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Importance of Service Quality in Customer Satisfaction (A Study on Fast Food Restaurants)

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Fast food business has become a highly revenue generated industry in all over the world. Service quality plays a vital role to make the customers happy and insists them to revisit the restaurant. This research was carried out to clear the importance of service quality in customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants of Punjab, Pakistan. To clear this idea, five dimensions (tangibility, reliability, empathy, assurance and responsiveness) of service quality have been taken as predictor variables while customer satisfaction was taken as dependent variable. A survey was conducted on customers of fast food restaurants by using cluster sampling. The collected data was transferred to statistical package of social sciences (SPSS) for data analysis. The outcomes revealed that service quality is positively influenced on customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants of Punjab, Pakistan. The results showed how to enhance customer's satisfaction and make them loyal and also how to increase their revenue by improving service quality.

Keywords: Service quality, Customer satisfaction, Fast food restaurants, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

The growth of fast food industry is playing an important role in the economy of Pakistan. Fast-food industry has become the fundamental service sector whose internationalization and growth has become significant (Woodman, 1980; Chaudhry, 1995). Fast food industry in Pakistan is interested in global market in order to grow and maintain competitive advantage. Fast food restaurants such as KFC, McDonald's, Wendy's and Domino's have developed and enlarged their working to many foreign countries. Restaurants focus on their services which they provide to their customers for growing and sustaining in competitive market. For this purpose, many improved and innovated services are provided by the organizations as a result of globalization, economic and financial deregulation, government policies, and many advanced technologies. To remain competitive, many organizations have provided diverse range of services (Hinson *et al.*, 2006). Customer satisfaction is important for every sector. Customer satisfaction has a significant link with profitability and service quality (Cronin & Taylor 1992; Anderson, Fornell & Lehman, 1994).The concept of customer satisfaction has been evolved over the years. It is process of satisfaction that allows the firms to enhance their reputation effectively and efficiently.

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So, service quality and customer satisfaction are the key elements of an organization. Organizations that give prevalent service quality have satisfied customers more than the firms who do not provide service quality (Gilbert & Veloutsou, 2006; Gilbert et al., 2004). Customer satisfaction is affecting repurchase goals and behaviors. In addition to this profit and revenue of the organizations also depend upon customer satisfaction.

There is less literature available that address the customer satisfaction and quality of the services provided by the organizations, in fast-food restaurants (FFRs) (Gilbert *et al.*, 2004; Qin & Prybutok, 2008). Studies are limited and do not explain the significant association between customer satisfaction and service quality. In creating a repetitive and satisfied customer, service quality plays a vital role. Customer satisfaction is calculated through the productivity and profitability level of the organizations, and the organizations should focus on the profitability and productivity level (Anderson & Rust, 1997). This research will help the management of fast food restaurants to provide best services to their customers by improving service quality dimensions.

Research Objectives

This research is performed to clarify the importance of service quality in customer satisfaction. It has the following objectives

1. To determine and evaluate the importance of service quality dimensions such as tangibility, reliability, empathy, assurance and responsiveness in fast food restaurants.
2. To analyze the relationship among service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service quality (SQ) is defined as the difference between expectations of customers and perception regarding services provided by the firms. Service quality can be clarified as how well the services are provided to the consumer's desires. Customer satisfaction and service quality are interconnected (Shi and Su, 2007). Parasuarman and Berry (1988) stated that SQ is related to the decisions of the customers either to buy the service and product or not. Perceived service quality has become a key construct of customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants of Pakistan. It has been observed that service quality is the key determinant component of customer satisfaction (Parasuraman *et al.* 1988; Spreng & Mackoy, 1996). Quality of service is not only a key component of customer satisfaction in manufacturing industries but also in today's emerging service sector (Karim & Chowdhury, 2014). Parasuraman *et al.* (1994) explained the gap between what customers feel to be offered and what is delivered is known as quality. In his model, he measured the gap between expected and perception of service among the customers (Ghost & Gnanadhas, 2011).

