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WHAT KEEPS THEM COMING BACK? INVESTIGATING REVISIT BEHAVIOUR FOR BUBBLE TEA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the factors influencing consumer revisit behavior for bubble tea purchases in Malaysia, a rapidly growing market where customer retention is highly competitive. It explores how service quality, product quality, price fairness, and store environment influence repeat visits. Using a positivist, descriptive–explanatory approach, data were collected via questionnaires from 340 respondents aged 18 to 55 across Malaysia and analysed using SPSS. Results show that all four factors significantly and positively affect consumer revisit behaviour, explaining 47.4% of the variance. This highlights that beyond high-quality products and fair pricing, the sensory and experiential aspects of the store environment are crucial in encouraging repeat visits. The study contributes to understanding the intention–behavioural gap by providing empirical evidence in Malaysia's emerging bubble tea market, framed within the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model. Practically, it offers guidance for business owners and marketers, emphasising consistent service delivery, product excellence, competitive pricing, and engaging store experiences to foster customer loyalty. Its uniqueness lies in combining tangible and experiential factors in a niche yet rapidly expanding segment, offering fresh insights into consumer behaviour in a dynamic retail environment.

Keywords: *Customer loyalty, consumer behaviour, retail experience, purchase behaviour, market competition*

INTRODUCTION

Bubble tea, also known as boba tea or milk tea, originated in Taiwan and has since become a globally recognised beverage, symbolising a unique facet of Taiwanese tea culture (Hung, 2022). Its appeal lies not only in its flavour but also in the lifestyle it represents, particularly among students and working adults who associate the drink with relaxation, socialisation, and convenience. The beverage's meteoric rise in popularity across Southeast Asia is evident from its reported 3,000% growth rate in 2018 (Hisam et al., 2023). This growth is supported by changing consumer preferences towards beverages that are perceived as low in fat and calories, which enhances demand (Eksangkul & Nuangjamnong, 2022). Recent regional analysis further indicates that product-related and experiential factors continue to shape demand in comparable markets, reflecting similar behavioural drivers across Southeast Asia (Phou et al., 2024).

Malaysia has emerged as a particularly vibrant market within this global trend. The country's bubble tea sector, valued at USD 49.8 million in 2018, is projected to grow by 6.9% between 2019 and 2026, reflecting the beverage's expanding consumer base and strong market presence (Straits Research, 2018, as cited in Eksangkul & Nuangjamnong, 2022). Industry reports indicate that the Malaysian bubble tea market is experiencing steady growth, driven by increasing consumer demand and rapid brand expansion (Credence Research Europe LTD, 2024). Popular brands such as Tealive, Chatime, The Alley, Tiger Sugar, Xing Fu Tang, Daboba, Black Whale, Chagee, and Gong Cha dominate Malaysia's urban areas, including the renowned "Bubble Tea Street" in Subang Jaya. Their success stems from consistently high product and service quality, which encourages customers to return (Koay & Cheah, 2023). Recent findings similarly reveal evolving purchasing patterns that reflect heightened engagement with bubble tea among Malaysian consumers (Mohd Yusoff, 2025).

Beyond taste, bubble tea consumption also fulfils emotional and social needs. According to Istijanto and Handoko (2022), when consumed with the right balance of ingredients and reduced sugar, bubble tea can provide an energy boost and enhance overall satisfaction. Marketing appeals to self-expression and social identity also play a critical role; consumers often associate bubble tea with modernity and trendiness, aligning with their lifestyle aspirations (Kamalul Ariffin et al., 2022). The emotional gratification and sense of belonging that accompany the consumption experience positively influence revisit behaviours. This is consistent with broader Malaysian beverage consumption trends, in which young adults exhibit strong preferences for sugar-sweetened drinks sold by tea and coffee retail chains (Singh & Say, 2025).

The introduction of Chatime in 2010 marked the beginning of the bubble tea craze in Malaysia and across Asia (Koay & Cheah, 2023). Since then, the market has witnessed increasing competition, prompting store owners to innovate through new product offerings, promotional events, and loyalty programmes to retain their customer base. Competitive pressures have also encouraged brands to adopt precision marketing and differentiated positioning strategies to maintain an edge within the saturated beverage landscape (Yang, 2025). In an age where brand engagement and experiential value are vital, enhancing customer satisfaction has become a key strategic objective.

