

Published online on the journal's web page: http://jurnal.usahid.ac.id/index.php/jamr

eISSN: 2797-2917

Journal of Applied Management Research

Strengthening the Brand Image and Customer Loyalty of Kampung Empang Restaurant Through Food Quality and Service Quality

Isalman*

[1]Department of Management, Halu Oleo University, Kendari, Indonesia

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 28 January 2026
Revised: 20 March 2026
Accepted: 17 Mei 2026

Keywords:

Brand Image, Customer Loyalty, Food Quality, Service Quality

* *Corresponding author.*

E-mail addresses:
isalmans@uho.ac.id
(Isalman).

ABSTRACT

Previous studies in the restaurant industry have primarily focused on the direct effects of food quality and service quality on customer loyalty, with limited attention to the mediating role of brand image, particularly in open-air restaurant settings. This gap is important because customers in open-air dining environments evaluate both functional and experiential aspects of the service encounter differently from those in conventional restaurants. Therefore, this study examines the effects of food quality and service quality on customer loyalty through brand image at Kampung Empang Restaurant, an open-air restaurant in Kendari City. A quantitative explanatory approach was employed using survey data collected from 85 customers selected through purposive sampling, specifically those who had visited the restaurant at least twice within the previous five months. Data were gathered using a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using PLS-SEM, which is well-suited to predictive models involving mediation analysis with relatively small sample sizes. The results indicate that food quality significantly influences brand image but has no direct effect on customer loyalty. Service quality significantly affects both brand image and customer loyalty. Brand image also significantly influences customer loyalty and mediates the effects of food quality and service quality on loyalty. These findings contribute to hospitality marketing literature by highlighting brand image as a key mechanism linking service experiences and customer loyalty in open-air restaurant contexts.

Published by LPPM Usahid
ISSN 2797-2917 – © 2025 The Authors. This is an open-access article under the CC BY NC SA license http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of the culinary industry has intensified competition, making customer loyalty a strategic factor for sustaining business performance (Krishnan, 2020; Nguyen, 2024). Loyal customers generate repeat purchases and contribute to stable revenue streams (Sudari et al., 2019), engage in positive word-of-mouth communication (Rita et al., 2023), and provide valuable feedback for continuous improvement Nguyen, (2024). Therefore, understanding the determinants of customer loyalty remains an important issue in hospitality and restaurant marketing research.

Brand image has been identified as an important determinant of customer loyalty because it reflects consumers' perceptions shaped by direct experiences and information about a brand. Previous studies suggest that a favorable brand image enhances trust, differentiates businesses from competitors, and encourages long-term customer commitment (Ladwein & Sánchez Romero, 2021; Nyamekye et al., 2023; Raddats et al., 2024). In restaurant settings, brand image may be an important mechanism by which customers translate their dining experiences into loyalty intentions.

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.36441/jamr

The restaurant industry consistently recognizes food quality and service quality as critical factors shaping customer evaluations. Food quality influences customer satisfaction, repurchase intentions, and trust through attributes such as taste, freshness, hygiene, safety, and presentation (Were et al., 2021; Czernyszewicz & Wiśniewska, 2024). Likewise, service quality contributes to positive customer experiences, enhances business reputation, and strengthens customer relationships (Bichler et al., 2020; Ji & Ko, 2021; Raddats et al., 2024; Jin et al., (2018) further argue that long-term customer relationships are developed through the combination of humanistic factors, such as employee interactions, and non-humanistic factors, such as food quality.

Despite extensive research on these constructs, several important gaps remain. First, from a theoretical perspective, previous studies have predominantly examined food quality and service quality as direct antecedents of customer loyalty, thereby providing a limited understanding of the underlying mechanism by which these factors influence loyalty outcomes. Although brand image has been acknowledged as an important marketing construct, its mediating role in translating service experiences into customer loyalty has received relatively little empirical attention (Suhartanto et al., 2019; Ji & Ko, 2021; Raddats et al., 2024).

Second, from an empirical perspective, existing findings regarding the relationships among food quality, service quality, brand image, and customer loyalty remain fragmented because these variables are often investigated separately rather than within an integrated framework. Consequently, evidence explaining how brand image simultaneously mediates the effects of food quality and service quality on customer loyalty remains inconclusive.

