

## Meeting Online Customers' Expectations: How Do e-Service Quality and e-Reputation Impact Restaurant e-Customer Satisfaction?

### Abstract

Restaurants need to have a strong awareness of e-customer perception and a dedication to continuous improvement to succeed in the digital environment. Thus, conducting a thorough analysis of the digital elements affecting e-customer satisfaction is crucial. This study utilises the expectation-confirmation theory to investigate how e-service quality and e-reputation management affect restaurant e-customer satisfaction. A questionnaire was used to collect information from Egyptian restaurant customers. Structural equation modelling analysed the relationships between the identified constructs. The findings indicate that e-customer satisfaction is positively influenced by e-service quality and e-reputation dimensions, except locality information and brand characteristics. This study expands the application of expectation confirmation theory to online restaurant interactions. By identifying key touchpoints that influence e-customer satisfaction, this research empowers restaurants to map customer journeys. These insights can then be leveraged to develop targeted online marketing and service strategies, ultimately optimising the restaurant's online presence and driving success in the digital marketplace.

**Keywords:** E-customer satisfaction, e-service quality, e-reputation management, expectation confirmation theory, online restaurant interactions, structural equation modelling

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### Introduction

Customers increasingly turn to online platforms to find various dining options, browse menus, and make purchases and reservations (Lee & Kim, 2020). This change in customer behaviours calls for a rethink of how restaurants connect with their customers online and provide e-service quality (Venkatakrishnan et al., 2023, Chokoe & Joao, 2024). E-service quality is a customer's assessment of how well an online service satisfies their expectations (Swaid & Wigand, 2009). E-service quality includes efficient online ordering systems that enable seamless meal purchases and delivery or pickup coordination. An additional component of e-service is providing responsive customer support through online channels, such as social media or chatbots (Hahn et al., 2017). Therefore, e-service plays a pivotal role in shaping customer perception by offering a smooth and enjoyable online experience, enhancing customer satisfaction. Moreover, social media and online reviews have become practical tools for influencing others and expressing opinions. This has given birth to the e-reputation management concept, which represents a restaurant's digital perception and the general sentiment surrounding its brand. A positive e-reputation, earned through consistent delivery of high-quality food and service offline and online, can significantly boost brand loyalty and attract new business (Baber & Baber, 2023). Conversely, negative online reviews, often due to poor service or disappointing dining experiences, can fuel customer dissatisfaction and lead to a higher turnover rate (Xin et al., 2023). Traditional service quality and reputation research has mainly concentrated on in-person encounters (Chang, 2013). However, the digital world



has brought up a new aspect: e-customer satisfaction (Miao et al., 2021). E-customer satisfaction is when online products and services exceed customers' expectations. This satisfaction is determined by comparing the customer's level of satisfaction after purchasing and experiencing the online post-purchase process with their initial expectations. Product fulfilment is not the only factor that affects e-customer satisfaction (Miao et al., 2021). An easy-to-use and effective website or mobile application enhances satisfaction and simplifies ordering, browsing, and safe transactions. For restaurants functioning in the ever-changing digital landscape, it is essential to comprehend the relationship between e-service quality and e-reputation. Therefore, this research aims to examine these two factors' impact on e-customer satisfaction. The central questions are 1) how does e-service quality affect restaurants' e-customer satisfaction? 2) how does e-reputation management impact restaurants' e-customer satisfaction? The Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT) asserts that customer satisfaction arises from evaluating the customer's previous expectations about their perceived service or product performance level (Mamun et al., 2020). This study enhances the theoretical understanding of ECT by implementing the theory within the framework of online restaurant interactions. The study highlights the significance of e-service quality in achieving success online while examining e-reputation management's impact on shaping customer experiences. The research enhances focused online marketing and service efforts by comprehending the potential differences in online and offline expectations. Moreover, this study extends the field of customer journey mapping in chain restaurants by pinpointing crucial touchpoints where e-service quality and e-reputation significantly influence customer satisfaction. From a managerial perspective, the research allows restaurants to make well-informed decisions regarding their online presence and strategically allocate resources for optimal online success.

## Literature review

### *Expectation-confirmation theory*

The ECT explains how prior expectations and perceived performance affect an individual's satisfaction with a product or service (Lee & Kim, 2020). The expectation dimension captures customers' pre-encounter product, service, or experience perceptions and impressions (Oh et al., 2022). Past experiences with similar products can build a baseline expectation, marketing messages, and advertising prime customers for specific attributes; trusted word-of-mouth recommendations shape perceptions, and product category assumptions shape expectations (Das Guru & Paulssen, 2020). The confirmation dimension measures the customer's assessment of the product's performance after the experience (Eren, 2021). Pre-encounter expectations and experience reality are compared. Satisfaction comes from performance meeting or exceeding expectations. When the performance is inadequate, leading to discontent, disconfirmation occurs. Hence, satisfaction depends on confirmation or disconfirmation (Oh et al., 2022). ECT posits that satisfaction is derived from the confirmation of expectations (Mamun et al., 2020). In this sense, e-service quality and e-reputation management refer to customers' expectations before interacting with a service. Customers' perceptions of the ease of online engagement are shaped by factors such as user-friendly platforms and effective online ordering, which all contribute to e-service quality expectations (Xin et al., 2023). E-reputation management, including positive online reviews and active social media involvement, generates expectations for the eating experience (Baber & Baber, 2023). The current e-service experience and exposure to online reviews function as the confirmation construct. Hence, ECT offers a structure to comprehend the interplay between e-service quality, e-reputation management, and e-customer satisfaction inside the chain restaurant sector.

