

Service Quality and Customer Loyalty in Restaurants in the City of Tshwane

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Abstract

This study was undertaken to investigate the link concerning service quality constructs and customer loyalty in casual dining restaurants in the City of Tshwane, South Africa. A quantitative research method was applied using a SERVQUAL feedback form to gather primary data from the population. A non-probability convenience selection method was used to select the participants of the study. A total of 204 completed feedback forms were received and analysed using Stata, version 15, statistical analysis software. Partial least square structural equation modelling and descriptive statistics were also used to examine the data to allow the researcher to classify and describe the findings of the study. The results indicated that service quality constructs namely, understanding, responsiveness, safety and trustworthiness have a confident significant link with customer loyalty. Furthermore, the results from the study revealed a considerable breach between customers' expectations and actual service quality. The implication is thus that restaurant managers should take the necessary steps to improve the service quality at their establishments.

Keywords: Customer loyalty, expectations, restaurants, service quality, SERVQUAL

Introduction

Due to the high number of new entrants into the restaurant industry, this industry is faced with a complex, dynamic environment wherein fierce competition exists (Jogarathnam, 2017). According to Ramanathan, Di and Ramanathan (2016), hyper-competition in the restaurant industry has prompted an increase in the need for restaurant establishments to improve their quality of service as well as advance plans on how to entice new customers and to hold onto the already present loyal customers. Even though this reality of an ample supply of restaurant services puts pressure on restaurant managers to deliver the best possible service, it allows the customer to have a wider choice and variety of restaurant establishments to select from when planning to dine out (Sudhagar & Rajendran, 2017). The level of excellent quality demand by



the consumer is continuously growing (Chen, 2016). It is critical that restaurant managers adapt their service offering because once a need has been met, new needs will occur (Thienhirun & Chung, 2017). Hence, it crucial that customer needs and expectations are met or exceeded so that the customer can perceive satisfaction with the experienced service (Tangtatswas, Sornsaruht & Pimdee, 2019).

Looking for ways to enrich the quality of service has been a major focus in academic research and it has been identified as a key strategy towards the success of an establishment (Kuhn, Benetti, Anjos & Limberger, 2018). In previous research, it has been established that when a customer is satisfied with a restaurant's service, they will exhibit loyalty towards the establishment (Aldaihani & Ali, 2018). For that reason, to understand the elements which have an influence on the loyalty of the customer, restaurant managers need to identify service quality constructs which are linked to consumer loyalty (Keshavarz, Jamshidi & Bakhtazma, 2016). By understanding service quality, restaurants can improve the quality of their service, attracting new customers as well as maintaining their loyal customers and allowing higher profits margins (Mensah & Dei Mensah, 2018).

The restaurant sector contributes significantly to the economies of developed and developing countries. In South Africa, as a developing country, a vast amount of restaurant establishments have been opened as people have adopted the lifestyle of eating out as a means of enjoyment or due to their busy schedules (du Rand, & Fisher, 2020). As a result, the restaurant sector remains amongst the top employers in South Africa. According Stats-SA (2017), the sector contributed 2.9% towards the gross domestic product in 2016. This resulted in over 40 000 jobs created in the economy. The City of Tshwane, as South Africa's administrative capital, boasts a variety of restaurants. According to Dining-Out (2020), the capital city has some of the best restaurants in South Africa with more than 405 restaurants to select from, serving different cuisines. This study focused on ascertaining the perceptions of customers at casual dining restaurants. These types of restaurants provide medium to high quality food products with moderately priced menus and a waitron to serve the table (Dixon, Miscuraca & Koutroumanis, 2018).

Literature review

Service quality

Service quality is well defined by Zeithaml and Bitnel (1996), as “the delivery of excellent or superior service relative to customer expectations”. Providing quality service is one of the characteristics of an effective establishment, in addition, by delivering superior service quality, the customers' brand perceptions are positively influenced and this may result in repurchases or recommendations to others that have not yet experienced the product or service (Hapsari, Clemes & Dean, 2017). Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985), described service quality as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of ten dimensions constructs that they later refined into five namely, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangible.

