

# Effects of Traditional Coffee Shop (Kopitiam) Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty: A Study on Malaysian Youth

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This study employs a service quality model (reliability, assurance, tangible, empathy, and responsiveness) to assess youth satisfaction and loyalty to Malaysia's traditional coffee shops (*Kopitiams*).

**Design/methodology/approach:** This study applied a quantitative approach, and a self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data from 250 respondents online.

**Findings:** The current study suggested reliability, assurance, empathy, and responsiveness have a positive relationship with customer satisfaction. On the contrary, this study revealed that tangible items such as the ambience of a kopitiam had no significant effect on customer satisfaction. In addition, customer satisfaction is positively related to customer loyalty toward traditional coffee shops among young Malaysians.

**Originality/value:** The study outcome is significant to the theoretical aspect, where the results further strengthen the Service Quality Model in the Malaysian *kopitiam* context. In the practical aspect, the outcome of the study provides new insights to business owners and operators to enhance youth satisfaction and loyalty from the dimension of service quality.

**Keywords:** Service Quality Model, Traditional Coffee Shops, Youth, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty, Malaysia

## Introduction

The Malaysian lifestyle has changed throughout the years because of the accelerated phase of urbanisation. This has influenced food and beverage consumption, including coffee (Aprilia & Suryani, 2020; Langgat, Pawan, Fabeil & Pazim, 2020). Today, traditional coffee shops

such as cafés, with a well-designed and straightforward menu (Andrews, 2009), rapidly developing in the food and beverage sector (Muhammad, 2015). For this reason, coffee drinking is the current routine for people, especially the younger generation, to be consumed outside their households (Lee, Rajaratnam & Konar, 2018; Samoggia & Riedel, 2019). Hirschmann (2020) indicated that Malaysians consumed about six hundred thousand 60kg bags (36 million kg) of coffee in 2018 alone. Cafés might offer a relatively cheaper option than other restaurants, bars, or clubs (Chow, 2019), especially for young consumers.

Before the trendy and high demands of modern cafés, *kopitiam*s were the pioneer coffee shops among Malaysian adults (Khoo, 2009). The expression *Kopitiam* originated from the English term coffee, and the Hokkien dialect word for a shop, which usually means a shop that offers a regular place to drink and social activities (Aprilia & Suryani, 2020; Langgat et al., 2020). Typically, locals will meet together daily to exchange talks on different topics (Rahman, 2010). Nowadays, Western-style coffee giants such as Starbucks thrive greatly in Malaysia with their artistic and technological-sophisticated services (Rahardjo, Hasbullah & Taqi, 2019). This offering attracts more customers by offering high-quality services, free internet access, and a full menu such as cakes, pasta, and ice creams. There is also greater interest from different groups of people, from family gatherings to business people having professional meetings and youths spending time together (Davis, Lockwood & Pantelidis, 2012). The classic years of *kopitiam*s have now faded since customers, especially the younger generation, have changed their views on food, drink, and stylish surroundings (Langgat et al., 2020). There is also a social change with various Western culture alternatives (Rahman, 2010). Plus, most youths have a rising income, increasing purchasing power, and growing consumption of coffee beverages (Ponte, 2002).

The relationship with consumers is the most crucial achievement in the service sector. This relationship is an important achievement in the service sector (Krisnamoorthy & Balasubramanian, 2019). Previous studies demonstrate that service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty have had a significant relationship (Aprilia & Suryani, 2020). Therefore, there is a need to comprehend service quality factors to create satisfaction and loyalty in *kopitiam*s among Malaysian young people.

Malaysian purchasing power and social activities are rising, showing a demand for food services such as coffee shops (Lee et al., 2018). Khoo (2009) stated that *kopitiam*s represented an image of Malaysian civic national identity. Other food services, such as fast food and fine dining restaurants, have been researched continuously (Azim et al., 2014; Chow, 2019; Lee et al., 2018). *Kopitiam*s then need to improve the satisfaction attribute by obtaining their customers' trust, which leads to loyalty after their expectations are fully satisfied (Langgat et al., 2020). Past and current studies have involved loyalty implications in the service-related industry (Asuncion, Martin & Quintana, 2004). These studies substantiated the argument that service can potentially influence a company's sustainable competitive growth (Lee et al., 2018; Lee & Kim, 2021).

