

Mediating Effect of Corporate Reputation in the Influence of Service Quality on Customer Loyalty in Selected Restaurants in Bukidnon Province, Philippines

Journal of Tourism, Hospitality & Culinary Arts (JTHCA)
2024, Vol. 16 (2) pp 103-115
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UiTM Press
Submit date: 21st November 2023
Accept date: 12th June 2024
Publish date: xxth June 2024

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Proposed citation:

Escarlan, F. C., & Dagang, A. L. B. (2024). Mediating effect of corporate reputation in the influence of service quality on customer loyalty in selected restaurants in Bukidnon Province, Philippines. *Journal of Tourism, Hospitality & Culinary Arts*, 16(2), 103-115.

Abstract

In the competitive restaurant industry, where service quality and a positive corporate reputation are crucial for success, there is a gap in understanding how these factors work together to influence customer loyalty. While previous research has explored each concept separately, there's a lack of thorough studies on the interplay between corporate reputation, service quality and customer loyalty. Hence, this study aimed to fill this gap by investigating the role of corporate reputation in influencing the relationship between service quality levels and customer loyalty of selected casual dining restaurant customers in Bukidnon, Philippines. Quantitative research design was used in this study. The descriptive correlational design was used to evaluate the dimensions of service quality, corporate reputation, and customer loyalty in the selected casual dining restaurants. Pearson R correlation was employed to see the significant relationship between service quality and customer loyalty, corporate reputation, and customer loyalty. Structural equation modeling using IBM Amos was used to test if corporate reputation could enhance the influence of service quality on customer loyalty. Results showed that assessment of service quality dimensions was very high and corporate reputation had a very high level of agreement among the customers. Both service quality and corporate reputation can influence customer loyalty. There is a significant mediation effect of corporate reputation on loyalty and a significant, positive direct effect of service quality on loyalty, which contributes to a positive total effect, both directly and indirectly, between service quality, corporate reputation, and loyalty. Thus, this study concludes that the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty is strengthened by corporate reputation. The results highlight the crucial role of fostering a positive corporate reputation in reinforcing the association between service quality and customer loyalty in the restaurant sector. Recognizing the enhancing impact of corporate reputation, businesses are encouraged to prioritize efforts in building and maintaining a favorable reputation alongside improving service quality to sustain and strengthen customer loyalty.

Keywords:

Customer, loyalty, reputation, Philippines

1 Introduction

One of today's fastest-growing businesses is the restaurant industry. In this time of pandemic, it is also one of the hardest-hit industries. As vaccines have already been discovered, restaurant owners are hoping to be back on track in the business world. Social media is one technique to draw guests, but it can also have a favorable or negative impact on a restaurant's reputation. According to Dijkmans et al. (2015), corporate reputation is considered a valuable intangible asset for companies, yet it is increasingly difficult to manage in an era of hard-to-control online conversations. Thus, while participating on social media might have advantages, there are obvious negative effects on a company's reputation. According to Hadi and Indradewa (2019), a good or positive reputation has a beneficial impact or influence on consumer evaluations of services and products, notably loyalty to the product.

The increasing number of publications on corporate reputation makes it difficult to keep track of this growing body of literature (Veh et al., 2019). Thus, the complex study of corporate reputation may be the reason restaurant owners give it less importance because they are confused about what factors they should consider. Thus, it is important to consider the factors that could affect a restaurant's corporate reputation. This study investigates the importance of corporate reputation and its effect on customer loyalty.

As stated by Khan (2013), customer loyalty is seen as one of the most important aspects of a business's success, and to create loyal customers, a business must offer the highest quality service available. As stated by Saneva and Chortoseva (2018), the restaurant industry is one of the industries where service quality plays an essential role in development and advancement. Thus, even established restaurants still give importance to service quality. Therefore, restaurant owners must understand the importance of providing quality service and its possible impact on creating loyal customers. According to Hadi & Indradewa (2019), the determinant of a company's reputation is service quality. That is why it is good to investigate how corporate reputation affects service quality to gain customer loyalty.

