

## The Impact of Food Quality on Customer Satisfaction: A Study of Fast-Food Business

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of food quality on customer satisfaction at KFC, focusing on key factors such as taste, packaging or presentation, and freshness. The primary objective is to analyze how these factors influence customer satisfaction and loyalty among KFC customers in Malaysia, India, and Indonesia. Data were collected through an online survey using Google Forms, targeting 150 KFC customers across the three countries. Respondents rated their experiences on a 5-point Likert scale, with the survey distributed via social media platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram, and Instagram. The results reveal that taste and customer loyalty significantly influence customer satisfaction, with taste having a  $\beta$  value of 0.262 and loyalty showing the strongest effect with a  $\beta$  value of 0.537. In contrast, packaging and freshness did not show a significant impact on satisfaction. The  $R^2$  value of 0.637 indicates that 63.7% of customer satisfaction can be explained by these factors. In conclusion, the findings highlight the critical role of taste and loyalty in driving satisfaction at KFC, with implications for focusing on food quality and customer relationship strategies to enhance satisfaction and customer retention.

**Keywords:** Customer Loyalty; Customer Satisfaction; Fast-Food; Food Procedures; Food Quality

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most iconic fast-food franchises today is KFC, also known as Kentucky Fried Chicken. Founded by Colonel Harland Sanders at the age of 65, KFC began with Sanders perfecting his "secret recipe of 11 herbs and spices" and opening his first restaurant. Over the years, KFC has grown into one of the largest food chains globally, with its headquarters in Louisville, Kentucky, USA (Saha, 2023). As the second-largest fast-food chain after McDonald's, KFC is widely recognized for its signature fried chicken, serving over a billion meals annually. The brand has become synonymous with its "finger-lickin' good" recipe, making it an "American icon" in the global food industry.

In today's highly competitive food industry, customer satisfaction is essential for businesses seeking to drive repeat sales and maintain a loyal customer base. Food quality is one of the most significant determinants of customer satisfaction, influencing both the dining experience and brand differentiation (Lew et al., 2023). Offering high-quality food that meets customer expectations and stands out from competitors is a key challenge for fast food chains. Key attributes like freshness, taste, and packaging are crucial in shaping customer perceptions of food quality (Kannan, 2017). Many KFC customers, for instance, appreciate the taste and packaging of the meals. Despite the critical role of food quality, past research has predominantly focused on service quality and atmosphere, often neglecting the central importance of food quality in determining customer satisfaction. Models like DINESERV, which measure service and ambiance quality, fail to adequately capture the direct influence of food quality on customer satisfaction. Moreover, limited evidence exists that directly links food quality to customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions in restaurant contexts.

Previous study by Ahmed et al. (2010) has also examined how customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between perceived service quality and repurchase intentions. While service quality can enhance satisfaction, which in turn influences repeat visits, little attention has been given to how food quality itself drives customer satisfaction and subsequent behavior. Additionally, few studies have evaluated the relative importance of specific food quality attributes—such as taste, freshness, and packaging—in shaping satisfaction and influencing customer loyalty. This research addresses these gaps by analyzing how food quality affects customer satisfaction and subsequent behavioral intentions, specifically within KFC's fast-food operations.

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of food quality on customer satisfaction with KFC's food offerings, including specific factors like taste, packaging, and freshness. By proposing and testing a model that links food quality to customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions, this study seeks to advance understanding in the field of restaurant management. The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on food quality as a critical determinant of customer satisfaction, diverging from the traditional focus on service and atmosphere. The findings of this research are significant for restaurant managers, as they highlight the importance of prioritizing food quality to enhance customer satisfaction, foster loyalty, and stimulate business growth.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Taste

In the food sector, the flavor of a meal is one of the key factors influencing customer satisfaction. Taste plays a crucial role in attracting and retaining customers by shaping their overall dining experience. Utama (2022) explored the sensory perception of taste and its influence on customer satisfaction. Their findings revealed a strong positive correlation between favorable taste experiences and higher levels of customer satisfaction. Specifically, they found that the taste of food significantly impacted customer

satisfaction, with positive taste experiences driving repeat visits and encouraging word-of-mouth recommendations. This highlights the central role of taste in building customer loyalty.

