

A Study of Courier Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Courier services have grown in popularity due to the recent Covid-19 outbreak. We aim to examine how courier service quality dimensions such as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy can affect customer satisfaction. We conducted an online survey with 159 participants from Malaysia and Kuwait. We found that reliability, responsiveness, and empathy are significantly related to customer satisfaction. Furthermore, we identified that empathy is the most significant factor influencing customer satisfaction. Our study contributes to the prior research on customer satisfaction by showing that service quality dimensions play an important role in influencing customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Assurance, Customer Satisfaction, Empathy, Reliability, Responsiveness, Service Quality, Tangibility

INTRODUCTION

Courier company delivers messages, packages, and mail. J&T Express, FedEx, GD Express, DHL, and Pos Laju are examples of companies that run in the logistics industry for courier service. DHL ranked first globally among the largest courier service companies, with a market share of about 39 percent (Müller, 2021). However, the popularity of delivery services is not a new phenomenon. Even before COVID-19 they became a media sensation. Yet, owing to the Covid-19 epidemic, internet delivery service is in high demand. For instance, Pos Malaysia Berhad had received extra demands (Kee et al., 2021) and delivered about 522 million postal items in the past year. To satisfy the customers, courier companies mainly focus on their service quality, affecting customer behavior. For J&T Express in Malaysia, this company has won 'The Best Delivery Excellence Award' and 'The Best Customer Service Excellence' awards by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission.

The Covid-19 pandemic has hit many businesses due to prevailing lockdown measures, travel restrictions, and a reduction in consumers' disposable income (Hu & Kee, 2021a; 2021b). The global pandemic has forced people to stay indoors. Consumer lifestyles are constantly changing. Understanding behavioral changes shift is vital for businesses to stay competitive and adapt to changes to capitalize on new opportunities. People are compelled to change their buying habits from traditional to online shopping (Aryani et al., 2021). The e-commerce industry is booming due to many technologically savvy customers looking for great deals on the internet. Malaysians are increasingly purchasing their daily groceries online and sending goods to friends and family through courier services, as this allows purchasers to shop at any time and rewards with a 'pollution-free shopping experience.' A survey on shopping behavior in Malaysia conducted by Rakuten Insight shows that 71 percent of respondents changed their preferred time to go shopping during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hirschmann, 2021). Thus, the need for couriers has skyrocketed as more people prefer online shopping to outdoor shopping due to the epidemic. The expansion of e-commerce boosts the courier, express, and parcel businesses in Malaysia and Kuwait. The need for speedy delivery has risen as a result of expanding urbanization and hectic lifestyles.

Customers nowadays are well aware of the importance of service quality (Soriano, 2002). Courier companies are currently concentrating on service quality and customer satisfaction to match consumers' expectations. Improving the overall quality of a courier service might help them acquire customers' loyalty. Consequently, courier service quality is a critical component that may impact customer behavior and the courier company's business performance. The customer is the judge of quality (Evans & Dean, 2003). Thus, understanding client requirements necessitates accurately interpreting consumer requirements and expectations and providing products and services of acceptable quality. Improving service quality is especially crucial when developing a sustainable value proposition. To improve sustainable services, Baldassarre, Calabretta, Bocken, and Jaskiewicz (2017) highlighted the importance of a consumer-driven strategy. Hartono (2020) also underlined a need to include consumers in establishing sustainable courier service development. Sustainable service focuses on delivering goods and services that meet customers' requirements while making an effort about social achievement. Besides that, sustainable services should be conducted towards the identification and awareness of the customers' needs and expectations.

The SERVQUAL model is used by a variety of service kinds. Its five dimensions, namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibility, and empathy, are applied to promote positive results (Muljono & Setyawati, 2019). The SERVQUAL musical instrument made

is popular and has proven to be used in several quality-of-service studies. This is because it has a wide range of uses and can be applied in all situations. Pandey et al. (2021) investigated the relationship between courier service quality and customer satisfaction. This article examines courier services aspects, which are reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibility, and empathy, affecting customer satisfaction. This will assist courier service companies in improving their service quality by determining which dimensions influence customer satisfaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction and service quality play a role in comparing service performance to predetermined standards (Kar, 2016). A feeling of surprise and disappointment can also characterize a customer's satisfaction after comparing the results of the product with the expectations (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Customer satisfaction is described as a metric that assesses how satisfy customers are with a company's products, services, and capabilities. The level of customer satisfaction is related to the company's products and services as these might be a sign of the company's competitiveness and success in the long run (Ho, Teik, Tiffany, Loong, & Teh, 2012). Customer satisfaction data, including such surveys and ratings, may help the firm determine well how to strengthen or modify its products and services.

