

## **Analysing Bakery Café Attributes: The Role of Customer Satisfaction as a Mediator in Information Dissemination**

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**Abstract:** Bakery cafés represent a growing sector that is in line with current trends and modernization. In Malaysia's competitive bakery café market, particularly in the Klang Valley, the need to understand the dynamics of customer satisfaction mediated by bakery café attributes is crucial. Therefore, this study aims to explore these relationships within the framework of the extended Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory. Quantitative research was conducted using an online survey method with 303 valid respondents selected through non-probability purposive sampling. Data analysis involved SPSS 27 for descriptive statistics and SEM-PLS for structural equation modeling, including measurement and structural model evaluations. The findings revealed that customer satisfaction significantly mediated the relationship between bakery café attributes and the dissemination of information. This mediation effect underscores the substantial influence of bakery café attributes on customers' perceptions and behaviors. Practical implications include guiding bakery café operators in enhancing customer satisfaction through strategic attribute management. Moreover, this study contributes theoretically by validating the S-O-R framework in the context of bakery cafés, affirming the linkages from stimuli (attributes) to organismic responses (customer satisfaction) and subsequent behavioral outcomes.

**Keywords:** Bakery café, customer satisfaction, information dissemination, Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory

### **Introduction**

The bakery café industry is a rapidly expanding and specialized sector that is closely associated with current trends of modernization. IBISWorld (2021) predicts that the bakery café industry will experience growth in the next five years, especially when the general economy recovers from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Innovations in the bakery business contribute to the growth of the bakery market sector (Kapyrin et al., 2021). Nawawi et al. (2018) stated that cakes are widely favored baked items among people globally. Globally, numerous bakeries also function as cafés, offering coffee and tea to customers who like to purchase freshly baked delicacies (Gumaste et al., 2019). A sit-down bakery or bakery café is distinguished as establishments that provide customers with the opportunity to consume baked goods on the premises (Başulescu & Mutiu, 2020). The bakery café has thrived due to shifts in customer eating patterns (Charoenphol, 2020). Majid et al. (2018) reported that the increase in dining-out activities has been driven by lifestyle changes. According to Berlianshah

and Suroso (2018), bakery cafés, along with others, are highly regarded by customers as a promising choice.

The baking sector in Malaysia is more competitive than expected (Noorazam & Naziman, 2020) and has a significant impact on the country's economic growth (Shaari et al., 2021). GlobalData (2022) reported that the Malaysian bread and cereals industry was worth \$1.18 billion in 2021. Cafés are becoming more popular in Malaysia as a result of the country's young population and rising household wealth. Due to increased demand, more cafés and restaurants are being established throughout Malaysia (Moorthy et al., 2017). Malaysia's economic and social progress, as well as increased exposure to Western culture, have influenced the dynamic change in people's attitudes and lifestyles (Ting & Thurasamy, 2016).

The progress of the baking business in Malaysia has led the Klang Valley to be known for having a wide selection of bakery cafés. Malaysia's Klang Valley boasts numerous exceptional dining establishments (BURO, 2020). The process of urbanization in the Klang Valley region has had a notable influence on the foodservice industry, since it has led to an increased inclination for dining out (Leet et al., 2021). Cafés are often prevalent in both urban and suburban areas (Suib & Ismail, 2019). In addition, patisseries in the Klang Valley have recently emerged, drawing inspiration from European bakeries and showcasing rich and creamy desserts in their window displays (POSKOD, 2014).

There is a substantial body of previous research that has examined the behavior of customers at restaurants and cafés. However, there is a lack of study that specifically examines the behavior and preferences of customers at bakery cafés. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the correlation between customer satisfaction and the dissemination of information after dining in, focusing on the features of a bakery café, including product quality, cleanliness, concept, and price fairness. Furthermore, the majority of these concerns are being examined on a worldwide scale and have rather minimal impact in specific regions. Therefore, this study aimed to address the gap by specifically focusing on the Klang Valley area in Malaysia.

## **Literature Review**

### *Overview of bakery café*

Neacșu (2021) describes the bakery industry as active, thriving, facing high demand, and constantly evolving. A bakery café is a constituent of the bakery sector. It is an establishment that combines the functions of a café and a bakery. In this type of establishment, the café not only sells and serves coffee but also manufactures bakery items on the premises, which are available for purchase and consumption (Doan & Nguyen, 2019). A bakery café primarily focuses on the manufacture of baked goods, while the beverage portion serves as a complementary addition to the menu (Oliver, 2021). Each of these pastry restaurants has a bakery or café atmosphere, providing customers with the opportunity to have a lovely breakfast or snack.

