 1000	8	3.23
1000 to 1999	25	10.08
2000 to 2999	67	27.02
3000 to 4000	76	30.65
4000 to 4999	34	13.71
5000 and above	38	15.32

## Reliability Analysis

It is essential to seek out the scales that we've utilized in the questionnaire are reliable. One among the most reasons to try the reliability test is to see the consistency of the collected information. That refers to the degree to which the things that structure the size are according to one another, which suggests all the measuring express an equivalent underlying construct. The reliability of thirty questions within the questionnaire is investigated with Cronbach's Alpha. Ideally, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of a scale should be 0.7 and above (Pallant, 2007).

Table 2. Reliability Test

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
Quality of Food	0.792	6
Restaurant Environment	0.930	7
Customer Satisfaction	0.748	7
Customer Loyalty	0.995	10
Overall	0.791	30

Table 2 reveals Cronbach's Alpha (alpha coefficient) for every construct. For questions associated with the standard of the food, which contains six items, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.792 was calculated. For inquiries associated with the restaurant environment, which incorporates seven elements, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.930 was calculated. For questions associated with customer satisfaction which also contains seven items, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.748 was calculated. For inquiries associated with customer loyalty which incorporates ten items, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.995 was calculated. For all the constructs within the questions totaling thirty items, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.791 was calculated. Therefore, all the factors demonstrated a high degree of reliability. So, the questionnaire is reliable and may be used for further analysis.

## Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Factor analysis is a data reduction technique that's widely used to identify the underlying dimensions in multivariate data analysis. The aim of correlational analysis is to get rid of all redundant or highly correlated variables from the data set, replacing the remaining ones with a smaller number of variables, often called factors. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measures the proportion of variance within the variables which may be caused by an underlying factor. Statistically, it tests whether the partial correlations among variable are small. Moreover, the KMO of this study is 0.815, which is considered excellent. Similarly, Bartlett's test shows 0.000, which is a smaller amount than 0.005. This means that there's no high correlation or coefficient among the things and also suggests conducting an EFA. Besides, if the variances are independent of every other, then the entire difference are going to be adequate to the amount of variables within the analysis. The eigenvalue is usually utilized in choosing the amount of things. The primary factor extracted explains more variance within the observed variations compared to the next factors. During EFA, the factors explained 61.98% variance. The rotation has the effect of optimizing the factor structure, and one consequence for these data is that the relative importance of the four factors is equalized. This study used Varimax because it's an orthogonal rotation method that minimizes the amount of variables that have high loading on each element. This method simplifies the interpretation of the factors. Subsequent step is to load all the content of questions to spot the common ones. Table 3 below exhibits the output of rotated component matrix which resulted from suppressing factor loadings less than 0.5.

Table 3. Rotated Component Matrix

	Factors				
Variables	Quality of Food	Restaurant Environment	Customer Satisfaction	Customer Loyalty	
Q11	.738				
Q12	.743				
Q13	.792				
Q14	.809				
Q15	.822				
Q25		.802			
Q27		.774			
Q28		.725			
Q29		.709			
Q30		.622			
Q17			.862		
Q18			.798		
Q20			.791		
Q21			.705		
Q22			.509		
Q23			.505		
01				.822	
Q1 Q2 Q3				.798	
03				.738	
Q4				.725	
Q5				.676	
Q6				.596	
Q7				.549	
Q8				.525	
Q10				.588	

## Validity Analysis

Table 4 demonstrated that average variance extracted (AVE) values for the entire constructs are more significant than 0.5. Further to this, the composite reliability (CR) values are more significant than the AVE values, which indicates convergent validity has been met.

Table 4. AVE and CR Values for the Structural Model

Variables	AVE	CR
Quality of Food	0.57	0.82
Restaurant Environment	0.56	0.85
<b>Customer Satisfaction</b>	0.59	0.86
Customer Loyalty	0.54	0.84

## Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

The structural model is an inclusive way to measure the relationships among the constructs. The analysis of the structural model illustrates the relationship between the latent constructs. This study highlights the recursive approach where no particular construct is both a cause and effect of the other. The structured model (Figure 2) represents the acceptable fit indices (Normed Chi-Square, CFI and RMSEA values are within threshold levels).

