

Service Beyond Taste: A Food and Beverage Service Quality Framework for Specialty Cafés in Cebu City

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ABSTRACT

The growing café culture in urban communities has transformed specialty cafés and food and beverage establishments into experiential spaces where service quality influences customer satisfaction and business sustainability. This study examined customer perception and satisfaction as bases for developing a Food and Beverage Service Quality Framework (FABSQF) for selected specialty cafés and food and beverage establishments in Cebu City. Anchored on the SERVQUAL Model, Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory, and Perceived Value Theory, the study assessed four service quality dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance. A descriptive-correlational research design was used. Data were gathered from 300 café customers from six selected establishments through a validated researcher-made questionnaire and were analyzed using frequency,

percentage, mean, weighted mean, standard deviation, Chi-square Test of Independence, and Cramer's V. Findings showed that customers perceived food and beverage service quality at a consistently high level across all dimensions, with assurance obtaining the highest factor mean ($M = 3.68$), followed by responsiveness ($M = 3.67$), tangibles ($M = 3.66$), and reliability ($M = 3.63$). Customer satisfaction was likewise very high (aggregate $M = 3.64$), particularly in overall dining experience and consistency of service quality. Statistical analysis revealed significant relationships between overall customer satisfaction and all service quality dimensions ($p < .001$), with assurance showing the strongest association ($V = 0.80128$). The results indicate that customer satisfaction in specialty cafés is shaped not only by product offerings but also by dependable, responsive, professional, and trust-driven service encounters. Based on the findings, the study developed the FABSQF as a localized and evidence-based guide for sustaining service excellence, strengthening customer satisfaction, and enhancing operational competitiveness in Cebu City's café sector.

Keywords: *service quality, customer satisfaction, specialty cafés, SERVQUAL, hospitality management, food and beverage service quality framework*

INTRODUCTION

The food and beverage industry is an important component of the hospitality sector because it supports employment, local enterprise development, and consumer spending in service-based economies. In contemporary urban settings, cafés and specialty beverage shops are no longer limited to the sale of food and drinks; they also function as spaces for work, study, relaxation, social interaction, and lifestyle expression. As customer expectations continue to evolve, service encounters have become central to dining experiences and business performance (Hanaysha, 2022; Sharma & Srivastava, 2023).

Service quality is commonly understood as a multidimensional construct that shapes customers' evaluation of hospitality establishments. The SERVQUAL tradition identifies measurable dimensions of service quality, including tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance (Parasuraman et al., 1988). In food and beverage settings, tangibles refer to physical facilities, cleanliness, ambiance, equipment, and employee appearance; reliability refers to the accurate and dependable delivery of promised services; responsiveness involves prompt assistance and willingness to address customer needs; and assurance refers to staff competence, courtesy, professionalism, and the capacity to build customer trust.

Customer satisfaction is also a critical outcome in hospitality operations because satisfied customers are more likely to return, recommend the establishment, and develop positive perceptions of service value. The Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory explains that satisfaction emerges when actual service performance meets or exceeds customer expectations (Oliver, 1980), while Perceived Value Theory emphasizes customers' evaluation of benefits in relation to the cost, time, and effort spent (Zeithaml, 1988). Recent hospitality studies similarly indicate that customer satisfaction is shaped by service interaction, ambiance, operational consistency, and perceived value (Cheng et al., 2022; Hapsari et al., 2021; Kuo et al., 2021).

In the Philippine context, café consumption has expanded alongside urban development, changing lifestyles, and customer demand for enjoyable dining experiences. Cebu City, as a major educational, tourism, and commercial center, has a competitive café culture composed of independent cafés, kiosk-based specialty coffee shops, established coffee chains, casual dining outlets, and specialty food businesses. However, although service quality has been widely studied in general hospitality settings, fewer localized empirical studies focus on how Cebu City café customers evaluate service quality dimensions and how these dimensions relate to satisfaction.

