

Research on the Impact of Service Quality, Price, and Environment on Customer Loyalty towards Restaurants in Ho Chi Minh City

Tu Tran Ngoc¹

Abstract

Research aimed to examine the impact of service quality, price, and restaurant environment on customer satisfaction and loyalty towards restaurants in Ho Chi Minh City. The author conducted a survey of 309 customers using a convenient sampling method and employed structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis and testing. The research results indicated that service quality, price, and restaurant environment all have an influence on customer satisfaction. Additionally, customer satisfaction was found to be a precursor to customer loyalty towards the restaurants. Based on these findings, the author proposed solutions to enhance customer satisfaction, thereby maintain and strengthen customer loyalty.

Keywords: *Service Quality, Price, Loyalty, Restaurant Environment, Customer Satisfaction.*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, more and more people choose to eat out instead of having to prepare their own meals, and this has become a part of their lifestyle. The reasons for this include convenience, saving time, as well as the changing environment, diverse food options, and entertainment. Modern lifestyle has changed people's eating habits and dining out activities. Increased income and education level may have influenced this lifestyle (Shamsudin & Selamat, 2005). Restaurants are places where people engage in social activities and business (Majid et al., 2018).

Restaurants should focus on improving service, prices, and environment in order to not only compete but also generate more actual income. The restaurant environment and appropriate prices are the main factors determining customer satisfaction (Reimer & Kuehn, 2005; Ryu & Jang, 2007). Prices and environment can represent service quality and even change customer buying behavior (Shoemaker et al., 2005). These factors are important predictors of customer satisfaction (Ryu & Han, 2010). Maintaining customer satisfaction is crucial as it can drive customer loyalty and increase sales (Ma et al., 2014; Ryu et al., 2012). According to Shoemaker and Lewis (1999), retaining current customers is one of the marketing strategies. Restaurant managers should focus on their marketing strategies, from attracting new customers to retaining existing ones.

Customer loyalty is primarily based on their satisfaction (McDougall & Levesque, 2000). Therefore, most studies on service marketing focus on identifying factors to enhance customer satisfaction. Research has shown that service quality, environment, and price have a positive impact on customer satisfaction (Ryu, 2005; Varki & Colgate, 2001). Although physical environment, service quality, price, and customer satisfaction seem to be important factors in generating customer loyalty, there is limited research in the service literature that examines the role of these variables in shaping customer loyalty. Based on service-related literature, most previous studies have analyzed different industries (such as healthcare (Yeşilada & Direktouml, 2010), hotels and resorts (Ali et al., 2016; Dedeoğlu & Demirer, 2015), tourism (Debata et al., 2015; Kanwel et al., 2019), car services (Izogo & Ogba, 2015), airlines and public transportation (Kumar, 2012; Rahim, 2016), and banking (Mohsan et al., 2011)) regarding service standards, customer satisfaction,

¹ Sai Gon University, VIETNAM. E-mail: trngoctu1984@gmail.com

and physical environment. Some studies have explored different contexts of satisfaction, such as physical environment and price expectations (Ali et al., 2016; Han & Ryu, 2009; Lee et al., 2014; Wu & Ko, 2013).

While considering the importance of service quality, restaurant environment, food prices, customer satisfaction, and loyalty have been rarely mentioned (especially in the restaurant industry) in previous studies. However, the author has also not found any previous studies examining the mediating effects of service quality, prices, and environment on customer loyalty through customer satisfaction. Therefore, these variables need to be experimentally tested in the restaurant industry to understand the impact of service quality, food prices, and restaurant environment on the increase in customer satisfaction and, consequently, loyalty. Furthermore, in the restaurant industry (especially in Ho Chi Minh City), there have been no experimental studies exploring the extent of the mediating effects of service quality, prices, and restaurant environment on customer loyalty through customer satisfaction. Additionally, both in terms of experimentation and theory, the role of food prices and restaurant environment in enhancing satisfaction and loyalty remains unclear.