Moreover, [Drewnowski \(1997\)](#) and [Forde & Graaf \(2022\)](#) emphasized the sensory factors that influence food taste preferences, such as taste intensity, flavor complexity, and aroma. Their study showed how these elements contribute to shaping customer satisfaction by creating more enjoyable dining experiences. Customers are more likely to feel satisfied when food has a balanced intensity of flavors and a pleasing aroma, which enhances the overall sensory experience.

Theoretical perspectives in the literature consistently underscore the pivotal role that food taste plays in customer satisfaction across various food service settings. Positive taste experiences have been shown to boost consumer satisfaction, loyalty, and repurchase intentions, while also encouraging positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Furthermore, taste is seen as a mediator between customer satisfaction and service quality. When the food taste meets or exceeds customer expectations, it amplifies the overall perception of quality, contributing to a more satisfying dining experience. Therefore, prioritizing food taste in the food industry is critical for ensuring customer satisfaction and, ultimately, for achieving business success.

H1: The good taste of the food served by KFC determines customer satisfaction.

### **Presentation or Packaging**

Food packaging plays a crucial role in attracting customers and influencing their overall purchase behavior and satisfaction with a food product ([Fikri et al., 2022](#)). It not only serves as a protective layer for the food but also functions as a powerful communication tool, shaping customer perceptions and expectations. [Waheed et al. \(2018\)](#) explored the influence of food packaging on consumer perception and purchase intention in a study involving various food products. They discovered that visually appealing and well-designed packaging positively impacted consumer perception, leading to higher purchase intentions. The study underscored the importance of packaging aesthetics in capturing consumer attention and driving repurchase behavior, showing that attractive packaging directly influences a consumer's decision-making process.

[Steenis et al. \(2017\)](#) further elaborated on the significance of packaging by examining how quality, functionality, and information provision affected consumer perceptions. Their research revealed that consumers viewed high-quality packaging as an indicator of superior product quality, which increased their likelihood of repurchasing. Functional packaging that enhances convenience and usability also boosted customer satisfaction, as consumers appreciated packaging that improved their experience with the product.

In addition to aesthetics and functionality, packaging design elements like color, imagery, and typography have been shown to directly impact customer satisfaction. [Kang et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Letona et al. \(2014\)](#) investigated this in the context of snack food products, finding that positive evaluations of these design elements led to a greater likelihood of repurchasing the product. For instance, vibrant colors and appealing imagery created a strong association with the product's quality, which enhanced overall customer satisfaction. Typography, when used effectively, conveyed essential product information while reinforcing brand identity, further contributing to a positive consumer experience.

Theoretical perspectives consistently highlight the importance of packaging as a key driver of customer satisfaction and repurchase behavior. Beyond aesthetics, packaging quality, eco-friendliness, and the provision of informative content contribute significantly

to shaping customer perceptions. For example, eco-friendly packaging options not only appeal to environmentally conscious consumers but also improve brand image, making it a competitive advantage. The reviewed studies illustrate that well-designed, visually appealing, and functional packaging plays a critical role in influencing consumer purchase intentions and fostering long-term customer loyalty. The findings stress the importance of treating packaging as a strategic element in the food industry to enhance customer satisfaction and promote repurchase behavior.

H2: Quality food packaging positively affects consumer satisfaction.

### **Freshness**

Food freshness is a crucial factor that significantly influences customer satisfaction in the food industry. Freshness is often associated with quality, taste, and nutritional value, making it a key determinant of customers' dining experience. [Liu and Lee \(2018\)](#) revealed that part of food freshness mediated the relationship between food safety and customer satisfaction. Customers perceived fresh food as a reflection of safe and hygienic practices, contributing to their overall satisfaction with the dining experience. A study by [Lombart et al. \(2019\)](#) highlights the significant impact of freshness on customer perceptions of food quality and their purchasing behavior. This perception is not just limited to how the food looks or smells, but extends to deeper associations such as taste and nutritional value. Customers often believe that fresher food offers a superior taste, which enhances their overall eating experience, making it a more desirable option when choosing what to buy.