With the foregoing premise, this study examines the mediating effect of corporate reputation on service quality and customer loyalty in selected casual dining restaurants in Bukidnon. With increasing food service businesses in the country in 2019, including cafes, bars, motels, restaurants, street stalls, and kiosks (Singian, 2020), the restaurant industry is highly competitive. Additionally, as Bukidnon is known as the 'Food Basket of Mindanao' and is a popular tourist destination (Salonga & Borbon 2021), it is worthwhile to investigate how corporate reputation significantly influences service quality in creating loyal customers in this region. By addressing these research gaps, this study aimed to contribute to existing knowledge by highlighting the importance of corporate reputation, its relationship with service quality, and its impact on customer loyalty in the context of casual dining restaurants in Bukidnon. Understanding these dynamics can

provide valuable insights for restaurant owners and contribute to their success in an increasingly competitive industry. This study considers that corporate reputation may enhance the impact of quality services on creating loyal customers. The more reputable a company is the more impact service quality has on increasing loyal customers. The main focus of the research is to analyze the mediation effect of corporate reputation on service quality and customer loyalty at selected hotel restaurants and casual dining restaurants in Bukidnon.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Social Exchange and Service Quality

This study was anchored on the "effect theory of social exchange" by Lawler (2001). This theory sees social units as sources of emotions that are proportional to the degree of jointness in a task or trade. The social units in a service setting can be the relationships between service providers and customers. According to Lawler's theory, as the degree of shared responsibility increases, so does the possibility for emotions to increase and be directed at the service relationship. Moreover, a positive outcome and a customer's emotional response in a service setting spread to the entire company, resulting in increased loyalty to the service brand. Therefore, one notion that may help in analyzing consumer loyalty is Lawler's theory of social exchange (Sierra & McQuitty, 2005).

Several authors defined service quality. As stated by Ramya (2019a), "service quality is a term that refers to a service provider's capacity to efficiently satisfy a client's needs while also enhancing business performance. According to Aftab et al. (2016), in restaurants, service quality plays a crucial role in making customers happy and persuading them to return. Thus, service quality is one of the major elements influencing customer satisfaction and loyalty in restaurants. Kenneth and Azunwo (2018) assumed that having a good presentation and reliable service delivery has a huge impact on customer happiness, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth in an eatery. Therefore, a restaurant with excellent service knows how to satisfy customers and will give them a reason to revisit and recommend the restaurant. This study used the five dimensions of service quality, such as tangibility, assurance, responsiveness, empathy, and reliability, for the evaluation of the quality of service in a restaurant.

Another dimension of service quality that is very important to building customer relationships is empathy. This is when a service employee shows that he or she understands and sympathizes with the customer's situation. Empathy is very important for understanding people's feelings. According to Song et al. (2022), when a company puts itself in the shoes of the client, it is exhibiting empathy. The author also said that businesses that include empathy in their development are not only making sales but also making friends with their customers. Therefore, having empathy from the employees for their customers helps in building customer relationships, which might as well create customer loyalty.

2.2 Customer Loyalty

Customers, nowadays, are much more sensitive when it comes to the physical appearance of the employees as well as the physical environment of the restaurant. That is why tangibility is one of the most important factors in service quality. Tangibles refer to the 'physical quality' and usually refer to elements of services, such as the appearance, equipment, staff, advertising material, and other physical characteristics used for rendering services (Maric et al., 2016). Therefore, restaurant owners must place a high value on the tangible qualities of their food and services to receive favorable feedback from their patrons and encourage them to return.

Customer loyalty can be defined as the customer's authenticity toward a specific brand in the service industry (Gorondutse, 2014). On the other hand, Xuan (2019) defined customer loyalty as the unwavering dedication with which customers will keep purchasing or showing interest in a specific good or service in the future. Moreover, Chun & Nyam-Ochir (2020) stated that loyal customers are the ones who have a pleasant experience at a restaurant and might tell others about it, disseminate positive information about it, or become loyal customers. Therefore, customer loyalty is the act of patronizing a business after having been satisfied with its goods and services. Therefore, loyal customers have the potential to share and recommend the restaurant to their friends and families.