It is critical that organizations do not assume they know what their customers want. Instead, utilizing approaches such as consumer surveys, focus groups, and polls is critical to understanding what customers desire. These technologies give businesses a clear picture of what their consumers want, allowing them to better adjust their services and goods to meet or exceed those expectations. As a result, service quality has a significant impact on customer satisfaction. It is the brand's responsibility to ensure customer satisfaction to the greatest extent possible. Courteous interaction is essential to provide customers with information or a place where they can be listened to when they wish to do so (Chen, Waseem, Xia, Tran, & Yao, 2021). A highly satisfied customer means a lower churn rate, higher retention, and a boost to the company's reputation. There is a difference between service quality and customer satisfaction. The former is a cause, and the latter is the effect or result of that cause. Thus, it is a cause whose result is customer satisfaction to provide excellent customer service.

Consumer Behavior

In consumer behavior theories and research, attitudes play an increasingly important role. The term attitude refers to enduring groups of beliefs, feelings, and behaviors toward objects, groups, and symbols of social significance (Hogg & Vaughan, 2005). Attitude describes how one feels about something or what one likes and dislikes (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2001). The rapid growth of e-commerce caused startups, courier services, and consumer transactions to have undergone radical changes. Another study indicates that erratic purchase behavior is related to a tendency to isolate oneself (Laato, Islam, Farooq, & Dhir, 2020). According to an analysis of consumer behavior in the U.S. before and during the Covid-19, people dramatically increased their online shopping during the pandemic period (Mason, Narcum, & Mason, 2020). The intention to buy online and use a courier service simultaneously is determined by the consumer's attitude. Consumer acceptance of internet buying as a medium for purchasing is one indicator of attitudes toward it. The second element is consumer perceptions about a particular online merchant and its delivery service providers (Jahng, Jain, & Ramamurthy, 2001). Customer behavior regarding online purchasing is undoubtedly changing and resulting in a rise in courier services.

Tangibility and Customer Satisfaction

Tangibles are characteristics of a service that can be experienced without actually purchasing it. By emphasizing the 'visible' components of the service, businesses may boost external client satisfaction. Customers' judgments of service quality are based on a comparison of the tangibles associated with the services provided since services are tangible. An industry such as a courier company could be considered fundamental to the analysis and practice of service marketing due to the concept of tangibility (McDougall & Snetsinger, 1990). A tangible experience comprises everything in a customer's visual experience of a service provider, including equipment, staff, facilities, products, and appearance (Shukri, Yajid, & Tham, 2020). These are important since they may assist improve the company's overall image. As such, we hypothesize:

H1: Tangibility is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Reliability and Customer Satisfaction

Reliability is defined as the capacity to deliver promised courier services accurately to customers. It is also defined as the ability to assure customers of the delivery of goods on time, solve their problems, deliver goods that are damage-free, and do things right the first time. This dimension is significant in terms of service quality since most customers prefer trading with a company that keeps its promises. Reliability plays an important role in the efficiency of courier service companies as it consists of a number of components such as billing, quotation, record consistency, and order fulfillment commitment. It was shown that perceived value could be a medium between perceived quality and customer satisfaction (Fida, Ahmed, Al-Balushi, & Singh, 2020). Since this implies that reliability has a substantial impact on a business, all businesses must be aware of the reliability expectations of their customers. As such, we hypothesize:

H2: Reliability is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Responsiveness and Customer Satisfaction

When it comes to responsiveness, it is frequently about how personnel assist their customers and immediately handle their concerns or difficulties. Responsiveness focuses on understanding, valuing, and supporting one another in fulfilling important personal goals and needs (Reis & Clark, 2013). The enthusiasm of employees to give services is another indicator of responsiveness. It also includes understanding the customer's needs and demands, a fast operation time, individual employee attention, issue resolution, and customer safety (Rashid, Hamid, Said, & Musa, 2020). This demonstrates the staff's ability to provide customers with services efficiently without delay, while ensuring that they are receiving their service promptly. Responsiveness can be measured by the length of time it takes for the answer or solution to be given. Basically, responsiveness means providing the customer with the information or product they need as soon as possible. Therefore, courier companies have a duty to ensure that the customer receives their service responsively, and they are truly interested in helping the customer. As such, we hypothesize:

H3: Responsiveness is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Assurance and Customer Satisfaction

The assurance dimension comes next. It involves establishing credibility and trust with customers. For a company to achieve customer trust and credibility, employees must have technical knowledge, communication skills, generosity, integrity, proficiency, and expertise (Kobiruzzaman, 2021). Competence, courtesy, credibility, and security are the four qualities that make up the assurance dimension in courier service. Francis (2012) defined assurance as the ability of service providers to instill a sense of trust and confidence while serving their potential customers. The key to understanding customer needs and wants is to continually focus on assurance, which can lead to significant

impacts on customer satisfaction (Tuan & Linh, 2014). For example, while serving customers, the employee treats them with respect and politeness. Due to this, we hypothesize:

H4: Assurance is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Empathy and Customer Satisfaction

Empathy can be defined as an emotional response that unconsciously loses the difference between the self and others, immersion of oneself in other people's feelings, and undergoing the same experience (Kang, 2020). The empathy component relates to the employee's individualized attention and concern for the customers. It contains an individualized or set of services designed to better meet the diverse requirements, desires, and preferences of customers (Ramya et. al., 2019). Empathy experiences affect brand attitudes, and attitudes toward services (Escalas & Stern, 2003). If employees lack empathy, the organization could lose clients. Therefore, compassion must be ensured. on account of this, we hypothesize:

H5: Empathy is positively related to customer satisfaction.

This study aims to investigate the effects of courier service quality on customer satisfaction and proposes hypotheses based on the research model illustrated in Figure 1.

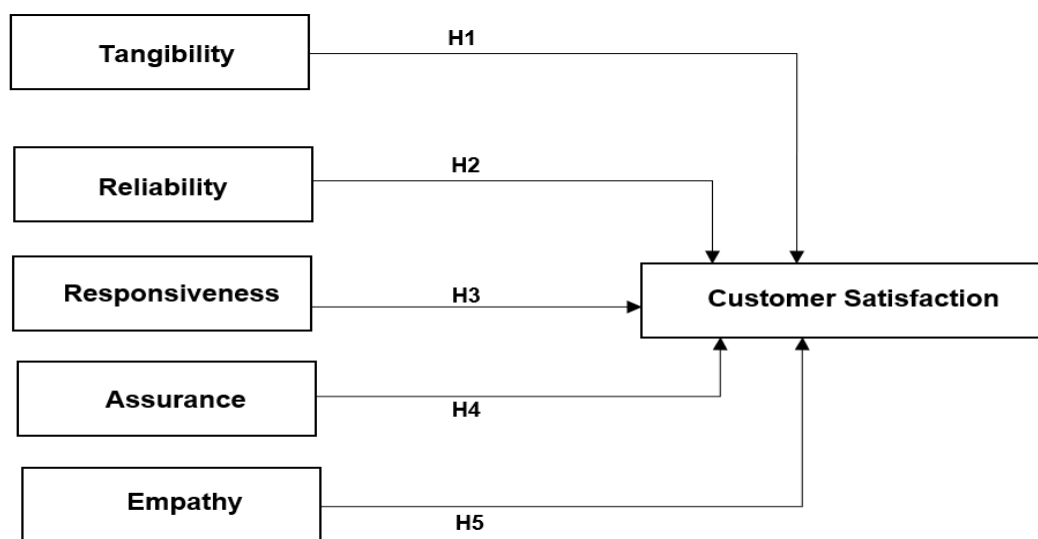


Figure 1. Research Model

RESEARCH METHOD

Data were collected in November 2021 via an online survey (Google Form). Our sample consisted of 159 respondents, the courier service users from Malaysia and Kuwait. We set two filtering questions to ensure all participants were the courier service users in both countries. The majority of those who responded were between the ages of 20 to 29 (79.3%), and over half were students (71.4%). The data was gathered and analyzed using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics version 26.0 software. The scale is a 5-point Likert scale with items ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

Customer Satisfaction

We created a three-item scale that could best capture customer satisfaction in our setting. In constructing this scale, we used principal component analysis with varimax rotation to ensure all items had a single factor loading over 60, which is considered acceptable in terms of reliability (Nunnally, 1978). The reported Cronbach alpha for the scale is 0.85. In other words, the instrument is highly reliable, and the quality of service and customer satisfaction are highly correlated (Muyeed, 2012).