Third, from a contextual perspective, most prior studies have focused on conventional restaurants, hotels, or service organizations in developed countries. Limited empirical evidence exists from local Indonesian restaurants, particularly those adopting open-air dining concepts that emphasize experiential consumption. This limitation is important because customers increasingly evaluate restaurants not only based on functional attributes but also on emotional and experiential aspects of dining environments (Q. Nguyen et al., 2018; Mendocilla et al., 2020).

Fourth, from a methodological perspective, previous studies have primarily emphasized direct relationships among variables, while studies employing mediation models to explain the formation of customer loyalty in experience-based restaurant settings remain scarce. Therefore, examining brand image as a mediating mechanism may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the processes underlying loyalty formation in the hospitality context.

Kampung Empang Restaurant offers a unique setting to address these gaps by adopting an open-air dining concept that integrates natural surroundings into the customer experience. The fish ponds, wooden gazebos, natural stone elements, pathway designs along pond embankments, and evening garden lighting create a distinctive atmosphere that may shape customers' emotional responses. Mendocilla et al. (2020) suggest that the physical environment constitutes an important component of service quality, while (Nyamekye et al., 2023) argue that unique dining atmospheres can strengthen positive emotional experiences and brand perceptions. In this context, customers may evaluate food and service quality not solely from functional perspectives but also in terms of their contribution to brand image formation and loyalty development.

Accordingly, the novelty of this study lies in four aspects: (1) integrating food quality and service quality within a single mediation model of customer loyalty; (2) positioning brand image as the underlying mechanism linking service experiences to loyalty outcomes; (3) extending hospitality marketing literature to the context of open-air restaurants characterized by experiential dining; and (4) providing empirical evidence from a local Indonesian restaurant setting, which remains underrepresented in previous studies.

Based on these considerations, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) Does food quality influence brand image and customer loyalty? (2) Does service quality influence brand image and customer loyalty? and (3) Does brand image mediate the effects of food quality and service quality on customer loyalty

at Kampung Empang Restaurant? Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effects of food quality and service quality on brand image and customer loyalty and to examine the mediating role of brand image in these relationships. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the hospitality marketing literature by explaining the mechanism by which experiential dining attributes foster customer loyalty, and, practically, by providing guidance for restaurant managers on developing sustainable customer retention strategies.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employed an explanatory research design to examine the causal relationships among food quality, service quality, brand image, and customer loyalty in the culinary business context. The study was conducted at Kampung Empang Restaurant in Kendari City, Indonesia, an open-air restaurant featuring experiential dining. This setting was selected because customers' evaluations of food quality, service quality, and brand image are expected to influence the formation of loyalty in experience-based restaurant environments.

2.2 Population and Sample

The population comprised all customers of Kampung Empang Restaurant who had visited and made purchases there. Since the exact population size was unknown, it was assumed to be infinite. Following (Hair et al., 2017)The minimum sample size for PLS-SEM ranges from 5 to 10 times the number of indicators. This study employed 17 indicators, resulting in a minimum sample size of 85 respondents (5 × 17). Accordingly, data were collected from 85 respondents.

Purposive sampling was used because this study required respondents with sufficient experience to accurately evaluate the restaurant's food quality, service quality, brand image, and loyalty. Therefore, respondents were required to have visited and made purchases at Kampung Empang Restaurant at least twice within the last five months, ensuring familiarity with the restaurant's products and services. The operational definitions of variables and their corresponding measurement indicators are presented in Table 1. All measurement items were adapted from established scales in previous studies to ensure content validity and contextual relevance.

Table 1. Operational Definitions and Measurement Indicators

Variable	Operational Definition	Indicators	Sources
Food Quality	Customers' perceptions of the overall quality attributes of the restaurant's food.	Taste, freshness, food presentation, hygiene, temperature appropriateness, and menu variety.	(Mendocilla et al., 2020; Ji & Ko, 2021)
Service Quality	Customers' evaluation of service performance provided by restaurant employees during the dining experience.	Prompt service, employee responsiveness, courtesy, reliability, and willingness to help customers.	(Mendocilla et al., 2020; Ji & Ko, 2021)
Brand Image	Customers' overall perceptions and associations regarding the restaurant's brand.	Favorable brand impression, uniqueness of brand characteristics, and positive brand reputation.	Macías et al., 2023)
Customer Loyalty	Customers' commitment to maintain relationships with the restaurant through repeat patronage and advocacy behaviors.	Repurchase intention, recommendation intention, and preference over competitors.	(Thielemann et al., 2018; Macias et al., 2023)

Source: data processing results, 2026.