The study further emphasizes that freshness plays a pivotal role in influencing customer satisfaction. When consumers feel confident that the food they purchase is fresh, they tend to feel more satisfied with their choice. This satisfaction is largely driven by the belief that fresh food is healthier and more nutritious, as freshness is often equated with better quality ingredients and fewer preservatives. For many consumers, purchasing fresh food is not just about fulfilling a need but also about maintaining a lifestyle that prioritizes health and wellness.

Additionally, the study reveals that the positive perception of freshness leads to repeat purchases, as customers who are satisfied with the quality and taste of fresh products are more likely to continue buying them. This suggests that for food retailers and suppliers, ensuring the freshness of their products can be a key strategy for improving customer satisfaction and encouraging brand loyalty.

In summary, the findings from [Simmonds and Spence \(2017\)](#) underscore the importance of freshness in shaping customer perceptions of quality and driving purchase decisions. Freshness not only enhances the sensory experience of food but also boosts customer satisfaction by aligning with consumers' desires for better taste and nutritional value.

One of the crucial factors to consider as we transition to a healthier and more sustainable way of living is food freshness. To maintain good health and to prevent food waste, we all want to eat healthy, fresh foods. Additionally, three-quarters of customers feel that fresh meals are healthier when it comes to health. Customers constantly demand tasty cuisine that has the same freshness and high-quality standards as prepared meals. The difficulty for food manufacturers is to satisfy consumer demand for food that maintains its ideal texture while looking, smelling, and tasting fresh. While being more durable and meeting quick and basic client requests. Freshness is crucial for foods like fruits, vegetables, and proteins like the chicken that makes up the majority of KFC. Additionally, qualities like color, luster, scent, and firmness are indicators of how fresh fruit or vegetables are. In other words, the ordinary consumer chooses the level of freshness that will please them.

H3: Freshness of food positively affects customer satisfaction.

### **Customer Loyalty**

Customer loyalty is vital for the ongoing success and sustainability of a business (Putri et al., 2022). Customers who are loyal to a brand are more likely to interact with it and make repeat purchases from that brand than from one of its rivals (Kee et al., 2021; Pérez-Morón et al., 2022). When a consumer has a pleasant experience with you, loyalty develops naturally and helps build trust. The degree to which a consumer is satisfied with a business, service, or product also affects their view of it. Customer loyalty is a collection of behaviors individuals engage in to show their steadfast allegiance to a product, service, or brand. Making more purchases or choosing the brand over a competitor are two examples.

Ashari et al. (2023) looked at the effect of meal flavor on fast-food patron loyalty in a different research. Their research showed a significant relationship between food flavor and customer loyalty. According to Zhong and Moon (2020), the perception of food taste plays a crucial role in shaping customer loyalty, particularly in the fast-food industry. Their study emphasizes the significant influence that food taste has on customer satisfaction, even when service quality is already high. When customers perceive the taste of food as excellent, they are more likely to become loyal patrons of the establishment. This loyalty, in turn, leads to increased profitability for the fast-food chain as satisfied customers frequently return and recommend the establishment to others.

The study highlights how food taste acts as a mediating factor between service quality and customer satisfaction. Even when the service is impeccable, a customer's overall experience can be diminished if the food fails to meet taste expectations. Conversely, if the food taste exceeds or matches customer expectations, it enhances their dining experience and leaves a lasting positive impression. This finding is particularly relevant in the fast-food sector, where the quality of the food itself often carries more weight in driving customer satisfaction and repeat business than the service quality alone.

For hotel restaurants and other food establishments, the balance between service excellence and food taste is essential. Lina's (2022) research shows that food flavor can either strengthen or weaken the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction. Therefore, even when the service is excellent, ensuring that the food meets high taste standards is key to fostering customer loyalty and long-term success.