In this study, the author conducted an experimental evaluation of the factors that contribute to customer satisfaction and loyalty in the restaurant industry. This research aims to explore how service quality, price, and restaurant environment influence user satisfaction. Additionally, this study also examines the relationship between service quality, price, environment, and customer loyalty through the mediating role of customer satisfaction in the restaurant industry.

Theoretical Foundations And Research Hypotheses

Service Quality

Service quality is becoming the most important factor in competition in the business world, heralding a new era of "quality era". Therefore, some examples of this challenge have been put forward by service marketing experts and researchers. For example, Berry and Parasuraman (2004) called it the strongest competitive tool and Clow and Vorhies (1993) called it the "lifeblood" of the organization. The quality of service in restaurants is closely related to how employees perform their tasks (Bell et al., 2005). In general, service quality is primarily analyzed based on the customer's experience, compared to the expectations set before consuming the service.

Service quality is a critical factor in measuring customer satisfaction (Dandotiya et al., 2020). Customer purchasing behavior is closely related to overall evaluation of service or product (Oliver, 1980). Service quality can significantly impact customer satisfaction, which is important for the success of an organization (Zhong & Moon, 2020). High service quality can contribute to enhancing customer satisfaction (Zhao & Huddleston, 2012). Studies have identified a significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction (Loureiro and González, 2008). Therefore, hypothesis H1 is proposed as:

H₁: *The quality of service has a positive impact on customer satisfaction;*

Price

Price is the amount of money customers pay for goods and services. This amount represents the benefits that customers receive from using the goods or services (Zhong & Moon, 2020). Price is an important factor that can bring satisfaction, as customers often evaluate the quality of a service/product based on its value (AlMsallam, 2015). Price has a significant impact on the performance of goods/services; therefore, price differences can lead to negative behaviors such as brand switching (Campbell, 1999). It has also been shown that customers' social price expectations that are not met can lead to disappointment, reduced repeat purchases, negative word-of-mouth, and complaints (Rothenberger, 2015). This can result in undesirable behavior towards the seller. There are various pricing techniques that can be used to increase revenue and create a sense of price fairness. The decision of pricing strategy is not easy, as it directly affects revenue, income, and customer satisfaction. For the current study, because research has shown that price fairness significantly affects customer satisfaction in the food context (Konuk, 2018), hypothesis H2 is proposed: .

H₂: *Price has a positive impact on customer satisfaction.*

Restaurant Environment

Besides price and service quality, the restaurant environment is another factor that can affect customer satisfaction (Padlee et al., 2019). Studies on service have noted the impact of the environment on customer satisfaction (Han and Ryu, 2009; Martín-Ruiz et al., 2012). The impressive architecture of a restaurant also attracts customers and directly influences their level of satisfaction. Similarly, the environment and atmosphere of a service organization often affect customer satisfaction (Han & Ryu, 2009). Factors such as temperature, lighting, scent, noise, air quality, and music are components of the restaurant environment.

Many studies on services have investigated the impact of the environment on customer satisfaction (Ali et al., 2016; Mattila & O'Neill, 2003; Wakerfield & Blodgett, 1996). In addition, Marković and Raspor Janković (2013) found that customer satisfaction is significantly influenced by the physical environment, appearance, good facilities, and good communication between staff and customers. (MJ, 1992; Ryu et al., 2012) also emphasize the relationship between physical space and customer satisfaction. Therefore, hypothesis H3 is proposed as:

H₃: *The restaurant environment has a positive impact on customer satisfaction.*

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction can be clearly described as a detailed evaluation of the service/product based on the purchasing experience and its usage over time (Khadka & Maharjan, 2017).

Restaurants and other service organizations can achieve customer satisfaction and loyalty by providing quality service, fair pricing, and a friendly environment (Ma et al., 2014; Zhong & Moon, 2020). According to Khadka and Maharjan (2017), satisfied customers tend to repurchase the same product/service, become loyal customers, and actively engage in word-of-mouth referrals. Furthermore, once consumers are satisfied with a product/service, they will recommend it to others and repurchase it in the future (Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2004).