Previous literature has integrated the SERVQUAL model with other concepts in the food and beverages industry to explore customers' perceptions of visiting a restaurant. Nevertheless, the study which focuses on predicting customer satisfaction and loyalty among youths in Malaysian *Kopitiam* is limited at its best (Namin, 2017; Tuncer, Unusan & Cobanoglu, 2021). Also, there has been an inconsistency in service quality outcomes, focusing on various service industries different from the food-service sector. For instance, five service quality dimensions reacted differently to customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Yap, 2020). Several earlier research studies specified that only some of the five dimensions have a meaningful impact on the satisfaction and loyalty of the people (Tan, Oriade & Fallon, 2014; Mee, Ariffin & Rahman, 2014 and Moorthy et al., 2017). Inversely, some analyses used the theory of planned behaviour to measure customer intention in visiting restaurants (Jang, Chung & Kim, 2015).

Additionally, service quality can mediate service climate on perceived value and behavioural purposes (Mokhtaran et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2021).

Therefore, this paper aims to fill the research gap by utilising the service quality model to assess the relationship between satisfaction and youth loyalty, which is also an infrequent practice for the target audience, within the proposed quantitative approach in the case of Malaysian *kopitiam*s. Firstly, this study seeks to measure youth expectations and perceptions of service quality in *kopitiam*s based on SERVQUAL's five dimensions: reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. Secondly, the study will examine service quality dimensions in predicting customer satisfaction and loyalty among youths in Malaysian *kopitiam*s. To sum up, this paper introduces the essence of service quality that can impact customer satisfaction and loyalty towards the downturn preferences of Malaysian *kopitiam*s.

### **Literature Review**

The subject of service quality measurement has attracted wide academic and industrial attention and practical focus (Yuan et al., 2015). SERVQUAL is a multi-item scale obtained to weigh the gap between customer expectation and the actual performance of the service offered (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985; Yap, 2020). Besides, since people have different stances on particular services, every firm needs to deliver consistent service quality (Lee et al., 2018). This model was designed for several service and retail corporations to measure clients' opinions on service quality (Kang & James, 2004; Parasuraman et al., 1985; Tuncer, Unusan & Cobanoglu, 2021). From this onwards, scholars and experts have generated much interest in examining disputes about service quality. This recognition happened because there is a belief that superior service quality would advance a company's overall execution (Yap, 2020).

Countries including Malaysia and Singapore are unique because of their racially-influenced and traditional coffeeshops called *kopitiam*s. Coffee has become an essential beverage globally (Aprilia & Suryani, 2020; Yuan et al., 2015). The *kopitiam*s have become part of the country's intangible cultural assets that represent the population that must protect their heritage cuisine (Santilli, 2015). This protection showcases the actual identity and conveys the history of traditional coffeehouses to the new generation (Turmo, 2012). Traditionally, *kopitiam*s have existed for an extended period, owned chiefly by Foochow and Hainanese refugees, who lived in towns and urban areas throughout the British colonial period (Aprilia & Suryani, 2020). Another unique characteristic of *kopitiam*s is that several business owners will rent out stall spaces to various vendors to sell different kinds of foods, which is dissimilar from the culture of the European market Cafés (Duruz & Khoo, 2014). The United Nations indicates youth as those aged from 15 to 24 years old (Robertson & Parry, 2013). In Malaysia, the National Youth Development Policy (NYDP) 1997 and Youth Societies and Youth Development Act (YSADA) 2007 defined youth as an individual who is not less than 15 years old and not more than 40 years old (Youth Policy, 2021).



Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework of Customer Loyalty Towards *Kopitiam*s among Youth in Malaysia

Figure 1 above shows the hypothesised relationships between several variables. From the service quality factor perspective, customer satisfaction will assist in accomplishing customer loyalty (Yuan, Chang & Tzeng, 2015). Several researchers in past studies have supported the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction (Fornell et al. 1996; Spreng & Macky, 1996; Lee & Kim, 2021).

This paper offers six hypotheses concerning the relationships between various service quality variables in the context of youth loyalty and Malaysian kopitiam.

#### *Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction*

The most common research on SERVQUAL involves small to medium-scale hospitality organisations due to their worries about people’s views on the proper performance of service quality (Agabu & Pillay, 2017). On the other hand, Parasuraman et al. (1993) condensed the initial ten dimensions to five overall to measure a company's service quality. These five measurements are reliability, tangible, assurance, empathy, and responsiveness (Mmutle & Shonhe, 2017). For these dimensions, there are 22 items for companies to assess their service quality, which affects the satisfaction outcome from customers (Ladhari, 2008).

The dimension of reliability anticipates to which degree a service provider can deliver precise and steady service (Parasuraman et al., 1993). The early behaviour encountered during service is the first impression of customers towards a company (Parasuraman et al., 1993). In other words, this affects the consistency of reliability traits (Daniel, Joseph & Victor, 2013). In the context of kopitiam, reliability can be seen as the promise of delivering intended services, dealing with issues, precise assistance, and timely service. In addition, the accuracy of billing and error-free delivery service are also counted as reliability dimensions (Tan, Oriade & Fallon, 2014; Zhang et al., 2014). With all that is being stated, it is postulated that:

**H1a: There is a positive relationship between reliability and customer satisfaction.**

The assurance of an organisation's service quality can attract more customers (Parasuraman et al., 1993). This factor includes the guarantee of competence where employees do their task proficiently, security that can avoid the uncertainty of customers, courtesy of the business in respecting all consumers, and credibility arising from a team's honesty (Hirmukhe, 2012; Yuan et al., 2015). Due to this, this study suggested that:

**H1b: There is a positive relationship between assurance and customer satisfaction.**

Another service quality dimension is tangibility. In this paper, the physical appearance of *kopitiams* will be accessible for customers to assess, affecting service quality (Krishnamurthy, SivaKumar & Sellamuthu, 2010). This factor comprises attractive interior physical facilities such as tables, chairs, and lights or the building's exterior designs to attract more patrons (Lee & Kim, 2021; Lee, et al., 2021; Park, 2019). Therefore, the next hypothesis that can be posited is as follows:

**H1c: There is a positive relationship between tangibility and customer satisfaction.**

The empathy dimension occurs when a company is thoughtful towards its customers. In the case of *kopitiams*, the waiters provide personal attention to each consumer by communicating with them when needed (Yuan, Chang & Tzeng, 2015). Besides, the employees to take reasonable care in listening and understanding the particular needs of customers (Lee & Kim, 2021). This factor also recognises the client's needs by offering protection, availability, and determination (Ko & Chou, 2020; Yap, 2020). As *kopitiams* are recognised as a place of interaction, convenient operation hours are also an empathy element (Ananth, Ramesh & Prabakaran, 2010). So, being observant, mindful, and sociable with a purchaser's needs and expectations are vital (Ennew, Waite & Waite, 2013). As such, this study proposed that:

**H1d: There is a positive relationship between empathy and customer satisfaction.**

The last dimension of service quality for this study is responsiveness. For *kopitiams*, this factor will show customers that the business is ready to assist any person by means of fast service and proper timeliness (Parasuraman et al., 1985). This dimension is a key component as it defines promptness and exactness of service quality, showing the speediness and time taken for service delivery (Kandampully, Mok & Sparks, 2001). Here, *kopitiams*, are willing to offer their capability to help customers (Wen et al., 2012; Leong et al., 2015) by providing help with the menu and other appropriate responses (Tan, Oriade & Fallon, 2014). Hence, this study suggested that:

**H1e: There is a positive relationship between responsiveness and customer satisfaction.**

*Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty*

These dimensions will further demonstrate how the service providers of *kopitiams* should look into the variables of satisfaction as they can lean towards loyalty traits among customers (Bahri-Ammari, 2012; Haque, Rahman & Jalil, 2014). Moreover, long-term customer loyalty will increase the number of customers consuming the service provider's goods or services with satisfaction, which helps retain customers and avoid them switching to other rival *kopitiams* (Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2004; Nauman, Khan & Ehsan, 2010). As such, in light of the evidence provided in the literature, it is proposed that:

**H2: There is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.**

**Methodology**

Purposive sampling was used in recruiting participants, where a self-administered online questionnaire involving the five dimensions of SERVQUAL was administered. A five-point Likert scale was used in the instrument, as it saves time, results in a higher response rate, controls bias, and attains honest answers from unknown respondents (Mitchell & Jolley, 2012). An online questionnaire involved every person answering identical questions in a fixed sequence (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). The respondents voluntarily participated in

the survey, spending 10 to 15 minutes completing it. The target population was young Malaysians (18 to 40 years old) to evaluate their nearby *kopitiams*. A sample size of 200 to 500 respondents is considered sufficient to achieve accurate estimation (Hill & Alexander, 2000), and most research papers can appropriately attain 30 to 500 samples when conducting a quantitative approach (Guthrie, 2010). Furthermore, by applying effect size of 0.15, power of 0.80 and number predictors of 5, the minimum sample size suggested by G\*Power was 92 respondents. 250 out of 263 completed questionnaires were deemed suitable for the data analyses.

The study made use of the SPSS statistical analysis software. There were four steps to the analytical procedure. Firstly, the data and inferential analyses encompassing descriptive analysis of the participants' sociodemographic characteristics were conducted. Next, scale measurement to assess the normality and reliability tests to ensure the validity and reliability of the items were conducted. Thirdly, inferential analysis was used to test the relationships between SERVQUAL's five dimensions and customer satisfaction and loyalty using Multiple Linear Regression Analyses. Lastly, the theoretical and practical implications of the results were considered. As direct relationships are tested for each of the proposed hypotheses, Multiple Linear Regressions Analyses was used.

## **Results and discussion**

### ***Demographic Profile***

The study involved 250 respondents aged from 18 to 40 years. The sample comprised 163 women and 87 men. Of the participants, 52.4% were Malay individuals who enjoyed service at their nearby *kopitiams*. 44.2% of participants visit a *kopitiam* for dine-in meals and prefer the Café type. At the same time, all of the participants patronised *kopitiams* at least once per month, 18% did so one to four times per month, and 82% did so five times or more per month. (See Table 1).

### ***Normality Test and Reliability Test***

For this study, the highest value of skewness is -0.730 for the checking of normality. In the meantime, customer satisfaction attained the uppermost of 6.177 for its kurtosis. Hence, all of the variables' values indicated normality, sufficient for further analysis as it falls within the desired range (Kline, 2005). The R<sup>2</sup> value for Service Quality (Reliability, Assurance, Tangible, Empathy, and Responsiveness) and Customer Satisfaction was 0.817, while Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty were 0.769. The Cronbach's Alpha value is considered good if the figure is more than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2003). Overall, the Cronbach's Alpha value for each item was within the reliable range, indicating that the multi-item measures were valid and reliable. (See Table 2).