Next is responsiveness. In full-service restaurants, customers expect the servers to understand their needs and address them promptly. Waiting time affects significantly customer satisfaction and experiences (Tran Thi Phuong Dung, *n.d.*). Therefore, being able to fulfill the promised service in time makes the customers feel important and happy with the service. Thus, responsiveness is one of those factors that satisfy the customer on the dimensions of service quality (Sabir et al., 2014).

Reliability is one of the important dimensions that a restaurant needs to consider. As reviewed by several scholars and authors, reliability is considered to be the capacity to deliver the desired service with accuracy and consistency. Furthermore, according to Wibisono & Lukito (2020), reliability contributes to the formation of trust. Thus, if the servers perform the promised service to the customers, they may likely develop trust and tend to be loyal to the restaurant.

Finally, assurance was described Pakurár et al. (2019) as a term that entails communicating with clients in their language and paying attention to their concerns. Thus, the product expertise of employees when it comes to the food and services they offer is crucial in this dimension because customers will gradually build a sense of confidence in the restaurant if the staff can respond to their questions accurately. That is why assurance is very important because it helps build trust with customers and makes them feel safe in every transaction.

Several authors described corporate reputation from different perspectives. Hadi and Indradewa (2019) defined reputation (image) as typically characterized as a notion of quality paired with the name of the company. Corporate reputation, on the other

hand, can be defined as a customer's view of how well a firm looks after them and cares about their well-being, as stated by Duygun et al. (2014). However, Hadi and Indradewa (2019) concluded that a good or positive reputation would have a favorable impact or influence on consumer evaluations of services and products, particularly loyalty to the product, whereas a bad or negative reputation would harm the product. As a result, having a good reputation can lead to a positive perception of the products and services provided by a company. Moreover, Gorondutse (2014) stated that if a company has a good reputation among its customers and they are happy with the quality of services it provides, they will eventually become loyal to it. Thus, corporate reputation is a factor that enhances service quality and can significantly impact customer loyalty.

2.3 Corporate Reputation

This study also used "The Factors Responsible for Corporate Reputation" by Sandu (2015), where the result concluded the six relevant factors in corporate reputation, which are: emotional appeal, ethical and social responsibility, patriotism, management and leadership, customer value, and economic performance. However, this study will use the first four factors responsible for the corporate reputation of Sandu (2015), which apply to restaurants.

The first factor is an emotional appeal. According to Hashem & Al-dweeri (2015), customers' emotions have long been thought to be useful tools for determining how they feel about a product or service. In his study, the findings suggest that positive customer emotions associated with a positive shopping experience are influential and can lead to a favorable purchase decision. Therefore, customers buying behavior will depend on their emotions and whether they feel good about the products and services offered to them.

Next is ethical and social responsibility. The phrase "ethical" refers to the application of moral principles and ethical standards to everyday company operations, behavior, and policies (Grigoropoulos, 2019). On the other hand, social responsibility can help to improve a company's image and perception while also enhancing brand awareness and recognition (Abd Aziz, 2020). In today's business, leaders must ensure that their companies act ethically and do what is right for all stakeholders, including consumers, suppliers, employees, local communities, society, and the environment, according to Bassell et al. (2015). Moreover, the author Blajer-Gobiewska (2014) said that if a company wants to attract investors and gain a competitive advantage, it must understand the importance of environmental protection (environmental management, recycling), corporate social responsibility activities, appropriate investor relations, compliance with codes of best practices for publicly traded companies, codes of ethics, and employee health and safety. Thus, both being ethical and socially responsible can help build a good corporate image for the company, which might as well attract possible loyal customers.

Leadership and management play an important role in a company's reputation. According to Liphadzi et al. (2017), for every company to fulfill its vision and objectives, effective leadership is an important driving force, while management has to do with leading a project from its planning to implementation. Furthermore, Rizan et al. (2020) said that regardless of how large or small a business is, it must be managed successfully and efficiently for employees to be more productive and satisfied with their work. Thus, having a good leader and well-managed employees can take part in the customers' experience and contribute to their satisfaction and loyalty.

