

Building loyalty

by Wanda Gema

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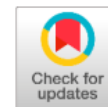
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Building loyalty: The influencing factors of fast-food restaurants in Indonesia



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36

Abstract The study examines the joint contribution of service quality attributes, price fairness, and customer satisfaction to customer loyalty in the fast-food industry. Utilizing a quantitative methodology and structural equation modeling, the study examines a conceptual model designed to clarify the complex interdependence of these factors in optimizing loyalty levels. The empirical findings reveal that while price fairness and specific service quality attributes, such as physical environment and employee service quality, significantly impact customer satisfaction, food quality surprisingly does not yield a significant influence in this specific context. Furthermore, the results confirm that customer satisfaction is the primary driver of customer loyalty, serving as a vital mediator in the relationship. By addressing the existing research gap concerning the interplay and collective influence of these antecedents, this study provides valuable insights for both academics and practitioners. It offers a robust framework for refining marketing and operational strategies to enhance restaurant profitability, foster long-term customer retention, and navigate the competitive landscape of the fast-food sector. Ultimately, these findings challenge traditional assumptions about food quality and emphasize the growing importance of the service environment and perceived value in shaping modern consumer behavior and brand loyalty.

Keywords: customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, service quality, price fairness

1. Introduction

The global fast-food landscape has undergone a profound transformation, with dietary patterns and consumer lifestyles evolving rapidly in response to a post-pandemic reality (Mulyawan et al., 2022). In Indonesia, this shift is particularly pronounced. According to Statista, the number of Limited Service Restaurants (LSRs) in Indonesia surged from 7,161 outlets in 2019 to 9,869 in 2023, with sales value reaching 2.57 billion dollars. While this growth signals a robust market, it has led to extreme market saturation retention (Ha & Jang, 2012). In this high-density environment, traditional drivers of success are being re-evaluated as consumer behavior shifts from mere convenience to a more nuanced demand for value and experience.

Retaining customers in such a saturated market has become a matter of survival rather than just growth (Ha & Jang, 2012). While Western literature extensively documents loyalty drivers, the Indonesian context presents a unique cultural and economic intersection where traditional Western models may falter (Mubarok et al., 2023). For Indonesian consumers, the fast-food experience is often a social occasion rather than a solitary, time-saving task. This cultural nuance suggests that dimensions like physical environment quality and service interactions may outweigh the "product" itself, a hypothesis supported by recent shifts in local consumer priorities toward atmospheric and interpersonal value (Asab, 2025; Chrisjatmiko, 2019; Chun, 2020; Doeim et al., 2022; Fard & Namgalauri, 2025; Izquierdo-yusta et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2018; Ong et al., 2022; Rajput & Gahfoor, 2020; Singh et al., 2021; Uddin, 2019; Xiao & Yang, 2019; Zaw & Nuangjamnong, 2023).

Despite the proliferation of global fast-food brands, empirical analysis of consumer loyalty within the Indonesian local context remains surprisingly limited (Mulyawan et al., 2022). Most existing research focuses on initial purchase intent rather than the complex interplay of factors required for long-term retention. Consequently, there is a critical need to re-examine the relationships between food quality, service attributes, price fairness, and satisfaction to determine how they collectively foster loyalty in this specific emerging market.

This study addresses these gaps by proposing a comprehensive model to examine the determinants of loyalty in Indonesian fast-food establishments. By investigating why certain traditional drivers, such as food quality, might be superseded by experiential factors in a post-pandemic setting, this research offers significant contributions. It provides a localized analysis of consumer interactions, assisting both managers and scholars in understanding the specific levers of satisfaction that drive loyalty in an increasingly crowded and culturally distinct marketplace (Asab, 2025).