In essence, the study reveals that while service quality is important, the taste of the food is often the determining factor in whether customers become repeat patrons. This underscores the importance of consistently delivering delicious food to build a loyal customer base and enhance profitability in the competitive fast-food industry. The findings showed that the association between customer happiness and service quality was largely mediated by food flavor. Higher levels of customer satisfaction resulted from a great eating experience that was marked by both exceptional service quality and mouthwatering food flavor.

H4: Customer satisfaction is shown in a customer's loyalty.

### **Relationship Between Food Quality and Customer Satisfaction**

Studies on the influence of meal quality on KFC customers' satisfaction have been undertaken by a number of researchers. According to Zhong and Moon (2020), food quality has a significant impact on consumer happiness and brand loyalty. In fast-food restaurants like KFC, the quality of the meal has a big impact on customers' pleasure,



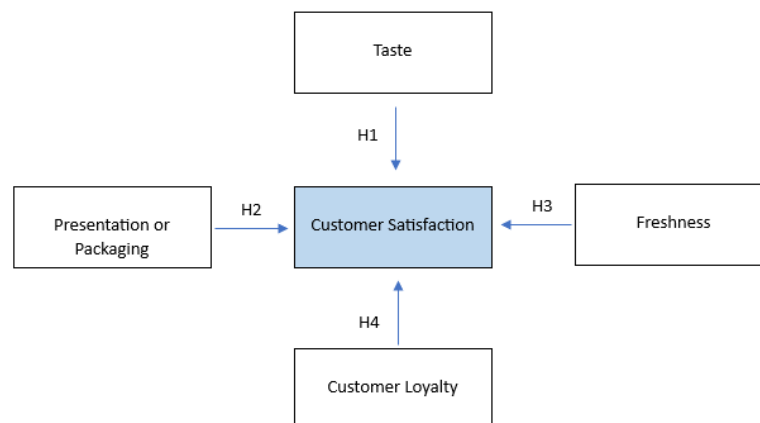
according to research by [Ganatra et al. \(2021\)](#). The study also discovered that fast food restaurant patron happiness might boost brand loyalty and patron trust.

Another study by [Zamani et al. \(2020\)](#) showed that KFC customers' pleasure is significantly impacted by the quality of the meals they are served. The study also found that service and ambiance at the restaurant also affect customer satisfaction, but food quality remains the most important factor. In addition, the study by [Rahman et al. \(2017\)](#) found that variations in food quality across different KFC branches can affect customer satisfaction. The study suggested that food quality management needs to be consistently improved in all branches to ensure consistent customer satisfaction.

Overall, these studies demonstrate that KFC customers' satisfaction with the food is significantly influenced by food quality. Therefore, the company needs to ensure that food quality at all branches is consistently high to build strong customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Additionally, the studies also indicate that service and ambiance at the restaurant need to be considered, but food quality remains the most important aspect in meeting customer satisfaction at KFC.

[Figure 1](#) below represents the framework of this study.

**Figure 1.** Research Framework



## RESEARCH METHOD

To gather information and data collection about KFC's food procedures by analyzing the relationship between food quality on customer satisfaction among consumers, this study used Google Forms to carry out an online survey. Customers of KFC in Malaysia, India, and Indonesia were the target respondents. Respondents are rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). By delivering the online survey to 150 KFC customers, this study has gathered respondents through social media platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram, and Instagram.

### Measures

The purpose of this study is to determine the association between customer satisfaction at KFC in terms of taste, freshness, packaging or presentation, and customer loyalty. This research used a sum of 25 items, including "I am familiar with KFC's brand", "I am aware of KFC's products and menu offering", and "KFC's is a brand that I trust most" to measure customers' opinions on KFC. Additionally, measures such as "I am loyal to KFC's brand due to fulfill my satisfaction.", "I am likely to try new and improved menus offered by KFC.", "I am willing to pay a premium for KFC's products compared to other brands." and "I would recommend KFC to my family and friends." are applied to test

customers' perception towards loyalties on KFC. Each question was formatted using a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. Cronbach's alpha was 0.875, 0.809, 0.796, 0.875, and 0.884.