This study addressed that gap by examining customer perception and satisfaction in selected specialty cafés and food and beverage establishments in Cebu City. Specifically, it described the respondents' demographic and behavioral profile, determined customer perception of food and beverage service quality in terms of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance, assessed overall customer satisfaction, tested the relationship between satisfaction and service quality dimensions, and developed a Food and Beverage Service Quality Framework based on the findings.

Literature Review

Service Quality in Food and Beverage Operations

Service quality remains a foundational concern in hospitality management because customers evaluate service encounters through both physical and interpersonal cues. The SERVQUAL Model provides a useful structure for measuring service quality through distinct but interrelated dimensions (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Later service quality scholarship emphasizes that customers do not evaluate service experiences in isolation but rather combine perceptions of the environment, accuracy, promptness, employee competence, value, and emotional experience (Almeida & Monteiro, 2022; Anabila et al., 2021; Cheng et al., 2022).

Tangibles

Tangibles refer to the visible aspects of service, including physical facilities, equipment, cleanliness, ambiance, and employee appearance. In hospitality spaces, the physical environment influences first impressions and affects comfort, mood, and perceived professionalism. Line and Hanks (2021) described the servicescape as a social and physical environment that shapes customers' emotional responses, while Ryu and Han (2021) emphasized that physical environment cues influence restaurant experiences. Studies on hospitality service quality also show that ambiance and physical presentation contribute to customer satisfaction, although tangible elements work together with interpersonal and operational dimensions (Arli, 2024; Asgeirsson et al., 2024).

Reliability

Reliability refers to the ability of service providers to deliver services accurately, dependably, and consistently. In café operations, it includes accurate order fulfillment, predictable waiting time, consistent procedures, and dependable service quality across visits. Reliability reduces uncertainty and builds customer trust,

especially in service environments where customers expect consistency despite changing staff, demand levels, and operating conditions. Prior studies associate reliability with satisfaction, loyalty, and perceived service value (Ekong & Akai, 2025; Nguyen et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2024).

Responsiveness

Responsiveness refers to the willingness and ability of employees to provide prompt service, assist customers, respond to requests, and communicate clearly. It is particularly important in cafés and quick-service environments because customers often expect efficient service within a limited time. Responsiveness contributes to positive service encounters when employees are attentive and able to address concerns efficiently. Hospitality research has linked responsiveness to customer satisfaction, engagement, and service recovery because customers value prompt and helpful interactions (Buhagiar et al., 2023; Perdomo-Verdecia et al., 2024; Prentice et al., 2021).

Assurance

Assurance refers to employee knowledge, courtesy, professionalism, competence, and ability to inspire trust. In food and beverage service, assurance also includes confidence in food safety practices and the perception that staff can deliver quality service safely and responsibly. This dimension became more salient in post-pandemic and health-conscious dining environments where customers connect safety, hygiene, and professionalism with trustworthy service (Shin & Kang, 2021; Zibarzani et al., 2022). Assurance is therefore important not only as an interpersonal service dimension but also as a trust-building mechanism in hospitality establishments.

Customer Satisfaction and Perceived Value

Customer satisfaction is generally understood as the fulfillment customers experience after comparing expectations with actual service performance (Oliver, 1980). Satisfaction is also connected to perceived value, where customers assess whether the benefits they received were worth the price, time, and effort spent (Zeithaml, 1988). Recent studies indicate that perceived value strengthens the link between service quality and satisfaction, while satisfaction influences loyalty, revisit intention, and positive word-of-mouth (Činčalová et al., 2021; Dam & Dam, 2021; El-Adly, 2021; Gallarza & Saura, 2021; Han et al., 2023).