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.36441/jamr

2.3 Data Collection

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed offline to respondents who met the sampling criteria. The questionnaire items were developed from validated indicators used in previous studies and were adapted to the research context of Kampung Empang Restaurant. All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Before the main data collection, the instrument was reviewed to ensure content relevance and clarity of language. Construct validity and reliability were subsequently assessed through the outer model evaluation in SmartPLS.

2.4 Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 3.0. PLS-SEM was selected because it is suitable for predictive research involving relatively small samples and mediation models. The analysis consisted of evaluations of the outer and inner models. The outer model assessment examined convergent validity through factor loadings (> 0.70) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE > 0.50); discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loadings; and reliability using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (> 0.70) (Hair et al., 2017).

The inner model evaluation included collinearity assessment using VIF, explanatory power using the coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance using the effect size (f^2), and model fit using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), with values below 0.08 indicating an acceptable model fit. Hypothesis testing was performed using bootstrapping procedures by examining path coefficients, t-statistics (> 1.96), and p-values (< 0.05). The mediating effect of brand image was evaluated by assessing the significance of the indirect effects of food quality and service quality on customer loyalty.

2.5 Hypothesis Development

Furthermore, based on various theories and empirical findings in previous research, several hypotheses were formulated and will be tested in this research. Food quality determines the extent to which food meets consumer standards and expectations (Williamson & Hassanli, 2020). The most basic aspect is safety, which includes aspects of cleanliness and freedom from chemical and physical contaminants, and ensuring that food can be consumed safely without endangering health (Czernyszewicz & Wiśniewska, 2024). Apart from that, nutritional value is also the main factor determining food quality (Ji & Ko, 2021). Taste, aroma, and texture appearance play an important role in influencing consumer preferences (Mendocilla et al., 2020). Its fresh and visually attractive appearance will add to the appeal of the dish (Kraus et al., 2022). Ethical and environmentally friendly production processes and compliance with regulations and standards set by health and food safety authorities are also important factors (Nguyen & Jolly, 2020). The combination of these aspects determines the food quality that meets consumer needs and expectations. Food quality is also key in maintaining consistent loyalty (Williamson & Hassanli, 2020; Bichler et al., 2020). The high quality of the food, especially in terms of taste, cleanliness, and safety, has left positive reviews and recommendations on various social media. Maintaining consistent food quality is very important to strengthen customer loyalty (Suhartanto et al., 2019) as well as encourage sustainable business growth (Jin et al., 2018; Whaley et al., 2019).

H1: Food quality has a significant positive effect on brand image.
H2: Food quality has a significant positive effect on customer loyalty.

Service quality plays an important role in forming brand image (Raddats et al., 2024). Positive customer experiences, such as staff friendliness, service speed, and environmental cleanliness, can strengthen emotional connections with a brand. Customers who receive good service help build brand reputation. Consistently high service quality also creates a perception of credibility for the brand and provides added value to customers. By creating memorable, unique services, restaurants can differentiate themselves from competitors and build a strong, competitive brand image in the market. Therefore, restaurant management must strive to improve high service standards to create a positive and long-lasting brand image. The

relationship between service quality and customer loyalty is also directly identified (Shen & Yahya, 2021). Customers tend to return to restaurants that provide a positive experience, including friendly, efficient, and quality service. Consistency in service should not be overlooked, as customers want to have the same experience every time they visit the restaurant. Effective communication between employees and customers, good complaint handling, and a comfortable atmosphere also play important roles in creating strong relationships that increase customer loyalty (Jin et al., 2018; Whaley et al., 2019). So by paying attention to and improving all aspects of service, restaurants can build strong relationships with customers (Bichler et al., 2020; Raddats et al., 2024).
H3: Service quality has a significant positive effect on brand image.
H4: Service quality has a significant positive effect on customer loyalty.

