The Influence of Service Quality on Customer Loyalty Outcomes:
A Case of Convenience Stores in Myanmar

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Abstract

In this study conducted in Shan State, Myanmar, the impact of service qualities on convenience store customer loyalty was explored, along with the impact of customer loyalty on outcomes through the mediators of perceived value, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. The study focused on five service quality dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Five customer loyalty outcomes were also included: identification, exclusive consideration, advocacy, strength of preference, and share of wallet. The mediators considered were perceived value, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. The data were collected via a survey questionnaire from customers (N = 446) of D-Mart convenience stores. Structural equation modeling and confirmatory factor analysis were used for analyzing the data. It was found that the tangibility and responsiveness dimensions of service quality positively influenced perceived value, and customer loyalty positively influenced the five dimensions of customer loyalty outcomes. The findings could contribute to service loyalty outcomes. Moreover, the findings could be applied to the development of service quality strategies to induce customers to remain with a convenience store chain.

Keyword: *Service quality, perceived value, customer loyalty, outcomes*

Introduction

In Myanmar, there are few high income earners. Low and middle income earners do not have extra money to make purchases. They usually make purchases near their homes after being paid. Most customers depend on retail stores in the market place. In these, payment is by cash, in contrast to a credit system operating in wholesale markets. The low and middle income earners do not buy on credit, and indeed, the retailers refuse to operate on such a basis. The advantage is that the stores get their money instantly, gaining a profit of around 10% for each product. In wholesale markets, by contrast, money is not gained instantly and the profit margin is lower.

In Myanmar, the retail industry is well developed in urban areas such as Yangon and Mandalay. There are lots of shopping malls, supermarkets, and convenience stores in the downtown areas. Well-known supermarkets such as Capital, Citymart, and Ocean are present in big cities beside Yangon, Mandalay, and Nay Pyi Taw. There are over 30,000 retail stores in Myanmar according to the Myanmar Retailer Association (Phyu, 2018).

According to the Myanmar Times (Mullines & Win, 2014), there are also homegrown convenience stores such as ABC (founded 2006), City Express (founded 2011), and Grab & Go (founded 2012). They have the greatest representation in Yangon. Most convenience stores are planning to expand in well-known cities such as Nay Pyi Taw (third largest city) and Mandalay (second largest). Other convenience stores such as One Stop, Sunny, and Grab Mart are already in the market place. Meanwhile, there is also rapid expansion of local convenience stores. So many local owners of convenience stores need to improve service quality, such as providing up-to-date equipment, supporting excellent promotions, and training the employees to serve customers. Foreign investors also are poised to invest in Myanmar's domestic market when legal restrictions are removed.

There are 14 states and 135 ethnic groups in Myanmar. Most ethnic groups (around 100) live in Shan State, which is very high compared to other states. Shan State is divided into three parts: Eastern, Northern, and Southern. Eastern Shan State is near Thailand, Northern Shan State is near China, and Southern Shan State is near the principal cities of Nay Pyi Daw and Mandalay. The main products of Southern Shan State involve growing raw vegetables such as ginger, garlic, lettuce, cabbage, potatoes,

and tomatoes. Most of the growers are low income people. They rely on retail stores for daily purchases. Southern Shan State also has the popular tourist resorts of Kalaw and Pindaya (two of the study sites selected). Foreign visitors make purchases at retail stores there, as do local holidaying people. However, according to the Myanmar Retailers Association (Phyu, 2018), convenience stores are most numerous in Taunggyi City in Southern Shan State.

Aung Pann (the third study site) is an agricultural trading town close to Kalaw; its existence is critical for supplying Yangon's daily needs (~ 590 km distance). A D-Mart was opened in 2000 as the first convenience store in Aung Pann. It offered foodstuffs only. The owner visited Thailand in 2009 and observed the 7-Eleven convenience stores there. This inspired him to open a store that offered not only foodstuffs, but also consumer products. Five branches now operate in Aung Pann, Kalaw, and Pindaya. These stores were selected for detailed study among all the convenience stores available.