To create relationships with customers, this study also utilized one multiple-choice question in our study to ask respondents how frequently they visit KFC restaurants. The item is "How often do you visit KFC's restaurant. (Once every year, once every month, once every week, every day, others)."

## RESULTS

**Table 1.** Respondent Profile's Summary (N=150)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	110	73.3
Male	40	26.7
<b>Age</b>		
18-24	119	79.3
25-34	9	6
35-44	11	7.3
45-54	6	4
55 and above	5	3.3
<b>Education Level</b>		
Bachelor Degree	92	61.3
Diploma	34	22.7
High school	15	10
Master's Degree	5	3.3
SPM	4	2.7
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Full time	45	30
Part-time	9	6
Self-employed	4	2.7
Student	90	60
Unemployed	2	1.3
<b>Annual income</b>		
Less than RM25,000	123	82
RM 25,000 – RM 50,000	10	6.7
RM 50,001 – RM 100,000	1	0.7
RM 100,001 – RM 200,000	1	0.7
RM 200,001 and above	15	10

The demographic profile of the respondents, as shown in Table 1, provides important insights into the characteristics of the participants involved in the study. A significant portion of the respondents were women, making up 73.3% of the sample, indicating a predominance of female participants in this study. In terms of age, the majority of respondents belong to Generation Z (Gen Z), specifically those between the ages of 18 and 24, representing 79.3% of the total sample. This suggests that the study primarily targeted younger individuals, capturing the perspectives of a generation that is tech-savvy, highly engaged with digital media, and potentially more responsive to current consumer trends.

When looking at the educational background of the respondents, a large proportion of them are highly educated, with 61.3% holding a bachelor's degree. This high level of education may influence their decision-making processes and attitudes, as educated

individuals are likely to be more informed and analytical in their consumption patterns. Furthermore, 60% of the respondents identified as students, which aligns with the age demographic and suggests that many of the participants are still in the process of completing their education and preparing to enter the workforce.

In terms of income, 82% of the respondents reported an annual income of less than RM25,000, placing them within the B40 category, which refers to the bottom 40% of income earners in Malaysia. This income group typically faces financial constraints, and their consumption behavior may be influenced by price sensitivity and a preference for budget-friendly options. Overall, the demographic profile indicates that the study's respondents are predominantly young, educated women from lower-income households, many of whom are still pursuing their studies. These factors collectively shape their consumer behavior and preferences, providing important context for interpreting the study's findings.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics, Zero-order Correlations of All Study Variables, and Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha

Variables		1	2	3	4	5
Dependent Variable						
1.	Taste	0.875				
2.	Presentation or Packaging	0.725**	0.809			
3.	Freshness	0.633**	0.690**	0.796		
4.	Customer Loyalty	0.793**	0.754**	0.694**	0.875	
Independent Variable						
5.	Customer Satisfaction	0.713**	0.603**	0.619**	0.776**	0.884
Mean		4.015	3.688	3.717	3.813	3.945
Standard Deviation		2.648	2.754	2.674	2.908	2.938
No. of items		4	4	4	4	4

Note: N=150; \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001. Diagonal entries in bold indicate Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha

**Table 2** provides an overview of the descriptive statistics and correlations, including the alpha values and zero-order correlations, for the key variables in the study. The results indicate that the internal consistency reliability of the five variables analyzed is acceptable, with coefficient alpha values ranging from 0.80 to 0.88. This range demonstrates strong reliability, meaning that the items used to measure each variable are consistent and dependable in capturing the intended constructs. Reliability is essential in ensuring that the data collected can be trusted and accurately reflects the variables under investigation.

The alpha values within this range suggest that the measures used in the study are well-suited for research purposes, as coefficients above 0.70 are generally considered reliable. The high reliability implies that the variables are being assessed in a manner that minimizes measurement error, increasing confidence in the findings. For example, if one of the variables measured customer satisfaction or employee performance, the reliability score indicates that the scale used to assess these variables is stable and provides consistent results across different respondents.

In addition to the alpha values, the zero-order correlations between the variables offer insights into the relationships between them. Zero-order correlations measure the direct relationship between two variables without controlling for the influence of other variables. These correlations help to identify whether there are significant associations among the study variables, which can provide insights into how one factor might influence another.