High service quality will improve customer satisfaction, give a firm an edge in the market share and attract profit (Hossan, 2012). Parasuraman *et al.* (1994) contended that the SERVQUAL scale using the expectations/performance gaps method is an acceptable and richer way of measuring service quality. It is a model that is often utilized for quantifying customer service and perceived satisfaction in industries that are more service oriented in their daily tasks (Timothy, 2012). Due to the increasing importance of service sector in the economy, the measurement of service quality began to be an interest factor for the individuals of this field (Ghost & Gnanadhas, 2011).

The SERVQUAL model is used to assess consumers' perceptions of the identified five dimensions of service quality (tangibles, responsiveness, empathy, assurance and reliability) relative to customers' satisfaction. Now-a-days, service quality is gradually becoming a big part of many organizations' regionally, nationally and globally. It is considered the main factor of revenue streams. According to Spohrer and Maglio (2008) organizations require reliable techniques of assessment, measurement and improvement.

Service Quality

Responsiveness is characterized as the extent to which service providers are willing to accommodate clients and provide timely service. Eagerness to assist clients and offer quick service is known as responsiveness (Armstrong, 2012). Providing service in a timely manner is highly appreciated by customers. Good service providers understand this aspect (Iqbal *et al.*, 2010).

Customer satisfaction may be achieved in the fast food restaurants when employees are willing to assist their customers when required. Responsiveness is positively related to customer satisfaction and customers can refer others if satisfied (Akbaba, 2009). Empathy is characterized as the extent to which the customers are offered caring and individualized consideration.

Armstrong (2012) concluded that individualized attention and caring, offered by a firm to its clients is known as empathy; moreover employee and customer interactions are showed through the empathy dimension. When we consider empathy in fast food restaurants the following services come in mind. For example convenient restaurants location, availability of utensils, completely packaged food and convenient operating hours etc. Toosi and Kohonali (2011) recommended that service provider organizations must try to understand the situation from customer's perspective in order to get a clear picture of what is actually happening.

Assurance is characterized as the extent to which service providers are proficient, polite, and able to inspire trust & certainty. Assurance implies in restaurants as very mannered, knowledgeable & friendly employees and also feel safe when make financial transactions by customers. Tangibility is characterized as the extent to which physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of work force are adequate. Modern looking equipment, well dressed workers, physical facility and materials are apparently appealing, included in tangibility of fast food restaurants.

According to Narangajavana and Hu (2008) to acquire improvement in service quality, there is a need to emphasis on tangible and intangible assets. Reliability is characterized as the extent to which a guaranteed service is performed reliably and precisely. According to Armstrong (2012) ability to perform the promised service dependably and precisely is known as reliability. Reliability shows the service provider's capacity to perform services in a dependable and accurate manner (Safwan *et al.,* 2010). Reliability in restaurants referred as providing service as promised, on-schedule food delivery and fair charges for food. It is noticed that being reliable is an exceptionally vital quality to have, particularly in the fast food industry.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction can be interpreted as the feeling that an individual experiences, when an offered service come across to their expectations. Kotler *et al.* (2000) found that customer satisfaction relies on how products and services meet or surpass client expectation. According to Deng *et al.* (2009), the capability of a service provider to create satisfaction of high degree and it is significant for product differentiation and setting up strong relationship with customers. Mohsan *et al.* (2011) demonstrated that customer satisfaction plays a very critical part for their retention but it does not guarantee repeat purchase. One of the crucial components which influence the customers' satisfaction is the quality of service (Timothy, 2012). At the point when service quality is raised, it will prompt to customer satisfaction that will result in great business outcomes (Nilsson *et al.,* 2001). According to Hossan (2012) customer satisfaction is a vital component in positioning a firm's performance. Hunt (1977) stated that satisfaction is an assessment that an 'experience was good as it was perceived to be'. Mittal and Kamakura (2001) found customer satisfaction is a vital part in development of customer's desires for future purchase. Sureshchandar *et al.* (2002) found that there is a two-way connection among service quality and satisfaction. Both service quality and product are commonly noticed as a basic prerequisite for satisfying and retaining esteemed customers (Muslim & Zaidi, 2005). Only satisfied customers talk about their good experiences in restaurants.

