Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty: Testing a Structural Equation Model

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to examine the relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in fast-food restaurants. An original model has been created with the use of structural equation model for the dependency of service quality, satisfaction and loyalty. The analysis covered 148 completely answered questionnaires. The service quality is measured through the perception of customer service with 29 attributes allocated among six dimensions, the customer satisfaction with three attributes and the customer loyalty with two attributes. The validity of the questionnaire has been confirmed with the value of Cronbach alfa coefficient greater than 0.8. Furthermore, the research showed significant influence of service quality over the satisfaction and loyalty, as well as significant influence of customer satisfaction over the customer loyalty of fast-food restaurants. Therefore, this set model can be applied to follow changes in the level of service quality, satisfaction and loyalty of customers in time, and performance comparison of different fast-food restaurants in order to increase the standards of operation, customer service satisfaction and competition among the restaurants.

Keywords: service quality; satisfaction; loyalty; CEM; fast-food restaurants.

1. Introduction

Service quality is essential for the organizational success due to its close connection with customers' satisfaction and loyalty, especially in the service industry. The excellent service keeps the customers and leads toward greater satisfaction and increased loyalty, which results in increased market share and income for the companies (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Gilbert and Veloutsou, 2006; Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000). Moreover, organizations are increasingly focused on the service quality as a strategic tool for positioning as well as a way to achieve operational efficacy and business performance improvement (Gounaris et al., 2005; Mehta et al., 2000; Lai, 2005).

The literature identifies great number of models for measuring the service quality and its impact on customers' satisfaction and loyalty. In the contemporary study of the hospitality industry development, restaurants are an important segment with continuous growth. The accelerated pace of living and less leisure time have led to a growing trend for visitors to fast-food restaurants. Nowadays, fast-food restaurants are under increased pressure from the growing competition and the increasing customers' demands regarding service quality. Given that, it is important to monitor the service quality in the fast-food restaurants from customers' point of view, since providing the required service quality and satisfaction leads towards long-term financial results and stronger competitive position in today's dynamic environment. The crucial and constant market changes, as well as the changes in social, educational and cultural aspect which affect the customers' demands, require continuous improvement of the service quality in fast-food restaurants. Therefore, the service quality measurement must be done frequently and in a timely manner to determine the level of service quality provided by the hospitality facility, in order to increase the customers' satisfaction and maintain their visits.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1. Service Quality

Assurance of excellent service quality in hospitality industry and gaining customers' satisfaction is an important issue in order to maintain the existing capabilities to satisfy its customers and the opportunity for its improvement. The service quality generates an important volume of interest among researches and practitioners (Marinković and Senic, 2012). When defining the quality in a service context, it is important to exclude the customer, that is, from its understanding of the quality. As a result, the quality is everything that the customer considers to be, meaning, the quality is the ability of a product or service to meet or exceed the customers' expectations.

Parasuraman et al., (1988) define the quality perception as „global judgement or stance on the superiority of service". Many researchers in the literature use this definition to address the service quality (Bolton et al., 1991; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Boulding, et al., 1993; Spreng and Mackoy, 1996).

Based on qualitative research conducted with the use of focus group method on an employed customers and more or less intangible types of services, Parasuraman et al., (1991) find that customers expect from the service company to deliver the service in a secured manner. Regarding this research, for any type of service, the customers will judge the quality based on five determinants such as reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance and tangible elements of the service and service

environment. Research by a large number of researchers indicate the multidimensionality of service quality (Brady and Cronin, 2001).

Still there isn't general agreement for the number of determinants and attributes that define the service quality. According to more researchers, the main components of total quality of restaurant service is the quality of food, physical environment and employees (Dulen, 1999; Susskind, et al., 2000).

Moreover, according to the results of a research conducted in Nigeria for the quality of fast-food restaurants, it is concluded that the service quality, the quality of the atmosphere, environment, customers demographic characteristics and the modernization are important factor that affect customers' behavior regarding the support of fast-food restaurants (Olise, 2015).

2.2. Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality

The advantages of customer satisfaction from fast-food restaurant services are numerous. Satisfaction increases loyalty and that depends from how the service is delivered. Satisfaction is the complete attitude towards the service provider or emotional reaction from the difference between what customers expect and what they receive in terms of meeting their needs, goals or wishes (Zineldin, 2000).

There is a general opinion among researchers that the concept of customer satisfaction and service quality are extremely interconnected. Even though, satisfaction and service quality are close to its meaning, they are still different. The perceived service quality is explained as a form of opinion and long-term total evaluation of product or service, whereas customers' satisfaction is considered as a specific manageable evaluation (Oliver, 1981; Bitner, et al.1990).

Regarding the hospitality segment, the results from several researchers prove that there is a strong relationship between service quality and customers' satisfaction from the service (Kim and Moon 2009; Min and Min, 2011). Andaleeb and Conway (2006) noticed that employees behaviour, price and food quality have significant influence on the customers' satisfaction. The research conducted in USA in several service businesses such as retail, fast-food restaurants, air traffic, health, etc., based on a modified SERVQUAL scale indicates that there is a direct impact of service quality on the customers' loyalty and indirect impact through perceived value and satisfaction (Brady, 2005; Setó-Pamies, 2012).