Relationship Between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Most hospitality studies suggest that service quality dimensions significantly influence customer satisfaction, but the relative influence of each dimension may vary depending on setting, customer expectations, and service type. Some studies show that satisfaction is strongly affected by consistent service quality and positive customer experiences (Akhtar et al., 2023; Alananzeh et al., 2022; Ismail & Yunan, 2022). Other studies highlight that emotional experiences, customer characteristics, trust, and revisit intention can modify satisfaction outcomes (Abubakar et al., 2023; Kim & Baker, 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Suchánek & Králová, 2023). These findings support the need for a localized framework that reflects the specific café service context of Cebu City.

Framework Development in Hospitality Service Quality

The present study extends established service quality frameworks by developing a localized Food and Beverage Service Quality Framework. Grönroos (1984) emphasized technical and functional service quality, while later models provided measurable service quality dimensions. Sustainability and service consistency have also become relevant to hospitality competitiveness (Baratta & Simeoni, 2021; Fobbe & Hilletoft, 2025; Rasyd et al., 2025). In this study, the FABSQF integrates empirical results on tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance to guide café managers in sustaining customer-centered service quality.

METHODS

Research Design

This study used a descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive component was used to describe the demographic and behavioral profile of customers, their perception of food and beverage service quality, and their level of overall customer satisfaction. The correlational component was used to determine whether significant relationships existed between overall customer satisfaction and the four service quality

dimensions. This design was appropriate because it allowed the researchers to describe existing conditions and examine relationships among variables without manipulating the study setting (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018; Taherdoost, 2022).

Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected cafés and specialty food and beverage establishments in Cebu City. The establishments were Pietro Café and Lounge, JARRK's Café, Pick Up Coffee, Army Navy, Bo's Coffee, and Jafar's Shawarma. These establishments represented different café and foodservice formats, including independent cafés, kiosk-based specialty coffee shops, established coffee chains, casual dining outlets, and specialty food outlets. Cebu City was selected because it is a major urban, educational, and tourism center with an active café culture and a growing demand for experiential food and beverage services.

Table 1. *Selected Establishments and Estimated Daily Customer Volume*

Establishment	Type of Establishment	Estimated Daily Customers
Pietro Café and Lounge	Independent café	50-80 customers
JARRK's Café	Independent café	50-70 customers
Pick Up Coffee	Kiosk-based specialty coffee shop	70-90 customers
Army Navy	Casual dining / specialty food outlet	50-70 customers
Bo's Coffee	Established coffee chain	70-90 customers
Jafar's Shawarma	Specialty food outlet	50-80 customers

Participants and Sampling Technique

The respondents were 300 customers from the six selected establishments, with 50 respondents from each establishment. Only customers who had already finished dining during the data collection period were included to ensure that their responses were based on recent and actual service experiences. Respondents were at least 18 years old and participated voluntarily. The study used convenience sampling because the respondents were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate during the data gathering period.

Research Instrument

The study used a structured researcher-made questionnaire based on the statement of the problem, service quality dimensions, and related literature. The questionnaire had three major sections. Section A gathered demographic and behavioral data, including age, frequency of visit, and length of stay per visit. Section B measured customer perception of food and beverage service quality in terms of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance using a four-point scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Section C measured overall customer satisfaction using a four-point scale from Not Satisfied to Very Satisfied. The instrument underwent content validation by experts in hospitality and tourism management.

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The instrument obtained an alpha value of 0.966 for customer perception and 0.949 for overall customer satisfaction, indicating excellent internal consistency. These values exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70 and supported the suitability of the instrument for data collection (Taber, 2018).

Table 2. *Reliability Results of the Research Instrument*

Section	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Customer perception on service quality	20	0.966	Excellent internal consistency
Overall customer satisfaction	15	0.949	Excellent internal consistency

Data Gathering Procedure

Before data gathering, the researchers developed and validated the questionnaire and secured permission from the management of the selected establishments. The questionnaire was administered to eligible customer-

respondents after they completed their dining experience. Data collection was conducted until the target sample of 300 valid responses was reached. After collection, responses were checked for completeness, coded, encoded, and prepared for statistical treatment. Incomplete or invalid responses were excluded from analysis.

