The Impact of Restaurant's Online Food Delivery (OFD) Service Quality on Customers' Repurchase Intention: A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract: The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 had a profound impact on the food service industry, forcing many restaurants and eateries to pivot towards online food delivery (OFD) services to survive. This shift, driven by restrictions on dining-in, has persisted even as dine-in services resumed, positioning OFD as an integral part of restaurant operations. This paper explores the impact of service quality in OFD, proposing a conceptual framework that links service quality dimensions—such as delivery speed, order accuracy, customer service, and platform usability—to the customer's repurchase intention of food from the restaurant via its OFD services. By addressing these dimensions, restaurants can enhance customer satisfaction, leading to improved financial outcomes. This study aims to provide actionable insights for restaurant operators and contribute to the existing literature on service quality within the OFD sector.

Keywords: *Online food delivery (OFD), Service Quality, Repurchase Intention, Customer Satisfaction*

1. Introduction and Background

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 severely affected the food businesses, particularly food eateries such as restaurants, cafes, food stalls, and fast-food joints. With restricted movements, dine-in at these places dropped badly, hitting on their profits and forcing some to shut down. To stay alive, many of them were forced to shift to the practice of online food ordering and delivery services to get their offerings to the customers. Thus, we saw a surge in the use of online food delivery (OFD) services such as Foodpanda and Grabfood, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Though the pandemic has subsided, and these food eateries are getting back their customers into their premises, they continue using the OFD services. From merely assisting businesses to survive the hardship of COVID-19, the use of OFD services has become an essential part of the operation of these food businesses and may add to their overall financial performance. This online food delivery platform has fundamentally altered the restaurant industry, transforming the way consumers place orders and receive their food. This shift has not only enhanced convenience for consumers but has also created new challenges and opportunities for restaurants aiming to maintain a competitive advantage in a rapidly evolving market landscape (Chowdhury, 2023).

As such, an understanding of the variables that influence service quality in online food delivery—such as delivery speed and order accuracy—becomes essential for restaurants seeking to optimize their financial performance and customer retention efforts in this competitive environment (Azman et al., 2021; Saad, 2020). The interplay between these service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction is increasingly recognized as a critical factor that can drive repeat business and, subsequently enhance the overall financial performance of restaurants operating within the online delivery sphere (Azman et al., 2021). In Malaysia, the popularity of online food delivery has gained strong momentum due to the various advantages offered by these services, with consumers increasingly turning to platforms that allow them to customize their orders and receive meals in a manner akin to the in-restaurant experience (Tarmazi et al., 2021). This trend underscores the necessity for restaurants to not only focus on the quality of the food but also invest in their delivery services, customer interactions, and the overall user experience on their platforms to foster loyalty and ultimately improve their profit margins (Azman et al., 2021). Moreover, the effective management of these service quality dimensions, alongside factors such as delivery tracking and the attitude of delivery personnel, plays a significant role in enhancing customer satisfaction and retention, which are pivotal for driving long-term financial success in the industry (Tarmazi et al., 2021, Azman et al., 2021; Saad, 2020, Tarmazi et al., 2021; Idris et al., 2021). Furthermore, the ability to provide timely updates and ensure accurate order fulfillment is critical, as these elements significantly influence customer perceptions and their likelihood to return for subsequent orders,

ultimately affecting the restaurant's financial viability in an increasingly digital marketplace (Azman et al., 2021; Saad, 2020). Issues related to order cancellations, inaccuracies, and the quality of customer service interactions can have detrimental effects on customer satisfaction, leading to decreased retention rates and impacting restaurants' financial outcomes negatively (Smith & Heriyati, 2023). Customer grievances regarding order accuracy and delivery efficiency can significantly undermine both satisfaction and profitability in the fast-evolving online food delivery landscape (Smith & Heriyati, 2023, Tarmazi et al., 2021). As such, restaurant operators must prioritize the assessment and improvement of their online service quality to increase customer satisfaction, promote repeat purchases, and gain a competitive edge.

