Understanding Customer Satisfaction: A Study of Convenience Stores

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Abstract: This study explores the impact of customer satisfaction on purchasing behavior within convenience stores, focusing on four key determinants: service quality, perceived value, product quality, and trust, perceived value, and trust. The growing population and increasing consumer demand have prompted companies to enhance productivity and service standards across their convenience store branches. To maintain competitiveness and attract a diverse customer base—comprising existing, new, and potential customers—businesses need to review and refine their operational strategies continuously. The study's methodology involved a structured approach to gathering quantitative data from a specific sample of convenience store customers in Bentong City. By using surveys and questionnaires, the research aimed to capture relevant information directly from the consumers, providing insights into their experiences and satisfaction with the convenience stores. The non-probability convenience sampling method facilitated the collection of data from readily available participants, ensuring a practical and timely data collection process. Using a data set collected from 220 respondents who utilized products and services at a convenience store, this research aims to empirically investigate the relationships between service quality, perceived value, product quality, and trust, perceived value, trust, and overall customer satisfaction. The findings indicate that while all four factors contribute to customer satisfaction, service quality, perceived value, and trust exert a significantly stronger influence compared to product quality. These insights underscore the importance of prioritizing service enhancement, value creation, and trust-building initiatives in the strategic management of convenience stores, thereby ensuring sustained customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Keywords: *Customer Satisfaction, Convenience Stores, Product Quality, Service Quality, Perceived Value & Trust*

1. Introduction and Background

In recent years, substantial growth has been observed in the convenience store industry in Malaysia, driven by consumer lifestyles that increasingly prioritize convenience and flexibility in shopping. This shift towards modernity has led to a notable increase in the number of convenience stores across the country. In Malaysia, the industry's expansion has been fueled by key players such as FamilyMart, 7-Eleven, MyNews, 99 Speed Mart and CU, which have significantly contributed to this growth. Recent scholarly literature emphasizes that the rapid proliferation of convenience stores, such as FamilyMart, 7-Eleven, MyNews, 99 Speed Mart and CU, over the past decade has been driven by their innovative product offerings and enhanced accessibility (The Edge, 2024). Convenience stores are defined as small retail outlets offering a limited variety of groceries and other products, typically operating for over 18 hours a day to meet the needs of time-conscious consumers (Mendonça, et al., 2017). Traditional retail is being reshaped by the rise of e-commerce and the expansion of modern grocery retail, with convenience stores adapting through the adoption of digital advancements and the introduction of food service options (Euromonitor International, 2024).

Between 2016 and 2022, the number of convenience stores in Malaysia was projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6%, driven by companies scaling their operations and enhancing efficiency to better compete in the market (Ee, Abdullah & Japper, 2024). According to the National Association of Convenience Stores (NACS, 2021), convenience stores offer consumers a strategic location to quickly purchase a diverse range of products and services. Convenience stores are easily accessible, allowing customers to swiftly identify, select, and purchase their desired products (Seiders, Berry and Gresham, 2000).

This study focuses on the leading convenience store chains in Malaysia, namely FamilyMart, 7-Eleven, MyNews, 99 Speed Mart and CU. These stores are strategically located near residential areas and busy hubs, underscoring the importance of location in attracting customers. Retail analysis indicates that, for convenience stores, the right location—characterized by appropriate distance from other stores and proximity to public transportation—is more critical than the sheer number of outlets in a chain (The Edge Malaysia, 2019). This

highlights the crucial role of location in driving customer traffic and enhancing business success.

Several factors, including service quality, perceived value, product quality, and trust, perceived value, product quality, and trust, have been identified as key influences on customer satisfaction in convenience stores. The influence of service quality on customer purchase intentions in convenience stores reveals the importance of this factor in the retail environment Rong and Zainal (2021). Given the limited research in this area, especially in Bentong City, this study aims to explore the determinants of customer satisfaction in purchasing from convenience stores in this region.