In addition to the perception of service quality, research shows that there is a positive impact on the service ambience and the desire of customers to stay longer in the restaurant, as well as to recommend it to other potential customers (Ryu and Han, 2010; Lam et al, 2011). According to the above findings, the following hypothesis is set:

X1. The quality of service has significant impact on customers' satisfaction in fast-food restaurants.

2.3. Customer Loyalty and Service Quality

Customer loyalty is a result from its continuous positive and emotional experience, satisfaction based on physical attributes and perceived value of product or service quality. Customers' satisfaction has direct impact on their loyalty (Mittal and Walfried, 1998).

For customers, loyalty is positive attitude and behaviour associated with their return visit or future consumption (Chu, 2009). Customers' loyalty usually can be said that it is consequence of all experiences that they have with the service or product provider. (Mascarenhas, et al, 2006). Customers' loyalty has positive impact on markets and economic performances of the company. Actually, customers' loyalty is link between their attitude, service or product reuse and financial performances (Camarero, et al., 2005; Heskett, et al., 2008).

Due to the increased competition in fast-food restaurants and increased health awareness among customers, they start to be picky regarding the aesthetics, product and service they receive in fast-food restaurants (Nezakati, et al., 2011; Tabassum and Rahman, 2012). There are a lot of studies conducted in fast-food restaurants from different points of view, profiling different attitudes that influence customers' intentions i.e. their loyalty (Lowenstein, 1995; Park, 2004; Carew, 2010; Ahmad, et al., 2013). The factors, such as food quality, service quality, environment, price, quick service, restaurant layout, impression of fast-food facilities, are considered to influence the customer support of restaurants in regions with different culture, environment and socioeconomic specifics (Tat, et al., 2011; Akbar and Alaudeen, 2012; Ahmad, et al., 2013). The findings of most studies show different results and due to those differences it is not yet clear what factors clearly influence customers' behavior towards fast-food restaurant support. Resulting is the second hypothesis:

X2. The service quality significantly influences the loyalty of customers in fast-food restaurants

2.4. Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty

Customers' satisfaction is key when trying to keep the existing and attract new customers (Kabu and Soniya, 2017). The customer whose needs during the consumption are not met is less satisfied and it is assumed that his/her (un) satisfaction impacts the future decisions about where, what and how he/she will buy, i.e. use the service. If the product or service meet the needs and demand of the customer, he/she will be satisfied and will become a loyal customer. Service customers are the driving force for profitable growth, and a loyal customer leads to a greater profitability (Hayes, 2008). Most researchers have defined that service quality is very important for customers' satisfaction, as well as for their loyalty. Some researchers have established that the service quality determines customers' satisfaction and has impact on the loyalty through the satisfaction (Rust and Oliver, 1994). Ahmed et al., (2010) indicate that customers' satisfaction has significant mediating effect on the relationship between service quality and loyalty. According to the research, a hypothesis has been set:

X3. Satisfaction significantly impacts loyalty of fast-food restaurant customers

3. Methodology of research

The research was conducted in total of six fast-food restaurants in R. Macedonia, and 148 questionnaires were analyzed. The service quality was measured through the customers' perception based on 29 attributes divided into six determinants according to the SERVQUAL, DINESERV and CFFRSERV model (Stevens, et al., 1995; Parasuraman, et al., 1988; Tan, et al., 2014; Saneva and Chortoseva, 2018). The customers' satisfaction from the service as well as their loyalty towards the restaurants, were measured as one-dimensional concepts represented with five statements. Of these, three statements were related to the satisfaction measurement and how satisfied they were with the approach of the restaurant employees, the service and the time spent in the restaurant. The remaining two statements were for loyalty measurement, that is, whether they would recommend the restaurant to relatives and friends and if they plan to visit it again. In order to evaluate of the statements regarding the perception, satisfaction and loyalty, the Likert scale of five values was used, with an interval from 1 to 5 (1 for „strongly disagree" to 5 for „strongly agree"). The reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed with the Cronbach alfa coefficient. The link between service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty of the service customers and the validation of the specific hypothesis set in this research, has been tested with the application of structural equation modeling. Furthermore, the results were statistically processed with SPSS version 19 and SPSS Amos version 22 software package.

4. Data analysis and results

Convergent Reliability and Internal Consistency of the model was confirmed with the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR), and the reliability was confirmed with the Cronbach alfa test. Given the values shown in Table 1 all regression coefficients (β) are statistically important (p<0.0001) with a value greater than 0.7 (Hulland, 1999). According to the values obtained for AVE the construct "Service

quality" is with value of 0.63, "Customer Satisfaction" with value of 0.7, and the construct "Customer Loyalty" is with value of 0.79. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is acceptable when the value is above 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Composite reliability (CR) for the three constructors ("Service quality", "Customer Satisfaction", and "Customer Loyalty") has value above 0.8. Given the results obtained for β, AVE and CR, the validity of the attributes and formed constructors has been proven.