The value of a brand comes from its ability to obtain exclusive, positive, and prominent meaning in the minds of consumers (Krishnan, 2020). Brand image is the perception or image that consumers have of a brand (Kotler, 2019). This covers all aspects of the brand, including product or service quality, value delivered, and the customer experience. Brand image can be influenced by customer experience and brand interactions with customers. Creating and maintaining a strong and positive brand image is a key goal for many businesses, because a good brand can help build customer loyalty, differentiate a brand from its competitors, and contribute to repeat purchase decisions (Nyamekye et al., 2023). Macias et al., (2023) The study explains that brand image is a determinant of customer loyalty. A strong brand image that meets customer expectations tends to make customers more loyal (Kraus et al., 2022). An emotional connection to a brand, whether through recognition of brand values, pleasant experiences, or friendly service interactions, plays an important role in strengthening customer loyalty. In the intensity of competition, brands that offer something unique tend to be more loyal to the brands (Nyamekye et al., 2023).
H5: Brand image has a significant positive effect on customer loyalty.

Consistent product and service quality will create positive associations in consumers' minds, leading them to view the brand as a trusted, high-value choice. Food quality, which includes taste, freshness, presentation, and food safety, can build a positive perception of the restaurant's brand identity, while service quality, such as speed of service, employee friendliness, and responsiveness, enhances customers' emotional experience with the brand (Konuk, 2019; Saputro & Oetomo, 2023). When customers have a strong and positive brand perception, they are more likely to demonstrate long-term commitment (Suhartanto et al., 2019; Gallarza-granizo et al., 2019; Nyamekye et al., 2023). Thus, brand image is an important mechanism that explains how food quality and service quality can translate into sustained customer loyalty.
H6: Brand image mediates the effect of food quality on customer loyalty.
H7: Brand image mediates the effect of service quality on customer loyalty.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Results

Table 2. Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	17 – 20	12	14,1
	21 – 30	53	62,4
	31 – 40	10	11,8
	> 40	10	11,8
Occupation	University Student	42	49,4
	Government employees	19	22,4
	Private sector employee, Entrepreneur	5	5,9
		19	22,4
Frequency of visits in the last 6 months	2- 5 times	57	67,1
	> 5 times	28	32,9

Source: data processing results, 2026.

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of respondents, indicating that the majority were aged 21–30 years (62.4%) and predominantly university students (49.4%), followed by government employees and entrepreneurs (22.4% each), while most respondents had visited the restaurant 2–5 times in the past six months (67.1%). This profile suggests that Kampung Empang Restaurant is mainly frequented by young and experience-oriented consumers who are highly responsive to food and service quality, as well as brand image. In addition, the predominance of repeat visitors indicates that respondents have sufficient experience to evaluate service encounters, making them well-suited to assessing how food and service quality contribute to brand image formation and customer loyalty.