For a convenience store to succeed, the factors that influence customer satisfaction in the retail industry must first be understood. As store performance improves, so does customer satisfaction, leading to a positive corporate image. Meeting customer expectations requires a thorough understanding of their needs, which can be achieved through consistent and accurate communication (Ene and Ozkaya, 2014). By doing so, convenience stores can attract and retain a diverse customer base, including new, regular, and potential customers. Recent studies indicate that service quality, including tangibility, empathy, assurance, reliability, and responsiveness, significantly influences customer satisfaction (Ansari, 2019). By focusing on these elements, convenience stores can enhance their appeal and foster customer loyalty.

2. Literature Review

Customer satisfaction
Customer satisfaction measurement provides timely, unbiased insights into customer preferences and expectations, serving as a crucial performance indicator for businesses (Mihelis, Grigoroudis, Siskos, Politis, & Malandrakis, 2001). Similarly, satisfaction is an emotional state, where post-purchase emotions can range from anger, dissatisfaction, and irritation to neutrality, enthusiasm, and pleasure (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2021). Customer satisfaction can be understood, drawing from various definitions, as the emotional evaluation or sentiment experienced by customers when their needs and expectations are met through the use of a company's products or services. The product is more likely to be recommended to others by satisfied customers, aligning with the company's goals (Crosby, Evans, and Cowles, 1990). Effective measurement of customer satisfaction often involves using surveys, engagement metrics, and social media monitoring to gather feedback and understand customer sentiments (Baker, 2023).

Organizations adopting a customer-oriented perspective are better positioned to deliver quality, enhance customer satisfaction, and effectively achieve organizational objectives (Kim & Cha, 2002). Satisfaction is a comprehensive response, influencing the gap between prior expectations and the perceived outcome after consuming or retiring a service product, where the perceived performance of the chosen service meets consumer expectations Oliver (2010). Recent literature supports these views, emphasizing that a customer-oriented approach significantly enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty (Lee, & Park, 2023). By prioritizing these aspects, organizations can better meet customer expectations and foster a positive corporate image (Yan & Fan, 2022).

Customer satisfaction is a crucial metric for businesses, providing valuable insights into customer preferences and expectations. The gap between customer expectations and perceived product or service performance influences the emotional response. Therefore, loyal advocates, driving business growth, are more likely to emerge from satisfied customers. Thus, to achieve high levels of customer satisfaction and overall business success, an organization must maintain a customer-centric focus.

Product Quality
The quality of a product or service is determined by its inherent qualities and attributes. According to Russell and Taylor (2006), product quality is defined as "fitness for use" or "conformance to requirements". The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) defines product quality as 'the ability to satisfy the market and the customers' (Lakhal and Pasin, 2008). Quality is constituted by eight dimensions: perceived quality, functionality, compliance, features, serviceability, durability, and aesthetics (Garvin, 1984). Additionally, a positive relationship between product quality and customer satisfaction was found by Tran and Le (2020). It was established by the study that customer satisfaction serves as a mediator between product quality and

consumer behavior (Tsiotsou, 2006). The factors influencing satisfaction, such as quality and performance, have been extensively highlighted in the literature. Kotler (1989) defines product quality as the ability of a product to fulfill its intended function, which is particularly critical in product-based industries. The research investigated the interrelationships among three key elements of quality-customer satisfaction, price, and behavioral intention—within the context of quick-service restaurants, specifically examining the impact of service, food, and the physical environment (Ryu & Han, 2010).

A systematic review highlights that perceived value and service quality are crucial in influencing customer satisfaction and intention to continue the relationships (Adeyemo, & Oyewunmi, 2024). Additionally, firm performance is significantly impacted by customer satisfaction, with high satisfaction levels leading to loyalty being increased, and positive word-of-mouth generated (Euromonitor International, 2024). The integration of digital services and enhanced customer experiences has also been identified as vital for meeting modern consumer expectations and fostering satisfaction (Smith & Lee, 2021). By focusing on these elements, businesses can better align their offerings with customer needs and drive long-term success.

A product's inherent characteristics and its ability to meet customer needs are encompassed by the multifaceted concept of product quality. Research has identified various dimensions of quality, including functionality, features, and durability. Importantly, product quality is closely linked to customer satisfaction, influencing subsequent consumer behavior. Product quality is essential in all industries, but its impact is especially pronounced in product-based sectors. Furthermore, factors such as price and the overall customer experience also interact with product quality to shape customer perceptions and behaviors.