### *E-customer satisfaction*

E-customer satisfaction is fundamental to an online business's success (Miao et al., 2021). E-customer satisfaction refers to how well a customer's experience with a restaurant's online services (e.g., website, mobile app, online ordering) matches their expectations (Juwaini et al., 2022). On the one hand, customers who feel satisfied with their experience are more willing to purchase from the restaurant again and promote it to others, which leads to increased revenue (Helal, 2023). On the other hand, an unpleasant encounter with the online platform might result in customer retention when customers choose to eat at other restaurants (Farah et al., 2021). Accordingly, this study considers e-customer satisfaction essential for online restaurants to prioritise providing high-quality digital services. Even though e-customer satisfaction is crucial in the digital age, limited research thoroughly examines the variables affecting it in the restaurant business. The customer journey has unquestionably changed, with online interactions influencing expectations before an actual visit (Helal et al., 2024). Moreover, although the significance of managing e-reputation through online reviews and social media is acknowledged, more studies must assess its influence on e-customer satisfaction. Restaurants can achieve growth in the competitive online food market by effectively addressing this research gap and quantifying these essential factors.

## Conceptual development

### *E-service quality and e-customer satisfaction*

The rapid increase in online service interactions has brought e-service quality to the forefront (Rajaobelina et al., 2021). E-service quality refers to the level of excellence or adequacy of services an online platform provides to its customers (Swaid & Wigand, 2009). E-service quality is crucial in restaurants as it replaces the need for constant human intervention by automating customer interactions, starting from the initial search for information to the evaluation after the purchase (Xin et al., 2023). This automation enhances efficiency and facilitates a seamless customer experience throughout their engagement with the restaurant (Helal, 2023). E-service quality is a complex concept encompassing various dimensions, such as functionality, reliability, availability of local information, quality of the ambience, customer feedback, and emotional engagement (Hahn et al., 2017). Functionality refers to how a platform assists users in achieving their goals and tasks or obtaining relevant



information (Iqbal et al., 2018). Platform functionality includes fast page loads, persistent links, payment options, and ease of searching, using, and accessing (Gonçalves et al., 2017). This study contends that customers who can navigate a restaurant's platform, rapidly access necessary information, and efficiently accomplish ordering or booking tasks are more likely to be satisfied with their online experience (Kim et al., 2019). A user-friendly platform lowers aggravation and enables customers to achieve their objectives smoothly, enhancing satisfaction (Gupta, 2024). Also, it leads to reliability which is the degree to which a business platform regularly gives its users accurate and current information (Filiari et al., 2020). Reliability encompasses the platform's trustworthiness, the guarantee of timely service delivery, and the availability of services (Raval & Bhatt, 2021). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis (H1): There is a positive relationship between a restaurant's online platform functionality and e-customer satisfaction.

Hypothesis (H2): There is a positive relationship between a restaurant's online platform reliability and e-customer satisfaction.

The availability of local information describes how much prospective consumers may learn about a business's location from its website or app, including pertinent and in-depth details (Hahn et al., 2017). This information includes things like nearby transit, entertainment options, and maps. Customers can better manage their time when restaurants provide comprehensive information about their surroundings on their internet platforms (Kim et al., 2019). Customers can feel more prepared and enthusiastic about their eating experience, which could improve their overall satisfaction (Helal, 2023). Moreover, given that information plays a crucial role in ambience quality perception; ambience quality refers to how much information a restaurant's online platform provides on intangible aspects of the restaurant's atmosphere, such as mood, surroundings, and overall aesthetic quality (Hahn et al., 2017). These aspects include décor, lighting, sound, and other senses (Hornig & Hsu, 2020). For instance, online platforms may offer videos or visual tours of their spaces to highlight the design and décor, which can aid customers in better understanding the restaurant's ambience (Marinkovic et al., 2014). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis (H3): There is a positive relationship between the availability of local information on a restaurant's online platforms and e-customer satisfaction.

Hypothesis (H4): There is a positive relationship between the quality of ambience portrayed on a restaurant online platform and e-customer satisfaction.

Moreover, customer reviews are evaluations of customers' experiences after consuming a particular good or service (Al-Natour & Turetken, 2020). Customer reviews offer insight into the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service they receive on the restaurant's platform (Alshreef et al., 2023). Reviews may discuss how user-friendly the platforms are and the quality of the amenities offered, including the menu choices, cost, booking procedure, and available payment methods. They can also discuss possible problems and areas that need development (Foris et al., 2019). Positive evaluations demonstrating a user-friendly online experience can help create trust and satisfaction and attract new customers (Rajaobelina et al., 2021), and help restaurant's online platform to generate positive emotional responses from customers by including interactive and entertaining elements (Rajaobelina et al., 2021) by giving a more engaging online experience (Souki et al., 2022). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis (H5): There is a positive relationship between the availability and visibility of customer reviews on a restaurant platform and e-customer satisfaction.