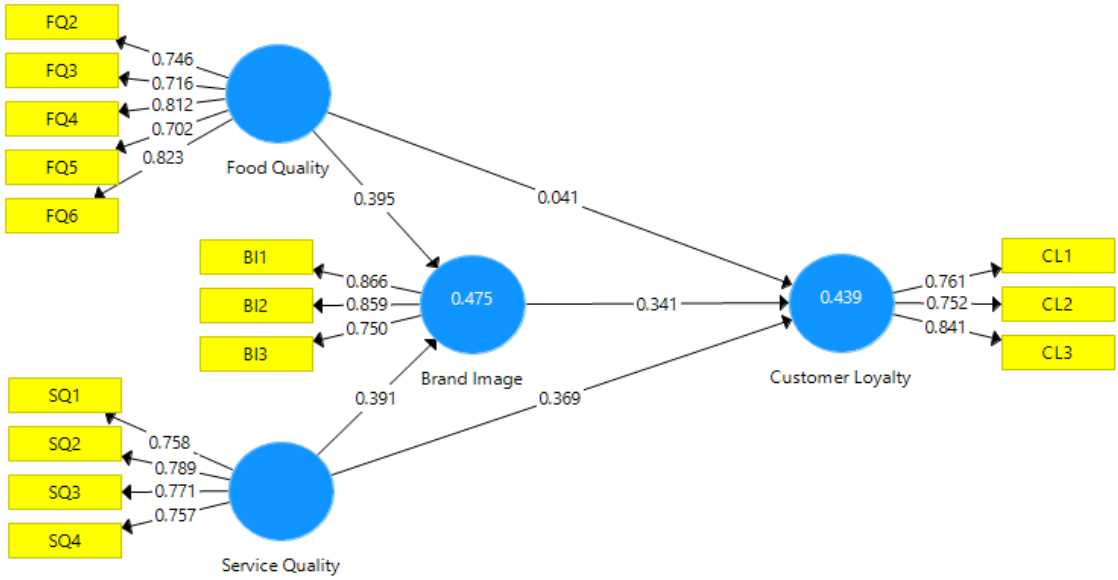


Fig 1. Outer Model

The PLS-SEM model image is the final result of data processing using tools such as SmartPLS, following the stages of evaluating the measurement (outer) model and the structural (inner) model. In the initial stage, each construct comprises a set of indicators. Then, validity and reliability tests are conducted to eliminate or reduce indicators that do not meet the criteria (e.g., low outer loadings), thereby obtaining a more stable model, as shown in this image. Operationally, the Food Quality construct is measured by 5 indicators (FQ2–FQ6), service quality with 4 indicators (SQ1–SQ4), brand image with 3 indicators (BI1–BI3), and customer loyalty with 3 indicators (CL1–CL3), so that a total of 15 valid indicators are used in the final model. These results are then estimated using the PLS algorithm and bootstrapping to produce path coefficients and R-square values, indicating that the model represents the relationships among variables.

Table 3. Outer loadings, Construct Reliability and Validity

Variabel	Item	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Food Quality	FQ2	0,746	0,818	0,873	0,580
	FQ3	0,716			
	FQ4	0,812			
	FQ5	0,702			
	FQ6	0,823			
Service Quality	SQ1	0,758	0,770	0,852	0,591
	SQ2	0,789			
	SQ3	0,771			
	SQ4	0,757			
Brand Image	BI1	0,866	0,766	0,866	0,684
	BI2	0,859			
	BI3	0,750			
Customer Loyalty	CL1	0,761	0,705	0,828	0,617
	CL2	0,752			
	CL3	0,841			

Source: data processing results, 2026.

Table 4 indicates that all constructs satisfied the discriminant validity requirement based on the Fornell-Larcker criterion, as the square roots of the AVEs for Brand Image (0.827), Customer Loyalty (0.786), Food Quality (0.761), and Service Quality (0.769) exceeded their inter-construct correlations. These findings confirm that each construct is conceptually distinct and measures different aspects of the model, supporting the suitability of the research framework for examining the relationships among food quality, service quality, brand image, and customer loyalty at Kampung Empang Restaurant.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity-Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Brand Image	Customer Loyalty	Food Quality	Service Quality
Brand Image	0,827			
Customer Loyalty	0,589	0,786		
Food Quality	0,605	0,445	0,761	
Service Quality	0,604	0,597	0,538	0,769

Source: data processing results, 2026.

Table 5 shows that all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values range from 1.406 to 1.906, which is still below the recommended limit (VIF < 5.00). These results indicate that there are no multicollinearity issues among the constructs in the model, so food quality, service quality, and brand image can be used independently to explain customer loyalty.

Table 5. Collinearity Statistics (VIF) - Inner VIF Values

	Brand Image	Customer Loyalty
Brand Image		1,906
Food Quality	1,406	1,704
Service Quality	1,406	1,698

Source: data processing results, 2026.

Table 6 shows an SRMR of 0.081 for both the saturated and estimated models. This value falls within the acceptable fit category (SRMR < 0.10), indicating that the research model has an adequate fit to the empirical data. Thus, the model linking food quality, service quality, brand image, and customer loyalty is suitable for explaining customer loyalty at Kampung Empang Restaurant.

Table 6. Model_Fit

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0,081	0,081
d_ULS	0,901	0,901
d_G	0,363	0,363
Chi-Square	192,934	192,934
NFI	0,716	0,716

Source: data processing results, 2026

Table 7 shows that the R-squared value for brand image is 0.475, and the adjusted R-squared is 0.464, indicating that 47.5% of the variation in brand image is explained by food quality and service quality, while the remaining 52.5% is influenced by factors outside the research model. Meanwhile, the R-squared value for customer loyalty is 0.439, and the adjusted R-squared is 0.421, indicating that 43.9% of the variation in customer loyalty is explained by food quality, service quality, and brand image, while the remaining 56.1% is attributable to other variables not examined. Based on PLS-SEM criteria, both values indicate that the model's predictive ability falls within the moderate category.