Customer satisfaction with goods/services significantly influences repurchase intention, and if satisfaction levels increase, the likelihood of retaining current customers also increases (Zhong & Moon, 2020). In general, satisfaction contributes to maintaining and strengthening loyalty, and loyalty is partly formed from satisfaction (Khadka & Maharjan, 2017). There is evidence of a strong relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Leninkumar, 2017). Customers who have positive interactions with goods/services will continue to transact with the brand in the future because it causes less disruption, making them loyal and trustworthy in their decisions. Some scholars have pointed out that customer satisfaction, especially in the service industry, is one of the indicators of customer loyalty (Belás & Gabčová, 2016; Coelho & Henseler, 2012). According to Zhong and Moon (2020), comprehensive loyalty is evaluated based on satisfaction, and satisfaction is a key factor in loyalty. Therefore, hypothesis H4 is proposed as:

H₄: *The satisfaction of customers has a positive impact on customer loyalty.*

Customers Loyal

Oliver (1999) defined customer loyalty as the willingness to repeatedly purchase preferred goods/services and recommend them to others. Customer loyalty is also important for marketers as it helps maintain existing customers instead of attracting new ones (Loureiro & González, 2008). However, customer repeat purchases help minimize marketing costs compared to attracting new customers (Shoemaker & Lewis, 1999). Customer loyalty is an essential part of an organization's long-term goals (Jin et al., 2013). Importantly, loyal customers have a deep emotional attachment to goods/services (Gounaris & Stathakopoulos, 2004). A customer with the intention to repurchase and recommend to others is likely to be loyal and stay with the same brand (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000).

Research Method

Data

To obtain data for testing the hypotheses mentioned above, the study was conducted in two stages:

Firstly, the author used in-depth interview technique (seven experts, including two lecturers and five marketing specialists, with extensive experience at the University of Finance - Marketing and the Saigon University), the interview was conducted from April 10, 2024 to April 20, 2024. The purpose of interviewing these experts is to adjust and supplement the observed variables for the concepts in the research model.

The selected observed variables are as shown in Table 1.

Table1. List of observed variables

No.	Code	Observed Variables	Source
Service quality (SQ)			
1	SQ1	The restaurant staff is friendly.	(Zhong & Moon, 2020)
2	SQ2	The restaurant staff is helpful.	
3	SQ3	The restaurant staff provides fast and timely service.	
Price (PR)			
4	PR1	The price of the food in the restaurant is reasonable.	(Hanaysha, 2016)
5	PR2	Based on food, the prices here are reasonable.	
6	PR3	The price of food is affordable.	
Restaurant environment (RE)			
7	RE1	The temperature inside the restaurant is comfortable.	(Ali & et al., 2016; Zhong & Moon, 2020)
8	RE2	Clean restaurant environment.	
9	RE3	The interior of the restaurant is harmoniously combined.	
10	RE4	The light inside the restaurant is comfortable	
Customer satisfaction (CS)			
11	CS1	Overall, the experience of the restaurant brings satisfaction.	(Ali & et al., 2016; Hanaysha, 2016)
12	CS2	I think my decision to come to this restaurant is a wise decision.	
13	CS3	This restaurant meets most of my expectations.	
Customer loyalty (CL)			
14	CL1	I will continue to visit this restaurant in the future.	(Zhong & Moon, 2020)
15	CL2	I will introduce this restaurant to others.	
16	CL3	I will speak positively about this Restaurant to others.	

(Source: Summary by the author)

Next, the study used the convenience sampling method with a sample size of 400, and the information collection method used was online interviews. The survey was conducted from April 22, 2024, to April 29, 2024. Out of the 368 responses received, only 309 were valid, but this sample size is still sufficient considering the number of observed variables used in the study, which is 16. The information about the study sample is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Description of respondent information

N = 309		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	174	56
	Female	135	44
	Total	309	100
Occupation	Students	65	21
	Officials, civil servants	113	37
	Office workers	131	42
	Total	309	100
Age	18 - 15	65	21
	26 - 33	97	31
	34 - 42	90	29
	>42	57	18
	Total	309	100

Data Analysis Method

The research model is analyzed by the author in two steps: measurement model evaluation and structural model evaluation.