35

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Influence of food quality on customer satisfaction



In a culinary setting, customer satisfaction is fundamentally based on food quality (Rajput & Gahfoor, 2020). A wide array of tangible properties, including composition, microbiology, nutritional profiles, processing and storage methods, and food safety, can be considered key indicators of food quality. Customers use these indicators to assess, categorize, and evaluate the overall acceptability of the meal. Consequently, food quality is often viewed as a prerequisite for customer satisfaction in fast-food restaurants. Recent studies in this domain consistently suggest that food quality positively affects consumer satisfaction and remains a critical factor in the fast-food experience. Furthermore, providing consumers with high-quality food is seen as an essential driver for achieving optimal culinary business performance.

However, the weight placed on food quality may shift as markets evolve. In developed markets, where food safety and basic quality standards are often highly regulated and taken for granted, food quality acts as a "hygiene factor" rather than a primary differentiator. Conversely, in emerging markets like Indonesia, the rapid saturation of the fast-food sector may lead to a "homogenization of taste," in which consumers perceive product quality across major brands as nearly identical. In such contexts, the relative importance of food quality may diminish in favor of experiential or economic factors, such as service speed or price fairness (Chun & Nyam-Ochir, 2020; Etemad-Sajadi & Rizzuto, 2013; Mulyawan et al., 2022; Rajput & Gahfoor, 2020). While food quality is a foundational requirement, it may not always be the primary driver of satisfaction in hyper-competitive or culturally specific environments (Singh et al., 2021; Yuan & Wang, 2025). Based on literary findings, the following hypothesis posits:

H1. Food quality has a significant positive influence on customer satisfaction.

2.2. Influence of physical environment quality on customer satisfaction

Restaurant owners and marketers can leverage a restaurant's ambience as a marketing strategy to distinguish itself from competition (Slack et al., 2021). Rajput and Gahfoor (2020) assert that the quality of the physical environment serves as a context for delivering products and services in restaurants. According to Zaw and Nuangjamnong (2023), the physical attributes of a dining establishment, including its interior design, spatial configuration, cleanliness, lighting, and overall ambience, play a critical role in shaping customer satisfaction. Prior research indicates that customers utilize the physical environment to assess the quality of products or services (Chen et al., 2022; Rajput & Gahfoor, 2020; Rodhiah et al., 2023; Zaw & Nuangjamnong, 2023; Zhong & Moon, 2020). The findings of previous studies indicate that a high-quality physical environment has a major influence on customer satisfaction. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2. Physical environment quality has a significant positive influence on customer satisfaction

2.3. Influence of employee service quality on customer satisfaction

A good level of service is essential for a successful brand in a competitive food service industry, such as in a restaurant business (Dabholkar, 2014). Expansion and enhanced customer satisfaction are contingent on service quality (Mubarak et al., 2023). According to Mulyawan et al. (2022), service quality comprises all activities undertaken by a business to fulfill its requirements. Moreover, according to Uddin (2019), service quality is given far greater priority than other elements to make customers happy with their visit to an organization. Yarimoglu (2014) stated that service quality is a comparative assessment of consumers' perceptions of service excellence relative to expectations of service delivery. Service quality in fast-food enterprises is an essential part of the fast-food service business, as it can be systematically measured and enhanced over time. Research findings indicate that service quality has a significant effect on customer satisfaction (Chun & Nyam-Ochir, 2020; Ong et al., 2022; Rajput & Gahfoor, 2020; Ruhluel & Bayram, 2021; Singh et al., 2021a). The hypotheses tested in this study are as follows:

H3. Employee service quality has a significant positive influence on customer satisfaction.

