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From Order to Satisfaction: Examining Food, Service, and Value Drivers of Customer Satisfaction in the Fast-Food Industry

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ABSTRACT

Customer satisfaction is a critical determinant of competitiveness in the fast-food industry, even for global leaders like McDonald’s, which is widely recognized for efficiency, consistency, and strong branding. Despite its success, adapting to evolving customer expectations remains essential. This study aims to evaluate the factors influencing customer satisfaction at McDonald’s in Malaysia, focusing on food quality, service quality, pricing and value, product variety, and service method. A quantitative survey was conducted with 100 respondents using structured questionnaires. The findings indicate that customer satisfaction is most strongly influenced by service method ($\beta = 0.449$) and product variety ($\beta = 0.279$), while food quality, service quality, and pricing and value showed weaker effects and did not significantly predict satisfaction. The overall model explained 49% of the variance in customer satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.492$). These results highlight that customers place the greatest emphasis on convenience, efficiency, and diverse menu options. McDonald’s should therefore prioritize enhancing service delivery across dine-in, drive-thru, and self-service kiosks, while maintaining food quality and competitive pricing as baseline expectations. Overall, this study provides practical insights for improving customer satisfaction and offers strategic implications for fast-food chains in highly competitive markets.

Keywords: Customer Experience; Customer Satisfaction; Fast-Food Industry; Quick-Service Restaurants; Service Innovation

INTRODUCTION

McDonald’s has established itself as one of the most recognized fast-food brands in the world, operating in over 100 countries and serving millions of customers daily (Kee et al., 2021). In Malaysia, the brand first entered the market in 1982 with its inaugural outlet at Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur, and has since expanded nationwide. In 1995, McDonald’s Malaysia became the first fast-food chain in the country to receive halal certification from the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), reflecting its commitment to aligning with cultural and religious expectations in a Muslim-majority nation (McDonald’s Malaysia, n.d.). Currently, McDonald’s Malaysia operates under Lionhorn Pte Ltd through a developmental licensee model, which allows full authority to control, manage, and grow the brand locally. The company continues to innovate by offering multiple service channels, including mobile applications, self-service kiosks, delivery, and drive-thru services, demonstrating its adaptability to changing customer needs (Guo, 2025).

Although McDonald’s has achieved remarkable global success, customer satisfaction remains a decisive factor in ensuring its competitiveness and long-term sustainability. The fast-food industry in Malaysia is highly competitive, with global players such as KFC and Burger King and various local chains competing for market share (Tarmidi et al., 2023). Customer satisfaction is therefore not only essential for retaining loyalty but also for attracting new customers in a crowded marketplace. Previous studies emphasize that customer satisfaction is determined by multiple dimensions, with food quality, service quality, pricing and value, product variety, and service methods being particularly significant in the fast-food sector (Hanaysha, 2016). However, customer expectations are shaped by cultural and contextual differences, making it necessary to explore these drivers within the Malaysian fast-food environment.

Food quality consistently emerges as one of the strongest determinants of customer satisfaction, as consumers expect freshness, taste, and hygiene from their meals (Sari & Yulianto, 2024; Tariq & Mubashir, 2023). Service quality is equally important, with efficient, accurate, and friendly service shaping perceptions of value and overall dining experiences (Abd-El-Salam et al., 2013). Pricing and value influence satisfaction by determining whether customers feel they are receiving fair returns for the money they spend, particularly in highly competitive markets (Hanaysha, 2016). Service methods also play a critical role, as the availability of dine-in, takeaway, drive-thru, and delivery options enhances convenience and flexibility for customers, directly influencing satisfaction levels (Bolton et al., 2018). In addition, product variety helps prevent menu fatigue, allowing customers to enjoy a wider selection and catering to diverse consumer preferences, which strengthens loyalty and repeat patronage (Nizam et al., 2022).