Social media has amplified the growth of the bubble tea phenomenon by fostering electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and viral marketing. Brands like Chagee have successfully leveraged this by combining product promotions with digital contests and luxury giveaways to strengthen engagement (Bahrom, 2024). This social sharing culture extends to store ambience and product aesthetics, as consumers often post images of bubble tea and café interiors on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, generating organic promotion (Koay et al., 2024). Such exposure reinforces positive brand perceptions, creating a cycle of social validation and repeat patronage. A content analysis of leading Chinese bubble tea brands further demonstrates that digital marketing plays a crucial role in influencing consumer engagement and shaping brand perceptions (Wang et al., 2025).

Research indicates that consumers' positive experiences, including satisfaction with service, perceived quality, and enjoyment of the drink's texture, lead to loyalty and repeat visits (Koay & Cheah, 2023; Istijanto & Handoko, 2022). Generation Z, aged between 12 and 27, represents the largest and most frequent consumer group, particularly within the Klang Valley region (May et al., 2020). This demographic values novelty, personalisation, and social experiences, driving continuous innovation in product development and marketing strategies. As a result, businesses must monitor changing consumption behaviours within this group to sustain growth in a competitive environment. Sustainability concerns are also increasingly influencing purchase decisions, as environmentally friendly packaging has become a significant consideration for both consumers and businesses in Malaysia (Sarifudin et al., 2025).

With the surge of bubble tea outlets nationwide, the focus has shifted toward delivering memorable in-store experiences to ensure satisfaction and repeat business. Store aesthetics, music, comfort, and packaging design have become integral to marketing strategies, enhancing emotional engagement and promoting eWOM. However, despite growing demand, the sustainability of customer retention depends on providing consistent service, fair pricing, and high-quality products. These variables form the foundation for understanding consumer revisit behaviour in Malaysia's bubble tea market.

Problem Statement

Despite its rapid expansion, the bubble tea industry faces several challenges that impact customer retention and repeat business. The market's competitiveness, coupled with health concerns surrounding the high sugar and calorie content of bubble tea, creates a paradox for consumers (Zubairi et al., 2023). While awareness of health risks such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases has increased (Brooke, 2024), consumption remains high, particularly among younger consumers. Generation Z continues to drive demand, reflecting a growing tension between health consciousness and indulgence (Istijanto & Handoko, 2022).

Customer revisit behaviours are influenced by four key factors: service quality, product quality, price

fairness, and store atmosphere. Service-related issues such as long queues, inattentive staff, or inconsistent experiences may discourage repeat visits (Srivastava & Thaichon, 2023). Product quality, including taste consistency, freshness, and packaging integrity, plays an equally vital role. Minor lapses, such as leaking cups or overly sweet formulations, can erode trust. Therefore, continuous monitoring and innovation are essential to meet evolving consumer preferences (Gierat, 2024).

Price perception significantly shapes customer satisfaction. High prices can lead to negative emotions, particularly when the perceived quality does not justify the cost (Koay & Cheah, 2023). As bubble tea is seen as an affordable indulgence, value for money is critical in retaining consumers. In addition, store ambience is increasingly linked to revisit behaviour. A well-designed, comfortable, and clean environment enhances the overall experience and influences word-of-mouth (Mfundi Ndengane et al., 2021). In contrast, overcrowded or poorly maintained stores may diminish customer enjoyment.

For Generation Z consumers who value accessibility, affordability, and a seamless shopping experience, store design and pricing strategies are especially important. Many bubble tea stores serve as social spaces where customers relax and connect, making ambience a decisive factor. Therefore, to sustain customer loyalty, store owners must balance price, quality, and comfort while addressing growing health concerns and changing lifestyle trends (Koay et al., 2021).