Existing literature has explored the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction in the online food delivery context, highlighting the multidimensional nature of this construct. Research indicates that consumers' perceptions of various aspects of service quality, including the efficiency of the delivery process, the attentiveness of customer service, and the overall user-friendliness of the online ordering platform, can significantly influence their willingness to continue engaging with a particular delivery service (Smith & Heriyati, 2023). Moreover, enhancing these service quality dimensions not only contributes to higher levels of customer satisfaction but also plays a vital role in fostering customer loyalty, which is critical for sustaining financial performance in the highly competitive online food delivery market (Smith & Heriyati, 2023; Sahidi et al., 2022). Furthermore, businesses must recognize that the quality of service extends beyond mere logistics; it encompasses the entire customer journey, from the ease of placing an order to the condition of the food upon delivery, all of which can impact consumer perceptions and future purchasing behavior. To effectively leverage these insights, restaurants, and delivery services must prioritize improvements in service quality dimensions, as the resulting customer satisfaction can lead to increased customer retention rates, directly influencing their financial viability and success in an e-commerce landscape characterized by heightened competition and evolving consumer preferences (Ahmed, 2019; Idris et al., 2021; Azman et al., 2021; Abdullaeva, 2020). In this regard, a strategic focus on service quality may not only enhance customer retention rates but also allow restaurants to build stronger relationships with their clientele, ultimately leading to sustained revenue growth and a competitive edge in the market.

Research findings suggest that organizations that prioritize superior service quality are better positioned to fulfill customer needs and expectations, thereby increasing customer satisfaction and establishing a loyal customer base essential for long-term financial success in the online food delivery sector (Azman et al., 2021) (Kaur, 2018). Enhancing service quality across various dimensions, such as timely delivery and accurate order fulfillment, can significantly affect a restaurant's ability to retain customers, as satisfied customers are more likely to return and recommend the service to others, resulting in improved financial performance and profitability (Smith & Heriyati, 2023; Ahmed, 2019). The implications of these findings underscore the necessity for restaurant managers to carefully evaluate and invest in the dimensions of service quality they offer through online platforms, thereby ensuring that customer expectations are not only met but exceeded, as this can lead to a robust increase in customer loyalty and, consequently, enhanced financial performance (Ahmed, 2019; Kaur, 2018; Abdullaeva, 2020; Ladhari et al., 2008).

Furthermore, as competition intensifies and customer preferences evolve, it becomes increasingly crucial for restaurant operators to continuously assess and refine their service quality strategies, thereby ensuring they remain responsive to consumer expectations while simultaneously seeking to maximize their financial outcomes in the online food delivery landscape. To navigate this complex environment effectively, restaurants must adopt a holistic approach to service quality that integrates feedback mechanisms, quality control processes, and ongoing employee training, ensuring that every aspect of the customer experience is optimized to encourage repeat patronage and drive financial success in the long term. (Abdullaeva, 2020; Ladhari et al., 2008; Ahmed, 2019). Incorporating such comprehensive strategies not only fosters a culture of excellence within the organization but also enables restaurants to adapt swiftly to the changing market dynamics, ultimately enhancing their reputation and encouraging customer loyalty, two pivotal elements that significantly contribute to improved financial performance in the competitive online food delivery industry (Ahmed, 2019; Abdullaeva, 2020; Azman et al., 2021; Ladhari et al., 2008).

The conceptual framework presented in this research paper underscores the critical role of service quality in the online food delivery industry and its influence on the customers' intentions of continuously supporting the

restaurants' online business. Overall, the research highlights the necessity for restaurant operators to understand and implement service quality improvement strategies that are aligned with evolving consumer expectations, as this not only enhances customer satisfaction but also significantly contributes to their long-term profitability and competitiveness within the food delivery sector, which is increasingly driven by customer loyalty and retention, necessitating a strategic emphasis on delivering exceptional service quality across all operational dimensions to foster a robust performance in an ever-changing market landscape. Moreover, the insights derived from existing studies suggest that the direct correlation between service quality and customer retention underscores the strategic imperative for restaurant operators to consistently evaluate their service offerings, thus allowing them to cultivate deeper customer connections and enhance their competitive positioning in the burgeoning online food delivery market (Ladhari et al., 2008; Ahmed, 2019; Azman et al., 2021; Abdullaeva, 2020).

This research proposes a critical need for empirical studies that explore how various dimensions of online service quality directly contribute to customers' repurchase intention of the food from the restaurant via its OFD services. This lack of comprehensive understanding hinders restaurant operators from making informed strategic decisions regarding service enhancements that could bolster customer satisfaction and retention, and meaningfully affect their overall performance. This is especially important in today's fast-evolving digital marketplace where customer preferences are changing rapidly. Bridging this research gap is essential for restaurant managers to develop effective strategies that align service quality improvements with enhanced performance, enabling them to stay competitive and capitalize on the growth opportunities presented by the booming online food delivery market. By conducting comprehensive studies that examine the intricate relationship between service quality dimensions and customer repurchase behavior, researchers can provide restaurant operators with actionable insights and data-driven recommendations to optimize their service offerings, ultimately driving customer retention, loyalty, and sustainable profitability in this dynamic industry. This necessitates a focused approach to integrate service quality metrics into performance assessments and ultimately results in improved financial viability for restaurants operating in the online food delivery sector.