Although these factors are well established in the literature, empirical studies on how they affect McDonald’s customer satisfaction in Malaysia remain limited. Much of the prior research has been conducted in Western contexts or across general fast-food comparisons, overlooking Malaysia’s unique cultural and economic environment where halal certification, digital adoption, and evolving lifestyles play key roles in shaping consumer behavior (Sulaiman et al., 2024). This gap highlights the need to investigate the primary drivers of satisfaction within McDonald’s Malaysia, specifically, in order to provide both theoretical insights and practical recommendations.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine how food quality, service quality, pricing and value, product variety, and service method influence customer satisfaction at McDonald’s Malaysia. The significance of this research lies in its ability to deepen the understanding of customer satisfaction in emerging markets and to inform strategies for improving customer loyalty. The novelty of this study is its focus on integrating both traditional drivers, such as food quality and pricing, and modern service innovations, such as kiosks and app-based ordering, in the Malaysian context. The contribution of this study is twofold. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on customer satisfaction in the fast-food industry by providing evidence from Malaysia. Practically, it offers guidance for McDonald's and similar fast-food chains to prioritize the most influential factors in sustaining competitive advantage and improving customer experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer Behavior and Satisfaction in Fast-Food Services

Introduction to Consumer Satisfaction in the Fast-Food Industry

The fast-food industry's growth can be attributed to urbanization, evolving lifestyles, and rising disposable incomes, which have collectively transformed dietary habits. Urbanization has notably increased fast-food preferences (Piao & Kim, 2024). Thus, convenience has become a top priority due to the fast-paced nature of modern living and increasing demand for quick meal options.

Customer satisfaction can be defined as "a person's feelings of pleasure or displeasure" (Kotler et al., 2017). Contrary to their post-purchase expectations, every individual has varying levels of satisfaction. If the buyer is happy with the product after using it, they will stick with that brand or product (Ardani et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2013). Because it affects profitability, repeat business, and consumer loyalty, the fast-food industry must comprehend and manage customer happiness. Numerous aspects, including food quality, service quality, pricing and value, service technique, and product diversity, affect consumer satisfaction in the fast-food industry. Effective management techniques that are in line with client needs promote customer satisfaction and repeat business, while positive interactions raise expectations (Singh & Raheja, 2024).

Consumer Behavior Studies in the Fast-Food Industry

Consumer behavior has been defined as a theory that describes how customers analyze, determine, and ultimately choose which goods and/or services they want before making purchases for a variety of reasons pertaining to quality, taste, advertising, pricing, or choice (Nassè et al. 2019). According to Solomon et al. (2006), consumer behavior can be the study of how people or groups choose, use, or discard products and services, opinions, or experiences. Thus, consumer behavior portrays what customers action to satisfy their needs and desires; it includes analyzing, selecting, buying, repurchasing, using, and ordering concepts, goods, and services (Nassè, 2021).

There are many factors that affect consumer behavior towards fast-food franchise, McDonald's, such as consumer characteristics, demographics, education level, age, culture, income, and many other reasons. The research about consumer behavior towards the fast-food industry has been done in India, and it shows that several key motivations drive young consumers to choose fast food, because of the tasty meals, the influence of friends, and the relaxation that fast-food outlets provide (Prabhavathi et al., 2014). By learning the factors that influence consumer behavior and lead to their satisfaction with the fast-food industry, marketers may determine what drives consumer behavior and provide items that appeal to and contribute to their satisfaction with the fast-food industry. This will increase sales and profits for the business.

Hypotheses Development

Product Variety

Product variety plays an important role in the fast-food industry as it provides customers with more choices and is able to attract different customers from various groups. According to research, fast-food restaurants may appeal to many different kinds of customers by providing a range of foods to accommodate various dietary needs and tastes, and cultural preferences (Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2019). A brand that fails to innovate may risk losing relevance and becoming outdated in a competitive market nowadays. Product diversity also makes it possible to stand out from rivals by offering distinctive choices that set a company apart and attract diverse customer segments (Tojiri, 2023).

McDonald's has consistently modified its menu to adapt to consumer needs and regional preferences. Looking back to McDonald's history, it only offered burgers, fries, and drinks at first, but as customer tastes changed, salads, fried chicken, breakfast, egg tarts, ice cream, apple pie, and healthier options were added to its menu. The wide product range of McDonald's enables it to stay relevant across generations because new menu options have kept customers interested. The regional adaptations are also a crucial reason for McDonald's to attract new customers in new places. For instance, tailored to local tastes and cultural norms, McDonald's offers halal foods in Muslim-majority countries, provides spicy flavor in regions that enjoy bold tastes, like parts of Asia, Latin America, as well as Korea, and offers vegetarian options like the McAloo Tikki in India. The variety of the menu makes customers feel more satisfied with brands that understand and respect their unique preferences.