Service Quality

Parasuraman developed and implemented the SERVQUAL approach in 1988 to recognize and analyze customer service quality. The model in the survey is based on 22 items that attribute to the five variables: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. To measure the construct of service quality, five variables are adapted from Libo-on (2021), depending on the setting in which this study was done to assess the construct of service quality. The original scale showed good reliability, with a Cronbach alpha of 0.97. In all variables except reliability and responsiveness, there are three questions, while the others have five questions each. This indicates that the relationship between customer satisfaction and the other five variables will be investigated. In describing the relationship between dependent and independent variables, each pair of variables will generate a hypothesis, either that they are positively related or negatively related.

RESULTS Table 1. Summary of Respondents' Demographics (N=159)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	112	70.4
Male	47	29.6
Age		
Below 20	7	4.4
20-29	126	79.2
30-39	15	9.4
40-49	5	3.1
50-59	3	1.9
Above 60	3	1.9
Nationality		
Malaysian	129	81.1
Kuwait	30	18.9
Occupation		
Student	114	71.7
Private Sector	21	13.2
Self-employed	9	5.7
Government Sector	6	3.8
Unemployed	5	3.1
Retiree	3	1.9
Housewife	1	0.6

A total of 159 respondents (N=159) participated in this survey: 70.4% are females, 29.6% are male. The majority of respondents are between 20-29 years old (79.2%) and most of them are from Malaysia (81.1%) and followed by Kuwait (18.9%). Among the respondents, over half of them are students (71.7%). Table 1 summarizes the demographic details of the respondents.

Table 2. Summary of Respondents' Consumer Behavior (N=159)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do you use courier services during the pandemic?		
Yes	150	94.3
No	9	5.7
Have you increased the use of courier services during the pandemic?		
Yes	114	71.7
No	15	9.4
Maybe	30	18.8
How often do you use the courier service?		
None	0	0
Occasionally	27	17
Once a month	63	39.6
Once a quarter	11	6.9
Once a week	44	27.7
Seldom	14	8.8
Your favorite courier service provider		
Agility	2	1.3
Aramex	11	6.9
DHL	32	20.1
FedEx	10	6.3
GD Express	15	9.4
J&T Express	62	39
Lazada & Shopee	1	0.6
Lazada	1	0.6
Ninja Van	1	0.6
PosLaju	23	14.5
UBT Express	1	0.6

Sohrabi et al. (2020) highlighted that a worldwide emergency was affirmed for the COVID-19 epidemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on January 30, 2020. Governments around the world have imposed travel restrictions, border closures, and quarantines in order to 'flatten the curve,' provoking fears of economic mishap and recession (Al Jazeera, 2020).

Based on Table 2, 150 respondents (94.3%) stated that they had used courier services during the global pandemics, while 9 of them (5.7%) claimed that they were not. In light of this, courier services have become one of the most profitable businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic as people shifted to buying online as a result of the community quarantine to stop the virus from spreading. Out of 159 respondents, 114 (71.7%) have increased their use of courier services in the pandemic, 30 (18.8%) indicated maybe, and 15 (10.8%) did not increase their use of services compared with normal circumstances.

The desire to receive products and packages on the same day or within a few days is now a global standard for most countries. Food and beverages, groceries, educational support, household items, clothing, and other essentials are parts of the supply-demand cycle.

In addition to this, Table 2 shows the prevalence of specific courier services. It is clear that J&T Express dominates (39.0%) as the most popular courier service provider and the preferred courier for the vast majority of customers. Of all 159 respondents, 32 respondents selected DHL Express (20%) while 23 selected PosLaju (14.5%). This is because, as an express delivery firm, J&T Express's primary system is technical innovation. J&T Express was the first express courier company to offer real-time parcel monitoring using mobile apps and the internet. It assists J&T Express management in better understanding the demands of their customers' devotion to their services so that they may increase their quality of service. As a result, a courier service's speed and efficiency may set them apart from other delivery firms.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Coefficients Alpha, and Zero-order Correlations of All Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Tangibility	0.784					
Reliability	0.721**	0.834				
Responsiveness	0.725**	0.709**	0.923			
Assurance	0.707**	0.697**	0.776**	0.850		
Empathy	0.669**	0.701**	0.747**	0.740**	0.864	
Customer Satisfaction	0.639**	0.682**	0.717**	0.696**	0.753**	0.852
M	4.28	4.30	4.13	4.04	4.04	4.30
SD	0.65	0.60	0.76	0.81	0.79	0.67
Number of items	3	5	5	3	3	3

Note: N = 159; *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. Diagonal entries indicate Cronbach's coefficients alpha.