### *Bakery café and customers' trend in Malaysia*

The Malaysian government has played an active role in promoting and providing assistance to the food industry (Perman et al., 2015). According to MalaysiaBest (2019), the bakery café is a concept that goes beyond the typical bakery model by offering a diverse range of pastries and main dishes. This practice has been popular in the country as a way to stay relevant in the market. Perman et al. (2015) found that a significant proportion of the population in Malaysia have a preference for cakes and buns. The Klang Valley is a region populated by a demographic consisting of young individuals, professionals, and contemporary residents who take pleasure in consuming baked goods and pastries in the present age (Noraziazam et al., 2019). Universal Bakehouse, Dou Dou Bake, Kenny Hill Bakers, Huckleberry, and Flakes are among the bakery cafés located in the Klang Valley (Sevenpie, 2021).

Globalisation has had a huge impact on the contemporary corporate climate (Isa et al., 2018). The economy of Malaysia has stimulated a rise in urbanization, resulting in notable shifts in patterns of food consumption, lifestyle, and disease occurrence in recent decades (Boon, 2014). Zailan (2022)

asserted that the food and beverage (F&B) industry experienced annual growth that has resulted in the emergence of new F&B trends. Furthermore, client demand remains consistently high, unaffected by changing trends. This led to a consistently high demand for bakery cafés and products.

#### *Underpinning Theory: Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR)*

The S-O-R approach emphasizes that an organism's internal assessment process expands in response to a stimulus, which then influences the organism's reaction (Jacoby, 2002). Woodworth (1985) originally introduced the SOR model as the fundamental basis of the conventional stimulus-response theory. Based on this hypothesis, food qualities such as taste, form, and appearance can serve as stimuli that influence consumers' judgements, potentially increasing their likelihood to revisit (Konuk, 2019). According to Shah et al. (2020), the model elucidates human behaviors by analyzing the cognitive and affective states of individuals that are influenced by the environment. The term "organism" pertains to the affective and cognitive intermediary states that govern how stimuli influence individuals' responses (Wu & Li, 2018). The emotional responses of individuals to a stimuli from the environment are known as the affective state (Sun & Zhang, 2015). Meanwhile, the mental process is linked to the cognitive state that occurs after encountering a stimulus (Fu & Feng, 2018). This study examines the emotions and behaviors that occur following a meal in a restaurant. The independent variables in this study are Product Quality (PQ), Cleanliness (C), Concept (Co), and Price Fairness (PF). The organism is referred to as Customers Satisfaction (CS) and the response is known as Dissemination of Information (DOI). Therefore, the S-O-R model is an appropriate theory for this study.

#### *Mediating Effect: Customer Satisfaction*

A mediator is a mechanism through which a dependent variable is influenced by an independent variable (Bhandari, 2021). Hefner (2017) posits that a mediating variable mediates the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, and its existence elucidates the relationship between the other two variables. Customer satisfaction is the feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction that a customer experiences after comparing the performance of products or services to their expectations (Cintya et al., 2021).

#### *Information Dissemination*

Customers employ social media platforms to evaluate their eating experiences, articulate their emotions, and seek perspectives from others (Lepkowska-White, 2017). Severi et al. (2014) emphasized that social media platforms enable users to effectively disseminate their thoughts to a larger audience and get information rapidly and inexpensively. The dissemination of information and recommendations on experiences, perspectives, and product consumption can be achieved through many platforms such as blogs, social networks, forums, and review sites (Fernández-Miguélez et al., 2020).

### **Methodology**

The data for this study were obtained by conducting a cross-sectional survey of 303 participants. A structured questionnaire was used, which included items derived from validated measures. The responses were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale. The data in this study was then analyzed using SPSS 26.0 and SmartPLS 3.0. A descriptive analysis was conducted using SPSS 26.0. The measurement model, structural model, and proposed hypotheses were evaluated using the partial least squares structural equation model (PLS-SEM) implemented in SmartPLS 3.0.

## Findings and Discussion

### *Demographic Profile of Respondents*

Table 1 below shows the demographic profile of the respondents.