To further understand superior quality, the researchers introduced a SERVQUAL gap model. Jones and Shandiz (2015), explained that the SERVQUAL model is effective in evaluating customer expectations against the actual experienced service quality. A negative breach indicates that the service received did not meet the customers' expectations, while a positive breach shows that customers observed service delivery is surpassing their expectations (Jones & Shaniz, 2015). Cronin and Taylor (1994), criticised the SERVQUAL model for its scarce theoretical support and for its weak empirical evidence. Furthermore, asking about customer expectations makes the questionnaire too long to complete (Khorshidi, Nikfalazar & Gunawan, 2016). Besides the criticism, Galeeva (2016), indicated that the SERVQUAL model



is the best service quality measure as it does not require any prerequisites for implementation such as external assessors for conducting assessments.

In addition to this model, their research led to the development of the Gap Model. The Gap Model was based on their assumption that the customers' level of happiness with the quality of service is "a function of the gap between a customer's expectations of a service and their perceptions of actual service delivered." The Gap Model is applied by asking a patron to rate the service quality aspects before and after experiencing a service at a restaurant. The variation between the expected and experienced service is then computed. The Gap Model encompasses five gaps namely:

- Gap 1: Customer expectation – management perception gap.
- Gap 2: Management perception – service quality specification gap.
- Gap 3: Service quality specification – service delivery gap.
- Gap 4: Service quality – external communications gap
- Gap 5: Expected service – experienced service gap.

Gronroos' (1984), service quality model is characterized in terms of three dimensions, namely, technical, functional and image. The researcher explained the technical quality as the by-product of the customers and service providers' relationship. The functional quality is the techniques used to convey technical quality. Image is made up of both technical and functional quality, which includes factors such as habits, values, word-of-mouth, pricing and community association. Jain and Aggarwal (2015), criticised the model by stating that it only sets out components of service quality without mentioning any techniques or tools to measure these components. Furthermore, the model does not consider direct impacts of functional quality and technical quality on customer satisfaction (Zaibaf, Teherrikia & Fakharian, 2013).

Customer loyalty

Customer loyalty has been well defined by Oliver (1999), by means of "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour". Apart from repetitively rebuying and reusing the service and products themselves, they can also contribute greatly to an establishment's success through positive word of mouth (Kandampully, Zhang & Bilgihan, 2015). Customer loyalty is realised and achieved when an establishment provides high service quality that meets and exceeds the customers' expectations repeatedly (Hashem, 2019).

For restaurants to increase and realise customer loyalty, it is necessary to invest and nurture a relationship with the existing customer (Ramaseshan, Rabbanee & Burford, 2018). Customer loyalty is regarded as an attitudinal as well as a behavioural measure. Ruiz (2019), noted that behavioural loyalty is a result of the customers' favourite product or service for a certain period as customers' preferences evolve over time. Attitudinal loyalty is the results reflecting the consumer's intention to re-purchase. Satisfied and loyal customers will spread positive word of mouth that will entice more consumers, therefore allowing the establishment to cut down on expensive marketing campaigns (Rambocas, Kirpalani, & Simms, 2018).

Different studies have investigated factors that have an influence on customer loyalty (Chen, Zeng, Cheung, Lee & Lee, 2014; Martinez, 2015). Palladan and Ahmad (2019), highlighted that the loyalty of a consumer is influenced by both internal and external factors. According to the researcher, one of the internal factors that has an impact on the loyalty of the consumer is service quality. External factors can refer to the customer's trust, commitment and



switching cost, among others. Bhuian, Al-Balushi and Butt (2018), utilised five factors namely; innovation, service quality, trust, satisfaction and switching cost to investigate the factors that influence customer loyalty. Lai (2015), proposed the assessment to be done by looking at the customer's perceived value, customer satisfaction as well as affective communication. The research reported in this article is therefore important as it identifies the factors that contribute to customer loyalty.