Table 7. R Square

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Brand Image	0,475	0,464
Customer Loyalty	0,439	0,421

Source: data processing results, 2026

Furthermore, the f-square (f^2) results indicate the magnitude of the contribution of each exogenous variable to the endogenous variable. Food quality has a moderate influence on brand image ($f^2 = 0.211$), and service

quality has a moderate influence as well ($f^2 = 0.208$). Service Quality has a small but significant effect on customer loyalty ($f^2 = 0.143$), while brand image has a small effect ($f^2 = 0.109$). Conversely, food quality has only a very weak effect on customer loyalty ($f^2 = 0.002$), indicating that it is not a major direct factor in shaping customer loyalty.

Table 8. f Square

	Brand Image	Customer Loyalty
Brand Image		0,109
Food Quality	0,211	0,002
Service Quality	0,208	0,143

Source: data processing results, 2026.

Table 9 presents the results of the hypothesis testing and reveals that most of the proposed relationships were supported. Food quality had a significant positive effect on brand image ($\beta = 0.395$, $p = 0.002$), but its direct effect on customer loyalty was not significant ($\beta = 0.041$, $p = 0.708$). In contrast, service quality significantly influenced both brand image ($\beta = 0.391$, $p = 0.001$) and customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.369$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, brand image had a significant positive effect on customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.341$, $p = 0.003$). The mediation analysis also showed that brand image significantly mediated the relationships between food quality and customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.135$, $p = 0.036$) and between service quality and customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.134$, $p = 0.029$). These findings suggest that while food quality alone may not directly enhance customer loyalty, both food quality and service quality can strengthen loyalty by improving the restaurant's brand image. Therefore, developing a positive brand image through high-quality food and excellent service is essential for fostering customer loyalty at Kampung Empang Restaurant.

Table 9. Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis	Original Sample	t-Statistics	P Values	Results
Direct Impact				
Food Quality -> Brand Image	0,395	3,126	0,002	Accepted
Food Quality -> Customer Loyalty	0,041	0,375	0,708	Rejected
Service Quality -> Brand Image	0,391	3,343	0,001	Accepted
Service Quality -> Customer Loyalty	0,369	4,142	0,000	Accepted
Brand Image -> Customer Loyalty	0,341	2,961	0,003	Accepted
Indirect impact				
Food Quality -> Brand Image -> Customer Loyalty	0,135	2,101	0,036	Accepted
Service Quality -> Brand Image -> Customer Loyalty	0,134	2,193	0,029	Accepted

Source: data processing results, 2026.

3.2 Discussions

The research results show that food quality plays a significant role in shaping brand image but does not directly drive customer loyalty. This indicates that, in the context of the Kampung Empang Restaurant, food quality has become a basic expectation that must be met, rather than a primary differentiating factor. Based on Expectation Confirmation Theory, customers will be satisfied when performance meets expectations, but this satisfaction does not necessarily lead to loyalty if it is not accompanied by a stronger emotional experience. In Indonesia's highly competitive culinary industry, food quality standards across restaurants are relatively uniform, so customers place more emphasis on the overall experience than on taste alone. From an experiential marketing perspective, loyalty is shaped more by the sensory, emotional, and atmospheric experiences of a restaurant, rather than just product attributes. Therefore, dining experiences such as the outdoor atmosphere, service interactions, and emotional comfort are more dominant factors in shaping loyalty than the quality of the food itself.

Conversely, food quality remains a significant factor in shaping brand image because consistent consumption experiences reinforce perceptions of the restaurant's professionalism and credibility. Consumers perceive food quality as a reflection of management's commitment to service standards, thereby

shaping a brand image through accumulated positive experiences. This aligns with (Mendocilla et al., 2020; Ji & Ko, (2021; Gallarza-granizo et al., 2019), which states that food quality contributes to long-term brand reputation and positioning. From a relationship marketing perspective (Morgan & Hunt, 1994)Food quality is part of the long-term exchange value that builds customer trust in a brand. In the context of service quality, research shows that service quality plays a stronger and more consistent role in shaping brand image and customer loyalty. This can be explained through the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR), where good service (stimulus) creates a positive emotional response (organism), which then drives loyal behavior (response). Direct interactions between customers and employees make service a primary source of emotional experiences. These findings support those of (Ji & Ko, 2021; Saputro & Oetomo, 2023; Shen & Yahya, 2021; Bichler et al., 2020; Raddats et al., 2024), who assert that service quality is a key determinant in the hospitality industry because it can create emotional bonds and long-term trust.

