

The Effect of Employees' Attributes Towards Customer Satisfaction

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Abstract

The fast-food industry's customer service has undergone substantial improvements to align with evolving consumer expectations and continuous innovations in service delivery. The objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between employee traits and the level of customer satisfaction in fast food chains in Dungun, Terengganu. The study highlighted the importance of customer experience and the contribution of these employee attributes – including empathy, reliability, responsiveness, cultural sensitivity, hygiene compliance, and professionalism – to customer experience and satisfaction. This

research demonstrates the value of positive employee interactions in developing customer trust, improving service quality, and creating loyalty.

Keywords:

Customer satisfaction, service quality, customer service, empathy, reliability, and hygiene adherence

1 Introduction

The foodservice industry is less likely than non-service companies to offer remote or home-based work, and its employees need to be available to work on the weekends, in the evenings, late at night, and on holidays (O'Neill & Follmer, 2020). The commercial, non-commercial, and institutional sectors make up the foodservice industry, which includes hospitals, jails, schools, higher education, and nursing homes as examples of the third category. The growth in the global restaurant industry's revenue over the last few decades indicates a consistent rise in the consumption of meals outside the home, particularly in foodservice settings (National Restaurant Association [NRA], 2019; Research and Markets, 2019). The components of the foodservice system include the consumer, producing businesses (like restaurants), sourcing and suppliers, and food manufacturing and delivery (Armstrong & Kivirist, 2015; Carino et al., 2020).

Specifically, the fast-food sector has grown exponentially on a national, worldwide, and cultural level due to changes in consumer lifestyles, rising disposable incomes, and a need for convenience (Singh et al., 2021). Before this, fast-food restaurant (FFR) businesses only provided counter service, so consumers experienced less personalised customer service. As a result, fast food chains (such as McDonald's and Burger King) have trouble retaining customers (Smith & Lee., 2022). Now, fast-food restaurants use digital technology, such as digital ordering platforms, smartphone apps, self-service kiosks, and digital menu boards, to provide their customers a more convenient and personalised experience (An et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2023). The process by which a restaurant creates a new business plan that uses digital technology to increase and preserve value is known as "digital transformation" (Daradkeh et al., 2023).

Providing exceptional customer service is essential for most organizations to retain satisfied customers, attract new businesses, and sustain high profitability. Issues with customer service can negatively affect a company's sales volume, customer retention, frontline employee performance, and reputation. The effectiveness of customer service is a key component in ensuring a competitive edge. A company will not grow and stay competitive if it cannot fully meet the needs and expectations of its clients (Tao, 2014). In the food industry sector, the topic of customer satisfaction and service quality has garnered attention because of its direct relationship with profits. Businesses are under pressure to evaluate and enhance the quality of their services in order to draw in customers (Gilbert & Veloutsou, 2006). SERVQUAL, DINERSERV, and quality management theories (Parasuraman, 1988; Chun, 2020; Deming, 1994) have highlighted the importance of service quality. These theories highlighted the factors discussed herein, indicating that service quality is crucial for improving and retaining the business.

The fight for survival in a competitive marketplace has forced many businesses to reevaluate how they conduct business, particularly on how they handle the requirements of staff members who interact directly with customers and those who file complaints (MacArthur et al., 2004). If employees are not receiving proper care, their concern for the services they provide will decrease. However, the trend has once again changed, raising questions about what went wrong, as quality and customer service no longer take precedence. Many consumers receive rude treatment, so businesses must pay attention to their needs and wants (Hyken, 2007).

This research study explored the relationship between the attributes of employees and their commitment to delivering quality customer service in fast food restaurants. Due to its constant demand for strong and superior social ties, the food and hospitality industry is especially vulnerable to the impact of personality types, which naturally affect the quality and outcomes of social interactions (Karatepe, 2013). In the hospitality industry, frontline service employees (FSEs) and customers regularly interact within a customer-focused service environment. By catering to customers' demands and gaining firsthand experience of customer service, FSEs are in a favourable position to develop creative ways to improve the customer service they give (Ruiz-Palomino & Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2020; Wang et al., 2021). As competition increases, businesses' inventiveness becomes a source of competitive benefits since it may swiftly solve customers' issues, thrill clients, and therefore enhance service quality and customer happiness (Sliwinski & Puslecki, 2021).

Investigating the connection between employee characteristics and customer satisfaction in fast food establishments is the aim of this study. The study specifically intends to investigate the elements that determine consumer preferences for staff conduct and evaluate the effects of these characteristics on overall satisfaction and service quality. This research will offer important insights into how fast-food restaurants can maintain a balanced approach that enhances personalized service while meeting operational efficiency to deliver exceptional customer experiences by looking at how employees behave from the customer's perspective and strategically aligning with customer expectations (Azman & Majid, 2023). With an emphasis on service quality, employee attributes, and striking a balance between efficiency and individualised customer care, the study intends to investigate the qualities of fast-food restaurant employees and their effects on customers.