Research methodology

Research is a systematic investigation that is carried out to gain knowledge. Such knowledge is used to correct present mistakes, remove existing misconceptions and to add to the existing knowledge (Pandey & Pandey, 2015). Research can be approached in three different ways by applying any of the following methods namely, qualitative, quantitative and mixed (Creswell, 2014). A quantitative research technique was employed for the aim of this study. This approach involves measuring variables and testing associations amongst variables with the mandate of establishing a pattern and the connection of the association (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). This method was deemed appropriate due to the objective of the study being to understand the correlation between the superiority of service and customer loyalty.

A study design is a theoretical strategy or arrangement, which directs the study. It involves approaches, frameworks, instruments and procedures to be used for gathering and analysing data (Bukve, 2019). According to Sahu (2013), a research approach clarifies the different phases of a research study to reach its aims and objectives. Data for this study was collected with a questionnaire via a survey research design and was statistically analysed. The questionnaire collected data quantitative in nature that produces numerically descriptive data regarding specific aspects of the population being studied (Fowler, 2014; Pandey & Pandey, 2015). The use of the questionnaire was feasible for this research to evaluate responses of the participants regarding the excellence of service and their loyalty to casual dining restaurants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The researcher applied a descriptive research approach to assess the excellence of service and consumer loyalty since the aim of the researcher was to conduct careful observations and describe a state of a phenomenon of interest (Bhattacharjee, 2012).

A population is a group of well-defined objects, such as people, plants or animals from which information can be collected via observation or questioning (Sahu, 2013; Williman, 2013). The population in this study consisted of customers visiting casual dining restaurants in the Metropolitan of Tshwane, the capital city of South Africa, situated in the northern part of Gauteng province. It has a population of 2 921,488 and contributes 26.8% of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Gauteng (Stats-SA, 2017). According to Zomato (2020), the City of Tshwane has 699 casual dining restaurants from which to choose. The sample design can be either a non-probability or probability sample design. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed in this study, due to its unbiased estimates of the population and being more efficient in recruiting participants (Miller, Strang & Miller, 2010).

To determine a well-represented sample size for the population under study, the researcher used recommendations as determined by Gay, Mills and Airasian (2012). As the populace in the City of Tshwane is above the threshold set by Gay, Mills and Airasian (2012) of 5000, a sample size of 400 respondents was estimated to be acceptable for the purpose of this research. A total of 204 completed questionnaires were received from the 400 that were distributed. This led to a 51% reply rate. 196 questionnaires were not fully completed and were not returned.

A questionnaire is a primary data collection tool in survey research. An existing SERVQUALLOYAL questionnaire by Jasinskias, Streimikiene, Svagzdiene and Simanavicius (2016), was self-administered to collect data from the volunteering participants of the study.

The researcher adapted the SERVQUALLOYAL criteria on the questionnaire. The questionnaire was revised to suit the South African setting in consultation with the study supervisor and statistician. The questionnaire consisted of nine questions with the first five collecting the demographical information of the respondents.

Questions six and seven were posed to investigate the frequency the respondents visited casual restaurants and collected the name of the recent restaurant as reference for completing the questionnaire. The service quality constructs were evaluated by question eight and measured on a 10-point scale, where 10 indicated perfect and 1 indicated very bad. The 10-point measure was employed to assess the respondents' attitude towards service expected and received as indicated by Kumar (2011). The final question of the questionnaire was based on a five-point scale with five equal to completely in agreement and one equal to completely disagree regarding the loyalty of the respondents.

Data analysis was executed using Stata version 15 statistical analysis software. Partial least square structural equation model analysis was also employed in this study as it has been identified by Ali, Rosoolimanesh, Sarstedt, Ringle and Ryu (2018), as the best method to analyse and explain variables of dependent latent constructs in path models (Avkiran &Ringle, 2018).

Conceptual model and hypothesis

Based on the literature review a conceptual model has been developed in an effort to identify the association between service quality constructs and customer loyalty. The model, as illustrated in Figure 1 indicates nine service quality constructs used to assess their significance towards the loyalty of customers. Therefore, the proposed hypotheses are as follows:

- (H₁): There is a link between service quality constructs and customer loyalty.
- (H₀): There is no link between service quality constructs and customer loyalty.