The role of brand image has been shown to be a crucial psychological mechanism bridging the influence of food and service quality on loyalty. From the perspectives of experiential marketing (Schmitt, 1999) and relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), customers assess not only functional attributes but also construct symbolic meaning from the overall consumption experience. Brand image functions as a "cognitive filter" that transforms experiences into beliefs and sustains emotions. Therefore, loyalty is formed not solely through functional satisfaction but also through the internalization of experiences within brand perception. This aligns with findings (Suhartanto et al., 2019; Konuk, (2019; Gallarza-granizo et al., 2019; Nyamekye et al., 2023; Saputro & Oetomo, 2023), which emphasizes that brand image plays a central role in linking consumption experiences to loyalty behavior. These findings suggest that in an experience-based culinary industry like Kampung Empang Restaurant, customer loyalty is determined more by the quality of interactions and emotional experiences than by the quality of the product alone. In Indonesia's socio-cultural context, the culture of communal dining, the tendency to seek recreational experiences, and the preference for natural settings reinforce the dominance of service and experience factors over the food itself. Therefore, restaurant business strategies need to shift from a sole focus on the product to a holistic approach to managing the customer experience to build sustainable loyalty.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that, in the context of experience-based restaurants like Kampung Empang Restaurant, food quality alone is insufficient to directly build loyalty, despite its important role in strengthening brand image. Instead, service quality is a key factor influencing customer loyalty, both indirectly through enhanced brand image and directly. These findings confirm that customer loyalty is shaped more by service experience and brand perception than by product quality alone. The scientific contribution of this study lies in confirming the central role of brand image as a psychological mechanism (the primary mediator) that bridges operational experience (food quality and service quality) with customer loyalty in the context of outdoor experience-based restaurants in Indonesia. This model reinforces the experience-based approach to loyalty formation, where loyalty is not solely functional but also shaped by emotional and symbolic perceptions of the brand. In practice, these findings suggest that restaurant management needs to shift from a product-based approach to a customer experience strategy, namely by designing a distinctive dining atmosphere, strengthening a brand identity based on nature experiences, and managing service interactions as part of an emotional branding strategy, rather than simply operational service. The main focus is not just “what is served”, but “how the experience is felt and remembered by the customer”.

REFERENCES

Bichler, B. F., Pikkemaat, B., & Peters, M. (2020). Exploring the role of service quality, atmosphere, and food for revisits in restaurants by using an e-mystery guest approach. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, *4*(3), 351–369. https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTI-04-2020-0048

Czernyszewicz, E., & Wiśniewska, M. Z. (2024). Credibility of food processing companies in terms of food safety: perspective of Generation Z consumers. *Central European Management Journal*, *32*(2), 320–335. https://doi.org/10.1108/CEMJ-10-2022-0175

Gallarza-granizo, M. G., Ruiz-molina, M., & Schlosser, C. (2019). International Journal of Hospitality

Management Customer value in Quick-Service Restaurants : A cross-cultural study. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *February*, 102351. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2019.102351

Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2017). *A Primer on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)*. Thousand Oaks. *Sage*, 165.

Ji, Y., & Ko, W. H. (2021). Exploration of constructing the catering quality indices of university canteens in China from the viewpoint of food safety. *British Food Journal*, *123*(13), 511–528. https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-07-2021-0743

Jin, N. P., Line, N. D., & Yoon, D. (2018). Understanding the Role of Gratitude in Building Quality Relationships. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management*, *27*(4), 465–485. https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2018.1390719

Konuk, F. A. (2019). The impact of retailer innovativeness and food healthiness on store prestige, store trust and store loyalty. *Food Research International*, *116*, 724–730. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodres.2018.09.003

Kotler, P. (2019). *Manajemen Pemasaran*. Salemba Empat.

