

FACTORS INFLUENCING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN THE FAST-FOOD INDUSTRY: A STUDY FROM WESTERN PROVINCE, SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

The fast-food industry significantly influences food choices driven by busy lifestyles and demand for convenience. Existing research predominantly focuses on customer satisfaction in fine- and casual-dining settings, leaving a notable gap concerning the specific factors driving customer satisfaction in the fast-food sector. Given the industry's high failure rate, fueled by intense competition and rapidly changing consumer preferences, attracting and retaining customers is crucial for survival. A pilot study indicated that fast-food consumers consider factors such as food quality, service, pricing, and promotions to influence their satisfaction, with preferences varying among customers. Thus, this study aimed to identify the key factors affecting customer satisfaction in the fast-food industry. Following a pilot study with twenty (20) consumers conveniently selected from Western Province, a quantitative approach was employed using a self-administered questionnaire based on established measures from the existing literature. The sample comprised fast-food patrons in Sri Lanka's Western Province, selected for their demographic diversity, high concentration of fast-food outlets, and the highest population density in the country. Respondents were chosen through simple random sampling to ensure broad demographic representation, with frequent follow-up procedures to enhance response rates. Out of 384 responses received, 306 complete surveys were analyzed using SPSS after excluding missing data and outliers. Significant positive relationships were identified between customer satisfaction and perceived price, food quality, service quality, and the physical environment through both correlation and regression analyses. These findings align with those of previous research, highlighting the significant impact of these factors on customer satisfaction in the fast-food sector. The findings suggest that prioritizing taste, freshness, and high food quality, along with maintaining competitive pricing and ensuring efficient and friendly services, is essential for enhancing customer satisfaction. Moreover, upholding high standards of cleanliness, choosing strategic locations with ample parking, and creating a pleasant ambiance further contribute to positive customer experiences. Offering attractive discounts and value-for-money deals can increase customer loyalty and encourage repeat visits. Thus, the findings of this study contribute to the existing literature and provide practical recommendations for fast food sellers to enhance customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Customer satisfaction, fast food, food quality, perceived price, service quality