Bloemer (1999) proposed a model to show the association among customer satisfaction and service quality that significantly affect customer loyalty. He proved that service quality directly affect the customer satisfaction. According to Caruana (2002) customer satisfaction is a very important factor for purchasing goods. His finding showed that customer satisfaction has mediating effect on service quality and customer loyalty. Liljander and Strandvik (1993) suggested that experience of the customer is not necessary for service quality. Their studies showed that knowledge is the main variable and factor for the evaluation of service. However, satisfaction is the inner perception of customers that is gained by their experience from the service provided by the service provider. Sureshchandar

et al. (2002) also proved two-way and significant association among satisfaction and service quality. Hanif *et al.* (2010) proposed in their study that satisfaction and the factors that affect the customer satisfaction has become the key area of thrust in the world. Customer satisfaction is the core component of any organization; they try their best to satisfy the customers using different means.

Research Model

The research model of this research was taken from previous research of Parasuraman *et al.* (1985). There were five hypotheses suggested for this research and they are given below

H_1: There is positive link between tangibility and customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants of Pakistan.

H_2: There is positive link between reliability and customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants of Pakistan.

H_3: There is positive link between assurance and customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants of Pakistan.

H_4: There is positive link between empathy and customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants of Pakistan.

H_5: There is positive link between responsiveness and customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants of Pakistan.

FIGURE 1 HERE

METHODOLOGY

Self-administered questionnaire was preferred on other data collecting techniques. The main reason for carrying this research was to reveal the importance of service quality in customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants. In order to find the linkage between five predictor variables (tangibility, reliability, empathy, assurance and responsiveness) and criterion variable customer satisfaction, a survey was conducted in the months of April-May, 2016 by using questionnaire.

There were two parts of questionnaire. Part 1 was consisted on items of research instruments while part 2 was consisted on items of demographic information. The four items of dependent variable customer satisfaction were taken from previous research of (Olorunniwo *et al.*, 2006) and 21 items of predictor variables service quality (tangibility, reliability, empathy, assurance and responsiveness) were taken from (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). All the items were treated on 5-point likert scale where 1 shows "very important" (Vimp) and 5 shows "not important" (Nimp). Demographic items included gender, age and preferred restaurants etc. The target population was customers of different fast food restaurants of Punjab, Pakistan.

The restaurant managers were contacted to help us in completing the survey. After their consent, the questionnaires were distributed among the customers of restaurants. An aggregate of 190 questionnaires were distributed among customers of fast food restaurants in major cities of Punjab through cluster sampling. But only 139 were got back. However, 122 were usable with response rate of 64.2%.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Reliability coefficient

After data collection, we checked the internal reliability of data through cronbachs' alpha. Previous researches concluded that if the value of alpha is equal or greater than 0.7 than it would be considered good. The results of cronbachs' alpha of this research is shown in table 1

TABLE 1 HERE

Here the outcomes showed that tangibility has the highest value of α=0.935. All the other variables have very good value of cronbachs' α reliability which is greater than 0.850. So, all the six variables have excellent internal reliability.

Demographic Profile

As the table 2 shows the respondents profile; the outcomes depict that out of 122 respondents 76(62.29%) were males and 46(37.71%) were females. Age of respondents divided them into four groups' i.e. 20(16.4%) respondents were less than 18 years of age category, the highest no of respondents 70(57.4%) were belonged to 18-35 years of age group, 25(20.25%) were belonged to 36-50 years of age group and 7(5.7%) were existed under 51 and above years of age group.

TABLE 2 HERE

When we asked to the customers that how frequently you visit the fast food restaurants than 53(43.4%) responded once in a month, 18(14.8%) replied once in a week, 29(23.8%) came to fast food restaurant twice in a month and 22(18%) responded more than twice a month. The customers preferred restaurants were as follow, 26(21.3%) customers preferred KFC, Pizza-Hut was chosen by 17(13.9%) customers, Burger king was first choice of 26(21.3%) customers, McDonalds preferred by 25(20.5%) customers, 12(9.8%) customers said that they love to come subway for meal and 16(13.1%) customers preferred other local and international fast food restaurants.

Correlation

Correlation values lie from -1 to 1. Correlation among the five predictor variables and customers' satisfaction as criterion variable was checked. We concluded that all the five independent variables have strong correlation with customer satisfaction.

