Measuring Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction: An Empirical Evidence from Fast-food Restaurants in Davao Region, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to study the correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction among fast food restaurants in major cities and provinces in Davao Region, Philippines. The study highlighted the five-dimensional aspects of service quality (tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy). This study utilized a modified SERVQUAL instrument among 384 randomly selected customers. Weighted mean was used to describe the levels of service quality and customer satisfaction while multiple regression was used to determine the predictors of customer satisfaction. The result shows that each indicator's coefficient shows the direction and strength of each factor's impact on customer satisfaction. In the regression analysis performed, it was found that customer satisfaction is significantly predicted by tangible factors including reliability, responsiveness, and assurance. However, empathy did not a statistically significant impact. Together, these service quality indicators can account for a sizable amount of difference in customer satisfaction ratings. The coefficients associated with each indicator indicate the direction and magnitude of their influence on customer satisfaction. Henceforth, the study recommends integrating and implementing service quality processes and methods in day-to-day operations to achieve a high level of customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Customer Satisfaction; Fast Food Restaurant; Service Quality; Philippines.

1. INTRODUCTION

Customer satisfaction has evolved into a crucial element of corporate strategy in the competitive hospitality sector (Chun & Nyam, 2020). It has been researched by several scholars in the travel, tourism, and food and beverage businesses (Uslu & Eren, 2020). Like other industries, the food service sector has also seen a significant rise in the importance of customer satisfaction as a business concern. The path to a sustained competitive advantage today in a world of intense competition hinges on offering top-notch customer service (Mmutle & Shonhe, 2017). Additionally, the right blend of tangible (food and physical facilities) and intangible (employee-customer interaction) factors should influence how well restaurant patrons perceive the quality of the food service, resulting in patron satisfaction and constructive behavioral intentions in the food service sector (Hussein, 2018). Also, there is disagreement about whether customer satisfaction precedes or follows quality service. Scholars initially hold the view that pleasure is a prerequisite for service quality since attaining a general attitude

(service quality) entails a progression of positive experiences (Bitner, 1990; Bolton & Drew, 1991). Other researchers, however, hold the opposite perspective, contending that customer happiness is a service quality function (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Ekinci, 2004; Rust & Oliver, 1994; Swan & Bowers, 1998).

Fast food restaurants are establishments that serve and prepare meals quickly. Customers who are typically families with children who work multiple jobs are compelled to choose a quick meal over ones prepared at home as a consequence of their hectic schedules. It was corroborated by Habib, R. Abu Dardak, and S. Zakarial (2011), that consumers' lack of time to make proper meals has compelled them to turn to fast food as a result of a demanding job requiring long work hours, a hectic schedule, and a demanding family. The fast food industry has turned into the easier choice for the majority of consumers who need easy, on-the-go food as a result of its speedy production of meals. The fast food sector eventually flourished as a result of changing customer lifestyle.

Global distribution is growing. Customers often consider both affordability and excellent flavor before even buying majority of fast food restaurants operate as counter service businesses, where customers must purchase and prepare their own meals in addition to the food they have bought. Fast food restaurants also have a hard time keeping up with new waves of customers who are looking for authenticity and meaning in their food. Large enterprises like McDonald's have shifted to advertising strategies on improving customer satisfaction and quality of service.

Additionally, much like in any other locality, Mindanao has experienced tremendous growth in the fast food sector, especially in Davao City. Restaurants in the region are doing their best to accommodate customer demands for a range of products and services. Customers are evolving into more knowledgeable and demanding individuals at the same time as market trends are shifting. (Mmutle & Shonhe, 2017). According to numerous studies, business appearance and impeccable customer service of fast food restaurants have an impact on customer loyalty. It has been evaluated in a number of research using various assessment scales. A tool called SERVQUAL has been developed by (Bitner, 1990; Bolton & Drew, 1991; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988) and consists of five dimensions: reliability, assurance, tangible, empathy and responsiveness.