H1: Product variety is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Food Quality

Product quality is the degree to which a product has value that can satisfy consumers on a physical and psychological level. Performance, durability, feature conformance, reliability, and conformity with specifications are examples of product quality indicators (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Food quality is an operation that ensures the consistency of menu quality, which is accomplished by establishing a standard for the product and then examining the areas that need to be regulated to determine the desired level of quality. Customer satisfaction is greatly impacted by McDonald's food quality aspects, including menu variety, flavor, presentation, temperature, and freshness. This emphasizes the importance of having an advanced recognition of these factors from a variety of cultural perspectives.

According to Shaharudin et al. (2011), in order to raise customer knowledge of nutrition and quality, restaurants should stress the value of freshness in food quality and appearance. Customers' perceptions of food quality and value are improved by presentation. However, taste, which can be spicy, salty, or sweet, also has a significant role in determining future consumer behavior and dining satisfaction (Kivela et al., 1999). Temperature is a sensory component of food quality that improves enjoyment and client satisfaction by guaranteeing that hot food is supplied in accordance with standards (Sulaiman & Haron, 2013). Therefore, understanding these factors is crucial for McDonald's management to satisfy customer needs and preferences.

H2: Food quality is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Service Quality

Service quality is a customer's assessment of the services that may meet or exceed their expectations (Kumolu-Johnson, 2024; Nursalim et al., 2025). When client needs and

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perceived performance are compared, the appropriateness of the desires is what determines the overall quality of the service. McDonald's, a multinational fast-food chain, places a high value on cleanliness, excellent service, and high-quality meals to guarantee customer satisfaction. Despite being well-known for its reliable product quality, the service component, which is unpredictable, presents difficulties. McDonald's strives to maintain a high degree of service quality throughout all of its locations worldwide by addressing this through stringent training and standardized procedures (Ceil, 2017).

Services are difficult to standardize or make identical, as they often vary (Lewis & Booms, 1983). On the other hand, McDonald's services are consistent, as customers will get the same level of service and quality of the product if they buy a Big Mac in the UK or India. McDonald's has effectively produced favorable consumer behavior with its numerous locations and first-rate services, as quality is essential for customer perception. In order to improve the overall dining experience, McDonald's also makes use of material components like ambiance and décor. For instance, McDonald's excels in seating and décor, using both tangible and intangible aspects of its business. McDonald's always prioritizes timely and reliable service in order to give its patrons a satisfying and unforgettable dining experience. Such as, burgers and fries are made in-store and served fresh, leaving little time to distinguish between the quality of the food and the quality of the service.

H3: Service quality is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Pricing and Value

Value can be defined as the total of the benefits seen by the customer in relation to the cost and effort put in obtaining them (Mahajan, 2020). Value is defined as the relationship between the sum of all perceived benefits and the cost and effort required to enter the market (Ravald & Grönroos, 1996). Value is the driving force behind sales and market share, giving customers a compelling reason to buy. Consumers only buy things that provide value to them.

According to Codini et al. (2012), the customer value-based approach determines an offering's price based on the customer's perceived value, rather than cost or competition. Ingenbleek (2007) defines value-based pricing as a firm's utilization of perceived advantages and customer trade-offs when determining prices. It is critical for businesses to measure and understand consumer value. Value-based pricing informs customers' willingness to pay and prevents enterprises from charging excessively cheap prices. Value-based pricing allows businesses to align customer perceived advantages with product prices, leading to increased buy intentions (Grewal et al., 1998). Understanding and incorporating the value perceived by the customer into the price definition may result in increased sales and profit margins.

A brand earns a price premium when buyers are willing to pay more for its items than for similar goods from other related brands (Aaker, 1996). In 1980, Oliver proposed the expectation confirmation theory. This idea is commonly utilized in post-adoption use behavior studies to analyze consumer satisfaction and its impact on repurchase intentions. Repurchase intentions are crucial for a company's success and have long been recognized as a key marketing notion. Keeping clients loyal to a product or service provider requires competent management and judicious decision-making. Today, organizations prioritize customer retention over new client acquisition. Based on the McDonald's Repurchase Interest in the Green Garden Kedoya Branch, it shows that the product value has a positive and significant impact on consumer repurchase interest.

H4: Pricing and value are positively related to customer satisfaction.

Service Method

Fast food is a restaurant-produced dish that prioritizes efficiency and price over nutritional value and quality. In today's world, people face increasing tasks and a lack of free time, leaving less time for meals. Fast-food restaurants provide a solution to this difficulty. A fast-food restaurant is a type of restaurant that sells fast food and often provides limited table service. Within the business, it is commonly referred to as a quick-service restaurant (QSR). Self-service technology (SST) is widely employed in various industries, including hospitality (Mendocilla et al., 2021; Samengon, 2022).