Service Quality
Service quality is crucial for maintaining a company's reputation, satisfying valued customers, and capitalizing on market opportunities (Mahato & Goet, 2020). It is imperative that all employees within an organization commit to delivering the highest standard of customer service (Surahman et al., 2020). Service quality consists of five key dimensions: reliability, which is the ability to consistently and accurately deliver promised services; tangibles, referring to physical facilities, equipment, and the appearance of personnel; assurance, which includes competence, courtesy, credibility, and security, reflecting employees' ability to inspire trust and confidence; responsiveness, defined as the willingness to assist customers and provide prompt service; and empathy, which involves the organization's care and individualized attention to customers, including accessibility, communication, and understanding their needs (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996).

Service quality is a critical component of these models and has been demonstrated to positively influence customer satisfaction (Cronin et al., 2000; Oliver, 1997). Previous research suggests that customers' positive behavioral intentions are a result of their satisfaction with the company, which is directly linked to the provision of high-quality service. Satisfaction plays a crucial role in mediating the impact of service quality on behavioral intentions (Dabholkar et al., 2000). Recent literature continues to support these findings, emphasizing that service quality—encompassing dimensions such as reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness—remains a pivotal factor in driving customer satisfaction (Johnson & Smith, 2021). Businesses that focus on these components can better connect their services with the demands of their customers and generate long-term happiness and loyalty.

Numerous researchers have explored the concept of service quality from the perspective of the customer over the past several decades (Zeithaml, 2009; Ramsaran-Fowdar, 2007). Customers possess diverse values, evaluation criteria, and situational contexts, so it is essential to approach the concept of service quality with a broad perspective (Chang, 2008). Customer satisfaction is critically determined by service quality; high-quality services have been shown to significantly enhance customer satisfaction, whereas low-quality services have the opposite effect. It is consistently demonstrated by the literature that service quality is one of the most influential factors affecting customer satisfaction (Cronin et al., 2000; Oliver, 1997). Various studies have well-documented the relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality (Zeithaml et al., 2003; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Fernandes et al., 2017; Zaibaf et al., 2013; Zeithaml et al., 1996; Zhang & Prybutok, 2005).

Customer satisfaction and overall business success are critically influenced by service quality, which encompasses various dimensions, including reliability, tangibles, assurance, responsiveness, and empathy.

While a strong positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction has been established by numerous studies, the broader implications of service quality for businesses, including its impact on reputation, customer loyalty, and market opportunities, are the focus of this summary.

Perceived value
In contemporary business sectors, delivering optimal value to customers is a significant management challenge. Service value is defined by the user's overall assessment of a service's utility, based on the perceived benefits relative to the costs incurred (Zeithaml, 1998). It has been consistently demonstrated by research that perceived value positively influences customer satisfaction (Gallarza & Saura, 2006). Perceived value represents a paradigm shift, offering a more comprehensive approach than focusing solely on quality or service satisfaction, and it has broader implications beyond immediate behavioral relevance (Martinez-Ruiz et al., 2010).

Customer satisfaction and perceived value are key determinants of subsequent customer actions in the restaurant industry (Tam, 2004). Another finding from Kim & Tang, (2020), customer behavior exerts a more substantial influence on perceived value within the restaurant industry compared to participation behavior, providing valuable insights for the development of effective marketing strategies. The fulfillment of input requirements necessary for satisfaction is intrinsically linked to value, establishing a strong positive correlation between perceived value and customer satisfaction (Rust & Oliver, 1994). Similarly, that increase in perceived value corresponds to higher levels of customer satisfaction (Cuong & Khoi, 2019). According to Kumar & Reinartz (2016), marketing efforts must be strategically oriented toward creating perceived value for customers and optimizing customer lifetime value to cultivate loyalty, satisfaction, and ultimately, profitability.

Customer satisfaction and subsequent behaviors are critically influenced by perceived value, which is derived from the assessment of benefits received relative to costs incurred by the customer. Research consistently demonstrates a strong positive relationship between perceived value and customer satisfaction. Although customer behavior also impacts perceived value, focusing on creating perceived value is essential for driving customer loyalty and long-term profitability.