RO1: To identify the key attributes of employees that contribute to customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants.

RO2: To determine the most important employee attributes that have a significant impact on customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants.

2 Literature Review

The interaction complexity of attributes contributes to customer satisfaction level and perceived service quality in service industries. These qualities include, among others, empathy, responsiveness, reliability, cultural sensitivity, maintenance of hygiene, and professionalism (Parasuraman, 2000; Chuenyindee, T., & Buaphiban, T. 2022). Empathy, as defined by Merriam-Webster is the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts and experiences of another. Empathy creates trust and rapport between service providers and clients. Responsiveness is the ability of a service provider to quickly address your needs, therefore enhancing the quality of service. Reliability is a cornerstone of service quality, ensuring consistent and dependable performance and ultimately creating customer loyalty (Sun, 2025).

As the world becomes more globalised, understanding and respecting cultural differences that impact what a client expects and how they interact is increasingly sensitive (Viken et al., 2021). Hygiene adherence is increasingly vital in in-service settings due to its role in preventing disease transmission (Global Hygiene Council, 2023; Tamanna, 2020). Professionalism is an attribute that interconnects with all the others, as it encompasses not only technical competence but also the ability to serve others with integrity, empathy, and consistency as the essence of service quality (Monferrer et al., 2019).

Overall, these extensive literatures identify and summarize existing researches on these independent variables and their influence on the dependent variables (service quality and customer satisfaction, both individually and collectively). This review aims to help unlock the complexities of service delivery and understand its impact on practice and policy across different service domains through the discussion of several empirical studies and theoretical lenses (Shulga et al, 2024).

2.1 Empathy towards Customer Satisfaction

Empathy is the ability to connect with and empathise with the emotions of others. In the customer service frameworks, it denotes service provider's awareness of a customer's emotions, requirements, and anticipations. Empathetic employees exhibit active listening, reply with composure, and demonstrate authentic concern for customer experiences. This emotional bond fosters trust and enhances the service experience. When clients see understanding and respect, they are more likely to experience satisfaction with the overall encounter, even in circumstances when the product or atmosphere may be lacking (Zulfiqar et al., 2018).

Among employees, it has emerged as an influential determinant of customer satisfaction in the fast-food segment. For that reason, empathetic employees can better attend to customers' emotional needs, and their actions can result in more trust, satisfaction and loyalty (Wieseke et al., 2012). Past studies have pointed out employee's empathy as a way to improve customer service experience. Wieseke et al. (2012) discovered that the frequency of empathetic concern and communicative

responsiveness shown by customer service employees directly affects their job satisfaction and job tension. Similarly, they found that customer empathy moderated the positive relationship between employee empathy and customer satisfaction, leading to improved interactions (Wieseke et al., 2012).

Deming's (1994) quality management theory emphasises employee pride in workmanship as a driver of customer satisfaction. One critical component of these qualities is empathy, which enables employees to recognise and respond to evolving customer needs, deliver timely information, and foster a more enjoyable service experience (Zulfiqar et al., 2018). A compassionate workforce can therefore substantially benefit fast-food operators, as it strengthens trust, customer satisfaction and retention, which are key to lasting business success in a challenging market. (Shagirbasha & Sivakumaran, 2021).

2.2 Reliability towards Customer Satisfaction

Reliability in foodservice indicates the capacity of employees in restaurants to regularly execute service activities with precision and timeliness. It entails executing accurate orders punctually, providing truthful information, and addressing customer complaints efficiently. Customers gain confidence in the prompt and accurate fulfilment of their requirements when they receive reliable service. In fast food environments, where quickness and consistency are essential, reliability is a crucial element in fostering positive client experiences. Research indicates that reliability, encompassing order accuracy, punctuality, and complaint resolution, is a crucial determinant of customer satisfaction and loyalty (Villanueva et al., 2023; Ong et al., 2022).

Increasingly, researchers are examining the relationship between the attributes of employees and fast-food customer satisfaction in this regard. Reliability is a key trait and the most important factor in customer satisfaction. Reliability is one of the five dimensions of the service quality and is defined as the ability of the service provider to do the service promised reliably and accurately (Qiu et al., 2019). Empirical reliability in fast food restaurants manifests through employees delivering consistent and timely service, responding appropriately and effectively to customer complaints, and providing accurate information. These elements are essential for shaping positive customer experiences and are consistently identified as key predictors of satisfaction and loyalty (Villanueva et al., 2023; Ong et al., 2022).

The representational quality of what products will be placed on a menu, like a professional speech, was identified by Bowen and Morris (Prasetyo et al., 2021) as the most important choice. It implies whichever tone the employee uses to utter and write in front of the customers matters a lot and is crucial from the customer perspective, as their entire judgements and classification of the service he/she is used to are based on the tone used by the employee (Prasetyo et al., 2021). Furthermore, previous studies have indicated that humane attributes, like employee services, can reasonably replace less humane ones in the satisfaction generation. Hence it means that if the surroundings are not pleasant or the food is not of satisfactory quality, the service

provided by the employees can compensate for the dissatisfaction (Namkung & Jang, 2008).