The primary objectives of this study are to:
- Develop a conceptual framework that delineates the key dimensions of service quality in online food delivery and their direct impact on customer's repurchase intention for restaurants.
- Empirically examine the relationship between service quality dimensions (delivery speed, order accuracy, customer service, food quality upon delivery, ease of use of the delivery platform, and communication and updates) and customer's repurchase intention.
- Provide restaurants with actionable insights and strategic recommendations to enhance their service quality and optimize their performance in the online food delivery market.

To seamlessly integrate restaurant online food delivery services into the restaurant business, it's essential to have a quality services delivery system that can keep things running smoothly from the moment of ordering till the food reaches the customers. Thus, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by addressing the research gap and offering a comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between service quality and restaurant performance in the growing online food delivery industry. Particularly, the study analyses the customers' perceptions of the service quality of the online food delivery (OFD) services used by the restaurant, and how it can lead to customers' continuous support of the restaurant's online business. As found in previous studies, customer retention and loyalty in the restaurant sector could affect the overall financial performance of food service establishments (Wu, 2013; Noh et al., 2023; Abdullaeva, 2020; Ahmed, 2019).

2. Literature Review

The six key dimensions of service quality in online food delivery are:
Delivery Speed, Order Accuracy, Customer Service, Food Quality Upon Delivery, Ease of Use of the Delivery Platform, and Communication and Updates are the key dimensions that define the service quality in online food delivery. These elements collectively shape the customer's overall experience and directly influence their satisfaction, which in turn impacts critical financial performance indicators such as customer retention rates and profitability for restaurants. By strategically optimizing these service quality dimensions, restaurants can

cultivate a loyal customer base, driving sustainable growth and gaining a competitive edge in the highly competitive online food delivery market. Moreover, research indicates that each of these dimensions plays a pivotal role in determining customer perceptions and behaviors, ultimately influencing their decisions to revisit and recommend restaurants, thereby underscoring the importance of maintaining high service quality standards to ensure long-term profitability and success in this dynamic industry. In this context, restaurant operators must recognize that a superior service quality framework not only fulfills customer expectations but also significantly contributes to enhanced financial outcomes through increased customer retention, as established in prior research indicating the strong correlation between perceived service quality and customer loyalty, satisfaction, and repeat patronage in the restaurant sector (Ladhari et al., 2008; Abdullaeva, 2020).

Ensuring efficient and timely delivery, providing accurate orders, delivering exceptional customer service, maintaining the quality and temperature of the food, offering a user-friendly digital platform, and effective communication throughout the process are all crucial factors that contribute to a positive customer experience. By optimizing these service quality dimensions, restaurants can cultivate a loyal customer base, drive repeat business, and improve their overall financial performance in the highly competitive online food delivery market. This holistic approach not only enhances customer satisfaction but also fosters brand loyalty, as research has shown that customers are more likely to return to establishments that consistently meet or exceed their service expectations, which is essential for sustainable growth in the restaurant industry (Azman et al., 2021).

Delivery Speed, for instance, encompasses the timeliness of order fulfillment, from the moment a customer places an order to the food arriving at their doorstep. Prompt and reliable delivery not only meets customer expectations but also fosters a sense of convenience and satisfaction, encouraging repeat business. Customers value the ability to receive their orders quickly, as it demonstrates the restaurant's efficiency and commitment to providing a seamless dining experience, even in the context of online food delivery.(Leo et al., 2022; Kimes, 2011; Ramli et al., 2021). Timely delivery also helps to ensure that the food maintains its freshness, temperature, and quality, further enhancing the customer's overall satisfaction with the service. Efficient and speedy delivery is a critical aspect of service quality that can significantly impact a customer's willingness to continue using the online platform and recommend the restaurant to others(Were et al., 2019; Kuo et al., 2011; Leo et al., 2022). In addition, research indicates that a delay in delivery can lead to increased customer dissatisfaction, often resulting in a negative perception of both the restaurant and the delivery service, ultimately lowering the likelihood of future orders from that customer and adversely affecting the restaurant's financial performance (Reddy & Aradhya, 2020; Idris et al., 2021).