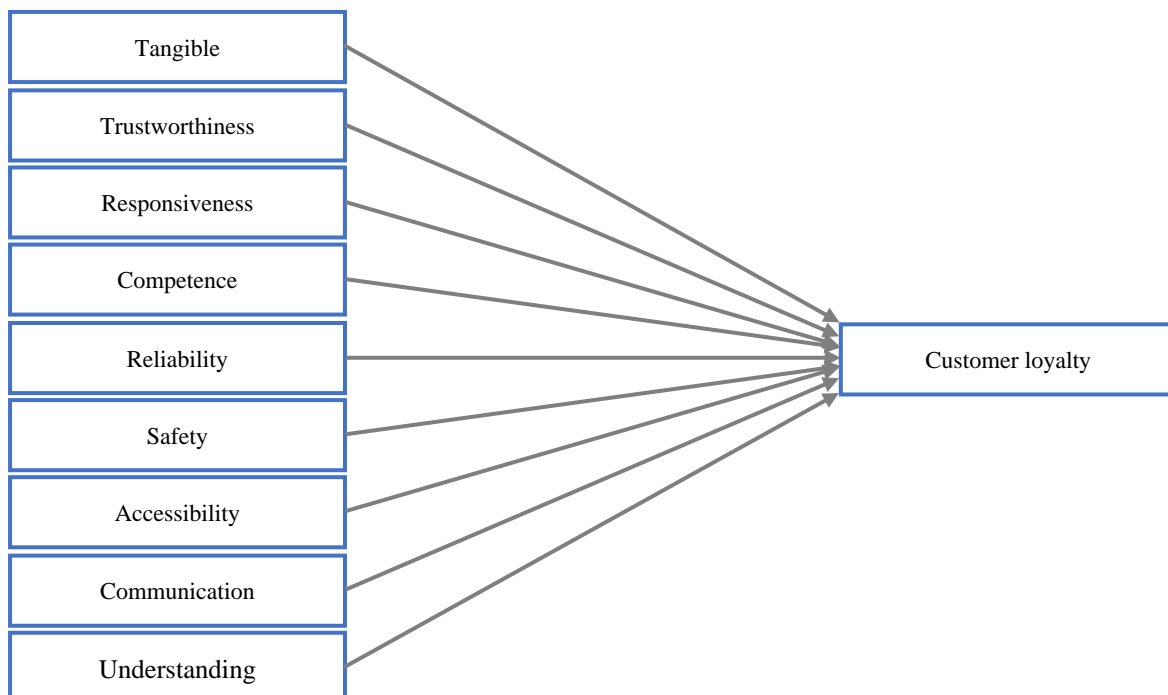


Figure 1: Service quality constructs
Source: Own compilation



Objectives

To accomplish the purpose and aim of this study the following objective were established;

- To determine the service quality expectations and experiences of customers at casual dining restaurants in the City of Tshwane.
- To discover the link between service quality and patron loyalty.
- To recognise service quality constructs that restaurant managers need to enhance in order to improve customer loyalty.

Results

Demographic profile of participants

Sinclair-Maragh (2017), emphasised the importance of assessing the demographic profile of participants when conducting research (Table 1). This provides an overview of the sample and helps to develop a better understanding of the population. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the demographic profile. From the total 204 participants of the study, the results revealed that more females at 53.43% took part in the study. The male participants accounted for 46.57%. In terms of age group, the majority of the participants were between the ages of 21 and 30 at 45.59% and having a marital status of being “Single” at 50.98%. A national diploma was indicated by most participants as their minimum level of education represented by 34.80%. In terms of their frequency of dining out at a restaurant, most of the participants indicated that they casually dine out two to four times a month at 48.04%.