Therefore, the researcher decided to conduct this study to better understand the circumstances and to bridge the gap by reviewing aspects that influence consumer satisfaction on fast food restaurants in Davao Region. The study endeavored much in gauging service quality and customer satisfaction. The motivation for conducting this study can be traced to two main reasons. The first reason is a dearth of regional studies assessing the level of customer service provided by fast food restaurants globally in light or regional cultural variations. The second rationale is the belief that by developing a realistic performance evaluation approach helpful for strategic management and planning, it may be possible to increase the influence of fast food restaurants, particularly in terms of service quality and customer satisfaction, which is this study's emphasis. Additionally, since these constructions have not been examined in previous studies, it will be service quality that will influence customer satisfaction particularly in selected fast food restaurants.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The fast food restaurant industry is one of the fastest growing industries in the global sectors. To satisfy consumer demand for a variety of goods and services, restaurant chains both domestically and internationally are working to achieve this goal. Along with changing market trends, customers are getting more sophisticated and demanding (Chun & Nyam, 2020). The technical or output dimension is known as the product-related dimension, while the functional or process-related dimension is known as the service-related dimension. The focus of service management is on these two dimensions. These two dimensions are the emphasis of service management. In a restaurant, both manufacturing and service aspects combine to create a unique environment for customer interactions. The fine dining restaurant industry along with other food service industries is very competitive. For fast food business owners to reap the benefits of recurring business with loyal customers, maximizing customer satisfaction should be their top priority.

Additionally, Bhattacharya, Sengupta, and Mishra (2011) conducted research on the restaurant business, which they found to be one of the biggest and most comprehensive. With customers and advertisers from all over the world, it is now a global phenomenon. The restaurant sector has recently seen huge expansion due to the changes in the global tourism industry as well as other factors like the economic and social situation in many developing countries. As a foundation for continuing improvement, regular reviews should also be carried out (Demetillo, Ocampo, & Gumban, 2021).

2.1 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION
According to Singh (Singh, 2023), customer loyalty is primarily influenced by service quality, along with the direct and indirect influences of price and relationship satisfaction. Additionally, it is evident that service quality has a considerable effect on both the financial (such as pricing) and interpersonal (such as relationships) aspects of service interactions. Customer satisfaction is defined as a measurement that determines how happy customers are with a company's products, services, and capabilities. Customer satisfaction information, including surveys and ratings, can help a company determine how to best improve or change its products and services. In today's world of ever-increasing globalization of services and brands, service-oriented businesses must address customer satisfaction both locally and internationally while bridging significant cultural variances from country to country (Gilbert, Veloutsou, Goode & Moutinho, 2004). Restaurant worker and patron communication is another factor that affects customer satisfaction, according to Rajput & Gahfoor (2020). Customer satisfaction refers to a consumer's evaluation of an experience as a whole. Businesses can boost consumer satisfaction by addressing their needs. Numerous studies show that factors such as cleanliness, dining room ambiance, level of comfort, working days and hours, environment, and capacity significantly impacted customer satisfaction and willingness to return (Serhan, M. & Serhan, C., 2019).

In the hotel and restaurant industry, high service standards as well as excellent business practices promote customer satisfaction (Rajput, A. and Gahfoor, R.Z, 2020). One excellent game-changer that must be practiced constantly in the restaurant industry is continuous improvisation of service. Such practice will have impact and guarantee

recurrence of business transaction. Service quality is a general evaluation or attitude of how poor or excellent a service is. Service industries must consistently try to exceed client's expectations for them to remain globally competitive. In the restaurant industry especially, the quality of the service is what makes or breaks an enterprise. (Wang, L., 2010).

