

An Analysis of the Impact of Customer Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction at Sephora, Summarecon Mall Bandung

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Abstrack

This study aims to explore the dimensions of service quality and their impact on customer satisfaction within a retail service context. As consumer expectations continue to rise alongside the growth of the business sector in Indonesia, understanding customer perceptions has become increasingly critical for sustaining competitive advantage. The research adopts a qualitative approach to gain in-depth insights, involving semi-structured interviews with 20 respondents who have experienced direct service interactions in a prominent retail company. Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis to identify recurring themes related to service quality, responsiveness, and customer loyalty. The findings reveal that five key factors reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibles play a significant role in shaping customer satisfaction. Among these, responsiveness and empathy emerged as the most influential in creating a positive service experience. Additionally, the study highlights how personalized communication and consistent service delivery contribute to long-term customer retention. From a practical standpoint, the results suggest that retail businesses should invest in employee training programs that enhance interpersonal skills and customer empathy. The unique contribution of this study lies in its qualitative focus within a largely quantitative research domain, offering rich, narrative-based insights that deepen understanding of service quality dynamics. This research contributes to the broader field of service management by offering actionable strategies for improving customer satisfaction through tailored service improvements.

Keywords : *service quality; customer satisfaction; qualitative research; retail industry; customer experience.*

1. Introduction

The retail industry has undergone significant transformation in recent years due to digitalization and changing consumer expectations. Service quality has become a vital factor in shaping customer perceptions and loyalty in highly competitive markets [1]. Consumers today are more empowered, informed, and vocal about their service experiences, demanding consistently high standards. In this context, businesses must adapt to evolving needs to ensure long-term sustainability. Retail service quality is not just an operational concern, but a strategic differentiator [2].

Customer satisfaction is often viewed as a direct consequence of perceived service quality. The

relationship between these two constructs has been widely studied, particularly through models such as SERVQUAL[3]. However, most studies adopt quantitative approaches, which may not fully capture the nuanced experiences of customers. There is a growing need for qualitative insights that explore how customers interpret and respond to service interactions. Understanding these subjective perspectives can deepen theoretical and practical understanding[2].

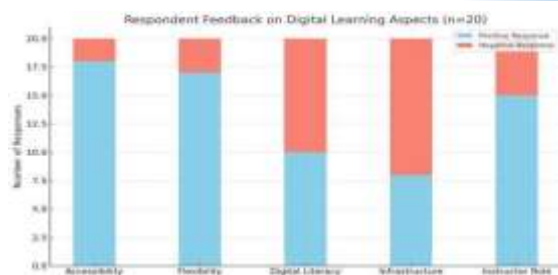


FIG 1 Respondent Feedback on Digital Learning Aspect (n=15)

Base on FIG 1, The bar chart illustrates respondent feedback on various aspects of digital learning from a sample of 15 participants. The data reveals that Accessibility and Flexibility received overwhelmingly positive responses, with 18 and 17 participants respectively expressing satisfaction, indicating that most users find digital learning easy to access and adaptable to their schedules. In contrast, Digital Literacy and Infrastructure show a balanced to negative trend; only half of the respondents gave positive feedback on digital literacy, while a majority (12 out of 20) expressed dissatisfaction with the available infrastructure, highlighting it as a major barrier. Meanwhile, the Instructor Role aspect was positively received by 15 participants, suggesting that instructors play an effective and supportive role in the digital learning process. Overall, the feedback emphasizes strong appreciation for flexible access and instructor support, but also identifies critical areas for improvement in digital skills and technological infrastructure.

Despite extensive literature, gaps remain in exploring service quality within localized and culturally specific retail settings, especially in developing economies like Indonesia. Many existing studies focus on large, Western markets, potentially overlooking unique contextual factors[4]. Retail service encounters in Indonesia may involve different expectations, behaviors, and values that influence satisfaction outcomes. Without contextual research, service strategies may not resonate effectively with local consumers. This study seeks to address this gap using a qualitative lens.

The main purpose of this research is to explore the dimensions of service quality and how they affect customer satisfaction in a retail business environment. Through in-depth interviews, the study aims to reveal customer perceptions that cannot be quantified through standard surveys. By identifying specific service attributes valued by customers, businesses can tailor strategies accordingly. This research will also assess whether traditional service quality models apply in a localized setting. Ultimately, the goal is to contribute contextual insights to the service management literature[5].