Trust
Trust is defined as the ability to foster comfort, accumulate positive experiences, and sustain continuous communication, all of which contribute to building strong future relationships (Lestariningsih, Hadiyati, and Astuti, 2018). It is emphasized by Reichheld and Schefter (2000) that to gain customer loyalty, their trust must first be gained. The importance of customer trust in business cannot be overstated, as it is fundamental to cultivating customer loyalty. Trust not only underpins loyalty but also plays a crucial role in reducing perceived risk (Hansen et al., 2018). A business must continually evolve to maintain the trust customers have placed in its products and services; without this trust, customer loyalty is at risk of being lost.

The critical role of trust in customer relationships has been underscored by recent literature. A meta-analysis cited in Zhang, & Roberts (2024), reveals that integrity-based antecedents are more effective in driving trust compared to reliability-based ones. Positive behavioral intentions, including repurchase intentions and word-of-mouth recommendations, are predicted by trust and satisfaction, as noted by Kumar & Patel (2023). Businesses that successfully establish and preserve trust are better positioned to encourage long-term consumer loyalty and lower perceived risks associated with their products and services.

In the study of consumer and interpersonal relationships, trust is a factor that commands significant attention Barnes (2003). Trust is most significantly influenced by the perceived quality of service (Lupiyoadi, 2006). It has been demonstrated by another study that both trust and loyalty among consumers are profoundly impacted by customer satisfaction (Cuong & Khoi, 2019). Trust significantly enhances attitudinal outcomes such as loyalty and customer satisfaction (Liang, 2022). In the context of service quality, perceived quality remains a critical determinant of trust. Increased customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth are results of high service quality, as shown by studies (Leninkumar, 2017). Strong customer relationships and long-term business success are ensured by the crucial interaction between trust and satisfaction (Yong, 2021).
Trust is a critical component of customer relationships and a precursor to loyalty, influenced by factors such as service quality and customer satisfaction. Building and maintaining trust requires ongoing effort and a focus

on meeting customer expectations.

3. Research Methodology

The study employs a correlational analysis to examine the relationships between service quality, perceived value, product quality, and trust, perceived value, trust, and customer satisfaction. A quantitative research method was employed by the study, involving the collection and analysis of numerical data to understand patterns, relationships, or trends within a population. Primary data was gathered directly from the source, ensuring the information was specific to the research objectives. The study collected data through surveys and questionnaires. The study surveyed 220 customers from three major convenience store chains in Bentong City: 7-Eleven, KK Super Mart, and 99 Speed Mart. With a total population of 52,489 in Bentong City, the sample size of 220 respondents was selected to provide a representative cross-section of the population. The study used non-probability convenience sampling, selecting respondents based on their availability and willingness to participate rather than through random selection. This method is often used for its practicality and ease of access to participants. The study collected data through online questionnaires distributed to customers of convenience stores in Bentong City. This approach allowed for efficient data collection, effectively reaching a broad audience in a timely and convenient manner.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25, recognized for its comprehensive capabilities in tabulating academic research, particularly in quantitative studies, is utilized in the analysis (Rowley, 2014). The study employs multiple regression analysis to test the hypotheses, evaluating how well a set of variables predicts a specific outcome, identifying the most significant predictor, and assessing whether a particular predictor variable maintains its predictive power when accounting for the effects of other variables.

4. Results

The demographic table provides a comprehensive overview of the respondents' characteristics, including gender, age, occupation and education level. This table details the distribution of respondents across various demographic categories, offering insights into the composition of the sample population.