Table 1: The Summary of Descriptive Analysis

Profile	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	87	34.8%
	Female	163	65.2%
Race	Malay	131	52.4%
	Chinese	73	29.2%
	India	6	2.4%
	Other Bumiputeras	40	16.0%
Age Range	18 - 24	105	42.0%
	25 - 31	56	22.4%
	32 - 40	89	35.6%
The Purpose for Visiting a <i>Kopitiam</i>	Discussion / Meeting (Formal)	34	7.6%
	Gathering (Informal)	114	25.3%
	Dine-in Meals	199	44.2%
	Relaxation	103	22.9%
Companion When Visiting a <i>Kopitiam</i>	Alone	67	12.2%
	Friends	192	35.1%
	Partner	69	12.6%
	Family	168	30.7%
	Co-workers	51	9.3%
Types of Coffeeshop Preferred	Café (The Owls Café)	144	26.6%
	Coffee Bar (The Library Coffee Bar)	43	7.9%
	Coffeehouse (San Francisco Coffee)	56	10.3%
	Retail Coffeeshop (Old Town White Coffee)	83	15.3%
	Drive-Thru Coffeeshop (Starbucks)	96	17.7%
	Traditional Coffeeshop (Ho Kow Hainan <i>Kopitiam</i> )	120	22.1%
Frequency of Visiting a <i>Kopitiam</i> (Per Month)	1-4 times	45	18%
	5 or more times	205	82%

Table 2: Reliability Test

Constructs	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Reliability	5	0.831
Assurance	4	0.817
Tangible	4	0.905
Empathy	5	0.817
Responsiveness	4	0.860
Customer Satisfaction	5	0.907
Customer Loyalty	4	0.909

### **Multiple Linear Regression Analysis**

Multiple regression was conducted to examine the relationship between the service quality items and customer satisfaction and the interaction effects of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty among the patronising youths at *kopitiams*. (See Table 3).

Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Variable	$\beta$ -Value	T-Value	P-Value	Supported/Not Supported
1	<b>Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction</b>				
	<b>H1a:</b> There is a positive relationship between reliability and customer satisfaction	0.245	4.929**	0.000	Supported
	<b>H1b:</b> There is a positive relationship between assurance and customer satisfaction	0.132	2.579**	0.010	Supported
	<b>H1c:</b> There is a positive relationship between tangible and customer satisfaction	0.028	0.824	0.411	Not Supported
	<b>H1d:</b> There is a positive relationship between empathy and customer satisfaction	0.146	2.484**	0.014	Supported
	<b>H1e:</b> There is a positive relationship between responsiveness and customer satisfaction	0.294	5.825**	0.000	Supported
2	<b>H2:</b> There is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty	0.759	9.798**	0.000	Supported

The results of the multiple regression indicated that reliability (i.e.,  $\beta = .245$ ,  $p = .000$ ), assurance (i.e.,  $\beta = .132$ ,  $p = .010$ ), empathy (i.e.,  $\beta = .146$ ,  $p = .014$ ), and responsiveness (i.e.,  $\beta = .294$ ,  $p = .000$ ) significantly and positively affected youth satisfaction with *kopitiams*. On the other hand, the tangible factor (i.e.,  $\beta = .028$ ,  $p = .411$ ) was found to be not a factor considered by youths while patronising *kopitiams*. Thus, the results of the multiple regression analyses supported all hypotheses apart from H1c. In addition, the results of the analyses indicated that the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty was positively significant (i.e.,  $\beta = .759$ ,  $p = .000$ ) in the context of youth visiting *kopitiams*. Therefore, the results of the multiple regression analysis supported H2 as well.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to develop a measurement scale to assess service quality dimensions in predicting customer satisfaction and loyalty among youths in Malaysian *kopitiams*. The empirical outcomes of this study provide sound evidence that service quality is associated with customer satisfaction, alongside customer loyalty. Reliability, assurance, empathy and responsiveness were found significantly related to customer satisfaction while



tangible was not significantly related to customer satisfaction. Moreover, customer satisfaction also positively affected customer loyalty. Therefore, the current findings have three implications that significantly extended the SERVQUAL model in the food and beverage industry, particularly in *kopitiam*s.