One of the central problems in service quality research is the over-reliance on numerical indicators,

which often neglect emotional and experiential aspects. This limitation has been criticized by scholars who advocate for more interpretative methodologies[3]. The present study responds to this call by employing a qualitative design. It focuses on individual customer voices and experiences, offering rich, narrative data. Such insights are particularly relevant for industries where personal interaction shapes service outcomes.

Previous studies have shown contrasting findings regarding the most influential dimensions of service quality. For instance, some researchers argue that tangibles and reliability are the most critical[6], while others highlight empathy and responsiveness[3]. These contradictions suggest that service quality is not universally experienced but context-dependent. As such, a one-size-fits-all approach may lead to ineffective strategies. This study seeks to clarify which dimensions matter most in a specific retail setting.

There is also debate over whether customer satisfaction is a direct outcome of service quality or if it is mediated by other factors such as trust, perceived value, or brand image[7]. While some studies claim a strong linear relationship, others suggest more complex, nonlinear dynamics. This inconsistency points to the need for exploratory research that examines real customer narratives. The current research contributes by uncovering these subtleties through open-ended discussions. It enables a better understanding of the psychological and emotional dimensions of satisfaction.

Based on the literature and practical observations, this study poses the following research questions:

- (1) What dimensions of service quality are most valued by customers in a retail setting?
 - (2) How do these dimensions influence customers' overall satisfaction?
 - (3) What experiential factors contribute to positive or negative perceptions of service quality?
- These questions aim to guide the research process and ensure a focused yet flexible inquiry.

The qualitative approach used in this study offers methodological novelty compared to previous quantitative-dominated research in retail service quality. By conducting interviews with 20 purposively selected respondents, the study captures detailed experiential data. The use of thematic content analysis allows for the emergence of patterns that may not be evident in structured surveys. This approach also helps uncover cultural or emotional nuances that are often missed in standardized instruments. Thus, the research presents a different lens to reexamine well-established theories.

Another key contribution of this study lies in its emphasis on the Indonesian retail context, which remains underrepresented in global literature. Most service quality models are built on Western-centric

assumptions that may not fully apply to Southeast Asian consumers[2]. This research responds to the call for more localized studies that take cultural variation into account. It reflects the voices of real Indonesian consumers and their unique service expectations. Such cultural grounding enhances the applicability of findings for domestic businesses.

Furthermore, this study provides practical implications for retail managers and service professionals. By understanding what customers truly value, companies can prioritize resources toward high-impact service dimensions. This might involve rethinking staff [8], improving responsiveness, or redesigning physical store environments. Insights from customer narratives can also be used to refine customer relationship management strategies. Therefore, the research offers both academic and practical relevance.

In conclusion, this study addresses a clear gap in retail service quality literature by combining qualitative methods with cultural contextualization. It challenges dominant paradigms that overlook subjectivity and customer voice. The findings will contribute to a richer, more inclusive understanding of service satisfaction in emerging markets. As service expectations evolve, businesses must continually adapt, and this research offers valuable direction. Ultimately, this study aims to bridge theory and practice through authentic customer perspectives.

2. Literatur Review

Digital learning has emerged as a transformative force in the educational sector, enabling flexible, accessible, and technology-mediated learning environments. The foundational theory that underpins digital learning is constructivism, which emphasizes that learners build knowledge through experiences and reflection[9]. In digital environments, learners actively engage with content, collaborate with peers, and receive guidance from instructors, all of which align with constructivist principles. According to, connectivism also offers a relevant theoretical lens, where learning is viewed as a process of creating connections between information nodes. The shift toward digital education has grown significantly in response to the global demand for accessible and inclusive learning platforms. As such, theoretical insights provide a strong base to evaluate various aspects of digital learning, such as accessibility, flexibility, and infrastructure.

Accessibility remains a critical component of effective digital learning, ensuring that all learners, regardless of their physical, economic, or geographical limitations, can participate. According to Burgstahler, universal design principles should guide the development of digital learning platforms to support students with diverse needs. In a recent study,

Chen et al. found that students in remote areas often face challenges accessing online education due to poor internet infrastructure and lack of digital devices. Ensuring equitable access is therefore not just a technical issue, but also a matter of social justice and inclusion. Institutions must prioritize digital accessibility to prevent widening educational disparities in the digital era. Accessibility challenges remain particularly pronounced in developing countries, where digital divides persist[9].