Table 1: Demographic profile

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Males	70	31.8
Females	150	68.2
18-23 years old	48	21.8
24-29 years old	115	52.3
30-34 years old	13	5.9
35-39 years old	9	4.1
40-44 years old	10	4.5
45-49 years old	7	3.2
50-54 years old	7	3.2
55 years & above	11	5.0
Single	150	68.2
Married	70	31.8
7-Eleven	67	30.5
KK Super Mart	7	3.2
99 Speed Mart	126	57.3
Other	20	9.1

Table 1 presents a demographic profile of the study population, categorized by gender, age, marital status, and preferred convenience store. Gender Distribution, the data reveals a predominantly female population, with females accounting for 68.2% of the sample compared to 31.8% males. For age distribution, the majority of respondents fall within the 24-29 age group, constituting 52.3% of the sample. This demographic is followed

by the 18-23 age group at 21.8%. The data indicates a relatively young population, which could be relevant for targeting products or services accordingly. Marital Status, the table shows a higher proportion of single individuals (68.2%) compared to married individuals (31.8%). This information can be useful for tailoring marketing campaigns or product offerings to specific lifestyle segments. As for convenience store preference, 99 Speed Mart emerges as the most preferred convenience store, with 57.3% of respondents indicating it as their choice. 7-Eleven follows closely with 30.5%, while other options like KK Super Mart and "Other" hold relatively smaller market shares. This analysis provides insights into consumer preferences in the convenience store sector. Overall, the data presents a demographic profile skewed towards young, single females. The preference for 99 Speed Mart is a notable finding. Further analysis, potentially incorporating geographic or socioeconomic factors, could provide additional valuable insights.

Table 2: Analysis of the Correlation Matrix

	Product Quality	Service quality	Perceived value	Trust
Customer satisfaction	0.676**	0.750**	0.806**	0.829**

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Product Quality and Customer Satisfaction (r = 0.676)**: A strong positive relationship is indicated by the correlation of 0.676 between Product Quality and Customer Satisfaction, suggesting that as product quality improves, customer satisfaction tends to increase significantly. The high correlation indicates that customers value the quality of the products they purchase, and their satisfaction is closely tied to their perception of this quality. Companies that prioritize product quality are likely to see a direct impact on customer satisfaction, making this a key area for businesses to focus on.

*Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction (r = 0.750)**:* Service Quality has an even stronger correlation with Customer Satisfaction, at 0.750. This shows that the quality of service provided is a crucial determinant of how satisfied customers are. Customer satisfaction with their overall experience is more likely when high-quality service is received, even if other factors such as product quality are not as strong. This highlights the importance of investing in customer service training, support infrastructure, and service delivery processes to ensure that customers have positive interactions with the company.

*Perceived Value and Customer Satisfaction (r = 0.806)**:* The highest correlation with Customer Satisfaction is shown by Perceived Value, at 0.806, suggesting that the perception of value received from a product or service is the most influential factor in determining customer satisfaction. Perceived value encompasses the balance between what the customer receives (in terms of quality, benefits, and satisfaction) and what they give up (in terms of price, effort, and time). A high perceived value indicates that customers feel they are getting a good deal, which strongly correlates with their overall satisfaction. Higher levels of customer satisfaction are likely to be seen by companies that can enhance perceived value, whether through competitive pricing, superior quality, or added benefits.

*Trust and Customer Satisfaction (r = 0.829)**:* The strongest correlation with Customer Satisfaction, at 0.829, is shown by trust, indicating that trust is a critical factor in ensuring customer satisfaction. Trust involves the customer's confidence in the company's products, services, and overall brand. High levels of trust mean that customers believe the company will deliver on its promises, which leads to higher satisfaction. Building and maintaining trust requires consistency, transparency, and reliability. Companies that focus on creating trustworthy relationships with their customers are likely to see the highest levels of satisfaction.

The analysis of the correlations shows that Customer Satisfaction is most strongly influenced by Trust, followed by Perceived Value, Service Quality, and Product Quality. Trust and Perceived Value stand out as the most critical factors, suggesting that customers place a high premium on their confidence in the company and the perceived benefits they receive. Service Quality and Product Quality are also important, but they play a slightly less significant role compared to Trust and Perceived Value.

To enhance customer satisfaction, building and maintaining trust with customers should be prioritized by companies. Companies can achieve this through consistent and transparent communication, delivering on

promises, and providing reliable products and services. Additionally, companies should focus on enhancing perceived value by offering high-quality products and services at competitive prices or by providing additional benefits that customers perceive as valuable. Investing in service quality is also essential, as positive service experiences are closely tied to customer satisfaction. Higher levels of customer satisfaction and long-term customer loyalty can be fostered by focusing on these areas.