Order Accuracy is a critical dimension of service quality in online food delivery, as it ensures that customers receive the exact items and portions they requested. Accurately fulfilling orders is a fundamental expectation for customers, and any discrepancies can lead to significant dissatisfaction and frustration (Kaipia et al., 2002; Rao et al., 2011; Yang & Peterson, 2002). Providing the correct order demonstrates the restaurant's attention to detail and commitment to delivering a high-quality dining experience, even in the remote context of online ordering. Customers highly value the assurance that their specific dietary requirements, preferences, and order specifications will be consistently met, as it reinforces their confidence in the restaurant's capabilities and reliability. Failure to fulfill orders accurately can have serious consequences, as research indicates that inaccuracies can significantly diminish customer loyalty and increase the likelihood of negative reviews, ultimately impacting the restaurant's reputation and future sales opportunities (Idris et al., 2021). In the competitive online food delivery landscape, where customers have numerous options, maintaining consistent order accuracy is essential for cultivating customer trust, satisfaction, and loyalty, which are key drivers of financial performance for restaurants. Accurate order fulfillment not only meets customer expectations but also builds a strong reputation for the restaurant, fostering repeat business and positive word-of-mouth. By consistently providing the correct items and portions, restaurants can demonstrate their commitment to quality, reliability, and attention to detail, which are all crucial factors in shaping a positive customer experience and driving customer retention, a critical financial performance indicator.

Effective Customer Service, through responsive and helpful interactions, can further enhance the overall experience and leave a lasting positive impression on customers. Delivering exceptional customer service, whether through prompt responses to inquiries, resolving any issues or concerns, or providing additional

support, can significantly contribute to a customer's overall satisfaction and willingness to continue using the online platform (Jafarpour et al., 2017, Hult et al., 2019; Thaichon et al., 2014). Positive customer service interactions can foster a sense of trust and loyalty, as customers perceive the restaurant as genuinely invested in their satisfaction and overall dining experience.

The quality of food upon delivery plays a critical role in shaping customer perceptions, as receiving warm, fresh, and visually appealing meals is integral to a satisfactory experience; this aspect of service quality is essential for ensuring that customers are pleased with their orders and willing to return for future purchases. To achieve this, restaurants must prioritize quality control measures to safeguard food temperature and presentation during the delivery process, recognizing that these factors greatly influence customer perceptions of value and satisfaction, ultimately impacting their likelihood of placing repeat orders and generating positive reviews that can drive new business. In Malaysia, effective customer service is particularly important, as the growing trend of dining out and fast-food consumption among families with busy schedules emphasizes the need for restaurants to provide a seamless, convenient, and satisfying online ordering and delivery experience (Nayan & Hassan, 2020; Shahril et al., 2021).

The ease of use of a delivery platform, encompassing both the website and mobile application, is a critical determinant of customer satisfaction and, consequently, business success. A user-friendly interface, characterized by intuitive design, significantly simplifies the ordering process, minimizing potential frustrations arising from navigation and selection. Features such as clear menus, a logical information architecture, readily accessible search bars, and personalized options like saved addresses and payment information contribute to a seamless and efficient user experience (Sharma & Bhargav, 2023; Nor et al., 2023; Ekşioğlu, 2016). Moreover, a streamlined ordering process, often facilitated by real-time order tracking and multiple payment options, can significantly influence a customer's propensity for repeat orders. Research indicates that users are more likely to repeatedly engage with platforms that are simple to navigate and efficient to use, highlighting the importance of this service quality dimension (Bateman et al., 2017). By prioritizing ease of use, businesses can reduce cart abandonment rates, increase conversion rates, and improve customer lifetime value, ultimately gaining a competitive advantage in the dynamic online food delivery market.