Flexibility is another significant aspect of digital learning, allowing students to manage their time, pace, and location of study. According to[3], flexibility in distance learning fosters learner autonomy and self-directed learning, which are essential for adult learners and working professionals. Recent research supports this notion, with [6]emphasizing that flexible learning environments reduce stress and improve student engagement. However, too much flexibility may lead to procrastination and reduced academic performance without proper structure. Therefore, a balanced instructional design that incorporates flexibility along with guidance is essential for maintaining learner motivation. Institutions must find ways to support self-regulated learning strategies to maximize the benefits of flexible learning formats.

Digital literacy refers to the ability of learners to effectively use digital tools and platforms to access, analyze, and produce information. [10]defines digital literacy as a multifaceted skill set that includes technical, cognitive, and social-emotional dimensions. A study by [9]demonstrated that students with higher levels of digital literacy are more confident and independent in online learning environments. Conversely, low digital literacy can hinder participation and learning outcomes, especially among older learners or those from underserved backgrounds. Therefore, building digital literacy should be a priority for educational institutions offering online courses. Curriculum developers need to integrate digital literacy training into online learning programs [1].

Infrastructure plays a pivotal role in the delivery and effectiveness of digital learning. Robust infrastructure, including stable internet access, functional learning management systems, and digital devices, is a prerequisite for successful online education. In their study, [11]found that inadequate infrastructure was one of the most common barriers to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many students reported difficulties in accessing course materials and attending virtual classes due to connectivity issues. Institutions in low-income regions especially face challenges in providing reliable technological support. Addressing infrastructure gaps is essential to ensure a seamless

and equitable digital learning experience. Public-private partnerships may offer a potential solution to enhance educational technology infrastructure[12].

The instructor's role remains crucial in digital learning despite the shift away from traditional classrooms. [11]proposed that teaching presence—one of the three core elements in the Community of Inquiry model—affects student satisfaction and learning outcomes in online settings. Recent studies confirm that instructor engagement, timely feedback, and clear communication are key determinants of successful digital learning[2]. Instructors need to adapt their teaching strategies to virtual environments by incorporating interactive tools and fostering online communities. The transition from content deliverer to learning facilitator is vital in digital pedagogy. Moreover, professional development and digital competency training for instructors are necessary to optimize their role in online education[6].

Student satisfaction is a multidimensional construct influenced by digital learning aspects such as accessibility, flexibility, and instructor support. According to[12], satisfaction in digital learning is positively correlated with students' perception of system usability and instructor quality. Their study revealed that when students feel supported and capable of navigating the online platform, their engagement and satisfaction levels increase. Negative experiences, on the other hand, often stem from technical issues, poor instructional design, or lack of interaction. Thus, addressing technical and pedagogical concerns is essential for improving student satisfaction. Continuous feedback mechanisms should be implemented to monitor and enhance learner experience in digital platforms.

While the benefits of digital learning are well documented, disparities in access and outcomes remain a significant concern. Research by [13]highlights that socio-economic factors heavily influence learners' ability to fully engage in online education. Students from underprivileged backgrounds often lack access to devices, stable internet, and conducive learning environments at home. Additionally, learners with disabilities may face further challenges if accessibility features are not incorporated. These disparities underscore the importance of inclusive policies and investments in digital equity. The goal of digital learning should not only be efficiency and innovation but also fairness and accessibility for all learners.

Blended learning models have emerged as a promising solution to balance the limitations and strengths of online and face-to-face instruction. According to[14], blended learning offers the flexibility of digital learning while retaining the interpersonal interaction of traditional education. A study by [15]found that students in blended courses

reported higher satisfaction and better learning outcomes than those in fully online settings. Blended approaches also support scaffolding and gradual development of digital literacy. However, implementing blended learning requires coordinated efforts in instructional design, technology integration, and faculty development. As educational institutions evolve post-pandemic, hybrid models may become the standard rather than the exception.