While previous studies have examined the role of service quality, product quality, price fairness, and store atmosphere in influencing purchase intention, fewer studies have explored these variables specifically within Malaysia's rapidly expanding bubble tea market. Additionally, many studies focus on behavioural intentions rather than actual revisit behaviour. This study extends the literature by examining how these four experiential factors simultaneously influence customer revisit behaviour, offering insight into the functional and emotional drivers unique to the Malaysian bubble tea context (Koay & Cheah, 2023).

Research Questions and Objectives

Given the rising competition and evolving consumer expectations in the bubble tea industry, this study seeks to understand the determinants that influence customers' revisit behaviour. Specifically, it examines whether service quality, product quality, price fairness, and store atmosphere significantly affect consumers' behavior in returning to bubble tea stores. The research aims to determine the strength and nature of these relationships, providing insights into how each factor contributes to customer satisfaction and repeat patronage.

Aligned with these questions, the study's objectives are to explore the extent to which service quality enhances revisit behaviour through positive customer experiences, to analyse how product quality consistency influences loyalty, to assess the impact of perceived price fairness on consumers' value judgments, and to investigate how store atmosphere shapes emotional responses that encourage repeat visits. Collectively, these objectives aim to deepen the understanding of revisit behaviour among Malaysian bubble tea consumers and to provide a foundation for strategies that can strengthen long-term customer relationships in an increasingly competitive beverage market.

Scope of Study

This research focuses on consumers' revisit behavior in Malaysian bubble tea outlets, particularly within Selangor, which hosts the highest concentration of bubble tea stores, with approximately 320 outlets as of May 2019 (May et al., 2020). The study centres on Generation Z consumers, aged 12 to 27, who represent the most frequent purchasers. As a digitally savvy and trend-oriented demographic, their preferences have a significant influence on market dynamics. Data are collected through structured online questionnaires targeting customers who regularly purchase bubble tea, offering insight into their satisfaction levels and revisit tendencies.

The study also focuses on Tealive, one of Malaysia's most prominent local brands, as a representative case due to its extensive market penetration and brand recognition. By analyzing behavioral patterns within this group, the research aims to provide a detailed understanding of the determinants influencing revisit behavior in Malaysia's bubble tea industry and the broader global beverage sector.

Significance of the Study

This study makes both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it expands the understanding of consumer behaviour by identifying how service quality, product quality, price fairness, and store atmosphere interact to shape revisit behaviour. These variables collectively illustrate how tangible (price, product) and intangible (service, ambience) factors contribute to customer satisfaction and loyalty within experiential consumption contexts.

Practically, the findings will provide valuable guidance for bubble tea retailers, franchise managers, and marketers. By identifying the factors that most strongly influence revisit behaviors, businesses can better allocate resources and design strategies to retain customers. Enhancing service quality and product consistency ensures consumer satisfaction, while fair pricing and appealing store environments strengthen emotional attachment to the brand.

Furthermore, the study's focus on Generation Z offers insight into the consumption behaviour of a digitally engaged and experience-driven segment. Understanding their motivations allows retailers to tailor marketing messages, product innovations, and store designs that align with their preferences. This is particularly relevant in an era where social media amplifies consumer voices and influences brand reputation through electronic word of mouth (eWOM).

From a managerial perspective, this study offers actionable recommendations for sustaining customer retention in a highly competitive market. Maintaining quality and fairness in pricing, ensuring consistent service delivery, and designing an inviting store atmosphere can collectively increase revisit rates and long-term profitability.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader discussion of consumer loyalty and revisit behaviour in the service industry by using Malaysia's bubble tea market as an empirical foundation. The insights generated are applicable to other experiential retail sectors, where customer satisfaction and ambiance play crucial roles in repeat patronage.

The bubble tea market has evolved into a highly competitive segment of the beverage industry, where understanding consumer revisit behaviour is vital for sustaining growth and loyalty. Customer revisit behaviour represents a consumer's intention or willingness to return to a store after a prior experience (Koay et al., 2024). Previous research identifies revisit behaviour as a strong indicator of customer satisfaction, word-of-mouth promotion, and long-term profitability (Raza & Siddiquei, 2022). This section reviews the theoretical underpinnings and empirical findings related to the dependent variable revisit behaviour and its four independent determinants: service quality, product quality, price fairness, and store atmosphere.