Another factor of corporate reputation is patriotism. According to the study of Puncheva-Michelotti & Michelotti (2013), consumers, investors, employees, and community members all place a high value on business patriotism. Locally owned businesses contribute more to their country than foreign-owned businesses because they reinvest profits in the local economy and help create local jobs, according to Puncheva-Michelotti & Michelotti (2014). Therefore, patriotism is a factor that helps construct a good corporate reputation, which helps attract customers who patronize local products and services knowing that they can greatly contribute to the local community.

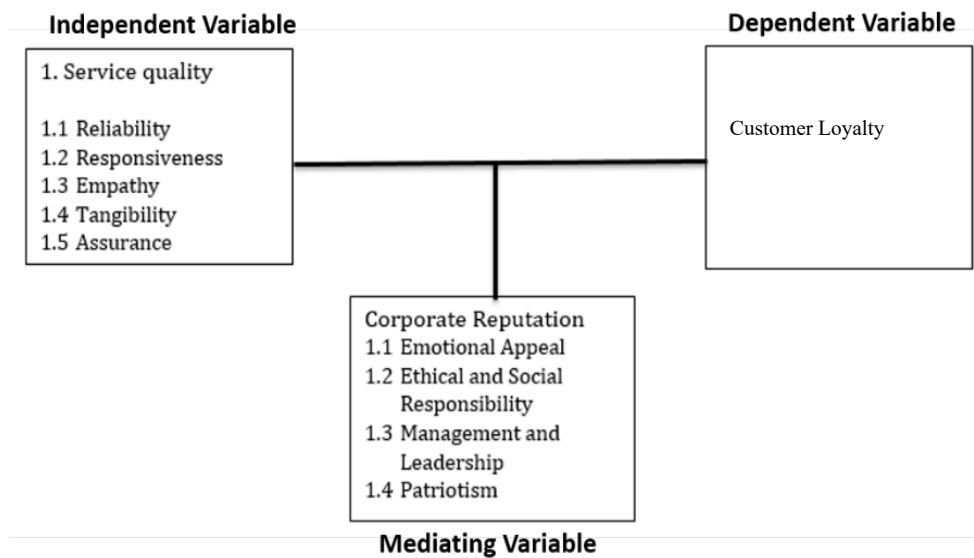


Figure 1: Schematic diagram showing the relationship between service quality and corporate reputation to customer loyalty.

3 Methodology

This study used the five SERVQUAL dimensions identified by Parasuraman et al. (1985), which are tangibility, assurance, responsiveness, empathy, and reliability. However, the researcher used SERVPERF by Fogarty et al. (2000) to measure service quality by perception only.

A descriptive method was also used to evaluate the dimensions of service quality, corporate reputation, and customer loyalty in the selected hotel restaurants in Bukidnon. Pearson R correlation was employed to see the significant relationship between service quality and customer loyalty, corporate reputation, and customer loyalty. Structural equation modeling using IBM Amos was used to test if corporate reputation could enhance the influence of service quality on customer loyalty.

This study also anchored on the study of Hadi and Indradewa (2019), who stated that a positive reputation has a favorable impact on consumer evaluations of services and products, particularly in terms of loyalty to the product. Thus, having a positive reputation can have multiple benefits for a restaurant business. It can greatly influence how customers view the products and services and eventually develop loyalty towards them.

This study evaluates customer loyalty according to the customer's revisit intention and recommendation of the restaurant based on their experience with the service quality and the restaurant's reputation. This study evaluates customer loyalty according to the customer's revisit intention and recommendation of the restaurant based on their experience with the service quality and the restaurant's reputation. Figure 1 shows the interplay of variables in the study.

Correlation statistics were used to determine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed in determining if corporate reputation can enhance the impact of a company's quality service offerings or not which is assumed to improve customer loyalty.

4 Findings

Table 1 presents the frequency, percentage, and mean distribution of the participants' satisfaction level with the service quality of the restaurants in terms of tangibility, responsiveness, empathy, reliability, and assurance.