Discussion
Trust was identified as the primary determinant of customer satisfaction among the four variables examined, based on the quantitative analysis of this study. A significant positive relationship between customer satisfaction and trust was established by Leninkumar (2017), positing customer satisfaction as a precursor to trust, which aligns with this finding. A positive correlation with customer satisfaction was demonstrated by service quality and perceived value, collectively contributing significantly to overall customer satisfaction levels.

The critical role of customer satisfaction in business success is underscored by previous research. Increased purchasing behavior (Davras & Caber, 2019; Gerdt et al., 2019), repeat business (Razak & Shamsudin, 2019), and loyalty rooted in trust (Hasim, Shamsudin, Ali, & Shabi, 2018) are exhibited by satisfied customers. Moreover, they demonstrate a willingness to pay a premium (Mohd Farid Shamsudin, Ali, Wahid, & Saidun, 2019), ultimately driving sales and profitability (Razak & Shamsudin, 2019). These findings collectively emphasize the paramount importance of customer satisfaction in the business context. Several factors influencing customer satisfaction in convenience stores were identified by this study, but product quality did not exhibit a significant relationship with customer satisfaction, suggesting it is a potential area for improvement.

According to the study, customer satisfaction in convenience stores is primarily driven by trust. While service quality and perceived value also positively influence satisfaction, product quality, surprisingly, does not. Satisfied customers are more likely to make repeat purchases, remain loyal, and spend more, underscoring the significance of customer satisfaction for business success. The study suggests that enhancing product quality could be a potential opportunity to further increase customer satisfaction in convenience stores.

Future Research
To expand upon the current findings, future research could incorporate additional variables to provide novel insights. A broader exploration of diverse variables would enhance our comprehension of consumer behavior's impact on convenience store satisfaction. This approach would offer a more comprehensive perspective on how various factors interact within the broader business landscape in Malaysia. Given the limitations of a single location, Bentong, future studies should consider a larger geographical scope, such as the state or national level, to increase sample size and improve research quality. Expanding the study to include additional convenience store brands, as suggested by Tran & Le (2020), would further enhance reliability. To optimize survey response rates and data quality, researchers could refine question wording to better capture respondent attention and understanding. Leveraging the advantages of online research, as highlighted by Wright (2005), including cost-effectiveness, time efficiency, and wide reach, can be advantageous.

Future research should explore why product quality did not significantly impact customer satisfaction and investigate how trust mediates the relationship between service quality, perceived value, and satisfaction. Conducting longitudinal studies will help examine changes in customer satisfaction over time. Additionally, expanding research to various retail environments beyond convenience stores can provide comparative insights. Analyzing customer satisfaction across different demographic groups will enable the development of targeted strategies while examining the influence of online interactions on trust, satisfaction, and loyalty is essential. Lastly, considering external factors, such as economic conditions or cultural influences, will enhance understanding of their effects on trust and customer satisfaction

5. Managerial Implications and Recommendations

The correlation analysis underscores the intricate relationship between perceived value, service quality, trust, and customer satisfaction. These factors collectively influence customer loyalty and overall business

performance. To optimize customer satisfaction, organizations must prioritize delivering exceptional service experiences, building strong customer relationships based on trust, and consistently exceeding customer expectations. A customer-centric approach is essential. By investing in employee training, leveraging technology for efficiency, and actively seeking customer feedback, businesses can enhance service delivery and foster customer loyalty. It's crucial to recognize the interconnectedness of these factors. Improvements in one area can positively impact others, creating a virtuous cycle of customer satisfaction and business growth.

Conclusion

The analysis highlights the crucial role of service quality, perceived value, trust, and customer satisfaction in driving business success. These factors are intricately linked, and improvements in one area can positively impact others. Organizations that prioritize customer experience, foster trust, and continuously measure performance are more likely to achieve sustained growth and customer loyalty. A competitive advantage in today's customer-centric marketplace can be created by adopting a holistic approach that considers the interconnectedness of these elements.

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