2.4. Influence of price fairness on customer satisfaction

As stated by Mulyawan et al. (2022), price has become an important factor for consumers, as it serves as a metric for assessing the alignment between the benefits received from products and the sacrifices made. The study by Slack et al. (2021) demonstrated that both social value and functional value (price/value for money) positively impact customer satisfaction in the context of fast-food purchases. Singh et al. (2021b) demonstrated a significant positive effect of price fairness on customer satisfaction within the context of a fast-food restaurant. Uddin (2019) studied fast-food restaurants in Bangladesh and reported a significant positive relationship between price fairness and customer satisfaction. Recent studies have confirmed significant positive relationships between price fairness and customer satisfaction (Chun & Nyam-Ochir, 2020; Lee et al., 2022; Ling et al., 2018; Mulyawan et al., 2022; Zaw & Nuangjamnong, 2023; Zhong & Moon, 2020). A predetermined price that is more acceptable will increase customer satisfaction. Therefore, the following hypothesis posits:

H4. Price fairness has a significant positive influence on customer satisfaction.

2.5. Influence of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty

According to Prayag et al. (2017), satisfied customers are more inclined to make repeat purchases and endorse products to others. Customer satisfaction is a major factor influencing customers' relationships with the restaurant and a key driver of repeat business (Zaw & Nuangjamnong, 2023). Service providers aim to meet customer satisfaction by providing enhanced benefits (Mulyawan et al., 2022). Customers usually show their loyalty through repeat business and positive referrals (Rafidinal & Suhartanto, 2020). The satisfaction and loyalty of a customer are important for contemporary businesses for two major reasons. First, because customers are scarce resources, collecting them from existing customers is much easier than finding new ones. Second, customer loyalty and satisfaction strongly affect the profitability and revenues of a company (Rosenberg & Czepiel, 1984). According to many studies conducted in the restaurant sector, customer satisfaction is a significant predictor of loyalty (Kayumov et al., 2024; Mubarak et al., 2023; Rodhiah et al., 2023; Ruhluel & Bayram, 2021; Singh et al., 2024; Slack et al., 2021; Uddin, 2019; Zhong & Moon, 2020). Therefore, the following hypothesis posits:

H5. Customer satisfaction positively impacts customer loyalty.

Based on the foundational theories discussed above, five hypotheses were formulated to test the drivers of loyalty. The resulting conceptual model, illustrated in Figure 1, outlines the hypothesized direct and indirect effects under investigation.