Table 1: Service Quality Dimension and Corresponding Mean and Interpretation

Service Quality Dimension	Mean	Interpretation
Reliability	4.47	High
Responsiveness	4.48	Very high
Empathy	4.49	High
Tangibility	4.53	Very high
Assurance	4.64	Very high
Overall mean	4.58	Very high

Findings show that the restaurants had a very high level of service quality as indicated by the overall mean of 4.58. Of the 100 participants, 61 percent of them responded with a very high level, 37 percent responded with a high level while 1 percent rated with moderate level and 1 responded with a low level of service quality. Considering the results presented, the study of Kenneth & Azunwo, (2018) confirmed that a restaurant's capacity to consistently present and provide reliable services can have a significant impact on customer satisfaction, loyalty, and good word of mouth. In other words, the more satisfied customers there are at the restaurant, the higher the quality of service.

Table 2: Corporate Reputation Factors and Corresponding Mean and Interpretation

Factors of Corporate Reputation	Mean	Interpretation
Emotional appeal	4.57	Very high
Ethical and social responsibility	4.47	High
Leadership and management	4.44	High
Patriotism	4.63	Very high
Overall Mean	4.54	Very high

Findings show that the customers agree with the very high level of corporate reputation of the restaurants, as indicated by the overall mean of 4.54. Of the 100 participants, 60 percent agreed to a very high level, 35 percent agreed to a high level, 4 percent agreed to a moderate level, and one agreed to a low level.

The factor of corporate reputation that has the highest mean is patriotism (M = 4.63), while the lowest is management and leadership (M = 4.44). The result highlighting patriotism as the highest factor aligns with the study conducted by Puncheva-Michelotti and Michelotti (2013), which confirmed that consumers, investors, employees, and community members highly value business patriotism. Additionally, the significance of emotional appeal as the second-highest factor corroborates the findings of Hashem and Al-dweeri (2015), emphasizing that a positive shopping experience influences customers' pleasant emotions and positively impacts their purchase decisions. Considering the results presented, in general, the results further confirm the study of Hadi and Indradewa (2019), which found that if a company's reputation was higher, there would be more opportunities and there would also be a higher level of client loyalty. Therefore, a good reputation can provide endless side benefits for any company (Prof et al., 2017).

Table 3 presents the frequency, percentage, and mean distribution of the participants' loyalty in terms of revisit intention and recommendation.

Table 3: Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Distribution of the participants' level of loyalty based on the service quality and corporate reputation of the selected restaurants (N=100)

Range	Interpretation	F	Percentage
4.51 to 5.00	Very high extent	76	76
3.51 to 4.50	High extent	21	21
2.51 to 3.50	Moderate extent	1	1
1.51 to 2.50	Low extent	2	2
1.00 to 1.50	Very low extent	0	0
Total			100
Mean			4.71
Description			Very high
Std. Deviation			0.59

Findings show that the customers agree with a very high level of loyalty based on their experience with the service quality and the corporate reputation of the restaurants as indicated by the overall mean of 4.71. Of the 100 participants, 76 percent of them responded agree with a very high level of loyalty, 21 percent responded agreed with a high level of loyalty while 1 percent rated agree to a moderate level of loyalty and 2 percent agree to a low level of loyalty.

The results further confirmed the study of Gorondutse (2014), that if a business has a positive reputation among its clients and they are satisfied with the level of services it offers, they will eventually develop loyalty towards it. Therefore, the higher level of customer satisfaction, there will be higher level of customer loyalty. Furthermore, if the level of corporate reputation were high, there would also be a high level of customer loyalty.

Table 4: Correlation Matrix Between Service Quality to Customer Loyalty; and Corporate Reputation to Customer Loyalty.