Table 1: Demographic data

Variable	Categories	Percentage
Gender	Male	46.57
	Female	53.43
Age	18-20	9.80
	21-30	45.59
	31-39	28.92
	40-51	12.25
	51-70	3.43
Marital status	Single	50.98
	Married	30.39
	Living together	13.73
	Divorced	44.41
	Widow(er)	0.49
Level of education	Below matric	6.37
	Matric	28.92
	National diploma	34.80
	Bachelor/Honours	21.57
	Masters	5.49
	Doctorate	2.94
Dining out frequency	Less than 1 time	5.88
	1 time	24.02
	2-4 times	48.04
	5-7 times	15.20
	8-13 times	4.90
	More than 13 times	1.96

In order to summarise and give an overall reflection of the quality of service expectations and experience of the consumers for all of the service quality constructs utilised in these study, Table 2 is presented showing the construct expected, experienced mean values as well as the gaps in terms of average mean values. Based on the results recorded in Table 2, the constructs



mostly expected by the participants were reliability and understanding with $M = 9.14$ for each. On the other hand, the lowest expectations were related to tangibles with $M = 8.70$. The mean scores for the participants' experience also rated tangibles the lowest, with $M = 7.87$. The best-experienced construct was that of understanding with $M = 8.59$ followed by safety with $M = 8.53$. In line with the experiences of the participants, tangibles recorded the biggest mean gap at -0.83 followed by accessibility with a mean gap of -0.80 . The lowest mean gap recorded was for understanding at -0.55 as well as trustworthiness with the same score. The negative mean gap recorded for all the constructs suggested that the casual dining restaurants in the City of Tshwane were not meeting the expectations of the participants. The results are in agreement with a study by Jasinskas, Streimikiene, Svagzdiene and Simanavicius (2016), that revealed how customers expect higher service quality than they would experience.

Table 2: Construct mean gap scores analysis

Constructs	Expected		Experienced		Mean Gap
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Tangibles	8.70	2.187	7.87	2.620	-0.83
Trustworthiness	8.98	1.568	8.43	1.736	-0.55
Responsiveness	9.05	1.628	8.34	1.915	-0.71
Competence	9.12	1.398	8.48	1.696	-0.64
Reliability	9.14	1.540	8.48	1.917	-0.66
Safety	9.13	1.696	8.53	1.953	-0.60
Accessibility	9.03	1.692	8.23	2.117	-0.80
Communication	8.86	1.877	8.18	2.052	-0.68
Understanding	9.14	1.536	8.59	1.823	-0.55

Gap significance analysis

To compare the gap significance of customers' expected and experienced service quality, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test was conducted. This nonparametric test is used to match double sets of totals which are connected (Field, 2017). Table 3 shows the results of the test. The p-value is below 0.05 for all the statements confirming a significant gap between the customers' expected and experienced service quality.

Table 3: Gap significance

Construct	Rank mean		p-value
	Expected	Experienced	
Tangibles			
1	142,994382	141,3717949	0.0000
2	149,3597561	157,7678571	0.0000
3	157,6304348	163,2954545	0.0000
4	139,6146789	122,92	0.0000
Trustworthiness			
1	147,3764706	135,0512821	0.0000
2	152,3766234	147,8823529	0.0000
3	151,9615385	143,5	0.0000
4	141,4942529	139,8055556	0.0000
Responsiveness			
1	142,5	132,109375	0.0000
2	143,2058824	127,6875	0.0000
3	157,7578125	158,469697	0.0020
4	144,3793103	156,2580645	0.0000



Competence			
1	148,4833333	138,7903226	0.0000
2	150	140,483871	0.0000
3	148,4137931	138,2571429	0.0000
Reliability			
1	172,5568182	169,7115385	0.0276
2	149,155914	130,5322581	0.0000
3	151,3068182	134,6153846	0.0000
4	149,6573034	144,6851852	0.0000
Safety			
1	151,6375	155,1538462	0.0000
2	157,65	153,8166667	0.0001
3	159,8768116	154,7	0.0000
Accessibility			
1	158,6780822	143,9827586	0.0000
2	145,1822917	126,453125	0.0000
3	151,5512821	155,5833333	0.0000
Communication			
1	147,3888889	133,7777778	0.0000
2	141,3804348	143,5405405	0.0000
3	147,5297619	135,4404762	0.0001
4	151,2882	152,22	0.0000
Understanding			
1	145,2073171	147,6666667	0.0002
2	157,4662162	141,6911765	0.0000
3	154,2933333	151,2962963	0.0000

To evaluate the consistency of the measurement tool, Cronbach’s Alpha, Composite reliability and Convergent validity tests were conducted by using R-software via the Partial Least Square Path Model (PLSPM) package for flexible analysis (Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2017).