McDonald's kiosks provide a conversational interface with customers. For example, while picking a meal, the kiosk asks about the meal size and beverage type. McDonald's kiosks consist of a computer and a touchscreen display in a cabinet. Customers can use the kiosk to order the meal, allowing the staff to focus on other tasks. Customers can pay with a credit card or cash at the kiosk, receive a receipt, and then pick up their food at the counter. The kiosks positioned throughout the restaurant help it better serve its customers and guests. McDonald's kiosks have cut operating expenses while increasing sales through upselling and cross-selling options. They also made the dining experience more convenient for the customer. Somebody would want to order at their own leisure rather than wait for a waiter. Providing customers with more ordering options minimizes waiting times to order and receive food (Cuento et al., 2025).

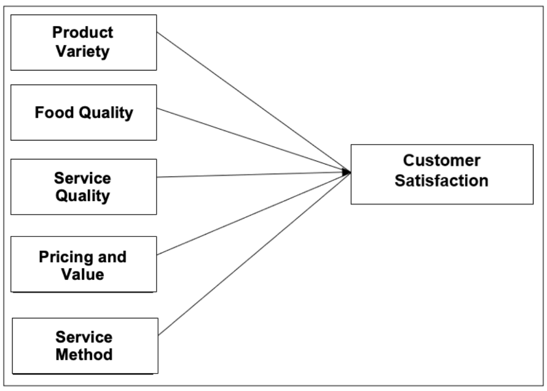
As the world's largest fast-food chain, McDonald's has innovated by introducing electronic services, which can be supplied on a huge screen and ordered independently by customers. This lends support to the study's goal of determining the extent to which McD's e-service quality influences customer trust. McDonald’s also provides delivery service to customers. Based on the research of McDonald's in Finland, most respondents were satisfied with McDonald's current customer service methods (ITIS), showing the restaurant's success in applying technological solutions to improve customer experience (Patel, 2023). McDonald’s also uses the method of drive-thru to serve the customer.

H5: Service method is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Research Framework

The framework of this study can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Research Framework



RESEARCH METHOD

For this study, a quantitative research method was employed, as it enables the collection of measurable data and the statistical examination of relationships between variables.

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Quantitative research provides a structured approach that facilitates the testing of hypotheses and the generalization of findings across a wider population. The primary data collection instrument applied was a questionnaire survey, which is widely recognized as an efficient, cost-effective, and practical tool for obtaining responses from a large sample within a relatively short period of time.

The questionnaire was designed to be concise, clear, and easily understood by the target audience, thereby minimizing response bias and maximizing reliability. It consisted of six sections covering: (1) demographic profile, (2) product variety, (3) food quality, (4) service quality, (5) pricing and value, and (6) service method. The distribution was conducted through online platforms using Google Forms, enabling a broad reach and accessibility to respondents. A total sample of 100 respondents participated in the survey, which is considered sufficient to provide meaningful statistical insights for this research context.

The collected data were subsequently processed and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics, which facilitated descriptive and inferential analysis. This analytical approach allowed the identification of patterns, trends, and correlations, ultimately providing empirical evidence regarding the influence of service quality on customer satisfaction within McDonald’s.

RESULTS

Table 1. Summary of Respondents’ Demographic (N=100)

Response	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	54	54
Male	46	46
Age		
Below 20	6	6
21 – 30	41	41
31 – 40	37	37
41 – 50	10	10
51 and above	6	6
Ethnicity		
Malay	29	29
Chinese	37	37
Indian	34	34
Occupation		
Student	30	30
Private Sector	20	20
Government Sector	20	20
Self-employed	20	20
Unemployed	7	7
Homemaker	3	3
Monthly Income		
Below RM1000	33	33
RM1000-RM2999	9	9
RM3000-RM4999	35	35
RM4000-RM6999	14	14
RM7000-RM9999	8	8
RM100000 and above	1	1

Table 1 summarizes the demographic profile of the 100 respondents. In terms of gender, females constitute a slight majority (54%), compared to males (46%). The largest age group is 21–30 years (41%), followed by 31–40 years (37%), while the smallest groups are respondents below 20 years and those aged 51 and above (6% each). Regarding ethnicity, Chinese respondents form the largest group (37%), followed closely by Indian (34%) and Malay (29%). With respect to occupation, 30% are students, while the remainder are distributed across the private sector (20%), government sector (20%), self-employed (20%), unemployed (7%), and homemakers (3%). Monthly income data show that 35% of respondents earn RM3000–RM4999, while a substantial proportion (33%) report incomes below RM1000, indicating a diverse financial background among participants. These patterns reflect the university-centered survey distribution, which may explain the large proportion of student respondents and relatively moderate income levels.