This study has special relevance for retail companies planning to open or operate convenience stores. It is to their advantage to know the attitudes and opinions of respondents, thus enabling them to fulfil the needs of local people, and to create more job opportunities for them. A principal aim of this study was to know how to attract new customers to recently opened convenience stores. Through this research, we planned to examine customer engagement based on their satisfaction and repurchase intentions. This knowledge will be valuable to enable new customers to be attracted, and for store chains to maintain customer loyalty amidst increasing competition. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to bridge the knowledge gap by investigating the influence of customer loyalty on customer loyalty outcomes among retail convenience stores in Shan State, Myanmar.

The questions that were addressed in this research are as follows:

1. How do tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy affect perceived value?
2. How does perceived value affect customer satisfaction?
3. How does customer satisfaction affect customer loyalty?
4. How does customer loyalty affect customer loyalty outcomes?

Literature Review

Specifically, the aims of the present study were to examine the factors influencing customer service quality, perceived value, and customer satisfaction in selected Myanmar convenience stores. Moreover, a focus of the study was to investigate the factors most influential in establishing customer loyalty in the Myanmar retail industry.

Service Quality Theory and Perceived Value

When customers consider the quality of service, they perceive that it is of high value if the service exceeds the costs that they imagine have been incurred to obtain it. There is some empirical evidence that service quality is positively related to perceived value (Brady & Robertson, 1999; Teas & Agarwal, 2000). Keng et al. (2007) indicated that perceived value reveals a general consumer appreciation of a service provider's business provisions following the display of competence and upon giving dependable service. Models of service quality and perceived value are intended to describe the influence of service quality on perceived value. Customer willingness to purchase is influenced by functional service quality perceptions, but also technical service quality perceptions, which have relevance to product quality perceptions. Service quality also shows consumers' willingness to buy from specific service providers where the value exceeds the benefits gained and sacrifices undertaken by purchasers. The model of service quality (SERVQUAL) developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) contains elements of assurance, empathy, reliability, responsiveness, and tangibles, which represent the direct influence of technical service quality and functional service quality on consumers and on their value perceptions, regardless of products' quality and price perceptions. Thus, the dimensions describing service quality become the index for defining customer values. The value of perceptions is directly influenced by the service quality in the customer satisfaction index. Therefore, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H₁: Tangibility of service quality has a positive influence on perceived value.

H₂: Reliability of service quality has a positive influence on perceived value.

H₃: Responsiveness of service quality has a positive influence on perceived value.

H₄: Assurance of service quality has a positive influence on perceived value.

H₅: Empathy of service quality has a positive influence on perceived value.

Perceived Value and Customer Satisfaction

Perceived value is a determinant of customer satisfaction. It represents a fundamental tool to facilitate reaching the goals of the business. The greater a customer's perception that the quality of a service exceeds the costs of offering the service, the higher their perceptions of the value of the service. Many papers confirmed the idea that perceived value shows a significant and strong relationship with customer satisfaction, which in turn leads to customer loyalty (Patterson & Spreng, 1997). For example in the sports industry, a direct and positive relationship has been found between perceived value and satisfaction of customers (Murray & Howat, 2002). Firms can either enhance perceived benefits or reduce perceived costs in order to improve perceived value by customers. According to Oliver (1992), satisfaction has a direct influence on perceived value and value-based satisfaction. Hence, the following hypothesis was proposed:
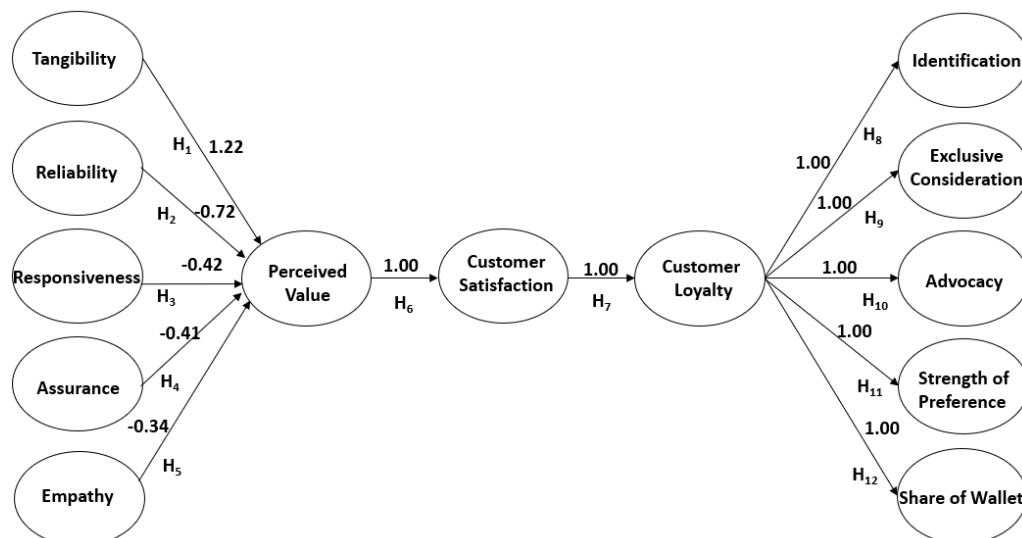
H₆: There is a direct positive relationship between perceived value and customer satisfaction.

Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty

According to Pont and McQuiken (2005), customer satisfaction can be assumed to be a crucial indicator of customer loyalty. These researchers also investigated the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty intentions in retirees and university students in the banking industry. There was no significant difference in the satisfaction levels of either group. Nonetheless, it was found that satisfaction has a significant impact on three behavioral intentions dimensions, which are loyalty, willingness to pay more, and external response. This suggests that management should launch service policies intended to secure improvements in customer satisfaction. Yu et al. (2006) explored the relationship among service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty to enable support service providers to improve their quality. According to their results, there was a significant relationship among service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. In addition, overall customer satisfaction has a significant relationship with customer loyalty. Hence, in this study it has been proposed that:

H₇: Customer satisfaction has a positive influence on customer loyalty.

Figure 1. *Theoretical Framework*

Note. Adapted from Parasuraman et al. (1988), Rai (2013), and Fournier (1998).

Customer Loyalty and Loyalty Outcomes

Various researchers have defined the outcomes of customer loyalty differently. Three types of loyalty are recognized, i.e., behavioral, attitudinal, and cognitive. This means that there are different outcomes in regards to customer loyalty. Widely operationalized outcomes are identification, exclusive consideration, advocacy, strength of preference, and share of wallet. In this study, each of these loyalty outcomes was regarded as a dependent variable to test whether it was influenced positively by customer loyalty or not. The group of hypotheses adopted is as follows:

H_8: Customer loyalty has a positive influence on identification.
H_9: Customer loyalty has a positive influence on exclusive consideration.
H_{10}: Customer loyalty has a positive influence on advocacy.
H_{11}: Customer loyalty has a positive influence on the strength of preference.
H_{12}: Customer loyalty has a positive influence on share of wallet.

Table 1 *Theoretical Framework*

Variable	Definitions	Operational Definitions
Tangibility	Physical facilities, equipment, appearance of personnel (Parasuraman et al., 1988)	Physical facilities, equipment, appearance of the employees of convenience stores
Reliability	Ability to perform a promised service dependably and accurately (Parasuraman et al., 1988)	The convenience store's ability to perform a promised service dependably and accurately
Satisfaction	The summary psychological state resulting when an emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with the consumer's prior feelings about the consumption experience (Oliver, 1992)	Psychological state of convenience stores' service consumers resulting from strong expectations of better shopping services as enhanced by prior experiences of acceptable shopping services received
Perceived Value	A customer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given	A customer's overall assessment of service by convenience store based on perception of what is received and what is given
Customer Loyalty	Customer loyalty is defined as a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product or service in the future despite the fact that situational influences and marketing efforts have the potential to cause switching behavior (Oliver, 1992)	Customers' commitment to re-buy a preferred product or service in the future from the convenience store
Identification	Relationship building between customer and service provider produces a sense of ownership over the service, with customers referring to "my accountant," "my hairdresser," or "my mechanic" (Gabbott & Hogg, 1994; Bhattacharya et al., 1995)	The sense of ownership over the service of the convenience store that customers received
Exclusive Consideration	Extent to which the consumer considers the service provider as their only choice when purchasing this type of service (Dwyer, 1987; Jones & Taylor, 2007)	Extent to which the customer purchases consistently from a convenience store as their only choice for purchasing desired products
Advocacy	Consumer's willingness to recommend a service provider to other consumers (Dick & Basu, 1994)	Customers' willingness to recommend the convenience store to other customers