Revisit Behaviour

Revisit behaviour is a post-purchase response that reflects consumers' evaluation of their experience and their likelihood of returning (Koay et al., 2024). It is closely tied to satisfaction and loyalty, which are critical in competitive service markets (Raza & Siddiquei, 2022). Satisfied customers not only return but also contribute to positive word-of-mouth (May et al., 2020), making revisit behaviour a valuable indicator of brand success.

In today's digital environment, revisit behaviour is further shaped by social media engagement. Platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram serve as extensions of the consumer experience, enabling businesses to influence perceptions through interactive content (Kamalul Ariffin et al., 2022). Brands like Tealive and Xing Fu Tang use social media promotions to enhance engagement and brand loyalty, leveraging visually appealing content and viral marketing to strengthen revisit intentions (Xing Fu Tang Malaysia, 2021; Chatime Malaysia, 2021).

Positive experiences shared online reinforce emotional attachment and stimulate electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which can further enhance revisit intentions (Cheung et al., 2021). Thus, revisit behaviour is not only driven by internal satisfaction but also by external social influence and digital connectivity, both of which are central to the modern consumer experience.

Service Quality

Service quality is widely recognised as a determinant of customer satisfaction and loyalty (Kamalul Ariffin et al., 2022). It refers to the extent to which service performance meets or exceeds customer expectations.

Within the bubble tea context, service quality extends beyond transactional efficiency to include the overall experiential environment, encompassing cleanliness, music, scent, comfort, and responsiveness, which together form the servicescape (Koay et al., 2024).

High-quality service encourages consumers to associate value with their experience and perceive the brand in a positive light. In contrast, poor service, such as long waiting times or unprofessional interactions, can lead to dissatisfaction and deter repeat visits (Ali & Hussain, 2020). Positive service interactions are also associated with greater tolerance for minor product imperfections and enhance customer referrals through social networks (Miao et al., 2021).

Research consistently demonstrates that service quality directly influences revisit behaviour. For instance, Wardana (2024) found that high service quality significantly impacts customer purchase and revisit decisions, while Bichler et al. (2021) confirmed its influence on loyalty in the food and beverage sector. The SERVQUAL model, comprising tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, remains central in explaining these dynamics (Yeong et al., 2022). As online sharing of brand experiences grows, perceived service quality shapes social validation and revisit likelihood (Zollo et al., 2020).

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Service quality has a positive effect on customer revisit behaviour in bubble tea stores.

Product Quality

Product quality refers to the degree to which a product meets consumer expectations in terms of taste, freshness, ingredients, and presentation (Koay et al., 2024). In the bubble tea industry, where product offerings are highly standardised, consistent quality is a key differentiator. A superior product not only satisfies consumers but also strengthens emotional bonds with the brand.

Empirical evidence supports the link between product quality and revisit behaviour. Research by Tsai et al. (2020) found that high-quality beverages significantly influence customers' intentions to return to coffee shops. In contrast, Kristiawan et al. (2021) reported that product quality in fast-food settings enhances satisfaction and loyalty. Slack et al. (2021) further demonstrated that product quality is a critical predictor of satisfaction and that satisfied customers are more likely to repurchase and recommend the brand.

In Malaysia, bubble tea brands compete on flavour innovation, customisation options, and the sensory appeal of ingredients such as pearls and jellies (Koay & Cheah, 2022). Consumers perceive such variations as signals of quality and uniqueness, which increase their likelihood of revisiting. Moreover, trust in consistent quality fosters brand loyalty and positive word of mouth (Zubairi et al., 2023).

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Product quality has a positive effect on customer revisit behaviour in bubble tea stores.

Price Fairness

Price fairness is defined as consumers' perception of whether the price they pay reflects a reasonable balance between value and cost (Koay et al., 2024). It plays a crucial role in determining customer satisfaction and loyalty, especially in competitive markets where alternative options are readily available. Perceived fairness contributes to emotional satisfaction, while perceptions of overpricing or poor value can evoke negative emotions such as frustration or anger (Kamalul Ariffin et al., 2022).