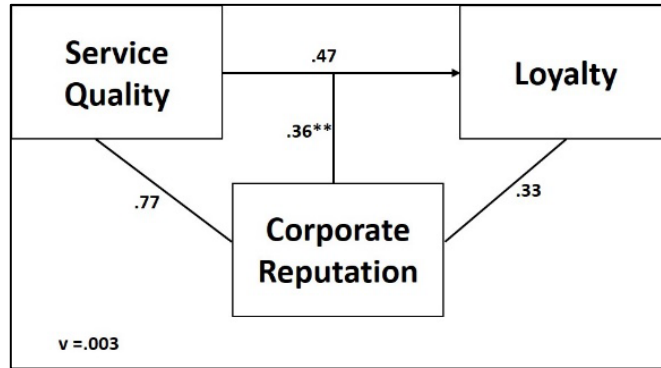
		Loyalty
Service Quality	Pearson R	.622**
	Sig (p-value)	0.000
Corporate Reputation	Pearson R	.591**
	Sig (p-value)	0.000

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

Data reveal that the service quality (P=0.000, R= 0.622***) has a significant, strong positive relationship with customers' loyalty. On the other hand, results showed that corporate reputation (P=0.000, R = 0.591***) has a moderately significant, positive relationship with customers' loyalty. Thus, hypotheses A and B are rejected. This correlation implies that the variables move in one direction. It is likely to imply that an increase in a certain variable may be the cause of an increase in another variable. Participants who are more satisfied with the service quality tend to be more loyal in recommending and revisiting the restaurant, and the better the reputation a company

has, the higher customer loyalty. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between service quality and loyalty; and corporate reputation and loyalty.

Results confirmed by Gorondutse (2014) that if a company has a good reputation with its customers and they are happy with the quality of services it provides, they will probably become loyal to it.



*Significant level at 0.01 level

Figure 2: Mediation Model of Corporate Reputation to Service Quality and Loyalty

Figure 2 presents the results of the indirect effect of corporate reputation and the direct effects of service quality and corporate reputation on loyalty. Results reveal that there is a significant mediation effect of corporate reputation on loyalty ($B = 0.360$). This means that when corporate reputation goes up by 1, loyalty goes up by 0.360. Moreover, there is also a significant and positive direct effect of service quality on loyalty ($B = .470$). This contributes to a positive total effect, both directly and indirectly, between service quality, corporate reputation, and loyalty ($B = .692$). Thus, the effect of service quality on loyalty is enhanced by corporate reputation. This implies that the level of customer loyalty can be influenced by the quality of services a restaurant provides, and improving their corporate reputation will enhance the services, thus making more loyal customers.

The results supported the suggestion of Yazid (2020) that a firm should maintain a good corporate reputation to maintain customer satisfaction, which leads to loyalty among customers. Furthermore, a good or positive reputation would have a beneficial impact or influence on consumer assessments of services and products, particularly loyalty to the product, while a bad or negative reputation would harm the product, according to Hadi & Indradewa (2019). Moreover, the result also confirmed the study of Prof et al. (2017): once a firm has a positive reputation, even the name of the company will serve as a positive indicator to make sure that its goods, services, or purchasing methods can live up to the company's credibility and expectations.

5 Conclusion

This study concludes that the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty is both strengthened by corporate reputation. Therefore, enhancing a restaurant's service quality can positively influence customer loyalty, and improving its corporate reputation can further enhance the services, ultimately leading to more loyal customers.

Corporate reputation is the overall perception and evaluation that customers have of a company, which is based on their experiences and interactions with the brand, as well as external factors such as the company's image, values, and public relations. When a company has a positive reputation, customers are more likely to trust and have confidence in the brand, which can enhance the perceived value of the services it offers. This positive perception can also create an emotional attachment and loyalty toward the brand, which can be a significant driver of customer behaviour.

Therefore, in the context of the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty, a positive corporate reputation can act as a multiplier effect that amplifies the impact of service quality on customer loyalty. In other words, if a company has a positive reputation, customers are more likely to perceive high-quality services as being even better, and they may be more willing to overlook occasional service failures because they have confidence in the company's ability to deliver a high level of service consistently. This positive cycle of trust, confidence, and loyalty can ultimately lead to increased customer retention, repeat business, and positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

Moreover, the Social Exchange theory of Lawler (2001) was operationalized in this study. Thus, it was proven that a successful outcome and a customer's emotional reaction in a service context influence the entire business, increasing brand loyalty.

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