The effectiveness of services can be assessed using a variety of instruments and methods. The best-known and most widely utilized SERVQUAL (service quality) is the instrument. The SERVQUAL is an extremely simple-to-use tool for determining how customers view a restaurant's quality of service. It has been applied in a few restaurant settings, including food chain restaurants, fine dining, casual dining, fast food restaurants, and food courts. It is an approach for assessing what customers anticipate from the degree of service (Gabrow, 2021).

2.2 SERVICE QUALITY DIMENSION

To explore the following dimensions for service quality: reliability, assurance, tangible, empathy, responsiveness, are some of the dimensions that an employee should provide to their esteemed clients.

2.2.1 RELIABILITY

Employee reliability is characterized as the ability and willingness of an employee to provide service in accordance with the agreement; they must also be precise and dependable enough in delivering their promises (Ngaliman, Mika, & Suharto, 2019). According to Zygiaris (2022), strengthening consumer perception of service quality requires reliability. Accountability and quality are linked to reliability. According to research from Johnson and Nilsson (2003), reliability is possibly more significant for services because of how they are generated differently than goods, which is what academics who study service quality believe.

2.2.2 ASSURANCE

According to Demetillo, Ocampo, and Gumban (2021), it is essential for workers to get skills and development training because businesses in the fast food industry rely on employees' abilities, knowledge, and skills to deliver customer care. Additionally, skilled staff increase profitability for restaurants by saving them resources like time and money because of their efficiency in delivering service. For these reasons, managers require staff to undergo intensive, continuous training in order to keep up with the market's intense competition. In addition to their research, the manager uses management skills to aid the company in achieving its goals. It is important that managers must possess exceptional supervisory skills, a strong work ethic and excellent job performance. This will be the necessary qualities that he can pass down to his people to increase productivity of the individuals under his supervision.

2.2.3 TANGIBLE

According to the research of Ngaliman et al. (2019), businesses use tangible as a form of physical tool to create and complete tasks. And if a company's genuine products are superior, customers will receive greater service from that company. The study of Zygiaris (2022) also noted that a service's tangible elements have a big impact on how well customers view it. These make up the external elements of a service that influence external client satisfaction. A restaurant can hone its competitive edge in the actual

setting as well.

According to the study by Azim et al. (2014), a restaurant's physical environment consists of all the visible and invisible elements, both inside and outdoors. Restaurant management should make significant investment in interior designs, decorations, overall cleanliness, and other accessories to improve the physical environment because these are the things that will have the most impact on attracting customers. The primary elements of tangibility are the cost, competitive positioning, marketing communication and actualization, and the effects of word-of-mouth marketing. The physical environment plays a key role in differentiating a restaurant from the competition by promoting an extraordinary customer experience in a warm and comfortable environment.   As a result, the physical environment has a greater impact on luring new customers and keeping existing ones (Canny, 2014).   Many researchers and restaurant managers place a high value on creating a pleasing physical environment because they believe it will reinforce and boost customer happiness in the hospitality sector (Ryu and Han 2010).

2.2.4 EMPATHY

Customers' intentions to repurchase or share their experience through word-of-mouth are influenced by their overall experience. Consequently, customer experience significantly and positively impacts both hedonic and utilitarian value (Choi, Shin, Mollah & Hwang, 2024). Customers need to be treated with respect and empathy to make them feel they are properly taken care of. It requires paying attention to their concerns and promptly addressing their wants and concerns (Fida, Ahmed, Al-Balushi, & Singh, 2020). Empathy significantly affects customer satisfaction since it focuses on each client's needs. Empathy can be demonstrated by attending carefully to the particular needs of the client and by taking the time to clarify the steps that must be taken in the service delivery process (Zygiaris, S., 2022).

2.2.5 RESPONSIVENESS:

Individual responsibility to the organization is the foundation for employee response. Employees who have a positive working attitude tend to treat clients in an equally positive manner. High levels of dependability among a company's employees are indicated by their response. According to Ngaliman, Mika, and Suharto (2019), a company's responsiveness can be utilized as a yardstick to assess its reliability. According to the research by Lagat and Uyoga (2019), customer responsiveness has previously been described as a service performance or market orientation dimension where market intelligence is obtained and employed to satisfy customer demands and needs or to provide value to the service by fostering relationships.