TABLE 3 HERE

As the outcomes showed that tangibility has highest level of correlation (r=0.868) and all the other independent variables have also strong correlation with customer satisfaction like reliability (r=0.586), empathy (r=0.683), assurance (r=0.499) and responsiveness (r=0.738). All are significant at 0.01

Multiple Regression Analysis

When we applied multiple regression analysis to find out the influence of service quality on customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants of Pakistan, we got the following outcomes as shown in table 4

TABLE 4 HERE

The results of model summary showed that 78.3% changes in dependent variable customer satisfaction are due to these five dimensions of service quality i.e. (Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy, Tangibility, Reliability) as R-square is equal to 0.783.

The ANOVA output illustrated in table 5 and we found that F-value is equal to (23.489/.280=83.892) at (p-value equals to 0.00). By use of the F-table, the F (5%, 5, 116) tabulated was 2.918 which was less than F= ±83.892 which reinforced that fact that the model was statistically significant. So, we can conclude that model is statistically significant.

TABLE 5 HERE

The coefficients table showed the following outcome as shown in table 6. Here we can see that all the independent variables have positive influence on dependent variable i.e., customer satisfaction. Tangibility has the strongest influence on customer satisfaction as (β=0.690, t-value=9.788 at p-value=0.00). It means that customer satisfaction is highly influenced by the sitting environment, seating and parking availability and well-dressed staff. Management should give special importance to tangibility when manage their restaurants.

TABLE 6 HERE

Responsiveness is one of the main dimension of service quality as results showed that (β=0.625, t-value=7.419 at p-value=0.00). It shows customer always need prompt response and help from restaurant's employees. Also, customers like to know the exact time of food delivery. So, if you want to make your customers satisfy than be honest to them. Similarly, reliability, assurance and empathy have values (β=0.230, t-value=2.891 at p-value<0.05), (β=0.268, t-value=4.238 at p-value=0.00) and (β-0.307, t-value=5.170 at p-value=0.00) respectively. Outcomes depicted that the reliability, assurance and empathy considerably influence customer satisfaction. Customers of fast food restaurants give special consideration to location and working hours of restaurants more concisely if it is easily reachable and remain open for desirable working hours. Furthermore, reliable and friendly employees, assured and on schedule delivery of services increase satisfaction of customers. These things can never be ignored in fast food restaurants because satisfied customers are real asset of any business and we cannot afford to lose our premier asset. The outcome of this research matches with the results of previous researches by Qin and Prybutok, 2008 and Lee *et al.*, 2005. Hence, from above results and discussion we can conclude that all hypotheses have been accepted.

CONCLUSION

Service quality is considered as dire success factor of fast food restaurants. The management of restaurants need continuous improvements in service quality to get optimum customer satisfaction. The purpose of this research is to investigate the importance and relationship between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants of Pakistan. By viewing results it can be concluded that more the services are tangible, greater will be the perceived value resulting in customer satisfaction. 'First impression is the last impression' this statement holds true with the results showing tangibility which influence customer satisfaction to a greater extent as compare to other dimensions of service quality. Customers attract more towards restaurant's ambience, fine dining and location. The dimension 'responsiveness' also holds a significant portion in customer satisfaction as every single diner needs prompt response to their order which ultimately gives 'assurance' for future dine-ins. This research also revealed that customer satisfaction is being influenced by reliability and empathy from service providers. Fast food restaurants of Pakistan are now in a need to provide quality services under the umbrella of identified dimensions in order to get their customers satisfaction.

Limitation & Future Plan

As the research was conducted on fast food restaurants of was conducted on fast food restaurants of Punjab Pakistan, the outcomes are not universal and might not be considered as the outcome of all over Pakistan. In future, researchers will increase the sample size to make the outcomes more universal. Also, researchers will introduce new variable i.e. customer loyalty and the mediating effect to make it more interesting.