Strength of Preference	Strength of preference is defined as an affectively generated evaluation of service (Mitra & Lynch, 1995)	Customers have a strong preference for the convenience store in comparison to others, and it is not easy for competitors to draw them away
Share of Wallet	Share of wallet is defined as a customer's desire to make all of their purchases in a category from the same service provider (Reynolds & Beatty, 1999)	Customer's relative desire to make all of their purchases from same convenience store

Methodology

The target group for this study were customers in Kalaw, Aung Pann and Pindaya (18–60 age bracket). These three towns are in Southern Shan State. They were selected because most of the D-Mart convenience store customers are from these areas, and more branches are being planned in these areas. The pilot study was conducted by using 30 randomly selected samples to test the validity and reliability of the measurement instrument. Then, the main data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire survey from 496 customers who were purchasing at D–Mart convenience stores in Kalaw, Aung Pann, and Pindaya (Figure 2). The questionnaires were given to and answered by the respondents when they came to the stores. The duration of the survey was about two months (April–May 2020). A total of 446 questionnaires were usable for data analysis after screening out incomplete returns.

In this study, 47 items were modified from those used by previous researchers to measure 13 variables. Twenty-two items measured six service qualities (Parasuraman et al., 1988), three items considered perceived value (Cronin et al., 2000), three items indicated customer satisfaction (Cronin et al., 2000), three items measured customer loyalty (Orel, 2014), and 16 items measured customer loyalty outcomes (Bourdeau, 2005). The survey questionnaire was scored on a five-point Likert scale.

Three main steps were involved in data analysis. First, Cronbach's alpha was used to ensure the reliability of scale items used to measure all variables. The output for all variables was between a minimum (-.780) and a maximum (.80). Second, the discriminant validity of the questionnaire was measured by using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Finally, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) research techniques were used to check the proposed conceptual model.

Figure 2 *Locations of the Towns of Kalaw, Aung Pann and Pindaya, Shan State, Myanmar*

Results

Table 2 shows the demographic information obtained in this study.

Table 2 *Characteristics of Respondents*

Item	Percent	Item	Percent
Gender		**Monthly Income (MMK)**	18.3
Female	68.0	Under 150,000	31.5
Male	32.0	300,001–450,000	14.5
Age (years)		450,001–600,000	11.4
18–20	23.0	Above 600,000	24.2
21–30	59.7	**Visit Frequency**	
31–40	11.4	Daily	7.8
41–50	2.5	2–3 times weekly	41.2
> 50	3.4	Once a week	33.3
Education		Once a month	17.7
High school	10.5	**Time Spent**	
Undergraduate	24.4	< 30 minutes	85.9
Postgraduate	55.3	30–60 minutes	12.1
Masters or above	7.4	>60 minutes	2.0
Other	2.5	**Amount Spent (MMK)**	
Job		< 50,000	86.1
Student	30.4	50,000–100,000	12.3
Government employee	4.0	> 100,000	1.6
Private staff	30.9		
Own business	29.1		
Dependent	5.6		

After modifying the model according to the modification index of Confirmatory Factor Analysis, 47 scale items were used to measure 13 variables (22 items for six service quality, three items for perceived value, three items for customer satisfaction, three items for customer loyalty, and 16 items for customer loyalty outcomes). The results of CFA are described in Table 3.