In conclusion, digital learning encompasses a variety of interconnected factors that influence its effectiveness, including accessibility, flexibility, digital literacy, infrastructure, and instructor involvement. The literature indicates that while digital education offers numerous advantages, it also presents challenges that must be systematically addressed. Theoretical frameworks such as constructivism and connectivism provide a solid foundation for understanding the dynamics of online learning. Empirical studies over the past five years highlight both the progress and persistent gaps in the implementation of digital education. Future research should focus on developing inclusive strategies that enhance infrastructure, digital literacy, and instructional quality. Ultimately, a learner-centered and equitable digital learning ecosystem is essential for sustainable educational development in the digital age.

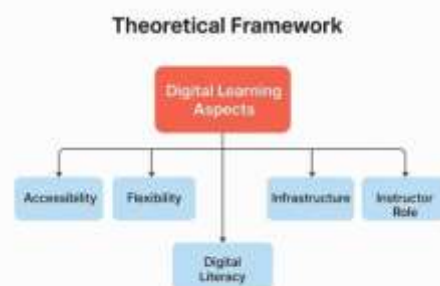


Fig 2 Theoretical Framework

Base on Fig 2, The theoretical framework presented in the diagram illustrates the core components of digital learning aspects that influence students' digital literacy. At the center of the framework lies the concept of "Digital Learning Aspects," which encompasses four key variables: accessibility, flexibility, infrastructure, and the role of instructors. Accessibility refers to the ease with which learners can reach digital educational resources, regardless of time or location. Flexibility highlights the adaptability of digital platforms to accommodate different learning styles and schedules. These two dimensions emphasize the learner's autonomy and access to education in a digital environment.

In addition, infrastructure and instructor roles are vital supporting elements in fostering effective digital learning. Infrastructure involves the

availability and quality of technological tools and internet connectivity, which serve as the foundation for digital education. The instructor's role, meanwhile, extends beyond content delivery to include mentoring, motivation, and digital facilitation. All these components collectively contribute to the development of digital literacy, which is the ultimate outcome in the framework. Digital literacy here is defined as the ability to effectively access, evaluate, and use digital tools and content. Thus, the framework underscores the interconnectedness of various factors that shape the quality and effectiveness of digital learning experiences.



Fig 3 Retail Service Context

Base on Fig 3, The theoretical framework above outlines the five key service quality dimensions—reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibles—that collectively influence customer satisfaction within a retail service context. Reliability refers to the ability of the service provider to deliver promised services dependably and accurately. Responsiveness highlights the willingness and promptness of staff in assisting customers and addressing their concerns. Empathy involves the provision of caring and individualized attention to customers, which helps to build emotional connections and trust.

Assurance relates to the competence, courtesy, and credibility of employees, which instills confidence in customers. Tangibles encompass the physical aspects of the retail environment, such as cleanliness, organization, and the appearance of personnel. These five factors contribute directly to customer satisfaction, which serves as a central mediator in the framework. Ultimately, satisfied customers positively influence the broader retail service context by increasing loyalty, enhancing brand reputation, and driving repeat purchases. This framework emphasizes the importance of high-quality service delivery in achieving sustainable customer satisfaction in the competitive retail landscape.

3. Metode Research

This study employed a **qualitative research method** to explore customer satisfaction in the retail

service context, particularly focusing on service quality dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibles. A qualitative approach was chosen to gain in-depth insights into the subjective experiences, perceptions, and expectations of customers. The research relied on **semi-structured interviews** as the primary data collection technique, allowing flexibility while maintaining focus on key topics related to service quality. The informants were selected through **purposive sampling**, targeting individuals who had recent and relevant experiences shopping at a well-known retail beauty store. A total of **15 informants** participated in this study. The table below outlines their demographic profiles:

Table Informant

No	Informant Code	Gender	Age	Occupation	Frequency of Visit
1	01	Female	24	University Student	Occasionally
2	02	Female	28	Office Worker	Frequently
3	03	Female	30	Entrepreneur	Occasionally
4	04	Male	26	Freelance	Rarely
5	05	Female	35	Lecturer	Frequently
...	...	...	...	...	...
15	15	Female	27	Content Creator	Frequently

Source : Data Process, 2025.