Attributes		Constructs	p	β	CR	AVE	α
Tangibility	<--		***	0.75			
Assurance	<--		***	0.84			
Food quality	<--	Service Quality	***	0.75	0.91	0.63	0.905
Responsiveness	<--		***	0.77			
Reliability	<--		***	0.78			
Empathy	<--		***	0.85			
Employees approach	<--		***	0.81			
Service	<--	Customer Satisfaction	***	0.89	0.87	0.7	0.87
Time spent	<--		***	0.8			
Recommendation to other people	<--	Customer Loyalty	***	0.91	0.88	0.79	0.872
Frequent visit	<--		***	0.86			

Table 1. Standardized regression coefficients (β) for attribute impact, Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α), average variability (AVE) and composite reliability (CR)

The reliability is confirmed by the Cronbach alfa test i.e. the coefficient of internal consistency of grouping attributes in the questionnaire in constructors such as service quality, satisfaction and loyalty. According to this test the value of alfa coefficient greater than 0.6 shows good opportunity to model the survey results for the population under study (Cronbach, 1951). Based on the values obtained for the Cronbach alfa coefficient for internal consistency of data grouping from 0.905, 0.870 and 0.872 prove the questionnaire validity i.e. the correctness of the constructs formed within it.

To determine the impact of the relationship between service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty of fast-food restaurants customers, the structural equation modeling was applied. Table 2 shows the fit statistics results. According to the results the small value of X2/df (<2), great values of GFI, AGFI, CFI, NFI, TLI (>0.9) and SRMR, RMSEA (<0.08) it can be concluded that the model of structural equations shown on figure 1 is appropriate and can be tested on the hypothesis (Bentler, 1990; Browne and Cudeck, 1992; Hair et al., 2009; Noruzy et al., 2013).

	X^2	X^2/df	GFI	AGFI	SRMR	RMSEA	CFI	NFI	TLI
Obtained values	50.243	1.225	0.945	0.912	0.028	0.039	0.991	0.955	0.988
Recommended values	p > .05	≤3.00	≥0.90	≥0.80	≤0.08	≤0.08	≥0.95	≥0.90	≥0.90

Note: Chi-square test (X^2), Goodness-of-fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness-of-fit Index (AGFI), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)

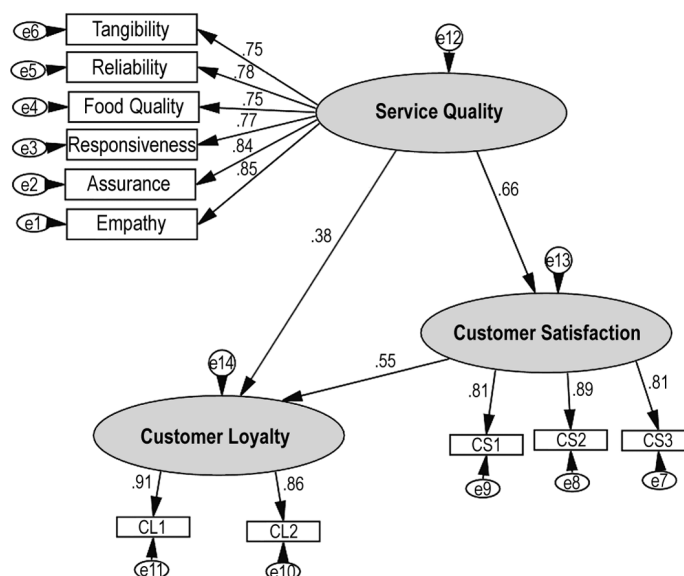*Table 2*. Fit Statistic Results of the quality model

Figure 1. Model of the impact on service quality, satisfaction and loyalty

The results shown in Table 3 indicate that the three hypothesis H1 (service quality→satisfaction), H2 (service quality→loyalty) and H3 (satisfaction→loyalty) are highly supported by the statistically important regression coefficients β with a level of importance p<0.00. Moreover, the service quality has significant impact over the satisfaction (β – 0.66***) and loyalty of service customers (β – 0.38***). The satisfaction has significant impact over the loyalty of service customers in fast-food restaurants (β – 0.55***).

			β	P	Results
H1: Customer Satisfaction	<---	Service Quality	0.66	***	Supported
H2: Customer Loyalty	<---	Service Quality	0.38	***	Supported
H3: Customer Loyalty	<---	Customer Satisfaction	0.55	***	Supported

Note: Significance level *** p<0.0001

Table 3. Standardized regression coefficient (β) for the dependability of service quality, satisfaction and loyalty

5. Conclusion

The research results show significant impact of service quality over satisfaction and loyalty of service customers, and also there is a significant impact of satisfaction over the loyalty of service customers in fast-food restaurants. The created structural model can be applied in different types of restaurants. The results from this research give direction for the management of service quality, satisfaction and loyalty of service customers in fast-food restaurants. Measuring service quality enables managers to perceive the service quality from customers' point of view, identify the location of quality issues and set clear standards for quality service delivery. Continuous measurement of service quality, satisfaction and loyalty in fast-food restaurants and taking corrective actions, contributes to continuous improvement of the quality of work, creating and promoting long-term profitable relationships with service customers and competitiveness.

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