Table 3 *Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

Items	Degrees of Freedom	CMIN/ df	p-values	GFI	AGFI	CFI	RMSEA	NFI	RMR
CFA Model for Service Quality	86	2.251	.000	.95	.93	.98	.05	.96	.02
CFA Model for Mediators	21	2.324	.000	.98	.96	.99	.05	.98	.01
CFA Model for Customer Loyalty Outcomes	60	2.258	.000	.96	.93	.99	.05	.98	.01

Note. GFI = Goodness-of-Fit Index; AGFI = Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; NFI = Normal Fit Index; RMR = Root Mean Square Residual

As shown in Table 3, there was an acceptable fit of the model with the key criteria studied. The ratio results produced by the model returned values lower than the 3.0 threshold, *p*-value = .000, GFI > .95, AGFI > .90, NFI > .94, RMR = .18, and RMSEA = .36. The data indicated that all of the CFA indexes reached levels that indicated goodness of fit of the model.

In the SEM analysis (Table 4), most of the fit indices reached the required levels. The values of AGFI and GFI fit with the requirements confirmed by Baumgartner & Homburg (1996), while the values obtained for RMSEA and RMR were at passable levels (threshold values) (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Table 4 *Overall Model Fit*

Model Fit	Acceptable Level	SEM Model
GFI	> .80	.88
AGFI	< .80	.85
RMSEA	< .08	.06
RMR	Smaller, the better	.02
CFI	> .90	.94

Most of the hypotheses specified in the model were supported (Table 5). Hypotheses relating to the service quality construct dealing with tangibility and reliability (H_1, H_2) were accepted. Hypotheses H_3, H_4, and H_5 were not significant. However, perceived value influenced customer satisfaction positively ($p < .000$). Moreover, customer satisfaction was linked to customer loyalty (H_7). All the remaining hypotheses, from customer loyalty to customer loyalty outcomes, were significant ($p < .000$). Therefore, all of these hypotheses (H_8, H_9, H_{10}, H_{11}, and H_{12}) were accepted.

Table 5 *Summary of Testing Results*

	Hypothesis Path	Beta	CR	Sig.(P)	Evidence
H_1	Tangibility > Perceived Value	1.22	4.213	.000***	Supported
H_2	Reliability > Perceived Value	-0.72	-3.129	.002**	Supported
H_3	Responsiveness > Perceived Value	-0.42	0.912	.362	Unsupported
H_4	Assurance > Perceived Value	-0.41	-1.221	.222	Unsupported
H_5	Empathy > Perceived Value	-0.34	1.142	.253	Unsupported
H_6	Perceived Value > Customer Satisfaction	1.00	17.179	.000***	Supported
H_7	Customer Satisfaction > Customer Loyalty	1.00	17.034	.000***	Supported
H_8	Customer Loyalty > Identification	1.00	16.703	.000***	Supported
H_9	Customer Loyalty > Exclusive Consideration	1.00	17.271	.000***	Supported
H_{10}	Customer Loyalty > Advocacy	1.00	17.630	.000***	Supported
H_{11}	Customer Loyalty > Strength of Preference	1.00	18.036	.000***	Supported
H_{12}	Customer Loyalty > Share of Wallet	1.00	16.761	.000***	Supported

Note. Cut off *t*-value is 1.96; * $p < 0.05$; *** $p < .001$

Discussion

The influence of the tangibility and reliability dimensions of service quality on perceived value were significant. The perceived value of service enterprises differs according to the product being marketed. In the retail industry, a number of studies have shown that services that provide scope for self-gratification and social interaction, that are utilitarian and convenient, that give transactional value, and are efficient in providing service excellence in an aesthetically pleasing environment add to perceived value (Reimer & Kuehn, 2005; El-Adly, 2019).