Table 2. Summary of Customer Experience with McDonald's. (N=100)

Response	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Had you ever heard about McDonald's?		
Yes	100	100
No	0	0
Which of these products are you most likely to buy at McDonald's?		
Burgers	30	30.0
Ayam Goreng McD	23	23.0
McNuggets	14	14.0
McSavers Mix & Match	13	13.0
Desserts & Sides	16	16.0
Happy Meals	4	4.0
If you purchase drinks, which ones are you most likely to buy at McDonald's?		
No Drinks	4	4.0
Soft Drinks	68	68.0
McCafe Drinks	28	28.0

Table 2 presents a summary of respondents' experiences with McDonald's, highlighting both awareness and product preferences. All 100 respondents indicated that they had heard of McDonald's (100%), reflecting the brand's strong market presence and universal recognition within the sample. When asked about their most likely food purchases, burgers emerged as the leading choice, selected by 30% (N=30) of respondents. Ayam Goreng McD followed closely at 23% (N=23), showing the popularity of localized menu options. Desserts and sides accounted for 16% (N=16) of selections, while McNuggets (14%, N=14) and McSavers Mix & Match (13%, N=13) represented other important categories. Happy Meals, although part of the core menu, were chosen by only 4% (N=4), indicating a smaller but specific consumer segment.

For beverages, soft drinks were the dominant preference, chosen by 68% (N=68) of respondents, suggesting they are the most common complement to meals. McCafe drinks were also notable, accounting for 28% (N=28), pointing to an emerging market for coffee-based and specialty beverages within the McDonald's menu. Only 4% (N=4) of respondents stated that they did not typically purchase drinks with their meals. Overall, these findings indicate that while awareness of McDonald's is universal among the sample, purchasing behavior is concentrated around a few core products, especially burgers and soft drinks, with other categories serving more niche segments.

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

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6

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1	Product Variety	0.915					
2	Food quality	0.343**	0.844				
3	Service quality	0.037	-0.212*	0.524			
4	Pricing and value	0.088	0.003	0.363**	0.511		
5	Service methods	0.624**	-0.180	0.282**	0.323**	0.915	
6	Satisfaction level	0.589**	0.074	0.143	0.281**	0.649**	0.796
Number of items		3	3	2	4	3	3
Mean		3.7000	4.0633	4.4350	4.3933	3.9650	3.9933
Standard deviation		0.89455	0.69259	0.41836	0.35889	0.83788	0.63913

Note: N = 100; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001. The diagonal entries in bold represent Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha, and the off-diagonal entries represent correlations between variables.

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha coefficients, and zero-order correlations for the study variables. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients range from 0.511 to 0.915. Product variety (α = 0.915), food quality (α = 0.844), service methods (α = 0.915), and satisfaction level (α = 0.796) demonstrate strong internal consistency, while service quality (α = 0.524) and pricing and value (α = 0.511) fall below the recommended threshold, suggesting that revisions to these scales may be needed.

The descriptive results show that the mean values for the independent variables range between 3.70 (product variety) and 4.43 (service quality), while the satisfaction level has a mean of 3.99. Standard deviations are generally moderate, indicating relatively consistent responses across participants.

Correlation analysis indicates several significant relationships. Product variety is positively correlated with food quality ($r = 0.343$, $p < 0.01$), service methods ($r = 0.624$, $p < 0.01$), and satisfaction level ($r = 0.589$, $p < 0.01$). Food quality shows a significant negative correlation with service quality ($r = -0.212$, $p < 0.05$) but is not significantly related to satisfaction. Service quality is positively related to pricing and value ($r = 0.363$, $p < 0.01$) and service methods ($r = 0.282$, $p < 0.01$), though its relationship with satisfaction is weak and non-significant. Pricing and value correlate positively with satisfaction ($r = 0.281$, $p < 0.01$). The strongest correlation with satisfaction is observed for service methods ($r = 0.649$, $p < 0.01$), underscoring the importance of delivery methods in shaping customer satisfaction.