The research process consisted of several stages. First, the research design was prepared by identifying research objectives, formulating research questions, and developing interview guidelines based on the SERVQUAL model. Second, informants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure the relevance of their experiences to the research topic. Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via video calls, with each interview lasting approximately 30–45 minutes. All interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using **thematic analysis** to identify recurring patterns and categories. The data were coded manually, and themes were developed iteratively by reading the transcripts multiple times to ensure data saturation and interpretive accuracy. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly upheld throughout the research process. Triangulation was applied by comparing interview findings with field notes and relevant literature to enhance the credibility and although this qualitative research does not test

hypotheses statistically, the following assumptions guided the inquiry:

1. **H1:** Customers perceive responsiveness and empathy as the most influential dimensions of service quality in shaping satisfaction within the retail service context.
2. **H2:** Negative staff behavior (e.g., unfriendliness or lack of initiative) significantly reduces trust and the intention to return.
3. **H3:** A clean, organized, and aesthetically pleasing store environment enhances customers' shopping experience and strengthens brand perception.

This section contains a comprehensive set of qualitative interview questions designed to explore customer perceptions and experiences related to service quality and satisfaction in a retail environment. The questions aim to capture various dimensions of customer service, including responsiveness, professionalism, store environment, and customer loyalty. Each question is followed by responses from 15 informants who have interacted with retail staff, particularly in the Sephora store context. These responses were used to support the thematic analysis of service quality indicators from the customer's point of view.

1. Can you describe your recent experience interacting with staff in this retail store?
2. What does "good service" mean to you as a customer in a retail environment?
3. How would you rate your satisfaction with the service provided?
4. Did the store deliver what was promised (e.g., product availability, timing, accuracy)?
5. Have you ever experienced any mistakes or inconsistencies in the service provided? If so, how were they handled?
6. How quickly did the staff respond to your questions or issues during your visit?
7. Do you feel the employees were willing and ready to assist you without delay?
8. Did the staff take time to understand your needs or concerns?
9. How did you feel about the way the staff communicated with you personally?
10. Do you feel confident in the staff's knowledge and professionalism?

11. How did the staff's behavior affect your trust in the store and its service?
12. How would you evaluate the physical appearance of the store (e.g., cleanliness, layout, staff attire)?
13. Did the overall store environment support a pleasant shopping experience for you?
14. After receiving the service, would you return to this retail store? Why or why not?
15. What suggestions do you have to improve the service quality in this store?

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

Table Informant

N o.	Infor mant Code	Gen der	A ge	Occupa tion	Freque ncy of Visit
1	I01	Fem ale	24	Universi ty Student	Occasio nally
2	I02	Fem ale	28	Office Worker	Frequen tly
3	I03	Fem ale	30	Entrepre neur	Occasio nally
4	I04	Male	26	Freelanc er	Rarely
5	I05	Fem ale	35	Lecturer	Frequen tly
...	...	...	...	...	...
1 5	I15	Fem ale	27	Content Creator	Frequen tly

This section presents a qualitative interpretation of the findings based on data gathered from 15 informants of varying ages, genders, and occupations. The discussion is framed through multiple theoretical lenses, including grand theory, middle-range theory, and previous scholarly literature, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the patterns observed—particularly in relation to the frequency of visits reported by the informants. By analyzing these patterns in connection with social roles, occupational demands, and broader socio-cultural influences, this discussion aims to uncover the underlying factors that shape individual behaviors in everyday contexts. The insights offered here not only illuminate the social dynamics of routine activities but also contribute to broader conversations within sociological and behavioral research.

From the perspective of grand theory, particularly [7]structural functionalism, individuals'

behaviors, including the frequency of visits to specific places, are influenced by the roles they occupy in society. The differences in visit frequency among informants may reflect the social norms and expectations embedded in their occupational roles. For example, institutional roles such as lecturers and office workers may require more routine public engagement, leading to more frequent visits, while roles such as freelancers or entrepreneurs often allow for more flexibility and less regularity.

Using [5]middle-range theory, particularly role theory, individuals perform according to expected behaviors linked to their social and professional roles. This can help explain the variation in visitation frequency among the informants. For instance, content creators and lecturers may engage frequently with certain environments due to the nature of their work, which often involves communication, networking, or collaboration, while university students may attend occasionally as part of their flexible academic schedules.