First, the measurement model is evaluated through the assessment of reliability, convergence value, and discriminant value of measurement concepts in the model.

Second, the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is used to test the relationships between concepts in a research model.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model

To evaluate the measurement model, the author used the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method to assess the properties of all variables used in the study. Because the variables in this study all contain reflective indicators, it is important to test their validity and reliability (Hair et al., 2014). Each indicator was tested to determine if it is suitable for measuring the construct it represents. The results of the validation process are presented in Table 3, showing that the factor loadings of the observed variables are all greater than 0.7, ensuring convergence (Hair et al., 2014). Furthermore, all factor loadings are greater than 0.7 (except for the observed variables "CL1" and "CL2" in the construct "Brand Loyalty") and the composite reliability of the scales is also greater than 0.7, meeting the requirements. The average extracted variance of the scales also reaches the cutoff point (greater than 0.5), indicating reliable reliability with values ranging from 0.624 to 1, meeting the requirements of Fornell and Larcker (1981). These results demonstrate that the choice of the measurement model is appropriate.

Table 3. The reliability and convergence value of the measurement scale

Constructs	No. of variables	Outer loading	CR	AVE
Service Quality (SQ)	3	0.758-0.817	0.833	0.625
Price (PR)	3	0.822-0.853	0.880	0.709
Restaurant environment (RE)	4	0.731-0.830	0.869	0.624
Customer satisfaction (CS)	3	0.815-0.860	0.880	0.710
Customers Loyal (CL)	1	1	1	1

(Source: Calculated from the sample)

Then, to continue the differential analysis, the author compared the relationship between the factors with the mean equation (AVE). The results of the analysis showed that the second level of AVE for each factor is greater than the coefficient of relationship between that factor and the other factors. In other words, the factor load factor of each indicator is the highest in the cross-correlation coefficient matrix and is statistically significant with a p value of 0.000. This shows that the sample ensures the differentiation of the measurement factors.

In addition, a multi-linear phenomenon test has been performed and all VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values are smaller than 5, with a maximum value of 1.904. This shows that the model does not violate the multi-community phenomenon (Hair & colleagues, 2014).

Structural Model

Results in Table 4 and Figure 1 show that all three factors, including service quality, price and restaurant environment, have a positive and statistically significant direct impact on customer satisfaction. This is demonstrated by positive estimate coefficients and t values greater than 1.96 to a significance of 5% as proposed by Henseler et al. (2009). Of these factors, "price" has the strongest influence on customer satisfaction. Besides, these three factors explain the 44.1% variation in customer satisfaction.

In addition, customer satisfaction is also confirmed as a key premise for loyalty (P-Value = 0,000 < 0.05), and it explains 45.3% of the volatility of loyalty. By using the bootstrapping method with 1000 repetitions, the structural model was tested and showed that all four theories were accepted. In addition, the results of the study in Table 4 also show that customer satisfaction serves as an intermediary in the relationship between

service quality, price and restaurant environment and customer loyalty. This is a new contribution from this study, providing critical information to explain customer behavior more clearly.

Table 4. Structural model analysis results

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics	P-Value	Research Hypothesis	Test results
Direct Effect						
CS R ² = 0.441	← SQ	0.252	4.496	0.000	H ₁	Support
	← PR	0.394	5.845	0.000	H ₂	Support
	← RE	0.121	2.034	0.042	H ₃	Support
CL R ² = 0.453	← CS	0.673	18.406	0.000	H ₄	Support
Indirect Effect						
CL ← CS ← SQ		0.170	4.330	0.000	-	-
CL ← CS ← PR		0.265	5.751	0.000	-	-
CL ← CS ← RE		0.082	1.988	0.047	-	-

(Source: Results of the author's survey data processing)