In summary, while most variables show acceptable reliability and positive relationships with satisfaction, service quality, and pricing/value need refinement in measurement. Among the predictors, service methods emerge as the strongest contributor to satisfaction.

Table 4. Summary of Regression Analysis

Variables Entered		Beta
(R2 Change = 0.492)		
1	Product Variety	0.279*
2	Food Quality	0.061
3	Service Quality	0.012
4	Pricing and Value	0.106
5	Service Method	0.449**

Note: N=100; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01

Table 4 reports the regression results examining the influence of five independent variables: product variety, food quality, service quality, pricing and value, and service method on customer satisfaction with McDonald's. The overall model is statistically meaningful, explaining 49.2% of the variance in satisfaction levels ($R^2 = 0.492$). This indicates that nearly half of the variation in customer satisfaction can be accounted for by the set of predictors examined in this study, highlighting their collective relevance in understanding customer experiences.

Looking at the individual predictors, two variables were found to have significant positive effects on satisfaction. First, service method ($\beta = 0.449$, $p < 0.01$) emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting that the way services are delivered plays a decisive role in shaping overall customer satisfaction. This finding highlights the importance of speed, accuracy, politeness, and convenience in service delivery, which align closely with customer expectations in the fast-food industry. Second, product variety ($\beta = 0.279$, $p < 0.05$) also demonstrated a significant positive effect, confirming that a broader menu selection and availability of diverse food items can enhance satisfaction by meeting the varied preferences of consumers. These results provide empirical support for H1 and H5.

In contrast, three predictors did not show statistically significant effects. Food quality ($\beta = 0.061$), despite its generally high mean score in the descriptive analysis, did not significantly influence satisfaction in the regression model. This suggests that while customers may perceive McDonald's food quality as acceptable, it may not serve as a distinctive factor in driving satisfaction compared to other fast-food competitors. Service quality ($\beta = 0.012$) also failed to show significance, possibly because aspects like staff friendliness and general service environment are overshadowed by more tangible factors such as speed of service and menu options. Similarly, pricing and value ($\beta = 0.106$) did not significantly predict satisfaction, which may indicate that McDonald's customers accept its pricing structure as standard within the fast-food market and therefore do not strongly link it with satisfaction outcomes. These results mean that H2, H3, and H4 were not supported.

Overall, the regression findings emphasize that customer satisfaction with McDonald's is more strongly shaped by operational and structural factors, particularly the methods of service delivery and the diversity of product offerings, than by perceptions of food quality, service quality, or pricing. Although correlations indicate positive associations between some predictors and satisfaction, regression analysis clarifies that only service method and product variety retain unique explanatory power after accounting for overlap among variable.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the independent variables, which are product variety, food quality, service quality, pricing and value, and service method, will affect customer satisfaction. This study demonstrates that McDonald's consumer satisfaction is impacted by product variety and service methods. In contrast, customer satisfaction at McDonald's was less impacted by pricing and value, food quality, and service quality.

Service Method and Its Influence on Customer Satisfaction

This study identifies service method as the most influential factor driving customer satisfaction at McDonald's Malaysia. Among the various elements of the fast-food experience, the way services are delivered, whether dine-in, drive-thru, self-service kiosks, or delivery platforms, plays a decisive role in shaping perceptions of convenience, efficiency, and overall satisfaction. Customers today expect fast, seamless, and flexible service, and McDonald's has invested heavily in technological innovations to meet these demands (Kustedja, 2019; Rosyidah & Andjarwati, 2021).

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The adoption of self-order kiosks and digital menu displays has transformed customer interactions by reducing waiting times, minimizing errors, and offering greater autonomy in ordering. Studies suggest that such innovations enhance the customer experience by simplifying the ordering process and catering to individuals who prefer minimal interpersonal interaction (Bolton et al., 2018). Similarly, the McDonald's mobile application and McDelivery services provide added flexibility, enabling customers to order from anywhere and receive meals with minimal effort. Drive-thru facilities further contribute to convenience, though they also carry the risk of frustration if delays or technical issues occur. Effective management of these service methods is therefore critical in sustaining customer satisfaction.

The findings confirm that McDonald's ability to deliver efficient, technology-driven, and customer-friendly service methods sets it apart in the fast-food industry, where convenience is often prioritized over other satisfaction drivers such as pricing or service quality. This suggests that service method not only enhances operational efficiency but also directly influences customer loyalty by aligning the brand with the fast-paced lifestyle of modern consumers.