Data Analysis

Frequency and percentage were used to describe the respondents' demographic and behavioral profile. Mean, weighted mean, subcategory mean, section mean, and standard deviation were used to determine customer perception and satisfaction levels. For inferential analysis, mean scores were categorized according to the established scoring guides and analyzed using the Chi-square Test of Independence. Cramer's V was used to determine the strength of association between overall customer satisfaction and each service quality dimension. Results were interpreted at the 0.05 level of significance.

Ethical Consideration

The study observed informed consent, voluntary participation, privacy, confidentiality, protection from harm, fairness, cultural sensitivity, and integrity in reporting. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to refuse or discontinue participation without penalty. No names or personal contact details were collected. Responses were used only for academic purposes and were reported in summary form. The study also secured appropriate institutional and establishment permissions before data gathering.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents

Table 3 shows that most respondents were 18-24 years old (63.7%), followed by those aged 25-34 years old (27.3%), 35-44 years old (8.0%), and 45 years old and above (1.0%). This indicates that the selected cafés were largely patronized by young adults. The pattern may be explained by the location and function of cafés as spaces for studying, socialization, relaxation, and lifestyle-oriented consumption among students and young professionals. Age and lifestyle preferences are relevant in hospitality settings because customer characteristics influence dining behavior and service expectations (Kim & Baker, 2022; Stylos et al., 2021; Suchánek & Králová, 2023).

Table 3. *Demographic and Behavioral Profile of the Respondents*

Profile Variable	Category	f	%
Age	18-24 years old	191	63.7
Age	25-34 years old	82	27.3
Age	35-44 years old	24	8.0
Age	45 years old and above	3	1.0
Frequency of Visit	First time	99	33.0
Frequency of Visit	Once a week	137	45.7
Frequency of Visit	Twice a week	64	21.3
Length of Stay per Visit	Less than 30 minutes	67	22.3
Length of Stay per Visit	30 minutes-1 hour	103	34.3
Length of Stay per Visit	1-2 hours	57	19.0
Length of Stay per Visit	More than 2 hours	73	24.3
Total	n = 300		

In terms of behavior, 45.7% of respondents visited cafés once a week, 33.0% were first-time visitors, and 21.3% visited twice a week. Most respondents stayed for 30 minutes to 1 hour (34.3%), followed by more than 2 hours (24.3%), less than 30 minutes (22.3%), and 1-2 hours (19.0%). These results indicate that customers commonly used cafés for short to moderate visits, making efficient, responsive, and consistent service delivery important for satisfaction.

Customer Perception on Food and Beverage Service Quality

Table 4 presents customer perception of food and beverage service quality. The aggregate mean was 3.66, interpreted as Strongly Agree, indicating a highly positive perception of service quality. Assurance obtained the highest factor mean ($M = 3.68$), followed by responsiveness ($M = 3.67$), tangibles ($M = 3.66$), and reliability ($M = 3.63$). Although all dimensions were rated highly, assurance emerged as the strongest perceived dimension, suggesting that customers gave particular importance to competence, courtesy, professionalism, food safety confidence, and trust in the dining experience.

Table 4. *Summary of Customer Perception on Food and Beverage Service Quality*

Service Quality Dimension	Selected Highest Indicator	Factor Mean	SD	Description
Tangibles	Staff members maintain a neat and professional appearance.	3.66	0.43168	Strongly Agree
Reliability	The café delivers orders accurately as promised; the café can be relied upon for dependable service quality.	3.63	0.44738	Strongly Agree
Responsiveness	Employees respond quickly to customer concerns or requests.	3.67	0.45343	Strongly Agree
Assurance	The café provides a safe and trustworthy dining experience.	3.68	0.43496	Strongly Agree
Aggregate Mean		3.66	0.02290	Strongly Agree