Hypothesis (H6): There is a positive relationship between the level of emotional engagement offered by a restaurant's online platform and e-customer satisfaction.

### ***E-reputation and e-customer satisfaction***

E-reputation refers to an individual's online and digital perceptions formed through online searches on various digital platforms, such as social media, blogs, forums, and review sites (Baber & Baber, 2023). Effective e-reputation management has been shown to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty in various service industries, including hospitality and tourism (Lekgau et al., 2024). E-reputation management is critical for restaurants because it directly impacts the business's image (Baber et al., 2022). On the one hand, a favourable e-reputation can boost brand awareness, attract new customers, and foster customer loyalty, resulting in improved financial performance (Strategy & David, 2016). On the other hand, a negative e-reputation might harm the restaurant's image, prevent potential consumers from visiting, and have a negative financial impact. As a result, an effective strategy for managing e-reputation can assist restaurants in developing long-term relationships with their customers, better understanding their preferences and needs, and improving overall customer satisfaction by building brands (Chang & Ku, 2023). Brand characteristics assist customers in identifying and distinguishing a brand from competitors and develop associations with the brand based on their experiences and views (Baber & Baber, 2023). When a platform accurately displays the brand image, customers can identify with the restaurant and form good associations, increasing satisfaction with the online experience (Bilgihan et al., 2017). As a result, a strong and well-defined brand identity on a restaurant's internet presence can improve e-customer satisfaction (Daradkeh et al., 2023). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:



Hypothesis (H7): There is a positive relationship between the strength of a restaurant's brand characteristics portrayed on its online platforms and e-customer satisfaction.

Additionally, platform performance and Perceived services reflect how well a platform meets its users' needs and demands. A platform's performance can be assessed by its content, usability, functionality, design, and speed (Baber & Baber, 2023). To satisfy e-customers, restaurants need excellent platform performance (Saha et al., 2020). This contains comprehensive and current content, user-friendly navigation, clear calls to action, and an attractive design. A well-designed platform helps users access information, accomplish tasks, and interact positively with the company, improving online satisfaction (Xiao et al., 2022). Also, perceived service is another dimension of e-reputation, which refers to how well a product or service meets or exceeds the expectations and needs of its customers (Baber & Baber, 2023). High service levels can increase customer loyalty and business growth (Chang, 2013). The service standard of the restaurant's online experience can significantly impact online customer satisfaction. Response to inquiries, efficient online ordering, and clear policy communication enhance service (Kim & Kim, 2022). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

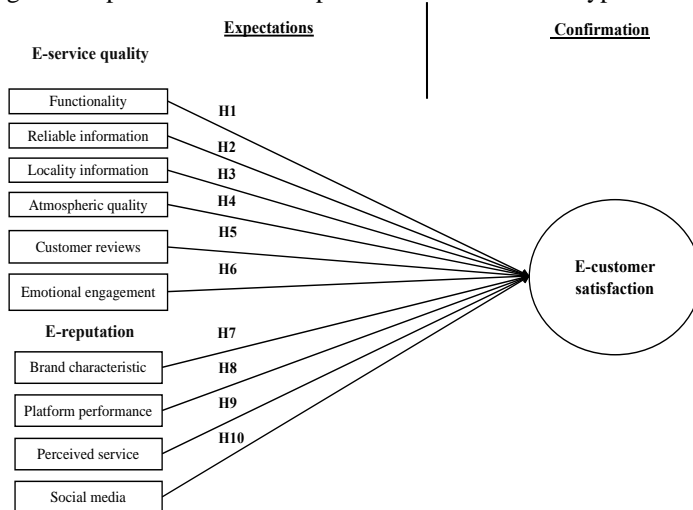
Hypothesis (H8): There is a positive relationship between a restaurant's platform performance and e-customer satisfaction.

Hypothesis (H9): There is a positive relationship between the perceived service offered on a restaurant's platform and e-customer satisfaction.

Social media are online platforms and apps that let individuals create, share, and discuss content and ideas. The most popular social media networks include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and TikTok. Social media allows members to upload photographs, text, and videos, exchange links, and interact with a large audience instantaneously and 24/7 (Gruss et al., 2019). They allow individuals and entities to develop customized content for specific audiences and communicate two-way. A restaurant's presence on social media platforms can substantially impact e-customer satisfaction (Kwon et al., 2021). Effective social media use enables direct connections with potential customers and develops brand awareness and customer complaint resolution (Strategy & David, 2016). This study contends that positive online reviews and social media interactions can build trust and influence customer decisions, improving online satisfaction (Baber et al., 2022). We propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis (H10): There is a positive relationship between a restaurant's effective use of social media and e-customer satisfaction.

Figure 1 depicts a schematic representation of the core hypotheses examined in this study.