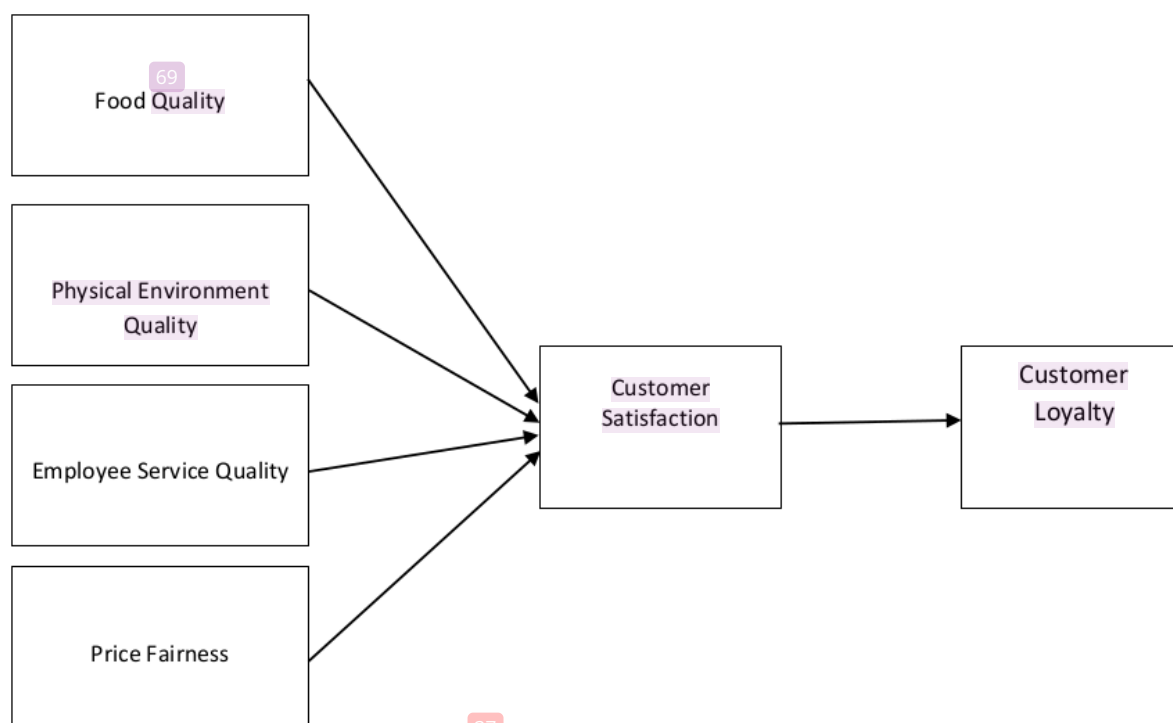


Figure 1 Conceptual framework.

3. Methodology

3.1. Survey instrument

A set of questions, including food quality, physical environment quality, employee service quality, price fairness, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, was employed in this study. The studies conducted by Jang & Namkung (2009) and Singh et al. (2021) focused on food quality with 5 items, Ryu & Jang (2008) and Singh et al. (2021) focused on physical environment quality with 3 items, Jang & Namkung (2009) and Singh et al. (2021) focused on employee service quality with 3 items, Xiao et al. (2019) and Singh et al. (2021) focused on price fairness with 3 items, Ryu et al. (2008) and Singh et al. (2021) focused on customer satisfaction with 3 items, and Mulyawan et al. (2022) focused on customer loyalty with 3 items. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). To ensure linguistic equivalence and cross-cultural validity for the Indonesian context, a double-back translation procedure was implemented. The original English scales were translated into Indonesian by a bilingual expert and then back-translated into English by an independent translator to verify that the initial meanings remained intact and culturally relevant.

3.2. Study site and data collection

Data were collected from fast-food customers in Indonesia through an online survey between November and December 2025. This research used both primary and secondary data. To obtain primary data, questionnaires were distributed to customers of fast-food restaurants. The secondary data were collected through literature reviews. Of 300 responses, 24 were excluded for inappropriate or incomplete answers; thus, 276 questionnaires were valid for further analysis. The word “fast food restaurant,” according to Singh et al. (2021), is a restaurant with a limited menu of dishes that are appropriate for the production line method, while suppliers usually specialize in items such as sandwiches, hamburgers, pizzas, and chickens. This study sampled customers from a cross-section of leading fast-food restaurants in Indonesia, including McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut, Hokben, Mie Gacoan, and Richeese Factory (Statista, 2025).

3.3. Data analysis method

The proposed model was tested, and the coded data were subjected to statistical analysis via Smart PLS. PLS-SEM is appropriate for both theory creation and prediction analysis (Hair, 2018; Sarstedt et al., 2020). Smart PLS explains the general structural relationships among small samples and many dimensions and successfully identifies complex causal linkages, including mediation effects (Dash & Paul, 2021). Factor loadings and AVEs were calculated to test the discriminant validity, convergent validity, and composite reliability of the constructs. Variance inflation factors (VIFs) were utilized to identify potential multicollinearity, and bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was implemented to evaluate the significance of the path coefficients.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic profiles of the respondents

The study sample comprised 276 participants. In terms of gender distribution, 149 respondents (54.0%) were female, while 127 (46.0%) were male (see Table 1). The age distribution was predominantly young to middle-aged adults. The largest cohort consisted of individuals aged 21–30 years (89 respondents; 32.2%), 31–40 years (80 respondents; 29%), under 20 years (71 respondents; 25.7%), 41–50 years (23 respondents; 8.3%), and over 50 years (13 respondents; 4.7%). With respect to education, 98 of them (35.5%) had finished high school, 16 respondents (5.8%) had attended or finished a master's degree or higher, and 162 respondents had attended or completed college/university (58.7%). Finally, for monthly income levels, 103 respondents, or 37.3% of the sample, earned less than Rp 5,000,000. The remaining 95 (34.4%) earned between Rp. 5.000.000–10.000.000, 53 (19.2%) earned between Rp. 10.000.000–15.000.000, 18 respondents or 6.5% earned between Rp. 15000.000–20.000.000, and 7 (2.5%) earned above Rp. 20.000.000, respectively. Following is the table of demographic respondents of this study.