Lastly, Bhattacharya et al.'s (2011) study pointed out that customer satisfaction is the ultimate goal of all marketing initiatives. The main objective of marketers who work to create and maintain a solid, loyal customer base is to expand their business and capture a larger share of the market to increase long-term profitability. Businesses utilize customer satisfaction—or lack thereof—as a feedback mechanism to identify qualities that could enhance or detract from the customer experience. From the perspective of the buyer, it is essentially a post-purchase evaluation (Sivadas & Jindal, 2017). Customer satisfaction also influences repurchase intentions and behaviors, as demonstrated by Gilbert, Veloutsou, and colleagues (2006). It also has an impact on a

company's capacity for revenue and profit generation. And they are the elements that must be taken into account.

2.3 Theory of Customer Satisfaction
It is a widely accepted theory on customer satisfaction that is based on the Value Percept Theory. Many of the common case types, such as those involving brand switching, the failure of trial products, and situations involving the acquisition of services, make this quite apparent to notice. Actual Value (AV) and Ideal Value (IV) are two aspects that are crucial to how customers perceive value, according to the Value-Percept theory (IV). The actual value (AV) of a product is how a client actually perceives its performance or quality (Rana, J., 2022). Moreover, the interrelationships among service providers, consumers, and service organizations are explained using Heider's (1958) Balancing Theory (Carson, P., Carson, K., & Knouse, 1997).

The ideas of customer satisfaction and service excellence are both somewhat ambiguous. Customer satisfaction and service quality have been distinguished in the literature on services (Bitner, 1990; Bolton & Drew, 1991; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988). Service providers must make this decision in order to decide whether to concentrate on enhancing their performance to satisfy customers or to give higher levels of service quality. According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), the position of academics is that service quality requires an attitude and is assessed over the course of numerous service encounters. According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), it is also regarded as an overall evaluation of a service category or an organization. Respondents in the study by Parasuraman et al. (1988) provide evidence for this.
2.4 Research Paradigm

The direction of the investigation was determined by the conceptual framework, which was explained below and was created for this study. The fast food restaurants were chosen because the researcher believed they would influence variables including service quality and customer satisfaction. A conceptual model based on the literature review is provided in Figure 1.
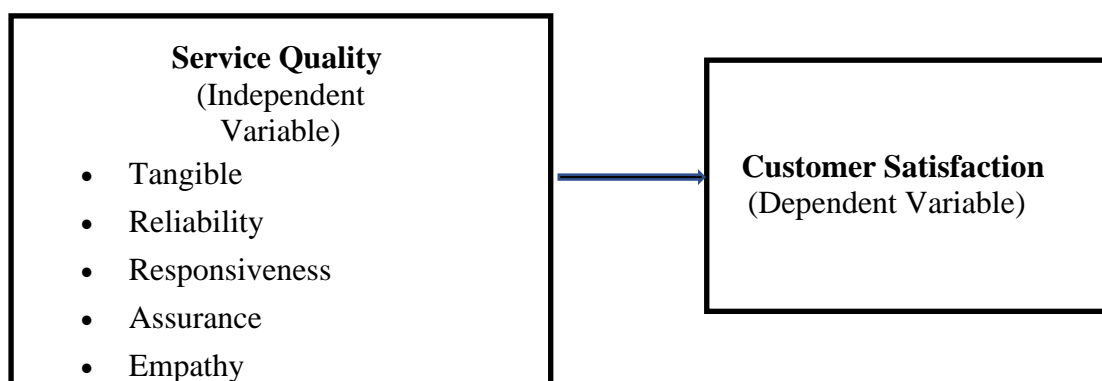

Figure 1. Conceptual Model

The results of this research suggest that the independent variable is the service quality dimension of Parasurama et al. (1988). Especially in tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. These factors will be evaluated in different

fast food restaurants to measure consumer satisfaction (the dependent variable).