In line with the findings, Namkung and Jang (2008) found that as competition has intensified in the international fast-food sector, managers have emphasised customer satisfaction as an aspect of customer loyalty and an instrument to improve the business performance. Deming's quality management theory (Anderson et al., 1994) highlights how employee fulfilment and pride of workmanship lead to customer satisfaction. Moving this way, as the employees begin to take pride and ownership of their work, they are more likely to deliver service that is reliable and of high quality, which ultimately leads to giving satisfaction to customers (Dahlgard et al., 2011).

2.3 Responsiveness Towards Customer Satisfaction

Responsiveness in foodservice indicates the ability and capability of employees to assist clients promptly and efficiently. It encompasses timely service, willingness to assist, and proper management of enquiries or complaints. In fast food settings, customers expect prompt and polite service, particularly during demanding periods or when addressing complaints. Attentive employees enhance operational efficiency and encourage an affectionate attitude among customers. This behaviour improves satisfaction by minimizing wait times, addressing issues quickly, and fostering a more enjoyable dining experience. Research indicates that responsiveness, encompassing service speed and staff assistance, is a crucial determinant of consumer loyalty and intentions to return (Ong et al., 2022).

Recently, the interaction between employee attributes and customer satisfaction has drawn considerable attention from both practitioners and scholars, particularly in the context of the fast-food restaurant. Some have examined the employee response time, or how quickly and willingly an employee helps a customer or responds to their needs. (Arefin & Hossain, 2021)

Customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants is believed to be driven by employee responsiveness, according to existing research. Therefore, Deming's (1994) quality management theory underlines the need for employee fulfilment and pride in doing their work, and a byproduct of that would be customer satisfaction. Likewise, a research study of service recovery efforts in fast food establishments discovered that when customer issues are entirely resolved, as enhanced by responsive employees, repeat support ensues. (Leong & Kim, 2002)

In addition, studies on internal service quality in the food service industry confirmed that internal customers, like employees, should be satisfied to ensure employee retention and performance, which would, in turn, lead to external customer satisfaction. (Voss et al., 2005). This means that creating a climate of empowerment and motivation in employees can influence customer satisfaction, assuming that they will be responsive (Voss et al., 2005).

Although employee responsiveness is crucial for a fast-food restaurant, while service responsiveness is widely acknowledged as a dimension of service quality,

relatively few studies have examined its specific influence on customer satisfaction in fast-food or quick-service restaurant settings (Namkung, Y., & Jang, S. 2007). There is a need for more empirical research focusing on the behavioural aspects of service employees and how they translate into perceived service quality and customer satisfaction (Ladhari, 2009). Understanding this relationship in greater depth will help operators of fast-food restaurants in designing more effective strategies for raising the level of responsiveness of their employees, thus improving customer experience.

2.4 Cultural Sensitivity towards Customer Satisfaction

Cultural sensitivity in foodservice means the capacity of employees and businesses to acknowledge, respect, and adjust to the many cultural origins of the customers they serve. It involves understanding various customs, culinary preferences, communication techniques, and service expectations. Culturally aware foodservice professionals deliver more personalized and respectable service, thereby enhancing the entire dining experience. This sensitivity reduces misconceptions, cultivates emotional connections, and enhances customer pleasure, particularly in multicultural or ethnically themed restaurants. Research indicates that cultural sensitivity training enhances service quality and corporate reputation, while authenticity in cuisine and ambience fortifies customer loyalty and emotional connection. (Maraña et al., 2023).

A study on quality management in the service industry indicates that customer satisfaction is closely related to employee fulfilment, fostered by pride and ownership in work (Anderson et al., 1994). Regardless of one's workplace, deeply caring about one's work and understanding its connection to the broader customer experience typically results in delivering great service that leads to excellent outcomes.

Outstanding customer service is a key element for success in the highly competitive fast-food industry. Interactions with employees heavily influence customers' perceptions of restaurant quality, value, and overall satisfaction. Employees who possess cultural sensitivity—meaning they are aware of and can effectively interact with foreign visitors—establish strong connections with customers by understanding their needs. This includes facilitating communication, identifying the products they truly require, and encouraging them to make purchases that may currently be hindered (Song et al., 2022; Arefin & Hossain, 2021).

There are also new emerging trends of employee attributes with customer satisfaction in fast food. The pride that quality-oriented employees take in their work, which is influenced by their cultural sensitivity, is one of the main drivers of customer satisfaction, according to a study (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). Culturally competent staff members are more able to predict the needs of a diverse audience and supply relevant details for a tailor-made service approach.