Based on the results, H_3, H_4, and H_5 were not significant. Such negative results for the value of responsiveness, assurance, and empathy cannot be taken to cover all situations. Responsiveness may be significant in some retail environments (Siu & Cheung, 2001). In our study, the customers in these unsupported areas thought that employees were not responsive to the questions or actions of the customers. They did not convey assurance and empathy enabling them to serve the customers according to their needs and wants. In the research areas surveyed (Kalaw, Aun Pann, Pindaya), firms did not wish to invest in training of employees, as they left after receiving training and moved to urban areas. This explains why the three dimensions of service quality–responsiveness, assurance, and empathy–did not have a positive influence on perceived value. Firms need to study what kind of support they can offer to their employees, such as negotiating

their salaries and offering incentives. In this way, they could maintain good relationships with their employees, which also would have more direct effects on customer relationships.

The hypothesis that perceived value positively influences customer satisfaction was supported ($p < .000$). This result also corresponded with the data found by Hapsari et al. (2015) involving 5-star airline passengers at two Indonesian airports. Moreover, customer satisfaction was linked to customer loyalty (H_7). This is in line with the work of Howat and Assaker (2013), who pointed out that the higher the level of customer satisfaction, the higher the level of customer loyalty. Hence, customer satisfaction has a positive influence on customer loyalty. All the hypotheses H_8, H_9, H_{10}, H_{11}, and H_{12} were accepted. This means that customer loyalty had positive influences on identification, exclusive consideration, advocacy, strength of preference, and on share of wallet. These results were aligned with the findings of Dick and Basu (1994) and Jones and Taylor (2007).

According to the results, firms can improve service quality by providing up-to-date equipment, giving quick responses to customer difficulties, and offering individualized care and attention to their customers. All of these activities can improve customer perceived value, which can develop higher customer satisfaction. Higher satisfaction leads to a high investment of customer loyalty in the firm. Improvement in customer loyalty leads to positive customer loyalty outcomes such as feelings of ownership over the store, considering the store as their only choice to purchase a certain type of service, willingness to recommend the store to other customers, having a strong preference for the store in comparison to others, and a willingness to make all of their purchases for certain types of services at the store.

Implications

This study provides beneficial observations for business organizations in retail marketplaces. First, the function of service quality seems to be the most important factor influencing customer loyalty in convenience stores. Looking at the individual indicators of service quality dimensions, it follows that stores should invest in offering attractive service with an acceptable level of quality, and that this level should be maintained over time. Firms can improve by providing up-to-date equipment, providing quick responses to resolve difficulties when they arise, and offering care and individualized attention to its customers. All of these activities can improve customer perceived value, which can develop high customer satisfaction. Higher satisfaction leads to development of customer loyalty to the firm. Improvement in customer loyalty leads to positive customer loyalty outcomes, such as feelings of ownership over the store, considering the store as their only choice to purchase a certain type of service, willingness to recommend the store to other customers, having a strong preference for the store in comparison to others, and willingness to make all of their purchases for certain types of products or services with the store.

Conclusions

This study examined the impact of five customer loyalty outcomes through the mediators of customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, and perceived value on five dimensions of service quality to understand the behavior of convenience store customers in Shan State, Myanmar (Kalaw, Aung Pann, and Pindaya). All factors examined, except responsiveness, assurance and empathy, had significant impacts on customer loyalty outcomes for customers purchasing in D-Mart convenience stores. The study data indicated that the greater the level of customer satisfaction, the more likely they are to be loyal to the firm. In today's world of intense competition, satisfying customers may not be sufficient. Management should not just focus on improving customer satisfaction, but also consider improving customer perceptions of overall service quality and increasing consumers' perceived value. Therefore, service providers have to develop both service quality and perceived value continuously.

Limitations of the Study

In future research, the scope of the study might be enlarged to include different service business industries in different geographical regions. In addition, as for theoretical limitations, future research should extend the predicators of customer loyalty by reviewing other studies. In testing service

quality, the five variables suggested by SERVQUAL were used. In future studies, the variables included might be extended to encompass different aspects of service quality. Moreover, in future studies the demographic characteristics of respondents might also be considered. Equal representation from different educational levels may be possible in order to make more realistic generalizations. In addition, future studies should also include a fair mix of occupational and income factors in order to generalize to a broader range of customers served by an industry.

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