Table 1 Demographic respondents.

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	127	46.0
	Female	149	54.0
Age	Under 20 years	71	25.7
	21–30 years	89	32.2
	31–40 years	80	29.0
	41–50 years	23	8.3
	Over 50 years	13	4.7
Education Level	High School	98	35.5
	College / University	162	58.7
	Master's Degree or higher	16	5.8
Monthly Income	< Rp 5,000,000	103	37.3
	Rp 5,000,000 – 10,000,000	95	34.4
	Rp 10,000,000 – 15,000,000	53	19.2
	Rp 15,000,000 – 20,000,000	18	6.5
	> Rp 20,000,000	7	2.5

4.2. Measurement model

All the item loadings, ranging from 0.864–0.918, were evaluated via smart PLS. All the items had loadings above the generally accepted threshold of 0.60 (Hair et al., 2010). The internal consistency and reliability of the measurement model were rigorously assessed through the calculation of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients. According to Hair et al. (2017), a threshold of 0.7 or higher was considered indicative of adequate consistency. This study's alpha ranged from 0.865–0.925. The composite reliability was also assessed, with all values ranging from 0.867–0.926, exceeding the minimum

threshold of 0.7 (Sarstedt et al., 2020). Convergent validity was confirmed, as all average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.770–0.821, surpassing the recommended threshold (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Therefore, internal consistency, composite reliability, and convergent validity were sufficiently established. To assess discriminant validity, Henseler et al. (2015) recommended the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio, which is considered valid when the ratio is less than or equal to 0.9. All the HTMT values in this study ranged from 0.567–0.696. The detailed PLS–SEM results are provided in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2 Measurement items and composite reliability.

Constructs and measurement items	loadings	α	Cr	AVE
Food Quality		0.925	0.926	0.770
FQ1 The food at fast-food restaurants was delicious	0.893			
FQ2 Fast-food restaurants offer a variety of menu items	0.878			
FQ3 Fast-food restaurants offer fresh food	0.864			
FQ4 The smell of fresh food was enticing	0.885			
FQ5 The food presentation was visually attractive	0.867			
Physical environment quality		0.891	0.893	0.821
PEQ1 Fast-food restaurants have attractive interior designs and décor	0.894			
PEQ2 The dining areas are thoroughly clean	0.905			
PEQ3 Employees are neat and well-dressed	0.918			
Price fairness		0.878	0.880	0.804
PF1 The food price charged by fast-food restaurants is reasonable	0.890			
PF2 The prices in fast-food restaurants seem appropriate for what I obtain	0.902			
PF3 Overall, fast food restaurants provide higher prices than other restaurants do food service providers	0.898			
Customer Satisfaction		0.871	0.871	0.795
CS1 I am satisfied with my overall experience at fast-food restaurants	0.900			
CS2 Overall, fast-food restaurants put me in a good mood	0.896			
CS3 I truly enjoy myself at fast-food restaurants	0.879			
Customer Loyalty		0.865	0.867	0.788
CL1 I will continue to visit this fast-food restaurant	0.883			
CL2 I will recommend this fast-food restaurant to others	0.873			
CL3 I will say positive things about this restaurant to others	0.906			

Table 3 HTMT discriminant validity criteria.

Constructs	CL	CS	FQ	PEQ	PF	ESQ
CL						
CS	0.674					
FQ	0.612	0.567				
PEQ	0.658	0.694	0.600			
PF	0.642	0.627	0.610	0.665		
ESQ	0.606	0.647	0.640	0.632	0.696	

Note (s): CL = Customer loyalty; CS = Customer satisfaction; FQ = Food quality; PEQ = Physical environment quality; PF = Price fairness; SQ = Service quality.