**Table 1.** Demographic Profile of Respondents

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	103	34.0
	Female	200	66.0
<b>Age</b>	18 - 23 years old	124	40.90
	24 - 30 years old	156	51.50
	31 - 35 years old	11	3.60
	36 - 40 years old	7	2.30
	41 years and above	5	1.70
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	255	84.20
	Married	48	15.80
<b>Race</b>	Malay	283	93.40
	Chinese	10	3.30
	Indian	5	1.70
	Others	5	1.70
<b>Highest Education Level</b>	Lower Secondary Assessment	3	1.0
	Malaysian Certificate of Education	26	8.6
	Malaysian Higher School Certificate	9	3.0
	Diploma	98	32.30
	Bachelor's Degree	143	47.20
	Master's or Doctoral Degree	24	7.90
<b>Occupation</b>	Student	124	40.90
	Private Servant	112	37.0
	Government Servant	21	6.90
	Self-Employed	31	10.20
	Others	6	2.00
<b>Monthly Income</b>	Under RM2999	143	47.20
	RM 3000 – RM 5000	143	47.20
	Over RM 5000	17	5.60
<b>District of Residence</b>	Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur	178	58.70
	Selangor District of Klang	28	9.20
	Selangor District of Petaling	51	16.80
	Selangor District of Hulu Langat	12	4.00
	Selangor District of Hulu Langat	20	6.60
	Federal Territory of Putrajaya	14	4.60
	Selangor District of Gombak		

The demographic profile of the respondents as shown in Table 1 above provides crucial insights into the target market for bakery cafés. A significant majority of the respondents (66.01%) were female, which suggests that bakery cafés may appeal more to women. Previous research has indicated that women often prioritize ambiance, variety, and the quality of food in their dining choices (Mattila et al., 2012). Bakery cafés that focus on creating a cozy, aesthetically pleasing environment with a wide selection of baked goods and beverages might therefore be more successful in attracting female customers.

The age distribution indicated that 51.59% of respondents were between 24 to 30 years old. This age group, typically consisting of young professionals and students, is known for seeking out trendy and convenient dining options (Jang et al., 2011). Bakery cafés that offer quick service, modern decor, and facilities such as free Wi-Fi may be particularly attractive to this demographic. Moreover, this age group is often active on social media; therefore, engaging marketing strategies that leverage platforms like Instagram and Facebook could be effective in reaching them.

In terms of occupation, 40.92% of responses came from students, suggesting that a significant portion of the customer base is likely to be price sensitive. Offering student discounts, loyalty programs, and budget-friendly menu options can attract this group. Additionally, creating a study-friendly environment with ample seating, power outlets, and quiet corners can make the café a popular spot for students (Stuart, 2012).

#### *Measurement Model*

**Table 2.** Measurement Model

<b>Loadings</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Composite Reliability (RHO_A)</b>	<b>Composite Reliability (RHO_C)</b>	<b>Average Variance Extract (AVE)</b>
Cleanliness (C)	0.883	0.887	0.919	0.740
Concept (CO)	0.917	0.919	0.941	0.80
Customers Satisfaction (CS)	0.912	0.912	0.944	0.850
Dissemination of Information (DOI)	0.893	0.893	0.933	0.824
Price Fairness (PF)	0.915	0.917	0.946	0.855
Product Quality (PQ)	0.809	0.830	0.875	0.640

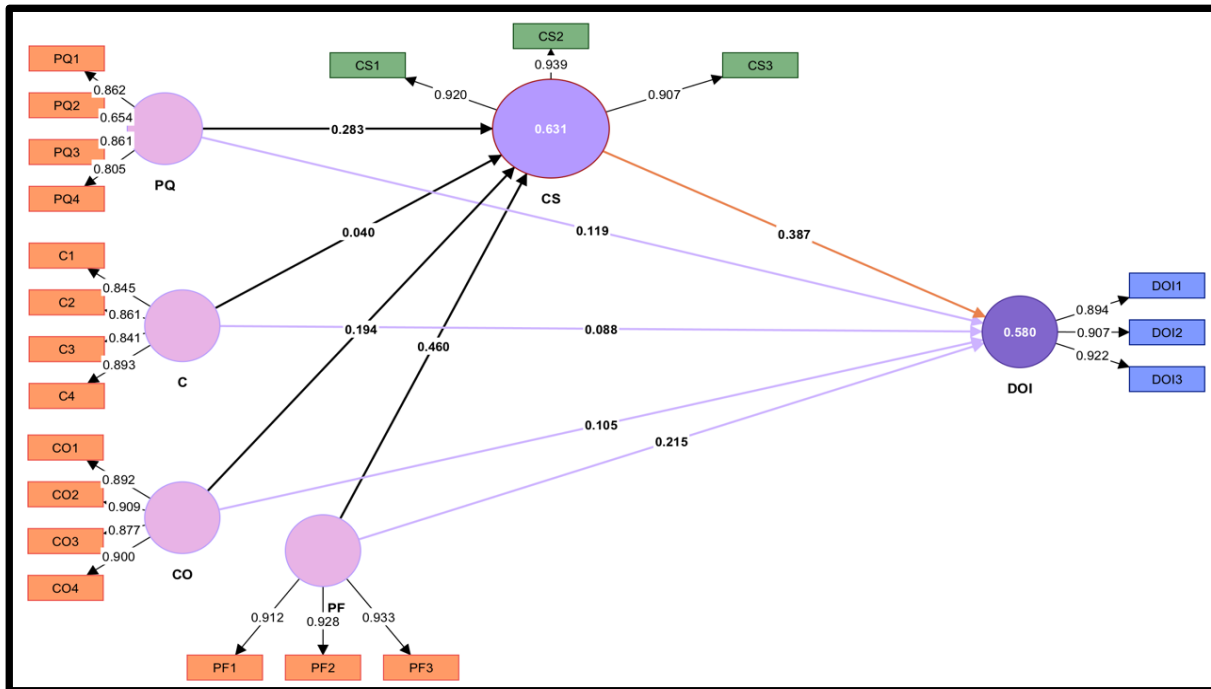
The evaluation of the measurement model in this study revealed robust reliability and validity across all constructs. Factor loadings consistently exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong indicators for each latent construct. Cronbach's alpha values, ranging from 0.830 to 0.919, demonstrated high internal consistency. Both composite reliability metrics (RHO\_A and RHO\_C) exceeded the 0.70 benchmark, further affirming the constructs' reliability. Additionally, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, ranging from 0.640 to 0.855, indicated good convergent validity.