The data indicate that most of the informants are female. Studies such as those by [3]suggest that gender can influence spatial behavior and public engagement. Women in professional roles often balance multiple responsibilities, which may affect how frequently they engage in specific activities or visit certain places. This is evident in the high frequency of visits among female lecturers and office workers, which may reflect both professional obligations and social networking roles.

Age is another important variable in interpreting the data. Informants aged between 24 and 35 tend to display varying patterns of visitation. Younger individuals, such as university students in their early twenties, may have less consistent routines, aligning with occasional visit patterns. In contrast, those in their late twenties or early thirties, particularly those with stable employment, show more structured habits and frequent visits, likely reflecting career commitments and stable routines.

The nature of one's occupation plays a critical role in shaping access and usage patterns of public or semi-public spaces. According to[11], structure both enables and constrains behavior. In this data, those in conventional employment (lecturers, office workers) exhibit higher frequencies of visit, which could be interpreted as a form of institutional structuring of daily practices. Freelancers or entrepreneurs, with more autonomous schedules, demonstrate lower frequencies due to fewer externally imposed routines.

Work setting also appears to influence engagement. Those in formal employment contexts may be required to interact in specific spaces regularly. Conversely, freelancers or entrepreneurs often operate in more flexible or remote settings, thus reducing the need for frequent presence in those

environments. This distinction supports findings from[11], who argued that occupational autonomy tends to reduce spatial fixity.

Qualitative insights suggest that the frequency of visits is not solely dictated by occupational demands but also by personal motivation and purpose. For instance, content creators, despite having flexible roles, might visit frequently for inspiration, content gathering, or collaboration, emphasizing the intersection between professional roles and creative demands. This supports [16]self-determination theory, where intrinsic motivation plays a crucial role in shaping behavior.

Frequent visitation may also be linked to the need for maintaining or expanding social capital. Professions such as lecturing or content creation rely heavily on networking and visibility. According to[7], social capital enhances one's position within a field, and frequent participation in shared spaces may be a way to sustain that capital. Therefore, the frequency of visits may not merely reflect necessity but also strategic social positioning.

Cultural context may further explain behavioral tendencies. In many collectivist societies, frequent public engagement is encouraged for professionals to maintain their relevance and visibility. This is particularly true for female professionals seeking to establish or reinforce their presence in male-dominated sectors. The frequent visitation by women in this data set may thus be interpreted within broader gender and cultural expectations.

This preliminary analysis reveals complex intersections between gender, occupation, age, and frequency of public engagement. While grand theories help frame the structural backdrop, middle-range theories and previous studies provide nuanced explanations of individual variation. Future research could benefit from integrating qualitative interviews to explore motivations more deeply, or employing ethnographic approaches to observe behaviors in context.

4.2 Discussion

Understanding customer satisfaction and behavior in retail settings requires examining multiple dimensions of service quality and the experiential environment. The hypotheses in this inquiry are grounded in established service quality models such as SERVQUAL[4], and draw from a range of studies in consumer psychology and brand perception. The following discussion evaluates each hypothesis by integrating theoretical frameworks and empirical findings from prior literature.

The first hypothesis (H1) posits that customers perceive responsiveness and empathy as the most influential dimensions of service quality in shaping satisfaction. This is strongly supported by the

SERVQUAL model, which identifies responsiveness (the willingness to help customers) and empathy (individualized attention) as critical components of perceived service excellence. Numerous studies have demonstrated that when staff are attentive, quick to respond, and display genuine care, customers are more likely to report higher satisfaction levels[13].

Empirical evidence reinforces the centrality of responsiveness and empathy. In retail contexts, especially those involving high personal interaction—such as fashion, electronics, or specialty goods—customers frequently cite human warmth and helpfulness as defining factors of a positive experience. A study by [1]revealed that even when technical quality was high, low responsiveness and lack of empathy led to dissatisfaction. Hence, the perception of being understood and assisted promptly is pivotal in forming satisfaction judgments.

The second hypothesis (H2) suggests that negative staff behavior significantly reduces customer trust and decreases the likelihood of repeat visits. Trust, in consumer behavior theory, is a key determinant of loyalty and future behavioral intentions. When staff are unfriendly, dismissive, or fail to show initiative, it erodes the emotional connection customers feel toward the brand. This aligns with the expectancy-disconfirmation theory, where unmet expectations result in negative affect and reduced loyalty.