4.3. Discussion

Hypothesis testing was conducted via a bootstrapping technique with 5,000 resamples and a 95% confidence interval. The results confirmed the model's predictive accuracy, with R^2 values of 0.473 for customer satisfaction and 0.343 for customer loyalty. Chin et al. (2008) classify the R^2 values of endogenous latent variables into three categories: weak (19%), moderate (33%), and substantial (67%). The R^2 value of 34% indicates a moderate level of explanatory power for the model, as per this classification. With reference to this classification, the R^2 of 34% indicates that the model's explanatory power is moderate.

The structural analysis reveals that the relationship between food quality and customer satisfaction yielded a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.117$ with a t -value of 1.937 ($p = 0.053$). While this result technically falls short of the rigorous statistical threshold of 1.96 required for significance at the 5% level, it is important to note its proximity to the cutoff. Rather than a definitive absence of influence, the data suggest a marginal trend that did not achieve full statistical support in this specific Indonesian context. These findings contribute to an existing body of literature that has yielded inconsistent results on the food quality–satisfaction nexus. While several scholars have identified food quality as a primary driver of satisfaction (Chun & Nyam-

Ochir, 2020; Mulyawan et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2021; Uddin, 2019), others have reported a non-significant relationship, suggesting that other atmospheric or service-related factors may occasionally overshadow the "product" itself (Kristiawan et al., 2021; Mcneil & Young, 2019; Sabir et al., 2014). The lack of a significant effect in this study does not imply that food quality is irrelevant; rather, it suggests that in the highly saturated and competitive Indonesian fast-food market, quality may have reached a point of "competitive parity," where it serves as a hygiene factor rather than a primary differentiator for customer satisfaction.

The second proposed relationship, between the quality of the physical environment and customer satisfaction, was analyzed. The quality of the physical environment significantly affected customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.338$, $t = 5.299$, $P < 0.000$). This is in line with previous studies (Rajput & Gahfoor, 2020; Zaw & Nuangjamnong, 2023; Zhong & Moon, 2020). Compared with other criteria, this aspect of physical environment quality has the most significant positive impact, such as price fairness and employee service quality. The findings indicated that the quality of a restaurant's interior design and decor, the establishment's cleanliness, and the tidiness of employees significantly influence fast-food customer satisfaction.

Third, the hypothesized links between employee service quality and customer satisfaction were analyzed. The findings revealed that the quality of staff services significantly influenced customer satisfaction, as evidenced by $\beta = 0.215$, $t = 3.409$, $P < 0.001$. This finding is supported by the previous literature (Ong et al., 2022; Ruhluel & Bayram, 2021; Singh et al., 2021). According to the findings, customer satisfaction with fast food stores depends on timely and efficient service delivery, prompt assistance, and the quality of employees' interactions with customers.

Fourth, we tested the proposed linkages of price fairness with customer satisfaction. Perceived price fairness was found to significantly influence customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.155$, $t = 2.504$, $P < 0.012$). This result also supports the findings of previous studies (Lee, 2023; Ling et al., 2018; Mulyawan et al., 2022). The results indicated that prompt, efficient service, the willingness to assist customers, and the quality of employee communication influence customer satisfaction in fast food establishments.

The last hypothesis concerns the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty. The results indicated that customer loyalty is significantly affected by customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.586$, $t = 10.387$, $P < 0.000$). This result is consistent with earlier studies (Kayumov & Ahn, 2024; Mubarak et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2025; Uddin, 2019). Customer satisfaction is considered an important factor in determining customer loyalty. The findings reveal that fast food settings need to consider placing greater emphasis on customer satisfaction in an attempt to ensure customer loyalty.