**Figure 1. The conceptual framework**

### Materials and methods

This study utilised well-established measures from previous research to assure the accuracy and consistency of the findings. The e-service quality factors were derived from Hahn et al. (2017). E-service quality includes functionality, reliability, local information, atmosphere quality, customer reviews, and emotional engagement. In addition, the dimensions of e-reputation were derived from Baber & Baber (2023). These evaluate, for example, the entire perception obtained from social media posts, encompassing user engagement and the restaurant's online representation standard. Finally, e-customer satisfaction was measured based on the work of Miao et al. (2021). E-customer satisfaction prioritises customer experience and evaluates factors such as convenience, enjoyment, and the probability of recommending the restaurant's online platform to others. This study examined how e-service quality and e-reputation management affect restaurant e-customer satisfaction in Greater Cairo, Egypt.





A powerful combination of societal and economic reasons drives fast-food restaurant growth in Egypt (Helal, 2023). First, more Egyptians can afford to eat out with increased disposable earnings, particularly at fast-food franchises (Doeim et al., 2022). Second, Egypt's rapid urbanisation produces hectic lifestyles. Thus, fast-food outlets offer quick and easy meals (Helal, 2022). Third, the country's youth population is rising. Younger generations are more exposed to international cuisine and speedy food. Fast food is also becoming more popular in Egypt due to media and travel exposure to Western culture (Daradkeh et al., 2023). Finally, successful fast-food restaurants have realized the need to localize their menus. They include halal alternatives or familiar spices and flavours to ensure the successful integration of Egyptian cuisine (Mohamed et al., 2019). We collected data using a questionnaire. Four hospitality experts carefully translated the tool from English to Arabic before distribution. We targeted customers who used these restaurants' digital platforms and remarked on their experiences to ensure participant relevance. Data collection lasted four months, from January to April 2024. Participants were chosen using convenience sampling, a non-probability method that selects conveniently available populations (Obilor, 2023). During sampling, we included most Egyptian fast-food chains. Participants were notified of the study's voluntary nature and dedication to Egyptian fast-food research and development. The first section of the two-part questionnaire collected demographic data. The second section assessed all 32 study items using a 7-point Likert scale: (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Slightly disagree; (4) Neutral; (5) Slightly agree; (6) Agree; (7) Strongly agree. With 425 surveys circulated and 374 valid responses, the response rate was 88%.

## Findings

### Sample profile

The questionnaire includes 374 respondents, with a gender distribution of 42% female and 58% male. Age-wise, the group with the most significant percentage is those between the ages of 18 and 21 (32.9%), followed by those between the ages of 22 and 30 (30.5%), 31 to 40 (16.3%), 41 to 50 (11.0%), and those above 50 (9.4%). The marital status shows that 59.9% are single, 27.3% are married, and 12.8% are married with children. Regarding education, 42% of the population holds an undergraduate degree from a university, 24.6% have a diploma, 19.3% have completed high school, and 14.2% have a postgraduate degree. Regarding using digital technology to order fast food online, 44.4% of users utilized a restaurant's mobile app, 28.3% used online ordering and delivery platforms, and 27.3% used the website. Mobile app feedback forms (43.4%) are the primary methods used to gather customer feedback. Other methods include online review platforms (18.2%), social media surveys (21.4%), phone surveys (13.4%), website feedback forms (17.6%), and emails sent after a purchase (7.8%).

**Table 1: Sample profile**

Characteristics	Descriptions	Statistics	(%)
Gender	Female	157	(42)
	Male	217	(58)
Age	18-21	123	(32.9)
	22-30	114	(30.5)
	31-40	61	(16.3)
	41-50	41	(11.0)
	More than 50	35	(9.4)
Marital status	Single	224	(59.9)
	Married	102	(27.3)
	Married with children	48	(12.8)
Education level	High School	72	(19.3)
	Diploma	92	(24.6)
	Undergraduate university degree	157	(42.0)
	Post-graduate university degree	53	(14.2)
What is the latest digital technology you used when you ordered online from a fast-food restaurant?	Restaurant website	102	(27.3)
	Restaurant mobile app	166	(44.4)
	Platforms for online ordering and delivery	106	(28.3)
	Feedback forms on the restaurant's mobile app	162	(43.4)
How does the restaurant collect customer feedback about their experience with the restaurant?	Social media surveys	80	(21.4)
	Feedback forms on the restaurant's website	66	(17.6)
	Emails after the purchasing	29	(7.8)
	Phone surveys	50	(13.4)
	Online review platforms	68	(18.2)

### Measurement model

Table 2 shows the constructs' successful measurement of their conceptual concepts using factor analysis. All factor loadings are statistically significant ( $t\text{-value} \leq 0.001$ ), indicating that the selected measures effectively represent the target constructs, as evidenced by Hair et al. (Hair et al., 2011). We included only items with loadings greater than 0.70 in the analysis to ensure a robust representation of the constructs. Additionally, the study examines two critical components of measurement quality: reliability and validity. Reliability is the consistency and precision of measures used to describe a construct (Rönkkö & Cho, 2020). Reliability represents how consistently the chosen measures capture the same underlying construct. The study used Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) to evaluate internal consistency. CR and  $\alpha$  values above 0.70 are acceptable in the study (Hair et al., 2019). This study found that all constructs had CR and  $\alpha$  values over 0.70, indicating reliable and consistent assessments. Furthermore, Borsboom et al. (2004) define validity as the extent to which a measure accurately reflects the intended idea. The study assesses validity using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which measures how much variance a construct explains in its indicators (Hair et al., 2020). An acceptable AVE value is 0.50 or above, indicating that the concept explains at least half of the variance in the measures. All constructs in this investigation had AVE values above 0.50, indicating they explain a lot of indicator variance (Hair et al., 2019). Finally, we report the mean and standard deviation of each



construct. The mean indicates the average score on indicators for each construct, revealing how participants responded to relevant questionnaire questions (Wan et al., 2014).