Product Variety as a Driver of Customer Satisfaction

The findings of this study demonstrate that product variety is one of the strongest predictors of customer satisfaction at McDonald's Malaysia, second only to service method. A diverse menu allows McDonald's to cater to a wide range of consumer preferences, which enhances the dining experience and boosts overall satisfaction. Customers feel more valued when they can select from multiple options that match their tastes and dietary needs, and this flexibility contributes to repeat patronage (Nizam et al., 2022).

The role of product variety is particularly important in multicultural contexts such as Malaysia, where food choices must accommodate religious and cultural expectations. All McDonald's outlets in Malaysia comply with halal standards regulated by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, ensuring that food products are acceptable to the Muslim-majority population. This regulatory compliance not only builds trust but also enhances customer confidence in menu offerings. In addition, McDonald's frequently updates its menu with localized options and seasonal promotions, which help prevent menu fatigue and create anticipation among customers for new experiences.

By maintaining a wide range of products, from core items such as burgers and fried chicken to desserts and breakfast selections, McDonald's positions itself as a brand that can meet the diverse preferences of its customer base. This study reinforces that product variety is not only a functional aspect of menu design but also a strategic tool for strengthening satisfaction and loyalty in a competitive fast-food market.

Pricing, Perceived Value, and Their Link to Customer Satisfaction

Although pricing and value are often considered important factors in shaping customer satisfaction in the fast-food industry, the findings of this study suggest that they exert a relatively weaker influence compared to service method and product variety. This aligns with Ryu and Han (2010), who noted that competitive pricing can enhance satisfaction, but only when customers perceive that the overall value matches their expectations. In McDonald's Malaysia, customers already associate the brand with affordable options, meaning price is treated more as a baseline expectation rather than a distinguishing driver of satisfaction.

Previous studies show that customers are more satisfied when they believe the price paid is fair relative to competitors (Hanaysha, 2016). However, the current results indicate that other factors, such as menu variety and service convenience, play a more decisive role in determining whether customers are satisfied. This suggests that while price remains relevant, its influence is limited once customers view McDonald's as an already affordable option. Moreover, consumers in Malaysia may prioritize speed, convenience, and diverse choices over marginal price differences, especially in a competitive market where fast-food chains frequently offer promotions and bundled deals (Tahir et al., 2024).

Therefore, pricing should be maintained at reasonable and competitive levels, but McDonald's may achieve greater customer satisfaction by emphasizing value-added strategies, such as promotions, loyalty programs, or bundling that enhance the perceived value of meals. At the same time, excessive reliance on discounts may harm long-term brand trust if customers perceive that quality is compromised. These insights reinforce that, within McDonald's Malaysia, pricing and value serve more as hygiene factors, necessary to prevent dissatisfaction but not the strongest contributors to overall customer satisfaction.

Food Quality and Its Contribution to Customer Satisfaction

The results of this study reveal that food quality, although traditionally emphasized in fast-food research, exerts a weaker influence on customer satisfaction at McDonald's Malaysia. This finding contrasts with much of the literature, which identifies food quality as one of the most significant predictors of customer satisfaction because it directly shapes customers' perceptions of taste, freshness, and overall dining experience (Peri, 2006; Namkung & Jang, 2007). Customers generally expect fast-food outlets to consistently deliver products that are fresh, safe, and appealing in terms of taste and temperature (Liu & Jang, 2009; Shaharudin et al., 2011).

The relatively lower impact observed in this study suggests that McDonald's customers in Malaysia may take food quality as a given, treating it as a baseline expectation rather than a differentiating factor in satisfaction. Since McDonald's is a well-established global brand, its reputation for standardized products may reduce the extent to which variations in food quality significantly affect satisfaction levels. Instead, customers may place greater weight on other factors such as service method and product variety, which were found to have stronger effects in this study.

Nevertheless, food quality remains a fundamental requirement that should not be overlooked. Even if it does not emerge as the strongest driver of satisfaction, consistently maintaining freshness, taste, and hygiene is critical to avoid dissatisfaction and protect brand trust. This indicates that food quality at McDonald's Malaysia functions more as a hygiene factor: necessary to meet expectations but insufficient on its own to elevate customer satisfaction.