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APPENDIX

Table 1

Cronbachs' Alpha

Variables	*No of Items*	*Cronbach's Alpha*
Customer Satisfaction	4	0.899
Tangibility	5	0.935
Reliability	4	0.879
Assurance	4	0.857
Empathy	3	0.886
Responsiveness	5	0.900

Table 2

Demographic Information (N=122)

Demographic Variables	*Frequency*	*Percentage %*
Gender		
Male	76	62.29
Female	46	37.71
Age		
Less than 18	20	16.4
18-35	70	57.4
36-50	25	20.25
51 and above	7	5.7
Frequency of visit		
Once in a week	18	14.8
Once in a month	53	43.4
Twice in a month	29	23.8
More than twice a month	22	18.0
Preferred restaurant		
KFC	26	21.3
Pizza Hut	17	13.9
Burger King	26	21.3
McDonalds	25	20.5
Subway	12	9.8
Others	16	13.1

Table 3

Table 3: Correlations

Variables	*CS*	*TAN*	*REL*	*ASS*	*EMP*	*RES*
Customer Satisfaction	1					
Tangibility	.868**	1				
Reliability	.586**	.519**	1			
Assurance	.499**	.476**	.510**	1		
Empathy	.683**	.717**	.411**	.528**	1	
Responsiveness	.738**	.771**	.533**	.419**	.779**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	*R*	*R Square*	*Adjusted R Square*	*Std. Error of the Estimate*
1	.885[a]	.783	.774	.28915

a. Predictors: (Constant), Assurance, Responsiveness, Empathy, Reliability, Tangibility

Table 5

Table 5: ANOVA

Model		*Sum of Squares*	*Df*	*Mean Square*	*F*	*Sig.*
1	Regression	117.447	5	23.489	83.892	.000
	Residual	32.480	116	.280		
	Total	149.926	121			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Reliability, Assurance, Responsiveness, Tangibility, Empathy

Table 6

Table 6: Coefficients

		Unstandardized Coefficients		*Standardized Coefficients*		
Model		*B*	*Std. Error*	*Beta*	*t*	*Sig.*
1	(Constant)	.268	.232		3.368	.000
	Tangibility	.713	.073	.690	9.788	.000
	Reliability	.256	.054	.230	2.891	.041
	Assurance	.331	.057	.268	4.238	.000
	Empathy	.339	.062	.307	5.170	.000
	Responsiveness	.657	.611	.625	7.419	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

Figure 1

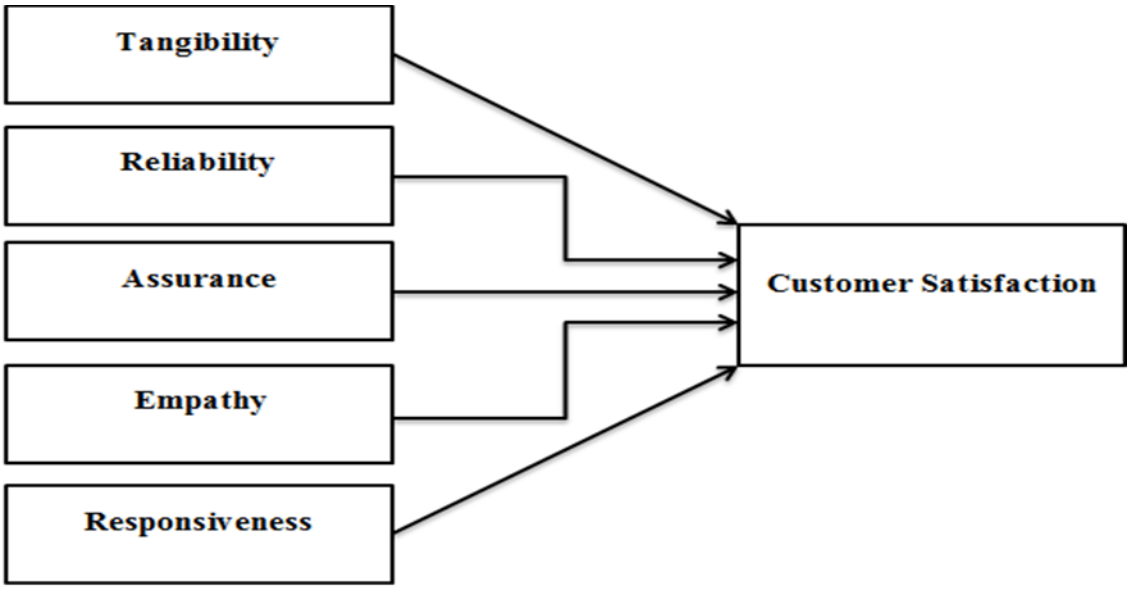

Figure 1: Research Model