Table 4: Cronbach’s Alpha, Composite reliability and AVE

Constructs	Cronbach’s Alpha	Composite reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Tangibles	0,586368	0,762102	0,61265
Trustworthiness	0,768988	0,852362	0,588964
Responsiveness	0,78198	0,85948	0,599655
Competence	0,738844	0,851817	0,656784
Reliability	0,740272	0,837469	0,560273
Safety	0,633806	0,804424	0,579402
Accessibility	0,575684	0,7795	0,525408
Communication	0,809693	0,875623	0,636538
Understanding	0,744061	0,854469	0,661724
Loyalty	0,867756	0,919173	0,791263

The results for Cronbach’s Alpha for all the constructs excluding tangibles, safety and accessibility are above the acclaimed value of 0.70 (Table 4). As a result of limitations of Cronbach’s Alpha a different assessment of internal reliability may be conducted (Hair et al. 2017), therefore, these three constructs were evaluated via the composite reliability test, which resulted in values above 0.70 which shows an adequate construct reliability. The results of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for testing the convergent validity of the constructs indicate a value of 0.5 and higher as recommended by (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

It is shown in Table 4 that the construct generally describes beyond half of the variance of its pointers. Since the AVE results of all the constructs were above 0.5, the convergent validity is adequate, ranging from 0.52 to 0.79. Furthermore, to evaluate the validity of the measurement model, discriminant validity tests were conducted. Discriminant validity is performed to verify that the patent variable in any construct is applicable to the detailed latent



variable wherein its cross-loading value in latent variables is greater than that in any other constructs. Discriminant validity shows how different a given construct is from the other constructs (Hair et al. 2017).

Table 5: Fornell-Larcker criterion discriminant validity

	Tangibles	Trust	Responsiveness	Competence	Reliability	Safety	Accessibility	Communication	Understanding	Loyalty
Tangibles	0.7827									
Trust	0.537	0.7674								
Responsiveness	0.468	0.684	0.7744							
Competence	0.497	0.624	0.589	0.8104						
Reliability	0.463	0.595	0.569	0.563	0.7485					
Safety	0.314	0.426	0.43	0.432	0.434	0.7612				
Accessibility	0.367	0.46	0.434	0.399	0.448	0.376	0.7249			
Communication	0.41	0.594	0.654	0.558	0.545	0.448	0.602	0.7978		
Understanding	0.445	0.622	0.597	0.649	0.575	0.503	0.567	0.606	0.8135	
Loyalty	0.295	0.486	0.51	0.408	0.399	0.409	0.327	0.461	0.501	0.8895

Table 5 displays the outcomes of the discriminant validity test. The square root of the Average Extracted Variance is higher than its related constructs and every element loads highest on its associated construct. It confirms that the dormant variables share additional variances with their intended underlying construct that the construct shares with other latent variables, thus establishing an evident discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Structural model

A structural model was utilised to determine the model’s descriptive power to evaluate the developed theoretical model about the link among service quality constructs and further test the hypotheses for this study. Findings of the hypothesis and the structural model path analysis are illustrated in Table 6 and Figure 2.

Table 6: Hypothesis plus relationship significance assessment

Hypothesis	Beta-Value	Results
Tangibles → Customer loyalty	-0.0306	Not supported
Trustworthiness → Customer loyalty	0.144	Supported
Responsiveness → Customer loyalty	0.204	Supported
Competence → Customer loyalty	-0.0271	Not Supported
Reliability → Customer loyalty	0.00846	Not supported
Safety → Customer loyalty	0.145	Supported
Accessibility → Customer loyalty	-0.0393	Not supported
Communication → Customer loyalty	0.0991	Not supported
Understanding → Customer loyalty	0.206	Supported

The results shown on Table 4 indicate that service quality constructs; understanding ($\beta=0.206$), responsiveness ($\beta=0.204$), safety ($\beta=0.145$), and trustworthiness ($\beta=0.144$) respectively have significant links with customer loyalty. On the contrary, this study discovered

that tangibles, competence, reliability, accessibility and communication had a negative or no significant link with customer loyalty.