Finally, effective Communication and Updates regarding order status and delivery timelines can contribute to a positive customer experience. Keeping customers informed about their order status fosters transparency and trust, leading to a more satisfying experience (Xiong, 2010; Bateman et al., 2017; Felix & Rembulan, 2023). By providing timely updates and clear information, restaurants can alleviate any potential anxieties customers may have about their orders, thereby reinforcing their loyalty and creating a sense of reliability that is essential for maintaining a competitive edge in the online food delivery market (Azman et al., 2021). Such an approach not only addresses immediate customer concerns but also contributes to long-term loyalty, as consistent and proactive communication can significantly enhance customers' perceptions of the service quality provided, ultimately influencing their decision to return and engage with the restaurant in future transactions. Moreover, as highlighted in recent studies, customer satisfaction is closely tied to their overall perceptions of service quality; therefore, the restaurant's ability to manage these dimensions effectively can lead to a more favorable customer retention rate and, subsequently, improved financial performance. Given the significance of these service quality dimensions, it becomes clear that their effective management not only ensures customer satisfaction but also plays a crucial role in enhancing the customer retention rate, which is a vital indicator of financial performance in the restaurant industry. Research suggests that by facilitating a seamless and pleasant online ordering experience through these dimensions of service quality, restaurants can foster enduring relationships with customers, ultimately optimizing profitability and sustaining growth in a competitive market (Idris et al., 2021).

For restaurants that incorporate the use of online food delivery services, customers can order food online, wait, receive the delivered food, and then eat at any place of their convenience. For these customers, their satisfaction with the restaurant is not only based on the quality of the food but include also the whole experience of making the order. Thus, for restaurants that offer online delivery services, repeat purchases are critical for their success. Repurchase intention is the process of an individual purchasing goods or services from the same firm (Hellier, Geursen, Carr, & Rickard, 2003), and the tendency to repurchase is based on how customers assess their past purchase experiences.

Restaurants can effectively leverage the online food delivery platform by ensuring the various facets of the service quality are carried out effectively to drive the customers to continue ordering online from these restaurants. By strategically optimizing these service quality dimensions, restaurants can cultivate a loyal customer base, driving sustainable growth and gaining a competitive edge in the highly competitive online food delivery market. Moreover, research indicates that each of these dimensions plays a pivotal role in determining customer perceptions and behaviors, ultimately influencing their decisions to revisit and recommend restaurants, thereby underscoring the importance of maintaining high service quality standards to ensure long-term profitability and success in this dynamic industry.

Research has shown that customer trust in the restaurant and the delivery service provider can also play a crucial role in determining repurchase intention. When customers have confidence in the restaurant's ability to deliver high-quality service, they are more likely to return and place additional orders.(Sirimongkol, 2021; Othman et al., 2013). This is particularly relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, where customers may be more cautious about their dining choices and prioritize reliable and trustworthy service providers.
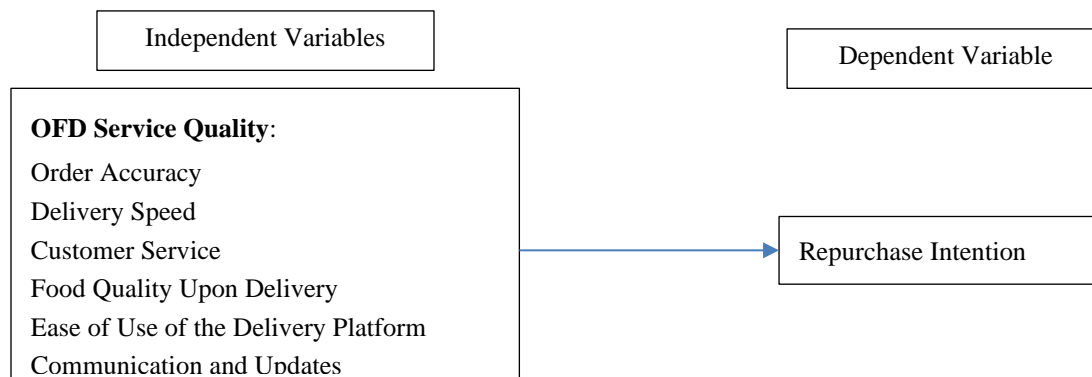
The restaurant industry has undergone significant changes in recent years, with the emergence of online food delivery services becoming increasingly popular among consumers. These services have transformed the way customers interact with restaurants, allowing them to order and receive their meals without leaving the comfort of their homes. As the competition in the online food delivery market intensifies, restaurants must understand the factors that influence customers' repurchase intention (Yeo et al., 2021).

Moreover, as the competition in the online food delivery market continues to intensify, restaurants that can deliver a consistently high-quality service are likely to have a significant advantage in retaining and attracting customers. By prioritizing and improving key aspects of their online food delivery service, such as timely order fulfillment, proper food handling, and exceptional customer support, restaurants can differentiate themselves in the crowded market and build a loyal customer base that continues to place repeat orders (Idris et al., 2021).