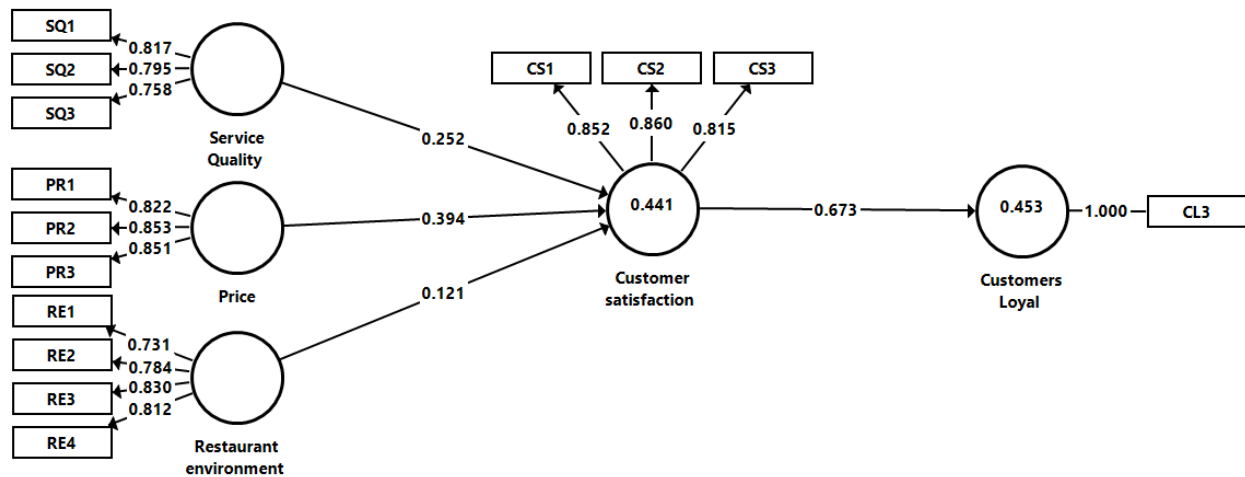


Figure 2. Structural model results

(Source: Results of the author's survey data processing)

CONCLUSIONS AND SOLUTIONS

With the aim of determining the impact of the quality of service, price, restaurant environment on customer satisfaction and loyalty to the restaurants in HCM. The results show: *First*, the quality of service has a positive impact on customer satisfaction, which implies that if improved service quality increases customer content, this finding is consistent with previous studies (Loureiro & González, 2008; Zhao & Huddleston, 2012). *Secondly*, price is one of the factors that influence customer satisfaction, also in this study price is determined to influence client satisfaction. A suitable price will boost customer satisfaction, which is similar to previous research. (Konuk, 2018). Third, furthermore, another finding in the study is that the restaurant environment has a positive impact on customer satisfaction, which implies that improving and investing in furniture in general will contribute to enhancing the satisfaction of customers, which is consistent with the findings of Ryu et al. (2012); Marković and Raspor Janković (2013). Finally, satisfaction is the key premise that leads to customer loyalty not only found in previous studies (Belás & Gabčová, 2016; Khadka & Maharjan, 2017) but in this study, this relationship is once again confirmed and reinforced.

Based on the results of the study, a number of solutions are proposed:

With regard to the “service quality” factor, in this study, the quality of service is largely related to the way employees provide services. Therefore, each employee first of all needs to have a positive attitude towards the customers of the restaurant; Restaurant management needs to regularly create facilities for staff to cultivate communication skills, customer service; especially concerned with attracting staff with good foreign language skills because the clients of the restaurants in HCM City are very diverse.

For the “price” factor, designing a suitable price is essential, but how suitable it is depends on the customer’s perception. Therefore, restaurant managers need to grasp the psychology and needs of the customers coming to the restaurant; design prices that fit each audience based on market segments. At the same time, in addition to functional value (food), it is necessary to direct the customer to experience emotional value (a story, an anecdote about food or discovery of a region's culinary culture, etc.).

With regard to the “Restaurant Environment” element: Through customer reviews, the restaurant management regularly improves, innovates and upgrades the interior and exterior of the restaurant to enhance its appeal, as well as to provide the customer with a full experience of visiting the restaurant. Enhance the research and design of spaces that serve different customer segments.

For the “satisfaction” factor, satisfaction is a prerequisite in helping to maintain and strengthen customer loyalty. To increase satisfaction, the restaurant management needs to learn about customer expectations by surveying and on that basis strive to provide the authentic values that customers want.

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