Assessing the Effect of Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction

The findings of this study indicate that service quality has the least influence on customer satisfaction at McDonald's Malaysia. This result is somewhat surprising, as prior research consistently shows that higher service quality enhances satisfaction by shaping positive impressions and emotional bonds with a brand (Abd-El-Salam et al., 2013). Typically, customer service factors such as attentiveness, politeness, and responsiveness contribute to improved perceptions of value and loyalty. However, in the context of McDonald's Malaysia, service quality may play a diminished role because customers primarily prioritize convenience, speed, and product offerings over interpersonal interactions.

One possible explanation is that McDonald's operates with standardized service protocols and technology-driven systems, such as kiosks and mobile apps, which reduce the level of personal interaction between staff and customers. As a result, service quality may be perceived as consistent but less central to the overall dining experience. This finding echoes Iksan and Sanjaya (2023), who note that interpersonal communication can have varying effects on customer satisfaction, while some customers value personal engagement, others may prefer efficiency and minimal interaction.

Nonetheless, even if service quality is not a strong driver of satisfaction in this study, it remains a critical factor for preventing dissatisfaction. Customers expect staff to be courteous, responsive, and capable of addressing issues such as incorrect orders or delays. Long wait times, unhelpful behavior, or inattentiveness can quickly lead to frustration and harm the brand's image. Therefore, while service quality may not be the most decisive factor in driving satisfaction, it continues to serve as an essential supporting element in maintaining a positive customer experience.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study was to examine how product variety, food quality, service quality, pricing and value, and service method influence customer satisfaction at McDonald's in Malaysia. The results demonstrate a clear ranking of influence: service method is the most dominant factor, followed by product variety. These two dimensions play a decisive role in shaping customer experiences, as customers place strong importance on efficient and seamless service delivery as well as a diverse range of menu choices. By contrast, food quality, pricing and value, and service quality show weaker effects, indicating that while they remain important elements of the dining experience, they are perceived more as basic expectations than as drivers of satisfaction.

The implications of this study provide valuable guidance for both McDonald's management and other fast-food chains. First, the results emphasize the importance of service innovations. Fast-food restaurants must ensure that service methods, whether dine-in, takeaway, drive-thru, or digital ordering, are quick, accurate, and convenient. Technologies such as self-order kiosks, mobile applications, and streamlined drive-thru systems can significantly improve the customer experience and build long-term satisfaction. Second, menu variety should be expanded to cater to a wide spectrum of consumer preferences. Offering localized and seasonal menu options, along with maintaining halal compliance in Muslim-majority markets, can strengthen customer loyalty by demonstrating cultural sensitivity and adaptability.

Although food quality, pricing and value, and service quality were less significant in predicting satisfaction, they still represent essential foundations that customers expect from a fast-food restaurant. McDonald's should consistently maintain fresh, safe, and high-quality food to uphold its global brand standards. In terms of pricing and value, rather than relying solely on direct price adjustments, McDonald's can introduce creative promotions, loyalty programs, and bundled deals that enhance perceived value without reducing profitability. Service quality, while not a major driver in this study, should remain a priority through courteous staff interactions, prompt issue resolution, and customer care initiatives that reinforce a positive overall impression.

In summary, the findings suggest that McDonald's and other fast-food chains should prioritize enhancing service methods and expanding product variety, while continuing to maintain high food quality, fair value, and acceptable service standards. By aligning operational strategies with these insights, fast-food restaurants can not only improve customer satisfaction but also strengthen retention and competitiveness in an increasingly dynamic and digitalized industry. Future research should further examine how cultural factors and digital innovations such as online delivery platforms shape satisfaction, as these trends are expected to play an even greater role in customer decision-making.

LIMITATION

This study has several limitations. The survey was limited to 100 respondents, which may not represent the wider population of McDonald's customers in Malaysia; larger and more diverse samples would strengthen generalizability. Data collection relied solely on online surveys, which may exclude certain groups and introduce response bias; future studies could integrate interviews or focus groups for richer insights.

The scope was restricted to McDonald's, so findings may not apply to other fast-food chains. In addition, only five variables: food quality, service quality, pricing and value, service method, and product variety, were examined, while other factors such as marketing, social media, and employee satisfaction were not considered. Finally, the study focused on Malaysian customers, meaning cultural preferences and service expectations may limit applicability in different contexts.

Despite these constraints, the study provides meaningful insights into the drivers of McDonald's customer satisfaction, particularly the influence of product variety and service method.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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