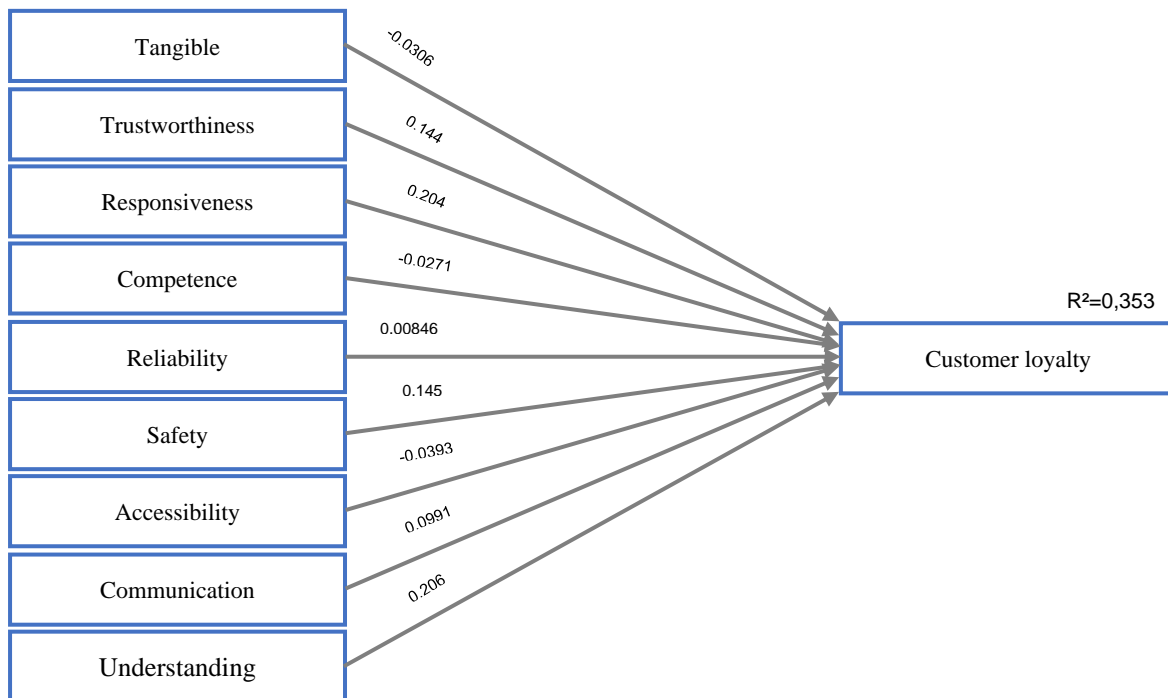


Figure 2: Path analysis model of Beta values and R² value

The outcomes of the path analysis model revealed that the model has a 35% of descriptive power for customer loyalty with $R^2 = 0.353$. R^2 points out the sum of variance in the endogenous latent variable described by its self-determining latent variables (Hair *et al.* 2017). Values of R^2 equal to 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 for the dependent variables are observed as substantial, moderate and weak, respectively. However, in studies related to customer behaviour, an R^2 value of 0.20 is recognised as a large percentage. In terms of the results, it can be determined that variable consumer loyalty was clarified by service quality constructs by 35%, while the other 65% of variable customer loyalty was clarified by extra variables not incorporated in this study.

Discussion and implications

The key objective of this study was to assess the link among service quality constructs and customer loyalty in casual dining restaurants in the City of Tshwane, South Africa. This study contributes significantly to the current writings on quality of service and the loyalty of customers. The results of the study show that customers' expectations of service quality were not met in restaurants. This was indicated by having a considerable gap for all constructs used in this study. Theron (2015), pointed out that a negative gap between customer expectations and experience indicates that the service quality is not up to standard. The tangible construct registered the largest gap with a mean value of -0.83. The statement under the construct with the biggest gap was the use of technology when ordering with $M = -1.94$. Managers and owners of casual dining restaurants should thus consider introducing electronic devices for the placement of orders which might reduce the waiting time for customers. Some of the restaurants also lacked physical appeal and owners should consider a facelift of their establishments. This study supports the notion that customers always have high expectations of service quality when visiting hospitality establishments such as restaurants (Jasinskas *et al.*



2016; Zhou, 2012). This implies that restaurant managers should regularly assess their level of service quality so that they align it with the expectation of the customer.