Conceptual Framework
Based on the research objectives and the review of existing literature, the following conceptual framework is proposed to examine the impact of service quality in online food delivery on the customer's repurchase intention of restaurants:

This framework depicts the key dimensions of service quality in online food delivery as the independent variables, which are expected to have a direct influence on the dependent variable of customer retention rate, a critical financial performance indicator for restaurants. Furthermore, the framework suggests that enhancements in service quality, such as improved order accuracy and faster delivery speed, not only boost customer satisfaction but also cultivate loyalty among diners, thereby providing a sustainable competitive edge in the increasingly saturated online food delivery landscape, thus reinforcing the direct positive impact on customer's repeat purchase from the restaurant.

Independent Variables

Dependent Variable

OFD Service Quality:

Order Accuracy

Delivery Speed

Customer Service

Food Quality Upon Delivery

Ease of Use of the Delivery Platform

Communication and Updates

Repurchase Intention

3. Research Methodology

To achieve the stated objectives, this study will employ a mixed-method research approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative elements. This approach will enable a comprehensive analysis of service quality dimensions as perceived by customers, as well as their subsequent impact on restaurant financial performance indicators, harnessing both survey data and in-depth interviews to triangulate findings and provide robust insights into the complex interactions at play.

The research will be conducted in the following phases:

Qualitative Phase: This phase will involve in-depth interviews with restaurant managers and online food delivery platform representatives to gain a deeper understanding of the key dimensions of service quality and their perceived impact on the restaurant's performance (such as repeat order and retention rate) from the industry's perspective.

Quantitative Phase: A large-scale customer survey will be designed and deployed to capture customers' perceptions of service quality and its influence on their satisfaction and propensity for repeat orders through online delivery platforms.

Data Analysis: The qualitative and quantitative data collected will be analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques, such as multiple regression analysis, to empirically examine the relationships between service quality dimensions and financial performance indicators, including customer retention rates and profitability.

Validation and Refinement: The conceptual framework will be validated and refined based on the findings from the data analysis, ensuring the robustness and generalizability of the research insights.

4. Dissemination and Recommendations

The study will conclude with the development of actionable recommendations for restaurant operators to enhance their service quality and optimize financial performance in the online food delivery market, which will be disseminated through academic publications and industry-focused knowledge-sharing platforms. In addition, the research will explore the implications of service quality on customer loyalty and retention, highlighting not only the immediate financial impacts but also the long-term benefits of developing strong customer relationships through consistent and high-quality service delivery, as previous studies have shown that customer loyalty is a key driver of sustained profitability in the restaurant industry (Ahmed, 2019).

By employing this mixed-method approach, the study will provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between service quality and repurchase intention in the online food delivery sector, offering valuable insights to both academics and industry practitioners. This research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by offering empirical evidence on the critical role that service quality plays in shaping customer behaviors and preferences, ultimately leading to better financial outcomes for restaurants in a competitive marketplace (Ahmed, 2019). Furthermore, the anticipated findings are expected to enrich the existing literature on service quality in the hospitality sector, particularly by demonstrating how service quality dimensions can directly influence customer loyalty and retention, thus fostering sustainable profitability for restaurants engaged in online food delivery services, as highlighted in prior research (Leo et al., 2022; Kuo et al., 2011; Ahmed, 2019; Abdullaeva, 2020). In conclusion, the study will not only underline the importance of optimizing service quality dimensions but also advocate for a strategic approach to customer engagement that leverages these insights for enhanced financial performance, thereby aligning with the consensus that customer loyalty—fueled by high-quality service—is a key driver of long-term success in the restaurant industry. Ultimately, this research aims to provide actionable recommendations that align with the evolving expectations of consumers in the online food delivery market, thereby facilitating enhanced customer loyalty and retention as fundamental components of sustained financial success for restaurants (Leo et al., 2022; Abdullaeva, 2020; Ahmed, 2019).

In conclusion, this study offers a comprehensive examination of the impact of service quality dimensions on customers' repurchase intention from restaurants engaged in online food delivery services. By elucidating the intricate relationships between these variables, it aims to offer empirical insights that can guide restaurant operators in formulating strategies to enhance service quality and foster customer loyalty, which are essential for achieving long-term profitability in an increasingly competitive landscape (Abdullaeva, 2020). As such, restaurant managers are encouraged to focus on improving service quality in all its dimensions, as research indicates that higher service quality not only increases customer satisfaction but also enhances customer retention rates, ultimately driving financial performance and competitive advantage in the online food delivery market.

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