Previous studies have established that fair pricing enhances customer contentment and retention (Sayuti & Amin, 2020). Consumers often use price as a proxy for quality, and competitive pricing strategies that align with perceived value can build trust and long-term loyalty (Nassar et al., 2021). In Malaysia's bubble tea sector, discounts, bundle promotions, and loyalty rewards reinforce perceptions of fairness, increasing revisit intentions (Koay & Cheah, 2023).

Interestingly, while Generation Z consumers are price-sensitive, they often prioritise emotional fulfilment over economic value. They are more likely to overlook high prices if the product delivers happiness, uniqueness, or experiential satisfaction (Istijanto & Handoko, 2022). Thus, bubble tea brands that strike a balance between affordability and experiential value are better positioned to retain this segment.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Price fairness has a positive effect on customer revisit behaviour in bubble tea stores.

Store Atmosphere

Store atmosphere encompasses the physical and sensory attributes of a retail environment, including lighting, layout, décor, scent, music, and cleanliness, all of which influence customers' emotional and cognitive responses (Jamunadevi et al., 2021). A well-designed atmosphere can elicit positive emotions, enhance satisfaction, and extend the duration of customer visits.

Empirical research supports the importance of ambiance in shaping behavioral patterns. Raza and Siddiquei (2020) reported that perceived store luxury influences emotional satisfaction, while Koay and Cheah (2023) found that ambience significantly affects purchase decisions in cafés. Similarly, Innocentius et al. (2022) observed that an inviting physical environment contributes to customer happiness and loyalty.

For Generation Z, store design is not only functional but also performative. Instagram-worthy interiors and photogenic layouts encourage consumers to share experiences on social media, generating eWOM and strengthening brand identity (Bichler et al., 2021). In Malaysia, where bubble tea outlets serve as social hubs, ambience plays a decisive role in differentiating brands. A clean, comfortable, and aesthetically pleasing store fosters relaxation and repeat patronage (Koay et al., 2024).

Hypothesis 4 (H4): The store atmosphere has a positive effect on customer revisit behavior in bubble tea stores.

Theoretical Underpinning

This study adopts the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) theory to explain revisit behaviour in bubble tea stores. In this framework, service quality, product quality, price fairness, and store atmosphere represent external stimuli (S) that influence customers' internal evaluations and experiences (O), which subsequently lead to the response (R), namely revisit behaviour.

S-O-R is more suitable for explaining sensory, experiential, and environment-driven consumption compared to the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which focuses mainly on cognitive reasoning. Given that bubble tea consumption involves sensory enjoyment and experiential value, S-O-R provides a more appropriate theoretical lens.

The Stimulus–Response (S-R) Theory and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) Framework underpin this study. The S-R Theory posits that consumer behaviour is a reaction to external stimuli such as service quality, product quality, pricing, and atmosphere (Cheung et al., 2021). Applied to marketing, this model explains how environmental factors trigger specific behavioral responses, such as the behavior of revisiting a store.

However, the S-O-R model extends this framework by introducing an intermediate variable *the organism* which captures consumers' internal emotional and cognitive evaluations (Chen & Li, 2019). These internal processes mediate the relationship between external stimuli and behavioural responses. In the context of bubble tea, external factors such as taste, trendiness, and ambience evoke emotions like pleasure and arousal, which in turn lead to revisit intentions (Istijanto & Handoko, 2022).

The S-O-R model thus provides a comprehensive explanation of how stimuli from the store environment (service, product, price, and atmosphere) influence internal states (satisfaction, trust, and enjoyment), which subsequently drive external behavioural outcomes (revisit and loyalty). In Malaysia, unique cultural factors such as Halal certification, local flavour innovation, and eco-friendly packaging act as additional stimuli that strengthen positive emotional responses (Kamalul Ariffin et al., 2022; Wen & Aun, 2020). Promotional strategies such as discounts and reward programmes further stimulate favourable responses, reinforcing revisit intentions (Phou et al., 2024).