The outcomes of the structural model for hypothesis testing revealed that service quality constructs namely, understanding, responsiveness, safety and trustworthiness respectively have a confident, significant link with the loyalty of the customer. This provides restaurant managers with an understanding of which service quality constructs they should enhance and give focus to when they want to grow their customer loyalty in their restaurants. A study by Majid, Samsudin, Noorkhizan, Zaki and Bakar (2018), revealed that service quality is the greatest significant factor for consumers when visiting a restaurant. By not providing satisfactory quality service, the loyalty of the customer towards the establishment is unlikely to improve. The result further highlighted five factors that had no significant link to customer loyalty. These factors are; tangibles, competence, reliability, accessibility and communication. As a result, tangibles recorded the highest gap supporting the results of Jasinskas et al. (2016), who deemed it essential to enhance the attractiveness of the establishment and to monitor service employees' work uniform as customers evaluate these factors when assessing service quality.

Conclusion and recommendation

This study investigated the link among the service quality constructs and customer loyalty in casual dining restaurants in the City of Tshwane, South Africa. The results revealed that overall, patrons' expectations were not met by the restaurants. Customers have a higher expectation of service quality than they have experienced. This finding can be used by restaurant managers to improve their service quality in order to reduce the breach among the consumers' expectations and experiences. Four constructs were found to have a significant link to customer loyalty namely; responsiveness, trustworthiness, safety and level of understanding. Therefore, the following recommendations are made in terms of the structural equation model results.

Responsiveness - the willingness to assist and deliver speedy service to customers must be a priority to all service employees. Customers' needs should be attended to quickly and problems should be resolved as effectively as possible. This behaviour should be emphasised by managers as it might lead to increased customer loyalty. Managers should offer training to their employees on problem solving or complaint management. They should also establish responsive problem solving channels when service problems arise. Managers should also train employees to responsively communicate to the customer on when and how long it would take to have their problem resolved.

Trustworthiness - when the customers trust the service provider to consider and deliver on their needs, their loyalty towards such a service provider might increase. Managers should put in place methods to establish how trust can be developed and ensure that the staff uphold these methods. The employees should be competent to instil trust in the customers by providing quality service with integrity. Trustworthiness plays an important role in developing a long-term relationship with customers therefore, managers should also nurture the trustworthy relationship with the customer.

Safety - customers should be able to relax in a restaurant without being concerned about their personal safety or the safety of their possessions. Clear emergency signs should be well displayed in the restaurant. By increasing the safety standards of an establishment, customer loyalty might also increase. Employees should receive health and safety training to ensure that they will be able to deal with any safety issue that may arise. Managers should also ensure that safety officers visit their establishments periodically to monitor their safety standards. Regular safety scenarios training should also be conducted in their restaurants. As in the airline industry,



safety issues should be explained to customers and safety guidelines provided in case of an emergency.

Understanding - every service employee of the restaurant should have a clear understanding of the customers' needs and desires. To understand these, it is necessary to determine the general needs of patrons. When customers believe that the restaurant strives to understand them, it could increase their loyalty towards the restaurant. Managers should also ensure that their service employees fully understand how to render service by providing training and testing their level of understanding by exposing them to different customers' service scenarios. They should understand their food and beverage menu lists and ensure that they are able to grasp and verbalise their understanding.

As a recommendation to future studies, a much wider geographic population as well as other types of restaurants should be included. Alternative tools, such as the Dineserv model, to assess service quality and other factors such as food quality and price can also be used as a measuring tool, which will include different constructs than the SERVQUALLOYAL questionnaire used in this study. A qualitative study could also be conducted to gather a wider range of perspectives from the patrons. Employees and managers could also be included in future studies.

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