**Table 2: Analysis of measurement model.**

Constructs	Standardised loading (t value)	AVE	CR	$\alpha$	Mean	Standard deviation
<b>E-customer satisfaction</b>		<b>0.51</b>	<b>0.76</b>	<b>0.76</b>	<b>4.96</b>	<b>1.20</b>
ES1 I am satisfied with the restaurant's online platforms, which offer convenient purchasing options.	.72					
ES2 Purchasing through the restaurant's online platforms enhances my enjoyment of the experience.	.70					
ES3 I recommend other customers order through the restaurant's online platforms based on my positive experience.	0.73					
<b>Functionality</b>		<b>0.62</b>	<b>0.92</b>	<b>0.88</b>	<b>5.10</b>	<b>1.25</b>
ESF1 The restaurant's online platforms are easy to use and navigate.	0.87					
ESF2 The service on the restaurant's online platforms is secure.	0.78					
ESF3 Immediate confirmation is received upon purchase through the restaurant's online platforms.	0.72					
ESF4 The restaurant does not share personal information with other platforms and securely stores it on its online platforms.	0.78					
ESF5 Product availability can be easily verified in real-time for purchase at the restaurant.	0.88					
ESF6 The restaurant's online platforms make it easy to calculate prices.	0.73					
ESF7 Necessary information about the restaurant's products and services can be quickly found on its online platforms.	0.75					
<b>Reliability</b>		<b>0.57</b>	<b>0.80</b>	<b>0.82</b>	<b>4.81</b>	<b>1.21</b>
EST1 The restaurant's online platforms offer up-to-date and accurate information.	0.79					
EST2 The information provided is credible and without exaggeration by the restaurant.	0.73					
EST3 Product prices are displayed using the restaurant's online platforms.	0.75					
<b>Locality information</b>		<b>0.58</b>	<b>0.81</b>	<b>0.79</b>	<b>4.75</b>	<b>1.76</b>
ESI1 The restaurant's online platforms provide insights into local attractions and the surrounding area.	0.74					
ESI2 Detailed maps of the restaurant's surrounding area are available online.	0.77					
ESI3 Transportation information is provided through the restaurant's online platforms.	0.79					
<b>Atmosphere quality</b>		<b>0.63</b>	<b>0.84</b>	<b>0.78</b>	<b>4.85</b>	<b>1.21</b>
ESA1 The restaurant's online platforms create a vibrant atmosphere for customers.	0.76					
ESA2 Through its online platforms, the restaurant conveys a distinctive and contemporary atmosphere.	0.77					
ESA3 The luxurious atmosphere is reflected in the design and presentation of meals through the restaurant's online platforms.	0.86					
<b>Customer reviews</b>		<b>0.55</b>	<b>0.78</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>5.28</b>	<b>2.06</b>
ESC1 Reviews from other customers contribute to building trust in the restaurant's service through online platforms.	0.77					
ESC2 Positive and negative reviews from customers can be accessed through the restaurant's online platforms.	0.73					
<b>Emotional engagement</b>		<b>0.59</b>	<b>0.81</b>	<b>0.79</b>	<b>5.05</b>	<b>1.30</b>
ESE1 The interaction of images or music on the restaurant's online platforms evokes happiness.	0.74					
ESE2 The virtual reality (VR) option offered by the restaurant through its platforms for the restaurant is exciting.	0.83					
ESE3 The excellent design of the restaurant's online platforms promotes a sense of calm.	0.74					
<b>Brand characteristic</b>		<b>0.53</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>0.71</b>	<b>4.92</b>	<b>1.13</b>
ER1 My impression of the restaurant's online platforms is positive based on social media messages.	0.70					
ER2 Based on social media messages, the restaurant's interaction with its online tools on social media is positive.	0.75					
ER3 I have a favourable opinion about the electronic/digital representation offered by the restaurant.	0.75					
<b>Platform performance</b>		<b>0.54</b>	<b>0.78</b>	<b>0.75</b>	<b>4.95</b>	<b>1.12</b>
ER4 The restaurant's online platforms are of high quality.	0.73					
ER5 I always expect the restaurant's online tools to be easy to use.	0.71					
ER6 The design of the restaurant's online tools meets my expectations.	0.78					
<b>Perceived service</b>		<b>0.59</b>	<b>0.87</b>	<b>0.83</b>	<b>5.18</b>	<b>1.11</b>
ER7 I hope to have an excellent online experience on the restaurant's website, including information and photos.	0.78					
ER8 The restaurant's online platforms should be easy to use without glitches or obstacles.	0.71					
ER9 The restaurant's online platforms will likely provide dependable and secure service.	0.75					
ER10 I expect the restaurant's online platforms to prioritise the interests of users.	0.72					
ER11 I expect the restaurant's staff to treat customers with care, especially after purchasing meals from the restaurant's online tools.	0.88					
<b>Social media</b>		<b>0.59</b>	<b>0.81</b>	<b>0.81</b>	<b>5.18</b>	<b>1.53</b>
ER12 The restaurant's social media account has a large number of followers.	0.82					
ER13 As evidenced by the interaction of its followers, the restaurant has many followers and interactions on its social media.	0.72					
ER14 There is much activity among the restaurant's followers on social media.	0.78					