Kraus, S., Sen, S., Savitskie, K., Kumar, S. K., & Brooks, J. (2022). Attracting the millennial customer: the case of food trucks. *British Food Journal*, *124*(13), 165–182. https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-09-2021-0996

Krishnan, J. J. (2020). A study on loyalty dimension and measurement. *Materials Today: Proceedings*, *37*(Part 2), 890–893. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.matpr.2020.06.046

Ladwein, R., & Sánchez Romero, A. M. (2021). The role of trust in the relationship between consumers, producers, and retailers of organic food: A sector-based approach. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *60*(October 2020). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102508

Macías, W., Rodríguez, K., & Barriga, H. (2023). Determinants of satisfaction with online food delivery providers and their impact on restaurant brands. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, *14*(4), 557–578. https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTT-04-2021-0117

Mendocilla, M., Miravitlles, P., & Matute, J. (2020). QUICKSERV: a service quality assessment tool for the quick-service restaurant industry. *British Food Journal*, *123*(13), 241–259. https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-12-2020-1108

Nguyen, H. S. (2024). The impact of value co-creation behavior on customer loyalty in the service domain. *Heliyon*, *10*(9), e30278. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e30278

Nguyen, Q., Nisar, T. M., Knox, D., & Prabhakar, G. P. (2018). Understanding customer satisfaction in the UK quick service restaurant industry: The influence of the tangible attributes of perceived service quality. *British Food Journal*, *120*(6), 1207–1222. https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-08-2017-0449

Nguyen, T. A. T., & Jolly, C. (2020). Global value chain and food safety and quality standards of Vietnam pangasius exports. *Aquaculture Reports*, *16*(July 2019), 100256. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aqrep.2019.100256

Nyamekye, M. B., Adam, D. R., Boateng, H., & Kosiba, J. P. (2023). Place attachment and brand loyalty: the moderating role of customer experience in the restaurant setting. *International Hospitality Review*, *37*(1), 48–70. https://doi.org/10.1108/ihr-02-2021-0013

Raddats, C., Roper, S., & Ashman, R. (2024). The role of services in creating brand loyalty for B2B manufacturers. *Journal of Business Research*, *174*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.114506

Rita, P., Vong, C., Pinheiro, F., & Mimoso, J. (2023). A sentiment analysis of Michelin-starred restaurants. *European Journal of Management and Business Economics*, *32*(3), 276–295. https://doi.org/10.1108/EJMBE-11-2021-0295

Saputro, A. W., & Oetomo, H. (2023). Pengaruh E-Service Quality Terhadap E-loyalty dengan Brand Image dan E-Satisfcation Sebagai Variabel Mediasi. *Jurnal Ilmiah Manajemen Kesatuan*, *11*(2), 203–212. https://doi.org/10.37641/jimkes.v11i2.1750

Schiffman, L. G., & Wisenblit, J. (2019). *Consumer Behavior* (12th Edition). Pearson Education, Inc.

Schmitt, B. H. (1999). *Experiential marketing: How to get customers to sense, feel, think, act, and relate to your company and brands*. Free Press.

Shen, C., & Yahya, Y. (2021). The impact of service quality and price on passengers' loyalty towards low-cost airlines: The Southeast Asia's perspective. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, *91*(October 2020), 101966. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jairtraman.2020.101966

Sudari, S. A., Tarofder, A. K., Khatibi, A., & Tham, J. (2019). Measuring the critical effect of marketing mix on customer loyalty through customer satisfaction in food and beverage products. *Management Science Letters*, *9*, 1385–1396. https://doi.org/10.5267/j.msl.2019.5.012

Suhartanto, D., Helmi Ali, M., Tan, K. H., Sjahroeddin, F., & Kusdibyo, L. (2019). Loyalty toward online food delivery service: the role of e-service quality and food quality. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, *22*(1), 81–97. https://doi.org/10.1080/15378020.2018.1546076

Thielemann, V. M., Ottenbacher, M. C., & Harrington, R. J. (2018). Antecedents and consequences of perceived customer value in the restaurant industry. *International Hospitality Review*, *32*(1), 26–45.

https://doi.org/10.1108/ihr-06-2018-0002
Were, S., Miricho, M., & Maranga, V. (2021). Restaurant tipping behavior and its inspiration on food service empathy: a focus on two- and three-star hotels in Kenya. *International Hospitality Review*, *35*(1), 57–69. https://doi.org/10.1108/ihr-07-2020-0026
Whaley, J., Lee, J., & Kim, Y.-K. (2019). Do tipping motivations predict loyalty to the server in a restaurant? *International Hospitality Review*, *33*(2), 91–105. https://doi.org/10.1108/ihr-01-2019-0001
Williamson, J., & Hassanli, N. (2020). It's all in the recipe: How to increase domestic leisure tourists' experiential loyalty to local food. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, *36*(April), 100745. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100745