Complementing this, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) explains revisit behaviour through attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Koay & Cheah, 2022). While TPB emphasises rational decision-making, S-O-R captures sensory and emotional influences, making it particularly suitable for experiential retail settings such as bubble tea stores. Together, these theories highlight both the cognitive and affective dimensions of consumer decision-making.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the reviewed literature and theoretical foundations, this study proposes a conceptual model linking four independent variables: service quality, product quality, price fairness, and store atmosphere

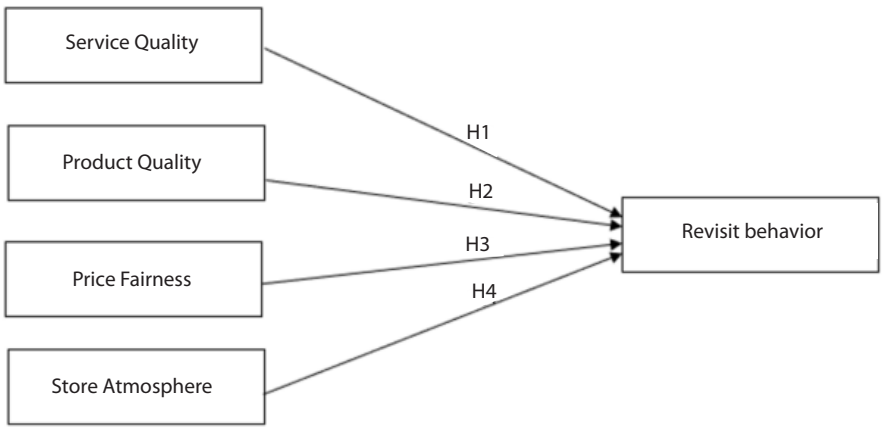


Figure 1 Framework of revisit behavior of bubble tea store

to the dependent variable, customer revisit behaviour. The Figure 1 framework posits that these variables jointly and individually influence revisit behaviours, as mediated by emotional and cognitive evaluations.

The literature suggests that customers are more likely to return to bubble tea stores that deliver high service standards, consistent product quality, fair pricing, and an appealing store atmosphere. The framework reflects the principles of the S-O-R model, illustrating how external stimuli generate internal responses that ultimately shape behavioural outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, descriptive, and explanatory research design to investigate the factors influencing customer revisit behavior in Malaysia's bubble tea industry. A cross-sectional approach was used, where data were collected at a single point in time to identify the relationships between key variables: service quality, product quality, price fairness, store atmosphere, and revisit behaviour. This design enabled the statistical analysis of consumers' behavioral tendencies within a real-world retail context, aligning with recommendations by Burns and Veeck (2020) and Malodia et al. (2023) for studies seeking to explain relationships rather than causal effects.

The research followed a positivist paradigm, focusing on objective measurement and empirical validation. A structured questionnaire was employed as the primary data collection instrument, ensuring consistency and comparability across respondents. The study targeted Generation Z consumers in Malaysia, specifically those aged between 18 and 25 years, due to their significant purchasing power and influence on beverage trends. Data were gathered from Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, two regions representing the core of Malaysia's urban consumer market.

According to Krejcie and Morgan (2020), a minimum sample size of 340 respondents is required to achieve a 5% margin of error for large populations. This study successfully collected 346 valid responses, meeting the recommended threshold. Furthermore, past studies in similar contexts (e.g., Koay & Cheah, 2023), which used 166 respondents to examine revisit-related behavior in Malaysia, support the notion that the current sample size is statistically adequate and reliable for multivariate analysis.

The questionnaire utilised a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (7) to measure perceptions across five constructs: service quality, product quality, price fairness, store atmosphere, and revisit behaviour. Items were adapted from prior validated instruments to ensure measurement consistency.

To ensure methodological rigour, validity, and reliability, tests were conducted. Content validity was established through expert review to confirm the relevance and clarity of the items, while construct validity assessed the degree to which the survey items accurately represented the theoretical concepts. Reliability was assessed using

Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients ranging from 0.785 to 0.854, indicating strong internal consistency.

A pilot test involving 50 participants was conducted to refine question wording, ensure comprehension, and validate response patterns. The pilot results confirmed that the questionnaire was both reliable and suitable for large-scale data collection. Overall, this design ensured systematic data collection and robust analysis to effectively address the study's objectives.