Note: All factor loadings were significant at  $\leq .001$ ; CR = Composite Reliability ( $\geq 0.70$ );  $\alpha$  = Alpha Reliability ( $\geq 0.70$ ); AVE = Average Variance Extracted ( $\geq 0.50$ ).

This study found positive reactions to the constructs evaluated, with averages of 3.84 to 4.8. Some constructs have relatively significant standard deviations, indicating a wide range of participant responses and various sample perspectives. Following Hair Jr. et al. (2020), we used fit indices to evaluate the measurement model's fit. The relative chi-square ( $\chi^2/df$ ) value of 2.72 ( $\chi^2 = 1665$ ,  $df = 610$ ,  $p < .000$ ) indicates an acceptable fit because it is below the recommended threshold of 3.0. The Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI = 0.93), Normed Fit Index (NFI = 0.92), and Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = 0.90) all exceeded the acceptable 0.90. The parsimony-adjusted Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.91) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = 0.94), both exceeding 0.90, demonstrated the adequacy of the model. The model's Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.079, below the 0.08 threshold, suggesting a reasonable fit. These fit indices strongly suggest that the measurement model represents the constructs. Table 3 displays the results of the discriminant validity analysis. This method, suggested by Fornell & Larcker (1981), checks how separate and distinct the parts of the measurement model are from each other. The analysis showed that the correlations between any two constructs (off-diagonal elements) were less than the square root of the AVE for each construct (diagonal elements). This result confirms the model's ability to distinguish between different constructs, as each construct's variance has a stronger correlation with its measures than those of other constructs.

**Table 3: Discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker)**

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1. Functionality	<b>0.78</b>										
2. Reliability	0.71	<b>0.75</b>									
3. Locality information	0.64	0.61	<b>0.76</b>								
4. Atmosphere quality	0.53	0.37	0.40	<b>0.79</b>							
5. Customer reviews	0.56	0.62	0.66	0.62	<b>0.74</b>						
6. Emotional engagement	0.47	0.46	0.55	0.51	0.65	<b>0.76</b>					
7. Brand characteristic	0.49	0.42	0.72	0.41	0.64	0.61	<b>0.72</b>				
8. Platform performance	0.50	0.59	0.70	0.61	0.54	0.59	0.63	<b>0.73</b>			
9. Perceived service	0.69	0.31	0.60	0.75	0.67	0.70	0.59	0.71	<b>0.76</b>		
10. Social media	0.30	0.13	0.72	0.70	0.68	0.67	0.70	0.60	0.67	<b>0.76</b>	
11. E-customer satisfaction	0.43	0.32	0.42	0.42	0.56	0.42	0.52	0.32	0.53	0.33	<b>0.71</b>

Note: All correlations are significant at  $p < .001$ .



**Hypothesis testing**

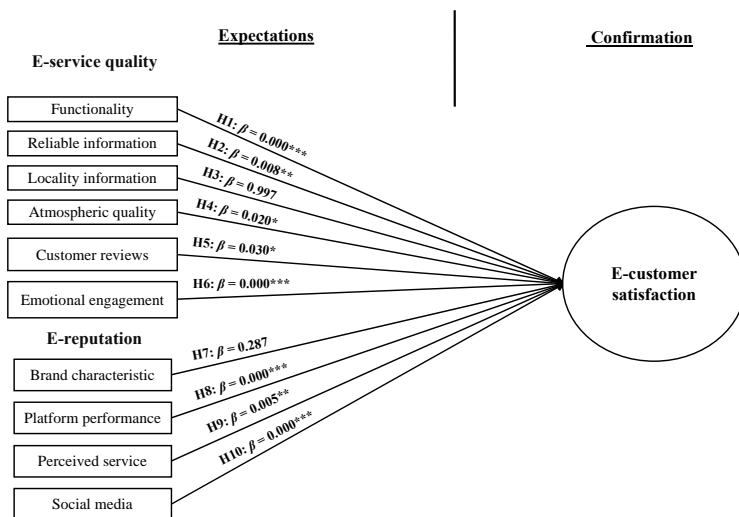
Table 4 and Figure 2 display the path coefficients of e-service quality and e-reputation components that impact e-customer satisfaction. All hypotheses regarding e-service quality had a strong positive impact on e-customer satisfaction, except location information. As expected, (H1), a restaurant's online platform's functionality positively impacts e-customer satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.000$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Similarly, reliability (H2), which assesses the online service's dependability and consistency, has a positive impact on e-customer satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.008$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 4: Path coefficients**