The results of PLS-SEM are shown in detail in Table 4 and illustrated graphically in Figure 2.

Table 4 Structural model results.

Path coefficients				
Hypotheses	Path	β	t values	Results
Direct effects				
H1	Food quality → Customer satisfaction	0.117	1.937	Not Supported
H2	Physical quality → Customer satisfaction	0.338	5.299	Supported
H3	Employee servqual → Customer satisfaction	0.215	3.409	Supported
H4	Price fairness → Customer satisfaction	0.155	2.503	Supported
H5	Customer satisfaction → Customer loyalty	0.586	10.387	Supported
Specific indirect effects				
	Food quality → Customer satisfaction → Customer loyalty	0.068	1.862	Not Supported
	Physical quality → Customer satisfaction → Customer loyalty	0.198	4.480	Supported
	Price fairness → Customer satisfaction → Customer loyalty	0.091	2.386	Supported
	Employee servqual → Customer satisfaction → Customer loyalty	0.126	3.161	Supported

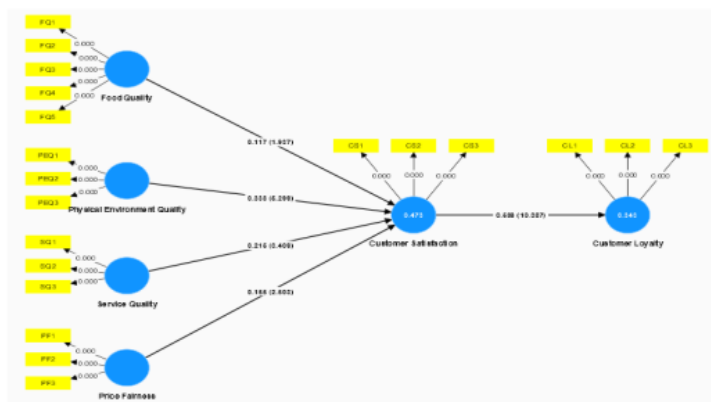


Figure 2 Estimated structural model results.

5. Conclusions

5.1. limitations, and suggestions for future researchers

This research seeks to provide deeper insights into the specific determinants of customer contentment and long-term loyalty in the Indonesian fast-food sector. The findings indicate that the quality of the physical environment, employee service quality, and price fairness are critical determinants of customer satisfaction. Customers' satisfaction levels can be enhanced when they perceive the physical environment as high quality, the price as fair and reasonable, and when they have positive perceptions and experiences of service quality. Compared with price fairness and employee service quality, the quality of the physical environment has the most significant positive effect on customer satisfaction. This study revealed a negative correlation between food quality and customer satisfaction, and our empirical results demonstrated a significant positive relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty in the fast-food restaurant sector.

While this study offers significant theoretical and practical contributions to our understanding of loyalty drivers in the fast-food industry, it is not without its constraints. This study is specific to a particular context, such as Indonesia, and a specific subset of the restaurant industry, namely, fast food restaurants. Second, the data were collected through convenience sampling; consequently, the study's findings are limited in generalizability. Additional research may be undertaken on various categories of restaurants, including local, ethnic, or continental establishments. Given the cross-sectional nature of this inquiry, subsequent studies should employ a longitudinal design to more accurately evaluate the evolving impact of satisfaction on consumer loyalty over time. Ultimately, incorporating the restaurant brand, brand value, and image to understand the relationships among the study constructs is essential for an accurate understanding.

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7. Declarations

7.1. Ethical considerations

The authors were committed to complying with all ethical standards in this research.

7.2. Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

The authors declare that the generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool Grammarly was used exclusively for language editing and grammatical improvement. The use of AI did not influence the scientific content, study design, data analysis, data interpretation, results, or the conclusion of the manuscript. Full responsibility for the content remains with the authors.

7.3. Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

7.4. Funding

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PAGE 3

PAGE 4

PAGE 5

PAGE 6

PAGE 7

PAGE 8

PAGE 9