Normed Chi-Square = 2.192 CFI =.873 RMSEA = .070

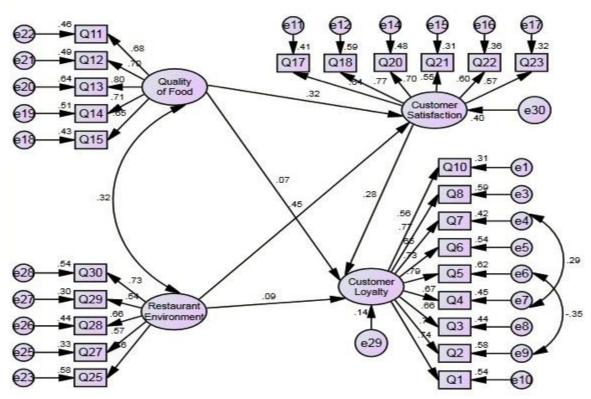


Figure 2. Structural Model

## Hypotheses Testing

Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique, the confirmatory factor analysis via individual and overall measurement model was analyzed to see the goodness-of-fit statistics. Table 5 summarizes the findings on the hypotheses in the proposed research framework. It provides maximum likelihood estimates of hypothesis testing expressing a few parameters. It also exhibits the standardized regression weights for the default model indicating the relationships of variables with estimated values. Table 6 summarizes the test results.

Table 5. Hypotheses Testing (Maximum Likelihood Estimates)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Customer Satisfaction	<	Quality of Food	.338	.084	4.040	***
<b>Customer Satisfaction</b>	<	Restaurant Environment	.444	.085	5.200	***
Customer Loyalty	<	Restaurant Environment	.054	.055	.977	.329
Customer Loyalty	<	<b>Customer Satisfaction</b>	.166	.064	2.604	.009
Customer Loyalty	<	Quality of Food	.046	.052	.887	.375

Table 6. Summary of Hypotheses Testing

$H_{(x)}$	Hypothesis	Results
$H_1$	There is a significant positive relationship exists between quality of	Supported
	food and customer satisfaction.	
$H_2$	There is a significant positive relationship exists between quality of	Not Supported
	food and customer loyalty.	
$H_3$	There is a significant positive relationship exists between restaurant	Supported
	environment and customer satisfaction.	
$H_4$	There is a significant positive relationship exists between restaurant	Not Supported
	environment and customer loyalty.	
$H_5$	There is a significant positive relationship exists between customer	Supported
	satisfaction and customer loyalty.	

#### **Discussion**

Based on the results of the study, three hypotheses (H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>3</sub> and H<sub>5</sub>) were supported among five. There is no significant relation found between quality of food and customer loyalty and at the same time there is no significant relation found between restaurant environment and customer loyalty. It means customer satisfaction fully mediates the relations among quality of food, restaurant environment and customer loyalty. Customer loyalty isn't constant; instead, it's a sort of variable because it varies and depends on several factors. Customer loyalty are often suffering from both customer satisfaction and customer complaint (Manjunath and Reginald, 2016). Consistent with Anderson (1998), there's a big relationship between happiness and loyalty, where dissatisfied customers conduct more disloyal behaviour than satisfied customers. Satisfied customers have the intention to advise about the merchandise or service to others (Wiedemann & Anderson, 1985). If a customer features a pleasant experience with any product or service, he or she is going to be encouraged to share his/her expertise or satisfaction to other people (Shaed et al., 2017).

Some implications are recommended to managers of various roadside restaurants in Malaysia. However, managers of the restaurants should consider these factors and distinguish the strength and weakness of their business by analyzing these factors and set the acceptable plan for their business improvement. The result reveals that restaurant environment has the leading effect and quality of food has the second leading effect on customer satisfaction towards customer loyalty for roadside restaurants. Therefore, managers should focus more to form good environment for the purchasers to go to their restaurants. They should increase the space to accommodate all types of customers. A manager who maintains a strict policy on the restaurant's interior and environment would successfully win the hearts of customers, as a good-looking interior and comfortable environment will be able to entice consumers to stay with them for a longer period of time, as it will satisfy customers to be able to sit back and relax in a pleasant interior and environment.

Restaurant managers should also specialize in the taste of food, the freshness of food and also maintain their standard of food quality. Within the quality of food, the flavor had the very best level of respondent satisfaction. Therefore, managers should give more attention to the ingredients of food and prepare the food with tasty and healthy ingredients. Moreover, managers should investigate why other factors haven't any effect and can't make the purchasers loyal as like the quality of food and environment. They ought to concentrate to extend the general facilities and cleanliness of the restaurants. Thus, managers should pay critical attention to those attributes of the factor to extend customer loyalty.

#### Conclusion

In summary, this study aims to examine the factors affecting customer loyalty on roadside restaurants in Malaysia while taking customer satisfaction as mediator. From the findings of this study, it was found that restaurant environment, quality of food and customer satisfaction shows significant influence towards customer loyalty, and customer satisfaction as a full mediator. The findings of this study would give readers a basic knowledge of the restaurant industry and can be used as a basic guideline for all managers of roadside restaurants who want to establish a profitable business by obtaining customer loyalty. Future research on this subject is suggested to be conducted by employing a bigger sample size, better research methods which could represent to hide up a more substantial area for better generality of the findings. It can also be suggested to look at the moderating roles of culture or the other environmental factors. Moreover, Future study on this subject might be conducted employing a more significant combination of independent variables with a more complex model.

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