The SERVQUAL dimensions were given as discrete customer service relation components that service providers like fast food restaurants should consider. The study brought to light the need for stakeholders like employees to deliver detailed and thoughtful output through their service in order to increase customer satisfaction. This will lead to a rise in the value of the industry. As a result, it is important to evaluate the SERVQUAL dimensions in relation to CSR.

According to several studies, a staff member's ability to respond to a customer's request in a reliable, precise, and timely manner is referred to as reliability. Restaurants respond to customer demands consistently and correctly, as seen by the creation of the menu item, reservations, meal orders, and accurate billings. Customer service will be better and more satisfactory as a result. The concept of "responsiveness" refers to a service provider's capacity, adaptability, and desire to address the demands and worries of its clients. Customer satisfaction is also impacted by personnel's receptivity to customers' service-related issues. Clients, thus perceive better service quality when employees show willingness to address their needs. The ability to care for and individually attend to clients is empathy on the part of the staff. For instance, when service was provided, customers were treated with utmost care. Without it, customers won't be satisfied with the assistance they received.   As a result, empathy has a significant effect on customer satisfaction.

3. METHODOLOGY

The quantitative correlational method is used in this paper's quantitative research investigation. Without changing or manipulating any of the variables, the correlational study design examines correlations between them. A correlation demonstrates the strength and/or direction of the relationship between two (or more) variables. Both positive and negative correlations are possible (Bhandari, 2021). The results of correlational research can be used to predict events based on the information that is already known as well as to determine prevalence and correlations between variables. Despite the methodology's wide range of applications, care must be taken while using it and when conducting data analysis. In order to assist researchers in reducing errors, significant issues were chosen for discussion, and a variety of data analysis strategies were given.

Numerous research techniques are centered on the systematic investigation of social processes utilizing statistical or numerical data. Therefore, quantitative research requires measurement and assumes that the phenomena being investigated can be quantified. It explores correlations and trends in the data while also validating the measures taken (Watson, 2015).

This study was conducted in Davao Region specifically in the following provinces: Davao Del Sur, Davao Del Norte, and Davao Oriental. The total number of respondents is 384; the researcher used Cochran's Formula to get the number of respondents from selected fast food restaurants in the Davao Region.

The major methods for gathering primary data were survey questionnaires, including data collection at selected fast food restaurants in Davao Region. The researcher used an adapted questionnaire to gather the necessary and relevant data. The quantitative questionnaire used in this study was taken from two studies: Gabrow (2021)

entitled, "Evaluation of Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality Using SERVQUAL Model: The Case of Fast Food Restaurant in Iraq" and Hanasha (2016) entitled, "View of Testing the Effects of Food Quality, Price Fairness, and Physical Environment on Customer Satisfaction in Fast Food Restaurant Industry". This questionnaire aimed to determine and develop the service quality and customer satisfaction of the fast food restaurants in Iraq and Malaysia.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts, providing validity and reliability supported by its dependent and independent variables. The researcher considers adapting each indicator of these variables. The first part of the questionnaire is the demographic profile of the respondents, which includes their name(optional), age, sex, status and selected fast food restaurant they frequent. The second part entails the dependent variable, which is "customer satisfaction", with its corresponding statement for the respondents. The third and last part of the questionnaire is the independent variable, which the "service quality," with its corresponding indicators; tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. In line with the study materials being utilized, the questionnaire includes questions that have been approved.

In addition, the researchers used the Likert Scale for its data analysis. In its final form, a Likert Scale is five-point scale that was used to let a person indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with a given proposition (Mcleod, 2008). There are a number of questions on the Likert Scale that have five possible answers that the respondents can choose from; Strongly agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1).