The strong rating for assurance is consistent with the literature suggesting that professionalism and trust influence customer confidence in hospitality establishments (Arlı, 2024; Shin & Kang, 2021; Zibarzani et al., 2022). The high responsiveness mean also shows that customers valued prompt assistance and quick responses to requests, which is important in urban café environments where many visits are short or time-bound (Perdomo-Verdecia et al., 2024; Prentice et al., 2021). Tangibles remained important because the physical environment and employee appearance shaped customers' first impressions (Line & Hanks, 2021; Ryu & Han, 2021). Reliability, although the lowest among the four dimensions, was still strongly agreed upon, indicating that customers generally perceived the establishments as accurate, dependable, and consistent.

Customer Satisfaction on Food and Beverage Service Quality

Table 5 shows that overall customer satisfaction was very high, with an aggregate mean of 3.64. The highest satisfaction areas were overall dining experience and consistency of service quality, both with factor means of 3.67. Service experience and behavioral intention were also very high, each with factor means of 3.65. Value for money obtained the lowest factor mean at 3.58, but it was still interpreted as Very Satisfied. These results indicate that customers generally viewed the selected establishments as providing satisfying café experiences.

Table 5. *Summary of Customer Satisfaction on Food and Beverage Service Quality*

Satisfaction Dimension	Selected Indicator or Focus	Factor Mean	SD	Description
Overall Dining Experience	Comfort, atmosphere, and ambiance of the café.	3.67	0.48647	Very Satisfied
Service Experience	Attentiveness, courtesy, timeliness, and smooth service delivery.	3.65	0.48224	Very Satisfied
Consistency of Service Quality	Consistency and reliability of service standards across visits.	3.67	0.45343	Very Satisfied
Value for Money	Balance between price paid and dining experience received.	3.58	0.55523	Very Satisfied
Behavioral Intention	Decision to dine, likelihood of return, and likelihood of recommendation.	3.65	0.41939	Very Satisfied
Aggregate Mean		3.64	0.03734	Very Satisfied

The high satisfaction ratings support the argument that satisfaction is formed through the customer's evaluation of service performance against expectations and perceived value (Oliver, 1980; Zeithaml, 1988). When customers perceive the dining experience as comfortable, consistent, and worth the cost, satisfaction becomes more positive. This is aligned with studies linking service quality, perceived value, and satisfaction in hospitality settings (Činčalová et al., 2021; Gallarza & Saura, 2021; Han et al., 2023; Kuo et al., 2021).

Relationship Between Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality Dimensions

Table 6 presents the results of the Chi-square Test of Independence and Cramer's V. All four service quality dimensions were significantly related to overall customer satisfaction, with p-values of 0.00000. Therefore, all null hypotheses were rejected. Among the four dimensions, assurance showed the strongest association with customer satisfaction ($V = 0.80128$), followed by tangibles ($V = 0.73561$), responsiveness ($V = 0.66962$), and reliability ($V = 0.65285$).

Table 6. *Relationship Between Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality Dimensions*

Pair of Variables	Cramer's V	Chi-square Value	df	p-value	Decision
Customer satisfaction and tangibles	0.73561	487.00538	9	0.00000	Reject null hypothesis
Customer satisfaction and reliability	0.65285	255.72785	6	0.00000	Reject null hypothesis
Customer satisfaction and responsiveness	0.66962	403.55329	9	0.00000	Reject null hypothesis
Customer satisfaction and assurance	0.80128	385.23107	6	0.00000	Reject null hypothesis

These findings show that customer satisfaction in Cebu City cafés is significantly associated with how customers perceive the physical environment, service consistency, employee promptness, and employee competence. The strongest role of assurance suggests that customers are especially satisfied when staff demonstrate professionalism, product knowledge, courtesy, safety awareness, and trustworthiness. This supports previous hospitality research showing that service quality dimensions significantly affect satisfaction and that trust-building service encounters are crucial in food and beverage settings (Akhtar et al., 2023; Alananzeh et al., 2022; Ismail & Yunan, 2022).