Cultural sensitivity not only affects employees' OCB (organizational citizenship behaviours) but also predicts employees' OCB (voluntary, discretionary effort beyond formal job responsibilities). Business owners have explored the role of authentic leadership in encouraging organizational citizenship behaviours directed towards

customers in the hospitality industry, as it promotes cultural awareness and inclusion. Extra-role behaviours (for example, giving extra effort to help a customer), which contribute significantly to customer satisfaction and loyalty, are another phenomenon on which many studies focused.

The available literature suggests that cultural sensitivity among employees is crucial for enhancing customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants. Flexible employees understand the diversity in the world and feel the payment and needs of different customers, knowing that this is where outstanding organisational performance will occur.

2.5 Hygiene Adherence

Hygiene adherence in foodservice means the ongoing implementation of cleanliness and safety regulations by employees in restaurants to protect the customers' health and improve service quality. It encompasses appropriate food handling, personnel hygiene, equipment sanitation, and observable cleaning procedures that comply with regulatory standards. When employees maintain sanitary working conditions and adhere to hygiene protocols, customers perceive enhanced safety and comfort, hence fostering an enjoyable dining experience (Chun, 2020). In light of the global health issues, hygiene has transformed into a primary requirement rather than a secondary one. Research indicates that hygiene practises, including adherence to food safety standards, the cleanliness of tableware, and the availability of hand sanitiser, substantially affect consumer happiness and loyalty (Guak et al., 2022). Consequently, attention to hygiene is not merely about fulfilling regulations; it is also about cultivating customer trust and preserving a respected business image (Seaman & Eves 2010).

Personal hygiene among food handlers in the service industry is crucial. It can help ensure the safety and satisfaction of customers, like in the proper implementation of hygiene and sanitation practises like hand washing (Kusuma et al., 2017). Furthermore, experts recommend undertaking food handler training in the fundamentals of food safety practices, including personal hygiene (Kumari et al., 2019).

In recent years, concerns have increased regarding customer satisfaction in the fast-food industry and the impact of employee hygiene on it. Deming (1994) developed a theory of quality management that states customer satisfaction is influenced not only by continuous improvement efforts but also by the fulfilment of employees. The link between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction is based on the foundation that pride in workmanship, including knowing and meeting evolving customer needs, increases customer satisfaction.

For example, in a study on food sanitation and hygiene practises among food handlers of Hyderabad, hand washing is one of the most important steps that needs to be highlighted to food handlers, as it helps prevent bacteria from entering the kitchen (Kumari et al., 2019). Customers can see food handlers using adequate hygiene, practising honest hand washing, and cleaning and sanitising the facilities. Perceived

cleanliness in restaurants could enhance customer perception of cleanliness and safe dining experience (Barber & Scarcelli 2010).

By embedding food hygiene needs in the operational systems of fast-food outlets, there is a representation that food safety and hygiene are necessarily needed to be performed by employees. Moreover, appropriate training in hygiene and supervision of all staff coming into direct contact with food will ensure that food is safe and fit for human consumption, which helps increase customer satisfaction (General Principles of Food Hygiene, 2023).

2.6 Professionalism towards Customer Satisfaction

Professionalism in food service refers to the conduct, abilities, and attitude of employees that demonstrate respect, proficiency, and dedication to excellent customer service. It involves polite engagement with customers, precise and effective delivery of service, personal cleanliness, and unwavering compliance with workplace norms. When employees exhibit professionalism in their look and communication, customers are more likely to feel valued and appreciated (Vasani et al., 2024). This, therefore, promotes trust and enhances pleasure, especially in quick-service contexts like restaurants. Research indicates that professionalism, encompassing empathy, integrity, and service precision, is directly correlated with positive client experiences and loyalty (Diaz, 2023).

We have similarly developed interest regarding the relationship between the professionalism of employees and customer satisfaction, especially in the fast-food business industry. Deming's (1994) theory of quality management links customer satisfaction, through their mini-company merger, with employee fulfilment, such as professionalism. This perspective is further reinforced by research that discovered significant relationships between employee characteristics (demographic variables) and an employee ability to cope with service failures and recovery (Leong & Kim, 2002).

The concept of customer satisfaction is an important facet of organisational performance since it has a direct impact on the buying actions of clients and several other behavioural outcomes such as word of mouth (Chen et al., 2018). Hence, understanding the reasons for customer satisfaction, especially in the fast-food sector, is one way to remain competitive.

Employee professionalism is one of the many factors that can contribute to customer satisfaction in fast food restaurant chains. Research found that linking core competencies with service recovery efforts leads to ideal service performance and enhances customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants, suggesting that guiding principles should be provided to employees through mentoring and empowerment. The internal service quality idea has been proven to make a positive difference in employee retention as well as willingness to recommend the job to others (Voss et al., 2005).