Overall, the findings presented in Table 2 suggest that the study's variables are measured reliably and that the correlations can offer meaningful insights into the relationships between these variables. The strong reliability and correlations provide a solid foundation for interpreting the study's results and drawing conclusions from the data.

**Table 3.** Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis

Variables		Customer Satisfaction Beta
1.	Taste	0.262**
2.	Packaging or Presentation	-0.091
3.	Freshness	0.143
4.	Customer Loyalty	0.537***
R <sup>2</sup>		0.637
F Value		63.663
Durbin-Watson Statistic		1.897

Note: N=150; \*p<0.05; \*\*P<0.01; \*\*\*P<0.001

According to Table 3, the study examines customer satisfaction as the dependent variable, while the independent variables include taste, packaging or presentation, freshness, and customer loyalty. The data reveals that customer satisfaction is positively influenced by taste and customer loyalty, while packaging or presentation, as well as freshness, do not show a significant relationship with customer satisfaction in this context. The beta ( $\beta$ ) values for taste and customer loyalty were 0.262 and 0.537, respectively, indicating strong positive associations between these two variables and customer satisfaction. Based on these findings, H1 (taste's positive impact on customer satisfaction) and H4 (customer loyalty's positive impact on customer satisfaction) were supported by the data.

On the other hand, packaging or presentation and freshness did not have a significant impact on customer satisfaction, meaning H2 and H3 were not supported. This suggests that while the appearance and freshness of the food are often emphasized in the fast-food industry, these factors may not play as critical a role in influencing customer satisfaction at KFC Malaysia as taste and loyalty do.

The R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.637 indicates that 63.7% of the variation in customer satisfaction can be explained by two significant factors: taste and customer loyalty. This is a high percentage, reflecting that these two elements are strong predictors of how satisfied customers feel when dining at KFC. Among these, customer loyalty was the most influential variable, with a  $\beta$  value of 0.537, suggesting that customers who are loyal to KFC have a stronger impact on overall satisfaction levels than other factors like taste. The significant positive effect of customer loyalty indicates that the more loyal a customer is, the more likely they are to express satisfaction with their dining experience, likely due to their ongoing relationship and trust with the brand.

Following customer loyalty, taste emerges as the second most important factor, with a  $\beta$  value of 0.262. This underscores the importance of delivering consistently high-quality and flavorful food to retain customer satisfaction. Although other elements like packaging and freshness may contribute to the overall experience, they do not appear to carry as much weight in driving customer satisfaction in this particular study.

In summary, the findings emphasize that customer loyalty and taste are the primary drivers of customer satisfaction for KFC in Malaysia, with loyalty having the most substantial impact. While packaging and freshness may be important aspects of the overall customer experience, they do not play as significant a role in determining

satisfaction levels in this case. This insight is crucial for KFC and similar fast-food chains in focusing their strategies on what matters most to their customers.

Figure 2 draws the hypothesized model of this study.

**Figure 2.** Hypothesized Model



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

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide clear insights into the factors influencing customer satisfaction at KFC Malaysia, with a specific focus on taste, packaging or presentation, freshness, and customer loyalty. The data revealed that taste and customer loyalty were the primary drivers of customer satisfaction, whereas packaging or presentation and freshness did not show a significant relationship with satisfaction levels.

Taste emerged as a critical factor in determining customer satisfaction, with a beta ( $\beta$ ) value of 0.262, supporting the hypothesis that taste has a positive impact on customer satisfaction (H1). This result is consistent with the findings of Hussain (2018), who demonstrated that food taste has a strong positive correlation with customer loyalty in fast-food chains. Customers who consistently experience satisfying food taste are more likely to return and recommend the brand to others, leading to long-term loyalty and business success. This highlights the importance of maintaining consistent food quality, particularly taste, to ensure a positive dining experience for customers.