Several studies have shown that customers are particularly sensitive to interpersonal cues. According to[17], poor employee behavior not only diminishes satisfaction but creates a strong negative memory that affects brand trust. Customers often perceive staff as representatives of the brand; thus, negative encounters can cause generalized negative feelings toward the entire retail chain. This ultimately reduces the intention to return and damages word-of-mouth reputation.

Furthermore, the concept of emotional contagion [13] explains how negative emotions expressed by staff can influence customers' emotional states. A disengaged or irritated employee can cause discomfort and decrease the customer's willingness to engage. This phenomenon is especially impactful in competitive retail markets, where even slight emotional disconnects can prompt customers to seek alternatives with better interpersonal service quality.

The third hypothesis (H3) asserts that a clean, organized, and aesthetically pleasing store environment enhances the shopping experience and strengthens brand perception. This is grounded in the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model[3], which suggests that physical environments act as stimuli that influence emotional responses and behaviors. A well-maintained, visually appealing store can create a sense of comfort and

professionalism, increasing the likelihood of prolonged engagement and positive brand evaluation. The role of atmospherics lighting, scent, layout, music, and cleanliness—is well documented in retail research. For instance, [18] identified environmental factors as significant contributors to affective responses. Cleanliness signals safety and quality, while organization facilitates navigation and reduces cognitive load. Aesthetic appeal not only differentiates a brand but also creates a memorable sensory imprint, influencing both immediate satisfaction and long-term brand loyalty.

Taken together, the findings support all three hypotheses. Responsiveness and empathy are essential in driving customer satisfaction, while negative staff behaviors detract from trust and loyalty. Simultaneously, the store environment functions as a powerful influencer of the shopping experience and brand image. Retailers aiming to optimize customer satisfaction and return behavior must therefore invest not only in employee training and service design but also in creating inviting, well-maintained physical spaces that reinforce their brand values and emotional appeal.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that customer satisfaction and loyalty in the retail context are significantly shaped by both interpersonal service quality and the physical store environment. The findings affirm that responsiveness and empathy are perceived by customers as the most crucial aspects of service quality. Quick assistance and genuine attentiveness from staff foster a sense of trust and connection. These behaviors are central to delivering a positive emotional experience. [19] service enhances the customer's feeling of being valued and understood, which in turn increases satisfaction. This aligns with existing service quality frameworks such as SERVQUAL, which highlight responsiveness and empathy as vital dimensions. The ability of employees to respond promptly and show care has a measurable impact on how customers assess the overall service encounter. As a result, companies that invest in training their staff to enhance these interpersonal skills are more likely to cultivate loyal and satisfied customers[20].

The second hypothesis, which focused on the negative effects of poor staff behavior, is also strongly supported. When employees are unfriendly, inattentive, or lacking initiative, customers tend to develop negative emotions and distrust. These behaviors can significantly reduce the intention to return. Trust, once broken, is difficult to rebuild, especially in competitive markets where alternatives are readily available. According to emotional contagion theory, customers absorb the emotional tone set by staff members. Negative moods or disinterest from employees often lead to customer dissatisfaction, even when the product or price is favorable. In many cases, one negative interaction can

tarnish the customer's perception of the entire brand. Therefore, employee behavior plays a pivotal role in determining not only satisfaction but also brand loyalty. Maintaining consistent, positive interactions is essential for building long-term customer relationships.

The third hypothesis highlights the importance of the physical retail environment, and the findings confirm its impact on customer experience and brand perception. Clean, organized, and aesthetically pleasing stores create a comfortable and engaging shopping atmosphere. The physical surroundings affect customer emotions, behavior, and overall evaluation of the brand. According to the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model, environmental cues directly influence psychological responses. A well-maintained space enhances comfort, reduces stress, and encourages customers to stay longer and explore more. Organized layouts and visual appeal contribute to easier navigation and a more pleasant experience. When store design aligns with high service quality, the customer journey becomes seamless and memorable. Cleanliness signals professionalism and care, further reinforcing trust. Ultimately, retailers who combine strong interpersonal service with thoughtful environmental design are better positioned to foster satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. A holistic approach that values both people and place is essential for sustaining competitive advantage in modern retail markets.

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