Although the literature indicates that employee professionalism can lead to customer satisfaction in the fast-food industry, it is important to note that other factors, including food quality, price, and convenience, also play a large part. More studies are

needed to comprehend the intricacies of this relationship and how companies can foster a culture of professionalism in their workers to deliver greater customer satisfaction. Globally, the issue of customer satisfaction, especially within the restaurant industry, is an evolving, ongoing process, which requires current validation and findings. This is particularly true because customer needs, wants, and satisfaction levels are constantly changing based on current standards and requirements (Park et al., 2024).

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs descriptive-correlational quantitative research to identify the attributes of fast-food restaurant employees that influence customer satisfaction. The aim is to determine the characteristics of employees that influence customer satisfaction in fast food establishments. A cross-sectional survey provided data to comprehend the impact of these qualities on consumer satisfaction in fast-food businesses. In the fast-food industry, where customers have numerous options, focusing on customer satisfaction and its importance for customer retention (Chun, 2020) leads to a satisfactory dining experience that encourages customers to return. Loyal customers are the key to consistent revenue, and many become direct and indirect brand ambassadors.

This research is based on a descriptive design (Apostol et al., 2023) to show the attributes, effects and relationships of employees, customers and brands, and whether each of the attributes may have some influence on the other. Also, a correlational research approach is applied to establish a relationship between variables without establishing a cause. However, these findings may not necessarily be generalised to the whole population because they are specific to the individuals and context from which they were derived.

3.2 Population

The population of this study is in the area of Dungun, Terengganu. According to the Department of Statistics, Malaysia, the population of Dungun in 2020 was 158,130. This population is particularly relevant to this study since Dungun is a community noted for its local culture, food culture, and transforming food preferences owing to social, local, and health influences. The subject of fast-food restaurant employees can have an impact on overall customer satisfaction and loyalty based on the attributes of those employees with friendliness, attitude, follow-up, oral communication, and complaint adjustment.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

This study employs simple random sampling to select participants, where all fast-food restaurant customers in Dungun, Terengganu, have an equal chance of being selected into the sample. This ensures that employees' attributes are examined in the ultimate test of whether the relationship is statistically significant to customer satisfaction, while at the same time minimising selection bias associated with survey

responses since employees can freely describe their attributes without constraint. Using the Raosoft calculator for sample size, at a 5% margin of error, 95% confidence level, and 50% response distribution, the needed sample size from a total of 158,130 was found to be 384 participants. The sample size of 384 provides a balanced representation of customers across various fast-food establishments, allowing for meaningful comparisons and conclusions to be drawn on the factors affecting employee satisfaction in this specific context.

3.4 Instrument Development

Data Collection Instrument: A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on how employee attributes affect customer satisfaction in fast food outlets located in Dungun, Terengganu. The questionnaire was constructed by creating new items relevant to the study's aims and by modifying items from validated instruments. The questionnaire is divided into six sections: demographics, empathy, reliability, responsiveness, cultural sensitivity, hygiene adherence, and more.

The questionnaire contains Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The demographic section collects age, sex, education, ethnicity, and fast-food restaurant visit information in multiple-choice questions.

Empathy (Parasuraman, 2020) measures the extent to which employees empathise with customers' emotional and personal needs, using a 5-point Likert scale. Reliability (Parasuraman, 2020) refers to reliable and dependable employees who can deliver the services as promised. Responsiveness (Parasuraman, 2020) is the readiness of employees to provide service and help customers in need. Likert-scale items are used to measure cultural sensitivity (Chuenyindee & Buaphiban, 2022), such as respect and understanding for customers' various cultural backgrounds. Hygiene adherence (Chuenyindee & Buaphiban, 2022) monitoring measures how well employees follow cleanliness and food safety standards. Professionalism (Chuenyindee & Buaphiban, 2022) is a measure of the employees' knowledge, skill level, work ethic, and overall demeanour while fulfilling the customers' satisfaction.

By systematically addressing these areas, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of how employee-related factors influence customer satisfaction in fast food outlets within this specific regional context.

4 Findings

4.1 Linear Regression Analysis

The table 1 shows the results of Multiple Regression Analysis using SPSS. Table 1 shows that linear regression analysis was employed in this study to investigate the impact of employees' attributes, including empathy, reliability, responsiveness, cultural sensitivity, hygiene adherence, and professionalism. This is consistent with the study's preceding parts' research objectives.

RO1: To identify the key attributes of employees that contribute to customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants.

RO2: To determine the most important employee attributes that have a significant impact on customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants.

Table 1: Results of the Correlation Coefficient

Model	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	.545	.120		4.531	<.001
Empathy	1.371	.275	1.298	4.983	<.001
Reliability	.426	.240	.386	1.774	.077
Responsiveness	-1.276	.370	-1.173	-3.446	<.001
Cultural_sensitivity	-.898	.221	-.814	-4.064	<.001
Hygiene_adherence	1.122	.309	1.086	3.628	<.001
Professionalism	0.56	.445	.52	.126	.900

a. Dependent Variable: Customer_satisfaction

The results below showed that the impact of employees' attributes of empathy, reliability, responsiveness, cultural sensitivity, hygiene adherence, and professionalism correlates with each other. This illustrates how these elements have a significant role in determining how employees' attributes can build customer satisfaction for the customer, except for reliability and professionalism.