Respondents were provided with five options to choose from while answering questions. The questionnaire contains questions that have been approved and were in line with the study materials being used.

Table 1: To measure the Service Quality, the following parameters were applied:

Rating Scale	Range (Mean)	Description	Interpretation
5	4.20-5.0	Strongly Agree	This means that indicator is strongly agreed felt and observed by the respondents.
4	3.40-4.19	Agree	This means that indicator is felt neutral observed by the respondents.
3	2.60-3.39	Neutral	This means that indicator is strongly agreed felt and observed by the respondents.
2	1.80-2.59	Disagree	This means that indicator is disagree agreed felt and observed by the respondents.
1	1.79-1.0	Strongly Disagree	This means that indicator is strongly

		disagreed felt and observed by the respondents.

Table 2: To measure customer satisfaction, the following parameters were applied:

Rating Scale	Range (Mean)	Description	Interpretation
5	4.20-5.0	Strongly Agree	This means that indicator is strongly agreed evident, felt, and observed.
4	3.40-4.19	Agree	This means that indicator is agreed evident, felt, and observed.
3	2.60-3.39	Neutral	This means that indicator is neutral, evident, felt, and observed.
2	1.80-2.59	Disagree	This means that indicator is disagreeing, evident, felt, and observed.
1	1.79-1.0	Strongly Disagree	This means that indicator is strongly disagreeing, evident, felt, and observed.

4. FINDINGS

Influence of Service Quality Dimension to Customer Satisfaction. The following findings are the outcome of using the Multiple Linear Regression to assess the impact of Service Quality Indicators such as Tangible, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy in response to Customer Satisfaction:

Table 3 shows the integrated empirical results provide valuable insights into the factors influencing the dependent variable, revealing a robust model that explains a significant portion of the variance. The model, with an R-squared value of 0.6415, indicating that approximately 64.15% of the variability in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variable in the model. This suggests a good fit. The Adjusted R-squared value of 0.6367 accounts for the number of predictors and support the model's validity. The Predicted R-squared of 0.6285 indicates the model is also reliable in predicting new data.

Table 3. Empirical Results of Service Quality Factors Influencing Customer Satisfaction.

S	R-sq	R-sq(adj)	R-sq(pred)
0.419579	0.6415 (64.15%)	0.6367 (63.67%)	0.6285 (62.85%)

Term	Coefficients	SE Coef	T-Value	P-Value
Reliability	**0.3049**	0.0455	6.70	*< 0.000*
Assurance	**0.2174**	0.0493	4.41	*< 0.000*

Tangible	**0.2573**	0.0659	3.90	*< 0.000*
Responsiveness	**0.0957**	0.0417	2.30	*0.022*
Constant	**0.306**	0.157	1.94	0.053
Empathy	**0.0690**	0.0426	1.62	*0.106*

Source	DF	Adj SS	Adj MS	F-Value	P-Value
Regression	5	119.059	23.8119	*135.26*	*< 0.000*
Error	378	66.546	0.1760		
Lack-of-Fit	317	59.573	0.1879	1.64	0.010
Pure Error	61	6.973	0.1143		
Total	383	185.605			

Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

Predictors: (Constant), Empathy, Responsive, Reliability, Assurance, Tangible

The regression analysis table provides a comprehensive overview of the relationship between several independent variables and the dependent variable. Among the predictors, **Reliability** stands out with the highest coefficient of **0.3049** and a highly significant P-value (<0.000), indicating a strong positive effect on the dependent variable. Following closely is **Assurance** with a coefficient of **0.2174**, also statistically significant, affirming its importance. The **Tangible** variable shows a significant positive impact as well, with a coefficient of **0.2573** and a similar P-value. **Responsiveness** has a smaller but still significant coefficient of **0.0957** (P-value of 0.022), while the **Constant** term suggests a baseline value of **0.306**, with a P-value approaching significance (0.053). In contrast, **Empathy** has the lowest coefficient of **0.0690** and is not statistically significant (P-value of 0.106), indicating it may not be a reliable predictor in this model. Overall, the regression model itself is highly significant, as indicated by the F-value of **135.26** and a P-value of <0.000, suggesting that the predictors collectively explain a substantial amount of variance in the dependent variable.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) provides information about the overall fit of the regression model. The regression F-value of 135.26 with a p-value of 0.000 indicates that the regression model as a whole is statistically significant in explaining customer satisfaction. The lack-of-fit F-value of 1.64 with a p-value of 0.010, indicating that the model does not fit the data perfectly, but it's still statistically significant. The breakdown shows that the majority of the variance is explained by the regression model compared to the error term, reinforcing the model's strength.

The comprehensive view of the empirical results showing strong relationships between the dependent variable and several key predictors with a good model fits overall. The findings highlight the importance of tangible aspects, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance in influencing the outcome of interest.

5. DISCUSSION

As businesses realize its importance in attaining a competitive edge, customer

satisfaction has grown in importance in the hospitality sector (Chun & Nyam, 2020). The travel, tourism, and food and beverage industries have all seen extensive research on customer satisfaction (Uslu & Eren, 2020). Similar to other companies, the food service sector has made customer satisfaction a top priority. Delivering great service to suit customer expectations is essential for gaining a sustained competitive edge in today's highly competitive environment (Mmutle & Shonhe, 2017).

The integrated empirical results provide valuable insights into the factors influencing the dependent variable, revealing a robust model that explains a significant portion of the variance. The overall model, with an R-squared value of **0.6415**, indicates that approximately **64.15%** of the variability can be accounted for by the predictors included in the analysis. This strong explanatory power underscores the relevance of the selected variables in understanding the underlying dynamics.

Reliability emerged as the most significant predictor ($\beta = 0.3049$, $p < 0.000$), suggesting that consumers place a high value on reliability when assessing the overall performance or quality of the service or product. This finding aligns with existing literature emphasizing the critical role of reliability in consumer satisfaction and loyalty.

Tangible aspects ($\beta = 0.2573$, $p < 0.000$) also play a crucial role, indicating that physical evidence and presentation significantly affect perceptions. This finding highlights the importance of investing in tangible elements to enhance customer experiences.

Responsiveness and **assurance** were found to have statistically significant positive effects on the outcome, with coefficients of **0.0957** and **0.2174**, respectively. These results emphasize that timely responses to customer needs and providing assurance can enhance consumer perceptions and satisfaction.

Interestingly, **empathy** ($\beta = 0.0690$, $p = 0.106$) did not show a statistically significant impact in this model. That contradicts to the previous study of Zygiaris (2022) which showed that empathy significantly affects customer satisfaction since it focuses on each client's needs. This suggests that while empathy may be a valued aspect of customer service, it may not have the same direct influence on the dependent variable as the other factors examined. Future research could explore this further, perhaps examining contextual variables that might affect the role of empathy.

The statistical significance of the overall model (F-value = 135.26, $p < 0.000$) reinforces its validity. However, the presence of a lack-of-fit ($p = 0.010$) suggests there are other unexplored variables or interactions that may further enhance the model's explanatory power. The findings from this study carry significant implications for practitioners. Organizations should prioritize enhancing reliability and tangible elements in their offerings to meet and exceed customer expectations. Investing in quality assurance and responsiveness mechanisms can lead to improved customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Furthermore, while empathy remains important in service delivery, organizations may need to balance its implementation with more tangible and impactful factors that drive consumer perceptions. This insight can guide training programs and customer service strategies, ensuring that efforts are aligned with what truly influences customer

satisfaction. Future studies could expand on this research by exploring additional variables, such as customer demographics or contextual factors that might influence the role of empathy. Longitudinal studies could also provide deeper insights into how these relationships evolve over time, particularly in dynamic markets.

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