Data were collected using an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms to ensure convenience and a broad reach of respondents. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to target individuals with prior experience in purchasing bubble tea, while snowball sampling occurred when respondents shared the survey link through WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. The inclusion criteria required participants to have visited a bubble tea store within the past six months.

Data collection was conducted over one month, from May to June, with daily distribution between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. To minimise response bias, the survey was fully anonymous, did not request personal information, and contained clear instructions. Questionnaire items were grouped by construct (service quality, product quality, price fairness, store atmosphere, and revisit behaviour), reducing confusion and enhancing response consistency.

After data collection, screening procedures were carried out. Multicollinearity was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values, all of which were below accepted thresholds, indicating no multicollinearity issues. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) confirmed the construct validity of the measurement items.

Research Analysis

The research analysis involved a systematic examination of the collected quantitative data to ensure its accuracy, reliability, and suitability for statistical testing. The data were first subjected to screening procedures to identify missing values, outliers, and data entry errors. Missing values below 5% were replaced with median scores, while both z-scores and Mahalanobis distance were used to detect univariate and multivariate outliers. These steps improved data quality and ensured that the dataset met the assumptions required for further analysis.

To verify normality, both statistical and graphical methods were applied. Skewness, kurtosis, and the Shapiro–Wilk test were used in conjunction with histograms and Q–Q plots to assess distributional symmetry. Results indicated that the data followed an approximately normal distribution, supporting the validity of parametric tests. Multicollinearity was also examined using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values, confirming that the independent variables were not highly correlated and that the regression results would remain stable and interpretable.

Following data screening, descriptive analysis was conducted to summarise respondents' demographic characteristics and behavioural patterns, including gender, age group, and frequency of bubble tea consumption. Measures of central tendency and dispersion, such as the mean, median, and standard deviation, provided insight into general response patterns and the overall tendency of customer perceptions.

Next, correlation analysis was used to explore the strength and direction of relationships between the independent variables (service quality, product quality, price fairness, and store atmosphere) and the dependent variable (revisit behaviour). The findings indicated positive associations among these variables, suggesting that improvements in service, product, and experiential factors could enhance consumers' behaviour to revisit bubble tea stores.

Finally, multiple regression analysis was applied to test the hypotheses and determine the extent to which the independent variables predicted revisit behaviour. The model revealed that all four variables had significant positive effects on customers' behaviour to return, with service quality and store atmosphere emerging as the strongest predictors. The regression model demonstrated a good fit, explaining a substantial proportion of variance in revisit behaviour.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile

A total of 346 respondents participated in the study, with the majority being female (76.3%) and predominantly Chinese (52.3%), followed by Indian (25.1%) and Malay (22.5%). Most participants were young adults aged 18–24 (72%), indicating that younger consumers largely drive the bubble tea market. In terms of occupation, students (76.6%) formed the largest group, while most respondents held a Bachelor's degree (81.5%), reflecting a well-educated sample. The majority also reported earning less than RM1,500 per month (70.2%), suggesting that bubble tea consumption is especially popular among low-income, educated youth and students, aligning with Generation Z's profile as key consumers in Malaysia's bubble tea market.

Multiple Regression Analysis

The regression analysis demonstrated that the model provided a good fit for predicting customer revisit behaviour (CRV), with a multiple correlation coefficient (R) of 0.688, indicating a strong positive association between the independent variables service quality (SQ), product quality (PQ), price fairness (PF), and store atmosphere (SA) and CRV. The R^2 value of 0.474 revealed that approximately 47.4% of the variance in revisit behaviour was explained by these factors, while the remaining 52.6% could be attributed to other unmeasured influences.

Among the predictors, store atmosphere (SA) had the most substantial impact on revisit behaviour ($\beta = 0.225$, $t = 4.008$), followed by service quality (SQ) ($\beta = 0.209$, $t = 3.531$), price fairness (PF) ($\beta = 0.207$, $t = 3.550$), and product quality (PQ) ($\beta = 0.170$, $t = 3.077$). All predictors demonstrated positive contributions, indicating that enhancements in these areas would likely increase customers' willingness to revisit bubble tea stores.