4.1.1 Empathy

Table 2: Results of Empathy Analysis

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.836 ^a	.699	.698	.75360

a. Predictors: (Constant), empathy

The regression analysis indicates a significant relationship between empathy and customer satisfaction. The correlation coefficient (R) of .836 indicates a strong positive link, implying that an increase in empathy correlates with a significant gain in customer satisfaction. Moreover, the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .699$) signifies that almost 69.9% of the variance in customer satisfaction is attributable only to empathy. This degree of accuracy is exceptionally remarkable for a single predictor and underscores the premise that empathy is fundamental in influencing how customers feel.

Table 3: Results of ANOVA Analysis

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	524.995	1	524.995	924.429	.001 ^b
	Residual	226.029	398	.568		

Total	751.024	399
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a. Dependent Variable: Customer_satisfaction
b. Predictors: (Cosntant), empathy

The importance of this association is confirmed by the ANOVA results, indicating that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 924.429$, $p < .001$). This evidence indicates that the probability of the observed connections developing by coincidence is exceedingly low, thereby supporting empathy as an appropriate variable in customer satisfaction.

4.1.2 Reliability

Table 4: Results of Reliability Analysis

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.822 ^a	.675	.674	.78316

- a. Dependent Variable: customer satisfaction
b. Predictors: (Constant), reliability

The analysis indicates a strong and statistically significant correlation between reliability and customer satisfaction. The correlation coefficient (R) of .822 indicates a strong positive association between dependability and satisfaction, suggesting that customers experience more satisfaction when service delivery is reliable and consistent. Moreover, the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .675$) indicates that 67.5% of the variance in customer satisfaction could be accounted for by dependability alone, an outstanding outcome for a single predictor variable. This establishes reliability as a crucial factor influencing satisfaction outcomes within service systems.

Table 5: Results of Reliability

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	506.915	1	506.915	826.483	.001 ^b
	Residual	244.109	398	.613		
	Total	751.024	399			

- a. Dependent Variable: customer satisfaction
b. Predictors: (Constant), reliability

This evidence indicates that the probability of the observed connections developing by coincidence is exceedingly low, thereby supporting empathy as an appropriate variable in customer satisfaction. The regression model shows statistical reliability, evidenced by an F-value of 826.483 and a p-value below .001, affirming the significant predictive capacity of reliability on customer satisfaction.

4.1.3 Responsiveness

Table 6: Results of responsiveness

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate

1	.832 ^a	.692	.691	.76204
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a. Dependent Variable: customer satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), responsiveness

The regression model provides clear statistical evidence of a large and significant correlation between responsiveness and customer satisfaction. The analysis reveals a high positive association, with a correlation coefficient (R) of .832, indicating that enhanced responsiveness significantly elevates customer satisfaction. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .692$) indicates that 69.2% of the variance in customer satisfaction is attributed only to responsiveness, establishing it as a vital factor in attaining positive service results.

Table 7: Results of responsiveness

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	519.903	1	519.903	895.294	.001 ^b
	Residual	231.121	398	.581		
	Total	751.024	399			

a. Dependent Variable: customer satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), responsiveness

The model's stability is shown by the ANOVA results ($F = 895.294$, $p < .001$), indicating the statistical significance of the association and establishing that the observed effects are unlikely to be attributable to random chance.

Table 8: Results of Cultural Sensitivity

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.803 ^a	.645	.644	.81887

a. Dependent Variable: customer satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), cultural sensitivity

The regression results demonstrate a strong and statistically significant correlation between cultural sensitivity and customer happiness. The correlation coefficient ($R = .803$) indicates a strong positive relationship, signifying that an increase in cultural sensitivity corresponds with an increase in customer satisfaction. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .645$) indicates that 64.5% of the variance in customer satisfaction is related only to cultural sensitivity, highlighting its essential influence on customer experiences.

Table 9: Results of Cultural Sensitivity

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	484.145	1	484.145	722.012	.001 ^b
	Residual	266.879	398	.671		
	Total	751.024	399			

a. Dependent Variable: customer satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), cultural sensitivity

The ANOVA table demonstrates the model's significance, showing an F-value of 722.012 and a p-value below .001, signifying that the relationship between variables is not related to chance.

4.1.4 Hygiene Adherence

Table 10: Results of Hygiene Adherence

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.839 ^a	.703	.703	.74819

a. Predictors: (Constant), hygiene_adherence

The regression analysis offers important proof about the correlation between hygiene adherence and customer happiness. The model demonstrates a substantial positive correlation ($R = .839$), indicating that increased adherence to hygiene is closely associated with enhanced customer satisfaction. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .703$) demonstrates that 70.3% of the variability in customer satisfaction is due only to hygiene adherence. This is a highly consistent outcome, especially for a single predictor variable.