Food and Beverage Service Quality Framework

Based on the descriptive and inferential findings, the study developed the Food and Beverage Service Quality Framework (FABSQF). The framework positions tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance as integrated service quality pillars that influence customer satisfaction. Assurance is treated as the strongest anchor because it obtained the highest perception mean and strongest association with satisfaction. The framework emphasizes that service excellence in cafés must go beyond product taste by ensuring a clean and comfortable environment, accurate and dependable service, prompt and helpful staff responses, and professional service encounters that build trust.

Table 7. *Food and Beverage Service Quality Framework (FABSQF)*

Framework Pillar	Core Meaning	Operational Focus	Expected Customer Outcome
Tangibles	Visible and physical service cues	Clean facilities, organized equipment, comfortable dining area, neat staff appearance	Positive first impression and comfortable dining experience
Reliability	Consistent and accurate service delivery	Accurate orders, reasonable waiting time, dependable procedures, consistent standards	Customer trust in service consistency

Responsiveness	Prompt assistance and efficient communication	Quick response to requests, willingness to help, clear information, efficient handling of concerns	Reduced waiting frustration and improved service experience
Assurance	Professionalism, competence, safety, and trust	Knowledgeable staff, courtesy, food safety confidence, competent service delivery, trustworthy environment	Strong customer confidence and satisfaction
Customer Satisfaction	Evaluation of overall service experience	Dining experience, service quality, value for money, return intention, recommendation intention	Retention, positive word-of-mouth, and café competitiveness

Compared with broader service quality models, the FABSQF is context-specific because it is grounded in actual data from selected cafés and specialty food and beverage establishments in Cebu City. It retains the measurable SERVQUAL dimensions but translates them into practical operational priorities for café managers. The framework may guide service audits, staff training, customer experience monitoring, and improvement planning in similar café and foodservice settings.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that customers of selected specialty cafés and food and beverage establishments in Cebu City perceived service quality at a high level across tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance. Assurance obtained the highest customer perception rating, indicating the importance of professional, competent, courteous, safe, and trustworthy service encounters. Customer satisfaction was also very high, particularly in overall dining experience and consistency of service quality. The findings further revealed significant relationships between overall customer satisfaction and all four service quality dimensions, with assurance showing the strongest association. These results confirm that customer satisfaction in specialty cafés is shaped by a combination of physical environment, service dependability, prompt assistance, and trust-building staff behavior. The developed Food and Beverage Service Quality Framework provide a localized and evidence-based guide for improving café service quality in Cebu City.

Recommendations

Café owners and managers should strengthen assurance-based service by training employees in professionalism, product knowledge, food safety communication, courtesy, and customer confidence-building. Since assurance showed the strongest association with satisfaction, staff competence and trustworthiness should be treated as priority areas in service improvement programs. Establishments should also maintain clean, organized, and visually comfortable dining environments because tangibles remain important to customer perception and first impressions.

Café personnel should consistently practice prompt, courteous, and accurate service delivery. Employees should be trained to respond quickly to concerns, provide clear information, and handle customer requests efficiently. Managers may use regular service audits and customer feedback tools to monitor reliability, responsiveness, and assurance across different shifts and customer volumes.

Hospitality schools and training institutions may use the findings as learning material for service quality management, café operations, and customer satisfaction assessment. The FABSQF may also be adapted as a practical teaching framework for hospitality students learning how service quality dimensions operate in real café environments.

Future researchers may replicate the study in other cities, compare independent cafés and chain cafés, include additional service quality dimensions such as empathy and sustainability, or use qualitative methods to explore customers' deeper experiences. Future studies may also examine whether demographic characteristics, café type, price perception, or digital ordering systems moderate the relationship between service quality and satisfaction.

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