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics, Cronbach alpha, and variables' correlations. In this study, the second (reliability) and third (responsiveness) variables used five items, while the first variable (tangibility), fourth (assurance), fifth (empathy), and sixth (customer satisfaction) used three items. It shows that the variables have a strong positive correlation. From Table 3, we can see that the coefficient's alpha for all variables ranged between 0.784 and 0.923. Cronbach's alpha is a test for determining internal consistency or reliability. Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 and above is regarded as good. Thus, all variables' internal consistency reliability is good and indicates that the items in each variable have strong relationships. In addition, all variables are significantly correlated because the r values range from 0.669 to 0.753. The result also indicates that all independent variables are positively related to dependent variables. The highest correlation between empathy and customer satisfaction is 0.753, followed by responsiveness (0.717), assurance (0.696), reliability (0.682), and tangibility (0.639). The mean of all variables is above 4.0. This shows that, on average, respondents agree to strongly agree that their satisfaction with express delivery service will be affected by all service quality dimensions.

DISCUSSION

Table 4. Summary of Regression Analysis

Variables	Customer Satisfaction
Tangibility	0.040
Reliability	0.167*
Responsiveness	0.197*
Assurance	0.125
Empathy	0.370***

R ²	0.634
F Value	55.763
Durbin-Watson Statistic	1.737

Note: N=159, * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

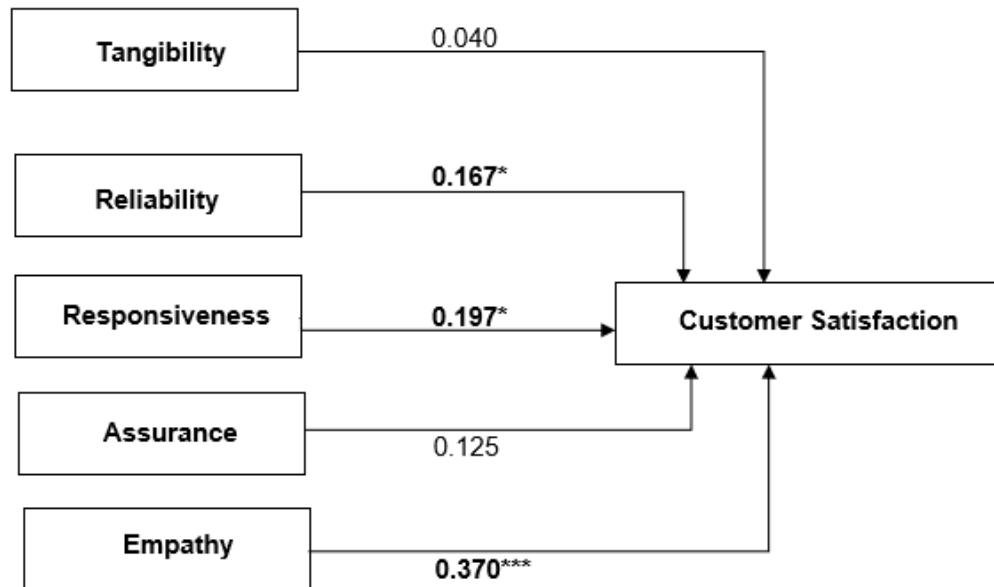


Figure 2. Hypothesised Research Model

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 4 and Figure 2 show the summary of regression analysis and hypothesized model respectively. Regression analysis is a dependable approach to identifying which variables influence a study. The model summary shows that the significant f change is 0.000, which means this study has a significant R² change of 0.652. The coefficients of a regression equation represent the relationship between each independent variable and the dependent variable in regression analysis (Frost, 2021).