Customer loyalty was found to be the most influential factor, with a  $\beta$  value of 0.537, indicating that loyal customers significantly contribute to overall satisfaction. Loyal customers tend to have stronger emotional connections with the brand, often resulting in higher satisfaction levels regardless of minor service or product inconsistencies. The high impact of loyalty suggests that KFC can leverage customer loyalty programs and personalized marketing strategies to further enhance satisfaction and retention.

On the other hand, packaging or presentation and freshness did not show significant effects on customer satisfaction, as the data did not support hypotheses H2 and H3. While packaging or presentation is often considered essential in food service for its role in shaping customer perceptions, the results indicate that it may not be a decisive factor in determining satisfaction at KFC Malaysia. This is in contrast to studies by Waheed et al. (2018), who found that visually appealing packaging could enhance purchase intentions. However, the lack of significance in this study may suggest that KFC's loyal customer base prioritizes taste and service over visual presentation, or that the packaging is perceived as sufficient but not central to their satisfaction.

Similarly, freshness did not emerge as a significant factor affecting customer satisfaction, which contrasts with common expectations in the food service industry, where freshness is often linked to quality. This result may reflect the standardized nature of KFC's fast-food products, where consistency in taste and service may overshadow concerns about freshness, particularly in a highly processed menu.

The  $R^2$  value of 0.637 further underscores the strong predictive power of taste and customer loyalty in determining customer satisfaction. The high explanatory power suggests that these two factors account for the majority of variance in satisfaction levels, reaffirming their importance for KFC's strategic focus. It is particularly noteworthy that customer loyalty had a stronger influence than taste, suggesting that the emotional bond and trust customers have in the brand play a more crucial role in their overall satisfaction than individual meal experiences.

In conclusion, this study highlights that customer satisfaction at KFC Malaysia is primarily driven by taste and customer loyalty. Packaging or presentation and freshness, while part of the overall dining experience, do not appear to play a significant role in determining customer satisfaction in this context. The findings suggest that KFC should focus on maintaining high-quality, flavorful food and fostering customer loyalty through personalized engagement and loyalty programs to ensure long-term success. Understanding the critical role of loyalty in satisfaction also points to the importance of customer relationship management as a key driver of business performance. The insights provided by this study can guide KFC's strategic decisions in improving customer satisfaction and enhancing its competitive position in the fast-food industry.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study reveals that customer satisfaction at KFC Malaysia is primarily driven by two key factors: taste and customer loyalty. The analysis demonstrated that taste significantly contributes to customer satisfaction, reinforcing the importance of delivering consistently flavorful and high-quality food. Customer loyalty emerged as the strongest predictor, indicating that customers who have established an emotional connection and trust in the brand are more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction. This suggests that KFC's ability to maintain and strengthen loyalty is critical to its success in retaining satisfied customers. On the other hand, packaging or presentation and freshness, though often emphasized in the fast-food industry, did not have a significant impact on customer satisfaction in this context.

Based on these findings, KFC should prioritize enhancing the taste of its menu offerings to ensure a consistently positive dining experience. Additionally, efforts should be directed toward building and maintaining customer loyalty through personalized marketing initiatives, loyalty programs, and exceptional service. Since loyalty plays a significant role in satisfaction, these strategies could help KFC strengthen its customer base and drive repeat business. Improving customer engagement and leveraging data-driven insights to meet customer preferences will further enhance the dining experience and customer retention.

The implications of this study suggest that while packaging and freshness are important aspects of the overall brand experience, they do not drive satisfaction as strongly as taste and loyalty. KFC can thus focus its resources on optimizing food quality and customer relations, which are more likely to yield positive outcomes in customer satisfaction and business performance. This strategic focus will be critical for KFC's long-term growth and competitive positioning in the fast-food industry.

## LIMITATIONS

Nonetheless, in this case study, there are several limitations that should be noted. Due to data gathering utilizing Google Forms and spreading via social media sites like WhatsApp, Telegram, and Instagram, the limitation is that the majority of respondents are students. Due to this restriction, it's possible that not all KFC consumers are represented among our responders. Future investigations are urged to use a larger sample size and incorporate all relevant independent variables that could impact consumer satisfaction regarding food quality, which is crucial for the long-term viability of the business.

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## DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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