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient (Cv)	Conclusion
H1	Functionality $\square$ e-customer satisfaction	0.000***	Supported
H2	Reliability $\square$ e-customer satisfaction	0.008**	Supported
H3	Locality information $\square$ e-customer Satisfaction	0.997	Rejected
H4	Atmosphere quality $\square$ e-customer Satisfaction	0.020*	Supported
H5	Customer reviews $\square$ e-customer Satisfaction	0.030*	Supported
H6	Emotional engagement $\square$ e-customer Satisfaction	0.000***	Supported
H7	Brand characteristic $\square$ e-customer Satisfaction	0.287	Rejected
H8	Platform performance $\square$ e-customer Satisfaction	0.000***	Supported
H9	Service $\square$ e-customer satisfaction	0.005**	Supported
H10	Social media $\square$ e-customer satisfaction	0.000***	Supported

Note: \*Absolute t-value > 1.96,  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*Absolute t-value > 2.58,  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*Absolute t-value > 3.29,  $p < 0.001$ .

Hypothesis H4, which examines atmosphere quality, is supported by a coefficient of ( $\beta = 0.020$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that a pleasant and engaging online environment contributes to e-customer satisfaction. Hypothesis H5, which examines the impact of customer reviews, is further substantiated by a coefficient of ( $\beta = 0.030$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that good evaluations and feedback improve e-consumer satisfaction. Hypothesis H6: emotional engagement is highly supported with a coefficient of ( $\beta = 0.000$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), highlighting that making an experience emotionally engaging significantly increases e-customer satisfaction. In contrast, there was no evidence to support Hypothesis H3, which concerned location information, with a coefficient of ( $\beta = 0.997$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), showing that supplying local information had no significant impact on e-customer satisfaction. In terms of the impact of e-reputation on e-customer satisfaction, all hypotheses demonstrate a positive influence, except for brand characteristics. Hypothesis H7, associated with brand characteristics, yielded no evidence, with a coefficient of ( $\beta = 0.287$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), suggesting that brand features did not significantly influence e-customer satisfaction. However, Hypothesis H8, which relates to platform performance, is substantially corroborated with a coefficient of ( $\beta = 0.000$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that superior performance of the restaurant platform has a substantial positive impact on e-customer satisfaction. Hypothesis H9, which assesses service, is further substantiated with a coefficient of ( $\beta = 0.005$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that providing high-quality service is essential for improving e-customer satisfaction. Finally, Hypothesis H10, which looks into the effect of social media, is strongly supported by a coefficient of ( $\beta = 0.000$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), meaning that using social media interestingly and effectively increases e-customer satisfaction.



**Figure 2. The structural model**

**Discussion and implications**

The present study highlights various crucial factors for online customers and their impact on their satisfaction. The study affirms the favourable impact of online platform functionality and reliability on e-customer satisfaction. Efficient navigation, rapid loading speeds, and precise information provide a seamless online experience, minimising annoyance and enhancing contentment (Filiari et al., 2020; Gonçalves et al., 2017; Iqbal et al., 2018). This result highlights the importance of user-friendly design and current information on online platforms for restaurants looking to improve the customer experience (Raval & Bhatt, 2021). Surprisingly, the study indicates that location information does not impact e-customer satisfaction. This result opposes the findings of Hahn et al. (2017) and Kim et al. (Kim et al., 2019), who proposed that providing specific location details improves the overall satisfaction of customers. Possible explanations may include prioritising key functionalities over



supplementary elements or a scenario where location information is not a significant determining factor. Research by Hahn et al. (2017) and Horng & Hsu (2020) confirms the positive influence of atmosphere quality on e-customer satisfaction. Online platforms can help customers develop expectations and establish a favourable emotional bond with a restaurant without visiting by presenting the establishment's atmosphere through superior photographs, virtual tours, or detailed descriptions. Moreover, the research supports the importance of customer reviews, which aligns with the findings of Al-Natour & Turetken (2020) and Alshreef et al. (2023). Favourable reviews about the user experience and platform performance foster confidence and motivate prospective customers, ultimately enhancing satisfaction. The study confirms the significance of emotional involvement, as emphasised by Rajaobelina et al. (2021) and Souki et al. (2022). Interactive elements such as gamification or captivating content can enhance the online experience, increasing satisfaction. Unexpectedly, the findings indicate that brand characteristics do not significantly impact e-customer satisfaction within the online platform. Nevertheless, utilising social media efficiently follows the findings of Kwon et al. (2021) and Strategy & David (2016), highlighting the significant impact of creating brand recognition and facilitating interactive engagement on social media platforms. Furthermore, Saha et al. (2020) and Xiao et al. (2022) have underscored the importance of platform performance. An efficient platform with rapid loading times and a user-friendly design allows users to engage positively, resulting in increased satisfaction. Perceived service is an additional crucial aspect, as emphasized by Baber & Baber (2023) and Kim & Kim (2022). Timely responses to inquiries and transparent policy communication improve the online service experience, increasing customer satisfaction.