Table 11: Results of Hygiene Adherence

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	528.226	1	528.226	943.607	.001 ^b
	Residual	222.798	398	.560		
	Total	751.024	399			

a. Dependent Variable: customer satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), hygiene adherence

The ANOVA results further support statistical significance, with the model producing an F-value of 943.607 and a p-value below .001. This confirms the model's reliability and stability, highlighting that cleanliness adherence is not merely connected with satisfaction but actively influences it.

4.1.5 Professionalism

Table 12: Results of Professionalism

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.832 ^a	.692	.691	.76223

a. Predictors: (Constant), professionalism

The R-square is .832a, which is considered high (close to 1.00), suggesting a high correlation between professionalism and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, the R-

squared is 0.692, suggesting a 69.2% probability that professionalism is closely related to customer satisfaction. This suggests professionalism plays a large role in terms of employees' attributes that contribute to customer satisfaction.

Table 13: Results of Professionalism Analysis

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	519.786	1	519.786	894.640	.001 ^b
	Residual	231.238	398	.581		
	Total	751.024	399			

a. Dependent Variable: customer satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), professionalism

By looking at the regression result, the significance level is <001, this shows a standard error of less than 0.005. The ANOVA results indicate minimum error and the probability that this result is accurate. In summary, we can draw conclusions by connecting the R-squared results. This clearly indicates that professionalism significantly influences employees' attributes, which in turn affect customer satisfaction.

Overall, customer satisfaction is the cornerstone of success in the competitive fast-food industry. This study examines two critical research objectives: identifying employee attributes that contribute to customer satisfaction (RO1) and determining which of these attributes have the most significant impact (RO2). Through rigorous regression analysis, we have uncovered compelling evidence about what truly matters to customers in fast food service encounters.

This research examines six hypotheses (H1–H6) that propose positive relationships between specific employee attributes (empathy, reliability, responsiveness, cultural sensitivity, hygiene adherence, and professionalism) and customer satisfaction. The analysis is based on linear regression results, which provide statistical evidence to support or refute these hypotheses.

The first hypothesis (H1) posits that empathy in employees positively influences customer satisfaction. The regression results strongly support this claim. The correlation coefficient ($R = 0.836$) indicates a robust positive relationship, while the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.699$) suggests that empathy alone accounts for nearly 70% of the variance in customer satisfaction. The unstandardised coefficient ($B = 0.883$) further confirms that a one-unit increase in empathy leads to a significant rise in satisfaction. The ANOVA results ($F = 924.429$, $p < 0.001$) reinforce the statistical significance of this relationship, leaving little doubt that empathy is a key driver of customer satisfaction.

The second hypothesis (H2) examines the role of reliability in shaping customer satisfaction. The regression analysis reveals a strong positive correlation ($R = 0.822$), with reliability explaining 67.5% of the variance in satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.675$). The unstandardised coefficient ($B = 0.908$) demonstrates that each unit increase in reliability corresponds to a nearly equivalent increase in satisfaction. The model's significance (F

= 826.483, $p < 0.001$) confirms that reliability is a statistically reliable predictor of customer satisfaction, supporting H2.

Hypothesis H3 focuses on responsiveness, proposing that quicker and more attentive service enhances customer satisfaction. The regression results validate this hypothesis, showing a high correlation ($R = 0.832$) and an R^2 value of 0.692, meaning responsiveness explains 69.2% of satisfaction variance. The unstandardised coefficient ($B = 0.905$) indicates that improvements in responsiveness directly boost satisfaction. The ANOVA results ($F = 895.294$, $p < 0.001$) further confirm the model's statistical significance, leaving no room for doubt about the importance of responsiveness.

Cultural sensitivity (H4) is another critical factor in customer satisfaction, particularly in diverse service environments. The regression analysis supports this hypothesis, with a strong correlation ($R = 0.803$) and an R^2 of 0.645, indicating that cultural sensitivity explains 64.5% of satisfaction variance. The unstandardised coefficient ($B = 0.886$) suggests that a one-unit increase in cultural sensitivity leads to a proportional rise in satisfaction. The model's significance ($F = 722.012$, $p < 0.001$) demonstrates the value of cultural sensitivity in fostering positive customer experiences.

Hygiene adherence (H5) is particularly relevant in industries such as healthcare, hospitality, and food services. The regression results strongly support this hypothesis, with the highest correlation among all variables ($R = 0.839$) and an R^2 of 0.703, meaning hygiene adherence accounts for more than 70% of satisfaction variance. The unstandardised coefficient ($B = 0.867$) confirms that better hygiene practises lead to higher satisfaction. The ANOVA results ($F = 943.607$, $p < 0.001$) further validate the model's reliability, highlighting hygiene as a non-negotiable factor in customer satisfaction.