The unstandardised regression equation predicting customer revisit behaviour was expressed as:

$$CRV = 0.285 + (0.221 \times SQ) + (0.190 \times PQ) + (0.239 \times PF) + (0.264 \times SA)$$

These findings suggest that while all four dimensions positively affect revisit behaviour, the store atmosphere emerges as the most influential determinant, highlighting the importance of creating comfortable and engaging retail environments. Although service quality was found to have a weaker effect, likely due to limited customer–staff interactions in self-service bubble tea settings, it still contributed significantly to overall satisfaction and revisit behavior.

The regression model confirms that service quality, product quality, price fairness, and store atmosphere collectively drive customer revisit behaviour, with ambience playing the most decisive role in motivating repeat patronage in Malaysia's competitive bubble tea market.

Theoretical Implications

The study reinforces the applicability of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework in understanding consumer behaviour within experience-based retail settings. The findings confirmed that service quality, product quality, price fairness, and store atmosphere act as external stimuli that influence customers' internal responses and revisit behaviours. This supports earlier theoretical models, while extending the S-O-R framework to the bubble tea industry, where sensory and emotional experiences strongly affect consumer loyalty (Koay & Low, 2025).

In contrast to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which focuses on rational decision-making, the S-O-R model captures emotional and sensory triggers that explain habitual revisit behaviours (Chen & Li, 2019). The findings also indicate that environmental aesthetics, service efficiency, and perceived value collectively enhance trust and satisfaction, key psychological mechanisms driving loyalty (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021; Ahmed et al., 2023).

Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide several important implications for bubble tea retailers in Malaysia. First, product quality remains crucial in driving repeat business. Retailers should prioritise the use of fresh ingredients, consistent flavours, and high-quality toppings, as these have been shown to significantly enhance customer satisfaction (Istijanto & Handoko, 2022). Offering seasonal or limited-edition beverages, as well as allowing customisation, can further strengthen customer attachment (Ong et al., 2021).

Second, price fairness has a strong influence on revisit behavior. Retailers may consider implementing value-driven pricing structures, such as competitive portion sizes, bundles, or digital stamp-card loyalty programmes (Ha, 2022). Such strategies enhance customers' perceived value and motivate repeat patronage.

Third, store atmosphere emerged as a strong predictor of revisit behaviour. A comfortable and visually appealing environment encourages customers to stay longer and return more frequently. Retailers can enhance their store ambiance through lighting, music, comfortable seating, and design elements that are suitable for social media sharing. Social media engagement is particularly effective, as platforms like TikTok, Xiaohongshu, and Instagram help drive organic marketing and brand awareness (Fowler & Thomas, 2023; Xie, 2025).

Ultimately, enhancing service quality through staff training, fostering friendly communication, and optimizing operational efficiency positively contributes to customer satisfaction and loyalty. Together, these recommendations offer meaningful and actionable strategies that are directly aligned with the study's empirical results.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the factors influencing consumer revisit behaviour toward bubble tea stores in Malaysia, focusing on service quality, product quality, price fairness, and store atmosphere. The results demonstrate that all four variables have positive and significant effects on revisit behaviour, thereby supporting the proposed hypotheses and highlighting that customer loyalty in the bubble tea sector is driven by a combination of functional, experiential, and emotional factors. Service quality shows a strong positive relationship with revisit intention, as efficient, reliable, and empathetic service enhances customer satisfaction, builds trust, and encourages repeat patronage, consistent with prior studies in the food and beverage context. Product quality also significantly influences revisit behaviour, with consumers valuing freshness, consistent taste, high-quality ingredients, and drink customisation, all of which contribute to repeat purchases and long-term loyalty. Price fairness emerges as another key determinant, indicating that customers are more likely to return when prices are perceived as reasonable and commensurate with the value received, thereby reducing the likelihood of switching to competitors. Among the four factors, store atmosphere is identified as the most influential predictor of revisit behaviour. A clean, well-designed, and comfortable environment enhances the overall customer experience, encourages longer visits, and increases the likelihood of positive word-of-mouth and social media sharing. Overall, the findings suggest that an integrated strategy encompassing service excellence, product consistency, fair pricing, and an appealing store environment is essential for sustaining customer loyalty in Malaysia's competitive bubble tea market.

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