This study significantly contributes to the hospitality and tourism literature by examining the factors influencing e-customer satisfaction in restaurants. The study investigates how e-service quality and e-reputation management influence e-customer satisfaction. The study expands on the ECT by showing how e-specific aspects, such as user-friendly and efficient online platforms with fast loading times (Saha et al., 2020; Xiao et al., 2022), prompt responses to inquiries (Baber & Baber, 2023; Kim & Kim, 2022), and positive online reviews highlighting user experience and platform performance (Al-Natour & Turetken, 2020; Alshreef et al., 2023), contribute to a pleasant online experience. Furthermore, the study emphasises the positive impact of emotional connection and atmosphere on e-customer satisfaction. Online platforms, similar to the impact of restaurant ambience in physical settings, can use high-quality photos, virtual tours, and detailed descriptions to foster a positive emotional association with the restaurant (Hahn et al., 2017). Moreover, this study expands the understanding of ECT by emphasizing the importance of e-reputation management in influencing customer experiences through online reviews and social media presence. The study affirms the significance of customer reviews and social media involvement, reiterating prior studies (Al-Natour & Turetken, 2020; Alshreef et al., 2023). Also, this study extends the concept of customer journey mapping in the restaurant business by identifying critical touchpoints where e-service quality and e-reputation management substantially impact e-customer satisfaction. This involves prioritising fundamental capabilities (Filiari et al., 2020; Gonçalves et al., 2017; Iqbal et al., 2018; Raval & Bhatt, 2021) rather than aspects such as location information (Hahn et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2019). Moreover, it is essential to enhance the emotional ambience by incorporating sensory aspects (Horng & Hsu, 2020) and utilising favourable reviews and social media interaction (Al-Natour & Turetken, 2020; Alshreef et al., 2023) to bridge the gap between sensory experiences and emotions. Studies by Baber & Baber (2023) and Kim & Kim (2022) demonstrate that optimising perceived service through fast communication enhances the online experience. The strategic touchpoints embedded in customer journey maps enable restaurants to create experiences that enhance e-customer satisfaction.

The present study provides valuable insights for restaurant managers aiming to improve customer satisfaction in the digital age. The results emphasise the crucial importance of e-service quality features in enhancing e-customer satisfaction. Similar findings have been reported in studies examining service quality in other tourism-related sectors, highlighting the need for continuous improvement in digital interactions (Gaonkar & Sukthakar, 2024). Restaurants should prioritise developing user-friendly online platforms that provide current information and guarantee quick loading times. To enhance customer satisfaction, investing in a design that is easy for users to navigate and understand is essential, reducing their annoyance and enabling a smooth online purchase process. In addition to essential features, managers should consider the emotional factors that impact online customer satisfaction. Just as the atmosphere is crucial in a brick-and-mortar restaurant, online platforms can use top-notch graphics and comprehensive descriptions to foster a favourable emotional bond with potential customers. Utilising virtual tours, visually appealing menu presentations, and enticing descriptions can establish an appealing ambience, attract customers, and cultivate a favourable brand perception. Also, restaurants must proactively manage their online reputation by swiftly responding to positive or negative reviews. Interacting with customers on social media platforms enables restaurants to display their brand identity, resolve issues, and cultivate more robust customer connections. Restaurants may develop a devoted customer base and draw in new customers by promoting good online interactions and establishing a robust presence on social media. Finally, the study highlights the significance of how customers perceive the service in an online setting. Timely and clear responses to customer requests and open information about policies are crucial for cultivating a favourable online service experience. Allocating resources to effective customer care channels and ensuring transparent communication on the digital platform fosters confidence and demonstrates a commitment to customer contentment. Furthermore, it is crucial to ensure optimal platform performance by achieving fast loading times. Restaurants can create a positive and lasting impression on their customers by prioritising these online service components.

### **Limitations and further research**

The current research has certain limitations, although offering significant insights into the elements that impact e-customer satisfaction in the restaurant industry. Firstly, the study is limited to Egyptian restaurant customers in terms of location, which may restrict the applicability of the findings to other cultural or regional contexts. Hence, comparable studies might be





conducted in various countries or regions to compare and contrast the effects of digital features on e-customer satisfaction across various cultural backgrounds. Secondly, one of the study's limitations is its reliance on self-reported questionnaire data. While efforts were made to ensure the data's dependability and accuracy, there is room for further investigation. A mixed-method approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews or focus groups, could enhance the strength of the results. This approach would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the various elements influencing e-customer satisfaction, enriching the study's findings. Thirdly, the study's cross-sectional design only captures customer opinions at a specific time. This method needs to consider the possibility of fluctuations in e-customer satisfaction over time or in reaction to changing digital trends. Longitudinal studies are essential for understanding the ever-changing nature of e-customer satisfaction. They enable researchers to study how variations in e-service quality and e-reputation management tactics affect e-customer satisfaction over long periods. Finally, the study primarily examines the direct impact of e-service quality and e-reputation management on e-customer satisfaction without considering any potential moderating or mediating factors. Subsequent investigations could delve into the influence of customer demographics, digital literacy, and previous online experiences in moderating these associations. Furthermore, examining potential mediating elements, such as customer trust and perceived value, could offer a more profound understanding of how digital service quality and e-reputation management impact e-customer satisfaction.

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