The final hypothesis (H6) explores the role of professionalism in customer satisfaction. The regression results support this hypothesis, showing a strong correlation ($R = 0.832$) and an R^2 of 0.692, indicating that professionalism explains 69.2% of satisfaction variance. The unstandardised coefficient ($B = 0.896$) suggests that professionalism has a nearly one-to-one impact on satisfaction. While the analysis mentions minor inconsistencies in some sub-factors (e.g., responsiveness and cultural sensitivity), the overall model remains statistically significant ($F = 894.640$, $p < 0.001$), confirming professionalism as a critical attribute.

The linear regression results provide compelling evidence to support all six hypotheses (H1–H6). Empathy, reliability, responsiveness, cultural sensitivity, hygiene adherence, and professionalism each exhibit strong, statistically significant relationships with customer satisfaction. Among these, hygiene adherence and empathy stand out as the most influential, explaining nearly 70% satisfaction variance, respectively. These findings underscore the importance of cultivating these attributes in employees to enhance customers' experiences. Businesses that prioritise these factors are likely to see measurable improvements in customer satisfaction, loyalty, and overall success.

5 Discussion

Our analysis reveals six fundamental employee attributes that significantly influence customer satisfaction:

1. Empathy emerges as a crucial factor, with employees who demonstrate genuine care and understanding creating more positive customer experiences. The strong correlation ($R = 0.836$) indicates that emotional connection in service interactions substantially enhances satisfaction levels.
2. Reliability proves equally important, as customers value consistent and dependable service. The data shows that when employees deliver what they promise ($R = 0.822$), it builds customer trust and repeat business.
3. Responsiveness to customer needs demonstrates a powerful relationship with satisfaction ($R = 0.832$). In the fast-paced fast-food environment, prompt attention to customer requests significantly impacts the overall experience.
4. Cultural Sensitivity has become increasingly relevant in today's diverse marketplace. Employees who demonstrate awareness and respect for cultural differences ($R = 0.803$) create more inclusive and welcoming service environments.
5. Hygiene Adherence stands out as particularly critical in food service contexts. With the strongest correlation ($R = 0.839$), cleanliness and proper hygiene practises form a fundamental expectation that directly affects customer perceptions and satisfaction.
6. Professionalism in employee demeanour and service delivery completes the picture, showing that courteous, well-trained staff ($R = 0.832$) contribute substantially to positive customer evaluations.

While all six attributes contribute meaningfully, our analysis reveals a clear hierarchy of importance. The most impactful factor is hygiene adherence, explaining 70.3% of satisfaction variance. In food service, cleanliness is not just important – it holds undisputed relevance. Customers perceive hygiene as a basic requirement, and any lapse in this area disproportionately affects their overall satisfaction.

Empathy follows closely, accounting for 69.9% satisfaction variance. This finding challenges the traditional view of fast food as purely transactional, revealing that emotional connection matters even in quick-service encounters.

Responsiveness and professionalism share equal importance (both $R^2 = 0.692$), highlighting that customers value both speed and quality in service delivery. The fast-food environment demands a delicate balance between efficiency and courtesy.

Reliability and cultural sensitivity, while slightly less dominant, remain essential components of service excellence. Their strong correlations (0.822 and 0.803, respectively) demonstrates that they are not merely nice-to-have qualities but genuine drivers of customer satisfaction.

6 Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between several employee traits and customer satisfaction in fast food restaurants in Dungun, Terengganu. The study focused on six key attributes: reliability, cultural sensitivity, professionalism, hygienic commitment, responsiveness, and empathy. The results of quantitative methods such as surveys and multiple regression analysis indicated that each of these attributes has a strong, positive, and statistically significant impact on customer satisfaction. Among the findings, empathy was identified as a crucial element. Customers appreciated it when employees genuinely cared about them, listened intently, and politely and respectfully met their needs. Similarly, hygiene adherence is also important, especially considering the public health awareness, as consumers place a larger value on cleanliness and food safety.

Additionally, the R-squared values from the regression study, which vary from about 64.5% to 70.3%, demonstrate that these personnel attributes contribute significantly to customer satisfaction. This proves that soft skills and interpersonal abilities are just as important, if not more so, in the fast-food industry than operational efficiency. In addition to timely service and affordable prices, the study shows that the way the employees interact with customers significantly affects customer satisfaction.

All things considered; the study emphasizes how crucial human factors are in providing high-quality services. The study provides empirical justification for firms to invest in employee development, particularly in areas such as emotional intelligence, hygienic practices, and customer communication. This study only included fast food consumers in Dungun, Terengganu. To find out if staff attribute effects and consumer expectations differ by culture, region, or population density, future researches are encouraged to examine other districts, states, or even nations. This would bring better insights into the dimensions of employee attributes and enrich the scope of the study.

7 About the authors

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