The regression equation for this study is:

$$\text{Customer Satisfaction} = 0.912 + 0.041\text{Tangibility} + 0.186\text{Reliability} + 0.175\text{Responsiveness} + 0.104\text{Assurance} + 0.315\text{Empathy}.$$

The significance for reliability (0.038), responsiveness (0.028), and empathy (0.000) are less than 0.05. Thus, these three independent variables are statistically significant. For tangibility (0.618) and assurance (0.151), the significance is not less than 0.5, which means these variables are not statistically significant. Furthermore, beta is the standardized coefficient. From Table 4, the beta for tangibility is 0.040, reliability is 0.167*, responsiveness is 0.197*, assurance is 0.125, and empathy is 0.370***. Hence, we can conclude that H2, H3, and H5 are accepted while H1 and H4 are rejected. In addition, the F-value is 55.763, which is calculated by dividing the mean square regression by the mean square residual. The Durbin-Watson statistic shows 1.737, which means there is a positive autocorrelation.

All of the dimensions will emerge from the consumer's attitudes, contributing to determining their perception of service quality (Jones & Shandiz, 2015). This study

revealed that empathy was the most significant variable, followed by responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and tangibility. Furthermore, we identified that empathy is the most significant factor influencing customer satisfaction. Service employees that demonstrate an empathic attitude during interpersonal encounters between customers and service employees have a beneficial impact on satisfaction (Jones & Shandiz, 2015). Customer service is extremely important to make customers feel unique and understand their needs. Besides that, responsiveness is also statistically significant. The more responsive a company in dealing with all the delivery is, the higher customers' satisfaction would be perceived (Nuseir, Akroush, Mahadin, & Bataineh, 2010). However, customers will create a bad impression of the company when a company fails to respond to a customer, especially when there is no evident cause or explanation. Next, reliability is also one of the significant variables. Reliability refers to performing the service accurately. It is important for courier companies to complete the delivery service on time, undamaged, and error-free every time to satisfy their customers.

Table 4 also indicates that assurance and tangibility did not significantly impact the overall customers' satisfaction. However, the findings indicate that their impact is still positive. Although assurance in this study is not statistically significant, it is important to have trust and a sense of security between customer and service provider. Customer evaluations of service quality are likely to be affected by initial impressions, and whether or not the preserved area is enchanting; hence tangibility was indeed the lowest (Bryslan & Curry, 2001).

In the business world, customer satisfaction has a huge impact on a company's client retention rate. To improve customer satisfaction, courier companies should personalize the delivery experience. The traditional one-size-fits-all approach is no longer suitable where customers have more data access and require an accurate view of their order and the capacity to affect delivery. An excellent courier company should personalize the delivery that meets the customer's expectations. Another way to enhance courier service quality is to improve the reliability and quality of the vehicles. The most common vehicles used for delivery are trucks, vans, cars, and motorbikes. These vehicles need to be well-equipped and serviceable to ensure that delivery runs smoothly. It should start each shipping fully loaded, be ready to deliver fragile items, and keep them protected. In addition, a reliable vehicle can protect the on-road employees and the communities. Lastly, courier companies can boost customer satisfaction by providing delivery notifications. An email, SMS, and WhatsApp notification for scheduling services like guaranteed delivery dates are important. This is because the customers may know when their parcel is likely to arrive and plan to receive it. By sending these notifications, the company can also reduce the number of emails and phone calls from customers inquiring about whether an order has been shipped and when it is scheduled to arrive.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates the courier service quality and customer satisfaction in Malaysia and Kuwait. A survey was conducted to collect data from a total of 159 respondents. The results show that most respondents used courier services and increased their usage during the Covid-19 pandemic. They normally use a courier service once a month.

According to the results, the most favorite courier service is J&T Express. We have adopted the SERVQUAL instrument to investigate courier service quality and customer satisfaction. Reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibility, and empathy are the five service dimensions of SERVQUAL. The results indicate that all the dimensions are positively related to customer satisfaction. However, not all the variables are statistically significant. As we can see, reliability, responsiveness, and empathy are statistically

significant, while assurance and tangibility are not. Nonetheless, the studies show that they have a good influence. Courier service businesses may customize the delivery experience, increase the reliability and quality of vehicles, and give delivery alerts to improve their performance in the logistics market. In conclusion, courier service has become an essential part of everyone's lives. Courier service quality and customer satisfaction are crucial to gaining customers' loyalty. Our study has shown that customer satisfaction is positively related to the five service dimensions of SERVQUAL. Hence, courier companies should improve their service quality based on these five dimensions to enhance customer satisfaction.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

We declare no potential conflicts of interest concerning the study, authorship, and/or publication of this article

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