Firstly, the positive outcome of the reliability, assurance, empathy and responsiveness dimensions in SERVEQUAL suggest that Malaysian youth believe that consistency and quality of service offered by *kopitiam*s as an experiential value (Aprilia & Suryani, 2020; Mmutle & Shonhe, 2017; Monther & Mahadevan, 2019; Parasuraman et al., 1985). The findings were consistent with the study of Lee and Kim (2021). In other words, youths can rely on the *kopitiam*s to deliver targeted services, address problems faced, provide accurate assistance, and provide well-timed and error-free services. Besides, these positive outcomes also reassure young customers that pleasant social interactions with staff and speedy service create a solid impression for young customers patronising *kopitiam*s (Ko & Chou, 2020). When the *kopitiam*'s waiters accurately do their assigned tasks by providing the requested service, this reliability element is present. Assurance exists when younger generation is counted on the *kopitiam* staff's guidance and familiarity of the menu. In *kopitiam*s, empathy exists when the waiters give each client individualised service by interacting with customers as necessary. In term of responsiveness, young folks must receive prompt service in order to return to the *kopitiam*.

Secondly, the results revealed that tangible items such as the ambience of a *kopitiam* had an insignificant effect on customer satisfaction. This result contradicts previous studies (Ko & Chou, 2020; Mmutle & Shonhe, 2017), where the ambience of coffee shops significantly affected customer satisfaction. This result showed that youth might not consider the ambient conditions of *kopitiam*s to be part of their satisfaction while patronising *kopitiam*s. This could be due to expectations among Malaysian youth that a *kopitiam* is considered a place mainly for dine-in meals and the ambience (e.g.: furnishings, lighting and artefacts) of a *kopitiam* may not be considered important for satisfaction in comparison to modern cafés. Nevertheless, *kopitiam* owners could retain their tangible features relatively to differentiate themselves from high-end or modern cafés and maintain their historical image to attract more young patrons.

Finally, the empirical findings in the regression model depict the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty towards Malaysian *kopitiam*s. In this case, the significant result means that youths will remain loyal if satisfied with the service offered. This evaluation is similar to the view of the previous research (Bahri-Ammari, 2012; Haque, Rahman & Jalil, 2014; Ko & Chou, 2020). In addition to gaining the loyalty of a pleasant young person, *kopitiam*s need this loyalty in order to keep them out of their rivalries. Thus, youth's loyalty to *kopitiam* results from their happiness with the quality of service provided. The findings also highlighted the importance of performing studies to look at the effect of each dimension of SERVQUAL model from the perspectives of youth and *kopitiam*s.

### ***Practical Implications***

From the perspective of business practitioners, this study provides essential marketing strategies to deliver values that customers can remember, strengthening and benefitting their relationship with businesses to stay competitive in the market (Aprilia & Suryani, 2020; Lee & Kim, 2021; Park, 2019; Langgat et al., 2020). For instance, From the perspectives of responsiveness and reliability dimensions, *kopitiam* owners and operators should consider the timeliness of their service by improving their reliable delivery services while responding to the customers' needs. The ability to respond accurately to customers' complaints and address the issues with dependability could attract more customers, particularly the youth. In the dimensions of assurance and empathy, *kopitiam* owners and operators could create a commitment to promise their goods and services offered to the customers. Furthermore, they

could provide an environment conducive to supporting convivial social interactions among employees and customers, which may offer added values that satisfy the youth. Although the study reported an insignificant effect of tangibles on customer satisfaction, in common practice, *kopitiam* owners or operators should maintain cleanliness and comfortable ambience to encourage young customers to patronise *kopitiams*.

### ***Limitations and Future Study***

The current study was conducted with a few limitations. Different literature addressed other impactful indicators to measure service quality in various sectors, and the role of moderators has not been investigated in the current study. Furthermore, the present study only focuses on youth despite other potential target segments that might influence the findings related to the topic discussed. Future research is expected to incorporate other appropriate indicators such as product quality, price fairness, or perceived value to evaluate the proposed framework. These suggestions might present an improved version of addressing customer satisfaction or loyalty in the service-related sector. Moreover, future work could utilise interviews or exploratory analysis to confirm the findings from the previous quantitative study. Finally, the proposed framework can be conducted across different generations to assess the antecedent of customer loyalty in various service industries.

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