#### *Structural Measurement*

The study explored the impact of various factors on customer satisfaction and information dissemination in the context of bakery cafés (Fig.1). The findings indicated a strong positive relationship between product quality and customer satisfaction, with a path coefficient of  $\beta=0.283$  and a significant p-value ( $p<0.001$ ). High product quality not only boosts customer satisfaction but also encourages customers to share positive experiences, as evidenced by the path coefficient of  $\beta=0.460$  for the relationship between product quality and information dissemination. This supports the notion that ensuring high product quality is crucial for both customer satisfaction and word-of-mouth marketing.

Cleanliness, however, did not significantly influence customer satisfaction or information dissemination, with path coefficients of  $\beta=0.040$  and  $\beta=0.088$ , respectively, both with non-significant p-values. This finding suggested that while cleanliness is important, other factors like product quality and ambiance play a more substantial role in shaping customer perceptions and behaviors. The concept of the bakery café, which includes its arrangement and decoration, significantly impacted customer satisfaction ( $\beta=0.194$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), highlighting the importance of a well-designed and pleasant environment. However, the concept did not significantly influence information dissemination.

Price fairness emerged as another critical factor, showing a strong positive association with customer satisfaction ( $\beta=0.460$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and a significant impact on information dissemination ( $\beta=0.215$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Fair pricing ensures customers feel that they receive good value for their money, enhancing satisfaction and encouraging them to share their positive experiences. Overall, the study findings emphasized that product quality, fair pricing, and a well-conceived ambiance are essential for achieving high customer satisfaction and promoting positive word-of-mouth, thus providing valuable insights for businesses aiming to enhance customer experiences.



**Fig. 1** The structural model

## Conclusion

Bakery cafés are gaining prominence in the contemporary F&B business. Appealing concepts that offer opportunities for socializing and relaxation have enticed individuals to visit and dine in, as well as capture images of their experiences to share on social media platforms. However, other aspects such as price and product quality play crucial roles in attaining content and fulfilled customers. These characteristics also influenced their behavior in discussing their dining experiences at the bakery cafés with others. Moreover, clients do not place as much importance on cleanliness compared to other features. Finally, this study demonstrates that the mediating factor of customer satisfaction influenced the spread of knowledge.

## Suggestion for Future Research

Future research may include other values or traits that influence customer satisfaction and knowledge dissemination. Furthermore, future studies can expand the survey beyond Malaysia to obtain more comprehensive results on the associated issue or field. In addition, data collection concerns in terms of sources and the diversity of cultures that comprise Malaysia's actual population can be addressed in future studies, as the demographic profile results suggested that the majority of respondents were Malay. Future studies can also target groups with higher purchasing power rather than younger groups as was sampled in this study, the majority of whom were still students with limited purchasing power.

## Co-Author Contribution

The authors confirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article. Author 1 and 2 carried out the fieldwork, prepared the literature review, wrote the research methodology and wrote the statistical analysis. Author 3 and 4 interpreted the results for the overall study.

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